

Crawford County Veterans Speak

***Selected Interviews
of
World War II Veterans***

**Published by the
Crawford County
Friends of Genealogy
Van Buren, Arkansas**

**Compiled by
Jerry Robertson
2018**

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all veterans of the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines Corps, Merchant Marine and Coast Guard.

It is especially dedicated to the many veterans of all services who served in World War II and the period immediately before and after that time. Their service contributed to the successful ending of the conflicts of that period and the restoration of peace in the years that followed.

Special recognition is given to the thirteen individuals from Crawford County whose stories of their background and wartime service are recounted herein. These individuals are listed below in alphabetical order, including their branch of service:

Warren Darrel Blaylock - US Army

Cathryn R. Cluck - US WAC

Cletis Raymond Odle - US Army

Charles William O'Kelly - US Navy, (Seabees)

Weldon Odell Ramey - US Navy, US Air Force

Eckel W. Rowland - US Army

James Everett Smith - US Army

Warren G. Taylor - US Army Air Force

Ewell Elmer Titsworth - US Army

Harry Vandergrift - US Army Air Force

Ray Vandergrift - US Navy

Raymond Earl Weese - US Navy

Inez Edna Wilber - US WAC

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Preface

The Crawford County Friends of Genealogy began a project in 2006 to preserve the stories and memories of many of the veterans of the area by doing video interviews. Approximately 80 of these videos were accomplished over the next several years through the efforts of CCFOG volunteers, principally Hilda Daugherty and Cliff and Wilma Jameson. Many of the interviewees were veterans of World War II, who served in various capacities during and after the war. These videos are available, upon request, in the Genealogy Room at the Main Library, Van Buren, AR.

In 2017, the CCFOG decided that better access to many of these interviews would be possible if they were transcribed into book form, so that they could be read as well as observed on video. After discussion, it was decided to research various ways that the audio contained on the video interviews could be converted into written text. The easiest method was to convert the audio files contained on the discs into a form that could be sent to a commercial transcription service and obtain a text document that could then be compiled into a book.

Fortuitously, during this time the organization had the opportunity to obtain a generous donation from the Bourland Society, Inc. Trust, principally from the efforts of Mr. Joe Lloyd, representing the Bourland Society, and Janette Perryman, representing the CCFOG. This donation allowed the CCFOG to proceed with the costs of transcription and, eventually, the printing and binding of the book.

The CCFOG selected a number of interviews of veterans of World War II, across a variety of services, to begin the project. Jerry Robertson volunteered to begin the process of converting the selected files into a form that could be transcribed and, eventually, compiled into a book. Hilda Daugherty and Wilma Jameson assisted in editing the final transcriptions. Janette Perryman researched the obituaries. This volume is the result of these many combined efforts.

Each of the interviews contained herein are presented as faithfully as possible to the original transcript, with minor editing for clarity and 'readability'. When available, an obituary of the individual veteran is added following the interview transcript. The obituaries were obtained from local newspaper and funeral services.

Crawford County Friends of Genealogy
Van Buren, AR
2018

Acknowledgements

The Crawford County Friends of Genealogy (CCFOG) wishes to acknowledge the efforts of members Hilda Daugherty, Wilma Jameson, Cliff Jameson and others who made possible the original audio/visual interviews of the veterans included in this book. These interviews were largely recorded in the years 2006-2007, when many of these veterans were advanced in years. Without their efforts, the stories of these veterans probably would not be available.

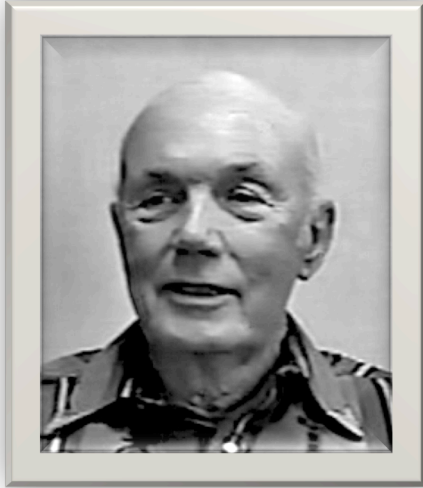
CCFOG also recognizes the members who contributed time and effort to transfer the audio contained in the original interviews into written form and then into the book: Jerry Robertson, Hilda Daugherty, Wilma Jameson and Janette Perryman.

Finally, the CCFOG wishes to thank the Bourland Society, Inc. Trust, with special thanks to Mr. Joe Lloyd, for the generous donation which made possible the costs of transcription from audio format into written text and the associated costs of printing and publishing.

Disclaimer

All veteran participants in the original audio/visual interviews signed consent forms allowing for the reproduction and dissemination of the content of their interviews by the CCFOG.

The Crawford County Friends of Genealogy do not necessarily endorse any views or statements made by the veterans in the course of the interviews that are presented herein. Also, all names, facts and events described are as recalled by the individual veterans and may be subject to the vagaries of time and human memory. Except for minor verification of place names and spellings, no additional attempt has been made by the CCFOG or others to verify or research the information contained in these interviews. They are presented "as is" and are recorded and compiled solely for the purposes of historical recording of the individual memories of persons who lived, served and were involved in various military units of the United States at a time of severe testing and conflict during World War II.



**Warren Blaylock
World War II Veteran
Interview**

The following was originally a video interview done by the Crawford County Friends of Genealogy, Van Buren, Arkansas. The interviewer is Hilda Daugherty. The original interview was recorded on July 25, 2007. This written transcript of the original audio was accomplished in March, 2018.

Interviewer: *Today is July 25, 2007. I'm Hilda Daugherty. I am interviewing Warren about his World War II experiences. Mr. Blaylock, I'd like you to tell me your full name, please.*

Warren: Warren Darrell Blaylock.

Interviewer: *I would like to know when you were born and where.*

Warren: I was born January 9, 1921, north of Alma where Dean's Furniture Store is located now. It was a little log cabin then. It had a one-room lean-to on it, I understand.

Interviewer: *Who built that little log cabin?*

Warren: I don't know. It was on a farm owned by Mr. and Mrs. Douglas. My mother and dad were sharecroppers that year when I was born. They

were sharecroppers with the Douglas family. That's where the Warren came in. After I was born, Mrs. Douglas who was Republican, came down to see me and she'd always say, "How's little Warren today?" Warren G. Harding, the president, was her cousin. So, the name Warren just kinda stuck with me all my life. Never was outright named, I guess.

Interviewer: *Who were your parents?*

Warren: My father was DH, and his name was Dock, D-O-C-K, Dock Blaylock. My mother was Edna Bennett, was her maiden name. Her father was Charles Bennett and her mother was Flora Levins, I believe. My grandparents came from Georgia and homesteaded down where, today, is Eagle Crest, the golf course.

Interviewer: *Is that right.*

Warren: They homesteaded there; my grandfather with a horse and one oxen. I visited many times, up on the hill there where Eagle Crest is today.

Interviewer: *Do you have any family stories about how they came here? Was it by river or by –?*

Warren: My grandfather came by boat when he was seven years old. He was an orphan and lived with some of his relatives. Then in latter years, why, he homesteaded the land there and married my grandmother, Flora Levins.

Interviewer: *Do you have a date of when he came to Arkansas? When he would have been seven?*

Warren: No. Seven years old –

Interviewer: *That would have been very early.*

Warren: A long time ago.

Interviewer: *Very early in our history.*

Warren: If the land was available to be homesteaded it had to be a number of years ago.

Interviewer: *Very early. I would like to know, then, did you live in that log cabin and in that area, on that farm, very long? Or where did you move?*

Warren: Probably about a year, and my parents moved to a larger farm where it's now near Highway 71, closer in to Alma, with the thought in mind that when I got to be six, seven years old I'd go to school in Alma. But I didn't. I walked and went to school in Pine Springs. There was a grade school in Pine Springs. Mr. Lade Dean, from the Dean Springs community was my teacher. Later on, then, we moved from where we were over to Dean Springs. My father became a livestock dealer for the rest of his life. He was dealing in livestock: horses, cows, mules, all kind of animals.

Interviewer: *He must have had a good eye for stock.*

Warren: He did. He had a real good eye. It challenged him to always guess the weight of an animal and see how far off it was one way or the other.

Interviewer: *Are there stories about the people that tried to cheat him?*

Warren: That tried what?

Interviewer: *Cheat him? Did he have stories about people that tried to cheat him?*

Warren: No. It would be what he would see going on with other people, especially with widows, that he would see people trying to buy their livestock or buy their machinery or their horses or something. He'd come home quite unhappy at times at how people would be taking advantage of the widow who didn't know anything about the prices. I admired him for this. He was concerned for the welfare of other people.

Interviewer: *Livestock was a large part of the livelihood of the people in that time.*

Warren: It sure was. He traveled in a truck. He had a route that he traveled in Winslow, Mountainburg, Mulberry, Lock, Fern, and all those communities.

At that time, people up in the mountains made their living by making railroad ties. They'd make them during the week with an ax and saw. Then on Saturday, they'd take them into Winslow to sell them. There would be a man there from the railroad company buying railroad ties. They would sell the railroad ties and take the money to buy their groceries and go back home with it, then, for another week. I have seen my father many times he would buy a horse or a mule or team or something from the man up there in the wagon and just leave the wagon sitting there. The man would come and get it sometime during the following week.

Interviewer: *Did you have other brothers and sisters?*

Warren: Yes, I have two brothers, no sisters; two brothers younger than I am. One is Ronald Wesley Blaylock. He's six years younger than I am. Then I have Russell Wayne Blaylock, who is 17 years younger than I am. He finished college and taught school a little. Then he had his own business in Artist Point, north of Mountainburg.

Interviewer: *That's nice. Did you go to school at the Pine Springs school for several years?*

Warren: I was probably in the third grade when we moved from where we were up to Dean Springs and then I started at the Dean Springs school. That school, Dean Springs, and I'm not sure about that, but Dean Springs had been a high school until it was consolidated later years, so that everyone seventh grade and above went to Alma when it started having school up there. Rudy and Dyer and Graphic and all those places, anyone in the seventh grade or over, we gotta go into Alma. They still had the elementary school there at the same location.

Interviewer: *Had it consolidated before you got to seventh grade? Did you go to high school –?*

Warren: Yes. Yes. I went to – I was probably in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade, walking, going to Dean Springs. Everybody walked, then, to school. Then when I got into seventh grade, why, I rode the bus and went to Alma, then, for school.

Interviewer: *Did you hear – seventh grade, you would have been about – what would that have been about, in the '30s? It would have been – I'm trying to think when the war rumbling started in your –*

Warren: I graduated from high school in 1938.

Interviewer: *It was a long time before the war.*

Warren: Yes.

Interviewer: *What I'm leading up to is I want to know if you heard in your school studies or on the radio, newspapers, perhaps, about the trouble they were having Europe before it actually broke into war.*

Warren: No. I did not know anything about it. Communication was very limited. You had radios. We didn't have electricity for a long time or running water. So, we didn't have radio or any way of communicating other than the *Kansas City Star*, came every Thursday. It was a

newspaper. It always had a continued story going on all the time. I read the continued story, and that's about....

Interviewer: *So, you enjoyed school and reading.*

Warren: Very much. Very much. I enjoyed reading and I like to read today. That's my pastime.

Interviewer: *As you were in those grade school years who was the person that became your model? Who was the main person that influenced your love of school, your love of reading, that kind of thing?*

Warren: When I was going to Alma, I stayed with an uncle in Alma in the second grade. My teacher there was a Mrs. Cravens. She was a lovely lady that instilled the desire to read. Then as I went to school in Dean Springs, there were two teachers, Mr. Sidney Crawford and his wife, who lived in the Kibler community, were two teachers up there. They, shall I say, invited me into the reading people.

Interviewer: *How did they divide the school between the two of them? How did they divide the classes?*

Warren: He had the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade. She had the smaller children, first, second, and third grades. I think a woman related or they related to a mother figure better than to a man.

Interviewer: *That's quite different to classrooms today, that they would have had three grades –*

Warren: Each teacher, yes.

Interviewer: *– at one time.*

Warren: At one time. And too, you were in the same room with the – if you were in third grade, you were in the same room with the fifth grade or sixth grade. You'd hear them reciting or reading, working arithmetic on the blackboard, even though you were not in that class.

Interviewer: *It actually sharpened your mental –*

Warren: It did. It did.

Interviewer: *You graduated high school at Alma in 1938. Did you find work at that time or did you continue studying?*

Warren: I helped my father some with his livestock. Then later in the summer I went to work at the Alma Inn for Mr. Henry Weis. He had a restaurant drive-in with a motel in the back, a circle in the back of it. And I lived in one of the rooms of the motel and worked from 11:00 in the morning until 1:00 at night. It was 14 hours a day and I made \$7.00 a day – \$7.00 a week and my room and board.

Interviewer: *And you considered that pretty good.*

Warren: Yes, I did. I saved \$5.00 a week so I could get a car at some later time, which my mother and dad purchased a car for me, then, so I could go home on my time off, take my laundry home. My first car cost \$125.00. I shoulda brought you a picture of that. \$125.00 and it was a two-door coupe that the doors opened in the front, not in the back like they do now. They opened in the front. Those were called suicide doors because if one of them opened, you were going down the road, you flew out and committed suicide.

I borrowed the money from my mother and dad and paid them back \$5.00 a week. Then I had \$125.00 paid out. Then I went over to Sears and bought my first item on time or on a credit card. I bought a radio for the car. It was \$25.00. It was to be paid out \$5.00 a month, I believe. I said if I ever get this paid out I'll never buy anything else on time (or) charge in there. And so, today, I still do not use credit cards unless it's a necessity.

Interviewer: *You learned your lesson early.*

Warren: I sure did.

Interviewer: *Where was that motel or system located that you worked in?*

Warren: It's right where Kiddie College is now, if you know where Kiddie College is. Right at the north end of we'd say Main Street. Actually, it's Federal Avenue. It's right at the end of Main Street there.

Interviewer: *I didn't realize that was there. How long did you get to work there?*

Warren: I worked there until I went into the Army. Let's see, now. I worked there for two years and then I had a friend, there in Alma, who was working at Camp Chaffee, Fort Chaffee, and just began to work out there. He said there was an opening with the surveying crew. I went over and applied with Black and Veatch, V-E-A-T-C-H, and worked with the surveying crew out surveying the outside boundary lines of Fort Chaffee, all the way around, setting concrete blocks and markers. Every time there was a curve, we would set a marker or set it every

half mile if there was a straight line. We'd make up the concrete markers in the morning and set them in the afternoon, the ones we'd made the day before.

I worked there until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. In fact, I was working there that day, another teenager and myself. When we heard this, we said, "Oh, boy. That's getting close to us." It wasn't long after that, maybe a couple of months, until my job was eliminated and also I got a letter saying, "We need you – Uncle Sam needs you," I believe is what it said.

Interviewer: *The surveying, was that actually when Fort Chaffee was being built up at first?*

Warren: Yes. First started; there were no buildings or anything out there to begin with. There were contractors there building the barracks and all those things, water lines, sewer lines. With the three of us that were working together, we were surveying the outside boundary line of the fort, all the way around, down from Charleston, across to Greenwood and back up to Van Buren.

Inteerviewer: *That was quite an undertaking.*

Warren: Yes, it was. But it was easy; easy in that we were outside. I was an outside person, having lived on a farm and just enjoyed the work. I worked out there and there were two men who asked if they could ride with me to Fort Smith. That was before we had the lock and dam, so you had to go to Fort Smith from Alma and then turn and come back down. They were working at the stockyards in Fort Smith. They lived about two miles beyond where I did in Dean Springs and they walked to be at my house in the morning by 6:30 or 7:00. Then I would take them to the Fort Smith, the Arkansas River Bridge and let them out. They'd walk on over to the stockyards. They gave me \$0.25 a day. That was enough to pay gas because gas was \$0.20 a gallon then. Like everything else it was cheaper. Then I'd go back by there, pick them up at the end of the bridge. They'd walk back to the end of the bridge.

There was a difference then than there is now. Today, if you have a friend with you, you would take him home. I know as a teenager I would be dating and I'd go up to Dean's Market to get started. They had a pickup truck and two twin boys, two twin girls. One of the boys would get the truck. So, when we got back from a date at night, at 11:00 or 12:00, he didn't take me home, which was just a mile down the road. We stopped there and I got out and walked home. Walking was a way of life then. And it was good for us. It was good for us.

Interviewer: *Well, sure it was.*

Warren: Didn't have to go to the spa or do anything of those things.

Interviewer: *Tell me about the day you were working out on the survey crew and heard the news about Pearl Harbor. Tell me exactly what you were doing and what it struck in your mind, how it stuck.*

Warren: I was not as familiar with geography, with the world and the nations and the political time in 1938 as we are today here in 2007. Today we're much closer related to everybody. At that time, whatever happened was so far away you didn't really pay much attention to it. On this particular – when the war started, several people, young men, joined; they volunteered. Then the draft came along.

When they had the draft, I didn't wanna go. No one really wanted to go. I went to Fayetteville and tried to get into the Coast Guard there. Then they gave me a ticket to Little Rock; went to Little Rock and got turned down on the physical there. Came back to Alma and then by that time I'd gotten my draft notice to report, so no one else was interested in you if you were in the ranks to report for the draft. So, we did and when I was examined by the Army doctor, and commented where I'd been turned down on the other item, he said that could be taken care of with a real sharp knife and if I were you I wouldn't say anything about it anymore. And I didn't!

Interviewer: *When you were out there on that survey crew and working on Port Chaffee, did you wonder why they were building that?*

Warren: No. We knew the war was going on over in Europe. We could get it in the *Kansas City Star*. I know, I had an uncle who lived in Kansas City and from time to time he would send to his brother-in-law who lived nearby, would send him a stack of newspapers he'd accumulated over three or four weeks and we would read those and find out what was going on.

Interviewer: *So, you did know why they were building Fort Chaffee.*

Warren: Yes. I sure did, and seeing by 1938, by that time we had electricity, REA, Rural Electrification. We had electricity, so we could have lights and then that, in turn, then gave us water because we could have a pump in the well, whereas we had been drawing it out of the well. We could have a pump in the well and have a bathroom in the house. That was, we thought, modern.

Interviewer: *Do you actually remember when electricity came to your family's home?*

Warren: About '34, I believe; '34 or '35. I'm thinking because that was right after the Depression and I know during that time I studied at home on the kitchen table with a – well, we had an Aladdin lamp. That was really uptown. We had an Aladdin lamp rather than just having a kerosene lamp.

Interviewer: *Yes, it was.*

Warren: I remember we went that route until we had the electricity.

Interviewer: *Let's go back to that famous letter. "Uncle Sam wants you." Where did he decide that he wanted you?*

Warren: He wanted me in Van Buren. Then I rode my train for the first time to Little Rock, where we had our physical exams and sworn into the Army. Then we had two weeks in which to come back home and take care of any loose ends we might have or –

Interviewer: *Say your goodbyes.*

Warren: Yes. If there were any jobs we wanted to close down or something of that nature.

Interviewer: *Then tell us where they did send you for basic training.*

Warren: There were 30 of us from Crawford County. Went on the train all together, and we knew some of them that were on the train that were with us. I knew Clovis Bryant, who was a state representative later on – a senator after the war was over and came back. There was Howard Mitchell, who lived here in Van Buren. His wife was a nurse and worked for Dr. Savers, I believe, here in Van Buren. Then he went into the Navy. But when we – at some point along the way, we would get in contact with each other. We would meet somewhere halfway on a weekend or something like that.

We went from Fort Robinson, Camp Robinson, Joe T. Robinson at Little Rock. We stayed there five days. Then at the end of five days, late in the afternoon, they told us all to set our barracks bags outside with all our clothing and everything in it, and they marched us down to the railroad and we all got on Pullman cars. Then we could see our bags being loaded on, so we knew we were going somewhere. They didn't tell us where. That was a big item of conjecture among us, where we were going, what we were gonna be doing.

The first night we slept in – as I said, I’d never been on a train before I came to Little Rock, from Van Buren to Little Rock. That was after the two weeks were up and then we went back and then we got on the train after five days and started some direction; we didn’t know where. The train had backed up and it’d go forward, and backed up and switched around, about all night. We were bedded down in our bunks. The next day, I had to laugh at my friend, Clovis Bryant. He didn’t know who the fella was who slept with him in his bunk, but he said he believed he had lice. And Clovis either paid the man to move to some other bunk with somebody or he traded somebody else. We were on the train for about five days and so you wanted to be with somebody that you knew.

Every time we’d go through a town, we’d wanna know where that town was. Were we going through Oklahoma or Arizona? We seemed to be going northeast all the time. We figured it out; we were going northeast. In the daytime, lots of people played poker for matches and things of that nature.

When we finally woke up one morning, the train had stopped. It sit still. We looked out and hollered at somebody and asked him where we were, what the town was. We were at Fort Rodman, Massachusetts.

Interviewer: *That’s a long ways off.*

Warren: It was about four days that we traveled there, eating and sleeping and not knowing where we were going. We went to Fort Rodman, which was a small, 40-acre fort. An old fort had been there since Civil War days, but it was just 40 acres and it was right on the ocean. One side was the seashore; the other side had a chain link fence around it. You weren’t gonna leave, either way, if you wanted to.

Hilda Dougherty: Did all 30 of you from Crawford County make it there?

Warren: All 30 of us made it there. But while we were there, going through basic training, two or three were sent back home for physical ailments. One was Mr. Hopkins’ son-in-law, J. T. Cox. He had a motor company. He did good. He came back with other (inaudible) and then he did good work for himself with the motor company. He couldn’t buy a new car. He couldn’t buy tires. So, trading in used cars was what he did (inaudible) for him. Another man who came back was from Mountainburg, Priddle, Joe Priddle. He came back and later on went to work with the government as a food inspector. He worked

here in Van Buren for OK Processors and others, in the processing plants here.

Warren: It wound up there were 25 of us who went. One of them was Charlie Moss, who was a superintendent of schools in Alma. He was in charge of us on our way up there. Then he was sent to a different organization and he wound up over in the Pacific. He spent his time over in the Pacific whereas we went to the European theater.

Interviewer: *Can you recall the others who were sent back to Van Buren? From Crawford County who didn't get to stay with your group? You said J. T. Cox and Joe Priddle. Would there have been another one or two?*

Warren: Yes, there was one more I remember that was sent back home. I cannot remember his name but I do remember his wife. Her maiden name was Larch. That's her maiden name. And her first name – I can't remember.

Interviewer: *That's okay. I just wondered if you might recall them if you thought a minute.*

Warren: And the rest of us, then, which was about 25, then we became the cadre to start a new mobile hospital. So, we went to medical schools while we were there. We'd be gone for 30 days in addition to doing our drilling and so forth for physical strength. Then we had classes there on everything related to injuries of various kinds because we were gonna be right in the front lines. We were not the first aid people. That's another group. But we were gonna be in a hospital unit that operated in tents all the time, unless as we moved from one battlefield to another we could find a school building or a gymnasium or something like that that we would use instead of setting up our tents. But we became proficient with our tents so we could set them up in 30 minutes and have them be ready to receive patients and operate on people that got into combat.

We spent six or eight months there at A.P. Hill, Virginia. When we left Fort Rodman, we came then down to A. P. Hill, Virginia.

Interviewer: *Is A.P. the name of a town, A. P. Hill?*

Warren: Nope. It's the name of a general. The general's name was A and a P, initials. His last name was Hill. This place was named after him. There were no permanent buildings there. Everything was in tents. It was a large – it's large acreage to it, probably several thousand acres there. It was used for us to become accustomed to working outside all the time. We'd go on midnight bivouacs and drills and things.

One night, we went out in the forest to set up our hospitals, someplace we'd never been and it was dark out there. We could not have any lights. We had to know where everything went and how – Everybody had their own assigned job. Then after that, it was about midnight, then, we went on a hike through the woods. I came to – we scattered out. We weren't all drilling – I came to a big log lying in front of me. I hopped up on this big log and jumped off on the other side. There was no other side. It was at the edge of a bluff and I landed in a treetop down below the bluff.

I spent some time in the hospital and then got back in and going again, with all my other comrades that I knew. We'd get some fresh harvest and trade it around. One of the boys was from Kubrick; his name was Kubrick, Leonard Kubrick; and one from Graphic, his name was Graham, Winfred Graham. There was one from Oak Grove named Brownlee.

Interviewer: *Those are interesting stories.*

Warren: Then there was Clovis Bryant, like I said, from Van Buren.

Interviewer: *What were you actually trained as, yourself?*

Warren: I was trained, to begin with, to be a non-commissioned officer in charge of the surgical division. We had a surgical division and a medical division. If someone gets sick he would go to the medical division. If he had to have an operation he'd go to the surgical division. But when we went into actual combat, the surgical division was 90 percent of what we were doing and the medical part of it, when somebody had, say, a sore throat or appendicitis or things of that nature.

Interviewer: *Were they really able to prepare you for what it was gonna be like?*

Warren: I think so. I think so. It didn't bother me at all, working at the hospital and what we were doing. After – let's back up a little bit. Am I gonna be too long?

Interviewer: *No, no. You continue. Take your liberty.*

Warren: From A. P. Hill we went to New York. While we were in A. P. Hill, the doctors came in and joined our organization. They were all officers. They were lieutenants or colonels or captains, I think. Radiological people, laboratory people, and all avenues that you would need in a hospital. And also nurses came, too. They were

usually second lieutenants or first lieutenants. They were away from – the officers and nurses were separated and they were all separated from us, from the enlisted people. They kept the segregation all the time.

We went to New York and we loaded on the *Queen Elizabeth*, which was leased from the English government. On this ship going across, there were 33,000 soldiers, counting officers and –

Interviewer: *Oh, my. 33,000 military personnel.*

Warren: The one thing I remember about it. Of course, all the staterooms were cleaned out, just the walls. There were bunks, from the bottom to the top, like five bunks and they would just be solid. If one or two of you got up, the others had to stay in their bunk. You couldn't get up and walk around or anything. There wasn't room.

We had two meals a day, one at 9:00 and one at 4:00. The English furnished the meals. I'll never again eat breaded tomatoes. The English like them.

Interviewer: *You had plenty.*

Warren: We had them twice a day for seven days. That's it. I'll never eat breaded tomatoes again.

We landed, then, in Scotland. Of course, 33,000, they all scattered and went in different directions where they were consigned. I know that our outfit, which was the 67th Evacuation Hospital, we were all on the English cars. They were small cars. You would have – at one end of the car you had two wheels. At the other end of the car you had two wheels. That was all. You were just bumping up and down over all the rough places. And they had wooden seats with a wooden back.

Interviewer: *And what was the car to them? An automobile or a train or a bus?*

Warren: A tram, I believe it was called, or something. And so when we got on the train and started, we didn't know where we were going from there. We'd go through a town and the train would stop and all the English people would come out and they'd have big trays of donuts and all like that, yummy, yummy. We hadn't had any donuts in so long, no cinnamon rolls in so long. Oh, my goodness. None of them were made with sugar. Sugar was rationed over there. They didn't have sugar to make them with. They had the dough, the shape, and all like that. Didn't have any sugar on it.

Interviewer: *Taste like a biscuit?*

Warren: That's what it was. Taste like biscuits. Well, I was disappointed there. But being a farm boy, back in the Fort Rodman, Massachusetts, I missed the fruit and vegetables that we had on the farm. When we had our first opportunity to go to town, I went to town and bought myself a can of peaches and a can of half and half and a small cake, and I went back to the barracks and I gorged myself.

Interviewer: *Peach shortcake. That's right. From the South.*

Warren: Like I say, missing mom's cooking and all of the favorites things that we had.

Interviewer: *From Scotland they put you on the trams into England?*

Warren: In Scotland, down through Scotland into England. And we came to a town called Dursley, D-U-R:-S-L-E-Y. Dursley, England. It was a small town. Had cobblestone streets and the rationing had strained all the stores. Lots and lots and lots of stores were closed. One would be open and he'd have a big display, but it'd be a display of empty boxes. It's clothing or whatever, just empty boxes displayed.

The only thing we found that you might buy was fish and chips. That was like McDonalds today or one of the fast food places. We'd go down in the evening before dark and take a newspaper. You always had to bring your own newspaper to wrap it in. They put your fish in there – they fried it. Put the fish in there and put your French fries in with it, chips. Roll it up in that paper and hand it to you. You'd go back to the barracks and eat it or whatever you need to –

Interviewer: *Fast food.*

Warren: Uh-huh. It started early there.

Interviewer: *The only fast food. Did you set up a practice hospital in England or did they –?*

Warren: Yes. And we did a lot of marching and drilling and school work. We kept right on just like we were doing before but we did it over there.

Interviewer: *Can you give us a timeframe on this? About what year we would have been in?*

Warren: Let's see. I believe June 6, 1944 was D-Day, I believe, if I remember right. It would be in the other piece, the interview I had.

Interviewer: *But it was before D-Day.*

Warren: Oh, yes. It was before D-Day.

Interviewer: *Did you have an idea of what they were planning?*

Warren: Oh, yes. We knew. If nothing else, we'd start the rumor.

Interviewer: *Liven it up a little?*

Warren: Yes. And while we were there, we lived in empty buildings. Store buildings or whatever they could offer. There were thousands and thousands and thousands, hundred thousands, hundred thousands, of troops over in England that they were accumulating. They just didn't have room for them unless in you were in an empty building or – I know one time we were in upstairs over a pub. Early in the evening, you could hear people coming in down below to drink a beer or something down there. The outside stairway we went up and I think there were about 25 of us slept up there. Anywhere we could find a place to put us.

And we had a ration. We were given rations of – let me think. Once a week, I believe, we got two Cokes in bottles, two Cokes. But there was no ice or anything. You just had to open them and drink them hot. And cigarettes; even if you didn't smoke, you still got your cigarettes. Those came in handy, cigarettes did, after we got over in the European theater. The people over there, you could trade them for souvenirs or different things. Some of the boys would trade them for cognac or wine or something of that nature.

Interviewer: *I'd like to know how your commanding officers kept control of their enlisted men when they were scattered all over a city, 25 here and 25 there.*

Warren: There would be a sergeant in there.

Interviewer: *So, you weren't exactly free.*

Warren: No. You weren't free to do what you'd wanna do. There was lots of freedom at night, but then, of course, there were no lights. You'd walk down the street; you kinda had to know where you were going. You couldn't have any light of any kind.

Interviewer: *What did you notice the mood of the people of England? The common, working man; the lady on the street doing her shopping. What did you note from the people?*

Warren: I didn't see the ladies doing shopping.

Interviewer: *Oh, you didn't.*

Warren: No. There wasn't anything to shop for. They had been in war, see, a lot longer than we had. And everybody rode bicycles. Everybody. Once in a while you might see a car. It'd be a government official or something or an Army vehicle. All the gasoline was saved for the Army vehicles. But everybody rode bicycles. And you could rent bicycles to ride out in the country on the weekend if you wanted to, on Sunday afternoon or something of that nature.

This little town of Dursley had a woman who was a character, a character of ill repute. If you saw her out in the daytime, she wore men's shoes and I don't know, ragged clothing or something of that nature. She was out at night, walking around and those men's shoes would be squeaking. You could hear her coming. And if you were walking down the street, two or three of you, say, "I hear Molly coming. I hear Molly coming." We'd step back in the door, it was dark, you know, until she went by. Everybody had a –

Interviewer: *Eerie, kind of.*

Warren: – tale to tell about Molly.

That was in England and then we knew we were getting close to D-Day, just from the feel of things. I think while I was in England – I believe I was a sergeant when I left the United States. I went to staff sergeant's rank when I was in England. Then I was still a staff sergeant when I went into war.

We were loaded on trains and we went – we were traveling down to the seashore. We stayed in the train all day, waiting for room to get in. So, many people coming, troops coming from every direction. We waited 'til it was our turn and then we got on the landing ship, LCS. It was open and it must have held 200 men, 250 men in there. The Coast Guard was operating this. We were getting ready and we stayed in that for a day, then.

Interviewer: *American Coast Guard men?*

Warren: Uh-huh. Before we were turned loose to go. Then we just – the weather wasn't good while we were in there, either. They had two days or more there was a real squall that came through. You know they postponed the invasion by one day.

Interviewer: *Was there desperation among the boys to be closed in on those craft and not allowed to –?*

Warren: No. No, no, no. Everybody was patriotic. They were going to do a job. They knew the people back home were rationing for us and sending us letters. That was the biggest thing from the time I went in the Army until I got out, was mail call. Are you gonna get a letter, a post card, just anything? If nothing else, I did – I turned around – I wrote to a friend, a classmate of mine, and we corresponded. He had a disability and was not drafted. We'd correspond. I'd tell him what was happening over there and he'd tell me what was happening back here.

Interviewer: *Kinda like a lifeline.*

Warren: Yes. That kept you in touch. Then we were getting the [inaudible]. Actually, we didn't know the seriousness of it. We found out, as soon as we hit the beaches over there, and they dropped the whole front end of the landing craft down. We said, "Boys, let's go." We went out through that. But it was in water. You were up to your waist in water there. Things kept bumping you and you'd look down. That was a soldier floating there, everywhere. You had to push them out of the way. You get on up to the beach there. We got up on the beach. Supplies were stacked there. Then they came with our trucks and they came off to get on the runways that had been laid out there for them to get off.

Interviewer: *Were you on the second day or the first day of the invasion?*

Warren: Fourth day.

Interviewer: *Fourth day. Those bodies had been in that water, now, for several days.*

Warren: Yes. Yes. They never made it to the shores on Normandy. They were already inside, the troops were already inside, I think, three miles before we went in.

Interviewer: *Now, tell us again so we'll have it clear on our tape, the name of the beach that you beached on there, which part of the –*

Warren: Omaha.

Interviewer: *Omaha Beach. It was a hideous time.*

Warren: Oh, yes. There were lots of foxholes along there where the first wave, they'd gone in and dug foxholes on the beach. We would spend the first night out there. They said, "Dig some foxholes right here. Take care of yourself." German planes would come over and strafe. There were foxholes that we got into that somebody else had dug and then moved on.

After we got our barracks where we were and we dug foxholes. Some of them were long that you could lay down in. Ones were round that you'd squat down in. I got them all ready. I went down the line to see that all the men had their foxholes dug, and about that time a German came over, strafing. It sounded like a gun being fired in a stovepipe: Pow! Pow! And you could tell it's what it was. Everybody was scattered in the foxholes. I was too far down there. I couldn't get back to my foxhole because I was checking to see that everybody had one. There was a long one here that somebody'd dug. I just dive into that and just as I hit the foxhole, whoever it belonged to came right in on top of me. He had lots of four-letter words to say to me for being in his foxhole. I turned and looked up where I could see him. It was Clovis Bryant from Van Buren.

Interviewer: *Now, that's a story!*

Warren: We laughed about that. He said, "Don't you ever do this again!" Said, "Don't you ever talk to me about that again, either."

Interviewer: *How many men did you have responsibility for?*

Warren: At that time I had about 40 because we were working in shifts. We worked around the clock once we set up our tents after we moved inside. We moved in right behind the front lines, perhaps a mile. Lots of times, they were shooting over us at the enemy out there. As soon as somebody was wounded they brought them right in to us. Did he need to go into the operating room here or was he able to be taken on back – they'd have an ambulance take him on back to a real hospital. We just –band aided people to where they could get back. If they had a badly mangled arm or leg, we just amputated the leg. I've walked to the back door of the tent, the operating tent and just throw a leg with a shoe on it up in a trailer out there, or an arm or something like this. They would have bled to death otherwise. The doctor would endeavor to amputate far enough, that when they were really an amputated professionally, they would do it professionally, but you'd get back in

a stationary hospital we call them general hospitals. Then they were gonna be there for several weeks or months at a time.

Interviewer: *Cleaned up a little bit.*

Warren: So, we saw it, just as soon as it happened, and then as the front line moved on forward, and we'd get as much as four miles behind, then another hospital just like us, would leapfrog and move up to the front then a half a mile from the front line. And, we were back here then taking the overflow and resting maybe for two or three days, and then we'd leapfrog them and get on up to the next one. And then I went in to administration, and that was one of my jobs was to go forward and find a place to set up the hospital. Sorry, I didn't bring books, I've got books with all the pictures of hospitals set up, all like that.

Interviewer: *Now, that's a risky proposition though, to be up that near to the front line?*

Warren: Oh, yeah. All my camps had big crosses painted on them, red cross painted on them, so that Germans would know we were not the combat troops, we were medics.

Interviewer: *Did they honor that?*

Warren: Yes, they always did. In fact, they just didn't get back to us. The allies kept them going the other way, and they didn't get back to us. So, of course, we could see all the bombers going over, going towards Germany, and all the planes and see a dog fight going on up there, things of that nature. So, we've stayed with – the only people that really got homesick were the older people that were in my organization, and people that had families. See, I was not married and did not have children, and it was hard on those people.

Interviewer: *Very hard.*

Warren: So, we went on –

Interviewer: *Just wait, before we jump on out in to the battle front, had others of the Crawford County men made Staff Sergeants and so on, like you had. Had they kept up the rank with you, or can you tell us any details about any of the other people, what they did? Or the names –*

Warren: Everybody had some increment, increase. Those who were in charge of – like I was in charge of the surgical division here, and I was a Staff Sergeant. The one in charge of the medical division was a Staff Sergeant and he might be from Crawford County or some other place

or somebody working in the X-ray room with X-ray technician, he might be a Corporal. And so, everybody was moving along because the organization called for so many Captains, so many Colonels, so many Lieutenant Colonels, so many Captains, so many Majors, so many Lieutenants and so many enlisted men then.

And they called, they had one which was the Top Sergeant No. 1, and you had Sergeant Major, which was in charge of administration, paperwork this sort of thing.

Interviewer: *How many people were, including the doctors and enlisted men, how many did it take to make up the 67th Evacuation Hospital Unit?*

Warren: About 200.

Interviewer: *Is that right? So, it was a good sized little group to be moving.*

Warren: Yes it was. But, it wasn't so big that you didn't get to know everybody. People who were working in the motor pool, truck drivers, we got to know those people even though we were in something else over here. And so, when today we have Army reunions, they'll be people in motor pool, surgery, people in administration, they all come together and we just know everybody by name.

Interviewer: *Well, that helped you to deal with it.*

Warren: Yes, it did, having some camaraderie, like Graham and Laylock and Brownlee and [inaudible] and Kibler, and a man named Spoon, and a man named Lakey from [inaudible]. Those were all, they'd say have you heard anything from home, did you get fresh [inaudible] or hey, you know what I read in [inaudible] yeah. So, we [inaudible] back here in Crawford County.

Interviewer: *And there's the family that you had, at that time.*

Warren: Yes, closest thing we had to family.

Interviewer: *So, you were leapfrogging behind the troops? Did you cross France in to Germany?*

Warren: Yes.

Interviewer: *Go ahead, and –*

Warren: Went in to the edge of Germany, and of course it's where the front line was going, they kept moving forward – some of the countries –

we went in to Luxembourg and to Belgium, Germany. Czechoslovakia – spell that, I’ve even forgotten how to spell it, I had to look it up. And back through France again, those were about the countries that we were in.

Interviewer: *What were some of the worst battles that you had to treat the wounded?*

Warren: The worst thing that happened to us, I think, was when the Germans lost the battle of the Bourg, and we close to the front lines and we were in a town, Bastion, but it weren’t that close, and we were set up in a boy’s school, and had a wall all around it, the boys stayed inside while going to school. And, we noticed outside, that all civilians were going in one direction, just hordes of them going in one direction. And we asked, what’s happening out there, and they said, well, the Germans are breaking through and they’re coming this way, and all the civilians were going that way to get out.

Well, it wasn’t long until orders came down that the Germans were heading in our direction, we need to move out. So, the Colonel came to me and he said, Blaylock I need seven men to stay here with the ones that are so seriously injured they can’t be moved. [Inaudible] they could walk in shoot them, the Germans would. And so, I said I’ll be the first one to volunteer, and I’ll get six men with me. And, I looked for single men to stay with me, and I got five, and I made six and I drafted one, he never did like me after that.

And, we stayed there anyway. And they loaded on the trucks, then that we had those who could in any way sit up or even lay on a stretcher, they could put the stretcher across one row of seats, so the other stretches could fit in there. You put them in there, you’d put a row under them, like this, but they didn’t go back down the main autobahn, because the Germans were too close. They were back over the hill, like you would go from Mountainburg to Fayetteville, and you’d go to [inaudible] and Lark and through those dirt roads.

Interviewer: *Oh, yeah, bad roads.*

Warren: That’s the way they went back, they went back through that direction. And, no one would say we’re gonna – they all have [inaudible] Germans were going to overrun us there. I went out in the back and dug a hole and buried all the souvenirs I had collected, I didn’t want them to find any of them. Then the next afternoon, battle lines had stalled and the next afternoon the trucks came back in and said we’re gonna take the rest of them whether they’re able to go or not. You can either stay here and be shot or we’re gonna take them out. So, the

more seriously wounded and so forth, we loaded them on the truck and we got on with it and went back and got to the hill the same way.

One of the trucks when it came in, coming in to get us had a hole shot his gas tank on the way down, so the Germans were that close.

Interviewer: *Did the men and the seriously wounded survive the trip over the mountains?*

Warren: Well, I, don't know if all of them did or not, some of them might of, but as we got back they left to some other hospital [inaudible] we went back to where we could find a place to [inaudible] building to be in, we went back to Belgium. We went back to Belgium and got away from the front line until the front line, if you remember, General George S. Patton and all of them. What with that it began to turn, the tide of the battle began to turn, but the Germans had come all – it seemed like in some places they were 35-40 miles back against [inaudible] allies turned and when back in the other direction, pushing them back and they took lots of [inaudible].

During that time, there was lots of snow on the ground and it snowed quite often, and you'd see bodies laying out, soldiers laying out on the field somewhere, side of the road, laying out in the snow where they'd been killed.

Interviewer: *Did you have very many who came in from the front lines with just frozen feet, frozen fingers? They would have gone to medical instead of surgical?*

Warren: They'd have gone to medical side, but they'd still come in to our hospital. The hospital was like a V, and there was an entranceway right there out front, and they need to go up here to the surgical side or they'd go to the medical side over here no this side.

Interviewer: *Were supplies able to reach you out there?*

Warren: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: *You had plenty of something to eat, clothing.*

Warren: Yeah, we 'd have clothing, all the clothing that we needed. We slept in tents, lots of time with that snow on the ground, we just slept in tents, slept with your clothes on. You might pull of your shoes or your boots, but you'd sleep with your clothes on to stay warm, and if there's any water in there, it'd be frozen the next morning... it's hard to do, because strip off and dress if you had to, and in the temperature

like that. We became accustomed to it and also lots of GIs became accustomed to it.

Interviewer: *Did any of those other guys who stayed with you, and the one you drafted, were any of those from Crawford County?*

Warren: I don't think they were. In fact, I can only remember one, I have to go look, but we were all given the Bronze Star after that. And, I remember the one who I had to draft, who didn't want to stay.

Interviewer: *So, that's getting near the end of the war? The Battle of the Bourguignons?*

Warren: Yes, things began to look up for us, and get better.

Interviewer: *That was December and January, I believe of '45.*

Warren: About that time, I had to move on up in to administration, I didn't do any work in the hospital anymore after [inaudible] one of my views, was to take a crew of men, and go forward looking for a placement so that our hospital it took a spot that had to be close to the road, so it could get to us in a hurry, and it had to be like 20 acres of cleared land that we could use.

And there was – we were fortunate in this way, there was a laundry unit attached to us, and they did our laundry, and kept us – we kept using the same laundry, you didn't have as much throw away as I would do now, and you'd use the same things over and over. Like, wrapping of surgical instruments, you'd wrap them up in a towel and then that towel would be sent down to the laundry, they'd launder that and dry it and send it back to us. It worked good, when we were not in war, they'd sometimes do cleaning or something for us, as far as our laundry was concerned.

And then, in the kitchen, we call it kitchen, they prepared food for all of us plus the soldiers that had to be fed, the wounded that had to be fed too. So, that would probably be another 100 or so, coming and going. The kitchen would make big pots of coffee in like a 30-gallon galvanized aluminum stainless steel, they'd just boil the coffee and put in like, a pillow case, let's say, drop it down in the hot water, and let it boil. And then – I never did drink coffee in my life, I've tasted it, but never did drink it. Then we'd have our mess kit to go eat in shifts, and when you'd eaten you'd take your mess kits and dip it down in a big barrel of hot water over here, and that's where you washed it and take it on back with you.

And, since I didn't drink coffee, I had my cup there and I'd just sip a cup of hot water and use that to shave with. A little of home life.

Interviewer: *What was the capacity of your hospital, how many wounded could you really handle? You mentioned there were about maybe 100?*

Warren: We could handle 200, but we were moving them through as fast as we could, they just didn't stack up. To get them right on back to the general hospital. Back to the coffee that we were drinking, after they take the bag of coffee grounds out and dumping out here, we were getting coffee all the time. Well, the natives, said, hey, we'd like to have that. And so, what the people in the kitchen began to do, they would take that bag of coffee round, over to the laundry, and said run this through the dryer would you. And they would dry that, and it would just be like fresh coffee –

Interviewer: *To those people.*

Warren: To the local people there you know.

Interviewer: *Oh, my goodness.*

Warren: Oh, maybe they hadn't had coffee in years.

Interviewer: *But then under rationing, much more severe than we had.*

Warren: Yes, they'd had it a long time before what we had over there.

Interviewer: *What rank did you finally achieve?*

Warren: Rank?

Interviewer: *Uh-huh.*

Warren: First Sergeant. That was the top enlisted man. It came with a great deal of responsibility, I can tell you it did.

Interviewer: *I'm sure.*

Warren: I remember, one time, the war was over and we were living in some school building, waiting for our turn to come home, if you had enough points. If you were married you had so many more, if you had children you had so many more points like that, and they could go first. Doctors and nurses got to go first too, because they were needed back in the States. We were in a school building there and one of the soldiers –

Interviewer: *Which town are we in now?*

Warren: I don't remember, we were in so many towns, I don't remember.

Interviewer: *Are you in Luxembourg, France, Germany?*

Warren: We were in, I think we were in Belgium.

Interviewer: *Belgium.*

Warren: And, so we were just kind of lollygagging around kind of doing what we wanted to do, and waiting for our call to be sent back home. And one of the soldiers came in and said, Sergeant Blaylock, do you remember Griffin, that was just recently sent out to another outfit where they needed a mechanic, I said, yes. He said, he's back over here, and I said, oh, how'd he get over here, he said well he remember he made a jeep out of parts. He found different things and had his own jeep, so he said he backs in the jeep and said he's drunk. And he has a gun, and said, we don't know what to do with him, I said, okay, I'll take care of it.

So, – Hurley, that's his name, Hurley. I went over and I said, hey, Hurley, what you doing over here, you're supposed to be 50 miles away from here. Oh, Blaylock, I just come over here to visit with my friends, he was drunk you know. And I said, well you got a gun there, he said, yeah. I said, let me have that, and let's you and I walk down here and talk to the officer of the day down here.

Oh, okay. The reason they called me, was he'd gone in the restroom and there was another door and it was locked, and he'd taken his gun and he blew the lock off the door, who do you think was on the other side of the other restroom? and he showed him where the bullet had gone through the door.

Interviewer: *Oh dear.*

Warren: Anyway –

Interviewer: *One of those war stories you tell young men.*

Warren: So, Hurley, I got him by his right arm, [inaudible], Hurley let's go down there and talk to the officer of the day. Start down the street, he said, Blaylock, turn loose my arm, it might make me wanna hit you. I turned loose his arm, because I had him by his right arm, and I knew he was left-handed. So, I did, I turned him loose, and said, you just

walk along here with me. So, I don't know how that –

Interviewer: *You mean he built his jeep out of parts he found on the road –*

Warren: Yeah, you know might be hit with a barrage of bullets or something and it had put it out of commission, but the he was mechanic, and he would find another jeep and some parts or something, and that was kind of his sideline doing that. So, he made his own jeep.

Interviewer: *Would he have been from Arkansas, possibly?*

Warren: Yeah, the other group, the size of 25 that when from Van Buren, they were from various places in Arkansas, and a few from Texas and a few from Oklahoma.

Interviewer: *So, the 67th Hospital was largely Arkansas men?*

Warren: It was largely Arkansas men, and we have 25 and might 6 from Oklahoma and I made three from Texas, and there'd be 8 from New York, and two from Virginia, but we had the closest-knit group of people from Crawford County. But, at that time we were waiting to come back home and we were going out to Southern France Marseilles to catch a boat. I saw the Mediterranean ocean for the first time.

Interviewer: *Why don't we stop just a minute and back up though. Did you go back and dig up your souvenirs?*

Warren: No, no.

Interviewer: *You didn't get to?*

Warren: No, I didn't think about those souvenirs anymore.

Interviewer: *The Germans breathing down your neck.*

Warren: Yeah, that's right.

Interviewer: *And also, I like to know where you were when the war was declared over? When you heard that the war was over where were you?*

Warren: I think we were in Luxembourg. And we noticed the decrease in planes going over and of course, we had some regular contact, and the German air force were surrendering. And we were on this large meadow down here, and just above us up here was a level plateau, maybe 200 ft. wide and there's a run way on that, and air planes were

coming in there to surrender. German planes and fighters were coming to surrender. And the Americans had anti-aircraft guns sitting all around up there, and I remember one plane, German plane coming in too fast and he couldn't make to land, and so he gunned his ship and took off again, and when he did they shot him down, right then.

Because, they thought he was coming back round to bomb them or something, so, that was an unusual thing.

Interviewer: *What was the mood? I know the mood changed in the camp.*

Warren: Oh, yes. We were happy, and the mood was going home, going home, going home. And that was with everybody, it was, going home. The Army as such, I felt was good for it took us to be disciplined, it taught us patience, and it taught us patriotism, and love for the country, and love for our fellow human beings. We learned to trust each other –

Interviewer: *Good life principles.*

Warren: Right. And so, we were checking to see who had the most points, that sort of thing and all. But, we stayed busy doing various items that needed to be done. Packing up equipment that was gonna be sent back home, this sort of thing. But, the mood was joyous time and I always think of the picture of *Life Magazine* and everybody singing. Or the sailor kissing the nurse. The nurses [inaudible] the nurse had on a black uniform, but the nurses all wore camouflage suits, just like the men did, enlisted men. But, they had officers' suits, equipment and clothing that they wore as separate. You could tell they were an officer.

Interviewer: *Were the lady nurses that followed y'all right at the front lines?*

Warren: Yes.

Interviewer: *What was their title, what were they called?*

Warren: They were nurses. They were nurses, that was their titles.

When we were in Virginia, their officers came to the organization, and the nurses came to the organization. They had been drafted from the United States, and they were sent there. They needed these nurses and doctors, and so we all stayed together. And I showed picture of the nurses altogether, and officers altogether.

Interviewer: *You were actually intermingling with them enough to tell how they were reacting toward the ladies?*

Warren: Well, they had a good attitude, they all had a good attitude. It was something that needed to be done, I do not know of any nurse or officer that belly ached and complained. If you had something to do, you did it with a good attitude.

Interviewer: *They had been nurses, professionally trained before they entered the service?*

Warren: Yes.

Interviewer: *So, they were used to blood and –*

Warren: Yes, all of that, that was nothing new to them.

Interviewer: *How long was it after the war was ended before you were able to see the Mediterranean you were gonna tell us about?*

Warren: It must've been four months. Some of the troops stayed over there to be in control –

Interviewer: *Occupation forces.*

Warren: Yeah, occupation forces. Others were coming over that hadn't been to war for occupation forces. What we didn't know though, at that time, Japan had not surrendered, and so, we didn't know what we were gonna go through with Japan. And so, we were just glad it was over over there. And of course, we really celebrated when the Japanese surrendered. I again, going back to my farm roots, when we got down to Marseilles, and the rumor got started that we were going to have eggs and we were gonna have milk. Oh, I couldn't wait to get on that boat, I couldn't wait to get on that boat. The eggs were powdered eggs, the milk powdered milk, the milk you mixed water. Where was the old Jersey cow. I wanted pure milk.

Interviewer: *What was the boat that they put you on?*

Warren: It was a much smaller boat than what we came over on, there was about six or seven thousand of us on that boat, going back. And you tend to get sick more there. On that big boat coming over, you couldn't tell when a wave hit you or anything on that, but on the small one you could feel the wave and it took longer to come back. I think it was like 14 days to come back on that. But, that was an American boat.

Interviewer: *So, you got to experience the queasy stomach of the sea?*

Warren: Sure, did. Along with the others...

But going over on the Queen Elizabeth there were no lights on the ship at all above deck. Because German submarines were patrolling [inaudible]. There were 800 ships, troop ships that were sunk by the Germans, that was a lottery. You didn't hear much about those people, and those soldiers, they gave their lives just like everybody else.

Interviewer: *They sure did.*

Warren: But, they just say that SS Missouri – because all that would've been negative publicity for people going over there. Just like today there's so much negative about the journalist and the papers, that if someone gets a fingernail broken over there, they'll come back us and tell us all about it, and say, I wish – my grandson's in Iraq now.

Interviewer: *Give us his name?*

Warren: Gerry Scott Lewis. His father, worked in the Post Office here in Van Buren, for a number of years, and he's the Postmaster now in Winslow. And he and my daughter are divorced, and he had married again and so has my daughter married again. My daughter's a nurse, that's in administration. She's an administrator of a 200-bed psychiatric hospital in Houston. She started at the bottom of nursing and went on up through the ranks.

Interviewer: *How long has your grandson been in Iraq?*

Warren: Well, he's been back once. So, he's hoping that his unit will come home in November, but it's already been moved up once. So, November is the second time now [inaudible] come home.

Interviewer: *Did he grow up hearing your war stories? Did you get to share your war stories with him as he was growing up?*

Warren: No, no, no.

Interviewer: *Didn't talk about it.*

Warren: He went in to the Army. He joined the Army, and when he came back, he and a buddy of his came by the house, and we talked a little bit about it then, and I showed him my uniform and medals and all. So, it may have meant something to him then, he said, gramps, I really love the Army, but I don't like where I am. But, he said, I love

the Army. He likes to know what's happening next, and he said that's what they tell us. We say, well what's going on today, and he said, I say now, who's gonna kick in the door? And who's the second man in.

He says I wanna know all that, but he's 25 and 18 and 19-year-old boys are going – they don't think that far ahead like the more mature – he's called grandpa by some of the people there. But, he hasn't talked much about it, he didn't talk much about it when he came home. It took him six days to get home, [inaudible] room on an air plane, he went to England and back around to finally get back. But, going back it just took him two days.

They got him back where they wanted him, he said as soon as he got back that morning, that afternoon he went out on a mission somewhere, he didn't tell us what. [Inaudible] email and computer and all of those things today, which kept him feeling closer to home and family.

Interviewer: *Well, which port did you come in to when your craft got in to the United States? Where did you enter the U.S. when you returned home?*

Warren: New York.

Interviewer: *New York City. You had to sail by the Statue of Liberty then?*

Warren: Coming in, oh yeah, beautiful girl, beautiful girl, I think.

Interviewer: *That's moving when you've been in war.*

Warren: Oh, yes. It is very moving and of course you know –

Interviewer: *Because, what you've been doing is what she stands for, you've been upholding –*

Warren: As we came in to New York and saw the Statue of Liberty, we watched for it for many hours, and then when it came on the horizon it was just a small little, like something you hold in your hand little statue. But, as you get closer and closer, and as it did that was just more dear to each of us. We were getting that much more closer to home, and putting behind us all of the carnage and the battle that we had endured. And so, our entry in to the United States when we came back was through New York and from there we went down to St. Louis, which is where we were discharged.

And, at that time, we turned in all the equipment, we had to get one uniform and our [inaudible] needed. Several people, myself included, were sent back home little souvenirs to our parents or to our family, and if we were carrying any of them with us as we went back out of St. Louis back in to catch the train going back to Little Rock where we took off. The little trinkets that we were carrying, they looked at those to be sure they were not something of value or something we shouldn't have.

One time, I sent a German sub machine gun home, when we were over in Germany, but it didn't ever get home. The box, even though it was a wooden box, and it had been taped with metal and nailed shut, they still opened it and took out the sub machine gun and nailed it all back together and sent it on home. What I should've done was to send one piece at a time, and then it would have all gotten home.

Interviewer: *That would've been –*

Warren: Yes, but I didn't do that, but we came back in to New York, and were sent on by train down to St. Louis, and we were all discharged together. Got back on the train and came back in to Little Rock, and the families were there to meet their loved ones and their friends. And as I talked about my friend Clovis Bryant earlier, his wife was there and I rode home with them to Alma –

Interviewer: *So, you two went in together and came back right back home together?*

Warren: Went all through the war together, and there were several others like that. Brownlee, I know he came back, after he got married. When we had our two weeks after we were inducted, in the Army you had two weeks to come back. The day before we went back he got married.

Interviewer: *That's short notice.*

Warren: I guess he just wanted to be sure he held her while he was gone, I guess.

Interviewer: *You were talking to me a little bit about, that you not only treated our American wounded when there was space and time to do so your hospital actually received some of the wounded Germans?*

Warren: Yes, we were not mad at the, or unhappy with the German people or the French people, especially those people who had been under Hitler for a number of years, and they were glad to see us, and would throw bouquets at us as we were going through towns, or open up a bottle of

wine or something, as we moved from one location to another location. They were very appreciative of us, and I remember one young man, and I never knew why he wasn't in the Army, it was in Czechoslovakia, [inaudible] was the name of the town over there.

And, met he and his fiancé, and we visited together and became good friends, and when we were moving out he gave me two pairs of gloves, one pair of leather gloves, real expensive leather gloves, and the other a pair of woolen gloves. I still have both of those here 67 years later. I wear them in the winter time for driving and put them back where I keep them, and it just reminds of this young man, and I often think about he and his fiancé, where there are and what they're doing, how they're getting along in life?

Some of the people that we met in England, made friends over there, I'm thinking if they're my age, they're probably deceased by now, and I just wonder how they got along in life and how they married. Think of the friendship.

But, we did, if we were a little bit slow and there weren't many people coming in, some of the Germans would be brought in to treat their ill. I remember one German particularly, he was lying on the bed, but it was an operating bed. He was lying on that, and he was just covered with a blanket, and I happened to notice that the blanket was moving on him, it was moving. And as I looked closer, it was full of lice, and that was lice in that blanket, a blue blanket, so, we just took it out and burned it.

And what, we did with all the Germans like that, we'd take off all their clothes and burn them, and give them new clothes to put on, give them a bath, and wash them and spray them, or whatever we needed to do, and clean them up. They were just like we were, they were drafted in to something that they didn't want to do.

Interviewer: *Their Army was in a sad condition, if they were lice infested. They were in poor condition.*

Warren: Yes, they were. Lots of them had been wounded, and their wounds would be wrapped up in either newspaper or toilet tissue, simply round and round their arms, just to cover up the injury that was there. And we would take care of them just like we did American soldiers, and they were most grateful to us. There were some Polish prisoners that were released, and we had about 50 Polish prisoners, that just worked with us all the time. By that, I mean, they did many a work, whatever needed to be done, and they were so happy to be free.

Interviewer: *They'd been prisoners of Nazi Germany?*

Warren: Yes, Nazi Germany for a number of years. And, they were so appreciative of the freedom they had. And even though they weren't going home or anything, they were just delighted – well they had a free meal, before they hadn't had food to eat when they were in prison.

Interviewer: *What about the Americans which the Germans and French had taken captive? Did you found any of those, that we freed and were able to come through?*

Warren: No, we did not see any of the men captive [inaudible]. When you went in to the concentration camps where the Americans were over there, the war was over at that time. And so, they sent those people to hospitals in other directions.

Interviewer: *Well, Mr. Blaylock, I'd like you to come back to Crawford County now and tell us what your family acted like when you stepped up on the porch?*

Warren: It was about 1:00 am, and I had one brother was there, that was my youngest brother, who is 17 years younger than I am, and he was just a small kid at that a particular time. And, my other brother who was older was in the Navy and he was not home. So, it was a change after four years.

Interviewer: *Did they already know you were coming that night?*

Warren: Yes, yes, oh, they knew we were coming, and how we were coming. Well, the families back here were all in contact with each other, all Crawford County families in contact with each other. Where we were and what we were doing, how far along the way we were towards coming back, or any activities that we were involved in. So, yes, we visited them and they visited together, our families did.

And we came back, we still visited together and went to Army reunions, and they would be of the 67th Evac. would move from one – after the war was over, we'd have an armory unit Eureka Springs, we'd have one in [inaudible] City, one in Hot Springs and my wife and I hosted the group for our 50th. Our 50th reunion, we hosted it in Fort Smith, and it was a wonderful time that we all had, and since that time they're gradually drifting away and dying.

And now, the last year we had – our last reunion in [inaudible] and they were only four veterans, and they were with us, children and

grandchildren, so we decided last year not to have it anymore, because we didn't wanna kinda have a contest to see who's gonna last the longest or you know just the four of us that were friends. And one of them comes from Kentucky, and one came from Oklahoma, myself made three and one from Little Rock made four.

My wife and I are going back to Eureka Springs in September, that's when we always had, September. We're going back with friends, and we're going to contact some of the other friends we've made, because these people [inaudible] down in Texas. Even though the veterans are deceased we always have lots of food. When we went to Eureka Springs, we went to the shows and Eureka Springs as a group, and we're recognized –

Interviewer: *When you came home did you go right back to the same type of work you'd been doing? Or how did you find something to do?*

Warren: No. When I came back home, I realized what was important in life, was an education. And so, I enrolled in the University of Arkansas and started school along with other veterans, and since starting in September, because of the veterans coming in, they started a group in November.

Interviewer: *Oh, really.*

Warren: And I was in that group that started in November, and went on through that for the next two and a half years. I went straight through, summer, winter and all. I kept on going until, because, I thought, hey, I was 29 years old I think by that time.

Or somewhere in there I've lost some time. And then after that it was a struggle to trying and make up what I wanted to major in, and what have you. Then I got married to a girl from Alma, who had just finished, she was three or four years ahead of me, because she went out of High School, and went on to [inaudible].

Interviewer: *Who did you marry?*

Warren: Ruth Belt, her father had a grocery store –

Interviewer: *Did you say Belt or Bell, what was her last name?*

Warren: B-E-L-T.

We both graduated, went back to Alma, I taught school there for two years, and then came to Van Buren, taught school for two years at

Van Buren. Then started a family and I went out in the business world, and been going ever since then.

Interviewer: *What was the business that you had?*

Warren: I first went to work for the American [inaudible] as Comptroller, worked there for four years, and then they closed the plant, and gave us the opportunity to move somewhere else. I didn't want to move somewhere else. And so, I stayed in Van Buren with the Darrell Thomas Company which was a fabricator of rubber goods, and they have lots of hunter factories here at that time. So, the man above smiled on us for the next several years and we did real good, and I retired in 1987, I believe it was and just enjoyed the first six months. And then after that, I thought, hey, I gotta have something to get up for in the morning, in the meantime my wife had died, she was deceased with Lou Gehrig's disease.

So, after I retired, I looked around for something to do, went to school for one semester, next semester they had a course called auctioneering. Auctioneering 1 and Auctioneering 2, and so [inaudible] University of Oklahoma. So, I went to school at night for two years over there, it was just one night a week. Took my examination in Little Rock and been doing this for approximately 20 years, I've retired now. I just do it occasionally you know for the Heart Association and for places like the High School. And the Women's League and things like that, I enjoy those non-profit work, helping those people out.

Interviewer: *Did you have other children than your daughter? Would you like to tell her name?*

Warren: My son and daughter.

Interviewer: *Tell their names, first names.*

Warren: My daughter is Lucinda Lee Blaylock and she married Gerry Lewis who was in the Post Office here and later on they got divorced. And she has remarried a man who is a registered nurse, and he is in administration down in Houston also in the hospital down there. My son is Warren Darryl Junior, and [inaudible] and he was not named after Darryl Thomas, [inaudible] spelled differently. He got his Master's Degree, they both have Master Degrees and he worked for a five or ten cents store – Can't think of it, I'd say... Just across from St. Edwards Hospital out there, there's a –

Interviewer: *K-mart.*

Warren: A Kmart, that's what it was, yeah. Oh, as I said, as we become more material we change, and that's one of the things I remember changed. He works for Kmart and he had worked in two or three different towns till now. And, for the last several years he's worked for Anderson Publishing Company out of San Angelo, Texas. And, he lives at Sulphur Springs, he's a single individual and just really enjoys life. And, he had one customer, you can guess who that is, Walmart.

Interviewer: *Oh, you can live with one customer, and Walmart's it.*

Warren: You know, they want their suppliers to live very close to Bentonville. So, he lives in Sulphur Springs. We see him quite often, like at Christmas. Just recently he and I decided that once a month we'll get together and eat somewhere between here and Siloam Springs, like in Fayetteville or other places. Just to – I remarried about 18 years ago to a lady I had known for some time. She has a boy and a girl too, they are married and they live in Fayetteville, so we're all [inaudible] –

Interviewer: *Tell us your second wife's name.*

Warren: Her name is Donna.

Interviewer: *Donna.*

Warren: She was originally from [inaudible], that vicinity down there, and so I had known her, in fact I hired her to work in the office for me. And then, later on she and her husband at that time, he was teaching and he went out in to the business world and they moved up to Kentucky [inaudible]. Eventually, 20 or 30 years later they moved back to Fort Smith to be closer to home, and they got divorced. And Donna and I got in contact with each other after four or five years, and found out that we had something in common, and so it's been a real good life. [Inaudible] blessed me, in so many ways.

Interviewer: *So, many ways. I would like to ask you a final question. Have you got some good advice you'd like to share with the young generation?*

Warren: The younger generation. First, education. Education, they can take your job away from you, but they can't take your education away from you. So, one of the first things you need to get is an education, and you can't get too much education, and make sure that the profession you choose is something that you like and that you enjoy. As, I said to my daughter, who really loved nursing, and I talked to my wife about going to dental school myself, after my first wife. Oh,

if I go to dental school, I've got to become a doctor, then I've got to get an internship and goodness I'd be 30 years old at that time, I can't wait that long.

But, you can, you can always start a new profession. In the auctioneering profession, I could've been doing this 35 years ago, and I love people, working with people, but there are so many good things about this country, I just have nothing to say in a negative sense. I may not agree with a lot of things that are happening, but when I count my blessings over on the other side, the blessings of our family, our churches, our jobs, we just have so many things to be thankful for every day. Thank you for asking me to come.

Interviewer: *Thank you for coming, we appreciate it so much. And thank you again for your service to our country during that critical time.*

Warren: Thank you, you are very kind.

END

Warren Darrell Blaylock

Times Record Fort Smith

Lifelong Crawford County leader and humanitarian, Warren D. Blaylock, 96, passed away Thursday, March 9, 2017 in Fort Smith. Warren was well known to almost all in the Fort Smith/Van Buren/Alma area. He grew up just north of Alma, graduated from Alma High School, and later joined the Army during WW II where he served in the 67th Evacuation Hospital, which landed on Normandy days after D-Day and trailed Allied forces throughout Europe. Initially, he entered the war expecting to be a soldier, but found his calling in the care and management of injured troops. Following the Battle of the Bulge, Blaylock's hospital moved to southern France before he was transported back to the States. Mr. Blaylock was promoted to First Sergeant during his time in Europe and received numerous awards for his efforts, including two Bronze Stars, the Superior Unit Award, and the Combat Medical Badge. He enjoyed sharing pieces of history through his WWII stories with many through personal discussions and public presentations.

He returned to Arkansas where he graduated from the University of Arkansas with a Bachelor's Degree in Business. For the majority of his professional life, he was Vice-President and General Manager of the Derrel Thomas Company in Van Buren. After his "retirement", he wanted to pursue another way to give back to the civic organizations of the area and became an auctioneer where he facilitated countless charity auctions and events.

