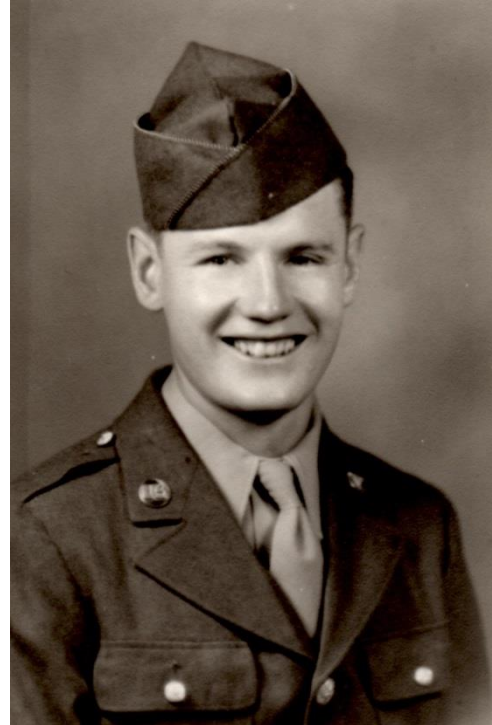


# Alva Ralph Wing

as interviewed by Judy Hansen

Alva Ralph Wing is the son of Alva H and Dorthy Udine Sabey Wing. He was born July 2, 1925 in the Lehi Mortuary because his father was the Funeral Director in town. He was the oldest child with four younger sisters Ila, Joyce, Lois, and Rita. He attended school in Lehi where he graduated. The April before he graduated he had enough credits so he didn't have to attend school. He went with his cousin Dale Russon to embalming college in Los Angeles, California where he also worked at Pierce Brothers Mortuary in Santa Monica. He came back in June 1943 to attend his High School graduation. It is fun to note that while he was in California he went to Sears and Roebuck and bought his girl back home an engagement ring. She never knew he bought it until after the war.



Because he had received medical background training during embalming school on 25 February 1944 Ralph was drafted in the Army Medical Corp at Fort Douglas. They sent him to Camp Barkley Texas for basic training. Ralph was with a lot of men that was from Georgia and Alabama. There were a lot of drinkers and smokers in the group. Ralph had played football in High School and after practice they would have them all run around the track a couple of times. Ralph wasn't the fastest or the slowest but in basic training he could beat everyone by ten or twelve yards every time with no trouble at all. He attributes this to the fact he kept the word of wisdom.

After boot camp he was sent to Fort Francis E Warren surgical hospital in Cheyenne, Wyoming for medical training. He was there about a month where he helped during surgeries. He was transferred to Fitz Simmons General Hospital just outside of Denver Colorado where he again worked as a technician assisting with surgeries for a couple more months.

After his medical training was complete he got leave and came home before they sent him back down to Camp Barkley Texas. In Texas they put him on a troop train and he went to Boston, Massachusetts. The train was like cattle cars and they hung hammocks from one side to the other all in a row. That is where he bunked for three days.

He shipped out of Boston Harbor on a huge carrier the USS Westpoint. It took six days to cross the Atlantic where they landed in Liverpool. They got on a train and went down to South Hampton and on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 1944 they crossed the English Channel. They got on a landing craft, climbed down on ropes and ladders and landed on Utah Beach head (Normandy, France). This was six weeks after D-Day and there was still a lot of destruction there. All the US troops and their allies went across and forced the German's back.

In the army you had your sleeping bag in your haversack – you would wear it on your back. There is half a tent in each haversack so you have to share with somebody. One side of the tent had buttonholes and the other side had the openings that would clip onto it to make your 2 man tent. Ralph ended up sleeping alone because the fellow he was supposed to share the tent with went to get some wood, chopped into a hedge, hit a booby trap, and was killed. Ralph slept on just his half of the canvas – well he didn't sleep, he just prayed most of the night. There were a lot of land mines, booby traps, and still occasional snipers who weren't supposed to be there.

