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Albert E. France

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Lael Morgan, interviewer

Tallahassee, Florida

Series: Lael Morgan Collection interviews

Albert France was from Cokeville Maryland. He was raised in coastal Maryland. There weren't any high schools around where he lived at that time. He was given the choice to attend school or work and he chose to work. He worked for the B & R Railroad for thirty-six years. His father was a farmer. He has one brother and two sisters. One sister has died. He attended school for eight years and then started doing construction work. He was twenty-four when he was drafted into the military. He was at Fort Bellwood and was in the Engineer Corps. He was trained to build roads, airstrips and bridges. He was a sergeant. He did demolition. He was in the Company 93rd Engineer, 1st Battalion, A Company. They were building a railroad in Liverton and went by train to Prince Rupert Canada. They took a boat to Skagway, Alaska. They built the road from Carcross. They were there in 1942. They built the road in sections. They moved every two or three days.

Lael Morgan asked him if grew up in the city. France said he grew up in the country. He had always done construction work. He worried about being away from home. Morgan asked what kind of demolition work they did. France said when they were building the road they had to blow up stones. No one ever got hurt by dynamite. He said sometimes they went six or seven miles and didn't run into any stones. They always got it done within the day. He worked on the road when he wasn't working on demolition. He turned down promotions because he didn't want someone to lose their job.

Lael Morgan asked him if he was treated fairly in the military. France said it was fair because they had all white officers and black soldiers. He doesn't remember seeing a white soldier on the Alcan Highway. He said his platoon commander was Lt. Brighton who was from Maine. He talked about other officers. France said he was always willing to help someone. He talked about Sgt. Alsteen. Morgan asked if there were people in their outfit that couldn't read or write. France said yes there were a number of them. They did some of the testing for the men. He talked about taking and passing other qualifying tests. After he was off the Alcan Highway job he went to Haines, Alaska. From Haines he went Cold Bay, Alaska and stayed there for about a year. They then went to the Aleutian Islands on the other side of Dutch Harbor. He talked about other soldiers being shipped out to Kiska and Attu. Lael Morgan asked about some of the men being treated badly by their white commanders. France said they didn't have that kind of problem. They had Colonel Hart who was very tough. After someone shot through his tent the colonel had them lock up their rifles when they weren't out in the field. They had a scare one night. They had a submarine net out and someone hit the net. They were concerned that it was a Japanese

submarine. It was actually a big fish that hit the net. He left the Aleutians on July 4, 1944. He came to the state of Washington and everyone got furloughs. He was gone from home for 38 months.

He was in charge of the barracks. There was gambling going on in the barracks, but he couldn't be disciplined because he was not a commissioned officer.

Morgan asked France if he stayed with the military after the war. France said he did not. He had left the railroad to join the military.

France said they were shipped to Riverside and then to San Francisco. From there they went to Calcutta, India. They were there for eight months. They worked on the Burma Road. They then built airplane hangars. He talked about Donald Nolan.

Morgan asked if the Corps of Engineers changed his life. France said no it didn't because he was already used to that kind of work. He was glad to get out of the service and lost contact with most of the soldiers.