His giving nature and community spirit was recognized and rewarded countless times throughout Arkansas. A few of the more notable ones were induction into the Arkansas Military Hall of Fame in 2015, as he was one of the five' inductees selected on the basis of honorable military service and exceptional state and community service. He was recognized in the U.S. Congressional Record in 2009, noted as a 'Hometown Hero' in Van Buren in 2016 for his service in WWII, inducted into the Arkansas Senior Hall of Fame in 2013, received the initial Alma Distinguished Alumni Award, the Kathleen Peek Community Service and Advocacy Life Achievement Award for his contributions to the field of behavioral healthcare, Friends of Senior Citizen Award as well as served over 20 years on the Board of Directors of the Crawford County Senior Citizen. His lifetime of service to the Northwest Arkansas area was highlighted with his leadership in the Van Buren Rotary Club and later, the Fort Smith Rotary Club for a legendary 54 years of perfect attendance as a Rotarian in Northwest Arkansas and was named a Paul Harris Fellow with Rotary International. He served 41 years on the Board of the Methodist Health and Rehab facilities in Fort Smith, 35 years of service on the Board of Western Arkansas Counseling and Guidance, numerous years as a member of the Board of Directors for Crawford Memorial Hospital, Board of Directors of Citizens Bank in Van Buren, Board of Trustees of the Methodist Hospitals of Memphis, Board of Directors of the Arkansas Cattlemen's Association, Crawford County Board of Education, Alma School Board, Arkansas School Board Association, and countless others.

He has been an active member of the Alma Methodist Church for his entire adult life. He held various board positions and served as lay leader throughout Northwest Arkansas. His home on Highway 71 was a Christmas lighting show long before it became popular in other areas of the state. He loved raising livestock on his ranch and enjoyed nothing more than coming home after work and 'going to the barn' to see his cows.

His family is in awe of the wonderful Christian, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, businessman, and humanitarian that he was while on this earth. He was preceded in death by his parents, Dock and Edna Blaylock of Alma; two brothers, Ronald Blaylock of Paris, TX and Russell Blaylock of Mountainburg; as well as his first wife and mother of his children, Ruth Belt Blaylock, and his second wife of 29 years, Donna Blaylock.

He will be lovingly missed by his daughter, Lucinda DeBruce and husband Lane of Alma; a son, Darrell Blaylock of Siloam Springs; grandson, Sgt. Jared Lewis of Fort Leonard Wood, MO; granddaughter, Audre Foster and husband Brad of Conway; and great-grandchildren, Logan Lewis, Jillan Lewis, and Morgan Foster; as well as Donna's children including stepdaughter, Dalana Nugent of Benton; stepson, Bill Byers of Springdale. Warren was a friend to many but he especially appreciated Pat Widders of Alma and Larry Womack of Fort Smith who tirelessly embodied the true definition of friendship.

Funeral service will be 10:00 a.m. Tuesday, March 14, 2017 at Edwards Van-Alma Funeral Home Chapel with interment to follow at Gracelawn Cemetery with Military Honors, under the direction of Edwards Van-Alma Funeral Home of Van Buren, AR

Pallbearers will be Robin Kuykendall, Pat Widders, Claude Blount, Larry Womack, Tony James, and Mayor Keith Greene. The family extends a blanket invitation for Rotarians to serve as honorary pallbearers.



**Cathryn Cluck
World War II Veteran
Interview**

The following was originally a video interview done by the Crawford County Friends of Genealogy, Van Buren, Arkansas. The interviewer is Wilma Jameson and the video recorder was Cliff Jameson. The original interview was recorded on March 15, 2006. This written transcript of the original audio was accomplished in March 2018. (Cathryn Cluck's daughter, Mary, is included at several places in the text).

Interviewer: *Today is March the 15th, 2006 and I'm visiting with Cathryn Cluck, and we're going to share some of her experiences in growing up and some of her experiences as working with the services in World War II. Okay, give me your full name Cathryn.*

Cathryn: What do you want, Cathryn R. Cluck.

Interviewer: *Okay, now, what was your maiden name?*

Cathryn: McCartney.

Interviewer: *McCourtney.*

Cathryn: McCartney, like the McCartney oil company. Oh, no, I ain't got no –

Interviewer: *You don't have any oil?*

Cathryn: No. No connection with them.

Interviewer: *And when were you born?*

Cathryn: October the 10th, 1919.

Interviewer: *And where were you born?*

Cathryn: Stark County, Ohio.

Interviewer: *Okay, and what was your parent's names? Your dad's name, what was his name?*

Cathryn: Warren J. McCartney.

Interviewer: *If you could describe your father to me, what would you say about him?*

Cathryn: He was strict, a hard worker, a money saver. My mom was more of a money saver than him. She was like the bark on a tree.

Interviewer: *What was her name?*

Cathryn: Florence.

Interviewer: *Florence and what was her maiden name?*

Cathryn: Hinnley.

Interviewer: *Hinnley. Okay.*

Cathryn: And the Hinnley's came from England, and our mother was Welsh and they all came from Wales.

Interviewer: *If you could describe your mother, what would you tell me, other than that she was tight, money tight?*

Cathryn: She was a good mother and she –

Interviewer: *What was her personality like?*

Cathryn: What?

Interviewer: *What was her personality? Was she a quiet woman?*

Cathryn: Yeah, she was quiet and she made all kinds of good stuff, and she couldn't hardly see.

Interviewer: *Okay, her eyesight was bad?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah, but she cooked and did all kinds of good stuff.

Interviewer: *What part of Iowa did you live?*

Cathryn: Not Iowa.

Interviewer: *I'm sorry.*

Cathryn: Ohio.

Interviewer: *Ohio.*

Cathryn: I guess that was my mistake, because I don't always get the words out right.

Interviewer: *What part did you live? Where did you live?*

Cathryn: Oh, in the middle part, I guess you would call it. Our post office was in Navarre, but we didn't live close to Navarre, just like we don't live close to Lodi.

Interviewer: *Okay. And how long did you live there?*

Cathryn: Until I was 22.

Interviewer: *22, alright, and what happened at 22?*

Cathryn: I got in the service and I was in there, well, until I got married.

Interviewer: *Did you enlist in the service?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: *Okay, so you grew up there in that part of the country. What was your earliest memory that you can remember?*

Cathryn: My earliest memory?

Interviewer: *I'm gonna put you on the spot.*

Cathryn: Oh, I don't know.

Interviewer: *Okay, what was the fondest memory that you have of growing up?*

Cathryn: Well, we lived in a place, there was no gas stations, no stores, no anything, just a little cluster of houses, and we lived close to a coal mine, but the coal mine had shut down when I was growing up. And everybody had kids, so we had lots of running buddies. Running, I mean, running on your feet, not running in a car. You got to remember, they didn't have many cars, hardly any, and there was a man, he had – I don't know what kind of a car it was. He was a young man and he'd be going about 20 miles an hour and he'd come down through that town and everybody would holler, "Get out of the way, here comes Roy", and he was only going, I doubt, 20 miles an hour, but you could hear him.

Interviewer: *So, you remember that car and you remember getting out of his way.*

Cathryn: Yeah, I remember that, and everything was dirt roads. There wasn't a highway nowhere near.

Interviewer: *Tell me your birth order, how many brothers and sisters did you have?*

Cathryn: Well, I'm the oldest and then I have two sisters and then a brother, and my brother died 13 years to the day on the day my husband died.

Interviewer: *Okay. What were some of the chores that you had when you were growing up?*

Cathryn: We always had to wash dishes and we had to get in the kindling. We started the fire and the cook stove with the kindlin. And, lord, he would even bring the kindlin in, get your pants ready for –

Interviewer: *I was gonna ask you about the discipline in your home? Who did the discipline?*

Cathryn: My dad.

Interviewer: *Your dad did. He was a strict man.*

Cathryn: He was strict.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, he was the disciplinarian in your home and he expected you to mind him when he told you to do something?*

Cathryn: Well, my mother was the same.

Interviewer: *What difference is there in the discipline of that day and the discipline of today?*

Cathryn: What discipline is there now?

Interviewer: *So, you think it's a vast difference?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: *Alright, tell me about your home itself. The conditions of your home, how did you heat your home?*

Cathryn: Well, in the sitting room. We never went in the living room in the winter. It was just too dulling cold, unless somebody was coming when we knew it was gonna be a party or something, and that part of the house got heated. But, we had a sitting room and it had a big old stove and heated – everything was coal, nothing was wood, and that was one of them big old stoves like that and it'd come like that, and then it went way over. It had a big fixture on top. Now, that, we had to keep scoured and cleaned. I don't know why.

Interviewer: *Coal's dirty, isn't it?*

Cathryn: Yeah. Well, so is wood, up to a point.

Interviewer: *But, how did your mother cook? What kind of fuel did she use to cook with?*

Cathryn: Coal.

Interviewer: *Coal, okay.*

Cathryn: Shoveled in the coal and kept the kitchen warm and my mom hung the clothes on the line, and when she hung them up, just about as fast as she hung them up, they froze. And when we come from school, we had to take all them down and we took them in the house and hung them on lines that we had stretched in the kitchen, and they finished drying. It was a hard life.

Interviewer: *The winters up there are hard?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah and cold. My mom would buy chicken and she'd hang it on the clothes line and boy, when we took that chicken down it was blue, but, you had to do that. What other way was there?

Interviewer: *What about the lights in your house? Did you use -?*

Cathryn: We had kerosene lamps and then, they also had - I don't know what they burned in that. It was a lamp with a big shade on like that and it had a [inaudible], they called them. They were cloth-like things and they hooked them up onto that and that's where the light comes from. I don't know how that all worked. I was only a kid. But, that's how we got our best light

Interviewer: What kind of social events did you attend as a child?

Cathryn: Hardly any. The kids played together all the time and when it got dark, why, you had to head for home.

Interviewer: *Did you live close neighbors to people?*

Cathryn: Yeah, but there was only a few houses. Well, I could go along and count them on my fingers, who lived in them, and - that wouldn't be a very long list.

Interviewer: *Alright, what about your first day of school?*

Cathryn: My first day of school, I wish - I knew you were going to ask me that. I got out the picture. Well, I don't know if I got them anymore or not because I give all my pictures to my kids, but the first day of school, there was eight grades and we had one teacher in one small school room.

Interviewer: *And she taught all eight grades?*

Cathryn: She taught all eight grades.

Interviewer: *Alright. When it was your class's turn to teach, how did she do that?*

Cathryn: We had to go up to the front and sit on a bench and she told us what she wanted to tell us, and when we were real young, she had a little chart about that long and, it was a little chart. You leafed it over like that and that was your reading lesson, and you had to learn to read that chart from what she told you or what you could do at home.

Interviewer: *Were you a good student?*

Cathryn: Pretty good.

Interviewer: *Did you get in trouble?*

Cathryn: No. Not much, hardly ever. When you got anything in school, you got it twice as bad at home. So, you made it your business to walk the straight and narrow when you were at school or any other place.

Interviewer: *Was the discipline at school, you think, different than it is today?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah. That teacher could pick up a paddle and pour it on you, but she didn't hardly ever do that. The boys in that room were old enough to get married. When you look at that picture, you think that some of them ought to be married.

Interviewer: *How many in your eight grades do you know, can you guess?*

Cathryn: Do I know them?

Interviewer: *No, how many, what number was in your grades? Did you have 20 students or –*

Cathryn: You mean in my class or the whole school?

Interviewer: *The whole school.*

Cathryn: The whole school, well, there might be 20, maybe.

Interviewer: *And in your class.*

Cathryn: Oh, maybe six or eight.

Interviewer: *Okay and you knew every one of them and you knew –*

Cathryn: Yeah, I knew them all.

Interviewer: *What were some of the games you played on the playground?*

Cathryn: Well, we had a rope and two people have the rope and these over here would run, try to catch these on this side, that kind of – sort of a makeup game. You had to do your own thing.

Interviewer: *You didn't have ball games?*

Cathryn: Well, we played ball in the summer time, but not with any other school or anything, just choose sides, that's all.

Interviewer: *When did the winter start up there?*

Cathryn: Oh, the last of October, it starts to snow.

Interviewer: *Did you ever have to go to school when it was snowing in –*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah, there was a neighbor boy. He was in the eighth grade and he used to help me through the snow drifts. I was little and he was big. He used to help me through the snow drifts. His name was Carl.

Interviewer: *So, he pulled you out of the drifts and helped you over the –*

Cathryn: Yeah, he helped me over the bumps.

Interviewer: *Alright, where did you go to school after you graduated that little eighth grade school? Did you go on to school?*

Cathryn: Eighth grade, then we went to high school and we caught the bus then. We had to walk a half mile and catch the bus and then ride the bus three miles

Interviewer: *You're in your teenage years now.*

Cathryn: Yep.

Interviewer: *Do you have a single class now or are you still in one room in your high school?*

Cathryn: Oh, in the high school, well, you had different classes and different teachers, nothing like –eighth grade we had been in. It's altogether different.

Interviewer: *Alright, are you – now you're a teenager and you have social events. What events are you attending as a teenager?*

Cathryn: We lived in the country. There was no –

Interviewer: *Did your family attend church?*

Cathryn: No. When we got older, my sisters and I used to go to church, but the rest didn't.

Interviewer: *You've talked about your family being a strict family, a family that was a very – was he strict in his money management, too?*

Cathryn: No. He wasn't so strict. It was my mom. She was tight.

Interviewer: *Did you worry about finances? Now, here you are in 1929 and you're in, what, high school, [inaudible] high school, and the depression is on. Did you worry about finances? Did your family get hurt in the depression?*

Cathryn: Well, my father worked for the railroad and he always worked for the railroad. He always had a job. He always brought home money, but it wasn't very much. We always had money and we always had plenty to eat, too.

Interviewer: *Okay, working for the railroad was a steady income, which a lot of people did not have.*

Cathryn: That's right.

Interviewer: *Were you on the railroad tracks?*

Cathryn: No.

Interviewer: *I mean, close to the railroad?*

Cathryn: No. My dad went three miles to go to work.

Interviewer: *I'm thinking about hobos and things like that during that time.*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah. We used to have hobos, and they'd come to your door and they said they would work for you for dinner or supper and – but, my mom always gave them something to eat. That's a hard old [inaudible] when you don't have anything at all to eat.

Interviewer: *So, even though she was tight financially and very close with her money, she still offered down and out person a meal?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah. You could give them bread or a sandwich, or meat or whatever you had, and they were glad to get it. They're not picky like people are nowadays, and everybody was the same. They could go to other people's house and get something, as well.

Interviewer: *I'm interested in your family. Did your dad and mother, did they openly show affection toward one another?*

Cathryn: No.

Interviewer: *Did he hug her and kiss her?*

Cathryn: Unh-uh.

Interviewer: *Okay, did he hug and kiss you kids?*

Cathryn: No.

Interviewer: *Did you doubt that he loved you?*

Cathryn: Well, it never crossed my mind. Dads just take care of kids.

Interviewer: *There's so much made today about being sure that you hug your children, that you tell them you love them, and this kind of thing, and so, in your generation, they did not openly show affection. So, one of my questions is, did you feel assured that they loved you?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah. We never had any doubts about that. I mean, that's just the way things were. Your dad and mother, they took care of you and loved you, and that's how it was with everybody. Now, I don't know what it was like in the city. I never had any dealings with people in the city and didn't have any relatives that lived in the city neither. So, I'm just talking about plain old country people. That's kind of – I don't know about the others.

Interviewer: *But now, you're a teenager and your parents don't – they don't openly show affection. They don't talk about a lot of stuff. Did your mother talk to you about sex before you –?*

Cathryn: Oh, my goodness. That was something you never mentioned. Her talking to us about sex, no, no.

Interviewer: *Alright, you're graduating from high school.*

Cathryn: Yeah.

Interviewer: *You're a young girl from the country, growing up very naïve because mom's – you don't – well, when did you get your first radio? Let me ask you that.*

Cathryn: Our first radio, I remember that. I was a little kid, maybe eight, maybe nine, and we got that Atwater Kent and that was a long radio about that long and about that wide, and it was as heavy as

lead. And then, on top of that, but separate, was a big speaker, that big. And it sat on top and that was where your – and on Saturday night when that Grand Ole Opry came on and had Uncle Dave Macon, and what's that one that always talked about the railroad tracks?

Interviewer: *I can't think. It wasn't Roy Acuff, was it?*

Cathryn: Yeah, could have been him. Roy Acuff and that tune he played. I can't think of that.

Interviewer: *So you remember the Grand Ole Opry. What are some of the other program y'all were allowed to listen to?*

Cathryn: Oh, I don't know, but now, on Saturday night when that Grand Ole Opry came on, people would come – never had been in your house before, neighbors, though, they would come and sit and listen to that, and woman would make – their wives, some of them didn't have wives, some of them was just old men, but they had never heard that Grand Ole Opry, so they liked to listen to it and they'd come and the women all brought baloney. That's all we had, you know. You got three pounds for \$0.29, so baloney is what the main thing was, and they grind that up and put pickles with it and homemade mayonnaise. They didn't have Miracle Whip. And they'd put pickles with it and homemade mayonnaise, and that was pretty good. And they'd fix sandwiches and they would all eat and drink coffee and –

Interviewer: *Listen to the Grand Ole Opry.*

Cathryn: And listen to the Grand Ole Opry. So, I remember the radio.

Interviewer: *You remember the radio and so, you kids were not allowed to listen to it, just sit and listen to it, like you had to be doing chores, is that right?*

Cathryn: Oh, no. It wasn't too much fun to sit and listen to that thing. A kid was waiting on you to come and play.

Interviewer: *What about – did you have a large, extended family where you lived, grandmothers and granddads and aunts and uncles?*

Cathryn: Yeah, they were my mother's aunts and uncles, not ours.

Interviewer: *And you told me she was from England, Wales?*

Cathryn: Her mother.

Interviewer: *Was from Wales?*

Cathryn: Yeah. She came here as a little girl and my grandpa came from England, and I think he was 11.

Interviewer: *But they lived close to you all?*

Cathryn: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Did you have Sunday get-togethers? Can you remember those?*

Cathryn: Not too much. My mom always cooked a big dinner on Sunday. She used to cook a leg of lamb. Boy, that was good.

Interviewer: *Okay, did she buy – were they good dessert makers?*

Cathryn: Yep.

Interviewer: *All on this coal stove.*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah. What else was there?

Interviewer: *I'm thinking about, her oven wasn't regulated and –*

Cathryn: No. You put hand in and felt.

Interviewer: *That's good.*

Cathryn: That's what you had to do.

Interviewer: *Alright, tell me about some of the things that we just take for granted about how you did your hair, how you washed your hair without running water in the house, and –*

Cathryn: Well, you had to heat water on the stove in the tea – we had a nickel tea kettle that was about that big and it was a big tea kettle, and you always kept that on the stove and, well, it wasn't boiling, but it was pretty hot.

Interviewer: *Okay, kept warm.*

Cathryn: Yeah. And you could always get water out of that for your hot water and then, right over here in the corner was a big old long sink. And right outside the window was a deep cistern. Water

came down off of the – the rain was on the roof and it came down the spouting. They don't call that spouting now. That man on the TV never calls that spouting but that's what we always called it. I forget what he calls it.

Interviewer: *And you use that water with a tea kettle water?*

Cathryn: Yep. What little water came out of the cistern and was put in the tea kettle. There was no way to get it in the tea kettle, unless you put it in.

Interviewer: *How did you roll your hair? All girls want to roll their hair and have curly hair.*

Cathryn: Well, mine was naturally curly.

Interviewer: *You were fortunate.*

Cathryn: Well, it was just wavy, it wasn't curly. My dad had curly hair and so some of us got that, but it never was curly. It was just wavy and who had time to mess with it? When we started to date and go around, by then, we'd fixed it. We put waves in with our fingers and the comb and then we had little clips. You don't hardly – I don't guess you see them anymore, but you squeezed them like that and they opened up, and when they opened up, why, you snapped that on the edge of that wave. I don't guess you'd have any idea how that works, but it worked.

Interviewer: *You got fixed up for your date, didn't you?*

Cathryn: Yeah, you had to fix up a little.

Interviewer: *Did you have curling irons?*

Cathryn: Well, yeah, we used to have a curling iron. You stuck it down in the lamp [inaudible].

Interviewer: *When it got too hot what did it do to your hair?*

Cathryn: I don't know. We never used it much.

Interviewer: *Oh, you didn't. You didn't have to, you had curly hair. Did you remember the first perms that came out?*

Cathryn: Well, I just remember seeing pictures.

Interviewer: *You didn't have to have one?*

Cathryn: No, we didn't go to get a perm. That was out of my mom's line. But, you saw pictures and it was just a ton of ropes hanging down from a big old tub-like thing, and all that was put on your hair. I don't know how they did it.

Interviewer: *Alright, now, you're a teenager and you're dating some, and you're hearing about the rumblings of war, and you heard about Germany invading Poland, and now they're coming into England and France, and England and France are getting kind of beat up on. And when did you enlist? I guess you enlisted, you did?*

Cathryn: Yeah. Let's see, that was – Mary, look on my discharge paper and see what it says when I got in. All that stuff sort of escapes me.

Interviewer: *Well, just tell me generally, you were 22 and so, you were born in 1919, so that would be – I can't think, my math is not that good. 1942,'43. Did you go in before war was declared?*

Cathryn: No, no. The boys were all fighting and taking them and – Does it tell you on that paper, Mary?

Mary: August the 30th, 1943.

Interviewer: *Okay, so you were – now, did you brothers – were they drafted?*

Cathryn: I only had one brother and he was the youngest, and no, he was too young.

Interviewer: *But your friends are being drafted?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah, they're taking them.

Interviewer: *And so, America decides to go to war –war with Germany, and what did your folks think about it?*

Cathryn: Oh, it killed my mother. My dad didn't say too much. I was in my 20s and I could do what I wanted.

Interviewer: *Why did you decide to go?*

Cathryn: Well, everybody was going, no women that I know of.

Interviewer: *But you decided that you wanted to be a part of the effort and to help out.*

Cathryn: Yeah. [Inaudible] that you'd help out but it was something.

Interviewer: Okay. Now, just before you went in, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Do you remember where you were?

Cathryn: Yeah, I was at home because I remember hearing about Pearl Harbor on a radio, but I didn't have any idea where Pearl Harbor was.

Interviewer: *So, the Japanese, now we're in war with Japan and we're in war with Germany, and you decided to go into the service to help in any way that you can. What was the feeling of America during that time? Do you remember? Did they think we were in over our heads or were they -?*

Cathryn: No, no. You can't think that kinda stuff. You gotta know that you're gonna win. That's just the way that it is.

Interviewer: *Where did you go for your physical?*

Cathryn: Fort Hayes, Columbus.

Interviewer: *Okay. Can you remember the thing that made you decide that you wanted to enlist?*

Cathryn: No.

Interviewer: *Now, you're a young girl who lives on the farm.*

Cathryn: I didn't live on a farm. I just lived in a farming community.

Interviewer: *Okay, that's right. You told me that your dad worked on the railroad. Alright, but what was the farthest you'd ever been away from home before this?*

Cathryn: Pittsburgh, PA.

Interviewer: *So, you decide to go into the services. Where do you take your physical?*

Cathryn: Fort Hayes, Columbus.

Interviewer: *And where did they give you orders to go after that?*

Cathryn: Well, I went back home. All they'd done was do a physical and, oh, give you instructions for this and that and the other, and then we all went back home. And you didn't have anything to do. I had already quit my job so I couldn't go back there, so they were really needing people to work, and the women, old women that you knew, they put on overalls and went to work on the railroad cleaning out old engines and all kinds of stuff, dirty, dirty work. And that's what they'd done. Well, they got paid for it. I suppose they worked also for the money, but somebody had to do it.

Interviewer: *So, it was changing the role of women.*

Cathryn: That's right. They never went back to being just complete housewives anymore. You know what I mean is baking and cooking and doing laundry, and all that old kinda stuff. Most of them had a sideline working at a job and doing their housework and all of that at night or on the weekends or something.

Interviewer: *Where did you take your basic training? Did you have any basic training?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah. That was in Iowa, and they told us not to bring anything except the clothes we had on and our toothbrush, and our pajamas. And, let's see, what was the name of that? Des Moines, Iowa. I really don't remember the name of the camp.

Interviewer: *When you got your orders, what did your orders say?*

Cathryn: Go to this camp on a certain day and don't bring anything except the clothes you have in and your toothbrush, and that kinda stuff, what you need.

Interviewer: *What unit were you in, what service?*

Cathryn: The army.

Interviewer: *Okay, and what unit? Do you know, remember?*

Cathryn: I was in the WAAC, the Army Auxiliary, and our pay was \$21.00 a month, same as the men.

Interviewer: *The same as the men?*

Cathryn: The men got all \$21.00 and we got \$21.00, and it was like that for several months. And then the government got generous and upped it to \$52, and the men got \$52.

Interviewer: *Well, good. Good, I'm glad to know you got the same.*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah, and we had the same rules and regulations and everything that the men did, except that at the end of the war, the men go to [inaudible] and get college educations and all that kinda stuff, but the WAAC didn't get that. And after so long of time, we were taken from being an auxiliary to being a part of the army, and then we became the WAC.

Interviewer: *The WAACs. Okay. What were some of your duties?*

Cathryn: I was a cook. I went through – in basic, that's your basic training in the army and I also had to go to cooks and bakers school. And then, after that, I was a cook, cook and a baker.

Interviewer: *Okay. Did you stay in that one place all during the time you were in service?*

Cathryn: Well, I stayed there a little while, and then they shipped us to – everything was by train. You went on a troop train. We went on a troop train to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. And I just don't remember how long we were there.

Interviewer: *There, she has a picture.*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah, that's at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. Who got that out?

Interviewer: *That's where she's baking.*

Cathryn: Cooking turkeys.

Interviewer: *One, two three, three big turkeys in one pan. Took a lot of strength to lift that, didn't it?*

Cathryn: Yep.

Interviewer: *Alright, so you got on a troop train and you went –*

Cathryn: To Des Moines, Iowa.

Interviewer: *And what did you do there, same thing?*

Cathryn: Yeah, that's where that was taken at.

Interviewer: *That's where that was taken? Okay. Did you remain there during the rest of the war?*

Cathryn: No, I was there I don't know how long, and then we went on a troop train up the Eastern Seaboard and to New Jersey and put on a boat, and sent overseas.

Interviewer: *We're going to take a break now and relax for a few minutes, and I'm gonna get back with you, okay?*

Cathryn: Okay.

Interviewer: *Today is March the 15th, 2006 and I'm talking with Cathryn Cluck, and we're going to be visiting a little bit about her war experience and how she met her husband. Now, Cathryn, let's go back just a little bit to your teenage years, and you're growing up there in a farming community, but not on a farm. And you say that one of the events of your childhood was listening to the Grand Ole Opry?*

Cathryn: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Okay, and that neighbors would come in and visit with you, but you also said something else about some of the social events that you had as a teenager.*

Cathryn: Yeah, we had parties. Most of them happened at our house. I don't know why but that's how it always seemed. We had a taffy pull. Now, that was fun.

Interviewer: *Tell me about a taffy pull.*

Cathryn: Well, you just made taffy and you give each one a handful of that hot taffy, and they have to pull it, just like that, to make the candy. And then, when you end up where you got a string of that stuff, then you clip it with the scissors so you can suck each piece.

Interviewer: *It's a hard candy when it gets through?*

Cathryn: Yeah. It's a hard candy when you're through. Well, we'd done that and we had a spaghetti supper. There was always something that we could have a party for. When you asked me, I didn't think about it until Mary told me. I never told any of that.

Interviewer: *Did you dance at your parties?*

Cathryn: No, nobody knew how to dance.

Interviewer: *They didn't? Okay, so, you just – being two girls, older girls, I guess your mother would rather have you there at the house having a party than going someplace.*

Cathryn: Yeah. There's really wasn't any place to go. I mean, you can't go to a beer joint. That's clear out of the question. At a beer joint, they dance and drink. You can't do that.

Interviewer: *Okay, now, America is hearing the rumblings of war, okay, and some of your friends are going to service.*

Cathryn: Yeah, the boys.

Interviewer: *Did you know anybody that was killed while they were over there?*

Cathryn: Yeah, there was one that was in an airplane and they never found him. And, let's see, the boy that lived next to us, he was killed in Italy.

Interviewer: *Did you have cousins or uncles that were in service?*

Cathryn: Yeah, that were in service but they didn't get killed.

Interviewer: *Were they all from your little community?*

Cathryn: No.

Interviewer: *What made you decide to enlist?*

Cathryn: I don't know. It just seemed like a necessity. You need to go and do something.

Interviewer: *How old were you when you enlisted?*

Cathryn: About 22.

Interviewer: *About 22. Alright, where were you working when you enlisted?*

Cathryn: At the hospital.

Interviewer: *What were you doing there?*

Cathryn: I worked in the record room.

Interviewer: *Do you remember how much you were paid?*

Cathryn: \$45.00 a month.

Interviewer: *That's good.*

Cathryn: That \$45.00 went real fast. We had to pay to get a ride into town, and then, after I got to town, then I had to pay for a bus ride to the hospital.

Interviewer: *And then, did you bring your lunch?*

Cathryn: No, we could eat at the hospital.

Interviewer: *So, you're working there at the hospital and you decide to go into service. Alright, you enlist in the army. Do you remember what day you enlisted?*

Cathryn: No.

Interviewer: *And you went to take your basic training. Where did you take your basic training?*

Cathryn: Fort Hayes, Columbus.

Interviewer: *And was it difficult?*

Cathryn: Oh, you asked me about my basic training. I thought you meant where did I go for a physical. Basic training was in Des Moines, Iowa.

Interviewer: *Was it hard?*

Cathryn: Well, yeah. You had to learn to make a bed that you could drop a quarter on and it would bounce up a little, that's how tight it had to be, and everything just had to be so. You had to cover your pillow with your blanket. Oh, I don't know.

Interviewer: *Did you have to stand inspection?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah. They'd come around with white gloves on and the least little bit of dust, well, you had to pay for that. They took it out of your hide, not out of your money. I don't mean they whipped us or anything like that, but you had to work.

Interviewer: *Did they make you run or anything like that?*

Cathryn: No, we didn't have to run. We had inspections every morning and you had to get out there and it's dark. You have to just do everything right.

Interviewer: *Do you remember some of the girls that you were with?*

Cathryn: Not there so much.

Interviewer: *Alright, now, you said the branch of the army that you went in was called WA –*

Cathryn: WAAC.

Interviewer: *Okay, and it was an auxiliary?*

Cathryn: An auxiliary to the army.

Interviewer: *But you were paid the same as the army boys?*

Cathryn: Yep.

Interviewer: *And that was?*

Cathryn: \$21.00 a month, and we had the same rules, the same regulations. Everything was the same as the boys, as the men.

Interviewer: *But you didn't go through the physical training they went through?*

Cathryn: No. We didn't have to learn to shoot guns or crawl under wires, or anything like that.

Interviewer: *And you decided to go into a certain area and that was you decided to be a cook?*

Cathryn: Yep.

Interviewer: *Did you get a choice in what you wanted to do?*

Cathryn: No, not really. They mostly told you. There weren't a whole lot of choices anyway. You could be in the motor pool and I forget all the other ones. Oh, you could work in the – do the shorthand and typing thing, work in an office.

Interviewer: *I would've thought that's where you would've gone since you worked with records.*

Cathryn: No. Cooks and bakers was a pretty good deal.

Interviewer: *And you went to cooking school, you said?*

Cathryn: Well, you didn't learn a whole lot. I remember there was a girl there. Well, she was just like one of us, only she was our teacher, and she was from down south and we were all from up north. And she'd say, and now, we'll talk about the menu. The menu, you know? But we didn't, hardly know what she was talking about.

Interviewer: *You couldn't understand her?*

Cathryn: No, not that south girl, and she had never seen snow. I forget where she was from.

Interviewer: *So, you stayed there in Des Moines for how long?*

Cathryn: Well, I don't know, several months, and then we went on a troop train to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia.

Interviewer: *And from Georgia – how long did you stay in Georgia?*

Cathryn: Well, I was in Georgia until they sent us overseas, but I don't know how long that was.

Interviewer: *And what did your orders come to go overseas? Where did you go?*

Cathryn: We went to England.

Interviewer: *England? Alright, and what were your duties over there?*

Cathryn: Well, cooking.

Interviewer: *Well, who did you cook for?*

Cathryn: Over there, first, we cooked for women and then we cooked for men.

Interviewer: *The troops that were over there in England? Okay. Now, America, do you get letters from home from America?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah, get letters and you can send letters, too, and you don't have to pay. The stamps were free. There were no stamps. They just marked them.

Interviewer: *Alright. What was the feeling from back home about the war?*

Cathryn: Well, we were gonna win, just, it was gonna take a while.

Interviewer: *Did they support their troops?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah. Everybody was buying bonds. My mom and dad had a lot of bonds. They took it out of their paychecks.

Interviewer: *Now, we're in war with Japan at the time because Japan has bombed Pearl Harbor, but you're over here in England.*

Cathryn: I'm in Ohio.

Interviewer: *When they bombed Pearl Harbor?*

Cathryn: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Yes, you're in Ohio. Okay, but now that you're in England, do you get – are you there when they start bombing England, when Hitler starts bombing England?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah. They bombed London all the time. We li-ved in Nissen huts. You know what a Nissen hut is? Well, they got some along the highway down towards town. They're a round metal building that like that. It's like it's cut in half, just like a half of a pop bottle, and it's round like that. That's a Nissen hut and that's what we lived in. And at night, you could go to the end of the building where the door was and you could hear the air raid sirens going, and you could see those airplanes way up there. You know they had to be way up there because we were a good ways from London, and those planes would just go up like that, crisscross, and you could see those planes right in those lights.

Interviewer: *Did they ever drop a bomb close to where you were?*

Cathryn: No. But when the air raid sounded, we always had to jump up and go jump down in that –

Interviewer: *Bunker type of thing?*

Cathryn: It was always a long –

Mary: Trench.

Cathryn: Trench. Who said that? We had to go and jump in a trench. That's right, we did, and it was as high as my head.

Interviewer: *Alright, now, it's the German's bombing. What did the people think about Hitler?*

Cathryn: Well, he was the bad boy so they didn't think too much of him.

Interviewer: *How was he presented back here in America? How did the people think about him in America?*

Cathryn: I don't know.

Interviewer: *Did you know what he was doing to the Jews?*

Cathryn: No.

Interviewer: *You had no idea?*

Cathryn: How could I know? There was no way of knowing.

Interviewer: *Did you have any clue of what he was doing to our American prisoners?*

Cathryn: No. One of my brother-in-laws was a prisoner of war for a year and a day, and he said – when he came home, he was just a wee little guy. He lost a lot of weight, and he said they'd give him cabbage soup and there'd be worms floating around in it. He didn't have much good to say about them.

Interviewer: *So, you're there cooking for the troops, cooking for some of the women, and where were you when war was declared to be over, V-Day?*

Cathryn: Reims, France.

Interviewer: *You didn't tell me you went to France. Tell me when you went to France.*

Cathryn: I don't know that.

Interviewer: *How many months did you stay in France before war was over?*

Cathryn: Oh, lots of them but I don't know how many. It's on that paper, I guess, Mary.

Interviewer: *We'll get it here in a minute. Did you like the people in France?*

Cathryn: Yeah, they were nice, but they had a little book and I had a little book, and that's how you talked, so you didn't talk much.

Interviewer: *Are you still cooking for the troops now?*

Cathryn: Yep. We figured 1,200.

Interviewer: *You cooked for 1,200 men.*

Cathryn: Men and women.

Interviewer: *Okay. When V Day was declared, where were you?*

Cathryn: Reims, France.

Interviewer: *And what were your feelings on that day?*

Cathryn: Oh, I don't know that. I remember seeing that building where the troops were settled, and there was a great big red brick building and it took up a block. And then, when you heard it on the TV, well, they said they had signed to peace in a little red school building. It made you think about a place – what's that place where Emmet in Florida lived, Mary?

Mary: Carol City.

Cathryn: Carol City. Did you ever see that little church house up in Carol City? You'd think it was a little place like that. That place took up a whole city block.

Interviewer: *So, it was much bigger than it was portrayed to be?*

Cathryn: Yep.

Interviewer: *Now, while you're in service, do you date any of the GIs?*

Cathryn: Well, yeah. I dated John.

Interviewer: *Okay, where did you meet John?*

Cathryn: In England.

Interviewer: *You met in England. Did he go on to France, too?*

Cathryn: Yeah. We met again in France.

Interviewer: *When you met your husband, do you remember the first time you saw him?*

Cathryn: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Tell me about it.*

Cathryn: Well, we were cooking and he came in, and he sat down over there on that bench and he watched us. An American girl was something they didn't, hardly ever see. And he watched all of us.

Interviewer: *How did he approach you for a first date?*

Cathryn: Oh, my, I don't know that. I don't know.

Interviewer: *So, you don't know how you began your first date or your courtship? So, you started dating John in England, and you're transferred over to France, then you go over there and you meet up with him again. Did you correspond with him during this time, write him letters?*

Cathryn: No. I just know he's waiting.

Interviewer: *Oh, did he tell you?*

Cathryn: No. I don't wanna get into all of that.

Interviewer: *Oh, okay.*

Cathryn: No, these kids don't know all of that. I never did tell them.

Interviewer: *Oh, you didn't tell them how you met?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah, they know we met in England.

Interviewer: *Oh, okay.*

Mary: We want details, mother.

Interviewer: *So, you meet him in England but you're going on to France and he's there, and so, you meet up with him again?*

Cathryn: Yep.

Interviewer: *Did you marry over there or did you marry after you came back to the states?*

Cathryn: We got married in Reims, France on July the 7th, 1945. He was 27 and I was 26.

Interviewer: *Okay. Did he tell you he was an Arkansas boy?*

Cathryn: Yeah, I knew that, but I had no idea what Arkansas was like. I knew it was a state and that's about all.

Interviewer: *Did he go home with you?*

Cathryn: I went home first. I went to Ohio, well, because I had to. And he had to come to Arkansas. That was just the way that it was. You had to come back to where you left from. And he wanted to see his folks, anyway, and then he came up there where I was, and I wanted him to stay up there and go to work in the steel mills. They made good money and the steel mill is right there close to my folks, but he didn't want any of that. He wanted to come back here, so that's where we came, and we didn't come together.

Interviewer: *He came home to Arkansas first?*

Cathryn: He came back here and then my mom had surgery and I had to stay up there for a while.

Interviewer: *Can you remember your first time you saw Arkansas?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah, that ain't hard to forget. He met me in Fort Smith.

Interviewer: *Well, Fort Smith's not so rural.*

Cathryn: Not anymore. Well, he met me in Fort Smith at the train station. I don't remember.

Interviewer: *Can you remember your first impression of coming to these – where did he – he lived on a farm, didn't he?*

Cathryn: Right up there in that little cabin.

Interviewer: *Alright, did you come to –?*

Cathryn: Yeah, I remember it.

Interviewer: *What did you think?*

Cathryn: Oh, boy. He came and got me in an old Model A Ford and that thing wouldn't start when we tried to get it going. We came from

Fort Smith to Van Buren on the bus and he had that old rattle trap parked in Van Buren. And he had parked on a hill and he pushed the car off to get it going, and he finally got it going and we started off. And the roads were all dirt and full of those big old potholes. And when we got up here, it wasn't like now. It was up on top of a hill and big old rocks in the road, and we just jumped up over them.

And then, we came down the hill to that log cabin right up there on the other side of those chicken houses, and such rocks in the road, well, they're in the road. You can't get them out and it's not like you can go up there with a crowbar and pry them up. They were there. And we drove down there and we got down to the end of the road where there's a cabin, and out in front, his dad had a huge tree all hollowed out and the end nailed shut, and that's where they watered their cows right there. And they got the water runout of the spring and run into that big log, and that big log was all over moss. Well, I couldn't see the moss because it was dark.

Interviewer: *By the time you got here, it was dark?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah. It was dark and there were all those cows, and then, right over the fence was the cabin and they had an oil lamp. That's how they – well, that's how it was in Arkansas. You had a kerosene lamp. And his mother and dad came out. I couldn't believe what was – those cows right there and that big watering trough.

Interviewer: *Where did you live?*

Cathryn: We stayed with them.

Interviewer: *And is this the picture here?*

Cathryn: Yeah. That's it right there, in that log cabin.

Interviewer: *Alright, and that's where you lived?*

Cathryn: Yeah, that's where they lives and that's where we stayed, and then he rented a place right over there that looked worse than that, and it was so dirty, we hauled stuff out of there, old wasp's nests. Oh, my, you'd never believe it, what we had to do to be able to move in that old place. It was just –

Interviewer: *So, you had thought you had come to the farthest –*

Cathryn: Yeah. I thought I had come to the very end.

Interviewer: *You thought you'd gone to the ends of the world. Alright, after you moved into your little house that you said you had to clear the wasp out and this kinda thing, do you remember how much you paid for the rent?*

Cathryn: Well, not in dollars. There was no dollar amount. He had to work that old field up there and plant corn, and then she was supposed to get half of the crop.

Interviewer: *For you to be able to live in the house?*

Cathryn: Yeah, for the rent.

Interviewer: *When was your first child born?*

Cathryn: Let's see, Mike was born on June the 29th. Well, let's see, we're gonna be married 61 years, so he was two years younger, 61, 59, he's 59. He's gonna be 59 on June the 29th.

Interviewer: *He was born in that little house that he first rented?*

Cathryn: No. She squawked around so much about that little old dab of corn and it wasn't, hardly two bushels apiece.

Interviewer: *And she didn't like what she got?*

Cathryn: Well, how can you raise corn where there ain't anything but rocks and that hasn't had any fertilizer as long as it's been there?

Interviewer: *Difficult.*

Cathryn: Yeah, it's difficult.

Interviewer: *So, where did you live then? Where did he move you then?*

Cathryn: We moved to a log cabin. Well, it's between here and Shamrock. We moved into a log cabin and there was no refrigerator, and we pulled up the water we wanted up out of the well, up out of the ground with a chain. That is hard living.

Interviewer: *How many children did you have?*

Cathryn: Well, I just had – that's where Mike was born.

Interviewer: *After Mike, you had how many more? Were you afraid to have children with times as hard as they were?*

Cathryn: Well, no. We went to the hospital.

Interviewer: *But I mean about raising them.*

Cathryn: Oh, well, we were doing alright. I mean, everybody else had something to eat and we had something to eat, and everybody lived in the same kind of a house. You'd never believe the houses that people used to live in, nothing like this.

Interviewer: *So, you're going to raise your children and America now has - we're over the war, we're prospering. America begins to prosper. Women begin to work. If you had to give me one change that you think that the war made in America, what would you think it would be?*

Cathryn: Well, it liberated the women. Well, it liberated them. They could get out and get a job, but they had to pay for it. They had to work at night, do their house work, and all of that kind of stuff. You want to know something about what it used to be like? Nobody had a washing machine. They washed all on the rub board and they heated their water in the big iron pots, and they hung their clothes on the fence and, well, what were they gonna hang them on if they didn't hang them on the fence?

And the sign of prosperity, I guess that'd be the word, in Arkansas was a washing machine on the front porch. I can remember that, whenever you went past a place and they had got ahead just a little, they had a washing machine on the front porch.

Interviewer: *This was unusual for you, wasn't it, even though you had grown up in a small community?*

Cathryn: Yeah. Everybody had a good house up there, but you'd see a washing machine on the front porch, and the middle of the front porch would be a thing like that with a light bulb in it and a string on the light bulb.

Interviewer: *They got electricity, then.*

Cathryn: Yeah, and they have a lightbulb on it and string hanging down, and that's how you turn on the lights. And that's how you turned on the lights on most of the houses, is pull down on that string.

Interviewer: *Alright, what about telephones? Did you have a telephone back here?*

Cathryn: Gosh, no, we didn't have a telephone here until – Mary, do you know how long?

Mary: 1969. I was a junior – senior in high school.

Cathryn: When we got a telephone.

Interviewer: *What about television?*

Mary: About the same time.

Cathryn: Well, we didn't have a telephone when Kennedy was killed because you went up to Georgia to see the – not the parade but –

Interviewer: *The funeral.*

Cathryn: Yeah, the funeral, that's it, and that was 1963, so we didn't have a TV then.

Interviewer: *So you didn't get to see Kennedy assassinated?*

Cathryn: No, only pictures that they had after we got a TV.

Interviewer: *Did you get to see the man walk on the moon?*

Cathryn: Yeah, we had that.

Interviewer: *Times were hard.*

Cathryn: Boy, you're not joking there.

Interviewer: *But, do you think Americans today are better off with all their prosperity than with the way you lived with, times were hard? What do you think is the difference?*

Cathryn: People throw away too much stuff and throw away too much money. People don't – we saved more when we were poor mice, church mice, and people save today and they got all kinds of stuff, and can hang on to their money, but nobody does.

Interviewer: *If you had anything at all to say to women today, any advice you would want to give to young people today, what would it be?*

Cathryn: Oh, gosh, I don't know.

Interviewer: *Go into the service as you did?*

Cathryn: No.

Interviewer: *Can you give me a reason?*

Cathryn: Well, just like the president sent them all over to Iraq all for nothing, just get killed. I wouldn't advise the service. You know, the president can do anything.

Interviewer: *I can't read it.*

Mary: Mr. Cluck's service.

Interviewer: *Oh, I didn't get – when did he go into service? He went in in 1941, Mr. Cluck?*

Cathryn: I don't know. What does the paper say?

Interviewer: *I think that's what it says here, 1941, and where did he serve besides – he was in England and France with you, but where else did he serve?*

Cathryn: Well, he was here in America for a while.

Interviewer: *Okay. What unit was he in? What was his duties?*

Cathryn: His unit or his headquarters – well, all I know is he was in the army.

Interviewer: *Okay, you don't really know what his responsibilities were? Okay, when you got home from the service, did you think America welcomed you back?*

Cathryn: Oh, yeah, they were all glad to see to us, sure enough.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, you think the patriotic spirit of America was very strong? Mrs. Cluck, I have really enjoyed talking to you, and is there anything else that you want to say?*

Cathryn: What have I missed, Mary? Mary always talks.

Interviewer: *Alright, if you think of anything else, we will have another interview, but for now, I'm going to shut it down, but it has been a joy. I've loved it.*

Cathryn: You didn't talk much.

Mary: That's the idea.

END

Cathryn R (Ruth) Cluck

Times Record Fort Smith, AR,

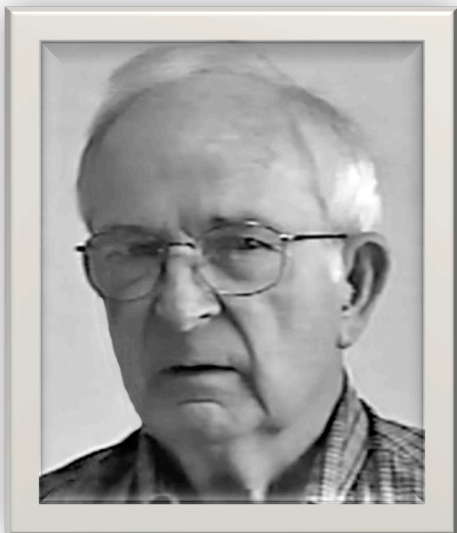
September 11, 2006

Catheyn R. Cluck, 86, of Rudy died Sunday, Sept. 10, 2008, in her home. She was a homemaker, member of Cedarville Baptist church and the widow of John Cluck, who passed away Feb. 6 of this year. She was an Army veteran of World War II, where she served as a WAC staff sergeant overseas. She was the recipient of two Bronze Service Stars, a Middle Eastern service Medal and a good conduct medal and a WAAC service ribbon.

Graveside service will be 4 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 12, 2006, at Gracelawn Arbor in Van Buren with burial at Gracelawn Cemetery with military honors under the direction of Ocker Funeral home of Van Buren.

She is survived by four daughters, Crystal Kimmey of Uniontown, Carol Swaim of Natural Dam and Mary Poole and Ruby Morrison, both of Rudy; two sons Micheal Cluck of Midwest City, Okla., and John W. Cluck of Cedarville; two sisters Marie Deomer and Sylvia Buirshaw, both of Vence, Fla; one siser-in-law, Betty McCartney of Navarre, Ohio; 14 grandchildren and 22 greatgrandchildren.

The family will visit with friends today, Sept 11, 2006. from 7 to 9 p.m. at Ocker Funeral Home, 700 Jefferson St. Van Buren, Arkansas



Cletis Odle
World War II Veteran
Interview

The following was originally a video interview done by the Crawford County Friends of Genealogy, Van Buren, Arkansas. The interviewer is Hilda Daugherty. The interview was recorded on March 14, 2007. This written transcript of the original audio was accomplished in June, 2018.

Interviewer: *This is March the 14th 2007. We're visiting with Cletis Odle. We're gonna discuss his World War II experience. Mr. Odle, would you tell me your full name, please?*

Cletis: Cletis Raymond Odle.

Interviewer: *And when were you born, Mr. Odle?*

Cletis: January 6, 1927.

Interviewer: *And where?*

Cletis: Westville, Oklahoma.

Interviewer: *And how far over the – from Arkansas line is that?*

Cletis: Two miles to the Arkansas line.

Interviewer: *Two miles.*

Cletis: Yes.

Interviewer: *You're almost born in Arkansas then.*

Cletis: Almost.

Interviewer: *Tell me your parents' names.*

Cletis: My dad's name was Bud Odle. My mother's name was Bertha Odle.

Interviewer: *Do you remember her maiden name?*

Cletis: Brown.

Interviewer: *She was a Brown? Were any of your relatives from Crawford County earlier on? Or where did they come to Oklahoma from?*

Cletis: My grandfather and grandmother came through this area way back in the 1800s. And she said she – my mother said she had two little brothers that were born and they died here at a very young age; just a small child. But she doesn't know where they were buried. She thinks maybe they were buried around Evansville, but she doesn't know.

Interviewer: *When the wagon trains were going through here probably.*

Cletis: Probably.

Interviewer: *Well, that's part of our history.*

Cletis: Then they moved on up to Adair County.

Interviewer: *Was your father a farmer?*

Cletis: No, he was in the grocery business.

Interviewer: *Oh, he was?*

Cletis: Yes.

Interviewer: *So, he had his store?*

Cletis: He had stores; he ran stores. And he also ran a very interesting thing. He peddled groceries out in the country, out of a little truck. He has done that for about ten or 12, 14 years.

Interviewer: *Tell us where his grocery route was and where his stores were. Talk a little bit about that.*

Cletis: His grocery route runs five days a week, different routes every day, in Adair County, Oklahoma, out of Westville. And the stores that he ran after he quit peddling were in Westville.

Interviewer: *Oh, they were? Well, did he peddle even before automobiles? Did he peddle from a wagon?*

Cletis: No, just a truck; a little truck.

Interviewer: *Well, that would've been understandable because people didn't have transportation.*

Cletis: Many people said they don't know what they would've done if it hadn't been for him. He brought it right to their door. In fact, that was the name of the store; Odell's Store at Your Door.

Interviewer: *Oh, now that's nice.*

Cletis: Yes.

Interviewer: *Do you have any idea what year they went through Crawford County and settled in Oklahoma?*

Cletis: It would probably have been prior to 1889, which was the year my mother was born. So, it would've been probably around 1880.

Interviewer: *So, her Brown family settled in Adair County?*

Cletis: Adair County, Oklahoma, from North Carolina.

Interviewer: *Oh, yeah? And where were the Odells' from? Do you have any idea about that history?*

Cletis: He was born in Whittington, which is close – north of Lincoln; between Lincoln and Siloam Springs. And they moved to Indian Territory when he was just a boy; wild country.

Interviewer: *Oklahoma became a state –*

Cletis: 1907.

Interviewer: *– 1907, so they were there before then.*

Cletis: Before then, yes.

Interviewer: *Well, that's an interesting piece of history. You know they saw some interesting things.*

Cletis: Yes, it was wild country. And you could go in there and clear the land out, build you a house, and farm the land without owning it. But you could not own it because it belonged to the Indians. But if they wanted to buy it from you, they had to pay for your house.

Interviewer: *Oh, I see. Well, did your father talk about the land rush that happened when -?*

Cletis: No, that wasn't in that area.

Interviewer: *Oh, it was in -*

Cletis: That was in the - up in Kansas -

Interviewer: *Oh, it was?*

Cletis: Kansas ward -

Interviewer: *Oh, I see.*

Cletis: - where the land rush was.

Interviewer: *Well, I know they would have had some interesting stories.*

Cletis: Yes.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, did you go to school there in -?*

Cletis: Westville.

Interviewer: *- Westville?*

Cletis: In Westville, Oklahoma.

Interviewer: *How many years did you get to go to school?*

Cletis: All 12 years.

Interviewer: *Oh, you were graduated from high school then.*

Cletis: Yes.

Interviewer: *And what year did you graduate from high school?*

Cletis: 1944.

Interviewer: *So, all during your high school years, you were hearing about the war.*

Cletis: Yes.

Interviewer: *Do you remember what you were doing when you heard about Pearl Harbor?*

Cletis: Very distinctly; I was listening to the radio and none of the other members of the family had heard it. So, I was in another room and I come rushing in there where the other family was and said come listen to the radio. So, we went in there and naturally it was on all stations at that time. We hadn't turned the radio on all day. About 2:00 in the afternoon when I first heard it.

Interviewer: *Well, being that young, did you have a sinking feeling that you might be going to war or were you so young that it didn't really hit you?*

Cletis: Well, I was about 14 years old at that time.

Interviewer: *Old enough to realize what war might be?*

Cletis: Yes, I believe I fully knew what it would mean.

Interviewer: *Well, from then on, what did the boys at school talk about related to this?*

Cletis: Well, they talked about – I don't remember, but –

Interviewer: *Well, we got over – not wanting to get over –*

Cletis: They were talking about war, of course.

Interviewer: *Probably in school classes, it was discussed.*

Cletis: Oh, yes, it was very much talked about.

Interviewer: *Describe that era – describe that feeling that became – that started in the country after Pearl Harbor. Describe what the country*

reacted like.

Cletis: Well, naturally, they were angry at Japan, but they understood that we had to defeat Germany probably first. So, we were angry, naturally, already at Germany because of the persecution of innocent people, especially the Jews.

Interviewer: *So, you were hearing about that, even that early?*

Cletis: Yes. Yes, we really were. We heard about the war, naturally. My dad, he would talk about it and all.

Interviewer: *How many brothers and sisters did you have at home?*

Cletis: I had two brothers and seven sisters –

Interviewer: *Two brothers –*

Cletis: – six sisters.

Interviewer: *– and six sisters.*

Cletis: Two brothers and six sisters.

Interviewer: *Wow. Were you first, second, third or how were you –*

Cletis: No. 7.

Interviewer: *No. 7. Well, your older brothers then. What were they doing about that time?*

Cletis: Well, they were – my older brother was almost old enough to be in the service at that time. So, he enlisted in the Marines shortly after the war started. My other brother was drafted into the Navy about a couple of more years.

Interviewer: *What were you thinking? Which did you think would be the best choice?*

Cletis: Well, I kinda wanted the Navy, but I didn't get my choice. They drafted me into the Army.

Interviewer: *As soon as you were out of high school? Did you already have –*

Cletis: Just a little bit – no, let's see. I graduated at 17 and just as soon as I was 18, then I was drafted.

Interviewer: *So, go ahead and tell us about that.*

Cletis: Well, I was drafted into the Army in March of 1945; took my basic training at Camp Fannin, Texas. Then I come home for a furlough and on the way back to Camp Rucker, Alabama, I heard about the atomic bomb.

Interviewer: *That it had been put off already? Or that it was in the –*

Cletis: While I was going there.

Interviewer: *That it was being –*

Cletis: While I was on the train down to Camp Rucker, Alabama, I heard about the atomic bomb. And all sorts of stories came out of that. One rumor said this could blow the whole world up. They didn't know how powerful it really was, but they knew it was definitely a powerful weapon.

Interviewer: *Had it already been exploded at that time or you're just waiting for it? You're just hearing what –*

Cletis: No, it was already exploded on Hiroshima. Then the next two days later, the one on Nagasaki, which ended the war.

Interviewer: *Yeah. So, the rumors and the what else were flying on the train.*

Cletis: Yes, they didn't know what would happen.

Interviewer: *Had there actually been no indication? Had none of the people you were acquainted with had any indication that something big was about to happen?*

Cletis: We had no idea that anything like that was gonna happen. Nobody knew it. It was too top secret.

Interviewer: *So top secret that no one had any idea?*

Cletis: No one had any idea about that.

Interviewer: *Oh, boy. That was uncertain, uncharted waters –*

Cletis: Yes.

Interviewer: *– for the world. Well, did the boys on the train act jubilant over the*

idea or did they act even more worried about it?

Cletis: They were happy, of course, but they were wondering if it could blow the whole world up almost and cause something really bad to happen. There was mixed emotions about it.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, where did your train leave you?*

Cletis: Camp Rucker, Alabama.

Interviewer: *And what were you doing at that camp?*

Cletis: I just stayed there just a few days and then I went to Fort Ord, California, to depart for the Far East.

Interviewer: *Oh. Well, what unit were you in, or division, or whatever they called it?*

Cletis: Well, it was just replacement, infantry replacement, so I didn't – I wasn't in a unit long enough to –

Interviewer: *Did it make you –*

Cletis: – be counted.

Interviewer: *Did it make you feel somber to think that they were training you to be a replacement for someone that probably had been killed?*

Cletis: Well, I knew that –

Interviewer: *Did you think about that?*

Cletis: I knew that it was a possibility that I wouldn't come back because Japan, you see, was still going strong.

Interviewer: *Oh, they were?*

Cletis: But this atomic bomb had been dropped. But then, just as I was leaving San Francisco Harbor, the Japanese come onboard the USS Missouri and signed the surrender.

Interviewer: *And that news traveled –*

Cletis: And that made me feel better.

Interviewer: *Did that news travel to you before you left San Francisco?*

Cletis: I heard it on the ship.

Interviewer: *On the ship?*

Cletis: Yep, I knew it –

Interviewer: *You were already on the ship?*

Cletis: I knew it when it was signed.

Interviewer: *So, everybody sighed a big sigh of relief at that?*

Cletis: Yes, very big.

Interviewer: *Oh, in jubilation.*

Cletis: Very big.

Interviewer: *Thanks be to –*

Cletis: Very much of a relief. And I imagine my family did. My mom and dad; I imagine they sighed a sigh of relief.

Interviewer: *Before we get you on over to your duties then, I'd like you to talk about your brothers. What were a little of their experiences and their names, please?*

Cletis: My older brother was Randolph and he was in the 1st Marine Division. And they invaded the island of New Britain, which was where the biggest Japanese base in the Southwest Pacific was. And that was Rabaul. And he developed a fever called typhus fever. And he was out of his head for about a week; very serious.

Interviewer: *Did they ship him back home on medical leave or did –*

Cletis: After a while; after a few months, they shipped him back to the United States.

Interviewer: *I think some of our boys contracted some terrible diseases and died from even those fevers over there.*

Cletis: A lot of them died, yes.

Interviewer: *And then your other brother, what was he assigned to?*

Cletis: He was in the Navy and he went to the Aleutian Islands up by Alaska. And he was there for – probably at the time that the war ended, I would say.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, you have one that was in New Britain, you have one on the seas in the Navy, and now they've put you on a ship going to the Far East.*

Cletis: Far East.

Interviewer: *So, where do you first dock and what do you first get for assignment?*

Cletis: We stopped at Hawaii, the Hawaiian Islands, to let some men off that had high points for release because the war was over. They had been in the European war and they shipped them over here. So, we stopped there –

Interviewer: *Tell me what those guys – if they'd been in the European war, what did they act like? How were they mentally and physically after the war?*

Cletis: Oh, they were alright. I was in – I went on over to the – Manila with some of them that were in the war over there.

Interviewer: *Were they just that much more determined to fight the Japanese after they defeated the Germans?*

Cletis: Well, they were determined, but the war was over. They signed the –

Interviewer: *Oh, yeah, that's right. Okay. Alright. So, you're at your first assignment. What are you doing on these islands in the southwest?*

Cletis: Well, we just took – the motor broke down on it, so we had to stay there about two weeks or better. So, we went up to Schofield Barracks, which is just out of Honolulu. Well, we could go down there to Honolulu and, if they want to, get a leave and go down there. So, we just went down there to Honolulu, and walked around Pearl Harbor, and saw the ship that was made into a museum.

Interviewer: *Was it already a museum by that time, at the end of the war?*

Cletis: No.

Interviewer: *Not yet?*

Cletis: I don't think so.

Interviewer: *Well, that was quite a memorial.*

Cletis: And the –

Interviewer: *That was –*

Cletis: There are a lot of pretty sights around Honolulu, so we just enjoyed ourselves for about two weeks.

Interviewer: *Two weeks in Hawaii. Isn't that a vacation?*

Cletis: A paid vacation you might say.

Interviewer: *But that didn't last too long.*

Cletis: Little over two weeks.

Interviewer: *So then?*

Cletis: So, then we went to another island and took some men off – Eniwetok. Have you ever heard of that name? Eniwetok Island; it's a beautiful island, just very small. Then we went on towards the Philippines and got into the tail end of a typhoon. And that ship rocked and rolled for a few days.

Interviewer: *What about the seasickness? Did you bother –?*

Cletis: Got seasick for two or three days when it first started.

Interviewer: *The typhoon?*

Cletis: No, not the typhoon. You don't stay sick. You just stay sick for about two or three days, then you get over it.

Interviewer: *I see.*

Cletis: Then it can rock all it wants to and you won't get sick.

Interviewer: *So, the first two or three days you were on the sea were rough.*

Cletis: I was sick. I had lost my breakfast, dinner, and supper. So, for two or three days and then that was all.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, now then, when you're in the Philippines, are they putting you to reconstruction or –*

Cletis: Well, I didn't do much of anything there, tell you the truth.

Interviewer: *Tell some of your impressions of the damage left from the war and the things that you saw.*

Cletis: It was terrible. In the Philippines, Manila was very much torn up, very much torn up. But not like some of the cities in Europe, in Germany.

Interviewer: *Really?*

Cletis: I wouldn't tell you wrong.

Interviewer: *Were you able to interact with the local people from the Philippines?*

Cletis: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: *Were they starving, hungry? Were they in good shape?*

Cletis: Well, not at that time. We fed them, the Americans fed them. And they were not there at that time.

Interviewer: *So, some rebuilding –*

Cletis: Yes, they were rebuilding.

Interviewer: *– had already begun at the time.*

Cletis: They'd begun rebuilding some of it. Their fort and the building.

Interviewer: *How long did you get to stay in the Philippine area?*

Cletis: Not very long because I re-enlisted for one year and then they sent me from there to Germany.

Interviewer: *Oh, I see. Well, how did you get from there to Germany?*

Cletis: I came home for 30 days; 30-day vacation. Then I went from New York to France, and went through France to Germany.

Interviewer: *What ship or how did you get over the seas?*

Cletis: A boat.

Interviewer: *Which one? Do you remember what it was? Was it a –*

Cletis: I can't remember.

Interviewer: *– military boat or a regular –*

Cletis: It was just a troop ship.

Interviewer: *Oh, I see. So, you landed in –*

Cletis: In France, went through France to Germany.

Interviewer: *And I'm sure you're seeing a lot of war damage.*

Cletis: Seen a lot of war damage, especially in Germany. All the big cities in Germany were a pile of rubble. Every major city in Germany was a pile of rubble; seen bathtubs sticking out of a pile of concrete. They hadn't started rebuilding at that time.

Interviewer: *Tell us a few of your experiences. Did you run into the local German people and how did –*

Cletis: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: *What was their attitude toward American troops?*

Cletis: Well, they sorta liked us.

Interviewer: *The common people were grateful.*

Cletis: Yes. I think the majority of the German people were relieved that Hitler was dead and the war was over.

Interviewer: *Well, of course they were.*

Cletis: Because they were tired. They'd been – 12 years of Adolph Hitler had ruined them and just left them totally drained and tired. They was tired. So, they was –

Interviewer: *Had the people begun returning to their cities by the time you went through?*

Cletis: Yeah, they was back –

Interviewer: *How were they making – describe some of the situations you saw.*

Cletis: Well, I was down in the Bavarian Alps and there was a lot of farming going on, just small farms. And they raised what they ate. They raised beets and garden products. And they lived on that.

Interviewer: *So, they fared better probably than the people in the city.*

Cletis: Fared better than the big cities.

Interviewer: *Oh, certainly would have.*

Cletis: And old people – I would see old men and women out there in the field raking hay, and throwing it up on a wagon, and going and putting it the barn; probably 80 years old.

Interviewer: *Well, they were like America.*

Cletis: There was no –

Interviewer: *Their young men had been taken into war, hadn't they?*

Cletis: That's all they had. They didn't have no Social Security or nothing like that to live on. So, they had to do that or starve. They was on their own.

Interviewer: *Did you ever try to communicate with one of them?*

Cletis: I learned a little bit of the language, German, but I've forgotten it.

Interviewer: *Oh, I'm sure.*

Cletis: I didn't have nobody to talk it with.

Interviewer: *Yeah, well, that's interesting.*

Cletis: Before I left, I could talk a little bit of German.

Interviewer: *And the people were grateful for any communication?*

Cletis: Yes, they enjoyed talking to us. And I kinda liked the German people because they were very industrious. They liked to work. That's strange, but it seemed like they liked to work.

Interviewer: *It's an unusual attitude in the world today, isn't it?*

Cletis: Yes.

Interviewer: *Okay, I just want you to pick up from the time you got off the shore at France. Describe going through France for me. I'm not gonna interrupt you. I want you to just tell your story now, all the way through Germany.*

Cletis: Well, I landed in Le Havre, France, the port of Le Havre, and went through France. It didn't take very long to go because we were on a train. So, it was just countryside like we see and I didn't get to visit with any of them much. I spoke to a few along the way. And some of them had some wine and they give me a cup of wine. And I took a sip of it; didn't much like it.

Interviewer: *They were giving you the best they had.*

Cletis: I didn't see too much destruction because I didn't go through big cities. So, I didn't see much of France. That's about all I can tell you.

Interviewer: *Just cross country?*

Cletis: Yeah, just cross country.

Interviewer: *But when you got into Germany, then it was –*

Cletis: Got into Germany and – the Bavarian Alps is a very beautiful place.

Interviewer: *Describe that for people who've never been there.*

Cletis: Well, if I had some pictures, I could show you better, but if you've ever been into the Rocky Mountains or Colorado, I've seen pictures of that. It would be similar. And I've been up to the highest mountain, I think, in the Alps – I mean, in the German Alps on a cable car.

Interviewer: *Oh, you did get to go?*

Cletis: Went over to Austria and went up on the mountain in a cable car; very beautiful scenery. And another very interesting place was Hitler's hideout. You've heard of Hitler's hideout; they call it the Eagle's Nest. It's down in Berchtesgaden, which is right on the border of Germany and Austria. It's a resort place.

And so I went up to that and, of course, the house was bombed. But down in the basement, there was a door that led into a tunnel. And this tunnel was about ten feet high and about ten feet wide. It had some rooms where Hitler and his mistress would sleep, and some servants would sleep.

And it also had a periscope there where you could look out and see if there were any enemy planes in the air. Well, it went on around about a quarter of a mile and it had another exit about a quarter of a mile at the end of this tunnel.

Interviewer: *And you were there. Did you get -?*

Cletis: I went through it.

Interviewer: *You went through it.*

Cletis: Went all the way through it; very interesting, a piece of it.

Interviewer: *Was it outfitted with riches? I mean, did he have riches in there or was it just empty -*

Cletis: There was not nothing in there but -

Interviewer: *- by the time you came, there was nothing -*

Cletis: - nothing in those, they were empty. Those rooms were empty. And it was covered with tile.

Interviewer: *Oh, it was?*

Cletis: The tunnel was inlaid with tile; very interesting place.

Interviewer: *And how did you get up to that place? On a cable car?*

Cletis: Walked.

Interviewer: *Oh, you walked?*

Cletis: I finally got a - me and another guy walked about halfway up and caught a ride on a log truck.

Interviewer: *Is that right? You mean the Germans were already logging? They were already logging? Well, that would have been lumber for reconstruction.*

Cletis: Yes.

Interviewer: *But was this on your time off, your leave days?*

Cletis: Yeah, we were on a vacation.

Interviewer: *Vacation.*

Cletis: I spent a week down there to Berchtesgaden.

Interviewer: *There was no restriction on coming and going from Hitler's hideout then?*

Cletis: No, you just went up there; no car, do nothing around.

Interviewer: *Was there a – is it still maintained? Do you know anything about that?*

Cletis: Well, I imagine they've reconstructed the house now.