There were German 'Buzz Bombs' (a rocket the Germans had) the Germans would shoot across the channel into England. They called them buzz bombs because you could hear them buzz as they flew over. They weren't too accurate so a lot of them would end up in the channel. The channel was about 25 miles across.<sup>1</sup>

Ralph was assigned to the 40<sup>th</sup> General Hospital just outside of Paris. He worked with a surgical team. The team was comprised of a couple doctors, about five nurses, and six-eight technicians. They would operate together all the time. They had to do a lot of amputations. Ralph would hand the doctors the instruments and sometimes he had to give the patient the anesthesia.

They worked about eighteen hours a day and Ralph was getting run down. He got assigned to take an ambulance full of German prisoners into Saint-Lazare train station in Paris so they could send them further back. There were three men in charge of one ambulance. The cots were stacked four high on each side to hold the eight prisoners they had. Two men were up front and the other man in the back with the prisoners. After they put the prisoners on the train at Saint-Lazare, the other men wanted to go into the USO and have coffee and donuts. Ralph was tired and didn't want to stay. He wanted to get back to the hospital as soon as he could. They drove about 100 yards to the big main gate leaving the Saint-Lazare Station. It had big wide double doors that would swing open after the middle opened up so the big trucks could go through. As soon as they reached this gate a big German plane came flying up the Seine River real low so it wasn't detected by radar and it bombed the station. Ralph could feel the ambulance rock back and forth from the concussion of the bomb. It killed several people in the canteen. If Ralph and his group would have stayed they probably would have been killed.

Ralph would attend the LDS church services whenever he could in Paris. There were about forty who attended church and not many of them were military men. One time at church he met Jay Nile Washburn who was one of his teachers back at Lehi High. During the war Mr. Washburn was in the Red Cross. He would take Ralph out to dinner in Paris after church.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1994 they opened a tunnel now that goes under the English Channel.

The Army would issue everyone two cartons of cigarettes a week. Ralph didn't smoke so he would sell his on the black market. He would get \$20 a carton. He was able to send quite a bit of money home. Once he spent a lot of his money on a picture. He went to a photographer in Paris that had a camera set up in a ½ circle. The camera would shoot pictures all the way around resulting with the face of the portrait moving when the observer moved. This was quite an expensive photo costing about \$60.00. He sent one home to his mother and one home to his girl.



The 3-D picture Ralph paid \$60 for

It was April fool's day in 1945 and Ralph got sick. At first they thought it was pneumonia but later they diagnosed it as tuberculosis. He was sick when the war ended. The TB drained him of all his energy. He was really weak and slept a lot. There were two theories for treatment; one was to send you to a warm climate and the other was to send you to a cold climate. He was in France nine months then they sent him to the US Army Bruns General Hospital in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He was there for ten months. They put a needle in his side and pushed air into the space between the lung and the wall so the lung wouldn't expand as much. They figured the TB lesion on his lung would heal faster if the lung wasn't moving in and out. They moved him where he spent another month at the Whipple general hospital and tuberculosis sanatorium in Prescott.

Ralph was honorably discharge Dec 23, 1945 from Technician Fifth grade detachment medical department 40<sup>th</sup> General Hospital. He served two years. He received a WWII Victory Medal, Good Conduct Ribbon, and Eamet Ribbon.<sup>2</sup> Ralph admits he would like to forget most of his service experience. Some of the cities in France that were bombed by the US and bombed by the German's were pretty much destroyed. He remembers one city that was just rubble. His team performed a too many amputations. One amputee was from Springville, Utah and his mother thanked Ralph several times over the years for caring for her son.

All during the war Ralph was writing back and forth to his girl Willa Fay Hadfield. She was attending BYU and working at Geneva Steel. When Ralph returned home from the war he continued his relationship with her and they married in June 1946. They have four children: Lenard (1951-2002 married to Julia Holmes), Ronald (1952-1971 – Thomas S Monson came and spoke at his funeral), Kathryn (married to Robin Klein), and Joanne (married to Robert Jensen).

In 1984 – 1985 Ralph and Willa served a mission for the LDS church in London England to work in the visitor center at Hyde Park, but was shortly moved to the office. They enjoyed their mission in England.

Ralph and Willa raised their family in Lehi and he continued in the family business all of this life at Wing Mortuary. They lived for quite a few years in the mortuary until they retired and moved into a new home they built at 190 North 400 East.

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<sup>2</sup> European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal is medal to recognize those military service members who had performed military duty in the European Theater.