



Where Are They Now? *Interview with Francis M. Coppersmith, Original Charter Member, Post 200*

Every time we do an interview we are amazed by the lives of our fellow friends and veterans. This interview was no exception. Francis M. Coppersmith, born December 3, 1923 and his lovely wife, Phyllis graciously invited us into their home and shared memories of their life. Francis is the next oldest child of thirteen children. He went to Hampstead School.

Five brothers served in wars. He was the only one in WWII, the others served during Korea and Vietnam. He joined the Army/Air Corps but when his unit landed in France he joined the Army as they needed men on the ground. His military time started when he received instructions from the Army and was drafted. He left his boyhood home on Shiloh Avenue in Hampstead, with his brothers, sisters and parents gathered in the yard to say goodbye. They each gave him all the change they had so that he had enough money to get along while he was gone. He then walked to the Hampstead Fire Hall (now Towne Pride Interiors); from there he was taken to Westminster where he met a lot of other guys who were going into the military to board the train for Fort George G. Meade, Md. From there he was sent to Miami, Florida for his basic training. The Army had taken over the Arnold Hotel there and that's where he lived while in basic. After basic, he was sent to Dayton, Ohio where he tested planes to go overseas. Sometimes when planes crashed while being tested in the states, he would bring back the remains of the planes as well as the remains of the soldiers. He spent about a year there.

Francis then took his overseas training at Camp Howze, near Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas where about 2,000 soldiers were shipped out after training. The Camp was used to train several hundred thousand soldiers who were sent to the European and Pacific campaigns. It was also used to house somewhere around 3,000 Prisoners of War. Francis spent 14 days on a ship arriving in France on a very cold December day in 1944. They were attacked before they got there, but they had escort planes going with them to protect them and they took care of them. Another ship traveling along with them was full of women (WAC's).

When he arrived in France, he served in the Army, 9th Division, 60th Field Artillery under General George S. Patton. His job was to lay wires for the walkie-talkies so the infantry could communicate with one another, so he was always on the move. He also drove a 2 ½ Ton truck hauling men and guns. Their diet usually consisted of K-rations although once in a while they would get a decent meal. One day he was in an area standing in line and looking forward to a nice hot breakfast when they were attacked, so that day he didn't get the breakfast that he was so looking forward to.

At the end of the war, he and three other men were moving fast across Germany when they came across a disabled American tank with one man in it. Ahead of them about 40 yards were groves of pine trees about 500 yards in between. There were two German battalions in that area, but they weren't attacked by them. Apparently they had heard that the war had ended.

He spent a lot of time in Munich, Germany where he was a mail clerk and also the most popular guy on the base. He made friends with a German gentleman named Jack who showed him how the Germans had built tunnels throughout the area. His job was also to take the displaced persons who had fled Russia back to Russia. He made two of these trips but these refugees didn't want to return as they knew they would be sent to Siberia when they arrived. If they had anything of value; jewelry, etc. they gave it away because they knew that it would be taken from them when they arrived. Two of

the men committed suicide while on the trip because they did not want to return to Russia.

On his return trip to the United States, he was on a ship called "The Wooster Victory". They left on March 2, 1946 and arrived on April 4th. Francis has daily papers that were given out every day on the ship telling them what to expect when they got back to the States. He also has many booklets supplied to them by the Army. Francis was discharged on April 7, 1946. He received a Good Conduct Medal, American Theater Ribbon, European African Middle Eastern Ribbon and the World War II Victory Ribbon. He also has many pictures of his time in the military as well as some given to him by his German friend, Jack showing the horrors of the Holocaust.

After his discharge from the Army, Francis returned home and went back to work at the Well Made Pants Company in Baltimore. A fortune teller once told Francis that he would meet a girl with long black hair and blue eyes. He met his wife, Phyllis at work. He was making \$17.00 a week for 40 hours work. Her blue eyes attracted him and he would greet her every day by saying "Good Morning Blue Eyes" and "Good Night, Blue Eyes". He tells of a prank that one of his brothers pulled on him when he was to go on a date. Francis borrowed his 1931 Model A Ford and it had a vacuum tank on it. The brother put rags in the gas tank so that it would soak up the gasoline. Francis headed out and ran out of gas. He bought a gallon of gas and the same thing happened. He finally made it to the date. Of course the brother thought it was funny. Soon he and Phyllis were married in December, 1946. While working during the day, he went to school on the GI Bill to learn to be a tailor. This took 5 years of night school.

He went to work at Hamburgers, a high end tailoring shop where he worked and retired from after 39½ years. At one point, there were 23 stores and he was the Director of Alterations with 35 employees. He fitted suits for the Colts and the Orioles as well as other high profile people. He remembers having tailored suits for the football players who had very large muscular upper halves of their bodies and smaller lower halves, often times having to totally remake the suits.

He once got a call to make 2 suits for Redd Foxx of the TV show, Sanford and Sons. He got the call one day and Mr. Foxx needed them by the next day. Francis finished them and made sure they were pressed and ready to go. Mr. Foxx showed up with a black plastic bag to put them in. Francis was shocked that he would do that, but Mr. Foxx was afraid he would get mugged crossing the street with those beautiful suits. This was in the 1980's and the store was located at Charles and Fayette Streets.

At Hamburgers, he knew two people who worked there who had their entire families killed by the Germans during the war.

Francis now lives with his wife in the Reisterstown area and suffers with macular degeneration, but his memory is still very keen. They have 3 children.

It was a real pleasure to spend time with Francis, his wife Phyllis and their son, Chuck. We thank him for his time and his service to our country.