Interviewer: *So, to keep it there as a –*

Cletis: Keep it there.

Interviewer: *– historic spot.*

Cletis: It's a historic spot, sure. I'm sure of it.

Interviewer: *Did they think that Hitler stayed there most of the war or was it just during the last days?*

Cletis: No, he just went down there when he – he went to pout; on a vacation or two or three days at a time. He didn't go down there a whole lot.

Interviewer: *Do they think that's where he committed suicide or was killed?*

Cletis: No, he committed suicide in Berlin.

Interviewer: *Oh, he did?*

Cletis: Right under the Chancellery. He had a big den down there, about 50 feet below the Chancellery.

Interviewer: *Another safe –*

Cletis: Yeah, safe –

Interviewer: – hiding place.

Cletis: – haven there. He thought it was safe, but the Russians had surrounded it, and he saw that that was the end of the road, and he didn't wanna be captured. So, he shot himself and he commanded his officers to burn him and his mistress with gasoline after he shot himself. So, he burned to a crisp.

Interviewer: Did he kill his mistress too?

Cletis: No, she took poison.

Interviewer: Oh, my God. Those were horrible times and he'd inflicted such horror on the world, but he knew he'd find no leniency anywhere.

Cletis: Oh, no, he knew what he would get. And he thought he was robbing justice, but he didn't rob justice.

Interviewer: No, he had a greater debt to pay yet.

Cletis: He just went to Hell a little bit early.

Interviewer: Yes, thank goodness.

Cletis: He didn't go to Heaven.

Interviewer: Okay. So, you're spending this vacation touring Hitler's hideouts and seeing parts of the country. What were your actual duties when you were on your assignments?

Cletis: Patrolling the back roads of the mountains to be sure that no insurrection or revolution would –

Interviewer: Hopefully, no Hitler followers were still hiding in the hills. Well, did you find any trouble in the hills?

Cletis: No trouble whatsoever.

Interviewer: Isn't that wonderful.

Cletis: They were ready for peace.

Interviewer: They were needing it. They were ready.

Cletis: They were ready for peace. Yes, ma'am.

Interviewer: Their mind was made up. So, was that your entire service?

Cletis: Yes, that was all I'd done after – when I got – was in Germany. It was called the constabulary forces.

Interviewer: Yes. Was it during cold winter?

Cletis: No, it was in the summer. But even in the summer, it wasn't very –

Interviewer: Now, we're talking about the summer of '45.

Cletis: '46.

Interviewer: '46 by now, okay. We're in summer of '46 by now. Okay.

Cletis: It was cool up there. Of course, the mountains, you know, are higher temperatures – higher elevations; naturally, lower temperatures. So, it was cool up there.

Interviewer: Were those mountains so high and severe that there was no room for farming in that area you were patrolling? Or were there small farms anywhere?

Cletis: There were small farms in there.

Interviewer: Well, did you see farm animals or had all those things –

Cletis: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: – been killed?

Cletis: Yes, there were cattle up there, yes.

Interviewer: So, all their livelihood had not been killed in the bombings and so forth.

Cletis: No.

Interviewer: That's probably the base that rebuilt Germany, beside the American and Allied funds that went into rebuild. But them having some of their livelihood left, they were able to feed part of their country.

Cletis: Yes, they helped to feed themselves. We helped them a little bit, but they helped too.

Interviewer: What were the other men in your unit assigned to? How many of you were patrolling these back roads together at one time and what other assignments were they given?

Cletis: There were probably three or four vehicles in each patrol. There were armor cars and jeeps.

Interviewer: Well, were the roads bombed out at all in the mountains?

Cletis: No, they were still pretty good. They were just country roads, so sometimes there wasn't nothing but a trail.

Interviewer: Oh, put your armor vehicle on a mountain trail in the Alps.

Cletis: I mean, it would be a road, but you might just call it a trail. That's about what it was; two tracks.

Interviewer: So, some of you were assigned to patrol in the cities also?

Cletis: We went through cities. Yes, we did. We went through just small cities. And sometimes we would surround the city and go into the houses to make sure there wasn't no ammunition and weapons stacked in there. And we never found anything.

Interviewer: Oh, I hadn't thought about that. The countryside would've had to been scoured to make sure there were no weapons or trouble spots brewing.

Cletis: That's what we done.

Interviewer: Well, did you hear of other of your groups out patrolling that did run into any trouble?

Cletis: Never heard of anything.

Interviewer: Not anything?

Cletis: Nothing.

Interviewer: Isn't that the wonderful thing about it?

Cletis: They were ready to give it up.

Interviewer: Well, did any of the local people in Germany, in Bavaria, or the areas you were in, actually try to – I'll just say make you part of

their family, but include you in their normal lives?

Cletis: Yes. One place I was at, I took my laundry over there to their house, this man and woman, and they done my laundry. And I paid them a little. And they had a little girl about like that and she'd come and get on my lap. And that made me think about home. And I liked them, they liked me, and it was just wonderful.

Interviewer: Well, that was good for both parties, wasn't it?

Cletis: Yes, it was.

Interviewer: You were not married yet were you?

Cletis: No, I was only –

Interviewer: No family at home of your own?

Cletis: I was 19 at that time.

Interviewer: Just a young man out getting acquainted with the world.

Cletis: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Well, go ahead and give us your images of then; how long you were in Germany and what change you saw during this time.

Cletis: Oh, I was in Germany about nine months. And when I left there, the things were getting along a little better, you know.

Interviewer: Had they cleaned up a lot of the rubble in the cities by now?

Cletis: No.

Interviewer: Not at all?

Cletis: Hadn't got started much on that. Too much, it's too much.

Interviewer: That was just such a huge undertaking.

Cletis: Yes.

Interviewer: Well, that took a lot of construction equipment. We had war equipment in Europe, but we had no construction equipment there yet to speak of.

Cletis: No. No, there wasn't much construction equipment there at that time.

Interviewer: Did our Americans – military bring in dozers and things to help with that clean up?

Cletis: Well, I'm sure that there was some construction going on a little bit.

Interviewer: Who was your commanding officer? What general or whatever – or division you were in, what was –

Cletis: Well, I remember one called Hamby, but General Hamby – Colonel – Colonel Hamby was his name. But that's about the only one I remember.

Interviewer: Tell us what unit you're finally assigned to. If you were in replacement pool, what is the name of this organization you're patrolling with?

Cletis: Well, it's called the constabulary forces. That's about all I remember. I don't remember the unit even.

Interviewer: Okay. We had to have constabulary forces on all the islands in the Pacific and in Germany. I'm sure they were also in France and parts of Italy, maybe all of Italy because the peace, once gained, had to be maintained.

Cletis: Yes.

Interviewer: Are there other images that stay in your mind of Germany?

Cletis: Well, there – there's kind of a –

Interviewer: Did you see large cemeteries?

Cletis: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you visit the church cemeteries where our troops were buried?

Cletis: No, I didn't see any of the cemeteries where our troops were buried. I saw some of the German cemeteries. They had one – a little town, I saw a German cemetery.

Interviewer: They were probably buried in mass graves and –

Cletis: This one I remember, he had his helmet hanging on the grave.

Interviewer: So, you know he was a soldier.

Cletis: Yeah.

Interviewer: Many, many, many of them buried somewhere. What about the Jews? You were there soon after all the liberation of the prison camps?

Cletis: Yes.

Interviewer: Tell me what you learned about those things from your own knowledge, not from what someone else has said. Because the reason I'm asking this is because we've actually heard in these days some people are questioning whether the gas chambers and all those things were ever used on the Jews; that that may not have ever happened.

Cletis: There's no doubt in my mind that they were real. We were stationed close to the one at Dachau. One of the worst – of course it all was worst; they're all bad. So, we heard a lot of stories about the people that had gone there, and blood on the walls, and everything like that; all kinds of bad things. But I didn't go in any of them. We were just close to one. So, that's about all I can –

Interviewer: From the outside, did your train station or – I mean, your rails travel or any of that kind of travel bring you close enough you could see from the outside any of the camps?

Cletis: No, I didn't see any of those concentration camps; never saw any of them.

Interviewer: Tell us what you were hearing.

Cletis: Well, we were hearing that the one at Dachau had 300,000 people killed. And the –

Interviewer: You understand most of those to have been Jews?

Cletis: Probably.

Interviewer: Jewish people?

Cletis: Probably most of them were Jews. Of course, they killed everybody that was opposed to Hitler. They would kill them.

Interviewer: When you got into – let's go back to the cities now. One person that we talked to said that they were in the troops that came into the city and liberated it at the first; one of the cities, I don't remember. But they said there were people that Hitler's forces had imprisoned in cages in old factories to keep workers in their war factories. Did you hear any rumors along that line? How Hitler mistreated the people that even were still living?

Cletis: No, I didn't hear that, but he got those Jews out of those concentration camps and made them walk – as they were about to be overcome, he would take those Jews out and take them to another camp rather than let them be liberated.

Interviewer: So, that's what happened oftentimes. Oh, my goodness. Well, you stayed in Germany about nine months and they were just beginning to reconstruct, do a little bit of clean up. So, where did you go from Germany? How did you get back –?

Cletis: I came home.

Interviewer: How did you get back home? Describe that process.

Cletis: I went to Bremerhaven. That was a port on the German mainland in the Baltic – I mean, in the North Sea, in the Baltic Sea. And we boarded a ship there for home.

Interviewer: So, now it's not summer. Are you into fall now?

Cletis: It's about November.

Interviewer: November?

Cletis: About the 1st of November.

Interviewer: I know it's bound to have been cold on the North Sea in Germany.

Cletis: It was kinda cool, pretty cool then. Yes, it was.

Interviewer: Well, did they bring in some more constabulary forces to take your place or what?

Cletis: Yes.

Interviewer: Is that right? Were you getting out because your points were built up or just because your time expired?

Cletis: *Well, my term had expired. I had re-enlisted for a year and it was over.*

Interviewer: *Okay. So, your year was up.*

Cletis: *That was the end of my year.*

Interviewer: *Okay. What rank were you – did they –*

Cletis: *Private First Class.*

Interviewer: *Private First Class. Okay. So, from Bremerhaven, you were put on another ship?*

Cletis: *Yes, and went to New York.*

Interviewer: *To New York City. And you had to see the Statue of Liberty.*

Cletis: *Went up to the tip-top of it.*

Interviewer: *You did?*

Cletis: *Yes.*

Interviewer: *Well, what did you feel like when you came across from such destruction in Europe and saw that lady standing with a light?*

Cletis: *I was looking forward to putting my foot on my beloved homeland. And I knew that then I would get on a bus and go down to North Carolina. I believe it's Camp Lejeune. Then I would get on a bus and go home, and see my father, and mother, and my sisters, and brothers, and be reunited with them.*

Interviewer: *With thoughts of war behind.*

Cletis: *Yes.*

Interviewer: *Well, it's been a real pleasure hearing your story, Mr. Odell. And I would like to ask you if you have some advice for the young people today, what that would be. Just talk from your heart for a couple of minutes and tell –*

Cletis: *Advice for young people? Well, I would say No. 1, serve the Lord all the days of your life. That's the best thing that anybody could advise people.*

Interviewer: *That's supreme advice, it sure is.*

Cletis: That's the No. 1 priority in my life, is serving God. And I would advise people to –

Interviewer: *What about the hardships of life as you're going through them, in relation to what you just said?*

Cletis: Well, I haven't had very much of a hardship in my life. I've had a good life. God's been blessing – has blessed me with a wonderful family. I have no complaints about this life. I've had a good life.

Interviewer: *But I'm saying that for those people whose lives are going through hard times and who may be facing wars in the future that we don't even know about.*

Cletis: Well, just keep your eyes on the Lord and it don't matter what you're going through. The best thing you can do is just serve God.

Interviewer: *Don't try to face them on your own, but have His strength to live in. That's very good life advice. I sure thank you for coming and visiting with us today.*

Cletis: Well, thank you.

Interviewer: *Thank you.*

END



**Charles O'Kelley
World War II Veteran
Interview**

The following was originally a video interview done by the Crawford County Friends of Genealogy, Van Buren, Arkansas. The interviewer was Wilma Jameson and the video recorder was Cliff Jameson. The original interview was recorded on April 5, 2006. This written transcript of the original audio was accomplished in June 2018.

Interviewer: *Today is April the 5th, 2006, and I'm going to visit with Mr. Charles O'Kelley, and he is going to tell me some of his experiences in World War II.*

Now, give me your full name, Charles.

Charles: Charles William O'Kelly. I'm named after my grandfather, the full name.

Interviewer: *Wow. Full name, okay. Where were you born?*

Charles: At Rudy.

Interviewer: *Okay. Rudy proper?*

Charles: Well, about three and a half miles south of Rudy. The 81 [community].

Interviewer: *What is your father's name?*

Charles: It's Albert Henry O'Kelly.

Interviewer: *Okay. What do you remember about your father? Can you describe him?*

Charles: Yes, but not in details. Well, he was a hard-working, strong-minded person, and far as he was concerned, I don't guess he ever did anything wrong.

Interviewer: *Was he strict on you boys?*

Charles: Yes, he was.

Interviewer: *And you told me you remembered your grandfather.*

Charles: Yes.

Interviewer: *Okay. What about your grandmother on your dad's side?*

Charles: I remember her.

Interviewer: *What was her name, do you know?*

Charles: I can't remember her name.

Interviewer: *What is your mother's name? Her maiden name.*

Charles: Jane Bowen.

Interviewer: *And do you remember her parents?*

Charles: I remember her dad. My granddad and she were laughing about him, he was a little bitty feller. And then, some of her brothers – or one brother – well, I remember two of them, but one of them is Ticker, the other died pretty young – or in my life, he, my life. But Uncle John Bowen lived up near Hobbtown while I knew him. Grewed up knowing him real well. We used to walk from 81 over and pick strawberries for him when strawberries was in season.

Interviewer: *Now, that was Mr. John Hobbs?*

Charles: John Bowen.

Interviewer: *Bowen, I'm sorry.*

Female Speaker: He was an uncle.

Interviewer: *He was your uncle.*

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *And he raised strawberries, and you helped him pick strawberries there in Hobbtown.*

Charles: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: *Okay. What do you remember about your mother? Can you describe your mother?*

Charles: Oh, well, mother was a real short person, about five foot tall, always jolly, almost all the time.

Interviewer: *Outgoing?*

Charles: Outgoing.

Interviewer: *Okay. Which one of them do you think you took after, Charles?*

Charles: Well, ask my wife, she'd know that.

Female Speaker: Both of them.

Interviewer: *Both of them, you got a little bit of both.*

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Okay. Did you go to school there in Rudy?*

Charles: Went to Rudy for five, six years, and then I went to Alma then.

Interviewer: *Did you graduate from Alma school?*

Charles: No, I went in the Navy before I graduated. I was a little behind on going to school.

Interviewer: *Tell me when you were born, we skipped that.*

Charles: February 2nd, 1925.

Interviewer: *Okay. And so, you graduated – I mean, you went into the service at 18 years old. Were you drafted, Charles?*

Charles: No, I volunteered.

Interviewer: *Oh, you are the very first person I have met who volunteered.*

Charles: Well, I volunteered for two things, the Navy and then the special service, which wound up being part of the Navy. I didn't know I'd got in until after I got to Little Rock on the Navy. Got down there and stayed all night in the boys' club and everything and then when I went up there, they set us up in, you know, an apartment because three guys to an apartment and myself and another guy from over here in Fort Smith, and the rest of them from up there in Bentonville.

Interviewer: *Okay, but you stayed there in –*

Charles: They all stayed there in Little Rock for, uh, three or four days, and then, they started to wind up going to Williamsburg, Virginia to take boot training there.

Interviewer: *Okay, and this –*

Female Speaker: You had to have to test in – let me interrupt you just a minute. He took a test in Van Buren with a recruiter, and he told him he would like for him to go to Little Rock, but they would like for him to go and take a test for them. And when they did, they sent him a letter after that telling him that he would be in the Seabee Special Forces in the Navy.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, that's the way he got in to the Seabee Special Forces?*

Charles: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: *All right. Now, this is 1943, what month?*

Charles: August 1943.

Interviewer: *And how long were you in the special school?*

Charles: Well, that school there, it lasted about three months, and then when that was over, that's when they sent me to Seabee camp up there in Rhode Island.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Charles: And that's where we went out there to take our gunnery practice and all that there...

Interviewer: *So, in Rhode Island, you did the armory, gunnery –*

Charles: Yes.

Interviewer: *– practice there. But in the other school – what did you learn in the other school?*

Charles: Well, they just boarded us, marching and –

Female Speaker: Boot camp.

Charles: Boot camp.

Interviewer: *Okay. All right.*

Charles: Run your tail off. Twenty-mile marches, those were short marches, they didn't bother me, I was – of course I was raised up near Rudy, you know, the only way transportation I had was walking. And I used to run – where we lived Rudy was three and a half miles, and I'd run that down there in about an hour, run at a dog-trot, stuff like that.

Interviewer: *So, the boot camp wasn't hard for you, right?*

Charles: No, it wasn't. And it was – a lot of them were crying about the food, but I had good food there because I was just raised on meat and potatoes. I got in there and I had stuff I never had before, you know, like I had apricots about every day and of course all the milk you wanted to drink.

Interviewer: *When you left there, when you got orders to leave there, what orders did you get?*

Charles: To, uh...

Interviewer: *From the Rhode Island.*

Charles: Rhode Island, well, they loaded a whole bunch of us and that's the 106th Seabee Battalion, Section 1, and we rode on the train all the way through, and they'd pulled us off and put us on the siding out there, Tucumcari, New Mexico, they just dropped it off, and we sat out there for about three hours and about starved to death, we thought. It was getting around 1:00, you know, and this lady come by selling tortillas, so we bought a bunch of them, and here they come with a whole

bunch of lunches we had it. And then we went over there and went to Shoemaker, California, that's up there in Tracy.

And we got out of there and unloaded us on some buses and took us out to that Camp Shoemaker there and we marched all over them California hills for about three or four weeks, then they moved us to Port Hueneme. And that's where I got most of the training there, and then –

Interviewer: *What kind of training did they do there now?*

Charles: It's marching and –

Interviewer: *Okay. So, they're still just marching you and teaching you how to fight?*

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *But in the Seabees, I thought it was more building of bridges and things like that?*

Charles: Well, we went out to - see, what I was on was trucks, and I knew them.

Interviewer: *Oh, okay.*

Charles: And then also, we went over to the Santa May island over on the – run dump trucks and bulldozers and all that over there.

Interviewer: *Okay, but is this – what ship do you get on though when you get orders to go out in Pacific? Do you remember?*

Charles: Yeah, we went over on the Clearfield [USS Clearfield].

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Charles: Oh, I don't know, four or five hours. It wound up going to Ie Shima, right off Okinawa.

Interviewer: *Okay. I copied a map of the different islands because she had told us where you were. And there is, I believe that's Ie Shima right there.*

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *And so, the American invaded these islands right outside Japan?*

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *They're little tiny little islands now.*

Charles: Yeah, that airport there's what I built.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Charles: Helped build anyway.

Interviewer: *In Ie Shima?*

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Okay. What was the purpose of taking those little bitty islands?*

Charles: Well, the thing to do, you had to take all of that stuff because they didn't give up, they dug back holes, so they was digging to get the coral off that island of Ie Shima. They just started digging in, they run a test site and said, yeah, this is all coral. We got in there a ways and it was a man made cave, they were full of rice and rubber gas suits everything like that. And I lost some good buddies by, all of them tender-hearted, but women come in, – this one woman come down there and a bunch of them gathered around her and she blew herself up and killed them too, so...

Well, you had to take all the islands, so you didn't leave nothing on the unturned. After the war was declared over, then I was moved over to Okinawa after they dropped that bomb because we got so much fallout on that little island there that they moved us right off it. So, we built a Navy air base, a permanent one, black top and everything down, and we had 2 or 3 people that was shot at and that was three or four months after the war was over.

Interviewer: *That was in Guam?*

Charles: That was on Okinawa.

Interviewer: *Oh, Okinawa, I'm sorry. Okay, but when you're in Ie Shima, and the lady came out and the boys gathered around her, and she had a bomb?*

Charles: Yes, strapped around her.

Interviewer: *And she exploded herself.*

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *We think those kinds of things are new, don't we?*

Charles: Well, not –

Interviewer: *You know, like they're doing it in Baghdad now, and we think, oh, that's brand new. But it's not, is it?*

Charles: No.

Female Speaker: [Inaudible] your brothers in the Marines [inaudible].

Interviewer: *So, they – when you went in and you thought all of that was coral, it really was caves –*

Charles: Yeah, it was all kinds of caves and everything. Well, and that was manmade, it was dug back in there and all that stored in that could, coral mountain there and then covered it up. And that top soil built up over here, you see, no telling how long that'd been stored there.

Interviewer: *All right. But the importance of taking those islands was to build an air strip?*

Charles: That there was built – we built it there for them big bombers coming up from over on them other islands to bomb Japan. If they got trouble then they can come back and land on that. And then we had night fighters stationed there and some little escort planes, but they had some of them P38 night fighters stationed there on that island.

Interviewer: *Okay. Did you – when you first landed, did ya'll get any resistance as you landed there? Or had they already left.*

Charles: Well, they, most of them had done left or had been captured – see I was – on the island there where Ernie Pyle got killed.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Charles: He got killed about three days before we got on the island.

Interviewer: *So, they had sent a battalion or a group of men in earlier –*

Charles: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: *– before you all landed?*

Charles: A bunch of marines.

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

Charles: Okay. Yeah, there were still – we had one banzai raid one night where a whole bunch of them come strolling and hollering down there, and then they had all that island laid off in, well, like it'd be sections. So, it was about, what we told them 5/8th square, you know. And they was dug in there for - our first night out on that island, and I was on the corner. Myself and a guy from Oklahoma City, and we dug a foxhole down and had it deep enough and then put sand bags up around it. One guy laid curled around it while the other stood on duty and then you get off and trade out.

Up in the middle of the night some time, he woke me up and said, turn and get up, we got something coming. And, of course, there when it's clear, it's clear at night. You just can really read the newspaper. And there's this little roadway and had sides full of grass and there was play in the weeds, wiggling like this, and I let it get about 75 yards of us, and I threw a Browning automatic on it, opened the clip, that stopped the wiggling. And the next morning we went out there and there was a billy goat.

Interviewer: *Oh, how funny. But you had to have those fun times, didn't you?*

Charles: Well, they didn't know what it is, they just stopped it that night.

Interviewer: *Did you have billy goat for dinner?*

Charles: No. See you didn't eat nothing over there that were on them islands, only what was prepared, canned, and come in on the – any of that food.

Interviewer: *Okay. What kind of runways did you make?*

Charles: Coral runways.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Charles: We'd haul that up there and wet it down, roll it, and let it down, roll it, and it was tough. And once in a while, you have a – be a soft place come up get that going there, put a little bit in it, re-roll it, but –

Interviewer: *Now, Charles, you're a rural country boy.*

Charles: Yeah, right.

Interviewer: *You're on an island in the Japan sea, out in the Pacific, how does it feel for you out there? Like, you were off in a never – in another world?*

Charles: Well, yes, but, I mean, it's something we had to do – wanted to do because we'd seen all them other places where they hit and we didn't want them come in here on our folks back here in Arkansas.

Interviewer: *I was gonna ask you, what was the factor that made you decide to go into the service, to enlist? Was there something that you heard on the news or something that prompted your enlistment?*

Charles: It was this, we would hear the news once in a while and we'd come to Van Buren down here to see a movie on Saturday night and it would show a newsreel showing all that, but you had to be over there with it, to believe that the type of people they was, they wasn't human.

Interviewer: *Okay. Japanese soldiers were pretty cruel, weren't they?*

Charles: Yeah, even the civilians were.

Interviewer: *Really?*

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Any thing else you want to tell me about the island?*

Female Speaker: The airplane.

Interviewer: *We'll get to that, just a second. I want to talk to him about just living on the island. So, you had food brought in in cans?*

Charles: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: *But you didn't eat anything that was on the island?*

Charles: No, it was a martial offense if we ate anything.

Interviewer: *All right. You're on an island just outside Japan within; I think we looked, three or four hundred miles to Japan. Were you aware they were going to drop the atomic bomb?*

Charles: No.

Interviewer: *Had no idea?*

Charles: Not until it had done been dropped.

Interviewer: *All right. When you heard that it had been dropped, was it the first one that gave the fallout to you all?*

Charles: Yes, it was the first one.

Interviewer: *All right. Tell me about that.*

Charles: Well, our water we kept in camp, you know, go out and get a drink of drinking water and stuff out of it, was stored in lister bags. And we go out there and it's like a frost storm, that white ash there – grey ash there – whatever it was. You know, the tents, the same way, but it's on a tiny spot, it's on the lever side, I guess the way the wind comes in and stuff because that part where we built the airport on the top up there, it didn't show it on there. But, of course, all that up there was coral anyhow.

Interviewer: *But down there where you had your camp.*

Charles: Yeah, yes.

Interviewer: *Was that the morning after the bomb was dropped?*

Charles: I would say so, you know. By the time we got news that they dropped it, all this and that, how many hours went by, I don't really know. But it was pretty shortly afterwards.

Interviewer: *All right. I'm gonna ask you a hard question. Do you think it was necessary to drop the bomb?*

Charles: Well, I don't think I'd be here now if they hadn't of dropped it. Because not everyone was hollering and fussing about it, but them people didn't give up. And if they had to invaded Japan, which our next step after that would have been, we'll I'd probably been killed.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Charles: And a lot of others. There'd a been a lot of them because they didn't give up, they'd even jump off a cliff to keep from surrendering.

Interviewer: *One of the sailors on one of the ships said that they had started arming them and training them to fight in combat because they were set to invade Japan.*

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *And you all would have been in the front, wouldn't you?*

Charles: Yeah. We'd been on the front row.

Interviewer: *Okay. Do you remember when Japan surrendered? Did you all get word of it there on the island?*

Charles: Yes.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Charles: We got a – a little beforehand, of course, that airplane she mentioned they brought it in on the runway up there, and I meant they steered it like nobody was supposed to be around it. They had them get out there.

Interviewer: *Now, who were talking about – who was in the airplane?*

Charles: Japanese – those people had done, they were telling all they're about to do, but all them that went and signed the peace treaty on that ship, they was on that, and come and searched, the plane was searched, and then went down there and put on the Missouri and then they come in the Japanese harbor out there, in Tokyo Harbor, and that's where they signed it.

Interviewer: *Okay, now, so you're telling me that the Japanese who signed the peace treaty landed in your little Ie Shima –*

Charles: Yes.

Interviewer: *– island. And they were strip searched – I mean, they were searched?*

Charles: Yeah, they pulled off the plane. They had a plane that looks like it was a copy of our B-25, and it was painted white with a green cross on each side of it. And it come in and landed on the island, up there, and they had – a couple Navy ambulances up there and they put them on them ambulances, the pilot and those –

Interviewer: *Officials?*

Charles: – officials, while they searched that plane to make sure that it wasn't rigged to blow up or anything. And then, they put them back on. Now, I was about a block, block and a half from them when they were doing that searching.

Of course, one of the Air Force guys I was running with was a camera expert. They got the film down, they had an old [inaudible] camera right over there, and of course that film was thick, which was about eight or nine's of what is supposed to have been on the [inaudible], but we could only get five or six [inaudible] and then we'd take it and, I mean, it was really A1 grade thing. And he told us it was turned in and they had some vehicles parked up there and we went up there and laid low until they started getting out and then we'd taken a few pictures of the –

- Female Speaker: Of them.
- Charles: – of them and of the plane. I never got – they were – didn't get any of them.
- Interviewer: *Pictures of the men?*
- Charles: – of the men. Lord knows they just bobbed it around about there.
- Interviewer: *Okay.*
- Charles: But now, I got a good picture of the plane.
- Interviewer: *Yes, you did. Charles, the plane then left Ie Shima –*
- Charles: Yes.
- Interviewer: *– with the Japanese officials –*
- Charles: Yes.
- Interviewer: *– that were gonna sign the peace treaty.*
- Charles: And where they went to, I don't know. It was somewhere down around Leyte or somewhere down in there and landed on –
- Interviewer: *The Missouri.*
- Charles: – on Missouri.
- Interviewer: *Okay. And there's where the treaty was signed?*
- Charles: No, it was signed up there in –
- Female Speaker: *Tokyo Bay.*

Charles: – Japanese Harbor up there because see that was – old MacArthur on it and everything was done the way - he predicted they were gonna be on Missouri and of course he wasn't gonna ride about three or four days on the Missouri up there to sign that peace treaty.

Interviewer: *So, he made them get out –*

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *– and come on over. Did you go into Japan after the war?*

Charles: Yes, on the way home.

Interviewer: *Okay. Did you see some of the devastation?*

Charles: Well, saw quite a bit of it. Course—what we started home on was the ship called Sea Bass, and they got about 60 miles off of Tokyo and it lost its screw. So, we drifted around out there while they're waiting for a tug to come pull us in and they rolled us in there and we spent about four, five days, or a week there in –

Female Speaker: Tokyo Bay.

Charles: Tokyo Bay and Yokohama. And so, of course, they gave us – some of them run off and I stayed with the group pretty well, they went to see some of their museums or something or stuff like that. Some men were in the museum, I wish I hadn't went through because it's showing lamps and stuff that had made their shade out of human skin. And that was where I saw my first...

Female Speaker: Mimosa.

Charles: Mimosa trees, oh, they were big over there.

Female Speaker: Wish they'd have kept them over there.

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *They cause a lot of hay fever, don't they? They're beautiful.*

Charles: Yeah, we had one here, but it died, and I didn't worry about it.

Interviewer: *How long did you stay there on Ie Shima, though, before they sent you home?*

Charles: Well, when we landed there, it's about a week or ten days after they dropped that bomb and they pulled us off and moved us back to Okinawa.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Charles: And then, we stayed there in Okinawa, that's where we set up our tent and went building that Navy air base, a permanent one, it had a black top and everything. They had a civilian crew and a Army engineer crew, and then we had some people down there building that black top at least. And we all had been there about 40 mile across there.

Interviewer: *Was the black top better than the coral?*

Charles: Oh, yes. The coral made good foundation, but, you know, when it dried out or anything like that, well, then it busted up. But this blacktop there, it had a coral base under it.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Charles: [Inaudible] Now, I was – a big typhoon they had over there, that was in September.

Interviewer: *Of '45?*

Charles: Of '45. Now, we was already over on Okinawa then. And they pulled a bunch of the ships up on the beach there and we spent a week or two weeks getting a bunch of them on, taking bulldozers and cables and pulling them on. And then they had shovels, steam shovels down there digging out sand where I could get back there.

And that's where I – when we started building that air strip then. Where we were camped at, we had to go by another Navy base, I didn't know what it was. To go over there by that, but I was maybe going by there about noon time and they had lined up going to chow. And I hear somebody laugh, and couldn't be nobody but Paul Moon. But I stopped that truck and I hollered about three times and here he comes.

Interviewer: *That was a highlight in your time over there?*

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Okay. You were talking about the typhoon.*

Charles: Yeah, all that.

Interviewer: *The USS Hornet and some of her sister ships had to ride out that typhoon and some of them were lost.*

Charles: Yeah, I'll tell you what, most of all them was smaller ships, I meant, like the LSTs [inaudible] – that the bigger ones went out, they rode it out out there in the sea, but the little ones they was kindly up in that lower hole. Well, they thought it was – that typhoon was the biggest thing you ever saw. It likely had 175 mile an hour winds. And I heard later on it was 2- [hundred] something.

I don't know, but I thought – I know one thing. We'd a – we'd hauled in a whole bunch of 4x8 sheets of plywood and had it stacked up. That was their main building material was plywood for like our tents. They'd put them up and they'd line with that plywood and build doors.

Well, that come in, blowed them up in the air, and they're just like a deck of cards, up there and them sheets of plywood up in there. And myself and a couple other guys, they had one of them pontoons that they buried their up in the side of the back up there, and so we went [inaudible] and got in there with them.

But I'll tell you what, it just blowed tents around and everything. I don't know how many guys that – It wasn't very many got killed on it, but a lot of them got wounded and stuff on it by –

Interviewer: *Just staying out in it?*

Charles: Staying out – well, they didn't try and find a place to –

Interviewer: *To get?*

Charles: To get. Well, they had a – they was – one of their native houses or something down there that a lot of us, I went to, but it was full. We left, but it had built out of a ebony wood, that black wood. There's whole ,just acres, of it around, but they used to –

Interviewer: *Was it a strong wood that withstands the typhoon?*

Charles: Yeah. But it was black and expensive wood to get it shipped in here because it was really expensive wood.

Interviewer: *But it was common over there?*

Charles: Yes.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, you stayed there on that island.*

Charles: We stayed on that island till I guess it must have been in January, of '46 because I spent Christmas on there. And then we started all getting to go home, taking us down there, and then of course that ship broke down. And then [inaudible] – anyhow, and when they finally got another ship, we come into Seattle, Washington. Spent about five days up there and then they put us on a train.

Well, we had only tickets from there because what ever [was] available, we rode it until we got down here to Nashville, Tennessee, and that's where we got – not Nashville, well, where that naval base is down there at Memphis.

Interviewer: *And you were –*

Charles: That's where I was discharged from.

Interviewer: *Discharged from the naval base there? Charles, what are some of – what are the worst things you remember about your time spent over there?*

Charles: Well, during that banzai raid, the second night we's on the – seems one of the worse things I ever saw because they pulled a bunch equipment in up there and had it up there. Course they was just kinda clubbing and squealing, and everything and I jumped in one of them scrapings that they pulled, to pickup dirt, behind them bulldozers. And when I jumped in there, well, they was already a Jap in it. And, course, that time it kind of got hairy for a little while.

And but, I guess, the worse thing, maybe it was about three or four days later when that woman came down out of the hill there, and blew herself up. And we were seventh up, but [inaudible] – we seen the camp at bivouac – we's prowling around and, like I say, they had their property lined off into squares for about a five mile, and the roads was just narrow lanes.

We got around there and heard something crying and got around there and it was a little about 15 or 18-month old kid trying to suck on his dead momma's breast. Now that bothered me quite a bit for a while. I used to dream about it quite a bit, but...

Interviewer: *What did you all do with the child?*

Charles: They got their Red Cross to come over and get it.

Interviewer: *Okay, there are a lot of orphans.*

Charles: Yeah, taken them over on Okinawa. See, they didn't – anything that we captured over on Ie Shima, we – you could see Okinawa just over a ways, and they said that when the tide was right, they could wade and swim that across there, but it was nine miles. We had some pontoons with big outboard motors on them that we hauled our garbage and stuff out with. And you had to watch there or that old outboard motor held down scrapped that –

Interviewer: *Bottom?*

Charles: Bottom.

Interviewer: *Okay, you told me the worst. What is some of the best memories you have?*

Charles: Oh, I – when we are going over, we stopped at down on the Marshall Islands to get some Coke and beers. They had a station down there and they was one of them little spider monkeys and a bunch of us sailors got out and chased it down. I don't know how many. I didn't climb any trees. I never was any good at climbing, but they people climbed them trees, you know, and he'd bail out of that tree and went over to the other one. And finally, I guess he about give out and they captured him.

Interviewer: *Did he get taken on the ship?*

Charles: Yeah. Course, wasn't supposed too, but.

Interviewer: *Did they get caught?*

Charles: Yeah, they eventually – Well, nobody claimed it, you know.

Interviewer: *Oh, okay. It wasn't anybody's monkey, but he was everybody's monkey?*

Charles: Yeah. And I don't know what they did with the monkey, but it was alive the last I seen of it.

Interviewer: *So, you all had your way of having a little fun and –*

Charles: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: – *lightheartedness, even in the midst of all that?*

Charles: Yes.

Interviewer: *Did you make strong bonds over there with your other buddies?*

Charles: Pretty much so.

Interviewer: *Do you think it's true that in war time, you form strong relationships?*

Charles: Yes.

Interviewer: *Okay. Did you ever regret enlisting?*

Charles: No.

Interviewer: *Never did?*

Charles: No.

Interviewer: *Not even in the midst of all those battles?*

Charles: No.

Interviewer: *You never regretted it? Okay, when you came home, did you think your country received you – how do you think they received you? Were they welcoming? Did they –*

Charles: Well, I'll tell you, when we –we got in on Memphis down there and got a discharge. And all the bus lines was on strike. And so, they hauled us out to the highway and said there you are, boys. So, we hitchhiked in to Little Rock, and three of them guys, I was – come over with there and one of them's from down there in Ozark. The other's down there in Greenwood, and one over here in Fort Smith. But anyhow, when we sat there, I told them, I said we're gonna have to get out of town here on the highway if we're gonna hitchhike, so we hired a taxicab to take us out on the highway.

 And so, on the way out there we discussed with him what was done. And he said well, I tell you what, said if you'd let me take this cab over there and dump it off and get in my car, he said I'll take you up there for \$25.

So, we had a big old Packard car, which in them days was pretty new. And we come on up here and come on up to Ozark and let that guy out, and then come up here and they dropped me off, and then I don't know if the other two he took them on there, but –

Interviewer: *So, that he was real accommodating to you guys?*

Charles: Yeah. Individuals was, and people, but I met – course, I didn't expect no band or anything like that. I was just glad to get home.

Interviewer: *Okay. Did you go back to Rudy?*

Charles: Yeah, next day, yes.

Interviewer: *Went home to Mom and Dad?*

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Did you have a hard time finding a job?*

Charles: No.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Charles: Course, it didn't pay nothing then, but I wound up working in a place in [inaudible], it's over there grading glass. And then went to Harding Glass and worked there at Harding's for 30 years and 6 months, something like that. And they closed that down in '77.

Interviewer: *Okay. How did you meet Pat?*

Charles: Well, her sister-in-law, she worked out there, too, at that last plant. And she kept trying to – at that time, Pat wasn't working there, and she kept asking me to come and see her pretty little sister. And she lived over on South D in Fort Smith. And I went over there and, sure enough, it was.

Interviewer: *A pretty little sister?*

Charles: A pretty little sister.

Interviewer: *When did y'all get married?*

Charles: In October. We had a very short –

Interviewer: *Courtship?*

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Well, you didn't wanna waste any more time. You'd been gone and you wanted to get on with your life. Charles, I noticed with this award that you got from the Veteran's Administration that you helped a lot of families, servicemen's families?*

Charles: I was – in the burial detail for years.

Interviewer: *National Cemetery?*

Charles: Yeah, National Cemetery and all these other cemeteries around here where they wanted the military [inaudible]. We went to two cemeteries over in Oklahoma, but most of them was all –

Interviewer: *Right around here?*

Charles: Right around here and we went clear down to – well, where's that one [inaudible]? It's oh, about 70 mile down there.

Interviewer: *So, as far away as 70 miles you went to represent the Armed Forces?*

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Charles: We had a full detail. We had a – I was the chaplain. And they had two guys fold the flag. And we had three guys in it that had a ritual that they went through, and then they had the commander of it. He was on out there. I guess it was about 45 minutes long and that –

Interviewer: *I've been to several with the Army, but I've never been one where the Navy.*

Charles: Well, they were just –

Female Speaker: VFW?

Charles: VFW, yeah.

Interviewer: *Oh, okay. So, it was all branches?*

Charles: Yeah, all branches, yes.

Interviewer: *Okay. Do you think the military has changed much since you got out?*

Charles: Yes, it sure has.

Interviewer: *You think the change is good or bad?*

Charles: I think it's bad.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Charles: They don't have – oh, a – well, they just let them do as they please. And, of course, when I was in you didn't do that. I meant, it was military, and –

Interviewer: *I heard on the radio this morning, or television, that they're no longer allowed to yell and scream at them in the boot camp. You got yelled and screamed at, didn't you?*

Charles: Yeah.

Interviewer: *If you had any advice for young people today, what would it be?*

Charles: Well, I think that all young men need to serve their country some way. Now I'm not for women being in it. Now if they have it separate, but I know how some of them guys are. They don't have no respect for – they didn't have no respect their mothers or their sisters, they don't others –

Interviewer: *How would it have been if you had had women over there in Nagashima? Iwoshima, however they pronounce it?*

Charles: Yeah, well, it was a – I'd have been feel sorry for the officers in charge because at that time, if they'd done all that, they'd a been trying to [inaudible], you know, just keep them separated and everything. Now we had a lot of nurses and stuff on there and I met some of them nurses, they'd go out with the guys and they went there. Now they, I don't know, I didn't.

Interviewer: *So, what I'm thinking of is the way you all lived in the foxholes and that kinda thing, and how the women would have –*

Charles: Fared.

Interviewer: *Fared in that kinda situation.*

Charles: Well, they wouldn't have been – they would've been treated just like everybody else. I mean, like you had to go to the bathroom, you went.

Interviewer: *I see. That's one of the things, in the midst of battle. It's hard for me to comprehend women and men being together like that.*

Charles: I can't, not even – But I'm not for it. I meant, if the women want to stay in the service, well, I think they ought to – you know, there are places they can serve and stuff, but I don't think they ought to.

Interviewer: *Okay. America prospered after World War II, not as a result of the war so much as the technology that we learned while we were in war.*

Charles: Yes, and the – well, another thing, the women that worked in the [inaudible] all that and stuff, and see they still – a lot of them stayed in and worked and the places kept them. And that –

Interviewer: *That changed America?*

Charles: That changed America.

Interviewer: *Women no longer stayed home with their children?*

Charles: No.

Interviewer: *And they got out in the workforce.*

Charles: Well, on that Fort Hueneme Navy base, see, that is a big supply base for all of the Navy. Course we had the camp there at Fort Hueneme, but there's –

Interviewer: *Was that in this little stream of islands here?*

Charles: No.

Interviewer: *No? It was –*

Charles: That's in [inaudible] off –

Female Speaker: California.

Charles: Okinawa, all that, I'm sorry, in California. And they's a lot of women worked on that base, and they drove the truck and the mail delivery in the camp and stuff was women, and –

Interviewer: *So, they had a place that they could serve?*

Charles: Yes.

Interviewer: *Okay. It's been a joy, Charles. Now see, it wasn't hard at all, was it?*

Charles: No.

Interviewer: *I've enjoyed it very much. Thank you.*

Charles: I hope you got something you can use.

END

Charles William O'Kelly

Times Record, Fort Smith

Charles William O'Kelly, 82, of Van Buren died Sunday, March 18, 2007, in a local nursing home. He was a retired shift supervisor for Harding Glass Co. in Fort Smith, A.E. Staley Co. and Diamond Shamrock; he served in the U.S. Navy Seabees in World War II. He was a member and elder of First Presbyterian Church in Van Buren and a lifetime member and past commander and chaplain for the VFW Post in Van Buren. He was preceded in death by two sons, Albert and William O'Kelly.

He is survived by his wife, Patsy of the home; one daughter, Sharon Blasingame of Van Buren; one son, Charles Howard O'Kelly of Van Buren; two sisters, Ellen Armer and her husband Earl of Muldrow and Mary Montoya of Albuquerque, N.M.; five brothers, Conley O'Kelly of Rudy, Freddy O'Kelly of Rudy, John C. O'Kelly of Rudy, Quincie O'Kelly of Van Buren and Curtis O'Kelly of Rudy; three grandchildren, Nathan O'Kelly of Van Buren, Tata Small of Van Buren and Craig Lauber of Fort Smith; three great-grandchildren, Jack, Hayley and Maddoux.

Memorial service will be 11 a.m. Wednesday, March 21, 2007, at Edwards Van-Alma Chapel. Mr. O'Kelly's ashes will be interred at U.S. National Cemetery at a later date under the direction of Edwards Van-Alma Funeral Home.



**Col. Weldon Ramey (Ret.)
World War II Veteran
Interview**

The following was originally a video interview done by the Crawford County Friends of Genealogy, Van Buren, Arkansas. The interviewer is Hilda Daugherty and the original interview was recorded on March 21, 2007. This written transcript of the original audio was accomplished in March, 2018.

Interviewer: *Today is March 21st, 2007. We're visiting with Retired Colonel Weldon Ramey. He was lifetime military, and he has an interesting story to share with us, especially related to World War II. Mr. Ramey, would you give us your complete name, please?*

Weldon: Weldon Odell Ramey.

Interviewer: *And your place and date of birth?*

Weldon: I was born in Van Buren, February 1st, 1926.

Interviewer: *Van Buren, Arkansas.*

Weldon: I lived in [inaudible].

Interviewer: *And who your parents were, please?*

Weldon: Well, my mother was born in Crawford County [inaudible] Ramey. Harwell-Ramey. Harwell is maiden name. Lived there all of her life in

Crawford County. My father was born in Oklahoma Territory, migrated to Arkansas, and met my mother while he was attending farmland, and they married.

Interviewer: *Did they live around Van Buren proper or in an outlying area?*

Weldon: They lived near Kibler, and did some farming there, and worked for farmers.

Interviewer: *The good, rich bottom lands of Van Buren, Crawford County.*

Weldon: And when it was hard to get a job farming, my father during the Great Depression left farming, came into Van Buren, and became a railroader.

Interviewer: *That was one of the more secure jobs. Railroads were a necessity even during depression times.*

Weldon: Well, Van Buren was a railroad town. So, he hounded them, and stayed with them until he got a job. It took months and months, but he couldn't make a living farming. Finally got onto the rail.

Interviewer: *Did his job last through the depression era?*

Weldon: No, he probably was off work more than he worked actually during the depression years. Like everybody else, he really had to scrape hard, do whatever he could, including the WPA, like in those days, just barely getting by.

Interviewer: *How many children did your parents have?*

Weldon: I have a twin sister and an older brother.

Interviewer: *So, there were three of you?*

Weldon: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: *And I'd like to know a little bit about your father himself. Did he have stories about being in Territory days?*

Weldon: Yeah, I went with him when he was older to the hospital here in Van Buren. He was being admitted, and they were taking information about him. I was standing next to him. And one of the young ladies who were taking information asked him, "Where were you born, Mr. Ramey?" And he said, "Well, I was born in Oklahoma Territory." And she looked over at another young nurse and said, "He means

Oklahoma. He's confused." He was born in 1895 in Oklahoma Territory.

Interviewer: *Did he talk about the Native Americans that were there? Did he tell stories about that? And what did his own father do in Oklahoma?*

Weldon: Well, his father was a small store owner, and they settled in eastern Oklahoma. They came from the southeast through Arkansas into Oklahoma. And his father owned a small store. And my father, at a very young age, left the area where they settled, it's called Old Remy, R-E-M-Y, instead of R-A-M-E-Y, the way we spell it, but it was named after my ancestors. And he had a lot of relations with Indians there. And my mother is an eighth Cherokee Indian as a matter of fact. And my grandfather had an opportunity to get land over in Oklahoma Territory, but he wouldn't go and get it. So, we're mixed in quite a bit with Indians.

Interviewer: *Did you have any family stories carried down about your Cherokee ancestors coming from the east or southeast?*

Weldon: I didn't have any directly, but my ancestors were Cherokee, and they obviously came on the Trail of Tears into Oklahoma because we were descendants of those Indians.

Interviewer: *So, you really are an American?*

Weldon: Yeah. As Will Rogers used to say, "I didn't beat the boat, but we were here to greet them."

Interviewer: *Well, that was an interesting time in our history. Give us a little indication where Old Remy is situated or was situated from the Arkansas line. How far were –*

Weldon: Just a few miles over to the west of Fort Smith. And my ancestors came from Georgia area, passed through Arkansas there, and later my father came back [inaudible] settled.

Interviewer: *Were both sides of your family from the same area of Georgia, or do you actually know that?*

Weldon: I really don't know that because I know so little about my mother's side, which is the Indian side. I know my grandfather who was either a half or a quarter Indian [inaudible] is buried in the cemetery in [inaudible], but I have no history going back beyond that.

Interviewer: *Well, that's interesting to connect what you lived with what they lived.*

So, we like to make that connection. So, you were born in the area of Van Buren, and you came up through the school, so tell us a few incidents in your school years, where you went to school.

Weldon: Well, of course I started school in Old Meyer. That's been torn down for many, many years.

Interviewer: *Now, tell us where Old Meyer was. I'd like to know exactly where that was.*

Weldon: It was on East Broadway. There's a car lot there now.

Interviewer: *Jack's Car?*

Weldon: Jack's Car Lot.

Interviewer: *So, the name of it was Meyer School?*

Weldon: It was Meyer School, and I think we called it Old Meyer. And then from there, it was getting rather – even when I started the school in 1932 – we went to Old Broadway, and that's where city hall is now.

Interviewer: *Is that right?*

Weldon: It was originally a high school here in Van Buren. And it was getting so old that they had to build a new school, Sophia Meyer, and closed it down. Sophia Meyer opened, as I recall, in 1935.

Interviewer: *Was it then the high school at that time?*

Weldon: It was a grade school.

Interviewer: *Oh, it was?*

Weldon: And the high school was on North 11th, I believe. And at the time I got there, the old high school there was a junior high school. Originally, on Broadway was a high school, and then they built a high school. I think it was North 11th.

Interviewer: *Yes. Probably what we call Butterfield Junior High now.*

Weldon: Yeah, and the front of it was originally a high school, later converted to a junior high school. And they built the high school just off of that, so junior high. And when I was going to school there, it was a combination of junior high and senior high.

Interviewer: *So, what year did you graduate from high school?*

Weldon: I graduated in May 1944, and a few days later, I went into the Navy. I had a contract to go with the Navy immediately after graduation.

Interviewer: *Let's back up about three years. Tell where you were the day that Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. What were you doing that day? Can you remember hearing about it?*

Weldon: December 7th, 1941.

Interviewer: *Do you remember the time you heard about it?*

Weldon: I don't. I don't. The only thing I remember is talking about it later. I don't remember what happened on that exact day. I don't remember hearing about it. And I know there was a lot of commotion regarding a lot of publicity regarding it, but I don't know, I guess I was a young lad –

Interviewer: *You just happened to be in the wrong place.*

Weldon: [Inaudible] doing other things.

Interviewer: *What were you hearing at school from that time on until you graduated? What was the talk about?*

Weldon: World War II was a very popular war, and the last of the popular wars. And ever since then, every war we've been engaged in, very controversial. And it was popular with the young people. We admired our friends a little older than we who'd gone into the war. We wanted to get into the war, and we could hardly wait for our time, our age to be such that we could volunteer to go into the war. In Van Buren, there was a group of military people there learning how to railroad. They had a railroad in Tiding where the hospital is now in Van Buren.

Interviewer: *Camp Jesse Turner?*

Weldon: Yeah, Camp Jesse Turner. That's where it was. And of course, the Fort Chaffee in Fort Smith was huge. And some of us younger people were envious of the soldiers. They seemed to get along quite well with our girlfriends, and we were somewhat envious of them. And I take because of that, I and some of my friends went into it later.

Interviewer: *Give us an estimation, if you heard it, how large did Camp Chaffee swell to during those years? I've not heard a number.*

Weldon: I take it at the high, there were probably between 10,000 to 15,000 men there. It was a huge, huge fort. And there were just a few hundred people in Van Buren at the railroad [inaudible]. But the whole area was permeated with soldiers.

Interviewer: *So, the military had an arrangement in the schools, that they could come in and sign you up or talk to you before graduation? Tell us a little about that.*

Weldon: I don't remember. They perhaps had that arrangement, but most of us were so eager to get into World War II that we sought them out. We went to the recruiters. We wanted to get in the war. We wanted to be a part of that war.

Interviewer: *And what age were you allowed to sign with the recruiter?*

Weldon: Well, I was 17 when I signed with a recruiter and had my parents' permission with the understanding that I wouldn't be called until I graduated in May of 1944.

Interviewer: *So, you weren't really with trepidation waiting that day. You were actually eager for it.*

Weldon: I and my friends were eager to get into the war and to be a part of World War II.

Interviewer: *Did you get to choose what branch of service you were gonna go into?*

Weldon: Yeah. I chose the Navy and enlisted in the Navy before graduation.

Interviewer: *After graduation now, they're expecting you, so give us a timetable and where you went.*

Weldon: Just a few days after I graduated, I was enroute to the Navy and went to basic training, boot camp, in Fort Wallace, Texas, which is near the Gulf, and stayed there, as I recall, about six weeks. We were needed overseas, so boot camp wasn't very long.

Interviewer: *Now, give us the date on this. This was 1944?*

Weldon: 1944.

Interviewer: *So, in May of 1944 –*

Weldon: I went to boot camp in the Navy, and after six weeks of boot camp,

left there and went to California in order to board a ship. I'd been assigned to a ship. And within three or four months of going into the Navy, I was aboard a ship, ready to ship out to the Pacific.

Interviewer: *And that suited you fine. You were so eager to go.*

Weldon: I was ready. Yes, I was.

Interviewer: *What was the name of the ship you were assigned to first?*

Weldon: It was an LCI, a Landing Craft Infantry, a very small ship. We would take troops right up to the seashore. The bow of the ship would open up, and they then would get on the land and fight, and that was primarily what we did. A very small ship.

Interviewer: *Did it have a number? LCI –*

Weldon: 649.

Interviewer: *649. They were very necessary instruments in that war.*

Weldon: Yes, they were. I don't know how I remember the number.

Interviewer: *We find that most can remember the number.*

Weldon: Oh, really?

Interviewer: *Yes. That was a milestone in their life.*

Weldon: Yeah, that was a big one.

Interviewer: *Did you remain with the same ship for the duration of your time?*

Weldon: I did for practically all of my tour in the Pacific. And toward the end of the fighting in the Pacific, I boarded a larger ship just for a short period of time, but most of my career was on that small ship.

Interviewer: *Well, take us on the ship with you and start us out from California and give us a tour.*

Weldon: Well, from there, we basically had a small armament, 20-millimeter guns and [inaudible]. So, I went to California, went to Hawaii, and stayed there about two months while the ship was retrofitted with rockets. And of course, rockets were much more popular and much more devastating.

Interviewer: Was this something new introduced into the war at this time?

Weldon: For our ships, it was, yeah. But since we could get so close to the shore, they wanted to retrofit us with rockets because we could go near the shore and fire the rockets right into the caves where the enemy was located.

Interviewer: So, in three months, you were approximately late summer?

Weldon: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: *Early fall, you were already in the South Pacific in 1944.*

Weldon: Yes.

Interviewer: *Where was the first island group, or what did you first draw near to after Pearl Harbor?*

Weldon: Well, first combat was the initial invasion of Okinawa. Our ship was involved with that as were hundreds and hundreds of ships and thousands of troops. It was a very bloody battle. And we were there, as I recall, the better part of three months from the beginning to the end. My most vivid memory is at night, when the enemy aircraft, the Japanese aircraft, would come overhead, and all those ships were firing, the tracer bullets made it seem like it was daytime.

And the kamikazes – Japan was desperate at that time. They were losing. They knew they were losing, and they initiated the use of the kamikaze aircraft in order to hit the larger ships, but they were mainly interested in hitting battleships, or cruisers, or destroyers, and we were a very small ship. But when they missed them, they came very close to us. Fortunately, my ship didn't get hit, but with some of the enemy fire, some of my friends were wounded right next to me. Fortunately, I did not get wounded in the war.

Interviewer: *Now, your ship was not hit directly?*

Weldon: No.

Interviewer: *But they received shrapnel or something from the other –*

Weldon: And we don't know that if that shrapnel came from enemy fire or our own ships.

Interviewer: *Well, that would be true, wouldn't it? There were all kinds of complications to war, so that's a thought I had not thought of, but it's*

possibly true. I would like to know about this, too. Was it only during the last desperate days of the war that the kamikazes were involved?

Weldon: It was probably the latter months of the war when Japan really realized they were losing the war and pulled out all stops, and that's when the kamikazes came into play.

Interviewer: *Describe a little bit about the battle for Okinawa.*

Weldon: Well, it was not a pleasant experience. The major advantage to the Navy is if you weren't hit by the kamikazes, you had a fairly decent life. The soldiers that were fighting on the ground in Okinawa had a horrible life. This was like the soldiers today in Iraq [inaudible]. So, we were up day and night. We were [inaudible], but we had it comparatively easy, and we knew that.

Interviewer: *What was your actual assignment on board?*

Weldon: Well, in terms of combat, I would assist in the manning of the 20-millimeter gun in order to fire at enemy aircraft, Japanese aircraft. And I would either put magazines on the gun, or I would man the gun itself. That was mainly my duty on the ship.

Interviewer: *So, you were pretty close to some hairy times, some scary times.*

Weldon: Well, I remember being scared quite a bit.

Interviewer: *Were the young men so eager to fight that they didn't give into that fear, or was it a problem among the young men?*

Weldon: Well, I think most of us during actual combat had fear. We didn't talk about it. We tried not to display it, but I think that most people my age had fear.

Interviewer: *It was a little more somber over there on the ship than it was at home wishing you could go help.*

Weldon: Yes. My friends and I never regretted the fact that we got in combat and fought in combat. It's what we wanted to do, and we did, and we were proud of it.

Interviewer: *Well, it was the mindset of that generation, the sacrifice for your country.*

Weldon: We were proud. We were proud that we were doing our part. It might've been a small part, but we were proud [inaudible].

Interviewer: *How well did you see that those small parts matched together to win the war?*

Weldon: Well, quite frankly, I rarely ever talked about World War II. I was in the Korean War and Vietnam War, and I probably would not be here today if it were not for Mary – Mary Owen [inaudible], a personal friend going back to our early lives because I'm not comfortable. I'm not comfortable talking about it. It's not just something I do.

Interviewer: *Well, these are not easy subjects to discuss, but our motive is to preserve our history and hopefully gain insight for future generations [inaudible].*

Weldon: I think you're doing a wonderful thing. I think your project is great. I'm just telling you it's a little difficult.

Interviewer: *Well, it certainly is.*

Weldon: Uncomfortable for me and perhaps for some others to talk about. I think the project is great.

Interviewer: *We don't take it lightly. Your experiences were not light experiences, and we understand the gravity of bringing these things out, but we appreciate your taking the time and emotional involvement to drag these things out one more time. So, you were during the Okinawan – complete three months of the Okinawan invasion, and did your ship stay in one relatively small area or did it circle back and forth?*

Weldon: From there we went to the Philippine islands, and because we had the rockets on our ship, we went around the different islands firing where the people in intelligence believed the enemy was still located, and fired rockets into caves and other areas, but mainly caves where they were located, where they were dug in. The war had not been [inaudible] yet. We didn't encounter any fire there, but we did a lot of firing into those caves and things.

Interviewer: *Were you ever given what some of the sailors and soldiers called liberty, that you could go onto land?*

Weldon: Well, at one time when I left California going into the South Pacific, I went five months without setting foot on land. The only land for about a year occasionally, rarely, but this would be months and months in between, we would get off, and go on an island somewhere, and relax for a few hours. The folks who drank beer would have a beer or two.

Interviewer: *What I'm interested in is to see if you saw firsthand the destruction of war on the land itself, on the islands, on the people themselves.*

Weldon: I didn't. I was the entire time aboard the ship. Later, I became an officer in the Air Force, and I was stationed in the Philippines, and I was able then to see the destruction that occurred at the time in Corregidor and places like that in the Philippines. But during World War II, I didn't see it.

Interviewer: *The war is drawing to a close. Japan realized that it's losing, and you've taken part in the securing of Okinawa, and there's something that's coming up pretty big. They're amassing a large contingent. Describe that for us and your part in that.*

Weldon: Well, that created a lot of anxiety because we knew even as a sailor, the word has spread that we were big and vast in order to invade Japan. And even though we were pretty far down the chain as young sailors, we knew that would be very bloody and very costly in lives, and we were apprehensive about that. But just as we went through the South Pacific and despite any fears or apprehensions, we did what we went there to do to the best of our ability, and we would do the same thing in Japan. We certainly were not looking forward to being a part of the invasion of Japan because we knew that many of us would lose our lives.

Interviewer: *What were the numbers that they were spreading around stories?*

Weldon: We knew that hundreds of thousands of Americans would lose their lives. Hundreds of thousands. Because they were very fanatical. They've had troops just like we have troops today in Iraq who are willing to give their lives in order to cost other opponents, the enemies, to die. And we knew that, and we were apprehensive about that.

Interviewer: *Did you think about also how many hundreds of thousands of the Japanese people themselves would die? The civilian population during an invasion like that? Did you hear anything to that effect?*

Weldon: I hope this doesn't sound cold or casual – I don't mean it that way. In combat, I think you become concerned about doing the job, and staying alive, and shooting, and perhaps even killing the enemy. I don't know anyone dead or alive that marched up and killed another human being, but I think in circumstances like that, I think self-preservation is pretty strong.

Interviewer: *That's the instinct that keeps a soldier going. Before the bombs were*

dropped, there was this possibility that we would be losing – you boys would be losing your lives. Hundreds of even thousands as we say.

Weldon: **[Inaudible]** of thousands.

Interviewer: *And then into the mainland, there would be great loss of life. You realized that was gonna happen. Did you have any inclinations that the government had some big thing that was gonna happen?*

Weldon: My friends and I did not have –that had been kept so secret that I'm not even sure on our ships the officers knew about it. Now, maybe some of the admirals did, but certainly down to my level and even the officers at that level had no idea of the atomic bomb.

Interviewer: *So, you were sitting in a formation in Okinawa when the first bomb was dropped in Japan?*

Weldon: Yes.

Interviewer: *Were you far enough away that you didn't have any fallout or anything close –?*

Weldon: Yeah, we were.

Interviewer: *And then when the next bomb was dropped, what was the atmosphere on the ship? When the first one, what atmosphere did you feel on the ship?*

Weldon: You know, communication back then was very, very difficult. Not like it is today. We're somewhat right in Iraq. It's communicated directly back home on the internet. We didn't have any newspapers, we didn't have any radios. We would only get bits – just small bits and pieces of what was going on in the water.

So, we had no details on the devastation the atomic bomb, the lives lost, or anything like that. We just knew that there was a possibility because something big had happened, and I know this sounds like we were just personally cut off from communications, which in fact we were at the level that I was – I was Senior First Class – but we knew something big had happened, and that we may not have to invade Japan. But it was just something that large and that big. We had no details at all.

Interviewer: *And nothing to measure it by from past history, so you weren't absolutely sure you weren't gonna have to go still yet.*

Weldon: We just somehow knew, somehow or another knew there was a possibility that we may not have to invade Japan.

Interviewer: *And then tell us about how you received the news that Japan had actually surrendered.*

Weldon: Well, when that information – course that information got to everybody, and that filtered down.

Interviewer: *Happy day.*

Weldon: So, there was a lot of celebration. A lot of celebration. We were very, very happy.

Interviewer: *How long did you remain in formation in Okinawa before then you dispersed [inaudible]?*

Weldon: Well, we had done a little work, as I mentioned earlier, in the Philippine Islands, and when the war was over, we took some of the enemy soldiers that had not been killed – they had been captured on our ship – back to – actually, I remember going into China. I guess we had both Japanese and some Chinese.

We took them back into China, did not go through Japan, but I remember going through Shanghai and dropping off some of those folks there. And we went up the Yangtze river to get to Shanghai and came back. After we did that, of course the war was over, then we came back, I remember seeing the coastal area of Korea. No one had an idea that just two years later, we'd be in another war there.

Interviewer: *Tell us about those Chinese. Were they fighting with the Japanese?*

Weldon: You know, there's confusion right now in my mind. I think they were Japanese, but we did not take them to Japan. We took them to China. They must've been imprisoned there because I remember distinctly being in China, I remember the prisoners, so they had to be Japanese.

Interviewer: *They probably were. Did they show any resistance to you on your ship?*

Weldon: No.

Interviewer: *They realized that they were completely whipped?*

Weldon: Yes. They realized that, but they were heavily guarded, too.

Interviewer: *Just to prevent any kind of—*

Weldon: So, no resistance of any kind.

Interviewer: *What kind of physical condition did you find them to be in? Did you actually get close enough that you could tell? Malnourished?*

Weldon: I did see them very closely. They were slight people anyhow, so perhaps slightly emaciated, but not like the prisoners of war, the Americans, not how they were treated. We at least fed them and guarded them carefully but treated them decently until we got them back.

Interviewer: *I would imagine that they felt almost unbelief to be treated humanely by their enemy.*

Weldon: I'm sure they were, but at the same time, because of their culture, not to die in action but to be captured was an extremely difficult thing on their part because they were taught to sacrifice their lives for the mother country of Japan. So, even though perhaps they felt relieved that they were getting at least some food and decent treatment, at the same time, they were disgraced.

Interviewer: *Their spirit was completely broken, in other words?*

Weldon: They were disgraced.

Interviewer: *That would've been a hard thing. [Inaudible] pick up your story from there and tell us after, instead of just coming back to Arkansas, you decided to reenlist or change branches?*

Weldon: Well, aboard ship back to California, and since I got into war relatively late in May of 1944, the war in Europe was over in there in 1945, and then the South Pacific and the Pacific, it wasn't over until August of '45. After the war was over, we went to China, that area, and came back through California. Since I was still fairly young, and I couldn't get out of the Navy – they had a point system, and you had to accumulate a lot of points: age held, length of service held. If you were married, that still would not help.

And I was none of the above. So, even though the war in the Pacific was over in August of '45, I had stayed until May of '46 to get out. Then I came back to Arkansas.

Interviewer: *You did come home.*

Weldon: Came back to Arkansas and went to the University of Arkansas. My older brother was in the Army Air Corp, and I worshipped him. He's a very handsome, dashing young man.

Interviewer: *What was his name while we're talking about him?*

Weldon: Edgar Russell Ramey. And he was a very glamorous man, very handsome man. And I didn't want to stay in the Navy. That wasn't my cup of tea, but I was proud to be in the Navy to do what I did, as little as it was. Nevertheless, I was proud of it. But when I went back, and I went to the University of Arkansas out of the Navy, I got in Air Force ROTC. I had no idea that I would be back in the military in a few years. I graduated in 1950. The Korean War came along at the same time, and they called me, matter of fact to be in the Air Force.

Interviewer: *So, it was not actually a choice of will, but an obligation –*

Weldon: Well, I really wanted to be a Russian linguist, and major in Russian language and area studies, but I couldn't get on active duty, and they wouldn't call me in to do that. And coincidentally, when I got my commission as Second Lieutenant, they called me on active duty, I took a battery of tests, and they sent me to an encampment with Russians in north New York. So, I accidentally accomplished what I wanted to anyhow, stayed in that encampment for a year with Russians and some other Air Force personnel.

Interviewer: *Were you learning their language? Was that the purpose of the camp?*

Weldon: Many of them could not speak English at all. Some could speak a little. And the purpose was to be with them, and both academically study Russian, but actually practice it with them. So, I was there for a year and did fairly well with Russian.

Interviewer: *Well, was that something you put in service when you went into further duty?*

Weldon: That I wanted to do that?

Interviewer: *Were you able to use that then in your service years?*

Weldon: Yeah. And then from that encampment, I was assigned back to the military and intelligence in psychological warfare. And as Russians would come through, a lot of Russians from the revolution [inaudible] of Russia went to Manchuria, Harbin, Manchuria. And after World War II, they wanted to get out there and go to South America or the United States, and many of them passed through Manila, and we did

some interrogation and intelligence work.

Interviewer: *Well, that was an interesting turn of events.*

Weldon: Yes, it was. And part of the psychological warfare, we went up to Korea during that war and worked with the army in psychological warfare.

Interviewer: *Did you find use for your Russian among what you found in Korea?*

Weldon: I eventually wound up in Air Force Security Service, which is part of the National Security Agency, and communications intelligence was our main thing, just like NSA today is in the very sophisticated communications intelligence. So, the Russian came in handy later in my career path in the Air Force.

Interviewer: *Go ahead and give us an overview of your remaining military years and tell us then when you retired.*

Weldon: Well, in intelligence, in Air Force Security Service of the National Security Agency, mainly stationed around Soviet Union and China. Did a tour in Turkey near the Black Sea, which is right – I can say this now. I couldn't before – on top of the Soviet Union's missile test range and spent two and a half years there. Came back to the United States for a brief time, then went to Italy with a large intelligence operation there under National Security Agency directed at Europe and the Soviet Union. And from there, again, came back to the United States.

Spent a good bit of time overseas in foreign countries. I went to Vietnam in 1967 and came out of there a year later in 1968 and worked for the Air Force inside Air Force Intelligence and went forward into the former lines of the Army on special assignments. Was there during the Tet Offensive, which – you got me talking quite a bit – which was the worst part of the war, the Tet Offensive.

Interviewer: *It was an important [inaudible].*

Weldon: And got caught [inaudible] Saigon [inaudible] and was very fortunate not to get killed making our way back to the base. So, those were difficult times, and I did see the results quite a more there as well as the Korean War. Came back from there to Italy, and then I served a tour there and came back to the United States. Commanded an intelligence group in San Angelo, Texas, and ended up retiring from there in 1973.

Interviewer: *When did you become a colonel?*

Weldon: I made colonel when I left Italy, coming back to the United States at the Goodfellow Air Force Base. I didn't know it because I was enroute, but when I got back to the United States, I had a friend call me from the Pentagon. I was in Chester, Arkansas. I don't know how he found me there, but he did and told me I was colonel's list, so I went to Goodfellow Air Force Base in Texas for the last three years of my career and commanded a group there as a colonel and enjoyed that very much. But after three wars and 26 years of active duty, I felt like I was ready to come home and [inaudible].

Interviewer: *You've certainly earned your retirement.*

Weldon: Well, yes, I think I did.

Interviewer: *I would like to ask you a question. Dealing with security issues and seeing all the reports, top-secret material, other people in the world will never know, how does that affect your relation to normal life? How are you able to relate to normal life knowing all these humongous threats that are threats to the world's peace and our country's peace?*

Weldon: It's like the Russian language. I haven't used any ever since I retired 30 years ago, and so it's very rusty. But there's no one to use it with, so there's no way to speak it. It would be difficult now for me, but not hard after some practice to get back to it, but there's no way to use it. And in intelligence, the same thing is true. For many years, I could not say anything about the intelligence work. Then after, because I was still current, all the intelligence was [inaudible]. But after a certain number of years, I could talk generally about it. But again, there really is no one to talk with about that.

Interviewer: *No one's gonna comprehend what you have to share.*

Weldon: No. You sound like – if you were to talk about it, which I did practically none of – it would sound like – well, I've done more talking here than I have in the past 30 years of intelligence. You would sound almost like you were griping. You got into such things as before [inaudible] that they could make you a speech that would be on the President's desk. You know, you don't talk about those things, and if you were to, people would think – even today, when I say we run with the National Security Agency, we work with [inaudible], it sounds like – well, everyone knows what NSA is today. It's a popular thing and [inaudible] NSA and spies.

Interviewer: *During the Cold War years though, it was almost a desperate grapple between world powers that to know you had a part in that must be weighty to start with, but very rewarding to know that during those years, maybe what you did kept something major from happening.*

Weldon: Yeah, it really was rewarding, and very enjoyable, and very challenging. It's just that I feel that way. I feel the satisfaction [inaudible], but I rarely ever mention it [inaudible] talk about.

Interviewer: *Another advantage to not talking so much about those weighted security issues is the paranoia that it would set off on many of the common people if they knew – if we knew – what you all dealt with all the time. Don't you think that's a true assessment?*

Weldon: Well, I think we're living in an age now where people are very aware of – many people. Many people are of the National Security Agency, the FBI, the Central Intelligence Agency. I think there should be a greater awareness on the part of the American people of what they do. Maybe not the current details, but what they do and how they do it. And this fight is going on in Congress right now because if we don't know what they do, we can't protect ourselves from excesses, and that's part of what's going on in Washington D.C. now. Did the NSA become excessive in what they were doing?

So, it's good for the American people to know some of this and pay attention to this because we have to have it to protect ourselves, and yet we have to have it not to prevent excessive use of it.

Interviewer: *I would like you to share a little bit about your analysis of the point that our country's at right now, that war that we're actually involved in.*

Weldon: Are you sure you want me to?

Interviewer: *It's your opinion.*

Weldon: Alright, this is my opinion. One man's opinion. One person's opinion.

Interviewer: *From a military perspective that you've had all your years, give us your analysis.*

Weldon: I think we went into Iraq erroneously. I think we went into it and lost the moral high ground. A good number of us didn't favor going in at first. It's not that we changed later, did not favor going in at first. We were given the wrong reasons for invading Iraq. They proved to be not true. That means that for the first time, the use of preemptive

strike where America wages war with another country without being attacked first by that country was not valid. There were no weapons of mass destruction there. They did not have the ability to deliver intercontinental ballistics missiles or even intermediate range. They could go maybe 50 or 60 miles only.

So, we went into there for the wrong reasons, unfortunately. And I think that it's sad for our country. I can appreciate after 26 years of military life and three wars what the troops are doing there. I admire them. I don't know how they go back for second and third tours, which I think is wrong also, but we don't any troops to put in there overall. I admire them for what they're doing immensely, but I don't think we should've been there in the first place, and I think we should get out of there as quickly as possible.

I think there is a civil war going on in Iraq, and some people believe that, and some people don't believe that, but I think we're fighting the Shiites on one hand; we're fighting the Sunnis on the other hand. There are Al Qaeda in there now that were not there earlier – we're fighting them. The countries around have taken issues in Iraq. In Iran, the Shiite, they are involved in Iraq. Syrians are Sunnis – they are involved in Iraq. So, we find that the countries around it depending on their religion are also involved in Iraq, and there are forces in there, factions in there.

The [inaudible], they were in power under the person we deposed – they're involved. So, we're caught in the middle, and the middle has been getting worse over the years. We've been in Iraq longer – Than we were in World War II. We were four years in Iraq. We a little under four years in World War II, and it's getting worse. Now, the administration believes that we can still win that war, and we need more troops in there, and we need more money in there, I don't think that's true. I think it's a civil war, and I think it's gonna have to be waged by people in the country, by the Iraqis and someone is gonna emerge from the civil war as the winner of the civil war. Most likely, it's gonna be the Shiites. I don't think Americans can win the war. You wanted my views.

Interviewer: *That's very good. Thank you. Well, I have two questions related to the subject. Do you have confidence in the National Security Agency's – that they are doing all possible in this situation?*

Weldon: Here is the situation. We have been prepared to wage conventional war. Our Air Force is magnificent. Navy and United States Air Force. Our troops were trained along conventional lines, but it [inaudible] intelligence [inaudible] National Security Agency. But that war is not

a conventional war. On the contrary, it's the opposite of a conventional war. We were not trained to fight that kind of war. We're still not trained to fight that kind of warfare.

Now, back to intelligence. I believe in what the National Security Agency does. I think they're good, but so much of what's happening in Iraq is base-to-base, person-to-person, voice-to-voice, door-to-door, neighborhood-to-neighborhood. And you may have satellites in the air, they can get intelligence all over the place, but it's not geared for unconventional warfare. So, we're in a warfare that's dragging out because we're not prepared to fight that kind of war, and we still aren't. There's some real issues about what our troops there, are they getting the proper equipment, personal equipment, the proper vehicles that are armored and protected?

It's a kind of war where our troops, so many of them, and there are thousands and thousands that are losing legs, and arms, and parts of their bodies. It's not like a big bomb dropping, wiping out whole sections of a country or a city. So, now I'll come back to your question. It's a long way to get there. But the National Security Agency is good, like our military, they're in the process of adapting, of changing. They had gone very largely over the satellite intelligence. We had lost what we used to have in terms of human intelligence – ground-to-ground, face-to-face kind of infiltration. So, we're having problems there.

Interviewer: *Do you feel like we're building that back up [inaudible] the situation?*

Weldon: Slowly. Slowly. Meanwhile, war is now over four years, and we've lost 3,200 lives, and about 25,000 troops have been wounded, about 10,000 so seriously they can't go back out to duty. So, it's a real question. I've told you how I feel as one individual, but America is torn – almost even divided about should we be there, should we get out of there. More Americans still doubt – about 56, 57 percent – that we should not have gone there in the first place, but that's happened in the past, I'd say, 6, 8, 9 months a year.

Interviewer: *To feel both sides of this issue, do you not feel like that our country or administration chose this route as a response to our attack in New York City? Not knowing the enemy, you go out looking for an enemy to kick back at?*

Weldon: You're asking me good questions, and I'm an individual.

Interviewer: *I want your individual opinion.*

Weldon: I have a military background. I'm giving you one person's opinion [inaudible].

Interviewer: *Understood.*

Weldon: When 9/11 occurred, our response was to go after the perpetrators of 9/11, and those perpetrators were located in Afghanistan. So, we were waging in Afghanistan the right war. And at that time, our leader said at the national level, "You could run, leaders of Al Qaeda, but we're gonna find you. You can't hide. We're gonna get you." So, we started out waging the right war. And suddenly, we shifted over from the right war to Iraq, and when we did that, it distracted us from the real war, which was against Al Qaeda.

Now, Al Qaeda has been using and is using Iraq as a training ground, a training ground for people who could go out throughout the world and perpetrate immense losses on us and others. So, we started out reacting to what happened in New York City, 9/11, and then we got distracted. Now, as a consequence of that, we said, if you recall, very loudly, our president, "Bin Laden, you can run, but you can't hide."

Now, he'd been running for over four years, and he's doing a pretty good job of hiding. Al Qaeda is building back up and [inaudible]. We have devoted and diverted so much money, and so many troops, and so much energy into Iraq that it has detracted on the war on terror worldwide, and we got detracted from our main vision was get him in Afghanistan.

Interviewer: *I want to explore just a little bit before we close our interview what you've perceived to be the war of the future to be like. What are wars in the future going to be like?*

Weldon: I think we have to be prepared for what we call conventional warfare, which is use of aircraft, the Air Forces, large armies and so forth, but we have to prepare also – and we need that in reserve – I think the main wars of the future are gonna be what we're experiencing right now. They're gonna be more one-on-one, house-on-house, neighborhood to neighborhood. Al Qaeda does not have the resources and in the foreseeable future will not have the resources, and have no intention by the way, of trying to match us aircraft to aircraft and army for army.

So, we have to retool, and we have to go about warring over the world in an entirely different way, in an entirely different manner, and that's what it's gonna be likely to [inaudible].

Interviewer: *It sounds to me like you're saying that World War II was the last big, popular war, that from now on, it's not gonna be the same big win in any situation in the world.*

Weldon: Well, look at what happened after World War II. World War I was the war to end all wars. World War II was the war to end all wars. World War II ended in 1945. 1950, we were back in another war in Korea. We didn't know how to wage that war. That became an immensely unpopular war. As a matter of fact, President Truman chose not to run because it was so unpopular. And Dwight Eisenhower, General Eisenhower, ran, and one of his major platforms was how to end the war in Korea, how to get us out of Korea.

Well, we wound up partitioning Korea, North and South, and some people think we won because they didn't get South Korea. Some people think we lost because we didn't unite Korea. However, you feel, it was an immensely unpopular war. The American people were unhappy with that war. It dragged on for several years. We want out. The American people forced the issue, and Eisenhower became president and concluded the peace treaty there. Then, we started building up in the '60s the next [inaudible] in southeast Asia in Vietnam, and we kept building up, and building up, and building up, and it divided the American people. Very much divided.

It became a war that was hated, one we needed to get out of, and President Johnson chose not to run for a second term. And his successor, the next President, came in with a promise to get us out of Vietnam. In 1975, we got out of Vietnam. We got out and turned Vietnam over to the communists. The question is should we have been there in the first place? Should we have been building up the way we did? It was a war we didn't understand, we didn't know how to wage, we lost over 50,000 men there. So, that was a second immensely unpopular fight.

And now, we find ourselves today in a very similar situation with a war that has become very unpopular. Many of us believe it's unwinnable, and the American people now, about 57 – as I said earlier – 57 percent or 58 percent believe we need to get out of there. Did I answer your question?

Interviewer: *That's a very good answer, and it leads me to another question. Was our commitment to these unpopular wars not sufficient to gain us victory, or was it that we were too afraid to use the big weapons that would've done like we did to Japan to say we had a victory? Were we not committed to the principle that we were fighting for?*

Weldon: I think initially we were, but when we were not successful in waging those wars, and they began dragging out, our commitment to them began to wane. And then over time, most Americans became unhappy with the wars because they couldn't see an end to them. And it was draining. You could talk about money, but mainly it was draining American lives. So, I think initially, there was a pretty good commitment to them.

Interviewer: *Well, if we had the commitment to them, and being probably the largest military power in the world, why could we not win? Were we not willing to commit the acts of killing human beings that would bring victory?*

Weldon: Well, let's apply that to Iraq. We have all kinds of nuclear weapons. We have all kinds of aircraft that are just so sophisticated; it's unbelievable what they could do to deliver weapons of mass destruction. We have the ability to wipe out every city in Iraq, wipe it off the face of the earth. But we don't want to do that. We still are a moral nation and the war is not being fought like that. If you use modern weapons in Baghdad, for example, you're wiping out good folks as well as bad folks. So, we can't use those.

So, the thing is dragging on as a form of warfare we don't understand, we haven't retrofitted to wage, and the American people are tired of our losing these lives – primarily losing these lives and tearing up the bodies of so many thousands of young Americans. And then I think, thirdly, that we're tired of spending, let's say, \$9 billion every month, over \$100 billion a year. We've spent over \$400 billion in Iraq. So, what happened is initially, the American people, because of our leaders, believed that was the right thing to do to go into Iraq.

And then gradually, they began to realize, look, there were no weapons of mass destruction. They didn't have the ability to threaten the United States. There was no tie-in with Al Qaeda before – there are Al Qaeda there now. So, this drain of human lives, and human limbs, and then thirdly, the money, but that's a poor third [inaudible] lives and limbs, has taken its toll on the American people. So, I think the ability in these wars started out supporting our President and our leaders, but it then began to wane. Over four years in Iraq, we won World War II in less.

Interviewer: *So, our country's still grappling with the war mentality to prepare for war, to be able to endure war, and when to wage war. These are issues that our country will continue to grapple with for many, many years. And we appreciate so much your overview, your personal insight from your experience, and the time you've given us today.*

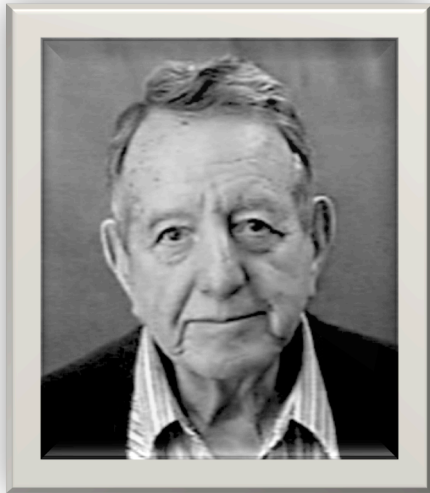
Thank you, Colonel Ramey.

Weldon: Let me tell you while I was reluctant to do this, I appreciate what you're doing and recording history because there are very few of us. I'm 81, but I was one of the younger people in the war, too, and I really appreciate what you all do in this project.

Interviewer: *Thank you for your service.*

Weldon: It's my pleasure.

END



**Eckel W. Rowland
World War II Veteran
Interview**

The following was originally a video interview done by the Crawford County Friends of Genealogy, Van Buren, Arkansas. The interviewer is Wilma Jameson. The original interview was recorded on March 7, 2007. This written transcript of the original audio was accomplished in June, 2018.

Interviewer: *Today is March 7, 2007 and I'm going to be interviewing Eckel. And we're gonna be talking about his World War 2 experiences and he's gonna be sharing his – some of his stories about his life. All right give me your full name*

Eckel: My full name is Eckel W. Rowland.

Interviewer: *When were you born?*

Eckel: I was born February 24, 1924.

Interviewer: *Where were you born?*

Eckel: I was born in the old Saint Joseph Hospital in Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas.

Interviewer: *What was your dad's name?*

Eckel: My dad's name was Jay Miller Rowland.

Interviewer: *Okay. What did your dad do for a living?*

Eckel: My dad had a college degree in Mining Engineering and in Law, and he passed the Arkansas bar exam, and practiced law. He visited his sister who had married a World War 1 veteran in Boulder, Colorado. And then after World War 1 they moved up – He was from Hot Springs and had a second-hand furniture store and he came down to visit her. And he liked Arkansas so well that he went back up to Boulder, Colorado – they had a flour mill up there – and he sold out, and came to Arkansas, and that’s – My brother and my older sister were born in Boulder, Colorado. And then I and two younger brothers were born in Arkansas.

Interviewer: *So, you were third in the birth order?*

Eckel: Yes, I’m the middle one.

Interviewer: *What’s your mom’s name?*

Eckel: My mother’s name was Mar Louise Echo.

Interviewer: *Okay. And she is from Colorado?*

Eckel: Yes, she was in Boulder, Colorado and she graduated from the University of Colorado, Buffalos. And she taught school in McGill, Nevada, and she rode a buckskin pony to school and back.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, when she came to Arkansas did she teach in Arkansas?*

Eckel: No. She didn’t work in the public after coming to Arkansas.

Interviewer: *Did you all live up in the mountains of Hot Springs?*

Eckel: We lived back behind the Oaklawn Race Track, and we would walk everywhere. We’d walk to school, we’d walk to church, we’d walk to town. We had streetcars in Hot Springs that you could catch but we could take a shortcut, make it all right.

Interviewer: *Okay. Where did you go to school there in Hot Springs, what was the name of your school?*

Eckel: My grade school was Oaklawn Elementary, and then I went to hot Springs Junior High, and Hot Springs High School. And they were located next to each other downtown. I think president Bill Clinton had planned to make kind of a museum out of the old high school. I don’t know how that’s coming along.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, you actually graduated from high school. So, your last years of high school did you get to hear – begin to hear the rumblings of war?*

Eckel: Yes. Our high school senior class in '43 was drafted in April. And they let us stay in school until May to get our high school diploma. And then we had a date to all gather to train depot and get – and go to Camp Robinson in Little Rock, enter the service. A night in June of '43.

Interviewer: *All right. Tell me what your teachers were saying about Hitler?*

Eckel: Well, we talked a little bit about it in our Civic classes about the war and all. I delivered newspapers and I would read the newspaper and I kept up with it a little bit that way. We just had the radio and the newspapers you might say. We didn't have the wonderful communications technology we have today.

Interviewer: *What about when – Now we knew Germany was a threat. And he had taken Europe – a lot of Europe –*

Eckel: Holland.

Interviewer: *Holland, Czechoslovakia, and he was coming at England. And so we knew Hitler was a threat. So, what did you think when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor? Where were you?*

Eckel: We were in church, Sunday morning. And when we got home we had the radio on and it was telling about President Roosevelt and Congress meeting in order to declare a war. And that's first we had heard about the Pearl Harbor attack by the Japanese. And that made part of the Axis with Germany, Japan and Italy. And Roosevelt I remember saying that "This day will go down in infamy. And we're declaring war on Japan."

Interviewer: *You know Japan ambassadors had just been over here saying: peace, peace.*

Eckel: Yeah, yeah. That was a hidden scratcher.

Interviewer: *And so, they really took us by surprise when they bombed Pearl Harbor.*

Eckel: Yes. I had a good friend that was in that. He was a minister in the Presbyterian Church near in Van Buren, Dr. Richard Young. He's

now living in Harrisburg, Virginia. And we got a Christmas letter from him saying that he and his son and his grandson went over to Pearl Harbor for the 65th reunion. And he was chaplain of the Pearl Harbor survivors and they called him over to the 65th year reunion, this year – or last year.

Interviewer: *Last year.*

Eckel: Last year, 41 from 6 is 65.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, your last year of high school, we're in war.*

Eckel: Your, what?

Interviewer: *Your last year of high school we're in war on both fronts.*

Eckel: Yeah. And it was a full-fledged war then and – And so we all went over to Camp Robinson and for three – And then three days all my buddies were gone, and they were holding me over because I didn't pass my physical. I had albumin in my urine and they told me they was gonna hold me over and not to eat any eggs or anything for a day or so, and "we'll test you again." So, I did, and in a couple of days I passed the test. So, I didn't get to go with any of my high school classmates. They all went to different places and different assignments, and I was sent to Camp Wolters, Texas for 17 weeks basic training. That's just the out of the coast of Fort Worth in Dallas, I believe. Mineral Wells, yeah. Mineral Wells Texas.

Interviewer: *All right, so it was just basic training?*

Eckel: Yes. It was infantry basic training now I think they –[inaudible]– the helicopters and [inaudible].

Interviewer: *Did they ask you if you wanted to go in a certain area or were you just gonna stay in the infantry?*

Eckel: Well, when I first went in at Camp Robinson they asked me what branch I wanted and they were offering navy, air force, army. And I was young and energetic and all and I told them, "I want the toughest parts you got." So, they sent me to the army infantry. A lot of my friends were in the air force. I later talked to them. And navy – I had one friend, classmate, that from the time we got out of school and reported, he joined the merchant marines and at that time it was not a branch of the service. So, he was sent there about a month he said, and they draft called him back up instead of [inaudible], "You were

drafted back in April and so you need to choose whether you're gonna be in the navy, army, air force or what. You gotta come back out of the merchant marines and so on." He took the navy. And he was on one of those little destroyer cruisers in the South Pacific.

Interviewer: *Okay. Now I understand also that the air force was not really a part – that they didn't have their own distinct unit, and they were part of the navy and they had a little bit of it in army.*

Eckel: Yeah.

Interviewer: *You had some air force in the navy, and some air force in the army.*

Eckel: Yes. And I had a good friend that served in the air force. He went to Florida, I believe it was for his training.

Interviewer: *Okay. All right. When you got through your training what happened then?*

Eckel: We completed our 17 weeks of training in Camp Wolters and I had a delay in route. I stopped off in Hot Springs for a week, and then on my way to Baltimore, Maryland. And it went by very fast I – the army or the military sent us by training from Camp Wolters Texas to Hot Springs and then got back out of Hot Springs and went on up to Fort Meade, Maryland. And as we were walking to the camp there we saw a lot of men building stone walls there. And I said, "Oh my – Look at that." They said, "Yeah. Those are German prisoners." I looked at them and I said, "Oh my goodness. We have to – There's one there, looks just like my brother." I said, "We're gonna have to fight fellows like that." So, I kinda worried about that a little bit.

But when we got on in the end and got our equipment and all – They issued me a lot of jungle equipment. So, I said, "Well, it looks like I'm gonna be going to South Pacific. I'd be fighting the Japanese and –" And I didn't feel so bad you might have said because at that time I didn't know too much about their culture, race and all like that. I was relieved. So, we stayed at Fort Meade, Maryland and we had Thanksgiving dinner there. And then they shipped us out to Camp Shanks, New York. And we had about two or three weeks there.

They had let us go to Time Square in New York City. We could ride the ferry free and get off on 42nd Street. We didn't have any money amount to anything. We walked around Times Square looking at those big tall buildings and really enjoyed seeing

something we'd never seen in our lives. And that was the first place that I'd ever seen white women and negroes dancing when you look into those bars and all. And that was new to me. The blacks and whites were separated at Hot Springs pretty much. And I didn't know too much about the black race at that time. And the reason I mention that is since then I've learned a lot about forgiveness, forgiving Japanese and all – about races and all, how we're all created by one God and one creator. And it has really helped me to be able to forgive – all the prejudice that I had built up in my mind about different races when I was just a young person.

But anyhow, we got on the ship. Coincidentally you might say December 7, in New York –

Interviewer: *And this is '45 – '40 –*

Eckel: It was in '43. December of '43. It was on December 7. And we all went – we had bunks down below. It was a kind of a freighter ship. One of the Liberty ships built by Kaiser's in New York – out in California. And we had 1,500 troops on it, and then jeeps and crate boxes and C-rations and K-rations. It was kind of a freighter, and it really wasn't a troop ship. But anyhow –

Interviewer: *Do you know how many troops were on there?*

Eckel: There were 1,500 troops on it. And regular troops I think was 5,000 to 10,000 on it I believe it was. I heard some of my buddies talk about that big ship going to Europe with so many on it and coming back. Well, we sat there in the harbor there for three days, and then at night we took off. And that Atlantic Ocean was so rough and stormy and everything, we all got seasick and we stopped off in the night there at Norfolk, Virginia, and a boat – one of those rescue boats that had our ship – they let it down and it went over there to the port and we said, "What's happening? What's happening?" But then it came back, it turned out they had taken some orders over there and papers and everything and got some back evidently.

And then they raised back up on the ship and we took off. I call that a boat, and the sailors on there corrected me, "This is not a boat, this is a ship. And you be certain to call it a ship." So, I learned something from the day we arrived there. But anyhow, we were so seasick that we just – we'd run down to the galley and eat. And then by that time, that we ate twice a day. By the time they [inaudible] once, it was time to line up again and be fed

again. But we got down around to Florida and the storm passed, or whatever we ran – and it was just so smooth and warm, we'd just lie up there on the deck you might say, and that cured our seasickness I guess.

But then we went through the Panama Canal and when we were going through in the Panama – it was just lined with machine gun nests and all. And we had hollered back and forth, "Where are you from?" They'd say the Bronx in New York, and they'd have certain accents and it was pretty much fun. We went by one little place that was built kind of dark out into the canal and there was a man out there fishing and he just dropped that bait down and pulled up a fish, take it off, make sure the bait was fixed, dropped it down – he caught about 15 fish while we were just easing by there, you might say. And when I got on the west side of the Panama Canal there was a leak in the waters, it looked like oil. And so, they stopped off at a dock, a repair place and they worked on that ship and they let us off so that we could stretch out legs up around Guantanamo Bay Fort or settlement, or naval base, whatever. And the we got back on.

At the docks there, natives were selling bananas. And they had some bunches of bananas, great big bananas I dare say, and they were about \$0.10 or \$0.15 for a big old bunch for that [inaudible]. So, I thought about buying one and I'd share it all with my buddies. They said "No, no, no, you don't get that set. Those are cooking bananas. So, they're no good." I didn't get any.

But anyhow after we got back on the ship you could look down in the water and you could see snakes swimming around and some of them had colors on them just like these coral snakes. Red, white and black. And some of the fellows said they're poisonous just like the – our poisonous snakes in the mainland.

Anyhow, we got that ship repaired and started out on the Pacific there and we were just doing fine. And about that time, a storm hit, and that ship would go way down in the valley and then way back up on the top of the wave. You'd think you was up on the top of a little hill or a mountain. We all got seasick again. And I finally made it through that storm. And then we washed our clothes by tying them on a rope and letting them drag behind. And about that time the captain of the ship made a big announcement [inaudible], "No more washing your clothes, dragging them on that rope, you're slowing us down too much." And then some of the crew would let a little raft out on the waters and after it got so far away they would fire their guns at it and it was – they said it was target practicing.

And then one day we were zig-zagging going there which way and so they said it was because they thought there was a Japanese submarine around there so we was trying to throw them off course, whatever. But anyhow, one morning we woke up and that – you looked out and that water was just completely level, just like a big, big parking lot. You just wanted to climb out and go out walk around on it. I'd never seen anything like that in my life. And so they said that was why Balboa named it the Pacific, that means peaceful. So, I don't know.

So, then we landed at New Caledonia, and that was a distribution and a processing place. I was a replacement – all of us on that – those 1,500 troops were gonna be replaced to different divisions over there. And so, they did the paperwork there and then about a week or so they sent us – sent me to New Zealand to join the 43rd Division. And it was originally a national guard division out of Vermont, and it was down there on maneuvers in New Zealand. We crossed the dateline, of course. We got down there – and that would be in about June or July, and it was winter in New Zealand. Snow was on the ground and we were out there, and camped out, and –

Interviewer: *Sleeping on the ground?*

Eckel: In the what?

Interviewer: *Sleeping on the ground?*

Eckel: Yes. And I got a little touch of frost bite on my heel. I did never have any big trouble from it or anything, but I can tell the difference and all. And all of our khaki clothes we had to turn those in and they issued us wool overcoats and wool clothing and all. And so, we stayed there until about – we stayed there from about a month or two and finished up the maneuvers. Now we were allowed hitchhike rides on jeeps and army trucks and all to go to Auckland, New Zealand and go to town there.

And I remember they have lots of sheep raising, and they had a lot of dairies, milk. And they'd bring that milk to the camp in big old ten-gallon cans. And they wanted you to drink all you could. And we learned a little bit about their original natives, the Maoris. And it seemed like, to me, when you walk on the ground in New Zealand it kinda gave our – and they say that's because a lot of it was lava – lava rock and all. And it was just a different feeling you might say. But I liked New Zealand just fine. And then they said from there it was time to move out and we went to New Guinea and set up a camp right on the edge of the ocean there. It was in a coconut grove. And what

they were doing – they were planning to – MacArthur was planning to return to the Philippines. And in the meantime, our squad was sent up into the hills. It's what was called the Tapir or Tapi operation. And we were sent up around the hills up there the search out the Japanese and all. We'd been gone about a week and we'd walk to this one village that – we'd walk for a day, and stop at just one village and then our leader would stop there, and they'd send another leader guide to lead us to the next village. And all that – one day, we went by a village and it seemed to be kind of abandoned and there was a lady out there having a baby on the front of a little – looked like a grass plateau or a shed or whatever you wanna call it – and she had already delivered just five or ten minutes before we got there and — she was sitting out there with the baby and they both seemed to be doing right. We just kept walking. And another day our guides – they had about three guides with us this time, and they stopped at a creek to get some water in our canteens and put that Halazone pill in there to purify it. And one fellow when we got on the ship in New York City, the Salvation Army was there as we went on, and they gave us a little cotton bag with toothpaste, and a razor, and toothbrushes.

And this fellow had kept his and had it with him on this adventure up there in the mountains. And he pulled his out and he was gonna brush his teeth, so he did. And those natives they reached down there, and they got to grab, and they rubbed their teeth with a – and I thought that was pretty interesting to – I never had seen anything like that. But they were walking, doing like he did.

And then about two days before our check was over we ran across one little village that was empty and that's where we met the Japanese. One Japanese, and so we took him prisoner. And we just had two more days and one night I believe it was and we left on our trip. And we were walking along there and he, and two or three others were behind me.

And first thing I noticed the Japanese started walking down toward a creek bed, with rocks, and it wasn't full of water or anything it was – He got down there close to the creek and about that time I heard about three or four shots and he went down. And then he kinda rolled over, and the blood – he didn't have any shirt on – kinda run across his back like – And reminded me of the time I was in the in wheat fields in Kansas, when we were milking cows in the morning, and cooling the milk, we ran it over kind of a washboard and it just came down like that. And that's the way it was on his back. And that was the first human being I'd ever seen killed like that.

Interviewer:

Okay. Who shot him? Who shot him?

Eckel: The sergeant and one other fellow behind me shot him. They said he was making a break for it and they got talking and everything, said, besides that he'd be pretty rough to guard him at night and everything. But after I thought of everything, if they had asked me to watch him I would have stayed up because I was young and energetic, and I would've been willing to do that. Anyhow –

Interviewer: *Now are the Japanese bedded into the mountains? Is that why you're going up in it?*

Eckel: Yes, they were up there and – Sometimes they said when Bob Hope and [inaudible] came to visit us, and we'd have those picture shows at night on the – back at the edge of the ocean and all, they said some of the Japanese had come down there and watch that with us, and then go back up the mountains. I don't know. I didn't see any of those. But they were still – there may be some still over there, don't know the war is over with – I don't know.

Interviewer: *Did you know that they had run out of supplies and didn't have food and this kind –*

Eckel: The one we found he didn't have any food. I carried his bag and that, and he – and he didn't have any – his clothes were worn out and everything. He didn't have any shirt and he just had rags for trousers. And he was just by himself, I guess, because he didn't have any supplies, ammunition. I guess maybe the natives – he might have got some food from them or so, but – He was just up there by himself when we found him.

Interviewer: *Okay. Go ahead. Now you're still tracking in the mountains looking for the Japanese.*

Eckel: So, when we got back to camp within a couple of days, and the lieutenant – all of them had to fill out the reports and everything. There were more gathered there to go back to the Philippines. More ships – you could see the ships gathering out there and everything. About that time, I got orders, they were sending me back to take study for the West Point examination. And so, they had promised us fresh turkey for Christmas and sure enough Christmas Day we had fresh turkey and all the trimmings and all. Oh, it was hot. It didn't seem much like Christmas.

Interviewer: *But you had everything.*

Eckel: Yep. They kept their promise and everything. The reason I mention

that is they put us on a B-24 Bomber converted to passengers and we crossed the dateline and I had two Christmases in one day. And we stopped off at Hawaii and got gasoline and then we came on to the Golden Gate, and it was night. And all I remember about California with the tropical plants at the airport and then they put us on a train at the train station and it was raining. And that's all I remember about California. I always wanted to go back and check California out, but I never did. And so, I got on the train and went to – close to Springfield, Massachusetts it was called Amherst College. And there we studied – [inaudible] being in January. And we took the exam – we studied about two or three months there –

Interviewer: – *January of what year?*

Eckel: Madam –

Interviewer: *January of what year?*

Eckel: That would be in '45. Let's see, we got there in January of '45. And I had two Christmases in December of '44. So, we studied there, and those of who passed the exam in April, they sent us to Fort Benning, Georgia. And we trained and stayed there until – August 8 is when they sent us to the Military Academy in West Point. And they discharged me from the Army on August 8. And then I became a cadet, August 9, at West Point. And I went out for football there. And we had Colonel Blaik, Red Blaik was our coach and we had some famous players: Glenn Davis and Doc Blanchard, Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside. We had our – I think it was all American [inaudible] coached at Huston for years there, can't think of it – his name right now. But anyhow, we had a national championship in the – that would be in the fall of '45.

Interviewer: *All right now – Where are you when you hear that peace has been declared?*

Eckel: Oh, I was in West Point on VJ day, I think it was August 14. And while I was at Fort Benning, Georgia, Roosevelt died, and Truman took over and he decided to drop the atomic bomb, and – I'm thankful that he did because that saved the Japanese, and it saved us a lot of lives. Peak of the city – MacArthur signed that treaty – peace treaty – I've forgotten when that was. It was... it would be that fall. And so, I'd be in West Point then – well back when this treaty was signed.

So, I stayed at West Point. I didn't pass my Spanish. You're supposed to make 2 point, I made 1.9. I did alright on the reading and writing but we played a record and you listen to the record and you write –

you say what that was about, and I was too slow on the interpretation and all of that. And I needed one more tenth of a point to pass my test, but I didn't do it. So, they said, "Well, the war is over, and you can get your honorable discharge out. And we'll send you back to Arkansas or we'll send you to New York City to prep school. And you can study and pass your tests and come back again in August, to start over again." I said, "I haven't [inaudible] how I did that." Well, I was so homesick for Arkansas that I went ahead and told them, "Well I think I'll just go back home." So, they said, "Okay." And they got me a train ticket, I came back home – January of '46.

Interviewer: *Okay, so you came back to Arkansas?*

Eckel: Yes, madam.

Interviewer: *Okay. What changes did you see in Arkansas, or in America?*

Eckel: What –

Interviewer: *– changes.*

Eckel: Changes?

Interviewer: *Mm-hmm.*

Eckel: Well, my family – personal changes. My family had moved from Oaklawn up to the north end of Hot Springs, off of – on Edith Street and I had an old model of [inaudible] that I gave to my brother before I left, and he said he just left it in the shed there behind the – in Oaklawn there. And I didn't really notice too many changes. Back then I didn't correspond too much with the family or – because they censored our letters – and going and coming. And our family was kinda raised up that no news was good news. When we went on different trips and everything we just didn't correspond too much or anything. They'd have mail call and some of those fellows really were energetic about getting a letter or writing or something.

Now, my present wife wrote me two times while I was in there. And I then sent her my different address. The different address, as in all and – She wrote me while I was in the service. I had met her before I went in. And I know everybody – the feeling was – nationally, and personally and all, there's lots of work to be done and there was that again. As far as building and around here and everything, it wasn't anything like that as I remember.

Interviewer: *What do you remember about the changes in society?*

Eckel: In society?

Interviewer: *What about the women going to work?*

Eckel: Oh, oh, yeah, yeah. That was really something. They had worked – some of my wife’s sisters had gone to Tulsa and worked in the airplane plants there I think. Yeah, I think it was a big change there – back then. Them going to work and all, and everybody pitching in on this help – on this war effort and all and furnishing supplies. And it did seem like everybody cooperated with one another and all that.

Interviewer: *So, you think we had national pride in our men?*

Eckel: Yes. They used to have – they told me about the bomb that they were selling war bombs and all. And they really did get in, pitch in and all that just happened. And there was lots of pride. A big thing – a big change was when all these returning servicemen could go to college if they wanted to. It was paid for. And I think that was one of the biggest things that have helped America.

Interviewer: *Okay. Do you think that every young man should have some sort of military service? Or what do you think about the military?*

Eckel: Well, I didn’t know too much about the military before I went into it. And I have a lot of friends – I belong to the Last Member of the DAV, and last member of VFW – Veterans for War, last member of the American Legion – and a lot of those are friends over there, or army brats, what they call, whose parents – both parents in some cases were in the military service. But I didn’t know too much about the military.

My dad in Colorado had this flour mill and in World War 1, he tried to join, and they didn’t draft him. And he tried to join, and they said “No, you’re in an essential industry.” And all his friends wrote on the sidewalks that he was a slacker and a coward and like that. But he couldn’t get in. What I was saying, he never did say anything about the military amount to anything. I just didn’t know too much about it. I wasn’t an ROTC and in high school I don’t remember if we even had it back then.

And I think it’s a wonderful, wonderful trade, but if a person wants to join in, I’d be all for him. But if they wait until they was drafted, well that’s what happened to me, I waited until I was drafted. I didn’t join up –

Interviewer: *Do you have any advice to give to young people today, what would*

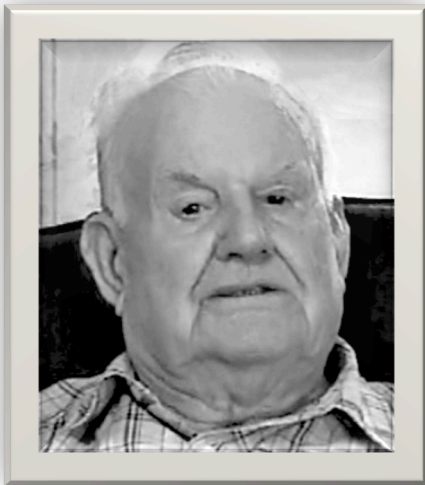
you say?

Eckel: Well, I'd sum up life, you might say, in a couple of words: forgiveness and love. And I think that would solve so many of our problems. Individual problems, national problems, any – Just a couple of words: forgiveness and love.

Interviewer: *Well it's been a joy talking to you.*

Eckel: Thank you and I appreciate it.

END



**James Everett Smith
World War II Veteran
Interview**

The original oral/video interview with James Everett Smith was done by Wilma Jameson, Crawford County Friends of Genealogy on May 15, 2006. This is a transcription of that interview.

Interviewer: *Today is May 15, 2006 and I am going to be interviewing Everett Smith and we are going to be discussing his WW II experiences. Everett, give me your full name.*

Everett: James Everett Smith

Interviewer: *When were you born?*

Everett: September 16, 1925.

Interviewer: *And where were you born?*

Everett: Procter, Oklahoma

Interviewer: *When did you move to Arkansas?*

Everett: We moved to Arkansas when I was five from Seminole, Oklahoma to Rudy, Arkansas.

Interviewer: *What was your Dad's name?*

Everett: Stephen Andrew Smith

Interviewer: *If you could describe your dad what would you say about him?*

Everett: Dad was hurt really badly in the oil field after we moved to Seminole, Oklahoma. Some pipe fell on him. He worked a lot after that but never really completely recovered from that accident. He was the type of fellow that wanted someone with him when he worked. It was back during the depression so I stayed home from school a lot and helped him work to put bread on the table.

Interviewer: *Was your dad an outgoing man or was he in constant pain?*

Everett: No, he wasn't in constant pain at all. I would say that he wasn't really an outgoing person, but he certainly wasn't bashful or reserved in that manner.

Interviewer: *Was he a farmer?*

Everett: Yes.

Interviewer: *And you helped him on the farm?*

Everett: Yes.

Interviewer: *What about your mother?*

Everett: My mother was (Edna Burkhart) the hardest working person I have ever known in my life. She gave birth to twelve children and raised ten of them. It was back when, there wasn't very much money available for anyone most of the time. She would can food all summer and she would take old clothes and make clothes for the children. They went to school looking as nice as anyone's children. She was working a lot of the time, I suppose. She was always working when I went to bed and for how long after I don't know, but many times it was until twelve or one o'clock. She lived to be an old lady and I have often thought that she must have been made of steel. There is not a lot of steel that lasts as long as she did.

Interviewer: *Was she an outgoing person?*

Everett: She never met a stranger. She was very outgoing.

Interviewer: *Who did the discipline in your home?*

Everett: Dad did mostly on my part. I remember Mother spanking me once.

Interviewer: *You went to school at Rudy?*

Everett: I went there some. I didn't get to go very long.

Interviewer: *What grade were you in when you had to quit school?*

Everett: Eighth grade.

Interviewer: *So you quit school to help your dad on the farm?*

Everett: Yes.

Interviewer: *Was the work hard?*

Everett: Well it was hard work but I was used to hard work and that made it easy on me when I went into the service. When they asked me to do something I just tried to see how quickly I could do it, so I got by really good that way.

Interviewer: *Was it long hours on the farm?*

Everett: Yes it was, part of the time, not all of the time. Like, we would bale hay down here in the River bottoms, down on the other side of Kibler. We might work down there pretty late and then haul hay from there over to our home north of Rudy on the wagon. It has been ten o'clock many times before we would ever get home. Sometimes I would be so tired I would just go upstairs to my bedroom and throw myself across the bed and be there at getting up time the next morning. I would be so tired I wouldn't eat anything. That was the way it was for everyone back then.

Interviewer: *What crops did you raise?*

Everett: Mostly strawberries.

Interviewer: *In the 8th grade you would have been 13? 14?*

Everett: Thirteen, I guess.

Interviewer: *So when you got to be a teenager you were still working there on the farm. Did you hear anything about the situation in Europe? Germany?*

Everett: Yes, we had an old battery operated radio. When the battery would go down we would have to carry it to Rudy and get it charged, bring it back and start over again. Yes, even as a child I kept up with the situation when Hitler began to take over other countries over there. Not knowing for sure, but almost sure, that I would enter the conflict before it was over.

Interviewer: *You had to register for the draft.*

Everett: They didn't draft everyone but you had to register for the draft. That was before the war started. Well, if you remember they started a campaign asking young men to join the Army for a year. I don't know if you remember or not but the song was "I'll be back in a year, Little Darling." But, little darling didn't get back in a year. It was more like 4 or 5 to, 6 years or something.

Interviewer: *When you went to the movies, did you see the newsreels about Germany?*

Everett: Not a whole lot. No, I don't remember a lot about that. I remember seeing the western films but I don't remember seeing anything about war on the screen.

Interviewer: *Were you worried about Japan? You worried about Germany.*

Everett: We were more concerned about Japan than we were about Germany because of the strike that they made on Pearl Harbor. In fact, I think that pretty well set people of all ages on edge against Japan. There wasn't any resistance against the war, none that I ever heard. But I am sure there must have been some resistance. It was, seemed to me, like we were a united people, a united nation. "If you are going to war you need to get this thing done," which we did.

Interviewer: *Where were you when you heard the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor?*

Everett: When I heard about it-- we had a large oak tree just to the left of our front door as you came out of the house and for some reason I was there by that tree when I heard it for the first time. I'll never forget where I was.

Interviewer: *You are a young man, 16 at that time. So are you thinking, "I am not quite old enough but I will be soon"?*

Everett: That was what I was thinking. I was taught that we had to fight for our freedom. I had no reservations at all about going. In fact, when I was inducted at Camp Robinson in Little Rock, I was approximately 3 to 4 pounds under the weight that they required you to be before you could go into the service. I told that doctor to put down what they needed and I would go ahead and put it on as quick as possible and I believe I had the weight on within the first 30 days after I went into service.

Interviewer: *What year was this?*

Everett: I believe it was '43, First of November. I was at Camp Robinson, not quite up to weight.

Interviewer: *When did you put your weight on?*

Everett: In the first 30 days. There was only one food I really didn't like and that was carrots. When I got down to Robinson, it seemed like they couldn't cook anything without carrots. If they had roast beef, it had carrots in it, if they boiled potatoes, it had carrots. I don't know why but the food all had carrots in it. I didn't eat anything out of the mess hall except breakfast. I had a few dollars in my pocket and I lived on cookies and ice cream. When that was gone I began to eat in the mess hall and it wasn't long until I went to chow at least three times a day. I put that weight on really quickly. It was kindly strange the way the dietitian prepared the food—those who were fat lost it and those who were below weight put it on. That's exactly the truth. Course I think our work had a lot to do with that. We did a lot of running and carrying full packs and over obstacle courses and things like that. I wanted to be first in all that I did. We had these obstacle courses that were maybe 18' or 20' high. Of course, you had to go over those and instead of going over and falling down on the other side, I would get to where I thought it was safe and I would jump down so I could get there faster than anyone. We had an old colonel at the end of the line that would tap me on the shoulder and that would make me feel foolish. So I came back with march fracture – that's when the bone from your heel to your toe breaks -- and I was in the hospital and the doctor said that he would never release me for full line duty because if he released me, then my bones would break again and I would be right back there in the hospital. I said, "Let me try it" and so he did and I have been walking on them ever since. I walked over those mountains in northern France and different places over there carrying a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) rifle, it was a heavy gun to be carrying.

Interviewer: *So you had an opportunity to get out of service?*

Everett: I had a golden opportunity not to go. The doctor said that as soon as you start marching again the bones are going to break down, but they didn't.

Interviewer: *Where was this training taking place?*

Everett: Camp Bannon [*sic*, Camp Fannin], Texas

Interviewer: *Did you make a good buddy down there?*

Everett: I don't remember buddies down there. I had some close friends. In fact, I was close to my Lieutenant Commander, a Lt. Kilgore, and I can't remember the names of others who were with me.

Interviewer: *But the strenuous exercise you were doing, you were used to that.*

Everett: That was one thing that made it better for me. My Platoon Sergeant down there, I remember his name was Sergeant. Murphy. When some of the guys were falling down on the ground, I was still going. I was used to working hard and I was pretty muscled up for a kid. I didn't have too much trouble getting through that.

Interviewer: *Everett, you were used to pushing yourself weren't you?*

Everett: Oh, yes. It was amazing that I could go on each and every day. There were a few of the boys that I'm sure were sick but there were some that played sick to keep from doing the work. I kept going.

Interviewer: *How long were you in training?*

Everett: It was supposed to be 17 weeks long but during this time my Dad was very sick and the Red Cross, from over in Van Buren, called down there and said I should come home. At that time I was in the hospital with those march fractures and I didn't know anything about it. Well, finally one day Lt. Kilgore came into the hospital and said, "I want to know why you haven't gone home? The Red Cross has called and said that your daddy is seriously ill and not expected to live and you are supposed to be home." He called the doctor in there and the doctor had thrown those requests in the trashcan because I wasn't able to walk or go home. Lt. Kilgore said, "Well he was walking when he came in here and I don't see why he couldn't go home on crutches." The doctor said, "Well if he wants to go that way it will be fine." So, they got me some crutches. I didn't have a dime in my pocket but I walked two blocks to the Red Cross Office on those crutches, went in and they gave me the money for a bus ticket home and money to eat on while I was going home. When I got back down there I went in and paid the Red Cross what they had loaned me and they gave me a credit card that was good at any Red Cross office in the world. I was proud of that. I don't think I ever used it but I was glad I had the opportunity to use it if I needed to. It was just for meals and travel, I guess.

Interviewer: *How was your Dad?*

Everett: Well, he was pretty sick but he got better and they gave me thirty days at home. The Red Cross called back down there and asked for 30 more days. The Red Cross told them, "His feet are not able to go back to duty,

anyway, at this time." So I was home 60 days. You had to have the 17 weeks before they sent you overseas, so my training time was extended. So the guys I started out with were already gone-- they were already in Europe.

Interviewer: *After you got through there in Texas, where did they send you then?*

Everett: They sent me to Camp Shanks, NY. We got all our overseas equipment and went down to Pier 13 to get on the boat. Out of several hundred men, they left me standing there by myself, one little lonely boy. I went up to the Sergeant. who was calling out the names and asked him why they had missed me. He said that Congress had come out with a new rule that they were not to send anyone overseas who was not 19 years old. This had just happened that day or the day before. I was still 18. So, I went from there down to Camp Hutton, NC and then on down to Fort Benning, GA and stayed there until I was 19. Then they gave me a 7 day pass, 7 day delay en route, and I came on home and went back to Camp Shanks and then believe it or not, I got on the Queen Mary and went overseas on the Queen Mary. If I remember correctly, they said there were 12 thousand troops on the ship. It was the first one that sailed out of convoy during the war. They changed course every 5 minutes, dodging the submarines. They said that no one could figure out their course the way they changed it. No one would have the time to figure it out and chart it. No one could be able to chart their course and intercept it. That's what they said. It was a pretty fast ship. I think it went about 35 knots and it was pretty fast for a ship that size. We landed in Ireland. I don't know why we landed there unless it was the safest place. After we landed in Ireland we were there for a few days and went on down to England and was there for a few days, then we crossed the Channel and we landed at Normandy which had already been secured. I don't remember for sure, but I believe I joined the unit at Reims, France.

Interviewer: *What unit was that?*

Everett: It was the 45th INF Division, 175th Regiment.

Interviewer: *How many are in your unit that is meeting with the 45th?*

Everett: Well, I really don't know. What they did was that they had a camp of replacements. It was a pretty large camp. They would put the new recruits in this camp. I guess you would call it a holding station. As the regiments or battalions or whatever it was, called for men they would pick them out of this holding area and put them on the front lines. When they didn't have the men they couldn't replace them. As far as I know, all the fighting units were understaffed when I was there. There were times when our platoon was down to 7 people.

Interviewer: *When you joined them in Reims, how many of you were there?*

Everett: There were probably just the ones that they had called for that day. I don't remember. I do remember that we were surrounded one time for four or five days. The 14th Armored Division, you probably don't remember this, but they trained at Camp Chaffee, and the 89th INF, they trained at Camp Hutton, NC. Usually when they put people on the front lines they put them with seasoned troops who knew how to live after you got there and they had done this for a time. But this was during the bad time over there and they put the 14th and the 89th on the front and they lost an awful lot of men. The first thing we did was dig a foxhole but these units, after they got to the front lines and when they stopped that first night, they pitched pup tents and they lost a lot of men.

Interviewer: *Everett, you told how you and your buddy would dig a foxhole. Would you share that?*

Everett: Anytime at all when we stopped, or didn't know how long we would be there I would start chopping wood as fast as I could and my buddy would start digging a foxhole. They were approximately 2 feet deep and 8 feet long, wide enough for two men to lay down in them. However, we never did that because one of us would be on watch all the time. Of an evening when they would bring bedrolls they would bring two blankets for each person and you would put two down and two over you. At this time, it was the coldest winter ever on record there and it got cold in one of those foxholes. In fact we used to cut firewood for a living when I was a kid, and when we would stop for the night I'd tell my buddy to start digging and I would start chopping. We would put these poles about so long in the foxholes and put blankets over the logs and left a space on one end of the foxhole. That was where one of us could sit with a rifle between our legs.

Interviewer: *How deep?*

Everett: About 2 feet.

Interviewer: *When you went into Reims, France at the time you joined the 45th. Did you go immediately into battle?*

Everett: I guess we did. I know they had pulled back. They were supposed to have a time of rest so many days. It was Thanksgiving and the cooks had set up a kitchen in the basement of this old mattress factory that we were staying in. That Thanksgiving day they came around and said that the dinner would be late because they were fixing hot rolls. Before the food was ready they told us to pull out. We loaded the food in the little

trailers like they pulled behind jeeps. I don't know when we stopped but we went into a Catholic Church and that was where we ate our Thanksgiving dinner. A hole had been blown out of the north side of it. While we were eating, a priest came in and he was really angry that we were eating in his church. We stayed and ate our cold rolls and cold turkey that night. We didn't stay there too long, though, till we moved out.

Interviewer: *Why do you think the priest was so angry?*

Everett: I guess he was so angry because his church had been damaged, for one reason or another. He couldn't speak English. The company commander could speak some French and they got into a pretty tacky argument. But we didn't move anyway.

Interviewer: *Everett, would you tell me about a seasoned man in combat and how he gets to be a seasoned man?*

Everett: I always heard that if you lived three days on the front line you had a very good chance of living and I would guess that you learned more in three days than in the 17 weeks basic training. For an example, we had stayed in an old barn one night. It had hay and a good place to sleep and there was a meadow on the east side of this barn. In fact, there was a little village there. They couldn't put tanks across this meadow because the Germans had mines set in it. They sent mine sweepers out to pick up the mines and they had to come back every time because they were firing at them from the woods on the other side. So, they told our company to go over there, that there were only two or three snipers, and to get rid of them so they could pick up the mines. They waited and then sent out our platoon. Just before we got to the woods they opened up on us with I don't know how many weapons, and I hit the ground and there was dust flying all around my head from the bullets. I emptied my BAR Rifle and then I looked around and all the rest of our men were gone and I was all alone so I elected to do the same thing. I got up and ran backwards. I knew I was going to die any instant if I stayed there. As I ran I could feel the bullets going by my face and you could feel the heat from them as they went by. I didn't know it then, but I passed seven of our boys on the ground that had tried to get back and couldn't. Anyway, I got to a gully that was washed out in that meadow along with all the boys who also made it into that ditch and we were all safe. That was one of the instances when like in basic training they tell you never to run—that you are a dead duck if you run--but there were occasions like that when if you don't run you won't live. A dead soldier is not worth anything. You just have to do whatever you have to do in order to live. That was what I did.

Interviewer: *How many men were trying to cross the meadow?*

Everett: It was probably a squad, so maybe 12. That was how many men we were supposed to have.

Interviewer: *Of the 12, how many were killed?*

Everett: Seven. I thought maybe some of them were just wounded. They could have been. They could have been just wounded, because they sent soldiers out there that night to pick them up but the Germans had already picked them up. The Germans were closer to them and the men were all gone. I don't know if they were wounded or not.

Interviewer: *Was this your first battle?*

Everett: No, this was the second. The first one was when we went into a town. We went through the woods most of the time after that, not all the time but most of the time. The first one that we went in was a small town. It had a pretty large church with a large steeple and we kept receiving fire and couldn't figure out where it was coming from. I finally noticed smoke coming out of the steeple and I emptied a clip into it and the smoke stopped. I don't know what happened, who was in there or what. It was a machine gun. We got through there and went on to this other place that I was telling you about.

Interviewer: *Where was the meadow located? Was it in Reims?*

Everett: It was past Reims. They had got rain all night that night. Of course the 88's shells had to hit the ground to explode. The next morning when we went across there the 88's started hitting all around us and because it had rained all night the ground was too soft for them to explode and some of them fell within 5 feet of me.

Interviewer: *The shells detonate on impact?*

Everett: Yes, if they hit the ground hard enough. If the ground is too soft they don't.

Interviewer: *You are on foot? Do you have tanks alongside you?*

Everett: Occasionally. On this particular occasion I was telling you about we went into the woods with a medium size tank. I was walking on the right side of that tank and for some unknown reason, I stopped and let the tank pull up a little and I got on the other side. About the time I got to the other side, the right side of the tank hit a mine and iron just scattered everywhere. Why I moved on the other side is just one reason I am here.

Interviewer: *Sometimes it is instinct and sometimes it is a little voice from the Lord, isn't it?*

Everett: I think it was the Lord. Why did I move over there? I never come up with an answer.

Interviewer: *What were the towns like, Everett?*

Everett: We didn't go through many towns. We were in the woods most of the time. What amazed me is that when we would go into one of the little towns you wouldn't see a civilian anywhere. If you were there all night or came back the next day all the people would move back in. I just often wondered where they went.

Interviewer: *Were they French people?*

Everett: Well, they were but most of the time we were right up close to the German border. You didn't know if they were French or German. You pretty well knew what was going on. I remember one day we had taken over a town and we had to go back there the next day. This was really close to the German border and there was a lady who had fixed a meal for six of us, a beautiful meal. This was the only time I ever saw this anywhere. She fixed a beautiful meal for us to let us know that she was glad we were there.

Interviewer: *Tell me about the food. You mentioned earlier that you had cooks taking care of you. Did they go all the way up to the front line?*

Everett: No, our food on the front line was strictly rations, altogether rations, but the Army at that time was serving C rations and K rations. C rations came in little cans about so big around. And when you opened the top of them it usually had about a quarter inch of grease on top or whatever it was. Now in the Third Army, Patton's Army, they tell me that C rations were all they served that winter. I was so fortunate; I had K rations each and every day. They were in a box about 3 inches long and about 1 ½ inches square and each carton came with a really hard chocolate bar about that long and maybe a inch square. I would get back in the back of the foxhole and I would take a canteen cup and fill it about half full of water and scrape the chocolate bar up into little bitty pieces. The bar came in a cellophane box and of course you couldn't have any fire outside but I would get back in the side of the fox hole and set that box afire and I would have about a half of a canteen cup full of the best chocolate you have ever eaten. It was delicious. That was the only hot food we had or that I had. I had that sometimes even twice a day,

because that little bar came in each box of rations. It was delicious, real good.

Interviewer: *Everett, did you have a foxhole buddy?*

Everett: I had one of the best in the world. In fact, I had two. One of them was name Leo Shaffer, he was from New Orleans. There was this little town that we went through. There was a highway coming from the northeast into this little town. There was a mountain up the way so they moved us into there late one night on this hillside so we could fire on the road that was coming into this town. It was late and Leo and I got our foxhole back too far and we couldn't fire on the road where we were. There came a column of Germans marching down the road on each side. You just didn't march that way, and it was because they didn't know we were there; they didn't know that anybody was close, I guess. There was a column of them coming down on each side, so I crawled up out of my foxhole up behind a big old fir tree and fired my BAR rifle one round and the rifle jammed and wouldn't fire another round. I always kept my rifle clean, oiled it all the time, because they were real bad to jam if you didn't keep them clean. Anyway, I had fired one round and it wouldn't fire anymore, so I pushed myself back into the foxhole and told Leo to give me his rifle. He said he didn't know anything about a BAR and to let him up there. He crawled up there to that tree and I saw him start to raise his gun to fire and he got a bullet right through his neck. Of course he couldn't talk, he just crawled back into the foxhole where I was and his mouth filled up with blood and he was dead instantly. We were there two or three days and I watched the snow cover his body and the mound of snow was all that I could see. Anyway, I had our mail in my pocket and I had to do something with it so I took it out of my pocket and read it to him. There was a letter from his daughter who was six years old. I am sure her mother had written it for her. She said "Daddy, I know you are coming home because mother and I pray for you each and every night." That was kind of touching; seeing her daddy laying there and knowing that he wasn't going home.

Interviewer: *What about the other Germans, after Leo rolled back into the foxhole?*

Everett: Well, there was another German patrol coming down through the woods and we didn't know they were there. We were one hundred percent concentrating on those Germans that were coming down the highway. This was how come he got hit. We had a couple of our machine guns on our right and they knocked the German patrol out just as soon as he was shot. The Germans who killed Leo died about as soon as he did.

Interviewer: *So you had other men around you with machine guns?*

Everett: Yes, on our right. It was our line and they took care of the other Germans who were coming through.

Interviewer: *How long did you stay there with the snow coming down on you?*

Everett: We stayed there four days.

Interviewer: *Everett, you told me about Leo, but you had another buddy. What was his name?*

Everett: His name was Banjo. In fact, the way we did it in foxholes, one man stayed at the front on his knee with his weapon ready while the other one slept two hours, back and forth. I went to bed and lay down to sleep one night and Banjo didn't wake me. I guess I had more hours awake than he had. He was a tough little dude. He was the kind of guy that would leave the front line and ease his way out through the woods and if he got a chance to shoot a Kraut that's what he did. Anyway, I woke up, and this is an example of how tired you can get, he had killed two Krauts – they were laying right there in front of the foxhole. A patrol had come up on us and he had killed two of them right there in front of the foxhole without it waking me. He was a real, real little soldier. I can't remember where we parted or how we parted. I know that he didn't get killed. He was still alive the last I knew.

Interviewer: *Tell me about where your feet froze. Was it in the foxhole where you had to stay the four days?*

Everett: Well really I didn't know. I never knew when they froze. I didn't have any feeling in them after a while. When I got back to the aid station, I had on two pair of big old wool socks and I took my shoes and socks off. After about an hour or two the doctor told me to put my shoes and socks back on. It was amazing that my feet could have swollen as fast as they did but I couldn't get my shoes back on with one pair of socks, so they put me in an ambulance. They had these aid stations; I guess is what you call them, between the front lines and the foxholes where you stop. They ask you a few questions and if they think you can make it on back to the hospital they send you on, if not they treat you there, just temporary I guess. Anyway, when they stopped, there I was sitting in the ambulance and the doctor came over and climbed up into the ambulance and wanted to know if I could make it back to the hospital and I never will forget what I told him. I told him that if they gave that buggy a roll, I could make it all the way back to Arkansas. He got a big laugh out of that. Anyway, we went on to the 132nd Hospital and I suppose most of the doctors were interns – they were the best in the world. They worked day and night, numerous hours, helping soldiers the best they could. But anyway, let's get back to the good part of it. They got those old greasy

clothes off of me, put me between two sheets and brought me a beautiful tray of food. I never will forget what I thought. I told my mother and daddy about this when I got home. I thought, "This is as close to heaven as I am ever going to be."

END

Everett Smith

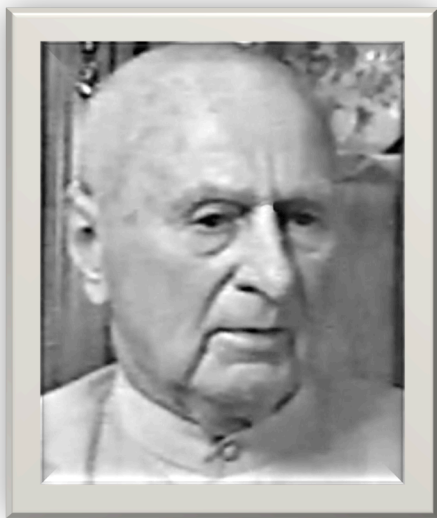
Times Record

The Rev. Everett Smith, 89, of Alma passed away Tuesday, April 14, 2015. He was born Sept. 16, 1925, in Proctor, Okla., to the late Stephen and Edna Burkhart Smith. He was a retired minister from Alma First Freewill Baptist, and the retired owner/operator of E and B Homebuilders. He served in the Army during World War II, and received a Bronze Star for his participation in the Battle of the Bulge.

He was preceded in death by a daughter, Deborah Elaine Smith and a son, Randy Smith. He is survived by his wife of 69 years, Billie Smith of the home; three daughters, Sue Yanda and husband Leo of Tampa, Kan., Diana Howard and husband Johnny of Alma and Kathy Jones and husband Dewayne of Alma; four sisters, Tina Veach of Fort Smith, Bessie Alexander of Alma and June Dillon and Wilma Downs, both of Van Buren; two brothers, Steve Smith of Alma, and Melvin Smith of Poteau; six grandchildren, Debbie Basham, Sheri Spohn, Sparky Trusty, Randi Kay Coleman, C.J. Smith and Tanya Smith; and 13 great-grandchildren.

Funeral service will be 10 a.m. Saturday at Edwards Van-Alma Funeral Home Chapel with interment to follow at Gracelawn Cemetery in Van Buren under the direction of Edwards Van-Alma Funeral Home in Van Buren.

Pallbearers will be Glen Hopkins Jr., Tommy Wilson, Curtis Carney, Mack Woody, Neil Hamlin, Chet Smith, Johnny Young and Darrell Young.



**Warren Taylor
World War II Veteran
Interview**

The following was originally a video interview done by the Crawford County Friends of Genealogy, Van Buren Arkansas. The interviewer is Wilma Jameson and the video recorder was Cliff Jameson. The original interview was done on February 13, 2007. This written transcript of the original audio of the interview was accomplished in February 2018.

Interviewer: *Today is February 13, 2007, and I'm going to be visiting with Warren Taylor, and he is going to be sharing with me some of his experiences in World War II.*

Now, Warren, I'm gonna ask you to give me your full name.

Warren: Warren Taylor. Warren G. Taylor, but what I use to go by is Warren Taylor.

Interviewer: *Oh, Okay. What's the "G" stand for?*

Warren: I don't know. I just quit using it. I was born in 1921, and evidently, I was named after Harding I suppose.

Interviewer: *Now tell me when your birthday is.*

Warren: 10/29/21.

Interviewer: *Okay, you were born in 1921?*

Warren: Right.

Interviewer: *Where were you born?*

Warren: I was born right here in Van Buren.

Interviewer: *Here in Van Buren proper?*

Warren: Yes.

Interviewer: *Were you a city boy?*

Warren: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: *Did you go to school here in Van Buren?*

Warren: Yes.

Interviewer: *Did you graduate from high school here?*

Warren: Yes.

Interviewer: *What high school did you – well, it was only one high school, so.*

Warren: That's right.

Interviewer: *Now, what was your dad's name?*

Warren: My dad's name was Alan Taylor. And he left my mother, and there was seven children. He left my mother when we was all young and so, I never had a father.

Interviewer: *All right, Warren, that's very interesting. What was your mom's name?*

Warren: Millie. Millie M. Taylor.

Interviewer: *Millie M. Taylor.*

Warren: But you know I didn't have a father. We didn't have one, but most of that was during the depression era also. But as far as not having a father, it had no effect on me at all.

Interviewer: *Okay, but what's interesting to me is that your mother with seven children.*

Warren: That's right.

Interviewer: *And she still was able to let you graduate from high school.*

Warren: That's right.

Interviewer: *Did all of the children?*

Warren: All of them, yes.

Interviewer: *What did she do for a living?*

Warren: She didn't – but she didn't work. We, all of the children maintained the household during that.

Interviewer: *You worked.*

Warren: Well, then I had one older brother that never finished.

Interviewer: *What did you do as a young teenage boy?*

Warren: Well, I worked at home. We had chickens and calves and cows, and we had just a hard time you might say. And then I had a paper route.

Interviewer: *Okay, you had a paper route.*

Warren: Yes.

Interviewer: *Now, what year did you graduate high school?*

Warren: 1939.

Interviewer: *1939. Okay. Did you go on from high school to college?*

Warren: Yes. I went Fort Smith Junior College.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: One year.

Interviewer: *All right, now Warren about that time, we're hearing a little about Germany and about what's happening in Germany. Did you hear about that?*

Warren: Yes, we did.

Interviewer: *Now, you're a young boy.*

Warren: Yeah. In fact, after that first year in junior college, the military draft was beginning to become in order. It was coming up. All of my age we sensed that, and it was doubtful that you'd go back to school. It wouldn't be practical.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: I met a good friend in junior college named Johnny Stevenson. We had one topic, we had the same thing. We was interested in aerial activity. Warfare.

Interviewer: *Okay. Aerodynamics?*

Warren: Yeah. Aerial, about flying. War, see?

Interviewer: *Like flying.*

Warren: And we both was interested in that. In fact, we – before this is prior to being drafted, we know that was coming up. We wrote a letter to the U.S. Army Air Forces. We wanted to join. We never did hear from them then.

Interviewer: Okay.

Warren: That was during the early part of 1941.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: Of course, before that, we hadn't traveled, we saved money. But anyway, early there in 1941 we wrote a letter [Army Air Force] and that's when we didn't hear from them, but after Pearl Harbor, December the 7th, then we called them in January, and it was no time we heard from them. The draft was really in order then.

Interviewer: Okay.

Warren: We was – we were really a few months or less ready to go. So, we all had our forms that said to be at Fort Chaffee, at a mobile U.S. Army Air Force [unit]. You know, during the whole World War II, we had the Army, the Navy; we didn't have the U.S. Army Air Force, it was attached to the Army.

Interviewer: *Yes. They were all almost one thing.*

Warren: And they didn't change that until after the war. Anyway, this mobile unit came to Chaffee, and he and I went out there. We took a test, we took a physical, and we got through. They told me I needed a fixed bridge [dental] here. Well, I was nineteen what years old, I didn't need – I never had anybody say you need to have that. He needs a little something, you know. And when we got through, and they gave us a piece of paper that said that you are – when you come back here, you'll be – this piece of paper tell us that you are in the U.S. Army Air Force.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: But do not try to write anymore. Just we'll let you know. We'll send you a letter; you'll come here, then we will send you to a flight school. Well, what we didn't realize then, we had no facilities here, you know. We didn't hear, and that was after Pearl Harbor. We didn't hear, and we knew that the draft was coming up, so I went to a draft board member here in town and said I'm subject for the draft, but I told him the story. Well, you can't do it. We won't release you now.

And Johnny he went to Fort Smith where he lived; they told him the same thing. We don't – you know.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: So, we had to do something. So, what he did, one day he called and got a number, he said from New Orleans, U.S. the naval [base], boy they'll take us both right now. [They said] "Report down there on such a date, and we'll take you both. Bring that paper along."

Interviewer: *The piece of paper that you handed –*

Warren: And said they'll take both of us. Well, I said Johnny, I don't want to, I rather – I [don't] want the Naval Air Force, see. Well, he said he didn't either, but we you know we're gonna be drafted. And I said that's right. So, he comes back a few days later and said well are you gonna make up your mind? I said no I don't believe – I said you know I never was that good of swimmer anyway.

Interviewer: *You just didn't really want the Navy.*

Warren: Well, you know what, he went on in, and then I was drafted probably a few weeks after that. September 19, 1942, is when I was drafted.

Interviewer: *Okay, now let's go back just a little bit. When they – the first year that*

they talked about the draft, it was just that they encouraged you to join. That very first year, probably 1940?

Warren: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: *Then somewhere, after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, then they instigated the draft, and you were – you had to go. All the young men had to go.*

Warren: That's right.

Interviewer: *And when you went in usually they told you where you were going. That you really didn't get much of a choice, but in this particular case, you went into the Army. You went down and went into the Army.*

Warren: Right.

Interviewer: *Okay, but let's go back again though, until the bombing of Pearl Harbor, I want you to tell me where you were?*

Warren: I was right here. When that happened, I was over at Cooley Drug Store on 21st and Rogers, getting my car washed across the street when we heard that about Pearl Harbor, see. And I knew then it wouldn't be long, see. I wasn't looking forward to it, but I wanted to go in the U.S. Army Air Force, see. But this draft was coming up, and we figured that, which it did. I didn't know. I was unhappy about that, but most of my age was in process of being drafted. Many of us wanted to go. Many would want to join, but they didn't take them yet.

All this time, we never heard from that mobile unit. But we didn't understand then. This country ranked about 15th in the world in military. Third world countries were better than we were. We had a good Navy. That's all. But you know, it was really – the fact that we didn't know or didn't realize that this country had no facilities. They'd have taken us the day we went over there to Chaffee, they would have taken us right then, but there's nowhere to send us.

Interviewer: *They didn't have any place to train you.*

Warren: We wasn't ready for it.

Interviewer: *America really was not ready for war.*

Warren: Oh no. They wasn't ready for war. They wasn't ready for us to go in. We wanted – they turned down lots of people because they had no facilities, see, to train you, see. They didn't have it. And you know

when I was drafted I went down to Little Rock you know, I was drafted to the U.S. Army Air Force I was forced there, see.

Interviewer: *So, you really got what you wanted anyway.*

Warren: Yeah, I got in there, but I wanted to be a cadet, see, like Johnny said. He went down to New Orleans, and that's where he went, see. And I could've gone, but I didn't choose to do that. I wanted to – so, I was in the U.S. Army Air Force, see, and I wasn't – The U.S. Army Air Force was with the Army, but they were entirely different.

Interviewer: *They were not a unit all on its own?*

Warren: No, they wasn't all – they was different, us and the Germans. The German Luftwaffe was there, the Wehrmacht, which was Army. And they were completely separate.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: In fact, when I was first apprehended after I bailed out well, the Luftwaffe was the only one that formed any army. They were there looking for me, but they needed the Luftwaffe before I was finally turned over to them.

Interviewer: *Okay. All right, let's go back to where you were drafted. Did your buddy – let's talk about Johnny just a minute. Did he get to fly airplanes when he went into the Navy?*

Warren: Oh yeah. I can tell you later on in the story what happened to him.

Interviewer: *Okay, we'll go to that. All right now, we're talking about America and the feelings in America about 1941 after Japan had bombed. We're going to war with Japan, and then Germany declares war on us almost immediately. So, the whole country is ready to go to war. Now we tried to stay out of it, didn't we?*

Warren: That's right. Too long. That's right. Oh, yeah most everybody had known that I had an older brother that he was in the National Guard and the 7th day of January, he was in. He's the same as being volunteered. He went to the Far East, you know. Anyway, most all of men my age they wanted to go in, but we didn't have any facilities.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: The young men, they were different than they are today. They're different. They all wanted to go.

Interviewer: *Wanting to serve their country?*

Warren: They had patriotism. Nationalistic pride. We all had that. We wasn't taught that we just knew it.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: Most all the young men. Entirely different than today. Well, everything has changed, but they were mostly like we were.

Interviewer: *All right, now Warren when you went to Camp Robinson?*

Warren: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Where did you go from Camp Robinson?*

Warren: Well, I was inducted into the U.S. Army Air Force, and I went to Hammer Field, Fresno, California.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: That's where I went.

Interviewer: *And you did basic training there in Hammer's Field?*

Warren: That's right. Yeah.

Interviewer: *How long were you there?*

Warren: I was there about – well I was there two different times. I was there first time maybe a couple, three months. It comes up in all this that I want to tell you about.

Interviewer: *So, you were there – where did you go from Hammer's Field the first time?*

Warren: Well, I went from there to Lowry Field, Denver, Colorado, see.

Interviewer: *And what were you going to, a specialty school?*

Warren: Well, yeah. See, back in – we got out... Out of the basic training at Hammer Field, we had a choice now. In the U.S. Army Air Force, you could go into mechanics that had to do with airplane engines, or you go to radio, or you could go into armor. I wanted to be – I went into armor. I chose machine guns and bombers and all of that. And

some of them – I even took the radio a year. And later on, you wound up on the crew like it tells you in that resume. You were either a tail gunner or a waist gunner on a bomber, or a top turret or a ball turret gunner, see. The radio man he had a radio position, and mechanic, he has a top turret. A tail gunner. At armor, I was a tail gunner. And then they had waist guns.

Interviewer: *Okay so, you had four gunnery positions on your –*

Warren: Oh, it was a B-17. I was a tailback when – but B-17 was known as a Flying Fortress. We only had two big bombers, and of all the participants in the war, we did have two great airplanes. The B-24 which was a four-engine twin tail boom bomber, four engine bomber. And then we had – it was known as the Liberator, and the B-17 was known as the Flying Fortress. We got a picture of one of them in there, and it was a great –

Interviewer: *My husband was Air Force.*

Warren: It was 13 .50 caliber machine guns on it.

Interviewer: *Okay so, since you have to take a test to tell you – I mean you did have to qualify to be a gunner?*

Warren: Oh yes.

Interviewer: *Did you have to take some sort of aptitude test?*

Warren: Yes ma'am. It's all in that when I tell you. Yes, ma'am.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: That's the whole story there. I can tell you more about it when you get through here in that. I can just tell you.

Interviewer: *So, now you're going to be training for the gunnery and after you left Hammer's Field?*

Warren: Oh no. Not at that time.

Interviewer: *Oh okay.*

Warren: This was at Lowry Field it was taught bomb shackles, bomb technique, machine gun military technique, and all about aero-warfare.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: It was a great – one of the great airbases of that time in our country. In Lowry Airfield in Denver.

Interviewer: *How long were you there?*

Warren: Oh, I was just there just a couple months maybe or three.

Interviewer: *Okay. And where did you go from there?*

Warren: Well, then I went to Hamilton Field in San Francisco.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: I stayed there.

Interviewer: *Had you been assigned to a unit yet?*

Warren: Oh no. Not yet. We was still training, see. And then I went to – myself and two or three others were sent Squaw Valley up in the Sequoia National Forest and then to check on – they had installed a gunnery unit up there, way up there in the mountains. And we were just up there for two or three weeks.

Interviewer: *So, all totaled, how long was your training?*

Warren: Well, that's training. I couldn't put it together. I'll tell you; I'd rather tell you on this story here.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: And I can tell you like it was in sequence. And I'd rather do that.

Interviewer: *All right. And then – so now you are – you still haven't been assigned to a unit. When did you get assigned to a unit?*

Warren: Oh, you've gotta go through these training areas that I'll tell you about in there. They're in sequence there, see where you – it's a pretty good story.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: I can remember that easily and just like it was, see. And it all comes together, see.

Interviewer: *We'll take a break now for just a minute Warren.*

Warren: Okay.

(Break)

Interviewer: *We're continuing our interview with Warren Taylor and today is February 13, 2007, and he's just gonna share with us a little bit about his life as a young man before he went into the service and as he goes into the service.*

Warren: You know, I graduated from high school and went to Fort Smith Junior College there, and that was in 1940, see. And in school I met a good friend; we had the same thing at the time. His name was Johnny Stevenson, We had the same idea - we was attracted to aerial warfare.

War fever was spreading. It was already going on in the Far East. We knew we'd be next and we wanted to fly. We wanted to be cadets.

Well, to make a long story short, we decide to contact the military to get in. We never heard from them. And later on, we didn't go back to school now because the draft was in order and ready to go. We knew we'd be next. So, you know I – when we got through school there we got to talking about what we were gonna do. We gotta get out of that draft.

So, Pearl Harbor happened, and when that happened, that really opened – that really changed things. So, we wrote to the proper authority of the U.S. Army Air Force and in 2-3 months we got a letter, it was out of Fort Chaffee, from out there. We went out there; we took the mental evaluation and a physical. They told me I needed a bridge there and he had something else. And they told us about when we're ready for you, we'll call you. Don't call us, don't write us, see.

Well, you know that's – I thought we were gonna go right then. We thought we did, but what we didn't realize then the military had no facilities. Anyway, they told us we would be in the U.S. Army Air Force, and later on, they'd let us know, and they'd send us to flight school.

So, soon after that then the draft was getting closer. We were all the same age, and it was getting closer. We wanted to be in the military, but we didn't want to be drafted. Well, me and our other boys, they were looking for – someone tried to join and couldn't because there was no facilities.

So, Johnny and I were trying to figure out what to do. We contacted the Navy, he did, down in New Orleans. He came back and he said, "Well, they'll take both of us right now. Come on down here and bring those two papers. You're ready to go in the Air Force, US Army. You come down; we'll take both of you." So, I told Johnny I'd rather not. A few days later he came back and he said, "Don't you wanna come and go with me?" "No," I said, "I'll stay."

He went on to New Orleans and then I was drafted. I was fortunate that I was drafted into the US Army/Air Force down at Camp Providence, you see. Then, I was sent to Hammer Field in Fresno, California. There's an air base there, you see. The first thing they do there is send you to basic training, which is about six or eight weeks. After that, they said, "Now, what kind of – you've got three choices here: would you like to be a mechanic, working on the airplane engines, radio, or armor, which is fix machine guns and turrets and bomb shelter, all that?"

I chose to be armor. Then, the people who would be in radio, they sent them to radio school. They sent me to Lowry Field, Denver, Colorado. It was real uptown, real late model – they knew everything about aerial activity. You learn all about bomb shackles, bombardiers, about which kind of machine guns – all that activity together. You know, while I was there – I can't think of the name of – you might know him – the name of the general that was in charge of all of our military in this country at that time [General George Marshall?].

Interviewer: *No, I don't know.*

Warren: General – I can't think of his name. Anyway, he came to Lowry Field when I was still a private, just finishing up there. They sent me and two or three others up there to this mess hall where he was. We put our Class A uniforms on, just stood around like we was somewhere or another standing there. He got up and he came over by me and he saluted me, I responded. He was telling me how good we all looked and he wondered where the latrine was. The latrine in the military is the bathroom. He was real nice and I showed him where it was.

Anyway, I got to thinking after that it would have been a good time for me to tell him what had happened. One thing – you go through channels, you don't go over – in business, same way. You go through channels. Anyway, a couple weeks later, they shipped me to Hamilton Field in San Francisco. There was another air base there and I don't know what they're gonna do with me there. But, I'd been there about 10 days when they sent me and two or three others up to an ice-laden

place – up to Squaw Valley, way up there in the Sequoia National Forest, in the snow. Anyway, the cold – that's all that was up there. We set up a machine gun situation up there for them.

From there, after the two or three weeks, they sent me back down to Hammer Field, going back to Hamilton Field where I come – and then Hamilton Field sent me back to Hammer Field. I was really disillusioned. The next Monday, I went to the chow hall and the large picture on the wall was a big sign, it said, "Be an aerial gunner, 50 percent more pay. Be an aerial gunner." I'd been to schools there, I was a gunner. I knew what it would take. You know what? It said, "Be an aerial gunner, 50 percent more pay." So, I went up got the forms and filled it out. You know, in 48 hours I was in Las Vegas, I mean, it was hours.

They sent me there with 2 MP's. One thing I don't remember was whether we flew there or went there on a train, but I knew we got there on the 4th of July. These two MP's were taking me, we were gonna eat. About there at noon, Harry James and Betty Grable had just gotten married and come out of that – down the street there. Boy, I said, "Boy, that sure looks like Betty and Harry, doesn't it?" I remember that that'd be the 4th of July.

There was two aerial gunnery schools only in this country, Las Vegas was the biggest and there was one in Arlington, Texas. Las Vegas was it. They sent – we went out there that night and by the next Monday morning – it was supposed to be eight weeks of gunnery school and that was a fast eight weeks. I learned everything about aerial gunnery and aerial activity – you see, I'd already studied machine guns and I'd already been to Lowry Field. I was an armory gunner. They said, "Now when you get on a crew, you choose." I chose to be a tail gunner.

I didn't want to be a waist gunner. A ball turret gunner – a guy had to be small. A ball turret right under the B-17, it's a cramped up position and you gotta be smaller. Then, there was the top turret gunner. That's usually the guy that studied mechanics, he was a top turret gunner. The ball turret gunner was under armor.

Interviewer:

Why did they have to study mechanics?

Warren:

This one, he – the pilot and copilot needed to know what the instruments said about this engine, that engine. The top turret gunner was educated in those machines. He never did hardly have to do it, they had to take it low to the ground, but that's what his duty was. A ball turret gunner, it was a – the B-17 was a great weapon. They put

50 caliber machine guns on all of them. It used to be 30, they're all 50's. A 50-caliber machine gun is a great weapon back then.

In my position in the tail, I had a twin that had two 50's and a ring in post-side up there and had a good position. Now, in gunner school, we learned we had to have air-to-air firing. We had some pilots come up from Florida. You know what an AT-6 is? AT-6 was a small fighter – in fact, Sweden had them before World War II. This country made them and they used them for training. Had a pilot and then a copilot seat. They had a 30 caliber machine gun back there, a gunner would be there, and a pilot. There'd be a B-17 pulling a huge target.

Flying air to air is entirely different than on ground. We'd go up, six planes in each – the last two weeks of gunnery They'd put us in this cockpit with this AT-6 and they'd put more or less – I had my ammunition was maybe tipped red. Somebody else was blue, some green, some black, some not at all. That's so when got up there and you fired it, you could see how many hits you had, see? They give you 200 rounds. You'd get up there and these pilots, they didn't like the job they was doing, it was boring to them. We'd fly along there and we had the 30 caliber machine guns. He went so close, we'd fire. You'd always wonder – well, you wanted to pass.

Later on, I wished I'd never passed. They count them by how many hits you had out of 200.

Interviewer: *What do you mean? What is a pass? You wanted to pass what?*

Warren: Pass that gunnery school. You could fail if you didn't make the – you could fail. When I was a prisoner of war, I got to thinking I might have been better if I failed.

Interviewer: *But, you wanted to pass?*

Warren: Yeah, I wanted to pass. I'll tell you I learned one thing – before, we learned in gunnery school you had to bore sight a 30 caliber. They don't do that anymore. What you do, there's a port side and the right side, up here. The right side is fixed, but this side here, you gotta be lining that up – that's called the 'bore' side. We had to do that. They never do that anymore.

We get up there with one mission, we got up there ready to – from my time on that sleeve – and that ring, that port side, would just swing, I forgot to tie it up. I told that pilot, I told him what the problem was. He said, "Wait a minute, you ready?" I said, "Yeah," he said, "Hell, I was taking you with it, we'll get there close." I remember saying I'm

only gonna be in there a few seconds, I've got 200 rounds. I'll never forget this – he peeled off, we peeled off in there, we went down to that target. That target looked big as a barn. I got to thinking I'm gonna get too many hits here, you can't miss, 200 rounds, you're good.

Before we put it out there, 15 to 20 something, that'd be here. Here, that thing is big as a barn, I didn't have to worry about is too many hits, I got 200 rounds, you know? I began to sweat that, you know, I'm sweating that out. When I took that, I had 17 hits out of 200.

Interviewer: *Oh my word! So, you wouldn't have had to worry –*

Warren: I'll tell you what, that made me – I started listening to these gunnery experts that was telling me how to fire these. I knew then they knew what they were talking about. Here, I had 200 rounds and I just got 17 hits. That thing was as big as a barn, that target was. But, that made a better employee, a better gunner out of me, when I did that.

Anyway, we come out of there and then, that's when we're gonna be put on a crew of a ship. Get a crew together – an air base near Dalhart, Texas, we called it Rattlesnake Air Base because they had big dump truck loads of rattlesnakes digging up, making that runway. We went there and got all this together to start training, ten of us on a crew: pilot, copilot, top turret, ball turret, two waist gunners, a bombardier, navigator, tail gunner – all ten. They get to be a real good family, you get close. You really get close.

We started training there. We'd fly down – we probably got into rural Mexico sometime on the border, then we flew over this area one time, practice mission, see? That went on. Skipped it all, we went to Dalhart, Texas, to get a ship when we got through. Let me tell you, we got a little over halfway through that – it was for three months and we'd been there about two months – we got word to skip that last month because we needed to go over there. I'll tell you, that was around in October.

Interviewer: *Of what year?*

Warren: Of '43. In October 8th the Air Force had hit Schweinfurt. Schweinfurt is a city about 40-50km east, a little south, from Frankfurt. Now, at that time, all the targets in Germany – the three most heavily defended were the Ploesti Oil Fields in Romania, Schweinfurt – they made ball bearings for the whole military – and Berlin. All three of those. Any time that you went, it was heavy losses.

The 15th Air Force down in Italy was hitting Ploesti, that was 50

percent of the German's need for oil. There was many, many a guy lost their life hitting Ploesti out of the 15th, they was flying mostly Liberators.

Interviewer: *That's the 15th and you all are the 8th?*

Warren: Yeah. The 15th was in Italy and the 8th was in England. You know that day on October, they said we want to quit. In August, two months prior to that, the 8th had hit Schweinfurt, lost 63-65 B-17s. That's 10 times – that's 650 men we lost. It was a heavily armored, heavily defended – flack guns and German fighters. Flack guns like the Army called heavy artillery. They'd fire those up there and there would be big, black blossoms explode up there. There would be thousands of pieces of fine metal, they're like bullets, scatter. The German's had thousands of those guns, they had many of them around Schweinfurt.

They had many ME-109's, the great German fighter. When the 8th Air Force had flew right into the teeth of the German military – the Luftwaffe, which is the greatest in the world. The Japanese had one, but theirs were all aircraft carriers. The German Luftwaffe was the greatest – Luftwaffe means air force.

Interviewer: *I was going to say –*

Warren: They had lost 63-65 B-17s. Two months later, the day in October, the 15th, they hit Schweinfurt again and lost 62-65 more over Schweinfurt. We was intending to go over and go into combat as a group of our own. The major of our provisional group, we was named while we were training, that's all – we gonna have to go over as replacement.

Interviewer: *The 8th?*

Warren: Replace all those – two big ones at Schweinfurt.

Interviewer: *Where was the 8th stationed?*

Warren: 8th Air Force is all over England. When we went there, we was in the 381st Bomb Group, which is stationed near Cambridge – up in the northeastern corridor, the British Isles. Anyway, they had air bases all over that. You fly and get up a little, it looked like a checkerboard down there. They sent us – we broke up that training a month early, and we went to Omaha, Nebraska, picked up an airplane, a brand new B-17. We were going to Gander Bay, Newfoundland. The weather – that was in October and November – the weather over there, up there then, was just like it is now up there.

We got that airplane at the Air Base in Nebraska and we flew over Michigan, over Lake Michigan. It looked frozen all over. It was terrible, it was terrible. We finally got – ordinarily, you wouldn't even fly in that kind of weather. We flew to – we had to land in Michigan somewhere and stay there overnight because of the weather. We took off the next day. Anyway, we got as far as Presque Isle, Maine. It was terrible. We had to land there and to go to the mess hall, there was a path about six feet wide, snow, 12-14 feet above us, down that to the mess hall. That's how bad that was. We shouldn't even been flying.

They were in bad need over there. It was cold. Then, went to Gander Bay, Newfoundland. It's hard to tell night from day, there. Bad weather –

Interviewer: *In Newfoundland?*

Warren: Yeah. We went up there in November. Last part of November, I think. That German general – I mean, that general up there told us, "Well boys, we're gonna do two things we've never done before: we're gonna put 100 octane fuel in these B-17's." We always had 90 before, it's 100 octane. And, he said, "We're gonna fly the North Atlantic in the winter time." That's impossible. In those days, no one flew the North Atlantic in the wintertime. There was no defrosters on anything, then.

We had 44 ships in our divisional group, and that day it was really – it was tough. The weather nearly a blizzard. We knew we were gonna lose a lot of them. I remember we got out there – we was number three lined up to take off – the first, the second one that took off, I remember the number - let me go back to when we left out a little – we got this new ship in Omaha, Nebraska. They backed the truck up there with this crew of ours – you go in and look for the number of so and so airplane. They got about a block away and we was in it and he backed up and said, "Oh, you're in the wrong one, you should be in this." We got in that one.

Anyway, that very one that we'd been in – it was the 2nd one to take off and it blew up 500 feet off the runway. Boy, I was lucky then. We were all lucky. That thing just blew to smithereens.

Interviewer: *Do you know what was wrong with it?*

Warren: Nobody knows, it was -, there's no telling. It just blew to smithereens. Then, we had 44 ships in that training and one of them's gone.

Interviewer: *So, now you're down to 43?*

Warren: Yeah. So, we're starting to fly across the Atlantic. Some of us, we had ATC crews with us – air transfer command – and maybe only half our crew would be on one, and half on another. So, we wouldn't lose a whole crew.

Anyway, we'd be flying across there and we'd listen to the Germans on their submarines. Now, you could hear them on our radio. We had a radio that you could turn on and hear the intercom and [inaudible].

Anyway, it was bitter cold, and we lost four of those planes crossing the Atlantic. That's forty men, went down Atlantic. They knew they was going to lose them, see? They knew they going to be a loss.

Interviewer: *So, now you're down to 40?*

Warren: Yeah. Later on, that's what had happened. By the time we got through over there.

Anyway, on this shipment, we dropped down, it looked like we stole [sic] – the ice – put a search light on the wing. Ice was that thick. What happens, it gets heavier than the engines can – engines blow air under. It gives the plane lift. But it gets too heavy, that ice. We dropped down.

Boy, I tell you, that was just about it. We threw out orange juice, mayo, machine guns, ammunition – we threw out in the Atlantic. We dropped down to – we could see those – oh, it wasn't 1,500 feet above it when we got that far.

Interviewer: *The waves in the ocean?*

Warren: Yeah, we almost went into one of them. It finally got that low in there and survived.

I used to –

Interviewer: *Now, Warren, when you get down lower to the ocean, it warms up a little bit, doesn't it?*

Warren: Well, it might in happen an average case. But in the North Atlantic, everything's cold.

Interviewer: *Oh, okay.*

Warren: And the thing about it is that the ice – it ices up, see? If they had had deicer back then, it'd be all right. But the ice weighs it down. I thought we're done.

Then we land in Scotland. If I'd been lucky enough, we would have gone over there, and they'd take us to – I don't know, the Azores, which is in the Atlantic west part of the African coast line, way out there by itself. And they tell us we can lay around in the sunshine there for 30 days before you got on over there. We always look forward to that, in the Azores.

But then we went over there. We landed in Scotland. And at the time, we went to certain – we went to, I believe, a base in Scotland.

But then, they start breaking us up. Different shifts, we went in different groups. I had one good friend named Bruce Cox from Fort Smith. We'd come on a delay in route before we went overseas. Give us five days. And we come en route to Fort Smith – I mean, I lived in Van Buren then.

And when we left there to go back, Bruce – we were going over the bridge down there. He said, "Well, Warren, take one good last good look at Garrison Avenue." "Why?" "That'd be our last." "No, that's not the way it is." He really believed that. He believed that. But his second mission – I found out later on – he was in 306 Bomb Group. He lost his life – he went down. Just right away, when he got over there.

Interviewer: *Now had you been with Bruce all the way through?*

Warren: Yeah, we was training. Yeah, I'd been with him all the time, see? Yeah.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: And when I got home that time, I called Johnny Steven's mother to see how he come out. Well, she said, "Warren, about three months ago, Johnny was lost in the Carolina, north of – Atlantic coast of the Carolinas." He was a flight instructor. He went down. He had a student piled in there with him. He went down in the Atlantic there. And that's where he lost his life, see? He was – just the way he wanted it. And he died that way.

And this Bruce Cox, he knew in that – got over there, and when I come back, I went to see – he was adopted. I went by to see his mother. His remains are still over there in Belgium today, and it's

hard for her to take. But he was a fine, fine –[man].

Anyway, we go in – the crew we had, we go to 381st Bomb Group. That's right out of Cambridge, I believe. And then it was – the warfare was really critical. The Germans was – they was loaded. They had the greatest Luftwaffe. They were – and these B-17s, we'd get in these formations, and you go right to the target, you know. The Germans, though, they had all this flak. All these guns. And those German fighters. And it was rough warfare.

And there's not many – well, I say before it was all over with all of those 44 ships. We lost four crossing the Atlantic. I was on another crew, which is another story. It wound up – another 32 was shot down. Only 8 out of that 40 [airplanes] ever made it – finished their mission.

Interviewer: *Out of the 44?*

Warren: Yeah, out of the 44. Only 8 left. That shows you the loss ratio, wasn't it? It was tough! We'd go to mess hall. And, we'd see new guys there all the time. Oh, and ones not there, how many –

And the big story was Big B. Berlin. You knew when you hit Berlin, it'd be the worst. It would be bad! Berlin had never been hit in the daytime. And here, everybody began to sweat out Big B. And every mission - it's going to be Big B.

And would you believe, on the third day of March, third day in March 1944, they come in waking me – the other crew members, they didn't wake up. Another tail gunner had called in sick that morning. It was 3:00. I knew, boy, you get up at 4:00. Here it's 3:00. But it's a Big ME – ME would mean maximum effort. Every ship goes up on maximum effort. You getting up at 3:00 at the morning, that'd be Big B. And then they took me off. And this guy that called in sick, I had to take his place.

Interviewer: *So, you left your crew and went with another crew.*

Warren: Yeah, that's right. I didn't like that. I didn't know any of those guys. Up in England it was bad weather. It's cold, raining or snowing. In fact, it's so cold, we had to steal little clumps of coal to keep from freezing in those – that's where I got a lot of this frostbite, see? Before I even got prisoner of war, I had froze limbs. That's why that's that way now, see? I froze. But you get up in the air. And we had heated suits on. It's 40, 50 degrees below zero up there when you're in the northern part where we was flying.

Well, 381st Bomb Group, being the break then. So, that morning, we go to breakfast. They always fed us good. If you don't eat right, you get up high altitude there, it don't agree with you. You don't want to eat cabbage. Don't want to eat anything that produce any gas. Fed us good. We had real eggs, you know? We had good, good breakfast, I mean. I still remember the last breakfast I had.

We knew – we got up, went to chow, and then we'd go to briefing. They had a big screen, almost as big as that whole wall over there. And it's two officers up there. Everything quiet. The whole group. The 381st Bomb Group. There's four squadrons in the whole room. About 175, or 200 men. We're all in this room and – you're looking at this – they had a big map up there.

Interviewer: *Mm-hmm. Screen?*

Warren: And they had a curtain they pull across, you know. And here it's ten minutes to 4:00. And usually we would just be getting and we knew it was early. And they pulled that shade gradually – you could hear a pin drop in there. Pulling that curtain back.

And then they had an orange ribbon or a string from where we went – it went across, over Denmark, into the Baltic Sea – high over the Baltic Sea. Its third spot would be the IP, which is Initial Point, where your ships gather. From that, you go in to the target. And that was Berlin.

And there I was on a new crew. Bad luck up in there. A new crew, didn't know any of them, see? And I still – that tail gunner who called in sick - I couldn't wait to see him and here it's Big Berlin. It's the – now this was to be one of the greatest of all of them, see? To go to Berlin.

Interviewer: *All right, were you excited about going? Or were you scared?*

Warren: Oh, we were all scared – concerned. We knew it was coming. But let me tell you though, before that happened, we had the greatest – with our full crew. Then about the mission before that. It was on February the 21st or 22nd. Went up to briefing. All officers and Intel said, "Oh, that's wonderful. We go, it's going to be the greatest air armada of all time." They showed this whole map, like the whole German – it was going to be American air power. They could be 10,000 [airplanes]. They said, "Boys, when you go up there today, you're not going to see Germans. They'll all be American." That was really the greatest air armada of all time. And it has never been equaled since.

And we got on that – that was the next to last mission. We got up there, boy, it was a beautiful day. Sitting in the tail. Had a good panoramic view of, you know, you could really see – and we didn't need any flags to tell us about nationalistic pride or patriotism. Boy, you could see it, all those B-17. See some P-47s. You see some – not a Germans. All American. Gliding along there.

And our target that day was Regensburg, which is the extreme east, southeastern part of Germany, close to the Swiss border. We're flying along there and – the Swiss Alps were over there. Now, see, I'm in the tail. I have a bicycle-sized seat at a 45 degree angle. And on my knees. And real – very comfortable position. And I had 2 50-caliber machine guns. I had a piece of armor plated – about 12 or 14 in front of me here. And we had these chest-up parachutes, you know. They were great. They snap on, you know? Always had one hooked to you, in case it blows up, you might –

And I was there just enjoying – see the Swiss Alps – they were about as high as we were. That was a beautiful sight. Way over on the other side, I saw a fuzzy streak over there. I didn't know exactly what that was. Coming back over. And then I saw a streak go by not 15 feet from us. Little bit higher. Saw it go by. And it was the first rocket ever fired by anybody in the world – the Germans. We knew they had the rockets. British used to call them missiles – they were missiles but they wasn't rockets. They had missiles later on, where you controlled them.

We knew the Germans had the rockets. And that had missed the whole formation. Looked [inaudible] of us. Black exhaust, a little pink in the middle, and a little white and black in the middle. That was the first rocket.

I look over there, saw the pilot a Focke-Wulf 190. That's the latest, newest German fighter plane. FW – made by the Focke Industry. And a Focke-Wulf 190. It was the newest. And that's what it was.

Interviewer: *Okay, now you're in the airplane –*

Warren: *Yeah.*

Interviewer: *– you're looking out the tail –*

Warren: *Yeah, I'm looking to the side.*

Interviewer: *– and you look over here to the side, and you see a German plane.*

Warren: Yeah. At one. They just fired that rocket.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: Yeah. I saw that. I'm looking right – he wasn't 12 feet – he was just out there under wing just a little bit. And I looked over. I'm in the tail by myself. I could see a lot more than everybody else back there, see? And I looked right at him. He had a black hat on. His oxygen mask was black. He had black – I could see his hand on the stick.

I mean this – we're going about 175, 200 miles an hour. He's going about 350, see? That's how fast – but it was quick. I saw all. I can still see it. That was something to behold. I saw – I looked that pilot right straight in the eye, you know, this German.

He fired this rocket before he – he come in about 1 o'clock high, or level. But you get in the formation angle – we try to fly in close formation. It's suicide if one of them get in there. He's done for. There are too many guns in there. So, he was trying to get by. He was on the upper edge there. And he fired and missed the whole formation, see? And boy, I looked right at him. And I mean now this is just split seconds.

Interviewer: *Split second. Yeah.*

Warren: But I could see the first rocket. The first rocket. And then he got out there, and I knew that it was 50. I can go 20 degrees this way, 20 that way, and 40 up and down, you know. And I knew, boy, if he keeps this up, I hit that trigger one time, he'd be gone. But he knew what to do. He got out there and he turned on the left side and went right straight down. So, he got out of there. And that's the last time I saw him, see?

Interviewer: *So, you didn't get a chance, because your gun wouldn't swing around that –*

Warren: No, I didn't get a chance – he – and the one over there with the fuzzy smoke – they did the same thing with one over there, and they missed the whole formation. Evidently, I was one of very few that was able to see that rocket. I just happened to be at the right place the right second and there he was, see? I could still see that. First rocket. But he missed the whole thing, see?

But anyway, that was February 21st or 22nd. Now many of them – the 15th Air Force – they said it was the 22nd, but they don't remember

that. I remember flying and I could look way off sometimes, and I could see the B-25 coming up from Italy. We was getting that close to our target. I could see the B-24's. They was coming up – the whole – they was an unbelievable, unbelievable force of aero supremacy – American–

Interviewer: *So, we had just about put everything in the air that we had.*

Interviewer: *Almost.*

Warren: – they had. It was the biggest one. And I didn't see a single fighter in there. Well, they told us we'd be the only ones up there, see? Germans didn't come up there that day. But even when the Germans were up, they had a great – they had an ME1 run, a [inaudible] 109. It was one of the greatest ones.

Now, we get back to Berlin. It's probably the most heavily defended one in Europe.

Interviewer: *Uh-huh. You had told me that.*

Warren: Now, Ploesti was bad. Schweinfurt was bad. But Berlin – so, you know, we took off, it was terrible weather. The 8th Air Force made a big mistake when they picked March the 3rd. The weatherman was wrong.

We crossed the channel in the North Sea part. I remember looking down, and I could see the Danish Strait in Denmark down there. Now the time we got there, I reckon – I knew, boy, the weather was getting bad. If it gets any worse, then they'd scrub the mission.

We kept going on. And this corridor we was flying, over Denmark and on - to the Baltic Sea out there.

But the weather got worse. And we got over for the Baltic Sea. Flak was unbelievable – it was a black mass. It was terrible. Didn't see a single German fighter then. Well, he had more sense to get out there then. When you got all that, that fighter, he's not going to get in there, see?

We went along there, and it was a terrible sight. Visibility was down to zero. And it's dangerous right there. We should have been – they should have scrubbed the mission. About along that time, I felt something hit me, like somebody hit me in the back with a hammer. That in my back there is a piece of flak. And it just knocked me further, you know, but first thing I – it didn't hurt too bad, but I was

happy that it didn't hit a parachute. See if that hit a parachute, the one that – used to, they had old backpacks. It'd ruin that. And I could have had some of that stuff – hit one of those – your parachute, you're done for, see?

But anyway, that knocked me forward. It hurt, but I knew it wasn't too deep, see? And one to my left right then I saw a windshield just blow up. I could feel a concussion. And another went right, straight down. And another in front. This flak was really heavy.

And about that time, we got word from 8th Air Force to scrub the mission. We was on the IP, ready to go in and hit Berlin from the north. It's impossible. So, they scrubbed the mission. The [inaudible] had showed up. Weather got a little better. We had 10 or 20 percent, we saw.

I remember we left the formation. And we got this bomb load on, and I heard the – now I didn't know any of these guys. I didn't know them. I heard the bombardier and the navigator arguing, where are they – what we gonna – gotta get rid of – the pilot said to someone, "We need to get rid of this load." You go, "Yeah." And I heard them arguing about where to get rid of it. Well, one of them said the submarine bands are so far. Well, they could see where it was.

Anyway, at that time, there was no intercom. Intercom was shot out. Didn't hear nothing. And for the next hour and fifteen minutes was really hell. Flew around there, flew – and once in a while, I knew flak was out there, because I could hear them. You throw gravel on a tin roof?

Interviewer: *Mm-hmm.*

Warren: You know, the fighter – the German fighters had 20 millimeter cannons. And it's a little small shell, but when it hits – it's like a bunch of little shrapnel in it, see? And it scatters and killed and it also damaged. It was a great weapon for them. And I could hear it hitting. I knew they was firing that, so – I could hear it on the metal, see?

Went along there, and then we was losing altitude, course to make it a longer story short, we got over – I didn't know where we were, but I knew that they hadn't dropped the bomb because when they did, when they did I knew it because there'd be an uplift of the airplane.

And we were flying along there and we got – oh, once we did see one fighter go by, but he couldn't see us. Then all at once I felt that

they dropped the bomb. I knew they –

Interviewer: *Percussion.*

Warren: I knew then that we were not in the Netherlands because they had dropped the bomb on Germany, some other place in Germany, so, they dropped the bomb. So then, I knew then we've probably crossed – we probably were in the Netherlands, which was right, see.

And then weather, in the clear, and then they moved on over, the pilot was losing control, I knew we was losing altitude, B17 was great because it could take a lot of damage, it was a great airplane. And I know we almost got over the Dutch coast one time, through the clouds I could see, and then I saw one chute go by. See, that ordinarily one of my crew members, he'd been up there for – knowing he would have crawled back there and told me what was going on.

But they didn't know what was going on either. When it comes out you don't know. And I got to thinking over the Dutch coast there, looked down could see the ice, the snow, and all the ground, and then the ice on the shoreline, and then the North Sea.

And now it looks like I wish that pilot would get away from this and get inland because if I'm a bail out, I don't wanna land in the North Sea. You see, we've got a heated suit, it's black-blue, heated suit what we had then, and then you take your GI shoes off, first thing you do when you get in an airplane you tie them together and put them next to you. If you ever bail out you gotta take those shoes with you, of course.

Interviewer: *I didn't know that.*

Warren: Oh, you had to because when you're flying that northern part that's like up in Canada over here. Now down in the south they didn't have heated suits down there. Out of Italy and those, in the southern part they didn't have that problem so much; I'd say a case of they did. But that heated suit, and then you had what we'd call, they called it the Mae West, it's a life jacket, and they call that a Mae West, that's all anybody knew was a Mae West. And that was a life jacket, if you got in the water there's a little plunger you pull and then inflate it, you know.

Then you had your parachute harness. Got this parachute harness on and it's a male, female type of snap. Two of them, so you go – it snaps onto your vest here and you wear it, and to get that – you

better get out of that parachute before you hit the water if you possibly can; if you hit the water and that shroud lines up parachute, you might get, oh, 15, 20 feet down, but that'll drown you, that shroud line.

So, what they always told us, now what you need to do to get out of that parachute – and I was trying to figure out, what you do, you gotta pull your weight up, see, you pull it up before you can take up the slack enough to disengage that. In fact, I already just had one hanging on, that helps, so it just had to have one of them, and I thought, “Well,” I knew, I said, “Pull that down there and take that slack up and then pull it out, and hold on to the shroud line before you hit the water.” And that would kill their spirit just like that.

Well, then I was worried about that, see. Then I saw another two more chutes go by, and this time I knew it was just about the time to go, and I took my oxygen mask off, disconnected myself, had the heated cord – you can't just jump out, you gotta connect to all this stuff here.

And I disconnected myself to get out of all that, and then about the time we got ready to get up, I was gonna get up and get ready to bail out of there. I couldn't move, I mean I couldn't move; I knew this was it. Either the centrifugal force, you know, and I looked out to see what, I knew we was hanging on because we just had one engine left and it was sharp, sharp turn.

It seemed like minutes but it was only about ten or 15 seconds, and then it releases me. And then I could see daylight out there, weather cleared up, I knew one thing. Wulf-Wulf-, that'd be, that's when they get right on your tail then, and we knew we was crippled and I thought I'll wait another minute or two because I've only counted three chutes, and I knew there was six more that hadn't left yet.

So, I got up, said all that stuff, and I got to looking because there's a hole and if they go up here they'd do it now. And I'm telling you it wasn't a minute and a half of looking through – I've got a little 12, six armored plate glass, you know, I looked through my sights there, boy, there was two Wulf-Wulf 109's out there six to 800 yards; with a 50 caliber machine gun that's point-blank, that's point-blank.

Boy, and I knew they absolutely saw us, they thought it was twelve [inaudible], we're done, I'd never get out of here. And I got

them lined up just like that and I hit that trigger, first three seconds I had three second bursts.

I couldn't hear it, but I knew it, the guns were working because I could feel the vibration. You know that, I hit that, and I could see two seconds, I saw the third second, clouds. And I'll never know to this day whether I blew them up or not. But I know I had to because one, two seconds, just a three second burst, just two seconds gone and the last second it was covered up with a cloud, see.

But then when I got up and I knew that danger's over, and I got my shoes, and I saw three more chutes go by, the ship was going down. And I had an escape hatch to myself right down to my left, a little lower, and another thing I forgot to check that, you should always check everything, but you're gonna be sure that it slides all right, you know, and sure you're gonna reach down there and just move it a little bit and pull it, it just disappears, you know, I'd be lucky.

So, then the ship was going down and I got my GI shoes, threw them over my shoulder, and left the ship. And you don't pull your ripcord too soon, you know. One mission I saw ship down about 5,000 feet below us on this mission and I saw this guy, he had pulled his chute too soon and it was hanging on to the stabilizer back there. And he was hanging there, this three enemy 109 attacks him, they'd shot one down, and I saw this thing blew up, and the last time I saw the guy was hanging on there.

See, he pulled the ripcord too soon. Anyway, I –

Interviewer: *The updraft got him.*

Warren: Yeah, that's right, he – that German, or the German shot him down, he were on enemy lines that day, they shot the, they blew the airplane up and he was gone.

Anyway, that one bailed out, and then I got to thinking about, just started descending, I got thinking about that story I wrote you.

Interviewer: *Okay, now, Warren, we're gonna take just a minute to break, and then I'm gonna come back to where you're descending out of the airplane.*

Warren: That's right, yeah.

(Break)

Interviewer: *Today is still February 13th, 2007, and I'm visiting with Warren Taylor, and he's going to share a little bit more about as he parachuted out of the plane that was going down, that was damaged and was going down.*

Okay, Warren, you are drifting down to the ground in your parachute. Did you wait until it was the right time to pull the ripcord?

Warren: Oh, yeah, I sure did, yeah.

Interviewer: *Okay. Now you had an interesting thing to tell us about when you were in junior college, and about a story you wrote, so you want to tell about that?*

Warren: Oh, yeah, the last semester the teacher she said write about 700 letter – or word short story with character; course I didn't know what she meant about character, but I wanted – I wrote, "Johnny See the Hero" one, two, I never even read his, you know. But I was interested in aero warfare. The setting was in France, World War I, they was flying these old cardboard airplanes, that's all they had, and I was a pilot in there.

Well, my first mission up, on account of the Germans, and I was defeated, I was shot down, I bailed out. Most of this story that I wrote was about the – was about while I was descending, see. And I was concerned about what was that, how I'd be, I knew I was dead, I would be shot, bayoneted, or what, and I was going through all those for, and –

Interviewer: *That's in your story?*

Warren: That's in my story, I'm gonna tell you now, maybe they can shoot me down before I even hit the ground, they can do that. When I got down there I could be shot, they could put me in a firing squad, there'd be a bayonet over here. Went through all four of those, you know.

And even to make the sure, the way I ended the story, when I landed the parachute, safe, just to where we took off from, you know, well that was really the story.

Interviewer: *That was fiction?*

Warren: That was fiction. And this –

Interviewer: *Okay, but now you're coming out of the plane, and you pull your*

ripcord on your parachute and you're drifting down.

Warren: Yeah, right.

Interviewer: *Are you having some of the same feelings?*

Warren: Yeah, I had a lot to think about, but I thought about that some, and I [thought], "This is not fiction, this is the real thing." And that was just, think two, three, or four years before that, three, or four years before that; three years, maybe. And that's quite ironic, that there.

But here, I knew one thing, and I was in the Netherlands. And let me say, a lot of people don't realize this but World War II the Dutch underground was well known, especially by all those personnel that flew out of the Eighth Air Force in England. The Dutch underground was – they helped. You bail out in the Netherlands, they could help you.

And the way they could help you, during the war Sweden, Switzerland, Spain was neutral. If you bailed out or had a crash landing in Sweden or Switzerland you are interred for the duration. You live in hotels, live the duration out, and your own, your particular government would pay the bill, see, that's what they do.

So, there's so much air traffic across the Netherlands, to and from the German industry, that there's many odds of having to bail out over the Netherlands. So, I'm about to land in this, and I didn't, coming down the chute I didn't see any Germans but there was a group of people, mostly – I didn't know what a senior citizen was then, but they were older people, and 10 to 11 year old kids, about 20 of them, rushing out to help me.

And I noticed my back, it didn't smart a little where that flack had hit me but it hurt a little bit, but anyway when I hit the ground it was away from the Dutch coast, I was glad of that. It was a high wind, the east wind going, I was proud of that because it didn't – it kept me away from the North Sea.

You get in the North Sea you wouldn't last 20 minutes, 15 minutes in there and you'd freeze to death, especially in the winter time. And these people running out to help and I – it's where that parachute took me. They always told us how you take the air out, how you take the air out of the chute to stop it.

You take two or three of the shroud lines and pull them and you

can spill it, what they call. So, I hit the ground, I didn't have time for that, that parachute, that high wind, it took me, and I was trying to spill it and couldn't, and it ripped my wrist watch off, ripped my a gash in my hand and my whole forearm there.

Was that fast, six inch of snow on the ground you hit something and it tore that off, that smarted a little bit. When I finally got it stopped all these people run out. And they'd been there before, two of the older guys; they come help me get out of all this stuff I had.

Interviewer: *How were they, too young?*

Warren: Oh, they were, these were senior, older men; most of them older men, older women. I saw two or three girls that had skirts all made out of American parachutes that was just white. The German parachutes was eggshell, a kinda tan looking, and they didn't have any of them, but some of them had used that silk.

Anyway, these two old men, they didn't say anything, come out and help me get out of the chute harness and all that heated suit out. And he got the heated suit out and he come around, and he was saying something, he showed me on the back of it that blowed about that big of a spot about that big around on my back where that shrapnel hit.

It felt pretty good, and he didn't rub that – he rubbed that one piece of flack in there, so I didn't have any sticking so it wasn't too bad. But my wrist, he got a little – he looked at it, but nothing. He had to get out of there and leave, they took the parachute, and my heated suit, all that with them. And all these people, they were really, really nice to me.

I had an escape kit, I took it out, wanted to know where I was. I had an escape kit compass and what I needed to do is go north, see, but I also found a packet of allied currency, \$1,500.00. Now never in these briefings has our military ever told us that we had this money to give to some of these people, but don't let the Germans at it, they'd never mentioned that, never, not one time.

But that morning when I was getting ready for the mission, getting the guts of the guns, you know where you take, the guts of a 50 caliber machine gun is about 12, 14 inches long and about 2 inches square, and that's the bolt, boy, I said, "That's the whole thing."

They always had them in a little old shack covered with oil and

greased, and you had wipe all that off or it'd freeze up there. Anyway, I started getting ready and I heard one of the guys – see, it's pitch dark, and one guy says, "My, Warren, if you get any of that," you know what I'm talking about, these bills, "Be sure you do right the thing, will you; and if you do, we don't know who got it, but it's best not to have the Germans have it. If you can't, destroy it or do something with it, if you can't give it to the right people."

But here I had it in that escape kit of mine, I had that packet of seven, it was \$1,500.00, I knew – I didn't count it, I couldn't count, but I'd had heard them say that's how much it was if you ever got one.

Interviewer: *Did every crew member have that?*

Warren: No, no. Nobody, I didn't know I even had it.

Interviewer: *Oh, so they just picked out one of you?*

Warren: Well, a lot of them might have had it like me, but when you – when there's a lot of activity, like going to Berlin or Scheinfeld–being targets, well, I imagine they know that you cross, sometimes you cross over that country and come back. They might have just had one or two, you never knew. It might just be here and there, see.

It just so happened that I was the one that had that money, that \$1,500.00.

Interviewer: *So, they just picked out individuals –*

Warren: Not individuals, they just –

Interviewer: *Randomly.*

Warren: Randomly, yeah, once in a while. They didn't do that all the time. They knew that a mission to Berlin would be bad, they knew that there'd be a lot of losses, see. Yeah, it was fast, though. You didn't get to know anybody very long, they would be there, and then they're gone; they were shot down, they gone. New guys come in.

It was, kept flying right into the heart of the German Luftwaffe. It's really something for American people to have been real proud of; here we was, we did not know anything about warfare, we had a good navy, good navy, probably all the money congress voted in was navy because that's where a lot of our interest was at that

time.

But anyway, this \$1,500.00 was just random here and there, but they knew this mission to Berlin –

Interviewer: *Was bad.*

Warren: With somebody, yeah, they might have, I don't know, it had to be, I might have been the only one, but maybe everybody had that, see, in that [kit].

But I went from there, my wrist hurt me quite a bit, but what I need to do now is – I didn't see any Germans. I got to thinking, and I couldn't figure out why I didn't see any Germans. Then later on one thing came to me years later, this is about five, six months before D-Day, the Germans were all up on the coastline there expecting allied upsurge somewhere. That's where most all these Germans were.

And it wasn't the day the Germans were – the Luftwaffe, they was none of them, I was fortunate then, I didn't see any them. So, what you gotta do, you travel the countryside and you hope that the underground will see you and stop.

Interviewer: *Warren, did you blend in? Did you look like everybody else?*

Warren: No, no, I didn't. I had this, we had a tan – I had the coverall uniform on, they knew what I was, you know, American average, they knew that, they'd seen enough of them.

Interviewer: *So, the people of the Netherlands where you were knew immediately when they saw you that you were –*

Warren: They probably did.

Warren: The canals, them in Holland, we call it, the Netherlands, I back up about 15 feet and hit the run, and jump across it and just one foot dragged the water, see, that's how wide they were. I crossed a couple of those and then I stopped at a house, I remember, and go in there, and they'd talk to me, and then I'd leave.

Went to two, three more, and I went to another one but he slammed the door in my face, you know. And later on I went out and I was sitting on the –

Interviewer: *Now wait a minute, when you'd go to the door did they feed you or did they just dismiss you or –*

Warren: Well, no, then they didn't do nothing. That one didn't, slammed the door, didn't do nothing.

Interviewer: *Yeah, I know but you said that you went to –*

Warren: Well, this one I'm gonna tell you now, I was sitting there next to this canal, oh, about a couple blocks down there's this house. And I could hear a faint conversation going on, couldn't understand what it was, and talking. So, I crossed that canal and went down there.

And over there their barns are attached to their houses like our garages are. And I went round to the back and I heard all the noise, talking, and I opened the door there, and it was the barn there was a big, tall stack of big hay there, and there's about a dozen or more boys and girls about 10, 11, 12 years old.

Well, they was having a big party, pulling Irish potatoes, just all having a big game of it. Snow on the ground, snowing, it was snowing the whole time, freezing now, it was miserable. Anyway–

Interviewer: *Were you cold if you only had your coveralls on?*

Warren: Oh, yeah, them were thin. I remember I was cold, yeah. I was cold. And those kids they saw me, well they stopped. And approached them and I said, "I'm American, does any of you speak English?" Didn't hear nothing. So, I got – I had a map, had a fantastic map about 2 or 3 by 3 feet; you unfold it or unravel it, was silk, and had just everywhere I'd be on both sides there, wherever you'd bailed out, I wanted to know where I was.

They didn't – I couldn't understand what they was saying, I took that map and I spread it on top of that hay, boy, all those kids – they run over there, and right across the top, the Netherlands, in big, black, letters right across the top of it. Boy, they got excited. They saw their name, the Netherland, and they were proud to see their country, that Netherlands.

And they knew exactly what I wanted to – all their fingers went right there to the one spot, and I did not want, I tell you what, I did not want to remember the name of that little town, because I knew if I was apprehended by the Germans and they knew them, and knew, that they had this, you know, they might force me to tell them where, who, "where was this at"? All I remember, the name started with a "B", of course it didn't make any difference, they showed me, "here I am".

First thing I heard someone walking down from the door inside, and this lady, she had a print dress on, and she looked about 15 years older than me; she would fall between 40, 45 maybe, something like that. And she comes down there, and I got up to meet her, and she said, "Welcome, come with me."

She spoke perfect English, perfect English, she said, "Come with me." And I followed her into the house, and she says, "You know I've helped many boys just like you. I've helped many of them. And tell you what, you can't stay here, you've got to go. You don't have long to stay, you've got to go because my husband will be here shortly anytime."

And she looked me right straight in the eye and said, "And he is not one of us." And then she said again, "He is not one of us." So, I thought about this \$1,500.00 then, now if have it.

I was only 21; I didn't know as much as these 16, maybe 17 year old boys nowadays, we didn't – we never even go anywhere before the war, seemed like. I worried about, sometimes, I should have given that to her, see. Anyway, she said to me, "You come over here." And went to the big, plate-glass window, she gestured out there, said, "You go out there, you stay up to three hours, don't stay any longer. If nothing happens, go your way."

She says, "Maybe an hour, or so, there'll be two men come by." She described how they'd be, you know, old, old, everyone's old over there then. All the young ones is –

Interviewer: *In the army.*

Warren: Army, yeah. And then she says – they come by there, she says, "Don't speak to them, don't approach them. You keep them in sight, stay away from them." Well then I knew, what I knew was, well, this the Dutch underground, see, and that mean – we was talking about patriotism and nationalistic pride, that lady had it; she risking her very neck what she was doing.

And her husband was not a part of it, because he didn't have the guts. And I got to thinking then, the reason I didn't give her this money is if there was the Gestapo, or a German would come and they'd find that money, or if he knew it someway. Now I satisfied my mind I did right by not giving that to her because it might jeopardize her life with that money.

They catch her with all that \$1,500 that's like \$15,000; at that

time that's like \$15,000 this \$1,500. So, she looked at my back there, and she said, "Well, it's not very deep, I don't think it will bother you", but then she let me out the side door, bid me the – told me the best, and I went up there, snowing again, wind blowing, it was cold.

And one of them little bushes; you can't see any trees in the Netherlands, big bush there. And I didn't have a watch, it were gone, see. And I waited, I'd just guess about a little over a hour, and sure these two kinda came by. They ignored me. Then I sorta walked; sometime like a block away from them, even further, sometime I'd get a little closer; just following them.

We'd been going about a little hour, maybe an hour and a little bit over, to my left on the horizon, snow covered horizon, I saw were five German troops, and then eight or ten more, 15 more, there was about 20, 25 of them, I'd guess. Just all spread out along there, they were, they knew I was there.

So, that ruined everything. It was about the afternoon, close to 5:00 p.m., I'd guess. More sun there, you couldn't tell what. And there's a herd of dairy cattle, I'd guess they come up to be milked, probably, and I just got right in the middle of all this, about 15, 20 head of them, I got in with them.

And one of those German wasn't 50 yards from me, he come by there, see, they all scattered out along there. But see, last I saw those two men, they were gone, my chances were gone too.

I knew I was a prisoner of war for the duration if I had my best chance –

Interviewer: *To get out.*

Warren: Was gone. It was cold, and I left – it was getting dark, and I went to another house and barn, and they had a little tool shed back along this barn, it was snowing and I got in there, stayed there overnight. And that was the third day in March, that first day. And the next morning, that was the fourth, I guess.

Anyway, I left there that morning and started, I wanted to keep going north, I knew I wanted to go north where I could get closer to the channel up there where everybody was. So, as I, that time I hesitated this morning where to go by, I decided well, I'll go by just like I did before. And just before noon this guy come along and pushed a bicycle, and he started – he wasn't talking to me, I was talking to him.

And I was in a hurry, we'd heard a lot of stories, everybody had bicycles, you know, a lot of times you could get out there and they'd give you a bicycle. What you need to do is go to Spain; that's the underground will get you, if you go Spain you can go home. You go England, you go home, it'd be over. Well, I was told if you cross the Spanish border, first one you see, tell them you want the nearest American Consulate, see, you could go home.

I knew one guy, one time in prison camp, he'd never forgot it, he even rode a bicycle. Over there they had these, later on they had these brakes on the handle like they do here, when I growing up we had mechanical brakes, see. And he wasn't used to those brakes, and he could see the Pyrenees Mountains over there.

He was a mile, less than a mile off the Spanish border with this German column marching up that street, and he's going down this hill and them German's are not gonna get out of your way, see, you get out of their way; they're rulers, they're in charge. He got to them, he tried to slow down, he hit two, locked the wheel and it threw him just into those Germans, and then he became a prisoner of war that way because he just, he got unlucky.

Anyway, that next morning -

Interviewer: *And now you're seeing this guy on the bicycle, and you're talking to him.*

Warren: Yeah, yeah. And he wasn't talking, he gestured me to go with him, which, I followed him and went to his house. His wife gave me some hot milk; they heat the milk, they heat it, drink it warm. Give me a little of that, you know, and I was, well, I laid down there on a quilt she gave me there, and I was awakened, oh, sometime later, and the German Gestapo and a Dutch policeman came in there.

This old man had called - he didn't call them, he called the Gestapo man. I knew, later on he'd come in there and he got me up, this Dutch policeman, he was Dutch military anyway, he come to see if I had a weapon, I didn't have a weapon, so then the Gestapo, he was real nice, and he spoke good English, you know, and this guy that, this old man, he'd called him, he was really one of them, he'd called this Gestapo to turn me in, and boy, he was really happy.

Anyway, this Gestapo, he took me out his car, he had a little round hat on, black with narrow edge on it, and this car had a big old, looked like a tank, hot water tank strapped on the side, and had

sacks of, burlap sacks full of woodchips, and this car were running on woodchips somehow. And he'd put me in the car and he had a driver there, and he was nice, he was nice to me, he said, "For you the war is all over." As if I didn't know it, see.

Anyway, he took me to this little village there, took me in that village and there I waited for some time, that's all this.

Did you ever see, my favorite war picture, "Where Eagles Dare"? You ever see that? That's a good movie. I remember in that Clint Eastwood and, what's his name, was rode in this motorcycle sidecar, yeah, well I heard this one coming down the cobblestone street, looked through the window, this two Luftwaffe, German Luftwaffe, it was the air force, see.

They was coming in for me. They pulled up, screeched to a halt out in front, these double doors leading out to the city hall, they burst through there, and one of them had a burp gun, the other one of them had a Mauser, that's right, with a bayonet on the end of them. They swarmed in there, he took that burp gun and charged it right in my stomach, he charged it and looked me straight, and I know they got behind me and see if I had a weapon, and I didn't.

And then he hit me in the back with the butt of his rifle, from here to there, up the wall I went hurt, it hurt little bit. And then I got up. They put me in this sidecar. And one drove the motorcycle, and the other of them stood with the burp gun behind me, stood behind me. And we went, it was getting dusky; late, we went all night. It was in the dark on that motorcycle sidecar.

And I remember looking to the left the water on, and it was probably along the North Sea coast, somewhere. Anyway, just about nearly daylight we could saw a sign there, what was the name of the capital of the Netherlands, what is that big city?

Interviewer: *I don't know.*

Warren: I can't believe I forgot that. Anyway, that was a big city, the biggest city in the Netherlands, I'll think of it later on. Anyway, they told me – it was getting daylight, and they put me in the city jail there. Amsterdam.

Interviewer: *Amsterdam, right.*

Warren: Amsterdam, yeah, that's what it is, yeah, Amsterdam. There was a sign there said Amsterdam, and they put me in this city jail. It was

snowing; they didn't open the door until the third day. I could see through the window up there that it was still snowing. And then that third day they woke me up, took me out, needed to go to the restroom, and they ferried me to the sidewalk out there. People could see you walking by, that's an embarrassing place to be.

Got through there and come back, and there was gone to be a little piece of black bread and feel like you get only a little creamy butter, a little square, and they had them squares of honey over that black bread, and gave me that and a cup of... it wasn't coffee, it tasted like leaves, was kinda, well, it was terrible.

Anyway, there, that third day, they took me to an airbase, the enemy 109 [airplane] airbase; enemy 109. And as we was driving up to the building I could see them, I knew there ain't one of them airplanes out there, but boy, if [the 8th Air Force] knew all them was there, they'd have a heyday with them.

Anyway, took me to there, and it was a headquarter building, was a lot of beautiful women working with the people, big headquarter building. And there was officers sitting across the table, and a German sergeant to my left, he was interpreter, and I was sitting here.

We will have, when we would go on a mission you take all your personal belongings and put them in a bag and you get them when you get back, but I left – my sister to give me a lifetime safety fountain pen, and I mean, and it was in my pocket and all out there.

And I had a comb, and now see I had hair back then. And I had to have a comb, and they take that and it had two or three teeth out of it, and they passed that comb and all these women, girls out there out there, way out there, they was little, they was laughing, and I asked that German, "Sir, what's the meaning, what's funny?" what he said, "They see that that's an American product, and they see these teeth and it's broken out." "Well, so what?" Well, [if] that [was] a German comb, none of them would be broken out.

Interviewer: *Oh, they thought their German were superior, then.*

Warren: Yeah, well they were. And then that German, I wondered what kind of rank he was, he was nice, but he didn't speak English. But I knew damn well that he could speak English because it's a German officer and they were educated, see. They weren't a nine day wonder, they were educated.

And he was real nice; I asked this German, "Sergeant what rank is he?" He smiled, he said, He hesitated and said, "Well," he says, "In your military you have stars," I said, "Yeah," he said, "He's one." A one star general, that's what he was, yeah. He asked me for the fountain pen, in German, he didn't speak – he wanted to know if he could have it, but I said, no. He took it, he wrote me out a receipt; give me a receipt for it.

Interviewer: *Tell me about the \$1,500 where did you lose that?*

Warren: Oh, I didn't – you know what, I was sitting on one of the banks, one of these canals and I knew that it would probably be, I couldn't be able to – it didn't look like I was gonna meet anybody, so I wadded up, and there's mud along that canal, dug a little hole with my hand, and stuck that down and buried it right there. So, maybe, somebody maybe found that later on and they'll wonder where that comes from, you know.

Interviewer: *Well, I kept sitting here thinking that he's gonna tell us that they searched you and found it.*

Warren: Yeah, they said be sure to don't do this; be sure you don't. Anyway, to make a long story short, I never heard [or] seen any of my, I didn't know any of them, my crew members. They took me up the railroad station, and there they all was.

Interviewer: *All of your old?*

Warren: All of them, I didn't know them, I told them rude, I didn't, I wasn't seeing too much gratification, I wasn't gratified to see the men there because –

Interviewer: *Someway or another you didn't like them.*

Warren: No, I didn't. They were not there, I didn't know. One of them was a bald turret gunner, and he was cussing a pilot out because they didn't get along, and it wasn't good at all.

Interviewer: *So, they didn't have the camaraderie in their unit that you did.*

Warren: No, they didn't, I could see it was what was wrong with it, and I didn't like them.

Interviewer: *Okay, now we're gonna leave right here, we're gonna stop a minute because she telling us that it's time.*

Warren: Yeah, okay.

(Break)

Interviewer: *Interview with Warren Taylor on February 13th, 2006. And Warren, we're talking about your reuniting now with that crew that you were stuck with and you're at this railroad station.*

Warren: Yeah, in the –

Interviewer: *In the Netherlands.*

Warren: Yeah, in the Netherlands. So, then they put me and them in the box cars and we were sent to Dulag Luft.

Interviewer: *Okay. Now, how many of the crew members were there in the –*

Warren: Oh, there were nine of them there; they all made it, nine of them.

Interviewer: *Every one of them.*

Warren: Yeah.

Interviewer: *So, now, you're the tenth so that's ten of you?*

Warren: Yeah, and we went to Dulag Luft, an interrogation center. It's out on the outskirts of Frankfurt. All our airmen when they were shot down would go there and the Germans would interrogate them. They'd take you in there and the German wanted to try to find some information but all you do is tell them your name, rank, and serial number. Oh, he was [inaudible], he lived in Brooklyn in New York and he knew all about the baseball games. And he had two or three big black books about that thick, about foot and a half long and a foot wide. And he went through that and he said, oh, yeah, you were from Van Buren and you were in this county in Arkansas.

And yeah, and you went to Little Rock and he knew all that about the city. He knew you went to California, he knew all about that.

Interviewer: *He was very intelligent.*

Warren: Yeah. Let me know, they told us back before, in briefing, they told us now, you'll be briefed, remember you'll tell your name, rank, and serial number. They'll tell you a lot of stuff, telling you, letting you know how much they know.

Interviewer: *How did he know all that?*

Warren: They knew all that, the Germans. The Germans, yeah, they got that

over here –

Interviewer: *No, I'm saying –*

Warren: – they had spies over here probably.

Interviewer: *Okay, but how did he know? Did you tell him where you were from?*

Warren: Well, one thing, my dog tags, Warren Taylor and he's a protestant and Van Buren, Arkansas –

Interviewer: *Oh, okay. So, your dog tags told him enough information?*

Warren: Yeah, he knew. He knew he had information from a lot of them, they had spies over there and Nazi sympathizers. But then he was trying to find out military something, what year, what group, what all this and all that but you just say, name, rank, and serial number. And he was pretty nice about it and he left and I could hear him next door and he was going on to this officer talking about another GI you know. And he [this other GI] was wrong, they told him don't say nothing, name, rank, and serial number but this German would ask him something and he'd say, "Well, beat the hell out of me." Well, that's what they did.

He kept saying smart things like that, you know. So, it sounded like they beat him up pretty good but all you did and they told us "name, rank, and serial number", see. And, you know, about six days there and then –

Interviewer: *Did they interrogate you every day?*

Warren: Oh, no, that's just – yeah, a little bit every day, yeah. And then you sit in the that cell there see –

Interviewer: *Were you in a cell by yourself, Warren?*

Warren: Yeah, oh, yeah.

Interviewer: *Did you have your teammates; your crew members –*

Warren: No, they didn't, they'd send them in there individually, I didn't see much more of them. However, we did go, that day we left there and I remember when the troops were on this train, the holes, kind of like cattle cars, you know. And, I remember we were going, I don't know where we were going but I remember once I saw a sign with the name of some city on this railroad. It said Pilsen, that was in Poland, a town

in Poland. So, I thought, heck we're going to Poland. Anyway, another day or two later I wound up in Stalag Luft VI, which is located up in the extreme north east of Germany near those Baltic countries.

But, we didn't know at that time, but we were in Poland on the Polish side of Germany. That was Stalag Luft VI.

Interviewer: *Right, now. Tell me about before you get in the box cars, you're being treated fairly well?*

Warren: There's no, no, not that. They didn't they give you anything to eat and then –

Interviewer: *Oh, I was gonna ask you what you got to eat.*

Warren: No, they didn't, ignore that. I'd already started starving see.

Interviewer: *Okay, so, now, you're sitting here six days in that cell and you're not getting anything to eat.*

Warren: Oh, no, they gave you a little ersatz coffee; they call that and a piece of black bread, that's about all. Yeah, and it wasn't, too we didn't have time to get hungry. In my escape kit I had some food that was concentrated food and maybe a chocolate flavor something. You'd eat one of those, it's a food concentrate is what it was, so we wasn't starving that early, we wasn't starving too bad, see. Because what you was getting wasn't good anyway. But they took us up to Stalag Luft VI and I remember one thing that happened, is a villatone [sic], you all go with villatone, you know.

Interviewer: *Okay, and this is after you're in the prison camp?*

Warren: Yeah, up in Stalag Luft VI.

Interviewer: *Now, when you're on the box cars, what kind of box car, you said they were cattle cars?*

Warren: Yeah, I saw them.

Interviewer: *Did it smell like cattle?*

Warren: Some of them did, some of them they would just pack you in like a herd of cattle, they would cram you in there, they just treat you like –

Interviewer: *No, how many of you, you said your whole crew, were there others?*

Warren: Oh, there were, I didn't see them many more for a long time. There was others, yeah, a bunch of them was with me just different ones, when we went up there.

Interviewer: *So, in a box car how many would you think was in there?*

Warren: Oh, they'd fill it up, maybe 50, 60 to 100, whoever they could cram in there.

Interviewer: *And you didn't have any place to lay down or anything?*

Warren: Oh, no, you didn't. Might sit down anyway, that was just a few days we were up to Stalag Luft VI and that was pretty, well, it wasn't brand new but it was a newer one. And I remember they [the prisoners] were digging a tunnel and the latrine up there and we each one of us, some of us had to go, it was digging that tunnel and it was big it looked like a two by six along board on top all of that stuff, you can imagine the smell whatever that was. Oh, it was terrible under there. We would crawl along this two by six over there and they'd already chiseled out the foundation hole to go through there.

Interviewer: *Okay, Warren, I'm getting confused here, come back. You prisoners began to dig a tunnel.*

Warren: Oh, when we got there they'd already –

Interviewer: *They had already started the tunnel.*

Warren: Oh, yeah –

Interviewer: *And they started it by the latrine?*

Warren: No, in it, went out over all that stuff, all that body waste. It was all open, it was open there, it was, you can imagine what the smell would be.

Interviewer: *But they had built the foundation, they'd already built the foundation.*

Warren: Well, no, they just tore out the foundation. The prisoners, they cut out a hole in the foundation concrete, go through there. And it's about six or eight feet out there. The fence was about 25 out there –
So, what you do, I went out there one time, then everybody, they said if you fall off in there, well forget it, we're through with you but anyway then we'd get the dirt and you'd fill your pockets full of dirt and when you got outside you'd take that dirt and throw it underneath

the building. They was on stilts, see, where you couldn't hide under it, we'd throw that dirt down there because the Germans they'd fly over and if you'd got any new dirt out there they could tell if you were digging it.

Interviewer: *Tunnel?*

Warren: Tunnel and that's what –

Interviewer: *So, you all planned to escape out of that tunnel but you only get about eight feet?*

Warren: Oh, yeah, that didn't last long. I wasn't there about two months and they never did. One morning before we left there after a hard rain a German soldier bought a couple of Russian prisoners in there to do all that kind of work, and it caved in. All that rain and it caved in and they discovered that [the tunnel]. And they come in and hauled us out there; we had to stand out there all day and all night.

Interviewer: *Because they caught you digging the tunnel?*

Warren: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Because it had caved in on itself?*

Warren: Yeah, man, they were mad about that, nothing you can do about it. Anyway, before we –

Interviewer: *What about the food in the prison camp?*

Warren: Oh, then, the food, we got some cans, big cans of fish. When you get fish, you throw the insides away, well that was canned, entrails and everything. They give that to you, paste, in a paste form. They give you some of that and black bread.

Interviewer: *And by that time, you're eating it because you're hungry?*

Warren: And by that time, we're eating. I remember one day we heard a shot, and one boy going to the latrine, they've seen him from up in this room and it's got wooden shutters. They opened up the doors the next morning, this boy got out in the playground out there, about half way out there, in the tower the German, the guard shot him in to the stomach, he laid there –

Interviewer: *Why did he shoot him?*

Warren: Well, just because he was out there, maybe he wasn't supposed to be out there. He [the German] wanted to kill somebody, he wanted to shoot him, he wanted to kill an American. He was out there by himself. He lay on the ground and he was suffering, no one was allowed to go out and see him, he lay there for nearly an hour. He lay there, I thought he was gonna die there but after about an hour the Germans did come in there and put him on a shaft and carried him out of there. The next day we were burying him and they cut a hole in the fence and we got out there and they had dug a coffin outside the fence.

I remember we got out there and I was, one of them six or eight, went over to there and watched it, you know, and covered and that. See, we had a German blanket, if you didn't have a warm blanket you'd freeze to death. But they had it wrapped around him and we started rolling him in that. I can remember seeing that boy, seeing that boy's face young and body young too. Laying there dead, you know, in this big hole. We started rolling him in and the German stopped it, they'd taken the blanket off him, they didn't want to waste that blanket.

Interviewer: *Ohh.*

Warren: Took that and then we rolled him in there and covered him all up with clay and leaves and dirt and clay soil. And I thought about that boy, it's a good thing his parents don't how he died but I guess he's still over there in the same place.

Interviewer: *In that same place. Did you know who he was?*

Warren: No, I didn't know him.

Interviewer: *Now, in the prison camp did you feel alone in the prison camp or did you make close –*

Warren: Oh, no, you make friends, you have something in common with all of them. You had a lot in common, yeah, you're close that way. That's the only thing you had.

Interviewer: *Were there different bunks and barracks?*

Warren: Oh, no, we had to be in similar barracks. They were, that place four or five of them but they wanted to put everybody in one or two, but that was all temporary we wasn't there very long. Just a very little while after that boy was buried –

Interviewer: *After the boy was killed.*

Warren: We were hearing these guns; these Russians had a big offense coming on. And all at once one day, they said, "We're moving out, we've got to evacuate because of the Russians." We'd hear the guns, when it's rain, cloudy, you can hear the guns, they were more prominent then, they were louder. So, rainy days, they were getting closer. So, they opened the gates and some of the guys they marched them out, hundreds of them they marched them out. Other hundreds they put in box cars.

And they had about two hundred, and again I was unlucky again, probably be I figured about 200, took us aside and put us in three box cars, and I wondered why. They was marched out those others, but then it took about 200, it might be a little more than 200 and put them in the three box cars, we was in there for three hours. We wound up in Port of Memoir [sic, Memel?] at that time, it was seaport on the Baltic Sea of Lithuania. If you look on the map Lithuania just out of the Baltic Sea and way out there.

Interviewer: *So, how many do you think was in your prison camp?*

Warren: There might have been 5,000, no, it was probably 4,000, maybe a little less. Maybe, I get mixed up but it was close to at least 3,000 there. But they hadn't been there very long because it was too close to Russia, it was in Poland.

Interviewer: *Now, there's only about 200 of you on the box cars.*

Warren: It run to a little bit more of that, these took us, the rest of them had left and they took me and about 200 more put us in another box, took us up to Port of Memoir, those others were still marching.

Interviewer: *Where did they march them too?*

Warren: Stalag Luft IV to another –

Interviewer: *To another –*

Warren: – prison camp.

Interviewer: *Prison camp.*

Warren: Yeah, which was the biggest but here I was one of at least 200, maybe a little more than 200 took us up to this Port Memoir [sic].

Interviewer: *The Peninsula.*

Warren: Lithuania. It's a big seaport out there in the Baltic Sea. The German Commandant out there, he told us that there's an old ship, 100 years old, they use it to haul coal from [inaudible] and they were going to put us in the hold of this ship. And was ready to march down. This German Commandant said, we've just contacted the British, the Allies, the American, the Allies were in litigation in Stockholm that this ship it pulled her anchor here and it's got American POWs on it, if anything happens it's your fault. I know there was four or five other big ships, I've never been on a ship before in my life.

And they started marching us single file and I could see way ahead of me they disappear down in it. And when I got up there looking down it was about half full. Oh, it was horrible, it was a hole with water seeping through it was a horrible poor situation. I knew it was bad. So, I got to a 50-foot ladder that went down and I got down there, this opening up here, two German guards both had burp guns and it's about four or five foot opening. I went straight down and got down there, I knew the best chance I had was to be close to that hole if anything happened. And there were two big steel posts, about three inches steel post supporting this ladder.

I wrapped my arms around that ladder there and held on. It kept filling up, oh, it was smelly, water seeping in the side, rusty and packed them in there, it was packed like sardines. It got fuller, it got worse but then we got full then they took off. Now, the Baltic sea there were Russian submarines, German submarines, and probably Americans. Mines floating in, it was a terrible place to be, that Baltic sea.

Interviewer: *And this was an old, old ship?*

Warren: Old, old ship. You know, took that thing out there and I lost track of the days. I would guess it was at least, two days, three days, it might've been just two, you're down in the hold of that ship.

Interviewer: *Wait just a minute. They had told you that if they got hit that they had told everybody that you were there on the ship.*

Warren: Told our government and our Allies. And our Allies and the Americans was on that ship, if it sunk it's your countries fault.

Interviewer: *Now, are you in a convoy?*

Warren: No, we're down in the hold of this ship.

Interviewer: *No, I mean is the ship –*

Warren: No, that's the only one of them.

Interviewer: *That's the only ship going out?*

Warren: Oh, yeah, that's the only one out there.

Interviewer: *Because I was wondering if they were using you all as bait to get –*

Warren: No, it wasn't that, it was different. I'll tell you what they was using for, I imagine later on they got those other four big ships, they probably got free exit out there. They used us but it was terrible, it was a terrible ordeal down there.

Interviewer: *Did you stay close to that ladder?*

Warren: I stayed on that and held that position. And it had a big bucket on a rope with water in it. It's being alone out there you know, and if you could grab it, just a little bit you get a little bit and it would swing it back. And if you had a chance to relieve yourself, urine, well, it's in the same buckets. And then maybe be hours later they'd send that same bucket out there again. Swing it across and you'd grab it. That's a feeble attempt.

Interviewer: *One bucket of water for about 200 men.*

Warren: Oh, well, yeah, that was even nothing we was starving for water, yeah. So, it must've been not more than two days. If you were lucky enough you get your hand in there and sloshed it in there just a little bit.

Anyway, we got the to where, it got rough.

Interviewer: The sea got rough?

Warren: The seas got rough. And then I saw one GI go up that ladder and then later on I saw three go up that way. Later on, I had no way of counting time, but I'd say a few hours, oh, yeah, I counted about seven of them. So, before it got pretty rough, it was sickening in there, so I thought I'd try that. You know, you make a lot of mistakes, that was a mistake. I went up there and boy, it was a storm going on and the waves looked like four story building, like huge. This little old ship tossing and those two German guards, boy, they were all tied up with their big lifejackets and their burp guns, and they were tied to their position there.

And I got up there, they got a hold of me, threw me down on the deck, you know. I slid along there, and that thing begin to slide, I went all the way down and I knew then that, I nearly gave up then, I knew this was all over. With the Baltic Sea I wouldn't last no time, and I can't believe that I got, at the end when my foot went over and I reached up and there was a white cord by me, not as big as my little finger, but a little thing. I grabbed a hold of that cord and held on to it. About half my body went over and then come back, and then went back over on the other side, you know.

And what that was, those Germans the rope was a cord they had themselves tied up in their positions, and they'd run this across there for their own good, that's the only thing that saved me. They got up there, they took me and threw me down on the top of that ladder. I hit my shoulder there, oh, it was painful, real bad, but anyway, they there me back in there. So, I was glad to get back down in the hold. So thankful.

Interviewer: *Okay, Warren, were you real, real scared when you're about to go over the side?*

Warren: Well, you get used to it, you had so much of that you get used to it.

Interviewer: *You get kind of numb?*

Warren: Well, you get used to it. No, you've seen so much in the combat mission, seeing guys dying, getting killed and dying. You finally get used to it, actually you feel more concerned at times. I tell you, that was a hell-hole.

Interviewer: *Are you a religious man, Warren?*

Warren: Oh, yeah, not radical. But –

Interviewer: *Were you praying all the time you were in the ship.*

Warren: Oh, no, I wasn't. Not very often.

Interviewer: *You just –*

Warren: I did one time, a little bit when I was ready to bail out and couldn't, for a few seconds there I did then. That was because I couldn't move. But later on, when you get used to all that, you don't like it, but it's –

Interviewer: *You get kind of numb –*

Warren: That's right. Yeah, you get used to it, and it's just one thing after another. But, I'll tell you they took us –

Interviewer: *So, you're back down in the hold of the ship.*

Warren: Anyway, I don't wanna spend too much time there because I don't have much time left.

Interviewer: *That's okay.*

Warren: We left there, we docked at the port there in Germany.

Interviewer: *Let me ask you, did some of the guys die down in the hold of the ship.*

Warren: There could've been, probably did, I don't know, I didn't see it but they was all in pretty bad shape when we got in there. But anyway, we got out of there and they put us in box cars and took us for, oh, I don't remember how long that was. And they put you in handcuffs to somebody next to you and you pulled up to a spot, now this is miles away from where we got out of that ship. They took us out of the boxcar with handcuffs. And some guy, he got out of those old antique handcuffs. He got where he could open those things up. And boy, that was big. When we started getting that thing unlocked there so you'd get out of your handcuffs, those Germans were furious. It was like a fury. Anyway, they put us back in there. And then they put them back on us.

Interviewer: *Put you back in where?*

Warren: In the boxcars. And then after a while, they took us back out of there. And then brought a bunch of German marines with marine bayonets and dogs. They brought them down there. And I was handcuffed to one guy. Everybody got handcuffed in pairs. They got us on the road. This culminated another horrible three-mile – they'd run us three miles up this dirt road through the pine forest. These German – young 16-year-old Germans, boy they were mean. Bayonets and dogs. And you had to run. Dogs would force you. These Germans – these kids with those bayonets, boy. And they used them.

And one would fall in the ditch and pull the other one with you, see? And I saw more than one laying there in the ditch. I don't know whether he was dead or not. He was bleeding pretty bad. This man I was attached to, he fell a couple of times. And I had to pull him up. Well, that was a horrible three-mile run. It was –

Interviewer: *So, if your buddy fell in a ditch that you were shackled to –*

Warren: If I fell down, but people – we all were handcuffed.

Interviewer: *Then they just go ahead and kill you and go on?*

Warren: Oh, they just – you had to keep moving. It's those dogs on you. You've got them bayonets. You had to – if you possibly could, you had to get up and go. Finally, that horrible day was over. Up on a grassy slope at the top there, we stopped up there. We were all out on the ground. The Germans said, "Anybody raise up off their knees, they'll be shot." They fired every half hour – the Germans fired a volley of 30-caliber machine guns over your head every once in a while. But we were right outside the Stalag Luft four. That was the biggest one, four. And we went in. We stayed there all night on the ground. It was terrible. I could go further there.

But anyway, to make a shorter story, we were in a muddy area there in the Stalag Luft 4. Didn't even have tents. Had tents in some of them. And that was Stalag Luft 4. That was the biggest one. And to shorten it all, close to the end, we started on what they call a death march. An 88-day death march. The last 88 days of the war. It was three months, you might say.

Interviewer: *Where are they going to march you to?*

Warren: Oh, yeah. They marched us. No place. We knew the Russians – we knew the – we could hear warfare, we knew, around. They were marching us to keep away. To keep us from being liberated. All the time, Hitler was trying to make peace with Americans. And I understand after the war was over, that he threatened our government if they didn't go along with his demand and what he wanted.

Interviewer: *Demands?*

Warren: Yeah. They were going to execute 50,000 American ex-POWs. Because they had – that's about all they had airmen. Well, you know –

Interviewer: *So, they were trying to blackmail our government.*

Warren: Oh, yeah. Which it didn't work. They didn't do it. The German high command didn't lie. They wouldn't do that. They knew. But they started us on – that was the most – talk about hell for 88 days. That's bitter cold.

Interviewer: *Are you still shackled?*

Warren: Oh, no. We're not shackled now. We're just –we are like cattle. They had Germans with machine guns following us. Herding us like cattle. Just like we were cattle. Right out on the road in the snow. And it's cold – still cold, bitter cold. And I could –

Interviewer: *Did you still have a blanket?*

Warren: Oh, we still got one blanket. Yeah. And I mean, during that, I made another big mistake. They stopped us on the banks of the river. I believe it was the river that separated Germany and Poland. I believe whatever river that was. And we had lice – long hair and lice. There were lice about to eat us up. Then I didn't have a haircut or a shower for a year, nearly a year-and-a-half. You can imagine what kind of shape. So, when the clothes were tattered and torn and there wasn't much left in your shoe – and some of us – including myself – these lice, they were bothersome. So, we had all this stream of good clear water, chunks of ice flowing in. It was fast.

I took off my shoes, all the clothes off and got in that river there. Now, if I had to do it over again, I wouldn't do that. Because when you take your clothes off, if something happened to them, you're dead. Those were the clothes you had. So, I thought maybe we'd get in and wash those lice off. But it – those lice, you couldn't hardly kill one of them. They stuck on. It was cold. But anyway, we didn't stay in there very long. We came out. Now, on that march, every day – some days, you could find a barn you could sleep in for the night. If you didn't, you slept outside up against a wall or in the snow. They had snow. That's the best you can do.

You'd like to get in the barn and then get in the loft. Some had a loft. You'd get up there and it's all right. But if you got down below there, no one can move. You get in with some guy who had to relieve himself, and that dripped down over here. And you've just cuss those guys all the time. They couldn't hold it –

Interviewer: *They couldn't help it.*

Warren: No.

Interviewer: *Now, are they feeding you at all?*

Warren: Oh, no. Very little. They feed us –

Interviewer: *On that 88 days, how much food do you –?*

Warren: Oh, they didn't give us any. Some days, they didn't give us nothing. The German farmers, we discovered, they would dig up this wide six or eight foot wide trench. And you'd see mounds of earth. And you knew they had – the winter, that's where they stored their carrots, and potatoes, and beets. Stuff they stored, they did that six or eight feet deep. Put straw down and dump all that stuff in. It'd keep all year. And sometimes, we'd dig a hole 18 inches down there. And you were hoping there'd be a potato or carrot. They used human waste for their fertilizer. They use that on carrots this big around. They use it all. And you dig down in there. And you could find a carrot or potato.

Sugar beets, you had to leave them alone. Boy, they'd give you a lot more diarrhea than you had. When we were in the hull of that ship, it's a good thing no one had any diarrhea. We didn't have any food in the system.

Interviewer: *So, in one way, that was a blessing.*

Warren: It was. Yeah. But you could dig down and get some of those. They'd sometimes feed you soup made out of carrot tops, potato tops. And there'd be worms sometimes around it. One night, we stopped. And as we all know, a hog will not eat a raw potato. They always say hogs will eat anything. But they don't like raw potatoes. I knew that growing up. They'd root stuff out of the ground. But they'd eat the top. They wouldn't eat that raw potato. But we came to one big farm there. And they had a huge tank at the end of that. And it was like a water tank, but a huge one. And they put the culled potatoes in that and steamed them. And give them culled potatoes to the hogs and they would eat them.

And one night, we got there. It's dark. We go by there and they give us a double handful of that stuff out of there. Boy, that was good. It was warm, no telling what was in there. But we ate that. Boy, it was good.

Interviewer: *Now, how many of you now are left on this march?*

Warren: Oh, there were different – you see, there were thousands of them. But they were in about 500 to 1,000 –

Interviewer: *Clumps?*

Warren: – bunches. With a bunch of – all those Germans had you scattered around. And that's all. You see this bunch and you're on this march. You had to – and on this march, you had to sleep. You hoped to get in a barn. And one time, there was one Red Cross parcel that I ever saw

over there. When we left Stalag Luft 4, there were 10,000 parcels outside with that much snow on top of them. They wouldn't let us have it. And after we moved out of there, the Germans moved in there and got them. But we had one parcel divided against four of us. I got a bar of K Bouquet soap and a D-Bar. A D-Bar is what the GI has in his pack. It's a chocolate flavored food type. It really was good.

And I'd been saving that. I carried it around. And that one night, it was snowing. I got up in that loft. I had good tall hay up there. There was a big hole of thatched roof. A big hole. And I could see the snow through there. It was a good warm place. And I got that D-Bar out. I thought, "Well, I'll just taste a bit." But I sat there, and I ate all of that. And I worried, because I did that. But you know that was a terrible, terrible ordeal. And they moved us on to the next barn. But one time, I was laying there, and I got to thinking about going up that ladder. And that whole ordeal. Well, I knew seven of them went up there all at once. And they didn't come back down.

Interviewer: *You were the only one that came back down.*

Warren: The only one. And I didn't – well, if I'd known that – I wasn't very bright.

Interviewer: *Well, the fact that you're not having enough to eat and you're not getting enough sleep affects the way you think.*

Warren: Yeah. That might be. One time on that – with the peril of the Baltic Sea with the bitter cold, we hear guns in this next village out of – a civil war went on with Germans and Russians, and all around us. And we – I guess I don't know what day it was. But we heard that. Boy, we were on. And the next day, we came to that city that had that fight. And there were six – eight or –

Horse were laying dead out there in the square with the feet sticking up. And boy, I got up out there. One of the German guards, he loaned me his knife. And I cut a – you know how you plug a watermelon? Well, the hindquarter on a horse is – I cut about a two-inch out of that and dug it down. And then took that knife and pulled it out. Then we gave him back his knife. I put that in my pocket. Another guy had done the same thing. We knew we didn't have time to build a fire. We stopped maybe the next day and started to build a fire. And we couldn't. And then the third day, we got time to build a fire and put that on a stick and held it over. It just warmed it up. Finally had to eat all that raw.

And another time, me and another guy caught a chicken up in the loft.

We took the – I hated to kill him. But the chicken went – we were hungry. And we killed that chicken. Didn't have enough food and we pulled it apart. Stuck those parts in the pockets. And then we'd get out to walking. Boy, you could smell that. You wouldn't believe it. It got to smelling. The chicken carried around. We didn't have time to cook it. But we finally had to eat it raw. But four or five days later, we didn't get sick. The whole time on that march, we were freezing and starving. We never had a cold. Didn't have a cough. The Germans were coughing and sneezing all the time.

Interviewer: *Why?*

Warren: I don't know.

Interviewer: *Why didn't you all get one?*

Warren: We didn't. Some of them died. They died, and they carried them out. I remember seeing one guy, he was stiff as a board. He died during the night in one of those lofts up there. I don't know what he died of. But there he was – we lost quite a few of them on that march. But I'll tell you –

Interviewer: *That's real interesting that you all didn't have bad colds, or cough, or pneumonia. But they did.*

Warren: That's right. We were starving. We didn't have enough to eat. Didn't have – it was tough. But we'll skip all that. It was a lot. That was a hellacious 88-day march –

Interviewer: *Well, it was.*

Warren: I don't know how many died. But I was –

Interviewer: *Did you still have somebody close to you? Do you still have a buddy?*

Warren: Oh, you have these guys. Yeah. You just know them. And –

Interviewer: *I was wondering if you felt alone in all that.*

Warren: Oh, no. You weren't alone. No. You had plenty of help that way.

Interviewer: *Did you take up for each other?*

Warren: Oh, yeah. Everybody was great. But they're all in the same boat. When they die, – most of them would die. I look around and think I made it five years and I am five years older now. And most – the ones

I knew, they're gone. If they didn't get killed, they're gone. I've had some unlucky parts. But overall, I was –

Interviewer: *Very fortunate.*

Warren: I've been fortunate. But let me skip over some of that. That's the last 88 days of the war. We knew it was getting close. I remember this –

Interviewer: *Did you know your allies were getting close to you?*

Warren: Oh, yeah. We knew this. We knew the Americans and the – yeah. America was in charge by then. I remember we were – we had gone to a place, a barn. We found a cache – a deposit of potatoes. And we had an old rusty can. We built a fire. And in this old rusty can, we put water. There was a well there. We got water and put it in. And we got these potatoes. And somebody had some kind of knife made out of tin, I think. Wouldn't even peel them. Cut them up. Put them – we'd stew them hot. We sat there all day. The mortars – I didn't know what a mortar was. I wasn't in the – didn't know what a mortar was. It's hell. They'd fire over and explode over there. They'd be going.

We could even hear heavy machine gun fire. We sat out there all day and stewed those potatoes. And the next couple days, we went on. And I knew the last day. Once in a while, a guard would be gone. They began to leave, you know. And that day at midday, there were five P-51s, the Mustang – the greatest fighter plane to come out of the war. The American P-51. They're the ones that were better than the Germans. By the time the war was over, it was defined, P-51. And the five of them up to – well, they zoomed us. And it was so – and then we knew then that –

Interviewer: *And you didn't have any guards left by that time?*

Warren: Oh, there were a few of them left. But we knew then – when those P-51s went over – what they were going to do. They let us know it was about over. And we marched on there. Two Germans would be in a foxhole standing and sitting in there with a machine gun. He's a German Wehrmacht. They were – but they wouldn't use them, the guns all along there. And I'll make it short.

Interviewer: *No, that's okay.*

Warren: No use to all that stuff. But what counts on the armistice. The first GI I saw was standing in the middle of the road with a .45. Boy, that really – he looked a lot better than Betty Grable looked that day. A lot better. Of course, a loaf of bread would look – anyway, he stood

there. Boy, he looked good. And I went up to him. And I'll tell you what. I just – I couldn't control myself. Right to his left was a Jeep carrying the American flag. Well, I'll tell you. That – [chokes up]

Interviewer: *Meant a lot to you, didn't it?*

Warren: Shoot. It sure did. Anyway, they took us up there. And we smell good cooking. And – one German had a little shed. And he was making these sausages and a big long tank had two German police dogs tied up in the corner. And they had these rings of lunch meat. They weren't done yet. And I got two or three bunches of them on my arm. Oh, my. I'm starved out. Liverwurst or whatever it was. These guys come in and grab me and it ran all over my face. I got out with one of them. That's how hungry we were. But anyway, to cut it all down, the first thing we had to get something to eat. But then the GIs had to delouse us.

The GIs had a – we come up there in the field. And they had a big oven out of a German bakery. And they'd take our clothes. We didn't have any – [inaudible]. The war is still going on around half a mile away. They took our clothes off and they went and hung them in this bakery. This oven. And I'm waiting for them about 15 minutes. They were getting mighty hot. There was about a three-foot-high cone of roasted lice. Then we'd get out there. And the GIs, "Boy," they said, "you boys smell just like hell. You smell terrible." They couldn't – I couldn't believe we were smelling. We never had a bed. I didn't have a hat or hair.

I came home to see the young men going around with hair. I just couldn't hardly take that.

Interviewer: *Because you'd had to go without a haircut.*

Warren: I had a beard and lice. Oh, that was – anyway, those GIs said, "Oh, you boys stink like – it's worse –" we did smell. I guess. I didn't smell anything. We didn't have that problem at all. And they've got to spray us over with spray to kill those lice. But anyway, all through. We'll skip all that and go to – they sent us from there to –

Interviewer: *Did they give you fresh clothes?*

Warren: No, not then.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, you just put back the clothes on that you had?*

Warren: Oh, yeah. We put them on. They shipped us. They flew – they

shipped us. Went on a train to take us up to Camp Lucky Strike Le Havre, France where there's a debarkation center. But you know what? We got on a train run by GIs. And first thing you know, we were going 50 miles in the wrong direction. Boy, that made us – those dang GIs up there saying, "You boys don't know anything." And we wanted to get up there to steer the train. Anyway, the Dulag Luft had moved. They flew us up to that train place in France from Germany in a C-47. Then we took that train. Finally had to get them going in the right direction. Anyway, we went up. We go to Camp Lucky Strike and knew that's where they built us back up. I weighed –

Interviewer: *I started to say – now, when you got your first meal, you couldn't eat all you wanted, could you?*

Warren: No, you couldn't. You'd hurt. Your stomach would hurt all the time. When I got there with those GIs and we were liberated, they weighed us. I weighed 75 pounds. That's about half of what I weighed. Maybe I weighed 155.

Interviewer: *Seventy-five pounds.*

Warren: If guy weighed 200 when he started, he weighed 100. And you starve, see? And they sent us to Camp Lucky Strike tent city. And boy, they treated – it's fantastic. But you couldn't eat much. You had to eat just so much. And the doctors told us, "Your stomach is just about this big around." And you eat all this, and my stomach hurt all the time for a month. Anytime you ate, they fed us good. And they had German POWs on the chow line. They'd just give us so much. And - everybody [had guns]. Some of them had a P38, some of them had a Luger. I had a 7.65 automatic. We all had guns though. And you ran back in the mess saying, "Mehr. Mehr." That means more. And boy, they'd pile it on there.

Interviewer: *You all were getting your own back, weren't you?*

Warren: Oh, yeah. But before we'd been there about two or three days, I want to say this, General Eisenhower came in there. And this is at Camp Lucky Strike. And there's about half a dozen of us up there at the entrance part close to the mess hall. And when General Eisenhower came in there with four of these big soldiers – he came in and turned to salute. And he shook hands with all of us there. And he said - he really told how he appreciated us. Really heartening meeting with General Eisenhower. That was really something.

Interviewer: *An emotional time?*

Warren: Oh, yeah. Anyway. After 60 days, I weighed 175 to 180 pounds. I got home, and I couldn't walk the block. I had to stop and rest. But that was – that's enough of that. That's over. But I'll tell you what; I spoke in some of these schools. And I tell these kids – we're at this junior high and everything's different now. I told those junior high kids. I said, "You don't know – you don't know – you need to look at that American flag." And you look at it. I told them, "When you get –"
[Warren choking up]

Interviewer: *Because you paid the price for it, one.*

Warren: And two, you know what it means. Before I didn't understand – all of us would have served. We all wanted to get in there, see? It's not like that anymore.

Interviewer: *I know.*

Warren: These kids, I told them how important – this American flag is, you don't know what that really means. Forget about these parties. We have a two or three party system, that's good. In it's time – that's what you do – but it is that flag. If you have to go through what all of us did to celebrate, well, you're in bad shape.

Interviewer: *In the camps that you were in, did you see any of the Jewish people? Were you anywhere close to them?*

Warren: Oh, no, I didn't see any of that, no.

Interviewer: *Did they interrogate you in the camps?*

Warren: No, no.

Interviewer: *They just left you pretty well alone, didn't they?*

Warren: That's right.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Warren: Yeah, they didn't any – interrogate you first, because if they wanted to know something –

Interviewer: *At the beginning, but they didn't. I was just wondering, Y'all were treated pretty badly in your camps, but then I understand the Jews were treated –*

Warren: And like I said, I have three Purple Hearts. I had the flack in my back

of course, I was treated for it at the VA, locally. Not for my back, that cleared up pretty quick, it wasn't very deep. But, my shoulder – when the Germans threw me to back down into the hold of the ship – that hung on for about a year. But this [shoulder], I had surgery for that at the VA hospital.

Anyway, the 104th Infantry is what liberated us. Evidently, they lost a lot of information. Many of the guys that I was with, and everybody in the prison camp had at least one Purple Heart. Some, two and three. Those didn't mean nothing to us. I just don't keep anything, I don't have anything that people would be interested in, so I just didn't keep the Purple Heart. I didn't get nothing. I appreciate it all.

Interviewer: *That's okay.*

Warren: It didn't make any big deal to me. Anyway, I wasn't the only one, many of them I was liberated with had one, two, and three Purple Hearts, but they were lost.

Interviewer: *It was the 104th that liberated you?*

Warren: 104th Infantry.

Interviewer: *Now, you all don't have any identification on you, so it's just what you tell them?*

Warren: We had a dog tag.

Interviewer: *Oh, you still had your dog tag?*

Warren: Oh yeah, you keep your dog tag, that's one thing. You keep your – everybody knew that.

Interviewer: *Now, when you – how long total were you there as a prisoner?*

Warren: About nearly a year and a half.

Interviewer: *Now, when you leave there, where do you go?*

Warren: We went home. But, then we got home – by the time I got home, I weighed 175, my normal weight, it's fine. Then we got a choice – they didn't let us out of the military. We had to – they could have, but they didn't, I don't know why. Anyway, they gave me a choice of where I wanted to go. I went to Oklahoma City, they had two air bases: Tinker Air Force and then Will Rogers Field. So, I went to Will Rogers Field and they gave me a position, didn't really amount to anything.

This 1st Lt. had an office right on the apron there. I went there to his office, nice fellow, you know? We had to wait there. I hadn't been there a couple of weeks, and a lot of big shots had come through there where we were. From military – a lot of them, military traffic going through there. I come through there and I knew then I'd seen his picture on Time Magazine. It was "Howlin' Mad" Smith, that took Iwo Jima, you know – Marine general. He came in there with his wife. I had a little desk over that way from my 1st Lt. I was a staff sergeant. You gotta keep your shoes shined, you know? Shine them in the military. One thing they learn you, see?

I had a pair there, in this – "Howlin' Mad", he come over and he turned to salute – I knew who he was, I'd seen a picture. He started giving me a lecture on, "Lad, you sure – you don't know how to shine." He told me how to shine my shoes. He said, "You're putting too much polish on." He was really, really nice.

Interviewer: *Probably just making conversation with you.*

Warren: Yeah, he was. He was a full general, boy.

Interviewer: *Did you come into New York harbor when you came in?*

Warren: No, came in – I'll tell you – Patrick Henry in Virginia. You know, again, we come in across that ship five days on that thing. That was a miserable – better than that hold the last year.

Interviewer: *Better than the hold of the ship!*

Warren: They had me going into Patrick Henry there. A couple of old boys coming over there laughing at me and another guy or two that was there, looking at – seeing another flag there. I'll tell you if you'd been through what we'd been through, that flag – it means something. There was something about that. Even though we're back home, we look at that flag there and it's – something!

Interviewer: *What did you think when you first saw the shore of America?*

Warren: Oh, I felt fantastic, great. It really was. We got the call home. I felt sorry for one guy, calling – it was sad, it was sad. He called, I don't know who he was talking to. He said he had a seven-month-old daughter there and he'd been gone for two years, you know? I felt sorry for him. He just broke down and cried and left. It really broke him up. Otherwise, everything was great – the way they treated us – I'm talking what, two or three years go by, disability. I got 100 percent

disability, service connected. I'm not allowed to work anywhere.

They did all they could for me. These medals, they don't mean nothing, really, the medal of war medal. The only two or three worth anything are the Congressional Medal of Honor and the Silver Star. These other things are secondary. Of course, now the Purple Heart is alright, you see. I wasn't the only one that didn't – many of them didn't get that.

Interviewer: *You have children, Warren?*

Warren: Yeah, I've got two daughters.

Interviewer: *They would be interested maybe in your medals?*

Warren: They probably would, yeah. They – I guess, the Air Medal, the – something else that didn't amount to anything. I should have had the three Purple Hearts – I did the VA hospital, both of them. My back injury wasn't much to it. I had a lot of bad luck.

Oh yeah, this guy, Oldbie is the guy that called sick. You know, a few years ago, we went to a reunion in Boston. I couldn't, hardly wait to see Oldbie. Damn, why couldn't I find him – he'd gone off to some small town in Maine. The women would go into places and buy stuff. I saw a stiff old boy across the street in front of a store... standing up there waiting on their wives and I went over there and I looked up there and one of the old boys said, "Oh my God." I got close and I said, "Are you Oldbie?" He said, "I'm afraid I am."

I said, "Oldbie, every day that I saw a new PW, I wished it was you." He was a good old boy. He was there with his wife

Warren: [Speaking to his friend, Joann Taylor] "You can come in now, it's over."

Interviewer: *I've enjoyed it a lot, Warren. It's been great. Thank you so much!*

Warren: Glad to do so.

Interviewer: *All right, Warren, would you introduce the lovely lady to your right?*

Warren: Her name is Joann Taylor. J-O-A-N-N.

Interviewer: *You told me you had two daughters, what are their names?*

Warren: One of them is Diane Hayes, she works over at ABF. She's – what, 50

something?

Female Speaker: 53.

Warren 55.

Female Speaker: 55, right.

Warren: She's the youngest, and Debbie, she's a couple years old.

Female Speaker: 58

Interviewee: *She works here in town, what is that place?*

Female Speaker: I don't know.

Warren: A brokerage firm.

Interviewer: *Did you stay in the service, Warren?*

Warren: No, I got out.

Interviewer: *What did you do for a living?*

Warren: I worked in the grocery business for a number of years. Then, I went from there – I retired from the postal service in Fort Smith. Then, I wrote insurance for about 15 years. I retired when I was, how old? I retired when I was 59, yeah. So, I lived happily ever after.

Interviewer: *If you had advice to give to young people today, what would it be?*

Warren: Well, Debbie and Diana always wanted to know how did you retire? We didn't retire easy, they thought we did! What you do is: when you look forward to retirement, get out of debt. Get out of debt, and stay – live right. Don't bite off more than you can chew. Be of good cheer.

Interviewer: *Have a positive outlook.*

Warren: Positive, that's right. A positive outlook. You know, I'd say that's one of the very most important things is positive.

Female Speaker: I think that's what's helped him survive.

Warren: Everything is not gonna die yet.

Interviewer: *It's been a joy!*

Warren: Nice to – that you were able to put up with all of it.

END

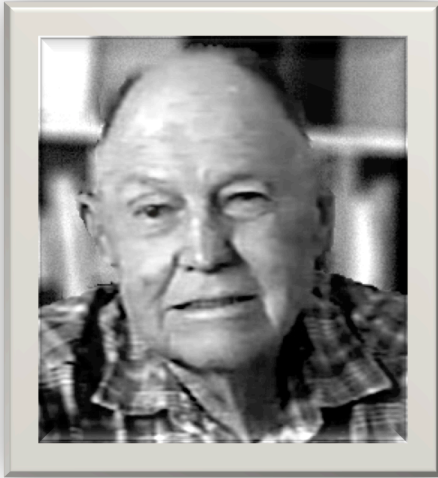
Warren G. Taylor

Fort Smith Times Record

Warren G. Taylor, 96, of Van Buren passed away May 18, 2018, in Fort Smith. He was born Oct. 29, 1921, in Van Buren to Alan S. Taylor and Millie M. Potts Taylor. Warren was a graduate of Van Buren High School and attended Fort Smith Junior College in 1941. He was a retired Postal Clerk for the U.S. Postal Service and a member of Heritage United Methodist Church. He served in the U.S. Army Air Force, as tail gunner on the B17 bomber in WWII. During active duty his plane was shot down and he was captured by the Germans' and held for 18 months as a POW. Warren volunteered to speak of his experience as a POW to schools, churches and other organizations. He also served on the Sebastian Federal Credit Union, was past commander of Fort Smith Chapter of American Ex-Prisoner of War Inc., and he was voted Crawford County Volunteer of the Year. Following his retirement for the U.S. Postal Service in Fort Smith, he became an insurance broker, and was a devoted Arkansas Razorback fan and loved the Van Buren High School Football Team.

He is survived by two daughters, Debby Hanna and Diane Hays, both of Van Buren; two grandsons, Eric and wife Morgan Hanna of Fort Smith, and Jason Dax Hays and Jennifer Collins of Van Buren, and son-in-law Philip Hays of Van Buren.

Graveside services will be Wednesday at 11 a.m. in Gracelawn Cemetery in Van Buren with full military honors, all under the directions of Edwards Funeral Home in Fort Smith.



**Ewell Titsworth
World War II Veteran
Interview**

The following was originally a video interview done by the Crawford County Friends of Genealogy, Van Buren, Arkansas. The interviewer is Hilda Daugherty. The original interview was recorded on August 1, 2007 in Van Buren. This written transcript of the original audio was accomplished in June 2018.

Interviewer: *Today is August 1, 2007. I'm Hilda Dougherty, and I'm interviewing Mr. Ewell Titsworth about his World War II experience. Mr. Titsworth, will you give me your full name please?*

Ewell: Ewell Elmer Titsworth.

Interviewer: *And your birthday?*

Ewell: August 2nd, 1919. I'll be 88 years old tomorrow.

Interviewer: *That is a good thing. And were you born in Crawford County?*

Ewell: Yes, ma'am. Alma, Arkansas.

Interviewer: *Alma, Arkansas. Who were you parents?*

Ewell: Reuben Calvin Titsworth and Sadie Ethel Trout Titsworth. My mother's maiden name was Trout.

Interviewer: *Did you have brothers and sisters?*

Ewell: Yes.

Interviewer: *What were their names?*

Ewell: Carmel, Tennie Louise, Burl Hugh, Glenn Wendell, and myself, Ewell Elmer.

Interviewer: *Were you the youngest?*

Ewell: I had one sister that was – she was born late. She was nine years younger, and her name was Catherine Ruth.

Interviewer: *Okay. Well that's nice.*

Ewell: I'm the only one left of my immediate family.

Interviewer: *Oh, my.*

Ewell: They're all gone.

Interviewer: *My. So, it's time we got your story.*

Ewell: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Mr. Titsworth, where did you go to school?*

Ewell: I graduated from Kibler. Kibler had a high school then.

Interviewer: *Is that right?*

Ewell: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: *What year did you graduate?*

Ewell: 1938.

Interviewer: *What did you set out for your life's work? What did you think you were gonna do?*

Ewell: Well, during the Depression, I wanted to go to school. And going to college was out of the question, so I worked on the farm. We was raised on the farm. I worked on a farm and that wasn't a very good paying job. And everything looked kinda bleak. And Lucille and I then – we knew each other. She was 16 and I was 19 when we first met. And I would say, "There's rumors of a draft."

A young man back then, if he couldn't get a job – wasn't available – they'd say, "Well, we can't hire you. You're gonna be drafted." And I said to heck with that boys, I'll beat it. So, I joined the Army. And that's the reason I was in the Army when war was declared. I had joined. I was gonna serve my time and get out and come home and then get a job, but it didn't work out that way.

Interviewer: *Oh. But you got the jump on the draft anyway. Well, let's go back to the farm you worked on. Did your father farm for a living?*

Ewell: Yes.

Interviewer: *What did he farm and where was that?*

Ewell: In Kibler Bottoms. It was south of Kibler.

Interviewer: *That rich bottom dirt – river bottom dirt.*

Ewell: Mm-hmm. And then I worked for neighbor farmers when I could.

Interviewer: *Who were your grandparents? Did they live in this area also?*

Ewell: Yes. My mother's parents were Tom Trout and my grandmother's name was Cinda Bourland.

Mrs. Titsworth: Lucinda.

Ewell: Lucinda Bourland. Huh? That was Titsworth. My grandmother's maiden name was Bourland.

Mrs. Titsworth: That was Titsworth.

Interviewer: *So, your Grandmother Titsworth –*

Mrs. Titsworth: You're talking about Trout.

Ewell: Oh. Yeah.

Interviewer: *Who was your Grandmother Trout?*

Ewell: Well, her name was Lucinda Bourland Trout. That was her last name.

Interviewer: *Okay. Now who was your Grandfather Titsworth?*

Ewell: Reuben Calvin, Sr.

Interviewer: *Oh, okay. That's pretty simple.*

Ewell: My father was Reuben Calvin, Jr.

Interviewer: *Okay. That's good. So, your family had been farmers for generations, probably?*

Ewell: As far as I can remember – back before I was born.

Interviewer: *Ms. Lucille, can you tell us where his Titsworth and Trouts came from to Arkansas? Do you recall that history?*

Mrs. Titsworth: Yeah.

Ewell: You've got the history on the Titsworths.

Mrs. Titsworth: How the Titsworths came, but not the Trout.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Ewell: They got to coming from Tennessee to Arkansas. They all got killed in an Indian massacre except Colonel Isaac. And they kept and [inaudible]. One daughter they kept. It was a little girl. I think she was 3 years old. And Colonel Isaac, in his position he was kind of an influential man. And he found out later that his daughter was still alive, that the Indians had her I think about three years. And he finagled to give some – like today, they trade you to captivity, so he done some horse trading with the Indians and he got his daughter back. And what was left migrated on to the Arkansas River on to Roseville and settled in Roseville, Arkansas, north of Paris. That's where we started.

Interviewer: *Oh, my. Well, that's quite a story. Thank you for sharing that with us. So, was that 1938 that you joined the US Army?*

Ewell: No. I joined in 1941 because I worked on the farm and anything I could get, and then I seen it was futile. I wasn't getting anywhere with it. It's the same old, same old. I worked for \$0.075 an hour, picked spinach for a nickel a bushel, and you don't make any plans for your future when you're doing that. So, my future was going in the Army and getting all that behind me.

Interviewer: *Did they send you immediately to Kansas? Or what camp did you go to for training?*

Ewell: Fort Riley, Kansas in the horse Cavalry. I asked for the 1st Artillery

when I was in the CC because I spent a year in a CC camp way back there. And I was stationed in California and we fought the fires. And I know what it is to fight them fires out there, and I was just a kid. So, I come out, and I'm just going to be honest about it. I lied about my age. The age limit was 18 to 25. But I was a big, old robust boy.

Interviewer: *Farm boy.*

Ewell: And I was 15 years old. And I walked in there to the CC headquarters and told them I was 18. And they said, "Are you sure?" And I said, "Yes. I was born in 1916, that makes me 18." And so, at the age of 15 I went in the CC camp.

Interviewer: *It was hard work.*

Ewell: The hard work that goes on 18 to 25 [inaudible] to do it. Let me tell you, I'd been used to hard work. But I held up my end of it. So, I stayed in there a year, and I'd planned this before I went in the CC. So, I went in the CC when I finished the 10th grade. So, I said I'm going in the CCs for a year, and I'm coming back to finish high school. And that is exactly what I did.

Interviewer: *Well, good.*

Ewell: I went to my captain in the CCs, and I said, "Look." At that time I was 16, and I told him my plan, what I had done, and I wanted to come home and go to school. And they didn't prosecute me or anything like that. They just bought my – I was in California, and they bought my ticket back to Arkansas, and I come back and finished high school.

Interviewer: *How was it that they sent you to California to a camp?*

Ewell: Well, that was back when CC was – my first one I did with them. I helped build Devil's Den.

Interviewer: Oh, you did?

Ewell: And then they sent us – I went to Little Rock and worked on the fisheries down there at [inaudible]. And then from there, they sent a bunch of us to California, and we was down at – Watsonville had a CC camp. And we fought forest fires, and we planted pine trees on them mountains. And we had a gopher squad where we killed gophers. It was burning up the fields and the mountains and causing gulley's and [inaudible].

Interviewer: *Just a general –*

Ewell: Just a – yeah. And then when –

Interviewer: – *interesting career.*

Ewell: – when I was 16, I went into my captain and told him I wanted to come home and finish high school. And that's exactly what I did.

Interviewer: *Did they send you to California on the train?*

Ewell: Mm-hmm. Boy, that's quite a deal, too, for a 15-year-old boy.

Interviewer: *From Arkansas hills, I would say.*

Ewell: Yeah. Yeah, it was. It was quite a deal. I'd say I grew up quick.

Interviewer: *Yes, indeed.*

Ewell: Grew up the hard way.

Interviewer: *Okay, I'd like you to take us to Fort Riley, Kansas and tell us what it was like during your training.*

Ewell: You'll get a kick out of this. At that time, they were sending – draft had started. And we were forming the 14th Cavalry. And they were sending the new draftees, and they all came from the east – from the Bronx and New York City and New Jersey and the city boys that had never seen a horse.

Interviewer: *Oh, dear.*

Ewell: And they sent our horses – we called them remounts. They had horses they had turned loose on the plains on Montana down there, and they were wild. And they sent our horses on trains back here to Fort Riley, Kansas. And at that time, I had just a little bit of rank, and I was able to pick my horse. Boy, I picked a dandy, too. I never will forget him, and I named him Sir Gibson. And his serial number was just like mine, only his was different. His serial number was 07T8, and it was branded right on his neck.

Interviewer: *Is that right?*

Ewell: I guess I rode that old horse a million miles.

Interviewer: *So, they always branded the Army horses.*

Ewell: That was my horse, just like issuing a rifle. That was your rifle, and that was my horse. Nobody touched him. And he was mine, and I took care of him and I rode him. But anyways, what I was gonna skip to – these boys come out of the east. Probably some of them had never seen a horse, and these little horses come off of that range – they weren't gentle. And you talk about a funny sight – the boys were scared to death.

They were afraid to get on them, but the commanding officer said, "You get on that horse." And when you got an order in the Army, you did it. And they'd get on that horse and they'd get bucked off. And they'd have to get back on, and let me tell you, they learned to ride. And I did to. I didn't like to get bucked around, but it didn't bother me.

Interviewer: *I would imagine there were some injuries over there.*

Ewell: And then when the war was declared, my time was just about up. And I was sitting in the day room at Fort Riley telling Lucille when I'm gonna be home. And we weren't engaged then – we just [inaudible].

Interviewer: *So, you were writing your sweetheart.*

Ewell: That engagement is another story.

Interviewer: *You were writing your sweetheart at that time.*

Ewell: But anyway, from Fort Riley, Kansas, war was declared. They loaded my outfit up on cattle cars and the trains and ship us to Arizona. And our main camp was in the desert up in Tucson, and we had a base camp in Nogales, Mexico on the Arkansas [*sic*, American?] side of Nogales. One side of Nogales, Mexico – Arkansas was Nogales, Arizona. And the base camp was there, right on the border and I would –

Interviewer: *So, the American side was Nogales, Arizona.*

Ewell: That's where we had the camp. So, we done our nightlife over in Nogales, Mexico. Nightclubs were better and the music was better and the women were prettier.

Interviewer: *Oh, my.*

Ewell: And that's how I wound up down there. And eventually, mechanical stuff was coming on. The horse was obsolete. So, they busted this up and I chose Armored Division.

Interviewer: *Was that the period of time that they completely quit having the horse Cavalry?*

Ewell: No. I've often wondered what happened to old Sir Gibson when he was retired. I've got pictures of it [inaudible]. I've got another [inaudible] big old horse.

Interviewer: *Well, to be effective, you would have had to build a bond with your animal, and you did, evidently.*

Ewell: We made [inaudible] shelter when we's in the field. It was what we call a pup tent – a half tent, and your buddy had a half tent. At night, we'd pitch that little old tent and our pillows was our saddles and our cover was our saddlebags. We were tough.

Interviewer: *You had to be tough.*

Ewell: I remember it raining in Louisiana. I done maneuvers for six weeks. And I wasn't even in the inside of a building for six weeks, me and that old horse. We lived at night – we'd pitch our pup tents, tie the horses to the rope line. We'd use the saddles for our pillow and the blanket to cover us. You could sleep on it or cover with it, whichever you prefer. That was it.

Interviewer: *You lived the life of the old west for a while.*

Ewell: It didn't hurt me because I could have done anything.

Interviewer: *You were a young one.*

Ewell: Them boys from town – but they was pretty good boys. And all the time I was in the Army, I never seen a boy from Arkansas.

Interviewer: *Is that right?*

Ewell: Because I went in before –

Interviewer: *So early.*

Ewell: All this. Yeah.

Interviewer: *So, what were you trying to do in Nogales? What was your purpose in being there?*

Ewell: We had orders not to let anybody cut across that border. And we – main line through there, there was a bridge. And my squad was at the

end of that bridge – we guarded that bridge and with orders that nobody come near that bridge. We said, "Well, what do we do?" You get your orders that nobody crosses that bridge, so take it from there. Nobody bothered it.

Interviewer: *That was to prevent Japanese and German [inaudible]–*

Ewell: You want me to tell you how Lucille got her engagement ring?

Interviewer: *Tell me about that.*

Ewell: Okay. One night I was in Nogales, Mexico walking the street, looking at the sights. Looked in the window of the jewelry store, and there was a pretty little engagement ring in there. And I'm not gonna tell you the price of it because a soldier didn't have much money.

Mrs. Titsworth: No.

Ewell: But I seen that engagement ring, and Lucille was pretty. So, I got back to camp. I sit down and wrote her a letter, and I said, "Lucille, if you will send me your ring size and acceptance, I'll send you an engagement ring. If you'll send me your size and you want to, we'll get engaged, and I'll send you an engagement ring." And that was the fastest reply I ever got to one of my letters. And she sent me her size, and as soon as I got the size, I went back in to Nogales, Mexico and bought that engagement ring and sent it to her. And that's the way we got engaged.

Interviewer: *I'll say.*

Ewell: By mail.

Interviewer: *By mail.*

Ewell: Then I oughtta tell you how I proposed to her to go ahead and get married. Oh, boy.

Interviewer: *Do you have that same ring, or have you had to have –*

Ewell: She has it, but she's not wearing it.

Interviewer: *Not wearing it?*

Ewell: I finally got a little bit of money for it and –

Mrs. Titsworth: It's wore in two.

Ewell: – bought her another one. But soldiers didn't have much money. I guess it took all the money I had, but I bought her an engagement ring.

Interviewer: *So did you – when they broke up your Cavalry unit, did they immediately send you to another training field?*

Ewell: Yeah. They sent me to Fort Knox, Kentucky. That's the home of the armored division.

Interviewer: *Okay. When did you come home to get married? Or when did she come out –*

Ewell: Probably.

Interviewer: *That's later, okay.*

Ewell: From there, I went to – on what we call a cadre, we went to Camp Beale, California, which was close to Marysville. They sent us ahead from various places. And we formed the 13th Armored Division, and all the men we got in – here comes that same old deal again. All the boys come in are from the east. But they wasn't horses that time, they went in tanks – little different. And all this time, of course, we was writing to each other. And I'd been out in Camp Beale – I don't know, a little while. And one day I got an officer come to the office – I had a telephone call.

And she was teaching school up there [inaudible]. She was teaching school up there. And it scared me to death. And I thought, "Uh-oh. My mother's gone or my dad's gone and that's it," because nobody knew where I was at. And then I had to call in headquarters to come to a phone – I had a long-distance telephone call. I picked up the phone, and it was Lucille. And I said, "Where in the world are you at? You scared me to death." And she said, "I'm on vacation. I'm down here at my aunt's." And her aunt lived down –

Mrs. Titsworth: Santa Paula.

Ewell: Santa – what, about 100 miles? Something like that?

Mrs. Titsworth: Mm-hmm.

Ewell: And she called me, and there we were on the telephone. And I thought, "What in the world are you doing out here?" She said, "I come out here to see my aunt." And I said, "Yeah. You come up and

seen your aunt, alright." And I said, "Lucille, do you wanna get married?" I mean, right on the telephone now. And she said yes. I'm getting close to it.

Mrs. Titsworth: Yes, you are.

Ewell: And I said, "You just let me make some plans. You just give me a little time." I said, "Boy, this is all at once." Here I was a soldier, wasn't very much money. And I found out that she had enough money. If I had had said that, she had enough money to get her bus ticket back home, I found out later. So, I said, "You do it." And California had a three-day waiting period and Nevada didn't. So, I said, "You let me see what I can do," [inaudible]. So, that night, I go into town. And I don't know, I must have went to a Chamber of Commerce somewhere. And I found a one room apartment – upstairs, one room. It wasn't an apartment. It was a bed and a dresser.

And I think there was another couple or two or three, and we all shared one bathroom. But I rented that for a month. I paid a month's rent on that one room for a month. So, I come back and our commanding officer – we called him the old man. And I had a buddy from Lickensfield, Pennsylvania. He was my best buddy, and he had an old car out there. And I said, "Harmon," – Sergeant Harmon. I and he was the same rank, but we were very – I said, "If I can swing it, get us a three-day pass, will you take me and my girlfriend to Reno, and we can get married?" "Yeah," he said. "Darn right." He said, "That did tickle me to do that," so I went to the old man.

And I told him – I said, "Look. I wanna get married. My girlfriend's out here, and we can't married in California – three-day wait. Can I have three days off?" "Yeah. I'll give you three days off." So, he gave me and Harmon three days off. And I called Lucille, and I said I'm trying to get off Friday, I guess. We'll come down on Friday night." I said, "Since we don't – we got about Friday, Saturday, and Sunday off. Or Saturday, Sunday, Monday – three-day pass. So, we [inaudible]. And the speed limit then – gas was rationed and the speed limit was 35 miles an hour.

And you better not get caught speeding or you'd lose your gas – you'd lose your card, and you'd find – and we drove down to Lucille that night. On Friday night down there. And we stayed there with her aunt the rest of the night. And early the next morning, we got in that old Chevrolet Coupe, and we headed for Reno, California – 35 miles an hour.

Mrs. Titsworth: Reno, Nevada.

Ewell: We drove all day and part of the night, and we stopped in Carson City. We had to have some sleep. The only thing we stopped for was gasoline and a bite to eat. And we found one little old room or something there we [inaudible]. Of course, me and Harmon was used to sleeping on the bank of a steel tank. We could sleep anywhere. And Lucille had a couch, and of course she had to get some sleep and getting ready for a wedding the next morning.

Interviewer: *Why, sure.*

Ewell: The day before, we stayed that night – the rest of the night. We drove on out to Reno the next morning. We went to the courthouse. We walked down the courthouse to the marriage license office. We got our marriage license. We went down the hall to the judge's office, and we got married. And we come out and got in that old Chevrolet Coupe, and we headed for – married – for Yuba City, California. We drove all the rest of that day. We stopped in Lake Tahoe. We seen a light in a place to see if we could get something to eat. We went in and the lady – she was so nice. And told her we'd love to get something to eat – we was traveling.

And she said, "I'm sorry, but this is off-season and we're closed." And we told her we just got married, and we had to get back to camp, and she said, "Y'all just wait a minute." And she went back in the kitchen and fixed up some cold cheese sandwiches, and that was our wedding supper. And she wouldn't charge us for it. She said, "No, I'm not gonna charge you for that." And so we come out and get in that old Chevrolet Coupe, and we drove all night long. That was Monday, and I had to answer roll call at 6:00 on Tuesday morning. So, we drove all that Monday. We drove Monday night. And we got into Yuba City where Lucille had that room. I don't know, 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning.

And our camp is – it's 35, 40 mile out to camp. And I said, "Harmon, don't even kill your motor." I'll take Lucille upstairs and showed her. I said, "Now this is your room, and you'll have to share your bathroom with these other three couples." But I said, "I've got to get because I've got to answer roll call at 6:00." Come back and get in that old coupe and Harmon and I drive back. We changed out of our uniform into our work clothes and we [inaudible] for the 6:00 roll call. Now that's the way we got married. That's the way we got engaged, and that's the way we got married.

Interviewer: *That was a whirlwind trip.*

Ewell: And we've been together 65 years.

Interviewer: *Well, it was a good trip wasn't it? That was worth the trip.*

Ewell: Well, Lucille and Harmon sat there asleep, and I done most of the driving. We drove for three days and three nights except, what, the two hours we stayed in Carson City.

Interviewer: *You sure did.*

Ewell: He's sleeping and I don't know how. Harmon was a big guy. He lay there with your head on his shoulder and he'd sleep. Harmon with his head against the window and he'd sleep, and I'm driving 35 miles an hour.

Interviewer: *Was Yuba City the nearest city to your camp?*

Ewell: No. Marysville. Yuba City was like Van Buren and Fort Smith.

Interviewer: *Oh, I see.*

Ewell: And so –

Mrs. Titsworth: I just don't remember –

Ewell: I was a staff sergeant and then my rank. And so, I could get a pass – I'd get a nighttime pass. And that room in Yuba City – I had my pass. In fact from time I get off at, I guess, 6:00 in the afternoon right after training until the roll call the next morning. I could go as long as I didn't get more than 100 miles – I think it's 100 miles from camp. So, I'd catch the bus in camp – the busses run from Camp Beale to Marysville, but there wasn't no bus over to Yuba City.

So, just like walking from Van Buren there to Fort Smith – I'd walk from Marysville over to Yuba City. I'd walk across that bridge. And the next morning at 4:00 – I'd have to set my alarm. And we saved up over three months, didn't we, in that one room apartment. I'd get up at 4:00 and walk across over into Marysville, catch the bus and get back to – life was pretty rough, but we were young.

Interviewer: *You were young.*

Ewell: And then we finally found a little three room house. And oh, you talk about a mansion. That was a mansion. If I had a mansion I would have traded down for that three room mansion.

Interviewer: *Well, how long did this trip to see her aunt wind up keeping her in California?*

Mrs. Titsworth: Well, I stayed with him.

Interviewer: *Yes, but how long was that before you –*

Ewell: Oh, about a year, I guess, I trained out there. Wasn't it something like that?

Mrs. Titsworth: Yeah.

Interviewer: *So, you –*

Ewell: But we had a little boy born while we were out here.

Interviewer: *Oh, you did.*

Ewell: Eual Fay. He's my junior, and he spells his name E-U-A-L. I just wanted him to be called Junior, see, and that's still pronounced but spelled different. And she brought him back here by herself when I was sent down to train. And boy, you talk about – but you know, it was rough. But you didn't expect anything. You had just accepted your fate and we were together and happy as a lark. I oughtta –

Interviewer: *And you felt –*

Ewell: – tell her I hope we didn't run out of money and we didn't have something to eat. Oh, she had it rough, but we come back here. And then I went to Camp Bowie and trained some more down in Texas.

Interviewer: *So, when you were sent to Camp Bowie, it was when she came back to Arkansas?*

Mrs. Titsworth: Mm-hmm.

Ewell: Yeah. And I went to Bowie. After Bowie, I took out for parts unknown. And she come down there and stayed with me. We had more than one room. We used to – when we moved there, she found one room to stay in down there and come down to see me while I was down there. But Eual Fay, he was a pretty good size baby. He [inaudible] mother. And I went overseas, shipped out.

Interviewer: *Where did you ship out from?*

Ewell: Newport News, Virginia. And I guess I landed in the same place coming back. I remember going over there, we was in a convoy. And you remember Kaiser that built ships in the war, too? I don't know whether his ship [inaudible] – and you talking about – God Almighty. He just threwed them together and come a storm and that ship – just like a rag in a washtub, just bouncing, and we didn't know whether it was going to make it or not. And then we got attacked, and I found out later that we had a convoy of tank destroyers, which was ships that circled our convoy [inaudible].

So then they would alert someways. One light – everybody put on your life jackets. We're being attacked. And these ships – we could hear them knocking those explosives for sub destroyers during the war. And they were so close to – we could feel the concussion down in the hull of that ship. Well, and anyway, I got introduced to combat. We didn't lose the ship. Those tank destroyers – we didn't call them tank destroyers. I forget what they did call them. And those cads.

Interviewer: *Do you remember the name of the ship that you were on?*

Ewell: No, I don't. I sure don't.

Interviewer: *You left Newport News, but where were you headed? Which country did you land in?*

Ewell: Le Havre, France.

Interviewer: *That's where you were headed.*

Ewell: I didn't know where we were going.

Interviewer: *Do you recall what month that might have been in? Month and year that was? Do you remember?*

Ewell: '42 or '43.

Mrs. Titsworth: Couldn't have been '43.

Ewell: '43?

Mrs. Titsworth: It would have to be '44.

Ewell: '44? Yeah, I trained a couple of years back here in the States, so '44.

Mrs. Titsworth: Eual Fay was born in '43.

Ewell: He was?

Mrs. Titsworth: July '43.

Ewell: No, '42, wasn't it?

Mrs. Titsworth: No, dear.

Ewell: Well, like I said. My memory's – whatever.

Interviewer: *You were on your way to war anyway, whenever it was.*

Ewell: Yeah. See, we were pushing it. We pushed across. We 're pushing the Germans back. And they said we couldn't cross the line – that was the line they were – but we did. We crossed it. And that's why it took me back to the Blue Danube – that Monday [inaudible]. We had them pretty hot when we crossed that, and I don't mean the sunshine either. And I remember them [inaudible]. I said this couldn't be the Blue Danube. Scared to death. Oh, boy.

Interviewer: *What was your actual job? Were you –?*

Ewell: Tank Commander.

Interviewer: *You were commander of a tank.*

Ewell: My lieutenant – and we had five tanks in the squad. And the lieutenant was in command of the squad, and I was staff sergeant. I was his second-in-command. And he got hurt right quick – hit in the shoulder or something. I don't know just what did it. And that left me – I had a squad of five tanks. They were 25 in my company. Of course, I don't know how many was in the division – hundreds of them. But my company had 25, my squad had 5. And I had charge of five tanks. We wound up – I was crossing the Inn River and going into Austria. We were headed for Berchtesgaden. And just before I got to that bridge on the radio, I got orders to stop, that the war was over.

And I remember a drizzly rain – of course, the weather didn't make us any difference. [Inaudible] we just took it as what was done to us. And I got orders to halt – stop right there. And they said that the bridge is blown out in front of you and to stop. And I thought, "Well, they gonna call the engineers to build a bridge. We have to have a bridge to get across. We're gonna wait." And while we were waiting for them engineers – or I figured that's what we were doing, waiting for the engineers to build us a pontoon, it comes over the radio that

the war was over. So, they told us back up to the – we turned around and went back to the camp.

Went back to that for a few miles, and I don't know – I guess we stayed there two or three weeks, come back across Germany and France and shipped out to come home. And I had orders to report to Camp Cooke, California. And that's the reason why I got a map of where we was gonna land on Japan. And it was estimated that – I got a copy of – after the war, they give us copies of articles and so on. [Inaudible] for where I was gonna land. And we were expected to lose a million people of Japan the [inaudible]. We were gonna surround Japan and the artillery, the infantry, the tanks and the flyboys. We were all making [inaudible].

It's gonna be the biggest in the world – biggest landing has ever made during the war. And I had a map of where I was gonna land. I forget the name of that little city. In the meantime, while we was sitting in Camp Cooke waiting on orders, our tanks were already – they shipped our tanks back from Germany back across [inaudible]. And while we were in Camp Cooke – at that time I become eligible because they released it and the war was over. And I was eligible for discharge, and let me tell you, I took it.

Interviewer: *Yes, sir. Did any of your company or unit, division, have to go on?*

Ewell: No. None of us. They cancelled every – [inaudible]. That's what ended the war. And I guess we sitting in Camp Cooke when that happened. I don't know.

Interviewer: *In the eventuality that that hadn't succeeded, you boys were sitting ready.*

Ewell: I wouldn't be here today if [inaudible] said, "Well, it killed 200,000 people." Well that's better than killing a million of us boys.

Interviewer: *Absolutely.*

Ewell: Because we weren't even planning on coming back if we had been over there because we knew what plugging into.

Interviewer: *Well, I'd like to go back over on the landing. When you first touched European soil when you disembarked from your ship with your tanks, tell us what you felt like. Tell us the mood –*

Ewell: Scared to death.

Interviewer: *Among all the boys, what was –*

Ewell: Why, sure. We was all scared. I tell you one thing, if you had found out whether you believe in your good Lord or whether you an atheist, you just didn't back and think you might not have more than a minute to live. And you're gonna find out whether you're an atheist or not. You better believe. You gonna call on Him.

Interviewer: *That's a good point.*

Ewell: I'd say, "Lord, let me go home and raise my two little boys." And he did. I'm not ashamed of that. Let me tell you. I looked down at those tank drivers sometimes and his lips would be moving. I said, "Yeah, he's praying now."

Interviewer: *Yes, sir.*

Ewell: No kidding.

Interviewer: *Oh, you had two little boys by now.*

Ewell: Not yet. Not two –

Interviewer: *No, not yet. Just one. Still one. Okay. And you were shut up in those old steel tanks. Did that give you claustrophobia?*

Ewell: No. We felt protected as small arms and rifles, something like that. Because [inaudible] my job. I was up in the turret. Them boys were buttoned up, and I had to keep my head sticking out. I had the lead pulled down in the periscope, but God, you couldn't see anything. And I had to guide my driver because he was looking through the periscope.

Interviewer: *Wow. That is dangerous.*

Ewell: And this boy that went with us [inaudible] Army. We went and then we come back. Did I say me and him are best buddies? We shipped out together, and we were somewhere in Germany. And it was pretty rough that night. It was just after dark, and he got shot. Had on a helmet, but the bullet hit him right there in his helmet. [Inaudible] from us – soldier's on the ground. And it went through his helmet and far as his skin around his head and come out back here. And the reason I know it was him, they carried him back on – the first aid boys – they followed us.

They carried him back from my tank and I got out of my tank to see

who it was, and it was my best buddy Harmon. And I never will forget that long as I live. When we visited after the war, didn't we? And he was still – he couldn't do much as part of his side was paralyzed [inaudible]. And that was just on one of them. I'll always remember him because he was my buddy.

Interviewer: *Why, sure. What was your very first battle? What city or town was it in?*

Ewell: I don't know. We just hit patches. Wasn't any big landing or anything. We were pushing. And we had the infantry with us – infantry's on the ground. We had the big guns and the infantry had the little guns. If something big, we would turn the big guns and make it a little safer for the infantry to move on. We worked together.

Interviewer: *What was your main commanding officer over our division? Who was that?*

Ewell: The division? It was a colonel over the division. In my squad, when I got wounded, he was the second lieutenant. And I don't know what – his name was Smith. Same Smith as our neighbor name. I remember him [inaudible] Smith. I think that's what it was. Pretty sure it was.

Interviewer: *How many months were you on the ground – weeks or months were you on the ground in France and Germany?*

Ewell: Not too long. Six months, something like that.

Interviewer: *Well, that would have been a –*

Ewell: Unlike some of them.

Interviewer: *That would have been a very long time shut up in a tank.*

Ewell: Well, I was the tank two or three years. I learned to sleep in them. At night, if we were out in the field, we'd dig a foxhole and crawl in that foxhole – do you know what a foxhole is? You get bombed at night or something, cause shrapnel or something.

Interviewer: *So, most of the time –*

Ewell: We'd dig a foxhole and pull old tank over that hole, and then we'd crawl in that hole and sleep. [Inaudible] we're doing things like that.

Interviewer: *Was that standard? Or did you –*

Ewell: We made it standard.

Interviewer: *You made it – well, it was smart thinking.*

Ewell: It was just something we thought of. Inside those tanks, you either froze to death or you burned up in there. We looked for air conditioner and had two big old Cadillac engines behind us and kinda warm in those tanks.

Interviewer: *Well, what time of the year was it when you were in France?*

Ewell: Well, that was a tense couple of years, I guess.

Interviewer: *No, what time of the year? Was it winter or summer?*

Mrs. Titsworth: When you was –

Interviewer: *In the tank.*

Ewell: I'm trying to think. I believe it was summer. I don't think I had any bad weather.

Interviewer: *Summer of '44?*

Ewell: I'd say I don't remember dates or times or nothing. I just don't remember.

Interviewer: *Well, yes. But that's ok.*

Ewell: But I don't remember much bad weather.

Interviewer: *It wasn't snowing.*

Ewell: No.

Interviewer: *So, it was probably –*

Ewell: I don't believe we had any snow. It didn't make any difference. The weather didn't have anything to do with us. We just had the orders and

Interviewer: *Just out of curiosity, what did you do in a lightning storm shut up in a steel tank.*

Ewell: Probably kept moving or something like that. We didn't pay attention to the weather unless nightly we stopped. And you'd get under your tank or you'd close up in your tank.

Interviewer: *Do you remember any of the towns that you drove through?*

Ewell: No. I'll tell you coincident – I remember one of them was Nancy. Nancy, France. And I had to look on my map to remember that. The VA has a clinic in Fort Smith, and I was going for my 3A [inaudible] check-up. I don't remember how it comes about, but I mentioned that I was an old soldier that had been through France and Germany. And she said, "Did you go through France?" And I said, "Yes, I sure did." And that doctor, the doctor – that Nancy – what was her last name? [Inaudible] Dr. Nancy – boy, she come around my neck, and she said, "Do you know you liberated my town?" She said, "You liberated us from the Germans."

And she remembered us coming through there – Nancy, France. And I come back and looked on my map, and I looked to Nancy, France. And when we left there, she said, "Anything that you want that I can do for you, you just let me know." And we'd come out of her office out through the waiting room with her arm around my neck. Because that whole waiting room sat around and looking at that doctor treating me like that.

Interviewer: *So, she was a French lady.*

Ewell: Oh, I wish she was here. She'd come around right now.

Interviewer: *And that was the Fort Smith VA?*

Ewell: Fort Smith. She was the doctor. Dr. Nancy Helen. Nancy Helen.

Mrs. Titsworth: Helen. She said they would have starved to death.

Ewell: She said, "We were starving to death. And I remembered – we got a candy ration that we'd get rationed. And I remember giving all my rationed candy to the kids.

Interviewer: *Would she have been a child?*

Ewell: Yes. She'd been pretty young.

Interviewer: *Oh, that's such a nice story.*

Ewell: Yes. Boy, she just told me – said, "Anything you want, you just let me know, and I'll see that you get it." And she said, "I've taken and looked at your medicine. And she gave me a prescription for a year's supply of medicine. And now, I'm not kidding you. She wrote me –

the doctor send me blanks, blanks, blanks, and when I get one, mail that blank, and I still get my medicine – some of it from the –

Interviewer: *Well, that's only just considering what you service you did to our country.*

Ewell: She said, "We were starving to death when you boys come through there."

Interviewer: *Were the children attracted to your tanks? Did they come out?*

Ewell: Oh, but they'd swarm in. You'd have to be careful moving, afraid we'd run over them. They'd come out and you'd get out of your tank. And they'd just, "Oh," and then I'd give all my candy away. We were liberating them. And the they just – oh, golly. You just can't believe how big the welcome was. And she said, "I remember it." She said, "We were starving to death when y'all come through there."

Interviewer: *Did you think of your little boy back home when you saw those little children?*

Ewell: Every minute.

Interviewer: *Every minute?*

Ewell: Every minute. Yeah [inaudible]. He was born after I come home one night – said my two little boys. I had one little one – Eual Fay.

Interviewer: *One little whitehead boy.*

Ewell: Lord, just let me go home and raise my little boy. I said, "I'll do the best I can." Be careful about making promises like that. You might have to keep them. But you'll find out whether you're an atheist or not when you get in combat.

Interviewer: *That's a very good point. Tell me about the destruction to the cities themselves – the buildings.*

Ewell: You wouldn't believe it. Just skeletons. And the airplanes – of course, they'd bomb in front of us. And they would use a bomb with a fire bomb – there's a name for it. I forget what that was. Gets on the skin and just keeps burning. Only thing will do is get it under water and then raise itself out of water and start burning again.

Interviewer: *Napalm?*

Ewell: That might have been it. That doesn't sound like it though. But they dropped those bombs in September. They were on fire, and they set the civilians on fire – people on fire. Now this is [inaudible] but I'm just stating a fact, and they'd jump and jump in those canals of people who weren't killed – still alive when they were bombed.

Interviewer: *But our troops –*

Ewell: I remember going around and telling that and everything. But you won't accept it [inaudible] –

Interviewer: *It's the truth of war. We want the truth of war.*

Ewell: Of what war is like.

Interviewer: *But didn't our air troops drop leaflets warning the people ahead of their bombing?*

Ewell: Some places, when they could. But what they did do if they had a place to go – some of them went, some of them didn't. And they'd talk about refugees. You read about it – about these Iraqis over there, how many millions. They said many of them are refugees removed – I've had them or I've feel God Almighty. Of course, I was moving up in my tank and I meet these refugees because they knew this is gonna be the war in front of them, move them out. Then, no men, old women, and little kids.

Interviewer: *Old people?*

Ewell: Women and little – of course, all the men and young boys was already in the service. And this is mine. I was born this way. And look, he's coming back to... And you'd think that old lady there, that could be my mother. That could be my sister. That little boy there could be mine. That little girl could be my sister or my daughter. Ain't but one word for it, and that's war is hell.

Interviewer: *Yes, it is.*

Ewell: And you can't describe it. You cannot describe it. I cannot describe even what fear is until you get... You might not live another minute.

Interviewer: *That's absolutely true.*

Ewell: I know what fear is and I know what rejoicing is too.

Interviewer: *So, you were sitting in that tank when the news came over your*

little radios?

Ewell: Come over my radio, the war in Germany is over. The war in the South Pacific was still going on, unfortunately. We sat there – they just sat there and then they [inaudible] turn around and go back to our [inaudible]. We were going across the Inn River and it was blown out in front of me, the Inn River Bridge blown out in front of me.

Mrs. Titsworth: Go ahead?

Interviewer: Yes.

Mrs. Titsworth: Tell her about being at Berchtesgaden.

Ewell: Oh, I went on up –

Interviewer: *Where was this?*

Ewell: That's Hitler's – Hitler's old hangout. You know, [inaudible]. We went on up there after the war. The 101st Airborne had took care of that in front of us. They bombed it and burned it in. I was surprised. I thought Berchtesgaden would be a big place but it wasn't. It was small. It was headquarters and whatnot and all I seen was concrete bunkers. The thing was concrete and bunkers, Berchtesgaden. There wasn't nothing fancy about it. I picked up some stationary. Now, she can prove it, she's got the letter. I picked up some of Hitler's stationary and I wrote her a letter on that stationary and she has got the letter to this day. You won't believe that, but we can prove that because we got the letter.

Mrs. Titsworth: That shows you were right in the spot.

Ewell: It shows I went to Berchtesgaden and I found a pair of boots up there in Hitler's old – in Hitler's – before he [inaudible]. I put them – I picked up – when we got to send things back home, I sent a lot of stuff back home. I sent a pair of boots back home. I still have guns. I got a gun [inaudible] automatic pistol. I kept it. It was a German officer's and he had it on him and I took it – took it off of him. I carried that thing back home with me.

Interviewer: *So, you captured –*

Ewell: I still got it.

Interviewer: *Tell us about capturing prisoners. Did you see a lot of prisoners*

taken?

Ewell: Yeah. Since you mentioned that, you know what I'd do with prisoners that they'd give up? I'd put them on the side of my tank. I'd make them ride on the side of my tank. The Germans wouldn't shoot their own people. Hell, that's self-protection. We did that. Get up on this tank. I'd make them ride on that tank.

Interviewer: *Well, did you have to stand guard over them or tie them on or what?*

Ewell: No, just make them stay on there. You didn't tie them. You threatened them.

Interviewer: *They knew they –*

Ewell: You couldn't talk without threatening them. See, I carried a sidearm and a rifle the Bolsheviks would jump and I'd say, 'No, no, I'll shoot you.' Well, I done that – I don't know – all of us did that. They'd give up and of them we'd – we didn't have room for them and they said send them on back and tell them to do like this and keep walking, keep walking. Make sure they didn't run off. If they had any arms, we'd –

Interviewer: *What were they? Young boys, old men?*

Ewell: Yeah, a lot of them were.

Interviewer: *Very young.*

Ewell: They got to where they were young boys too. You feel sorry for them, if you could feel sorry for somebody trying to kill you, but they had their orders. Just line after line of them. I figured they was led to give up. War is hell.

Interviewer: *Did they act insolent or did they act humble?*

Ewell: Humble, very quiet. They didn't say a word –

Interviewer: *So, you picked up on their attitude and you could tell if they were sincere?*

Ewell: They wasn't even talking to each other. They just kinda numb. They just accepted their fate and there wasn't nothing they could talk about.

They weren't even talking to each other, just kinda numb. They just accepted their fate and there wasn't nothing they could talk about. We'd get to a town and we'd make them get off and take off back the way they were walking. We'd try not to stay in the country at night on account of being bombed. We'd try to go to a town and stay in the town at night.

Interviewer: *Were the soldiers hungry? Did they look starved?*

Ewell: Well, I couldn't tell anything about that. I don't know. We had two or three weeks, I don't know, a month, we'd sit there waiting after the war for orders to come down. I've been a hunter all my life and boy, that beautiful countryside where I was in [inaudible]. You're gonna see deer tracks around camp. So, I had a .30 caliber carbine that I carried with me all the time and I did a lot of deer hunting. I killed a lot of deer. The funny part of that, in this countryside, there are villages and not like it is here. It'd be a village, houses set down in a group in this village and over here there'd be another little village.

I remember the first deer I killed, I didn't know what to do with it. I seen this house not too far in the distance and I knew them people were out there. So, I took my bootstraps – boot strings and I tied that deer. It was small. It wasn't a big old deer like we have here. I tied his feet together and I put that deer across my shoulder. I was in full combat uniform, it was all I had to wear, and I took off down toward this house. I was walking to that house and I had a rifle on one arm and a deer slung over the other. I wondered how scared or what them people thought at seeing an American soldier coming down that road with a rifle in one hand and a deer over the other shoulder in full combat uniform.

I got down to this house and I walk up on the door and I knocked. I didn't know what I was gonna get into. A man come to the door, an old man, and when he come to the door, I set the deer down on my foot and I said, 'Do want that deer?' 'Yeah, yeah.' I don't know after that – I remember taking one deer into camp and they cooked it in the camp. I remember eating one deer right there [inaudible] camp, giving a lady a deer and she cooked it. [Inaudible] and they loved that and she cooked the deer for us. My squad, we ate that. So, that was some of the spoils of war. I enjoyed that.

Interviewer: *What country did you say that was?*

Ewell: What country? Germany, right on the Inn River. Inn River goes

like this and here's Germany and here's Austria. Berchtesgaden is right up here. They had jackrabbits over there and the commanding officer had a Jeep. That old Jeep didn't have a top. It just had a windshield like this. The First Sergeant and me, we found out they had jackrabbits around there. Now look, I could shoot. I got medals to prove it. I could shoot the rabbits. We'd get out in that Jeep, we were just having fun after the war.

We'd get out in that Jeep and drive around them meadows and jump those jackrabbits. I'd stand up and hold onto the windshield. You wouldn't believe it if you didn't see it. I'd kill those jackrabbits while running with my rifle and we'd take the jackrabbits down to them people. I'd just [inaudible] war.

Interviewer: *Did the people act skittish of the gunfire? Did the civilians act like they were -?*

Ewell: Well, I didn't see enough of them to know. I couldn't tell you about that.

Interviewer: *If it brought them some food, they probably weren't too bad.*

Ewell: Yeah. All my men back east, I'd say, 'Boys,' sitting there on the Inn River, 'Wait for something.' We didn't know what we was waiting for. All of the tanks we had, I don't know, we had two or three cases I guess, 15 to 20 inches, hand grenades in a tank in case we got up close and hand to use them. Every tank had a [inaudible] of hand grenades. The Inn River looked like it had good fish in it to me. The cold water there just like the rivers here. I said, 'Boys,' to some of my boys, 'You ever hear - you know how we used to fish with dynamite back in Arkansas? You ever hear that, how Arkansawyer used to hunt?'

See, I'm the only Arkansawyer in the company. I said I'm gonna show you boys how we used to catch fish with dynamite. I go to these tanks and get three or four hand grenades and let's put them out to the river. So, we went down to the river and I said, 'Okay, be careful. Those with hand grenades, don't all go at one time. Just you throw and you throw. You throw that hand grenade and when you do, we'll hit the ground.' We dynamited that quite a few times, dynamited that river with hand grenades, and we'd go down to shore to pick up that fish.

We got enough to have a big fish fry for the whole company. I cleaned fish to where I don't ever want to see another fish. I'm the only person alive that was fishing with hand grenades.

Interviewer: *Well, it was welcome fare after eating that stuff the Army provided.*

Ewell: Yeah, anything. Those people over there, they didn't have salt or anything like that. No salt. I was pretty good buddies with the Mess Sergeant and I'd get him to give me salt and I'd take salt to the people I was giving deer to. Oh golly, they were just so thankful. They just, you know, couldn't talk to you but just fell down to you, just so thankful. It made you glad that you was American. I started to tell another funny one and I forgot now just what it was.

Miss Lucille: I don't know. Tell her you did get to go to Paris though.

Ewell: Yeah, after the war, I got to spend the weekend in Paris – Paris, France.

Interviewer: *Was it a pretty place?*

Ewell: No, it wasn't to me. I got to go to the Eiffel Tower but they wouldn't let us go up in it. It was off-limits. It was a dirty town to me. Narrow streets. You know, Paris is built around a hub like this and the streets come into this hub. It was narrow, dirty streets. It wasn't anything –

The Eiffel Tower down at the end of the street was all closed off. We could go up and look up in it, but we couldn't climb up in it. But we had [inaudible] streets and the bars and I didn't smoke. I only had a cigarette ration. It was so many cigarettes a week or month, and the tank driver didn't smoke. We just thought to cigarettes came late [inaudible] box in the tank. So, me and the First Sergeant, we got a pass in Paris, and a truckload of us went in there. We had duffle bags and I loaded my duffle bag with I don't know how many packages of cigarettes. We'd go out to the bars and sell those cigarettes.

It seems like I made about \$300.00 on that. I remember sending you \$300.00 to \$350.00 one time and the soldier there, he thought it was funny. There for my trip to Paris and I sent her the money. Sold them cigarettes on the black market.

Interviewer: *Were able to write and receive letters very well? Did you get news from home?*

Ewell: At one point, they censored. We couldn't write back. We had to be careful. They'd censor what was right and left. I had something

she caught onto. I let her know who wasn't with us anymore, who got bumped off. I'd say something about remember my buddy – I wouldn't say he got killed or anything like that. I put something there and let her know that he [inaudible]. I can't remember what that was. In my company, I heard we lost somewhere between 100 and 200 men.

Interviewer: *How big is a company now?*

Ewell: I don't know. Let's see, there's 125 in a company and I forget how many companies. There's five or six companies in a brigade. We lost quite a few.

Interviewer: *Was your tank ever directly hit?*

Ewell: No, it wasn't directly hit. I got hit – one of my buddies run into me one night. Sitting up here [inaudible]. I forget whose tank that was, backed into me or something.

Interviewer: *Have you investigated the new tanks? Have you had the opportunity?*

Ewell: No, I've always wanted to. Difference between a wagon and a limousine now. They got the radar and the night sights and all of that. All we had was periscope sights and I had to tell my gunner when to fire. Fire one.

Interviewer: *Were you called upon to wire them together and keep them going?*

Ewell: Yeah, we had the intercoms and radios in all of our tanks.

Interviewer: *I'm referring to repairs. Did you have to do your own repairs?*

Ewell: To a certain point, what we called 'first echelon.' Every time we stopped, the driver would get out and check it over. He'd check the brackets that held the skid, the wheels. What the tires and tracks were I'm trying to say. They were held on and they'd get loose. If we got two loose, we'd lose a track and there we sat. Every time we stopped, he'd do that. He had to know enough about his engine. They sit side by side and they're independent of each other. Each one had a [inaudible] and he had a thing in front of him that kept them synchronized on RPMs. They had exactly like 250 RPMs.

If this one over here was doing 240 while this one over here was doing the pulling, it would get hot and blow out the mission. He

had to keep – that was one of his main jobs, to see that each one of those tanks was pulling its load. He had called it – what we call synchronized. He'd check his engines.

Interviewer: *How much space did you have inside?*

Ewell: Not very much! It's crowded. It sure is crowded. You'd have to lay down and sleep on the floor if you curled up a little bit. You couldn't stretch out in it, that's for sure.

Interviewer: *And you had five people in there?*

Ewell: Five people, yep. Had the driver over here and a cistern had what we call a belt gunner and a cistern gunner on the right. They sit down in it with their heads sticking up. They had a lid. They could get down in the tank and pull that down and look through the periscope down there. I could do the same thing up here. By god, he'd put in line the four tanks and your own tank and see where he was going looking through a little old periscope. I had to see what's [inaudible]. I was telling the old boy upstairs now look here.

Interviewer: *So, at the end of the war, what rank did you have?*

Ewell: Staff Sergeant.

Interviewer: *After your few weeks that you had to wait to be shipped back home, can you remember what month?*

Ewell: I don't remember. I forget what we had to do then on the East Coast coming back. Some camp, Camp Pendleton? No, that wasn't it. I stayed there a while and they gave us leave. Somewhere on the East Coast, when we come back, we landed over here and they gave us a leave to come home. Mine, I think I got a two-weeks' leave. I come by home and then reported over to Camp Chaffee to get my orders to go to the West Coast. So, I tried to get –

Miss Lucille: I believe it was in Virginia.

Ewell: Well, I took out from Newport News, Virginia. I don't know before that. I just don't remember, but it was on the East Coast I know.

Interviewer: *What did you feel like when you got on American soil again?*

Ewell: Oh man, oh man, can't describe it. Coming back, I'll tell you what, I was on a big ship coming back and the sea was calm and it was

smooth and I'd stand on that deck – I'm getting kind of mushy now. I'd get up on the front of that deck and stand there and that old moon, beautiful moon, and them waves – you talk about a picture – the waves lapping down here agin' the bow, lap, lap, lap, lap, and I'm standing at the end of that ship on the railing and I'd look up at that moon and I'd think Lord, my prayers are answered. I'm going home. I'm on my way home.

You'll never know how – you can't describe it. Beautiful! That ship coming home and that big old moon and that sea, the moon shining over that sea and it was calm. The only noise you could hear was that ship hitting the water.

Interviewer: *So, to you, that was the symbol of that peace you had been able to gain by your service?*

Ewell: Yeah, I tell you, you'd never know... Let me tell you, some of that – we still had a pretty hard time on leave after you come home. You don't get over that. Let me tell you something, mark my word, these boys, I know how they feel because I was pulled back in the service. I had two little boys I had to get up and leave then when I was called back for the Korean deal. That's another story. I lost my train of thought.

Interviewer: *Before we go on to that – about your adjustment, you were starting to talk about your adjustment after you got home.*

Ewell: Oh.

Interviewer: *Tell me though, you were in California in the camp, waiting to go to Japan when they told you the war was over. So, how long did you have to wait before you were discharged?*

Ewell: Just a few days because they turned and I had the chance of standing orders or coming home and guess what I chose?

Interviewer: *So, you came back to probably Camp Chaffee?*

Ewell: No, I come right home. They paid me. It's on this discharge here what they paid me. I got \$300.00 I think. It seems like more. I needed that money for a ticket.

Interviewer: *So, you came home to your wife and little boy and life was a big change after being in war, wasn't it? There was a big change.*

Ewell: You're not the same person. You don't get over seeing other people – I've seen dead men in front of me and corpses and

getting out of my tank and we had to walk on them. If you don't think you'll take that home with you, [inaudible]. I don't want to talk about that. [Inaudible] what it's like. I don't mean our men, only the other men.

Interviewer: *They didn't allow you to get out and clean the roads before you went down them either, did they?*

Ewell: No, you stayed in that tank all the time. You got out of that tank, maybe you get stopped for something and you get out and relieve yourself or something like that. They say 'mount up,' and you mounted up and took off.

Interviewer: *Miss Lucille, tell us what it was like, what kind of adjustment it was for him when he came home.*

Miss Lucille: What kind of adjustment?

Interviewer: *Yeah, did he have nightmares?*

Miss Lucille: Yes, he did and he would get up and tear the paper off the walls.

Interviewer: *Out of frustration?*

Miss Lucille: Yeah.

Ewell: You could drop a pin and I'd jump. You better not have set something out – daytime, you better not wake me up because I'd come up fighting. I know my daughter-in-law, she woke we up wanting – I was in the living room, laying on the couch, and I took a swing at her. If I'd hit her, it would've killed her. I said, Judy, my god, don't never do that. You gotta wake me hard. Don't come over and kiss me and shake me like that. Oh lordy, and that's mild for some of these boys. They're gonna be divorces. They already have been.

They come back and there are gonna be divorces, there gonna be murders. And them timid husbands that went overseas like that and really good mamma's boys, they ain't gonna be goody-goody mama's boys when they come home. They ain't gonna be – I'm not talking about the whole bunch. I'm talking about some of them. You're gonna read about it in the paper, you're gonna read about divorces, you're gonna read about murders. Stress! It's stressful, war.

Interviewer: *The stress of war, very much.*

Ewell: It's already happening. It's already happening and they're trying to keep it quiet. I know what I'm talking about.

Interviewer: *Well, it was terrible and it was hard, but my generation owes you a thank you. We want to thank you for your service to our country because we realized what would have happened to the world if you men had not done that difficult job.*

Ewell: Something had to be done.

Interviewer: *Briefly tell us then, you came back to civilian life and what did you work at?*

Ewell: I worked for a feed company. I worked there 13 years.

Interviewer: *Alma?*

Ewell: Fort Smith.

Interviewer: *Fort Smith, Arkansas.*

Ewell: I got to be purchasing agent and one other. I liked sitting behind that desk.

Interviewer: *Tell me when you were called back. What was going on in the world?*

Ewell: I was working with a guy who was in the CI – Criminal Investigation Reserves. Times were pretty hard back then and he's making about \$60.00 a month extra attending meetings twice a month or once a week. He talked me into joining the CIV Reserves. He said it's just like picking up out of the streets and we don't do a thing. Lo and behold, I joined and lo and behold, this deal come along and I had to leave. I know I had to leave, I seen it on television. I remember when I left Lucille out in the yard the day I left with two little boys.

Interviewer: *Two of them now.*

Ewell: And I had to leave. I didn't leave the states that time. They sent me to Camp Gordon, Georgia to school. Before I could go in the CIV school, I had to complete the military police. I went through Military Police school. I've got a vet scan of a diploma to prove it. Then, I went into the Criminal Investigation school. Boy, let me tell you, they're rough. I graduated from that. I got the [inaudible]

of a CID agent. I had a chance to get out on account of they needed me at home. I convinced them with some help back here with my lawyer.

The papers were signed that I was needed at home... I told him this don't bother me one bit to leave this [inaudible] because I've got World War II behind me and I've got combat behind me that most of you guys in CID don't have. I said this doesn't bother me a bit to go home. He said, 'You know, I don't think,' - so I come home.

Interviewer: *That was the end of your military career.*

Ewell: I still got my diploma. I had a chance to - I actually [inaudible] retirement and one of the investigators. [Inaudible] another state, another town and take over for them. They were investigating [inaudible] Fort Smith you know or [inaudible] investigating. I was going good, good job. [Inaudible] and I said, 'Look, I'm not gonna leave home anymore. I've had it.' He said you've got the qualifications and I said I'm not gonna leave home anymore. I said you don't have anything at Fort Smith? He said no. Okay, so I come home.

Interviewer: *But you don't regret any of the service that you gave?*

Ewell: No.

Interviewer: *Well, we thank you. Miss Lucille, I'd like for you to say a few words and then tell us about your family.*

Miss Lucille: I'll tell you, I drove to Georgia with the two boys and my youngest one was four. When we got there, we could not get him out of the car. He said, 'We've come after my daddy, we've got him, and let's go home.'

Ewell: See what I had to leave?

Interviewer: *He wanted daddy.*

Ewell: They came around and stayed with us while I was going to school. That wasn't bad. God, I tell you, that CID school is rough. You studied nights, you studied weekends.

Interviewer: *Tell us how many children you wound up with and their names.*

Miss Lucille: Just the two boys.

Interviewer: *What's their names?*

Ewell: We got 18 great-grandkids.

Interviewer: *Well, you're doing good.*

Ewell: But only 15 of them are boys.

Interviewer: *Fifteen boys!*

Ewell: I'm right on that. Fifteen of them are boys. God a'mighty. We just got two sons, we got six grandkids.

Miss Lucille: The oldest one had a boy and a girl.

Ewell: One of my sons has four girls. He don't have any boys. He's got some grandsons, but he don't have any sons. He's got four girls.

Interviewer: *Well, is there any advice you'd like to give to the younger generation before we finish today?*

Ewell: No.

Interviewer: *Comments about service to your country? The attitudes among our youth?*

Ewell: The only thing I'm worried about is so much dope. You don't know who's on it anymore. When I come home, I was nervous and I was drinking, but I never did take dope. Finally, I had to quit before it killed me. You put a \$100 bill there and drink of whiskey and you say you can't have one of them, you've got to take them both. I'd say thank you very much. I hate it.

Miss Lucille: Yes.

Ewell: Goodness sakes, stay off of this dope. They don't know what they're getting into. They think it's smart, they gotta keep up with the crowd and the crowd don't give a damn about them. You'd be surprised anymore that the people were on that dope. It's a different type of war but it's even more deadly isn't it?

Miss Lucille: It certainly is.

Ewell: They tell me, I don't know, that narcotics is three times as hard to get off of as alcohol. I'd heard that. I've been told that. You might

quit alcohol but dope is something else. You'll kill for it if you can't get it.

Interviewer: *Well, that's very good advice.*

Ewell: And get an education. Stay clean and by hook or crook – I always wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to teach math or psychology. I was a math whiz in high school and my granddaughter, she teaches 12th grade advanced math at Northside in Fort Smith and I'm really proud of her. Boy, she's smart. She's a smart gal.

Interviewer: *She's living your dream.*

Ewell: She got her national teachers license and she can teach anywhere in the United States.

Interviewer: *Well, that's wonderful! Well, we thank you. You're a pair of sweethearts and we appreciate all the input y'all have been into our community with the Alma Genealogical Society that you founded Miss Lucille.*

Ewell: Well, I kind of skimmed the top talking to you, but I told you things I wouldn't tell anybody else.

Interviewer: *Well, you have an important story and we want to do our part to help preserve those stories.*

Ewell: Did you read this article?

Interviewer: *Yes, they have their life story.*

Ewell: I get a kick out of that.

Miss Lucille: Anything that you want to take from this, just go right ahead, okay?

Interviewer: *Yes, thank you.*

Ewell: We still live on that dirt road. I don't how we've been in that house 61 years now.

Interviewer: *Thank you very much, both of you.*

END

Ewell Titsworth

Fort Smith Times Record

Ewell E. Titsworth, 93, passed away peacefully, Wednesday, May 22, 2013, in Alma. He was born in Kibler on Aug 2, 1919, to the late Reuben and Sadie Titsworth. He was a proud veteran of World War II and the Korean War. He served as a tank commander with the 13th Armored Division in France and Germany. He was a 50-year member of Alma Masonic Lodge No. 735 and a 33rd Degree Scottish Rite Mason. He was also a 50-year member of the Fort Smith Shrine Club. He was very active in the VFW and DAV. He was an avid hunter and fisherman. He loved his country, his family and his home on the hillside in Alma. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his beloved wife of 69 years, Lucille; four brothers, Walter, Burl, Carl and Pete; three sisters, Carmel, Tennia and Ruth.

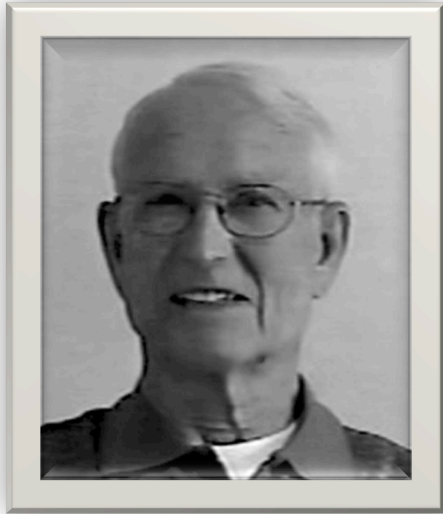
He is survived by his sons, Eual Fay Titsworth and wife Connie of Lavaca and Glenn Richard (Pete) Titsworth and wife Iris of Alma; a grandson, Bryan Titsworth and wife Holly; five granddaughters and their husbands, Cris and Bret Nuzman, Julie and Michael Emms, Jamie and Craig Asplund, Jennifer and Chad Hull and Katie and Wyatt Simpson. He also had three stepgrandsons and their wives. Brad and Kristi Albert, Brent and Denise Albert, and Brock and Amy Albert, he had 27 great-grandchildren.

Funeral will be 2 p.m. Saturday at Edwards Van-Alma Funeral Chapel with interment following at Alma City Cemetery under the directions of Edwards Van-Alma Funeral Home in Van Buren.

Pallbearers will be Bryan Titsworth, Bret Nuzman, Chad Hull, Michael Emms, Craig Asplund and Wyatt Simpson.

Honorary pallbearers will be great-grandsons.

The family will receive friends at the home of Pete and Iris Titsworth following the funeral and interment.



Harry Vandergriff World War II Veteran Interview

The original oral/video interview with Harry Vandergriff was done by Wilma Jameson, Crawford County Friends of Genealogy on May 11, 2007. The interview also included occasional remarks and events by Harry's brother, Bobby Vandergriff. The transcriptions of these recordings was made in June, 2018.

Interviewer: *Today is May 11, 2007. My name is Wilma Jameson and I'm going to be interviewing Harry Vandergriff. The other voice that you're going to be hearing occasionally will be Bobby Vandergriff. We're going to turn the interview over to Harry.*

Harry, introduce yourself to me.

Harry: I'm Harry Vandergriff. I live in Fayetteville, Arkansas. I'm a retired school person. That's about it.

Interviewer: *Harry, where were you born?*

Harry: I was born in Van Buren, Arkansas.

Interviewer: *What is your birthday?*

Harry: October 11, 1919.

Interviewer: *Give me your parents' names.*

Harry: My mother's name was Mae Vandergriff, Mae Springfield. And my dad's L.F.

Interviewer: *Vandergriff.*

Harry: He worked on the Missouri Pacific Railroad for years and years.

Interviewer: *Harry, you said you grew up here in Van Buren. Your dad worked on the railroad. Van Buren's a huge railroad town at that time. So, you went to grade school here.*

Harry: I went to grade school and high school. I graduated from high school in Van Buren.

Interviewer: *What year did you graduate?*

Harry: 1939.

Interviewer: *Alright. In 1939 we were hearing some rumors about what Hitler was doing but not anything big.*

Harry: That's right.

Interviewer: *Did your teachers ever discuss, that you can remember, the activities of Hitler and the war in Europe?*

Harry: No, I don't remember that in high school.

Interviewer: *After you graduated from high school what did you do?*

Harry: My dad wanted one of us to be a railroader, so I worked on the Missouri Pacific for a little while. Then I worked for a grocery store in town.

Interviewer: *What was the name of the grocery store?*

Harry: Whitmore's. I wound up marrying his daughter.

Interviewer: *What year did you get married?*

Harry: 1943.

Interviewer: *So, here we are. You're 39 – you graduated in 1939, excuse me. We're coming up on 1940 and you're working around here in Van Buren. Can you tell me where you were when you heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor?*

Harry: I really don't remember just where I was. I remember that we heard

about it on radio real fast, but I don't recall where I was, in particular. But I was here in Van Buren.

Interviewer: *Did it make an impact on your life?*

Harry: Oh, yeah. It wasn't very long 'til I decided that I needed to get into one of the services.

Interviewer: *Now, you're thinking about joining one of those services. We've got two enemies, now, at the time you begin to think about joining the service. We're fighting Japan and we're fighting Germany. Japan was sort of a surprise.*

Interviewer: *So, now we've got war on two fronts. On both oceans.*

Harry: On both oceans.

Interviewer: *You decide to join – did they not draft you?*

Harry: I would have been drafted soon if I hadn't joined. And I joined so I could pick my service that I wanted to. I decided to go into the Army Air Corps.

Interviewer: *Where did you go to join?*

Harry: I went down to Camp Robinson in Little Rock.

Interviewer: *From there – did you have any trouble getting in the Air Force?*

Harry: Oh, no. Not any trouble at all.

Interviewer: *We have to remember that the Army Air Force was part of the Army, not a separate branch.*

Harry: It was part of them.

Interviewer: *The Air Force; you could have joined the Navy and been part of the Air Force.*

Harry: I could have but I wanted to be in the Army.

Interviewer: *In the Army, here. Where did you go from Little Rock?*

Harry: From Little Rock I went to St. Louis where I did basic training at Jefferson Base. And from Jefferson Base I went over to East St. Louis for the radio operator school.

Interviewer: *They trained you to be a radio –*

Harry: A radio operator.

Interviewer: *Did you know if you were gonna be flying and doing the radio or doing radio on the ground?*

Harry: We assumed that we'd be flying. At least, we all hoped that we'd be flying but we didn't know that.

Interviewer: *What year was this? 1940?*

Harry: 1941.

Interviewer: *1941. You took your training there. You learned to be a radio operator. Where did they transfer you to?*

Harry: Then they sent me to MacDill Field in Florida. They started training us to fly. And they used the small bomber-type planes, twin-engine planes to train us on. They were anxious to get us overseas, so our training didn't last very long.

Interviewer: *You're going toward Europe.*

Harry: Right.

Interviewer: *And you said they're anxious to get you overseas.*

Harry: That's right.

Interviewer: *But now, we didn't really have an Air Force. We didn't have very many airplanes.*

Harry: That's right. But finally they – I don't remember how long but it wasn't very long before we went overseas that they got B-17s. They trained us for a short time on B-17s, getting trained to go overseas. They asked me – they took me away from my crew and put me in a special crew and we flew from Labrador to Greenland to Iceland to Europe and Scotland to fly.

We were doing what they called flying – weather flying. They were sending fighter planes to England. They wanted to know how the weather was between Labrador and Greenland and Greenland to Iceland. One plane would fly from – one B-17 would fly from Greenland back to Labrador at the same time one was flying from

Labrador to Greenland and we'd radio the weather every few minutes. The two planes met in the middle. They would know what the weather was like. They'd know whether they could fly their fighter planes from Labrador to Greenland.

We did that for, oh, a couple of weeks. Then the Japanese bombed Dutch Harbor. They recalled me and I went back to my unit. They sent us up to Washington State to be prepared to go to Alaska or somewhere. We were there a couple of days and they decided our mission was in Europe. So, we flew back to England. Our group flew the first combat mission, bombing raids for American bombers, first bombing raids from Europe.

Interviewer: *You all were the first ones –*

Harry: We were the first bombers, big bombers. There are four wings of bombers to fly out –

Interviewer: *What plane was that?*

Harry: That was a B-17.

Interviewer: *Now, the weather plane, what was that?*

Harry: That was a B-17, also.

Interviewer: *The B-17's kind of a –*

Harry: They had B-17s and B-24s. They were the only two four-engine bombers they had. The B-17, of course, since I was in them was the best (*chuckle*).

Interviewer: *Do you remember your first bombing run?*

Harry: Oh, yeah. It was very short. We were scared to death. It was – we (*inaudible*) into France. It was just barely across the Channel. It really didn't amount to anything, as far as opposition was concerned because I'm sure the Germans weren't prepared for it, daytime bombing. The British always bombed at night and we bombed in the daytime; high altitude, daytime.

Interviewer: *You remember being scared and –*

Harry: Oh, yeah. And then we had – I don't remember how long we were at England but I recollect we did, with our crews, six or seven bombing raids. Then the Allies invaded North Africa. They sent our group to

North Africa. That's where I finished my combat hours –

Interviewer: *North Africa was a pretty rough place to be.*

Harry: North Africa, the first part of North Africa, we lived in pup tents and get a canteen water a day and lived on the edge of the desert. It was kinda bad. It was a long way from our base to where the targets were. As the campaign got better, we moved further and further west – or east. I finished all my bombing runs from there. While we were in England, the bombing – they said that after 25 missions we would be sent home. After we got to Africa they changed it to 50 missions.

Interviewer: *Do you remember some of the targets?*

Harry: We bombed southern France and we bombed Sicily and Sardinia and a lot of times we'd get – a few of the targets were little islands over east of Algiers.

Interviewer: *Did you have a specific target in mind when you were doing that?*

Harry: They'd pick different targets, mostly – Most of our bombings were railroad and martial yards, where we bombed the rails and things. We bombed the airports. But most of it was railways or airports.

Interviewer: *Do you remember much opposition?*

Harry: Oh, yeah. Yeah. We had – opposition grew pretty heavy. We had – what scared us most was anti-aircraft fire. The Germans were pretty good at that. There were fighter planes, both – they'd be 109s and Focke Wulf planes that we fought against.

Interviewer: *Tell me, did you lose some buddies over there?*

Harry: Oh, yes. We certainly did. I don't remember how many planes we lost because it was off and on. Seldom we'd go on a mission without somebody getting hurt.

Interviewer: *One man, the other day, said the first group that went over, that would have been your bombing group, lost almost 50 percent of your planes.*

Harry: That's probably right.

Interviewer: *You think about that, you're about a 50 percent chance of your plane being hit. You didn't know it at the time.*

Harry: No. Oh, no. We didn't know what the odds were. But we had a lot of planes including ours that got hit. Many times planes would get very difficult or very substantial damage and still make it back home. Sometimes one or two crewmen would be hurt or killed but the plane would get back.

Interviewer: *Those bombers were pretty – how do I wanna say – were pretty good planes, to be able to get back. They could take a hit and still –*

Harry: They were very stable. Yes, they were.

Interviewer: *You have a picture here of an airplane that had some damage. You wanna tell about that?*

Harry: Yeah. This plane was in our squadron in fact. It was there, flying a mission, and a fighter, a German fighter plane, attacked from the front. He came in. Evidently, they killed the pilot of the fighter plane. He went right straight and his wing hit the horizontal stabilizer and knocked it off. That made a big gash through the rest of the plane. That plane flew back home and landed on (inaudible). Nobody on the plane was hurt, which turned out to be rare.

They salvaged – when a plane would go down they would salvage parts, like in this one. They were salvaging the engines from it and when they took the engines off the one side, the change in weight on that side caused the plane to twist and the plane completely fell apart. There was a lot of structural damage but the plane landed without any trouble. I think there was a song that somebody published. It was called *Coming in on a Wing and a Prayer*. I think that's the plane that they used to base it on.

Interviewer: *You think this was the basis of what they did. Tell me about a little farm boy – well, you're not farm. You're a city boy. I'm sorry.*

Harry: Van Buren was pretty small back in those days.

Interviewer: *I started to say you're a small-town boy over there doing bombing raids. Did you feel that you were contributing to the war effort in that way?*

Harry: Oh, yeah. We certainly did. Fact of the matter is it seemed like it took an awful long time for us to go overseas. We couldn't wait 'til we got overseas. Then after we had a few bombing runs we couldn't wait to get back home. We felt like we were really helping our cause.

Interviewer: *As you're advancing, there in Africa, where do you go from there?*

Harry: I can't tell you the names of the bases, but we moved four or five times. And as the Allies invaded – advanced to the east, then they grew closer and closer to them. I don't remember. Probably five times we moved.

Interviewer: *How many bombing raids did you actually go on?*

Harry: I had 50 official, but we had several raids that we would start on and for some reason or other, like the target might be clouded in, so we just turned around and come back home. Or we had engine trouble or some such thing. We had several raids that we started on but never finished.

Interviewer: *You had to complete them before they'd count them?*

Harry: You had to complete them.

Interviewer: *They were kinda stingy about counting them. So, when you finished your 50 did you get to come home?*

Harry: Yes, but it was a few months. Seemed to me, at the time – it is difficult for me to remember – but it seemed to me like an awful long time from the time that I quit flying until I got to go home. The way I got to come home, they gave us orders to come home and you hitchhiked home. You could either go to the Operations Center and catch a plane or you could get to the coast and get a boat. So, we just kinda hitchhiked our way home.

Interviewer: *Do you remember what year that was?*

Harry: That was 1942.

Interviewer: *So, you were now finished –*

Harry: 1943, I think it was.

Interviewer: *You actually got out of the service – did you get out of the service?*

Harry: No. No. After I came back from overseas – I got home in the summer of '43, or the fall of '43, it was. Ann and I got married at that time. Then they sent me to Dyersburg, Tennessee, and we trained bomber crews to go overseas.

Interviewer: *They used you for the rest of the time as a trainer.*

Harry: For two more years.

Interviewer: *In thinking back over your service time and your time overseas, can you think of a time that stood out in your mind more than anything else?*

Harry: The one thing that stands out most in my mind was Christmas of 1942. We were flying a raid over Algiers and the plane on our right wing was hit by anti-aircraft fire. He just exploded. The explosion knocked our right wing tip off and caught our right outboard engine on fire so we fell out of formation. When you fall out of formation fighter planes come to visit. We fought fighter planes for a while and we finally crash landed. The pilot and copilot and I were all injured a little bit. Two of the crew members bailed out. One of them was captured by the enemy. The other got back o.k. We found some help and got back home.

Interviewer: *Where did you land?*

Harry: We just landed on the side of a hill, just out there. All I can tell you is it was in North Africa. I can't tell you where it was, exactly. The pilot wanted us to stay there and wait for somebody to find us. I asked him if he'd give me permission to go look for help. So, he said it was okay. I found a British artillery outpost and they sent an ambulance back to the plane to pick up the rest of the crew, so we all made it back okay.

Interviewer: *But the crew members who bailed out, were they told to bail out?*

Harry: No. The pilot told them not to bail out. They did it on their own.

Interviewer: *It's kinda scary being up there in the air and your plane damaged and you don't know whether or not you're gonna make it.*

Harry: The strange part about it is when you get into a position like that you're not afraid. You don't worry about anything. You just do what you have to do. What we did was we fired at the enemy planes. They shot at us. You're so busy doing stuff like that that you don't have time to be afraid. Or air sick (*chuckle*).

Interviewer: *But your pilot is the commander.*

Harry: The pilot is the commander.

Interviewer: *And you're supposed to do what he tells you.*

Harry: You're supposed to do what he tells you.

Interviewer: *Because in a crew you have to have somebody in charge.*

Harry: That's right. And the pilot is the one. And one of the fellow's that bailed out, he was the ball turret gunner. He was a little Mississippian who was – to talk to him you'd think he was the toughest kid in the whole world. He turned out to be not quite as tough as he thought he was.

Interviewer: *In looking back, you don't ever know why another person does something, but he could see, where on the radio you had no way of seeing out?*

Harry: In my position as radio operator, on a bombing run like that, I would move back to the waist and fire one of the waist guns. So, I was a gunner as well as a radio operator. But the radio was off at that time, as far as usage.

Interviewer: *So, they put you in another position when –*

Harry: That's right.

Interviewer: *You had training on that, also?*

Harry: Sort of. We didn't have much training in firing weapons. We learned how to take the gun apart and clean it and put it back together. And our training was so fast, they took us out and we would shoot at all those buoys riding in the water. We never got to shoot at moving targets. It was always just learning how to pull the trigger, I guess.

Interviewer: *'42 was a rough year.*

Harry: Yes, it was.

Interviewer: *They didn't have time to train as much as they did, maybe, a little bit later.*

Harry: Later on they took more time.

Interviewer: *Sometimes. In '43 they just pretty much shoved them in there. But anyway – It's interesting. You come back and you're training, now, on the base. Did you tell me what base you were training on?*

Harry: Yeah. In Dyersburg, Tennessee.

Interviewer: *And that's where you stayed until the war was over?*

Harry: I stayed there until the war – until summer of 1945. I guess the war in Japan –

Bobby: It was August, '45 when they dropped the – the war was still going on.

Interviewer: *When you heard about the dropping of the atomic bomb how did you feel?*

Harry: I felt like we did what we had to do. Looking back now, it's too bad they developed the thing to start with. But my guess is that Germany would have had one pretty soon.

Interviewer: *Coming back home, was there a lot of changes in America?*

Harry: No, not right then. It doesn't seem to me like it. I came back and immediately started going to school at the University of Arkansas.

Interviewer: *Did you go on the GI Bill?*

Harry: I went on the GI Bill. Thanks to the GI Bill, I guess, it made us what we are now.

Interviewer: *You don't have anything but fond memories of what your time in service and what it did for you?*

Harry: That's correct. My time in the service was a good time.

Interviewer: *Let me ask you a question here. You were in battle. You had a lot of – I say battle. You were in air battles. Did you have post-traumatic stress disorder?*

Harry: No. We didn't even know what that was back in those days. No. I didn't have any trouble.

Interviewer: *Sometimes some of the foot soldiers did.*

Harry: I could see why they would have a lot more difficulty that we did not have.

Interviewer: *It's been a joy talking to you.*

Harry: Why, thank you very much.

Bobby: Winston Churchill was –

Interviewer: *You wanna tell me about Winston Churchill?*

Bobby: Also, I think he's left out one (inaudible) his getting out of that crash, how he got to the British line. All the Arabs and (inaudible) and he had money to pay but you were too tight and kept it. You had a gold medal – a gold and silver dollar.

Interviewer: *They're telling it for you but do you wanna tell it?*

Harry: Well, whatever. They were helping me tell about when my plane was shot down. They gave each one of us what they called escape kits. In your escape kit there was some gold, a couple of gold coins, flyers in several languages telling them if they would take us to the nearest Allied outpost they would be rewarded, and things like that; things that would help you get back to your own place. As we went along, as I went along there would be Arabs walking alone, working in the field or something, and they'd run over and I'd give them one of the flyers. They would – usually it would be a couple of them and they would talk to each other in a language that I certainly didn't understand. They were the ones who directed me to this base.

Right outside of the headquarters of this base there was an Arab plowing in the field. These two guys yelled at him. He came running over and they talked together, and so when we finally got to the British base they wanted all of them to be rewarded, even the one that was working in the field right beside the base. I assume they rewarded them. But anyway, I kept one of the little gold pieces and made it into a necklace for my wife.

Interviewer: *Along that line, did you know that sometimes in these escape kits that they put large sums of money?*

Harry: They didn't in our escape kits.

Interviewer: *The reason I say that is I know that in your plane you did have the escape kit. I have interviewed a man who, when he got on the ground, he didn't know what was in the kit until he got on the ground. When he got on the ground he had \$1500.00 in his escape kit.*

Harry: Well, there may have been that much in this one but I didn't know it. If we did it was in paper money.

Interviewer: *I think it was a random thing. I don't think they did it in every one but it would be random.*

Harry: They gave us each an individual escape kit. This was my individual escape kit. They probably, for the pilot or copilot or somebody like that, they may have different sums.

Interviewer: *I had never heard that before.*

Harry: No, I hadn't either.

Interviewer: *And the escape kit is something that I don't even know if they do that today. That is something that they did back then. And they tried to prepare you.*

Harry: And it helped in this case.

Interviewer: *Most of the time when the planes went down – if they could get down the people walked away from it. The soldiers, the Air Force people walked away. Today, sometimes, they don't walk away because the planes go too fast.*

But anyway, you tell me about Winston Churchill.

Harry: My last few missions – after our plane crashed, all the rest of the crew quit flying. I was the only one that continued to fly and I didn't have a crew. Finally, the wing commander, who was stationed close by, used me as his radio operator. As a result, we had – dignitaries would visit the wing commander, come to the base. They would have functions quite often and I got to go to some of the functions. And among the things were Winston Churchill visited there. Paul Tibbets who was the pilot of the Enola Gay that dropped the atomic bomb, he was one of the pilots in our group. He wasn't in our squadron but he was in our group. So, I got to visit with him. I had kind of a privileged position for a little while.

Interviewer: *What about Jimmy Doolittle?*

Harry: Jimmy Doolittle came to North Africa to fly a propaganda mission. He was gonna fly – we were gonna bomb Rome. General Doolittle flew on our plane as copilot. He was the first flier that I'd ever seen that wore a steel helmet instead of a leather helmet, like everybody else. But we bombed Rome and it was my duty, as his radio operator, to send a message out saying that we had bombed

Rome. That was pretty good – quite a privilege to be on a flight with him.

Interviewer: *I'm sure it was.*

Harry: That's because the wing commander was – I was flying with the wing commander.

Interviewer: *You're saying that some of that was morale –*

Harry: That's what the bombing run was.

Interviewer: *That this big name man was flying.*

Harry: That's right.

Interviewer: *We needed that.*

Harry: We were doing pretty good right then, though.

Interviewer: *The Distinguished Flying Cross? Did you get that for –?*

Harry: I got that on that mission, when my plane was shot down.

Interviewer: *When the plane was shot down they give you – not a Purple Heart but a Distinguished Flying –*

Harry: They gave me both.

Interviewer: *They gave you both? Well, good! Good. Because you were wounded.*

Harry: Yeah, I was wounded. They said that I did some other things, too.

Interviewer: *You acted above and beyond –*

Harry: Yeah. I had to put a little fire out on the plane. And then I went after this people to come get the rest of the crew. That sort of thing.

Interviewer: *You're kinda modest about it but I think it was more than just a little bit.*

Harry: Well, it didn't seem like much.

Interviewer: *You did what had to be done.*

Harry: Right.

Interviewer: *It's been a joy to talk to you.*

Harry: Well, thank you.

Interviewer: *Now, we're going to show some of the medals that he received. And did you have some pictures? Other pictures?*

Bobby: Of a B-17, if you wanna show it.

Interviewer: *Can you get the picture of this? Okay. Thank you. I enjoyed it.*

End

Harry Vandergriff

Arkansas Democrat Gazette

Harry Vandergriff was born on Oct. 11, 1919 and passed away on Aug. 29, 2012. Harry was a resident of Fayetteville, Ark. at the time of his passing.

Upon graduation from Van Buren High School, Harry enlisted in the Army Air Corps. His service included the first daylight heavy bomber missions flown out of England, 50 total combat missions, and awards of the Purple Heart and the Distinguished Flying Cross, these latter for wounds received, heroism, and resolute courage under fire in an aerial dogfight that resulted in his bomber crash landing. He was discharged in 1945 and enrolled in college at the University of Arkansas. Upon graduation, he began work for the Fayetteville Public Schools as a teacher at Jefferson Elementary School. He later became head football coach at Fayetteville High and Superintendent of Fayetteville Schools.

Harry's tenure as superintendent was marked by the goal that students deserved the best the community could give, and teachers must be encouraged and supported in reaching this goal. Advancing this goal, Harry worked with the state legislature lobbying for all students in the education system. He served on the boards of various community and state organizations to serve the city of Fayetteville. He was an elder in the First United Presbyterian Church in Fayetteville.

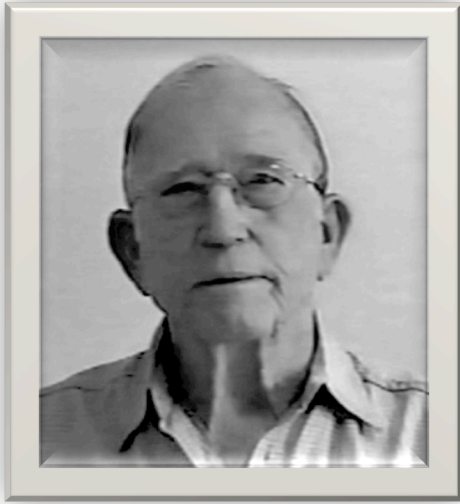
He is survived by his wife of 68 years, Anne Vandergriff; his daughter, Marcia Morris (Michael) of Corpus Christi, Texas; his brother, Bobby Vandergriff (Betty) of Van Buren,

Ark.; his four grandchildren, Van Hall (Jay) of Texarkana, Texas, Whitney Myers (Zachery) of Bastrop, Texas, Meredith Shaddox (Jonathan) of Fayetteville, Ark. and Kate Cox (Larry) of Corpus Christi, Texas; eight great-grandchildren and numerous nieces and nephews. He is preceded in death by his parents and four siblings.

Cremation arrangements were under the direction of Moore's Chapel.

A memorial service will be held at 11 a.m., Tuesday, Sept. 4, 2012 at First United Presbyterian Church, 695 Calvin St. in Fayetteville.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to First United Presbyterian Church, 695 Calvin St., Fayetteville, Ark. 72703, the Fayetteville Education Foundation, 877 Clinton Dr., Fayetteville, Ark. or Cooperative Emergency Outreach, P. O. Box 3631, Fayetteville, Ark. 72701.



**Ray Vandergriff
World War II Veteran
Interview**

Interviewer: *Today is May 11th, 2007. I'm going to be visiting with Ray Vandergriff and he's going to be telling me some of his World War II experiences. And the other voice that you will hear will be his brother Bobby. Let me get your full name, Ray.*

Ray: William Ray Vandergriff.

Interviewer: *What's your birthday?*

Ray: August 4, 1922.

Interviewer: *Where were you born?*

Ray: Van Buren, Arkansas.

Interviewer: *What's your mom and dad's name?*

Ray: Mother's Mae Springfield, maiden name. Father was Lafayette Vandergriff. He went by L.F. Vandergriff, and when I joined the Navy they said what does the L.F. stand for? And I didn't know. They said you can't get in until we know that your father and L.F. Vandergriff is the same. So, I hitchhiked back to Van Buren and Papa said, "What does L.F. stand for? Who wants to know?" "The Navy wants to know." "It's none of their business." And so I had to go back and he wasn't telling me. Mama said his name was Lafayette; it was Lafayette. But the "F" he just made it up. So, I ended up getting a notary to say that Lafayette Vandergriff, L.F. Vandergriff, Lafayette F. Vandergriff were all the same and was

my father.

Interviewer: *Ray, what year was this?*

Ray: 1942, when I was first signed up.

Interviewer: *You went to school here in Van Buren.*

Ray: Through high school right here in Van Buren.

Interviewer: *What year did you graduate?*

Ray: '41.

Interviewer: *In 1941. Things are already beginning to rumble, by '41. Are your teachers talking to you at all about Germany?*

Ray: No. Not that – Of course, the news was wide.

Interviewer: *You saw it on the newsreels.*

Ray: And having brothers that were both in the Navy, one before Harry and then Harry, so we was well aware of what going on as far as the –

Interviewer: *In 1941 you're graduating. What do you decide to do?*

Ray: Go to college.

Interviewer: *What changed your mind? Did the bombing of Pearl Harbor change your mind?*

Ray: I was in college when they bombed Pearl Harbor. I had already joined the reserves at the time. Well, I joined – after the bombing I joined the reserves but I didn't go into active duty until a year later, which was in July of 1943.

Interviewer: *Where did you go to college?*

Ray: Arkansas State Teachers.

Interviewer: *Arkansas State Teachers. You're there in the reserves.*

Ray: Right.

Interviewer: *As a reservist, what branch of the service did you go into?*

Ray: The Navy.

Interviewer: *You were allowed to do that because as a reservist you could pick what you wanted to do?*

Ray: I had gone into the Navy reserves. At that time, when I first joined, I could join whatever service because they were all wide open. I preferred the idea of the Navy.

Interviewer: *What made you choose the Navy?*

Ray: One, I like the water, but I had a brother that was already in. He was in submarines and at that moment he was one of the first – he was already in the Navy before Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. Since they destroyed so much of our Pacific fleet the submarines were – and very few of those – were all we had, pretty well, to keep the Japanese back. And it made them superheroes, basically, especially the tales we got back from him, what he went through.

Interviewer: *Are you anxious to get in the Navy? Or are you –?*

Ray: Kinda anxious.

Interviewer: *We're kind of taking a licking right now, in early '42.*

Ray: And '43 and especially in Japan or the South Pacific.

Interviewer: *Where did you go when you went into the Navy? You decided to go into full-time service or did they draft you on in?*

Ray: They called me in. I was already in the reserve and they said that I was safe in university. My momma had said, "It's time for you to go fight the war because Harry's there doing it and Boon's there doing it. Time for you to get out of school and go. I was not a very good student and anxious, so I'm being moved from the university to the Navy boot camp.

Interviewer: *Tell me. You said you had brothers in. How many brothers, now, do you have in service?*

Ray: Harry and Lafayette. We called him something else, but Lafayette was in, was the older one. He's the one that if he were here, the tales that he had to tell. The early war –

Interviewer: *He was the submariner?*

Ray: They'd be out there for months and months without getting into some base and all they could get back to was Hawaii. We couldn't land in any of the islands for fresh water or food.

Interviewer: *You're the third one, going in. I'm thinking about your mother. She's sending her boys into service, three of them. She knows that two of them are pretty well in danger and she knows you're going in, now.*

Ray: She had received, I'm sure, when Harry went down, I'm sure the War Department sent her a letter saying that, probably, at the time they didn't know that he was safe. All they knew was that he was missing. She would have received a missing in action letter from the Army department, the War Department, for both Lafayette and Harry. This has to be a fairly traumatic thing for a mother. Now, she has another one going and two waiting in the wings.

Interviewer: *A side issue from what we're talking about on the war but it is related, also, parents and families put in the windows stars to show how many boys they had from that one family serving?*

Ray: I think the stars – I'm not real sure – were different colored, also. If you had either lost it would be either gold or red or some other color. Those who had, like Harry, had seen some pretty heavy action would be another color. Then people like me and then Bobby, that came in later, would be another color. I'm not totally sure but she had five stars in her window.

Interviewer: *Now, you're going into service and you're taking your training.*

Ray: I chose to be a radio operator, the same as the others just because they did, I guess.

Interviewer: *You asked to be a radio operator?*

Ray: Right. And I wanted to fly, also, so I chose that, too. Since demand was still great, if you had any high school education or some college or education then you could pretty well choose –

Interviewer: *What you wanted to.*

Ray: Especially in the technical services.

Interviewer: *So, they trained you where?*

Ray: I went to Memphis, at the Naval Air Station there to train for radio skills. They had mocked up some aircraft and they received some rudimentary training in mechanics and other (inaudible) and machine guns that you would also, as Harry had said, that you served both as a radio operator and a gunner. On three and four-engine bombers like I was on and the one that he was on, had three radio and three ordinance men and three mechanics.

Interviewer: *Where did they deploy you?*

Ray: Went to Yellow Water Gunnery School in Florida and then from there to a squadron in San Diego. Joined a squadron in San Diego and then moved to Hawaii in '43, in the fall of '43 moved to Hawaii.

We were taking out a new aircraft that had never been used before, but it was a Navy version of the Army B-24, and what they called a B-24 in the Navy was a PB4Y-1, which was a heavy patrol bomber. And then ours was a PB4Y-2, which was a new version of the B-24, so that was the first squadron of those aircraft that were moving out.

Interviewer: *By the time you got a plane, America had begun to manufacture and supply more airplanes than they had in the beginning, right?*

Ray: Well, more of their effort had been more to Europe, the B-17s and all the armor and even ships (inaudible) Atlantic was full of German submarines right up to the very end. So, the effort had been there, but they were beginning to supply the South Pacific as we were taking out a new airplane.

Interviewer: *Okay, now you're serving in the Pacific and Harry's on the other side. So, and like I said before, we've got enemies on both sides. America was under siege from two different directions, and so did you fly your bombing missions from Hawaii or did you move –*

Ray: Well, we started there. That was our starting point from there and you then would go to different directions in the Pacific depending on the mission that your squadron had. We went on a submarine patrol from Hawaii for a short period of time but then we moved on more toward Japan.

Interviewer: *Are you always on land?*

Ray: Always land.

Interviewer: *Always land. You were not on any ship? Your planes did not –*

Ray: No, not deliberately.

Interviewer: *I know that the Navy had a lot of airplanes on a lot of ships out there, but your bombing raids are mainly land-based.*

Ray: Right.

Interviewer: *What were your targets? Do you remember?*

Ray: The primary target starting out was submarines, but we were bombing more of our own submarines. You had no way of telling what a submarine was. You could see it beneath the surface, slightly beneath, but you couldn't tell whether it was the US or Japan, and as the same token, the American ships shot at American planes. They couldn't tell the difference between, so we avoided our own Navy ships. And they told us to quit bombing submarines, so then we moved on to Tokyo, Japan.

Interviewer: *Go back to that just a little bit. So, we lost some men by what they call friendly fire?*

Ray: You really would never know there. That was one of our big problems is that our planes went one at a time. We went single. So if a plane would go up and didn't come back, you didn't know what happened to it. It just didn't come back. Sometime after the war was over, then the Japanese were able to account for some of the planes. We had some in our squadron that were prisoners that we didn't know about until the war was well over. But as it happened, we didn't know that until -. They had just gone up and didn't come back.

Interviewer: *So, what I was trying to get at though is there's a lot made today over friendly fire and over the fact that sometimes we lose people in our services to our own men because they mistake whoever it is, but this is not a new problem.*

Ray: It's not a new problem. With us, it wasn't much because we stayed away from it. We were told to. You go through recognition training that if you're on board a ship, they show you pictures of both US aircraft and enemy aircraft, and you supposedly learn to tell the difference, the same as we did with our recognition of enemy aircraft and submarines but say you can't tell what it looks like when it's a little underwater. And when you see another airplane coming toward you, you're not gonna stick a flag out and say are you friend or foe? You start shooting and then they start shooting, so you just stay away – we were told to stay away from –

Interviewer: *Alright, did your radios help? I mean if you saw a plane coming, could you make radio contact?*

Ray: We were radio silent because the Japanese I guess they – and Germany and there might have been so many radios you didn't know who was calling who, but when we were by ourselves, they could track us down by zeroing in on the radio transmissions. So, we had radio silence, they called it, so the only time we radioed was either when you were going down or to give a position report back to your base to send out strictly a position report which by the time the Japanese would intercept it or do anything about it, we wouldn't be there anyway.

Interviewer: *They're too late. Now you said you're going out on missions, but it's just your airplane.*

Ray: Just one airplane.

Interviewer: *Now tell me, you never did have fighters alongside of you?*

Ray: Not ours.

Interviewer: *Okay, so you're –*

Ray: Well, the only fighters I saw were when they were bombing Iwo Jima, and were in the neighborhood. But we went single. No fighters ever accompanied us.

Interviewer: *So you're going out singly on your bombing mission, and you say that your target basically is you're trying to get Japan.*

Ray: Well, in the beginning when we started from Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay actually was the Navy base that we were operating from. It was more training but submarine patrol. When we were in Hawaii, though, our first experience of getting a little bit shook up was we ran head-on into an airplane that we called a duck. It was a Grumman amphib, a single-engine amphib, that were launched off the battleships, and then the battleship picks them up and they (inaudible). And whatever happened – I don't know what - we ran head into the – so it was either pilot error or air traffic control error.

When you're young, you know, nothing's gonna happen to you, so to drift back in training in San Diego was then what was called the after station in an old B-24. It had long bay gasoline tanks and the hose going to the tank about that big around [showing by hand the size].

Then one came loose, and I was standing back in the open hatches smoking a cigarette, and the gasoline just put the cigarettes out, and we just had soaking wet gasoline up to about our knees. And a sailor who was next to me said, "Do you smell anything?" We were not afraid at all but obviously I was and I said, "I think we've got a gasoline leak." We called the pilot and he said to not panic but open the bomb bay doors and we got it out, but the boys are not afraid at this point.

Interviewer: *Now you said you were smoking a cigarette and the gasoline put it out?*

Ray: It put it out. It just splashed over. And no fear at all, you know, nothings gonna happen to me. But then when we ran into that airplane, we landed safely. They didn't. They destroyed their plane all to pieces.

Interviewer: *Now, is it an enemy plane?*

Ray: No, it's our own.

Interviewer: *It's your own.*

Ray: Yeah, friendly fire I think.

Interviewer: *So you're running into this plane and your plane is damaged and they go down.*

Ray: We lost an engine, but they - it tore them all to pieces. So there were two on there. It killed them.

Bobby: Tell them about the bomb.

Ray: So we start then in earnest to go to war after that, but the point is that you start out young and unafraid of anything. It's not gonna happen to me. Then maybe it might happen to me. You start looking back on those things of what could've been. So we go then from Hawaii to Guam to Kure Atoll [?] to Johnston Island to Tinian.

Interviewer: *Okay, you're getting closer and closer.*

Ray: Right, closer and closer. Now we're on Tinian Island, and we're now starting into the war. We go from Tinian to Japan before the B-17s and the B-29s. The B-29s were just coming in, and along the shore, they had what they called picket boats that were just big barges that were loaded with anti-aircraft. There were no engines on there. They

were towed out and anchored, and their purpose was to shoot down the incoming B-17s and B-29s and the radar stations that were on the coast.

Our job is we'd come in below the radar so they'd have one airplane and we'd try to knock the picket boats out and the radar stations, so when the heavy bombers came in, that they could get in without so much notice that they would be given without us and the ack-ack was so plentiful that there were black spots all around, but fortunately, we never got hit in that spot. We were able to get in, do our thing, and get out.

We didn't have enough gas to get back to Tinian, so we had to stop at Iwo Jima. And Iwo Jima was not secured. The Japanese had one end of it, the runway, and we had the other end, so we had to land on the Japanese side and then taxi up to our end and then take off from our end. But that's when I saw fighters and fighter-bombers that were bombing the Japanese positions. It was kind of like watching a movie. We'd circle around until it was clear to land, and we could see the Marines and them fighting one another, and we were watching it. That was a like a movie. The island was blown to pieces. It was just dust.

A marine came up and was all covered with mud. He said did we have any bread or any water. I said yeah and he could have all we got. We were gassing up and we had to go back to Tinian. I said that if we don't get back to Tinian, we wouldn't need the bread and water anyway, so he could have what we had. Then he said, "I wouldn't have your job for anything. But there dirty and fighting and I was thinking yeah, I'd sure like to have your job.

We had one night that we couldn't get out for some reason. I think the runway had been blown up or hadn't been repaired enough for us to get out, so we had to spend the night on Iwo Jima. They had little tents. I think there were two of us to a tent. They were screaming banzai, banzai and some sergeant stuck his head in and said, "Don't get out of the tent." There was shooting and banging. I had a little pistol that I wouldn't know which end to aim, then again you get a little bit of fear that adds to the one that you already have.

And that is why I guess before we got that far on the patrol that we had an engine catch fire, and we went down at sea then, so we were there for 36 hours in the water. One of our own planes saw us.

I taught Sunday school, and I had some pictures that were – I might have a piece of one. This is not the one that I had, but there were whitecaps and then there was a raft. And I held this picture up

(inaudible) we were talking miracles and did anybody ever feel there were miracles. And they were looking at the picture and said, "What's this?" and I said, "Well, look real close at the picture." And they looked and said we don't see anything but ocean. I said there's a raft out in that ocean but you couldn't tell it from a whitecap, and the fact that we were discovered in that day had to be a miracle. It was a big ocean. (inaudible) we'd had sent out a position report before we went down about where we were but you drift. Then planes went by that we saw but didn't see us.

Interviewer: *Can we show that then? Okay, I don't know whether it's going to show up or not.*

Ray: That's the little raft.

Interviewer: *So, out there in all that ocean, you spent 36 hours in that water.*

Ray: Right.

Interviewer: *Was it cold?*

Ray: It was cold. I think the problem with being cold was you'd get wet and then the wind blows (inaudible).

Interviewer: *How many of you were there?*

Ray: Fifteen on board and 8 survived; seven didn't make it.

Interviewer: *How big was your life raft?*

Ray: It was a one-man raft.

Interviewer: *And there were eight of you?*

Ray: Well, we were hanging around on the sides.

Interviewer: *So, you're telling me that you hung on the side of that life raft for 36 hours.*

Ray: That's right. Well, not all the time. There was a bomb bay tank that was floating, and the bomb bay tanks were big. I think about five or six of us crawled up on top of that tank, and after the wind blowing we got dried and it was warm. If you had to go to the bathroom, you just let it go because it was warm. Then it started sinking. The tank finally sunk. I don't know how long I was up there. I just crawled up on it in the middle of the night, but the rest of the time, we were

hanging around in the water.

The pilot said that he couldn't put the flames out of the engine. We had fire extinguishers in the engine that either didn't work or didn't work enough and then he dived trying to force the flames out. The flames just acted like a big blowtorch (inaudible) and cartwheeled in and before we went down, I was up on what we call the flight deck where the navigator, pilot, co-pilot and asked if they had a life vest. There weren't any up there though. We had some passengers that were up in the nose in the bombardier's compartment, which is not the place to be, and the pilot told me to go tell them to get in the catwalk. Well, they had no life vests or any spares. So I went back to my position, and I put that raft behind for a cushion if we were gonna land. But before we hit, a friend that was up on the flight deck that had asked for a life vest if he even had one. He said, "I found a life vest," and he handed it to me.

We must have hit about that time. It broke his arm. And then we had a threaded pipe that lowered the radar. His leg was just threaded [motion as around that pipe]. It broke all the bones in his face (and he is still having medical care even now). I got the raft out then and then we called the plane captain named Dandy, and I heard this (inaudible) which is what I was (inaudible) and then went over and got him. Then Dandy said he was on the wing floating, and the pilot was on that wing and said, "I'm gonna go over to see if I can get something to help us – another raft or anything that will help us float. I told him to stay with the raft and that we would go get the pilot. He said, "Oh, maybe I can help." So he left.

The pilot jumped off the wing and swam to the raft, and he swam to the wing, and the last we saw of him, he was sitting on the wing. He was too tired to swim back. So, we had a little whistle that was in the raft, and I could hear him blowing that whistle long after I couldn't see him in the dark. We'd hear that whistle blowing but the last we ever saw of him, and we got –

Interviewer: *So, when they picked you up, they didn't find him?*

Ray: No. (inaudible) the next day before they came around to us and once they located us, they had to get a ship to pick us up. There was a weather ship that was somewhere in the neighborhood that picked us up, and then we were transferred to a destroyer because the weather ship was so slow. I don't remember any of that. I remember getting on the first ship and getting off –

Interviewer: *Okay, now go back to where you're out there in the sea. You're wet*

and cold. You're afraid that somebody won't see you. Does your life flash before your eyes? I always wondered that.

Ray: No. Again, as Harry said, that for some reason, I was calm and wasn't afraid. I was afraid afterward. I wasn't afraid of the future or afraid of the past but not at the moment. There were so many occasions that happen that you could be afraid.

I was a radio operator and also our radar operator as well as being a gunner. And we had gone to Singapore. We moved from Tinian to Iwo Jima to the Philippines, and we would fly along the Borneo coast to Singapore and then back. It was about an 18-hour flight. And you never know to stop and get gasoline or ran into some unexpected bad weather, or if you were attacked, you would use evasive actions, it would use up gasoline that you didn't plan on. You didn't plan on getting attacked. And we were lost. And the pilot laid it on me and said if you find any land, let me know. And our gas tanks were showing empty, and I picked up something. I said I don't know if it's a cloud. It's 100 miles away. I don't know if it's a cloud or it's an island. It happened to be the end of our island.

But again, the point is that we could go in the water any minute, but you're not afraid. You've got a job to do, and you're doing it. Fear is not even a thought. We ran out of gas when we landed. We didn't even taxi off the runway. We ran out of gas.

Interviewer: *And did you find out where you were?*

Ray: Well, we were at our base. We were heading for our base, but the navigator didn't know it. He was lost, so he went (inaudible). So, we were gonna land on any land we could find whether it would be enemy or –

Interviewer: *Now Ray, let's go back just a minute to your plane going down. I'm interested to know. You said your buddy was hurt real bad. You've got a one-man raft. How do you keep him – now he can't swim. He's got a life vest on.*

Ray: I don't remember. I don't remember. I know we got him. I went over there. Dandy had left, so I was by myself in the raft. Since he was calling for me, I went to him. I had to have had help in getting him into that raft. There's no way that I could've – it's hard to get in the thing anyway when you're able-bodied. The raft sits up about like that out of the water, so pulling yourself up – I don't know how we got him in there. I know that his mouth was coagulated with quite a bit of blood. There was just a hole where he could breathe through. His nose

was all smashed up. In fact, it was sitting over on the side of his face. He could somehow communicate because he said he was thirsty.

One of the crewmen had tasted the water. He had like a little Coke can of water, and he said it doesn't taste good and threw it overboard. It had probably been in there ten years. So he said he was thirsty. Then I said well, we'll get you some water. Then he said, "I can see Dandy over there on the rock drinking water." Dandy was the one that had moved over to the wing and then was lost. Then he said, "We can pull over there and get water. Then he said "There's another rock up ahead that's got some water." Then after that, he couldn't talk at all.

Interviewer: *So, he was delirious?*

Ray: He was. His mouth had just completely closed up except for just a hole big enough to breathe through.

Interviewer: *Now, I understand that you received a medal for this for your time?*

Ray: They didn't give any – at least I feel we got the medal for answering roll call three times straight. It was more for missions and the area where you'd come under enemy attack. So, like Harry got the Distinguished Flying Cross and some Oak Leaf clusters in lieu of another medal, and I think the Flying Cross is a pretty distinguished medal.

Interviewer: *So, that's what you got?*

Ray: I [showing his frame of medals] got the Air Medal just for (inaudible). You get a lot of medals. The (inaudible) Freedom Medal which I got underneath there or the Campaign and the medal Harry was talking about and information that they usually had on the back of our jackets in several different languages (inaudible) airman to the –

Interviewer: *Okay, now here is the picture of you in the boat.*

Ray: (inaudible) thought that would be a good idea to put that in here.

Interviewer: *That's a beautiful frame.*

Ray: These are Campaign Medals that don't mean anything individually as far as heroism or activities, it's just that you were in that campaign, like the campaign of the China Sea or (inaudible) or the Philippine liberation, or something like that.

Interviewer: *My husband got a medal for being in the campaign in Korea, and he*

was in the very last bit of it. He really didn't do that much in Korea -

Ray: Well, one thing that took me a long time to get was the Good Conduct Medal. I got that (inaudible). Bobby got one and I think he took it back.

Interviewer: *Those are interesting. Alright, now so here we are. You're bombing Japan. Did they pull you back after you lost your plane? Did they pull you out of active service?*

Ray: Well, they gave us an opportunity that you could go back home on a 30-day survivor's leave is what they called it and then you'd turn around and come back. I thought while I'm out here, I'd rather go ahead and get it over with and not have to come back again. So, I stayed and the pilot stayed. There were three pilots – a pilot, co-pilot, and navigator, and the pilot and navigator would switch places every once in awhile. And the four of us were the only ones remaining of the original crew, and all of us elected to go ahead and finish the tour rather than go home and come back.

Interviewer: *Alright, so did you get on another plane?*

Ray: (inaudible) new planes.

Interviewer: *So, you're gonna be assigned a brand new plane.*

Ray: So, we had brand new planes, but we didn't actually have one. There were 18 crews and 15 airplanes, so we had a spare plane, so we took whatever plane was ready to go when our time came. We took whatever was available, so we'd go to the different ships at random. And before the bomb was dropped, then they started relieving crews. We had had the most trouble, so we were the first crew to be relieved to go back.

So, I know I spent my birthday in – there was a hotel in Hawaii, the famous Royal Hawaiian.

Interviewer: *Alright, can you think of anything else during your active duty time that you'd want to bring up?*

Ray: No, outside of an occasional (inaudible). We didn't have the kind of attacks like Harry went through and then the (inaudible). But then they didn't have the long hours over the water that –

Interviewer: *That you all did.*

Ray: We rendezvoused on Thanksgiving Day. We rendezvoused with an American submarine. If we spotted any ship, we'd relayed the information to the submarines, and anything that they could pass to us that would be helpful to the effort (inaudible). Our pilot was complaining that it was Thanksgiving Day, and we had been out, at that point, about 12 hours, and we were eating nothing but K-rations. And the guy said, "Well, we can kind of sympathize with you. We're having turkey and dressing," and something else, but he said, "We've been out here six months." So it sort of balances out over time, and like the Marine that wouldn't want our job, and I couldn't think of anything worse than a foot soldier. You know, they're fighting an enemy that you can't see in the dark –

Interviewer: *At least you were dry most of the time.*

Ray: I had a good place to sleep if we had a place to sleep, if we didn't, it didn't make any difference.

Interviewer: *Now, what did you think about the bombing of Pearl Harbor? I mean not the bombing of Pearl Harbor. I'm sorry. The bombing of the atomic bomb. I got all confused.*

Ray: Delighted, I guess, as probably most people. But we were, at that point, winning the war as far as pushing the Japanese back to their homeland. But with the kamikaze and things like that that were taking a bunch of lives and the lives that would be taken if we had to invade Japan is the same resistance that I'm sure they would get if they invaded the US. That every man, woman, and child would be defending this country. So, not only would millions of those people get killed but bunches of us would be killed. And at that time, we didn't know the extent of damage that the bomb, that happened. But we were glad that it was.

Interviewer: *Where were you when you heard that –?*

Ray: We were in the Philippines on Palawan Island. It's a little island that's separate from the main island of the Philippine islands. It was a small island that had just pretty much our base and a runway.

Interviewer: *How did you celebrate?*

Ray: I don't know, but there was not much chance of celebrating. I think they gave you a beer if you were a beer drinker or lucky but the food was what you could keep in a tropical area, so that wasn't much. A little K-ration that was cardboard boxes covered with wax which you got. We called it tropical butter, but I guess it was a kind of a

processed cheese. See, we had C-rations when we were on a bigger base, but I don't think there was much to celebrate with. We did shoot our guns. Our hut was right on the beach.

Interviewer: *I've heard there's a difference between C-rations and K-rations.*

Ray: C-rations are cooked and generally where you have a cook. It's sort of like spaghetti without the spaghetti or the meat sauce. It's kind of a meat mix. I thought it was pretty good, but I guess it was because it didn't have much; the eggs were dry and mixed with water or milk or some powder mixed with water which is okay, but we didn't even have that on the plane.

Interviewer: *Did you get much mail when you were over there? Did you know where your brothers were?*

Ray: No. (inaudible) received (inaudible) My momma had received a missing in action. And then I had a chance to write to her, and she wrote back and said tell your pilot not to do that no more.

Interviewer: *Your mother must have been a special person.*

Ray: She was, yes. She was the head of the household. But I guess my wife says that she had a bunch of good boys, and it wasn't because of papa, it was because of mama.

Interviewer: *So, the war is over and you're coming back, are you glad to get back to America?*

Ray: Glad to get back. The war was not over. I'm one day out of San Francisco. I had come back aboard ship, I flew the different aircraft from the Philippines to one little island to the next, and then I'd wait until another plane would come to take me a little further. And then in Hawaii, I got aboard a ship going into San Francisco, and they were a day out of San Francisco when the war was over. So, trying to go back when you said did you celebrate the war. I don't remember celebrating anything. But war wasn't over then, we didn't really have anything to celebrate at that point.

Then when we landed in San Francisco, there were a bunch of problems, I guess, with riots, and they wouldn't even let us off the base. We went from the ship and got on a bus that took us to the base, and from the base, we got on a bus that took us to the railroad station that took us to where we were going. They never let us get into downtown at all. There were guards on us that wouldn't let us out to celebrate.

Interviewer: *Do you think that there was a difference in the America and their attitude toward the war than there is today?*

Ray: A large difference both of what I have perceived myself and what I read in the letters to the editor and things of that nature. At that point, we truly had something to fight for, and there's some big division as to what we were fighting for in both Vietnam and what's going on in Iraq as to just what is the mission and what's it for.

Interviewer: *We had a clear-cut mission.*

Ray: At least in my mind, and the people that I knew, and the propaganda that was put out. I'm sure the German ruler Hitler was bad, but by in large we didn't think the German people and the Italian people and the Japanese people were all that bad. The propaganda that was put out at the time, but the pictures and the movies of the Japanese with teeth hanging out and were 8 feet tall. And we had a prison on Tania for Japanese, and they were about 3 feet tall and all wrinkled.

Interviewer: *Quite different than what you had been led to believe.*

Ray: I turned pretty sympathetic toward the people. They were defending what they thought to be their country, but the propaganda that they got I'm sure was the same that we got. And I don't see that in today's —

Interviewer: *If you had any advice to give to young people today, what would it be?*

Ray: Well, [chuckle] I live in Memphis, so I don't go out of the house. An education.

Interviewer: *Okay. Did you get an education when you came back on the GI Bill?*

Ray: I got a GI Bill education. I got a pilots license that gave me part of a job after I got out and I was working. It just makes life so much easier. Harry's tutored a young lad that couldn't read and then trying to go through life not being able to read. You know, what else can you do if you can't read? You dig ditches, do exactly as what somebody tells you to do. You can't do much on your own if you can't read.

Interviewer: *So, your advice would be to get an education.*

Ray: Get an education.

Interviewer: *Alright. It's been a joy talking to you.*

Ray: I'm glad to be able to tell some of the experiences. [Grinning] My brothers don't wanna listen to them.

Bobby: He's very modest.

End

William (Ray) Vandergriff

Press Argus Courier
March 1, 2012

William Ray Vandergriff died Friday, Feb. 24, 2012, at Germantown Methodist Hospital. He was born in Van Buren in 1922. Ray received his master's degree from the University of Arkansas and was a proud World War II Navy veteran. During World War II he served on several of the Pacific Islands and was awarded many decorations and medals including the Purple Heart and Distinguished Flying Cross. Ray worked for the Federal Aviation Agency for more than 25 years.

He is survived by his dearly devoted wife of 62 years, Dodie Vandergriff, two loving daughters and their spouses, Tinian (Steele) Molloy of Memphis and Diana (Warren) Graves of Keller, Texas; two devoted grandchildren, Greer (Gene) Allen of Gastonia, N.C., and Robert Vandergriff "Griff" Grissom of Nashville. He also leaves his precious great-granddaughters, Gillan, Caroline Rae and Annalise Allen. He also is survived by his brothers, Bob (Betty) Vandergriff of Van Buren and Harry (Anna) Vandergriff of Fayetteville; sister-in-law Barbara Vandgriff of Escondido, Calif., and many extended family members.

A memorial service at Kerby Pines Community is being planned. The arrangements are incomplete at this time. Please keep the family in your thoughts and prayers.

(Obituary submitted by Ocker Funeral Home of Van Buren.)



**Raymond Weese
World War II Veteran
Interview**

The following was originally a video interview done by the Crawford County Friends of Genealogy, Van Buren, Arkansas. The interviewer is Hilda Daugherty. The original interview was recorded on March 21, 2007. This written transcript of the original audio was accomplished in June 2018.

Interviewer: *Today is March 21, 2007. We're here interviewing Mr. Raymond Weese about his World War II experiences. Mr. Weese, would you tell me your full name please?*

Mr. Weese: Raymond Earl Weese.

Interviewer: *And where were you born?*

Mr. Weese: In Dyer, Arkansas.

Interviewer: *And when was that?*

Mr. Weese: 11/17 of '27.

Interviewer: *11/17 of 1927. So, I suppose you went to school in the Dyer area?*

Mr. Weese: [I went to] school in Dyer and elementary school and high school in Alma.

Interviewer: *Tell me who your parents were, Mr. Weese.*

Mr. Weese: George and Bonnie Weese.

Interviewer: *What was her maiden name?*

Mr. Weese: Johnson.

Interviewer: *She was Bonnie Johnson. Were they all from the Dyer area?*

Mr. Weese: Around the Dyer area, yes.

Interviewer: *If you can think of them, tell me your grandparents' names.*

Mr. Weese: My grandmother was Georgia Myrtle Thompson Morris. That was on my mother's side. And on my daddy's side was Sarah Anne Thomas – or Sarah Anne Carnes Weese Thomas. That's the way it was. And I never did know my grandpa on either side. They died before I was born.

Interviewer: *Oh, that's right.*

Mr. Weese: My mother's daddy's name was Josh Johnson. He was from down around Elba, Arkansas. Any my daddy's daddy was Albert Harvey Weese. And he was killed in some kind of a fight break-up or something in Alma, Arkansas –

Interviewer: *Oh, my.*

Mr. Weese: – in 1904. So I never did get to know neither of them.

Interviewer: *Do you happen to know the previous history of your families? Did they come here to Arkansas from Kentucky, Tennessee? Do you have any stories about them?*

Mr. Weese: Well, yes. I got stories that date back to 1733, whenever the first Weeses come to the United States.

Interviewer: *Oh, that's a nice history.*

Mr. Weese: I got a history of that about – they come over here on the USS Anderson in 1733 up around Muddy Creek, Pennsylvania.

Interviewer: *Muddy Creek, Pennsylvania.*

Mr. Weese: That's where they settled. And they had to cut it pretty short because the first Weese that was ever born in the United States – his name was

Jacob Weese – and he was born, I think, about three weeks after they landed.

Interviewer: *Oh, that's pretty close. He almost was born on the sea, wasn't he?*

Mr. Weese: I've run the history back on that, and it's in the library at Alma. And I finally – my great-great-grandmother is buried over at the Twelve Corners Cemetery between Alma and Goddard on that 61 community road. And I never could find out who her husband was, and I finally got in touch with a woman – or the woman got in touch with me – from San Diego. Jalene Beemer was her name. And she had a bunch of the history, and she connected Elizabeth, my great-great-grandmother's, husband. That's whenever I can connect it all the way back to Germany.

Interviewer: *Isn't that nice? That is a wonderful thing to do – to learn your family's history.*

Mr. Weese: I've got a whole lot of history on that. I've been working on this for several years.

Interviewer: *That's a good project. Tell me a little bit about Dyer – the big town of Dyer, Arkansas was like when you were a boy.*

Mr. Weese: Well, it's just one of these ordinary towns. And actually, they had these – we didn't call them games. It was cuds. They used to call them the Dyer Tinhorns. I've always held that whenever I'm talking about back then that I didn't even know how to spell tinhorn, and I said now I oughtta learn.

Interviewer: *What did they do? Were they just some boys that knocked around?*

Mr. Weese: Yeah, just messed around. Just find a little bit of something, do a little bit of work to make us some money to go to the show. We didn't have but two shows or two movies that we'd go to, one in Mulberry and one in Alma. So, we couldn't take our pick on what movie we would see like you do now. But I believe that we use to go to Mulberry, and a movie then was \$0.11. And I believe up at Alma was the same way too.

Interviewer: *Did your gang of boys play baseball together out in the cow pasture?*

Mr. Weese: Played baseball. They had one team named the Dyer Tinhorn, the other named the Kinsey Crawlers. We didn't have the regular baseballs you know. We just wound up a bunch of twine instead like that and then sewed it together.

Interviewer: *That was the common Arkansas way of making baseballs.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. Lots of times you could hit that ball and you couldn't see nothing but string there when the threads broke.

Interviewer: *Did your dad farm? What was your family's occupation?*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. He worked for a guy down where the Dyer truck stop is now. He worked for a guy down there for about 12 years and started out at \$0.75 a day, and I think the most he ever made for him was \$1.25 a day. And the guy who worked him was a shipping clerk at Fort Smith Folding Bed and Table Company, and he finally got him a job over on the dairy, and that's where he retired from.

Interviewer: *But did your father also farm on the side?*

Mr. Weese: No. Whenever he and Mom first got married – this was before I was ever born – they farmed cotton down there at one time.

Interviewer: *In the Dyer bottoms?*

Mr. Weese: Well, it was down towards Vine Prairie or someplace around there.

Interviewer: *What did your gang of young men find to do? What kind of work did you do to make a little money?*

Mr. Weese: Oh, pick beans, pick cotton, corn, and cut the spinach. All that stuff.

Interviewer: *So, you were living the life of Arkansas farmer even though your father was not a farmer.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah.

Interviewer: *What I'm building up to is how physically fit you were when you did enter the military service. You had farm muscles, didn't you?*

Mr. Weese: Oh, yeah. You do have to be physically fit in order to live back then, especially like my dad. He worked on the WPA there at one time. And he was coming to work and they was thrown in the back of a pickup that the government furnished, and they didn't have seats back there. All they had for seats was just a piece of lumber laid across the bed of the truck, and you sat down on it. And Picket Hill – you know where it is.

Interviewer: *Oh, yes.*

Mr. Weese: They was going down Picket Hill. And evidently there was a car run out in front of them or something had wrecked there. Well, when it did, it throwed Dad forward, and he went down on his knees. And that door hit him in the back of the legs and broke the leaders in his legs. He was flat on his back for 16 weeks at one time, and he was off work for over a year. And he never got a thing out of it back then. He worked on the railroad one time, and you've heard of carbuncles, haven't you?

Interviewer: *Yes.*

Mr. Weese: He had a carbuncle under his arm that had 16 heads on it. And he took off one day to go to have the doctor to lance that. Went back to work the next day and they fired him.

Mr. Weese: That's the story, I guess of the early part of my life.

Interviewer: *So, you were able to go on to high school. Did you finish high school?*

Mr. Weese: No. I went to about the 11th grade, something like that.

Interviewer: *And when you were in high school, were you beginning to hear the news about the war in Europe.*

Mr. Weese: Oh, yeah. I remember the day that they bombed Pearl Harbor...

Interviewer: *Tell us first of all what you were hearing as a school boy. Were the school kids talking about – the history teachers, perhaps, talking about what was going on in Europe with Hitler?*

Mr. Weese: Not that I can remember the first part of it. But when I went to high school at Alma, we had a history teacher up there that – the part that we got in to was a discussion. One student had the side of being 21 before you could vote, and the other student was the one that was on the side of just make up some kind of story or something. So, I happened to be on the one that was for the 18-year-olds voting [because that was the age of military service] and I think I made a mess out of it, but it didn't help. I usually always did, so it's nothing new for me.

Interviewer: *But there was talk and then there was news on the radio.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: *And you were mentioning Pearl Harbor. What were you doing the day*

of December 7th when you heard –?

Mr. Weese: I was walking to school. We lived about a mile from the schoolhouse, and I was walking to school. And I was going across that railroad track. It was a real foggy morning, and I was going across the railroad track and somebody said, "Well, Pearl Harbor's been bombed." And I thought that was the end of the world.

Interviewer: *How old were you at the time?*

Mr. Weese: Oh, 15, 16. Somewheres along in there.

Interviewer: *You knew you wouldn't be too many years until you'd be eligible for that 18 magic number for the service if you couldn't vote.*

Mr. Weese: Five of us boys and there's four of us in the military at one time.

Interviewer: *Were they older than you?*

Mr. Weese: I got a twin brother, and then I got two brothers older than I am and then one younger.

Interviewer: *So, you kept up with the news after Pearl Harbor. You probably heard what happened.*

Mr. Weese: Well, yeah. I didn't understand a whole lot about it at the time, but it didn't take long to get in school then, though.

Interviewer: *Well, who in your family was the first one to be called on to serve in the military?*

Mr. Weese: It was my older brother. His name was Bill. John William was his name, but we called him Bill.

Interviewer: *Was he drafted? Or did he volunteer?*

Mr. Weese: He was drafted.

Interviewer: *Do you remember what year that would have been?*

Mr. Weese: About '42, '43. Somewheres along in there.

Interviewer: *Go ahead and tell us what branch of service he was in.*

Mr. Weese: He was in the Navy.

Interviewer: *Oh, he was in the Navy, too.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Do you have any little rundown of where he served or anything about his service before we get into yours?*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. He served on a ship called the USS Gridley; 380, I believe, was the number of it. And he was on it for the whole time. In fact, his ship was on a secret mission one time, and they had them missing in action for over 30 days. My mom and dad couldn't get a thing from him, and that was during the time that he got injured. And he never did get a purple heart for it. That's what I'm working on now, trying to get him a purple heart. He died about two years ago.

Interviewer: *Did you ever know what the secret mission was?*

Mr. Weese: Never did. The injury that he got – it more or less destroyed a lot of his memory, and he didn't remember a whole lot about it. He just remembered that there was an explosion.

Interviewer: *Well, I'm glad you shared that with us. And your next brother, then, was called up?*

Mr. Weese: His name was Scott. And he had went – well, he had joined with a friend of his out of Tulsa, Oklahoma. And he was in the Naval Air Force. And I don't know a whole lot about his history. He doesn't talk about it too much. I don't even remember the name of the aircraft carrier he was on. He was an aerial gunner. They flew off some aircraft carrier – don't remember which one it was.

Interviewer: *And then it came your turn.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. Well, I went into the Navy. I was drafted into the Army, and I went down to Little Rock and took my physical examination. And me and a friend of mine – his name was Neil Henson – we went together. His birthday was on the 18th and mine was on the 17th of November. There's a little story about that. We turned 18 years old, and we had to come to [inaudible] to register. So, the 17th happened to be on a Sunday.

Interviewer: *Your birthday.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. But we had to wait until Monday to register, and this Neil Henson, his birthday was on the 18th. So, all three of us – me and my twin brother and Neil Henson come up to register. We got up there to

register, and they made me register first. The reason they made me register first is because I was the oldest. I was 15 minutes older than my twin brother, and then I was a day older than my friend.

Interviewer: *But they had to keep it in good order.*

Mr. Weese: It had to go in order, yeah. So, we went down and took our Army examination down at Fort Roberts or something like that down in Little Rock.

Interviewer: *Robinson.*

Mr. Weese: Camp Robinson. And that was during the time that you could take your 21 days. I guess it was to get your affairs ready before you go into the service. But during that time, you could join any branch of service that you wanted to –

Interviewer: *During those 21 –*

Mr. Weese: – during the 21 days. Well, me and Neil Henson got to talking and me, I never could stand the necktie around the neck. I just wore them on certain occasions. And so, I decided to go into the navy because the neckties are way down here. You can tie [inaudible] knots. So, anyhow, we went into that, and we took our basic training together, and we were even on a ship together.

Interviewer: *What about your twin brother? What did he go into?*

Mr. Weese: He went into the Army.

Interviewer: *Oh, he did?*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. And he went over in Korea. That was before the war ever went on in Korea. And I think, at that time, he was a cook. And they had them sleeping in tents, and his feet froze in the winter. He's had a little bit of problems with his feet, but not much.

Interviewer: *Well, did they give him a medical discharge because of his feet? Or had they just patch him up and send him back?*

Mr. Weese: They just patched him up.

Interviewer: *Put him back in.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah.

Interviewer: *What is your twin's name, Mr. Weese?*

Mr. Weese: Ralph.

Interviewer: *Ralph and Raymond.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. Mine is Raymond Earl and his is Ralph Burle.

Interviewer: *Well, that would be a good match. What was the date of your draft? What year was that? You went in in November the 18th of—*

Mr. Weese: I registered —

Interviewer: *Registered.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. That was '45.

Interviewer: *1945. So, you chose the Navy. And where did they send you first?*

Mr. Weese: To San Diego at the Naval Training Station there at San Diego.

Interviewer: *Tell us what they were training you for. Was there any specified training?*

Mr. Weese: Just the military training we all went through.

Interviewer: *Just the regular basic?*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. The first 21 days, you were restricted. You couldn't go nowhere but just there on base. Then after you graduated out of that camp and went into another camp — the basic training — you could get weekend liberties. And after you graduated the whole thing there, they'd let you come home on leave. Then when I went back to San Diego and they sent me to Camp Elliott. That's at the disembarkment center.

And well, we made a joke out of it, what we done over there just passing time. I'd pass out quilts or blankets for the servicemen that was coming back from overseas — they come in there to them barracks, but all we had was cots. I done that, and we called it dive-bombing. We had a stick with a nail on the end of it, and we were out picking up paper.

Interviewer: *Dive-bombing.*

Mr. Weese: We called it dive-bombing.

Interviewer: *I would like to back up a minute, though. You went into the war after a lot of the big battles. You were home and heard a lot of the stories. What was the attitude of the people at home? What support or did you hear criticism of the way the war was carried on? I'd like to know the atmosphere in the United States about that time.*

Mr. Weese: Well, I imagine that the whole time people were more or less stunned about it just like they were when they bombed Pearl Harbor. People were stunned. They couldn't believe that they was being bombed. So, that's the best I can remember of that.

Interviewer: *But did you feel like the country was united that we had to win this war?*

Mr. Weese: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: *There was not the faction of one fighting that we shouldn't be fighting this war?*

Mr. Weese: No. Everybody was behind them on that because we were attacked.

Interviewer: *And that unity, I think, probably gave the soldiers and the sailors courage.*

Mr. Weese: Well, yeah. In fact, during that time too after Pearl Harbor was bombed, you'd be surprised at the people that went down and joined whenever Roosevelt declared war on Japan.

Interviewer: *That's a good point.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah, they were a line. New York – I've been hearing a lot of stories about New York, and it was a line around the block. The next day after that was on a Sunday, and the next day after that on Monday, they lined up around the recruiting office.

Interviewer: *Had you personally known boys from Dyer who had been in the war for some time before you were in? Did you hear news?*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. I knew some people down there that was in before. I knew some that got killed. In fact, one of my best buddies got killed there. He went in before I did.

Interviewer: *What was his name?*

Mr. Weese: His name was Wylie Swofford, but we called him Docky Swofford.

Interviewer: *Docky Swofford.*

Mr. Weese: And he went in, and I guess he got killed no sooner than he got over there. And I don't remember where it was but anyhow – just like he stepped off the ship onto the beach and got killed right then.

Interviewer: *Soon after, yeah.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. Soon after he got there.

Interviewer: *War [inaudible]*

Mr. Weese: And then there's another one named Edgar Forbes, I believe, was his name. He was a little bit older than I was.

Interviewer: *Was he also killed or was he just –*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. He was killed.

Interviewer: *Well, what did that make you feel like knowing you were gonna have to go?*

Mr. Weese: I was hoping that I'd miss out on a bunch of it, but you never know.

Interviewer: *I'd like to ask this about life at home, too, during those early war years. Everything was rationed – many things were rationed in other words. And the newspapers were putting out suggestions of how to make do with what you have and how to make your food stretch, how to share food with the soldiers and all that. Now do you recall victory gardens or how you dealt with gas rationing and those kinds of things?*

Mr. Weese: Oh, yeah. I believe they had the gas stamps. And we had the A and the B and I believe the C stamp. They meant different things. One of them was for your ordinary driving, like private driving. One of them is for driving to work and back. And the other one is for another deal – I don't remember what it was now. But I think you were rationed on your private driving. Seem to me like it was three gallon a week. I'm not sure.

Interviewer: *I think that's right.*

Mr. Weese: And I don't remember how much the other one was.

Interviewer: *So, you had to think before you –*

Mr. Weese: Right. Right.

Interviewer: *Well, I'd like to know – now you're out in San Diego and you're waiting for your turn. So, they finally assign you to a ship.*

Mr. Weese: Assigned me to a ship.

Interviewer: *Now take us on through the war years and what you saw and did. I'd like to hear your story.*

Mr. Weese: Well, about the only thing that I seen was there out of Okinawa. The fighting was really over.

Interviewer: *And what ship was this?*

Mr. Weese: This was the USS Lowry.

Interviewer: *Lowry. L-O-W-E-R-Y.*

Mr. Weese: E-R-Y, yeah. And we were a ship on picket duty. And what that picket duty meant was we had radar on this ship, but radar wouldn't stretch out – I believe it was 90 miles. I'm not sure. But we'd get outside the fleet and circle around the fleet to pick up that early radar. And the ship that I was on, too – they were submarines in the area, and they launched torpedoes which tried to get into the main body of the fleet. Well, these destroyers are supposed to go in there and confront them first.

And if they were close enough into the fleet, if they sent off them torpedoes, they supposed to go in and take the torpedo before it got into them bigger ships. So, that was what that picket duty consist of. But I don't know how long it was after the war until – you'd find a bunch of damn nuts over there that didn't believe the war was over. They'd come in and start firing on you. And that's about the only way that I got in some of them battles which are not even recorded.

Interviewer: *But it was just as critical because they could undo what had been accomplished by the truce.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Well, let me go back then. Where were you when you heard that Germany had surrendered in May? Were you still at home?*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. I was still at home.

Interviewer: *Did that give you a little bit of courage?*

Mr. Weese: Yeah, it did. It let me breathe a little easier because I just figured when they surrendered, everybody else would surrender, too because they instigated the whole thing.

Interviewer: *Didn't quite work that way, though.*

Mr. Weese: No, it didn't quite work that way.

Interviewer: *Japan kept on fighting a little longer.*

Mr. Weese: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: *And you're out there trying to avert some of these attacks on the ship groups or whatever you would wanna call those. And when did you know that you were gonna be taking part in some secretive-type action?*

Mr. Weese: Well, I really didn't know. We'd heard about it. That was all the information we'd get – just that we'd heard that it was gonna have one. Well, me and my friend, that Neil Henson – we decided that if we got discharged before that thing had that test, we was gonna sign up for it. Gonna reenlist and sign up for that. They didn't have to ask us. We'd volunteer for it. But they didn't ask us.

Interviewer: *Oh, they didn't give you the opportunity about that.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. But it didn't work out that way because our ship was involved in it to start with. They already had that cut and dried, I guess, before we ever got on it.

Interviewer: *Yes, they did. I'm sure.*

Mr. Weese: So, the night before we left – the evening – the skipper of the ship give us liberty. We'd go wherever we wanted to, but we had to be back aboard the ship at midnight. So, me and a couple of my buddies went to San Francisco and walked up and down Market Street. And we come back aboard the ship – it was before midnight – and went on to bed. Well, when we woke up, we knew we were out in the middle of the ocean because it's a feel that you have on the ship. You can tell that you're underway. And we went to the chow line and they were – I thought they'd moved the whole army in on top of us there. They had soldier boys everywhere.

And we knew at that time that we were going somewhere. They was

two of us ships went from the United States to Pearl Harbor, and it was one of our sister ships called the USS Ramona. And it would escort us a while, then we'd escort it a while. We got into Pearl Harbor. We went to the sub base. That's where we always tied up was at the sub base. And we tied up there at the sub base. And there was one guy that got up on the dock there where we pulled in, and he was in a Jeep.

And he caught the lines when we threw them over to him, and he hooked them around a chock there to tie us up. Then he got in his Jeep and left. Took us about 30 minutes to refuel there, and when we got refueled, we could undo them ourselves. Then we took off and did the same thing. USS Ramona escorting us, us escorting them, all the way to Kwajalein over in the Marshall Islands. And on the way over there, I was in the engine room, and I kept – we have headphones down there that you can keep up what's going on aboard the ship there.

Interviewer: *So, what was your assignment on the ship? What were you supposed to be doing all the time?*

Mr. Weese: I was usually on the throttle. And they got to telling us over that headphone that we got to get the – like a distress call. And I don't know how true it is, but I understand afterwards that they were towing the battleship Oklahoma over to Bikini for it to participate in it. And all the stuff that I've got, it never was over there. Then I heard that they was taking it back to Seattle, Washington. They bought it for scrap iron. So, they were going to put that back in commission.

It had teakwood deck, and they couldn't – it was just too expensive, I guess. Anyhow, I heard that that guy that was going to buy it for scrap iron in Seattle, Washington backed out, and they had target practice on it. Now I don't know whether that's a fact or not. But when we got to Bikini – we got to Kwajalein, that's when this boat come out and picked up all them high officials.

Interviewer: *So, you had a lot of high-ranking officers on your ship –*

Mr. Weese: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: *– on that trip over.*

Mr. Weese: Oh, yeah. And the last we seen of them were headed towards Kwajalein, and then they come out with a bigger boat and got them other soldier boys and took them off. And we sat around Kwajalein there for a while, and then we headed for Bikini. I believe they said it

was around 90 miles from Kwajalein. And we got over there, and we spent the night over there just going so far this way, so far this way, so far this way just a square box all around.

Interviewer: *Did that seem odd to you?*

Mr. Weese: Well, not really because they done odd things there that I didn't understand, but I done it. But anyhow, they claim that we were eight miles from where that bomb went off. Now, all records show that we were 10 miles, but at the time when we heard it was 8. And they took all of our cameras away from us. Nobody had a camera.

Interviewer: *You were suspicioning things by now, weren't you?*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. So, whenever we knew when – they clued us in more when we got over there what we was gonna do. And whenever that bomb went off – we knew what time it was gonna go off that morning. And the men and some more of the sailors aboard the ship and we got up on the bow of the ship. And I was sitting on that anchor windlass whenever that thing went off.

Interviewer: *What bomb are we talking about? Tell us what it is that they're trying to –*

Mr. Weese: It's the underwater test on the Baker bomb. There's a overwater test, above water test that's dropped out of an airplane, and then they was a underwater test. It was in the bottom of one of them small boats there that they had sunk.

Interviewer: *What about the date? Can you put a date to this?*

Mr. Weese: I've got it in my stuff. I believe it was around August the 25th, I believe. I'm not sure, but it's in that stuff that I've got.

Interviewer: *Now this is before the bomb was dropped on Japan?*

Mr. Weese: This is after. It was the fifth bomb. It was the one in White Sands, New Mexico. Then there were two in Japan. And then this above water test in Bikini, and the underwater test, and that's the one that we were on.

Interviewer: *I'm going to stop right here in the story, though, and ask you where you were when the two went off in Japan? Were you in San Diego or on the ocean?*

Mr. Weese: No. I was at home.

Interviewer: *Still at home.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, you heard about these strange new bombs that could do tremendous damage –*

Mr. Weese: Yeah.

Interviewer: *– not knowing that you were gonna be pretty close to that kinda testing.*

Mr. Weese: No, I didn't know anything about it at that time. In fact, we didn't know what that bomb would do at the time anyhow. I don't think they did either.

Interviewer: *They didn't, I'm sure.*

Mr. Weese: Because they didn't know what – maybe it might set off a chain reaction to blow up the world.

Interviewer: *So, they were taking quite a risk.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. It was kinda hairy there for a while. But it just like another bomb that went off.

Interviewer: *So, you're getting in close to the underground testing and the atomic bomb further testing after the two were used on Japan. And you think you were stationed somewhere like eight miles from the –*

Mr. Weese: That's what we were told at that time, that we were eight miles. So, I had no other way of knowing it other than somebody's [inaudible]...

Interviewer: *Were all these above ocean and at ocean level and under ocean level – all these bomb tests carried out in August of the same year or were they scattered over a month or two?*

Mr. Weese: No. There was one – the above water test there in the Bikini was, seemed to me, like two weeks. I don't know the dates of either one of them, but I know it was somewhere around there – around two weeks of one another.

Interviewer: *Okay. That's what I want to know. All these five atomic blasts were set off within a few weeks of each other.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. It's gotta be either the last of July or the first of August.

Interviewer: *Well, that was quite a change in the world's military capabilities, and you took part in a historic part of that. Now continue and tell us what you saw your own self.*

Mr. Weese: Well, I was sitting there on that anchor windlass, and that was kind of weird the way that thing done. I was looking at the very front. It was the first time we were ever over in that area, and we didn't know exactly where they had that bomb set. But anyhow, we happened to be looking right at the spot whenever it went off. And it kinda looked like that – it's hard to explain what it looked like just before the water started coming up – the explosion. And it – just like it raised up, just gradually raised up a little bit. Then all at once – and there it was. Well, whenever it went off, we started running from it.

Interviewer: *The ship.*

Mr. Weese: The ship. And actually, they had a countdown on the PA system there. And they counted up to 0 when they bomb went off, then they counted 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and on up like that after it went off. And the count got to 8 by the time the sound got there. Well, the sound sounded a whole lot like explosion way off or thunder way off or something like that. But to me, it seemed like somebody took and –

Interviewer: *The pressure.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. So, anyhow, it put out a radioactive cloud after it went off. And actually after it went off, it just went up so far that the real important parts of it, and then all at once it just started to raggedy out – like in pictures, it started ragging out there. And it finally was just a couple little clouds up there. And the ship followed that cloud for four days before it all disappeared.

Interviewer: *Your ship did?*

Mr. Weese: No, we didn't.

Interviewer: *Some of the ships did.*

Mr. Weese: Anyhow, it was quite an experience. Than after we done that, we stayed around there a few days. And that's after we sitting there, directing traffic, too. We went in there to see what it done to all the animals and stuff that was on the ship.

Interviewer: *Tell us how many ships do you think they had collected out there to*

check damage on? Did they have several worn out battleships and different types of sea vessels?

Mr. Weese: Yeah. Then some of them they put back in commission.

Interviewer: *Oh.*

Mr. Weese: I used to have the number.

Interviewer: *Well, just an estimation would be –*

Mr. Weese: In fact, I've got it over there in my stuff.

Interviewer: *That'll be in your file when we copy and paste.*

Mr. Weese: It's got where they was placed – the ships was placed and everything.

Interviewer: *So, they did have live animals on some of these ships to test.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. They had from goats all the way down to ants, is the way I understand it.

Interviewer: *But no humans that you know of were within the –*

Mr. Weese: No. No humans that – I haven't heard of any.

Interviewer: *Speaking of the humans, what did they do to the Bikini Island natives?*

Mr. Weese: They moved them natives off. They even went and got them another island and built them houses and stuff like that.

Interviewer: *Did you ever hear an estimation of how many people lived on that island?*

Mr. Weese: Probably, but I don't remember now. And I don't even remember where they took them to. I think it was another island about 120 miles away or something like that.

Interviewer: *Was there any vegetation left? Was the island destroyed in these bombs? Or was it –*

Mr. Weese: I don't know. We got liberty after that and went on the island after that bomb went off. And the island I went on was – the name of it was Eneu [Eniwetok]. And shoot, we got to trying our hand and peeling the husk of them coconuts. That's not an easy thing to do.

Interviewer: *No. And you were hoping you weren't eating radiated coconut meat.*

Mr. Weese: Well, I didn't eat out of it. I don't know whether anybody else did or not. They even had the liberty board – I mean on one of them islands. They had a baseball game, and they went swimming there in that lagoon and the whole bit.

Interviewer: *How much precaution did they take with you? Did they warn you about anything? Did you really realize what they [inaudible].*

Mr. Weese: They really didn't.

Interviewer: *In the first place, they didn't know themselves.*

Mr. Weese: No. This was all new for us. But they did tell us after that was over with not to talk about it to nobody. In fact, they had us scared – that we was scared to talk about it, kinda like it was when they was in White Sands. I just heard stories about that.

Interviewer: *Well, do you think that secret mission your brother was injured on had anything to do with this kind of testing?*

Mr. Weese: Not that time, no. This is during that war time stuff. I don't believe it did.

Interviewer: *Did your ship get any of the ash – the fallout? Or debris?*

Mr. Weese: Oh, yeah. We went in there about eight hours after that bomb went off, and it was still daylight when you went in there. And we stayed until about 4:00 the next morning when we had to get out. But the whole time that we were in there, you could – you've been in on a foggy morning, have you?

Interviewer: *Mm-hmm.*

Mr. Weese: It just felt like the atmosphere was awfully thick. And you could – well, you couldn't actually feel like there was moisture coming down on you, but I'm pretty sure they were.

Interviewer: *It altered the atmosphere –*

Mr. Weese: Yeah.

Interviewer: *– in that region.*

Mr. Weese: And I'd go out and the scientists they had on our ship – I'd go out and

I would talk to them and see what they were doing. And they had a little tripod-like thing with the arm out like this and letting these little vials or something down in the water there in that lagoon and bringing up samples – all kind. They'd let one down. They'd put it [inaudible] then they'd put in another one. And some of them they would save. And fish? They were fish all over that place. I mean, the ungodliest looking fish you ever seen.

Interviewer: *Came to the surface?*

Mr. Weese: The bomb had –

Interviewer: *Dead? Came to the surface.*

Mr. Weese: – had killed them. Yeah.

Interviewer: *Well, did they keep you in that danger region very long? Or do they soon realize they had to get y'all away from there.*

Mr. Weese: They realized they had to do something. That's the reason we left out of there about 4:00 the next morning. We was right at the – I believe it was at the bow of the USS Independence. Because I remember going in there, and I remember thinking how that ship looked like it's rammed something. The flight deck was pushed up.

Interviewer: *And it's one of them that were close to the bomb area?*

Mr. Weese: Oh, yeah. They couldn't go [inaudible] because it was too hot.

Interviewer: *That would be something.*

Mr. Weese: See, I didn't know about all this until I started getting that [inaudible] and reading up about it. I've been trying to find everything out – everything about it that I can.

Interviewer: *So, how long did you continue in the service after you came away from those testing areas?*

Mr. Weese: They were in '46, and then I got out in '47 – October of '47.

Interviewer: *So, this bomb testing was in August or so of '46?*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. '46, yeah.

Interviewer: *About a year after the bombs were dropped on Japan.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. And we come back to the States, and that's when we had to go into dry dock. And, man, they cut the pieces out of that ship and stuff like that. They had to take out... Because it's radioactive. And we even got down – everybody had jobs that they done. That's me being in the engine room. That had things to do with screws on the ship, you see. And they had me and some more guys down there with the sander, sanding off them screws. Now you know that was radioactive.

Interviewer: *Yes.*

Mr. Weese: And this was in that dry dock. And then after we got out of that, and I actually had [inaudible] privileges, where we had to make sure that everything was operating just fine. And then we went to Pearl Harbor again, and while we was in Pearl Harbor – went over there and we stayed for about six months and followed up with on that. Well, we got the orders to go on a goodwill tour, but we were supposed to go from Pearl Harbor down to Australia and then back over to Japan to relieve the other half of the 8th fleet.

And we just got to Sydney, Australia because the ship got – something happened to the boilers on it, so they sent us back to the States. Well, when we got back to the States, we went into National City [San Diego] down there and went into a mothball fleet. And they decommissioned it down there, and someone had to help them decommission it. After that, I got – that's the reason the hat's got 1944 to 1947 on it. That's when it was built and when it was decommissioned.

Interviewer: *Yes. So, that was a World War II ship?*

Mr. Weese: That was a World War II ship.

Interviewer: *Give us the fleet number and all that. I didn't ask you that earlier – what the Lowry was part of.*

Mr. Weese: It was the seventh –

Interviewer: *Seventh or Eighth?*

Mr. Weese: I think it was the 7th fleet and the 72nd squadron, I believe it was, or the 8th fleet and the 72nd squadron. There was about five of us ships in one squadron there together that operated mostly together. And we went to Sydney, Australia. And then on the way back from Sydney Australia to Pearl Harbor, whenever we was coming into Pearl Harbor, the Hawaiian Islands, then we had a dummy attack on it.

Interviewer: *A dummy attack?*

Mr. Weese: Dummy attack on the Hawaiian Islands. Fleet maneuvers coming back – the first good will tour after the war and the first fleet maneuver after the war.

Interviewer: *Did they warn you that it was a dummy attack?*

Mr. Weese: Oh, yeah. We always had them. We always had them. So, then there to National City, they had all them ships decommissioned. And they had one ship – it's like the flagship of the group of about five. It was in the center and had two on either side of it. And then after we got that ship – the Lowry – decommissioned, they put me on another ship around there. It was already decommissioned, and I had to stand watch on it [inaudible]. And it was the USS Sullivans. It's in honor of them five soldiers that got killed.

Interviewer: *Oh, yes.*

Mr. Weese: Five brothers.

Interviewer: *Yes. Well, that was an honor to do that, then.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Well, then you stayed there until your time completes the service?*

Mr. Weese: Yep. Got discharged on Navy Day.

Interviewer: *On Navy Day.*

Mr. Weese: I told them they always celebrate my [inaudible] –

Interviewer: *Tell us that date and the year.*

Mr. Weese: October 27, 1947.

Interviewer: *1947. And then you came back to Arkansas. And who did you marry, Mr. Weese?*

Mr. Weese: The woman's name was Edith May Randall.

Interviewer: *And how many children did you have?*

Mr. Weese: I've got four. Had five, and one of them died of pneumonia when he was about 5 months old.

Interviewer: *And then your second wife, what's her name?*

Mr. Weese: Her name is Roletta. She's the one who that kept me out of mischief.

Interviewer: *She's accompanying us today in this interview. And then have you had any illnesses, health problems that you can relate directly to the radiation that you were exposed to?*

Mr. Weese: Well, I don't know whether I can relate it to the radiation or not because I can't, never get it tested. But I got – in my papers there, I've got how much radiation that I got, but it's only a estimate. Because see, at that time, they didn't have no way of testing that radiation except by a film badge or a dosimeter. Well, I never seen either one of them.

Interviewer: *So, they didn't do just blanket testing on everybody? They just did the*
–

Mr. Weese: No. They just handed out a few of them. I never did see one, so I don't even know whether they had them on the ship or not.

Interviewer: *Well, what are you hearing about the other guys that were on there with you? Are any of them showing signs?*

Mr. Weese: Well, I haven't talked to any of them other than Mariam Walker, and he died about two or three years ago. And I didn't talk to him much about that, but he seemed to be in pretty good shape. Now what he died of, I don't know.

Interviewer: *In other words, you feel like that you haven't been given the medical attention that deserves someone who's been that close to nuclear testing.*

Mr. Weese: Well, sometimes I think it, and sometimes I don't know.

Interviewer: *Sometimes you're glad you haven't had to use it.*

Mr. Weese: Well, yeah. Because I go to Little Rock now at that vascular clinic down there. And the lower part of my leg, see, it just feels like from here down I've got a pair of tight socks on. And my legs kinda cramps a little bit too, you see.

Interviewer: *The calf area and the feet?*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. And even the front part of my shin right there – well, both of

them there, and it stays sore all the time. And I can't get up in the morning – you know how you wake up in the morning and stretch out like that? If I do, I'll get a cramp in my leg. It's something...

Interviewer: *Point out your pictures here for us and tell us who the other fellow is there with you.*

Mr. Weese: Well, that's my twin brother, and that picture was taken over here at Fort Smith on Garrison Avenue, just about two or three doors up from where the old bus station used to be there on Garrison Avenue. Me and him was headed back to – I was headed back to the ship, and he was headed to Seattle, Washington to go to Korea.

Interviewer: *On your 21 days between –*

Mr. Weese: No. This is on leave. And so, we caught a bus together and we rode it to Oklahoma City together.

Interviewer: *Oh, that was good.*

Mr. Weese: And he had to change busses and go on another deal and go to another place. And then I went down to Los Angeles and then down to San Diego.

Interviewer: *And then show us your ship over here and tell us again –*

Mr. Weese: That's the ship that I was on. I had a picture of it, but that got lost in the divorce that I went through. And my daughter got me that off of the Internet.

Interviewer: *And that's the USS Lowry.*

Mr. Weese: The USS Lowry. And the number on it is 770.

Interviewer: *What was it classified as? Tell us that again.*

Mr. Weese: It was a destroyer, and it was in the Sumner class. A 2150 Sumner class is what it was.

Interviewer: *And then point out the books there about the [inaudible].*

Mr. Weese: The books are what my cousin down at [inaudible] has helped me get because I lost my book that I got whenever I was overseas. I think it cost me \$1.00 back then. And Mary Lou has helped me get these books here, and I'm trying to find a book that –

Interviewer: *These are primarily about the atomic testing.*

Mr. Weese: Yeah. Yeah. Now the reason I wanted to find some of them books is whenever I was trying to get the information about that radiation and atomic bomb deal and stuff like that, the Nuclear Regulatory Association had got in touch with me. And they wanted me to send in my story about my experiences with that atomic bomb. Well, at that time, I really hadn't thought about it in a long time. So I just got down there and I wrote down the best I could remember it. But one of the reasons I got these books is where I could refresh my memory and that's brought back a whole lot of [inaudible] that I had done already forgot about.

Interviewer: *Well, that's an important part of our history, Mr. Weese. We sure appreciate you sharing it with us. And we appreciate you coming in today and in your service to our country. Thank you very much.*

Mr. Weese: Okay.

END

Raymond Earl Weese

Fort Smith Times Record

Raymond Weese, 82, of Dyer entered into rest on Saturday, Sept 11, 2010, in Dyer. He was born Nov. 17,1927, in Dyer to the Later George and Bonnie Weese.

He attended the Dyer Assembly of God and was a retired owner of Sim's Upholstery in Tulsa. He was a Navy veteran of World War II, a 32-degree Mason, a member of Catoosa Masonic Lodge No. 185, past Master of the Catoosa Masonic and Royal Order of the Ducks. He was district deputy of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Oklahoma.

He was preceded in death by his son, George Raymond Weese, his son-in-law, Michael Wright; his brother, William "Bill" Weese; his sister, Louise Hawkins; and his great-grandson Ethan Avila.

He is survived by his loving wife of 41 years, Roletta Weese of the home; two daughters, Marilyn Wright of Bakersfield, Calif., and Gail Weese and her husband Buddy Weese of Tulsa;; two sons, Billy Wayne Weese and his wife Joyce of Owatonna, Minn., and Randy Weese and wife

Gloria of Tulsa; three brothers, Scott Weese of Claremore, Okla., his twin brother Ralph Weese of Alma and Jesse "Boots" Weese of Dyer; nine grandchildren; 17 great-grandchildren and three great-great-grandchildren.

Service was at 11 a.m. Wednesday, Sept. 14, at Dyer Assembly of God in Dyer with the Rev. Buddy Johnson officiating with Masonic graveside at Dyer Cemetery in Dyer.

Pallbearers were grandsons.

Arrangements were under the directions of Lewis Funeral Chapel in Fort Smith.



**Inez Wilber
World War II Veteran
Interview**

The following was originally a video interview done by the Crawford County Friends of Genealogy, Van Buren, Arkansas. The interviewer is Wilma Jameson. The original interview was recorded on September 6, 2006. This written transcript of the original audio was accomplished in June, 2018.

Interviewer: *Give me your full name, Inez.*

Inez: Now or when I was a little girl?

Interviewer: *When you was a little girl.*

Inez: Inez Edna Phillips.

Interviewer: *Okay. And what were your parent's names? Do you remember?*

Inez: Josephine Bennett.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: My dad was a full-blood Irishman. His name was Sherman Phillips. And his folks come from Ireland on the potato famine when they're starved out in Missouri. I was born in April 26, 1913 in Conway, Missouri.

Inez: And grandpa, my mother's dad.

Interviewer: *Grandpa Bennett?*

Inez: Yeah, Bennett. His name was John Thomas. And he was born in Holland. And his folks come over to the United States when he was a little kid. And he moved from Missouri. Now, I don't know what year, but he went down in Oklahoma when they was running the strip.

Interviewer: *About 1900 something?*

Inez: And he bought some land down there, grandpa did. And my dad died. And my mother – see we're from – all my folks is from Missouri, around Lebanon.

Interviewer: *Lebanon?*

Inez: And Bennett Springs.

Interviewer: *Bennett Springs?*

Inez: Now, Bennett Springs, my grandpa, my mother's dad, had a gristmill there and the water turned to grind the cornmeal. Well, up around there, north from there, Cole Younger, Jesse James, and all those outlaws and they'd come down in a wagon with the corn. And he'd take so much corn. And my grandpa married a cousin to them and her name was Lucretia.

Interviewer: *Lucretia?*

Inez: Yeah, I can't think of her last name. It's been too long ago.

Interviewer: *But now wait. Just a minute, Ms. Inez. That was Grandpa Bennett married Lucretia or the Phillips?*

Inez: Grandpa Bennett.

Interviewer: *Okay. Go ahead.*

Inez: Her name, my grandma's name, was Lucretie.

Inez: And they'd come to Oklahoma down from – I see that little old town – Fairland, Oklahoma about five miles or something down that my mom's dad and mother come down there. And they had some more kids, see? And he bought a farm there. Well, when my dad died, my mama came from Missouri and left me with Grandpa Bennett and Grandma.

Interviewer: *Now, what town in Oklahoma?*

Inez: Huh?

Interviewer: *What town in Oklahoma?*

Inez: There was no town. It was just out in the country.

Interviewer: *Okay. But, what was the closest town that you could go to?*

Inez: Oh, [inaudible].

Interviewer: *Heavener? What?*

Inez: No, wait. That's been a long time. It wasn't too far from the Missouri line.

Interviewer: *Okay. Okay.*

Inez: And there was a town in Oklahoma called Miami.

Interviewer: *Miami, Oklahoma?*

Inez: And then there's another little town west called Welch, Oklahoma. And then there's another little town down from there I think was called Fairland, Oklahoma.

Interviewer: *How old were you when you came to Oklahoma to Grandpa Bennett's?*

Inez: I was a baby. I couldn't even crawl, I could just turn over.

Interviewer: *So, your father died when you were just small? Okay. Where did your mother go? Did she leave you with your Grandpa Bennett?*

Inez: Yeah. And she worked. She worked all the time and she'd come in every once and a while. Grandpa Bennett, he was a Dutchman and he'd put on them wooden shoes and clog.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: And he was really, really religious. He taught me to talk. Taught me to pray. And Grandpa Bennett had so many – he was a harness maker and a horseshoe doer and a cobbler and a house builder. They had all that stuff that he could do. And he made me a little bed and they put it over in the east window. And he'd dress me, you see? Grandma would be busy cooking in the kitchen, I guess, and I'd put my

nightgown on. They made me wear a nightgown and he'd take me over there and he'd say, "Now, kneel and say your little prayers." Everything he'd say was little. And I'd pray and then he'd put me in bed and cover me up and I'd go to sleep.

And when of a morning in the kitchen he made a cedar long bench. Because he made so much of the furniture, the chairs and all he made.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: And the table was long, and it sat by east window and they had a box. Grandpa would set me on there and I'd sit by him because then he would eat breakfast there. He'd say, "Now, eat your little egg. Eat your little biscuits." Everything was little. Because they made biscuits every morning.

Interviewer: *Yeah. All right. Ms. Inez, how many brothers and sisters did you have?*

Inez: Well, later when I was going on six years old. See, I've stayed with my grandpa and grandma and my mother until she remarried again.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: And she married a man and he had about five or 600 acres of land on Grand River.

Interviewer: *Okay. In Texas?*

Inez: Grand River. Huh?

Interviewer: *In Texas?*

Inez: No, in Oklahoma.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: In Oklahoma. And he had horses. Because see I was six years old when I went down there. And he had cows and he had pigs and he had a dog.

Interviewer: *What was his name?*

Inez: Herod, H-E-R-O-D.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: And they had two kids. They had a girl first and then they had a boy. And the girl's name was Georgie. And the boy's name was J.T., which was Joseph Thomas. He went in the service in Japan. He talked Japanese and he married a Jap girl and he had two kids. And he stayed in there, the service, for 30 years. Because I was in the service too. And he got out of the service, and he divorced his wife and the two kids had grown up, Billy Joe and Mary Anne. And Mary Anne married a guy on T.V. and they had a baby. Phil Donoghue's friend.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: That's who she married. I went out and lived in Colorado Springs for about a year and it was too cold. I didn't like it there. I come back to California.

Interviewer: *Okay. Now, tell me about growing up at Grandpa Bennett's, do you remember anything about growing up there?*

Inez: Yes. Now, they had Aunt Idley who was still at home. Uncle Lewis was still at home. That's my mother's brother. And then Aunt Edith. Now, Aunt Edith was a baby. And I stayed there until I was six years old. And when my mother got married again and I cried when they come up there and got me in a wagon, I cried to go back to Grandpa's because he was my father. He learned me to put my shoes on, learned me to tie my shoes, and learned me to pray. Grandpa was very, very religious.

Well, Grandma got sick. I don't know what was the matter with her. But later when she married this man and he had all that land. And his mother owned land next to him on the west side and it had a – oh, a log house that was built a lot of – it's funny the way that was built. They moved down there in that and they – my mother got pregnant with my sister and grandpa got up and to build the fire in the fireplace and he sat there in a chair and he died.

Interviewer: *Now, he was on the other side of Oklahoma though?*

Inez: He died when they moved down there by that Grand River after my mother got married to that guy there.

Interviewer: *Oh, so, your grandparents also moved over – that's the ones that moved in the log cabin? Your grandparents did?*

Inez: Well, it's funny. The first room was a log cabin.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: And then it had a breezeway in-between. There's another room at the south side and then another kitchen off that way and it had a long porch clear across that. And it had cedar posts. I used to go up there and smell them cedar on them porches and used to sing.

Interviewer: *Oh.*

Inez: Grandpa taught me to sing.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: And I'd sing.

Interviewer: *I bet you sang hymns?*

Inez: Yes. I'd sing hymns then he'd teach me a little song about riding on a humpback mule.

Interviewer: *Oh.*

Inez: And when I grew up, I went to – wasn't grew up, I was going on 18 years old and went to California and got a job and went to work. And I sang on the radio in Northern California.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: And later I married out there and went in the service and went...

Interviewer: *What part of California were you in? You said Northern? Do you remember a town?*

Inez: Where I was?

Interviewer: *Where you sang on the radio?*

Inez: North from Frisco.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: It was way up there. But lord, look how long it is. You know I forget – as old as I am, sometimes I forget about some things.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: And then I get to thinking they'll come to me.

Interviewer: *Okay. You sang on the radio there and you were about 18 years old?*

Inez: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: *Okay. When did you join the service?*

Inez: I can't remember. I got out in 1945.

Interviewer: *Okay. But around 1941?*

Inez: Come here. [Getting up]

Interviewer: *Okay. Now, sit down because she wants to see your picture and I want you to tell me about this picture here.*

Inez: Okay.

Interviewer: *Tell me about that picture.*

Inez: I've got a spy glass. I can't see. Let me get it. I've got it in the kitchen.

Interviewer: *Straighten it down. Now in the air I've got two which is...*

Inez: That's when I went into the regular army.

Interviewer: *Okay. You went into the WACs. You told me you took two oaths. You went into the WACs.*

Inez: Yeah. I was under Colonel Holby.

Interviewer: *In the WACs? Okay. You don't have to...*

Inez: There. This. We weren't in the army. We had to pay for our insurance and our mail. And I don't know how many years I was in that. And here is when that Colonel Holby went into the regular army. We had about 300 girls and they all got out, but this [pointing to photo]. And I'm way back there in the back.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: And there's our first Sergeant.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: And I know all these girls. I'm way back in there. There's Barva.

Interviewer: *But now this is the regular army picture?*

Inez: Yes. When that was taken – can you see the date?

Interviewer: *I'll look at it and see. Yeah. I can see.*

Inez: Look at the bottom.

Interviewer: *1943. August 1943.*

Inez: Well, that's when I went in the regular army. But I was already in there. See? I's in the whole deal. About three or four years before I got out because I didn't get out until '45.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: I got out with medical discharge.

Interviewer: *All right. Did they ask you –?*

Interviewer: *– when you went from the auxiliary, what – was what he was. The auxiliary WAC unit. Then they incorporated it into the army and called them the WAC.*

Inez: Yeah. Colonel Holby is the one that done that.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: Because we used to have free for arm parade for her.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: And they took us to Des Moines, Iowa. There used to be an old cavalry post up there and they took the stables and made barracks for us to sleep in. We had three-tier beds. And they'd take us out in that wheat field and drill us in marches and runs. And it was a snowing and raining. Oh, God. There's a trainload of us. When we went from LA, I lived in Pasadena. When we went to Des Moines, this whole trainload was full of girls. And when they took – had to have a different oath then and go in this regular army because they saw they were so benefit at helping. Why that's when we went into the regular armed service. And I got out – when I was overseas I was sick over there and I got blown into the air.

Interviewer: *Wait now. Go back. You went into the regular army and you trained under General Holby?*

Inez: Under Colonel Holby.

Interviewer: *Colonel. I'm sorry. Colonel Holby. And that was a woman. Do you remember her full name?*

Inez: No, I don't. I can't remember. Honey, I'm too far – too far back.

Interviewer: *All right. How long were you – how long did you train? Two or three months before you went overseas?*

Inez: I can't remember because I was – in our base up there we had B-17 bombers. And down in El Paso, Texas they had B-24 bombers. So, they transferred me from there down into – from El Paso, Texas because out east of there was an old cavalry outfit. And they have B-24 bombers there. And I didn't stay there too long. I was a Sergeant. We took about 25 girls or something and went down at that – opened up that new base. Our Commanding Officer and the Mess Officer was already down there.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: I don't think I stayed there a year then they sent me down in Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: And I got that training there. Overseas they'd throw that screen – smokescreen down and throw gas in there and they'd make you go through that without your gas mask so far, so you'd get it, and put it on because that gas burns you. Oh, it burned on your arms and on your boobs and your legs. And we had to go through that cloud of smoke and you don't know which way you're going.

Interviewer: *All right.*

Inez: And I was in there stumbling along someone and I kicked them, and I said, "Who's there?" And she said, "TLC Fox." I said, "What's the matter, Foxy?" She said, "My gas mask leak and I'm sick." I said, "If I get out of this soup," I said, "I'll report it." And when I got out, I did report it. And they went in there and got her out and put her in the hospital. She damn near died. That gas mask of hers leaked. They'd make you go into a room with the gas burning in there and you first

had to go in there without that gas mask because you had it on you and then you had to grab it and put it on a certain way. And they marched you around in there and then you went out the door.

Interviewer: *Okay. Now, you said you were a Sergeant?*

Inez: Yes.

Interviewer: *You must have done pretty good to have earned your stripes?*

Inez: Yeah. I had my stripes.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, what unit was that? When did you join the paratrooper unit? Was that the one from the beginning?*

Inez: Huh-uh. The beginning, we didn't have nothing – we had to pay for all the mail.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: And we had to pay for our insurance and we had all that training and you'd go out on those different bases. But the government saw that they were doing such a good job in there is when they went into the – we had to take a different oath.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, all right.*

Inez: And then all them girls got out. That was what was left of my company.

Interviewer: *Oh.*

Inez: They all got out.

Interviewer: *They didn't wanna stay as the regular army?*

Inez: No. No. They didn't wanna go in the regular army. They got the hell out of there. If they could get a discharge, they got out.

Interviewer: *All right. Now, tell me who trained you, women, or men?*

Inez: Signed you where?

Interviewer: *Who trained you?*

Inez: Both.

Interviewer: *In your training?*

Inez: Both.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: I had a nigger when we were going through. We called him nigger going through. And see we were sent from down south to Camp Shanks, New York. And we had this nigger, a medic, and was getting shots, hit you and hit you. You go through and another and hit you giving you shots. Before they sent us – put us on a train and sent us to Camp Shanks, New York, up there. And we only stayed up there very few days and then they took down to the ocean where the ship was and loaded us on that ship, a troop ship.

They were down in the mess hall, you never saw so many troops on there. And then on the outside of that ship they had hammocks hanging up and men were just sleeping out there because we was in this end – the tail end of the ship and there were seven of us in that little dinky room. They had three-tier bunk beds in there.

Interviewer: *Do you remember the name of the ship?*

Inez: Huh?

Interviewer: *Do you remember the name of the ship?*

Inez: No. I can't remember. I can remember the one I come back on. It was called AL Catania I think it was called.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: I can't remember. I used to. I've got some pictures in my office someplace.

Interviewer: *Okay. We'll look at those in a minute. So, you're seven of you women in one room?*

Inez: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Was that all the women that went over on that ship?*

Inez: Oh, hell no. They were full. That little old dinky room wasn't big, but just bunk beds, three of them. And all of us is in there. We had to sleep with our clothes on and you couldn't get no air. And I laid down

in the floor and breathed air from the door that went out in the hall. And you opened up another door and it was out at the tail end of the ship.

Interviewer: *Did you get sick? Seasick?*

Inez: No, I didn't get seasick.

Interviewer: *Did some of the other girls get seasick?*

Inez: Yeah. They were urping all the time. They had nothing to urp in. There was no toilet there. It was hell. And I'll tell you what, we couldn't get Kotex and they'd give us a bundle of cotton. And we'd take this cotton and put it in our pockets and when that got full, we'd just have to reach up in there and take that cotton and we had to dig a hole like that with our shoe, put that in there, and put dirt over it.

Interviewer: *But that was after you were out in the field?*

Inez: That was after we was gonna – after we was overseas.

Interviewer: *All right. Where did you land from the ship? Where did the ship land?*

Inez: Taking us over there, that trip? Gourock, Scotland.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, you land there in Scotland?*

Inez: I landed in Gourock. That is the north part. Oh, that country. Oh, I hated that country over there. And then they put us on trains and took us down to London – on the west side of London and put us in old buildings. And they had a board fixed up next to the wall and there was straw and that's what we slept in. And we'd go to the mess hall and we had our mess kit. We had to eat out of them. Oh, that was hell over there where that Loch monster was.

Interviewer: *In Scotland?*

Inez: Yeah. I went over there and saw that. I went over to Cliffs of Dover. I went down in there. Went to Windsor castle. We were stationed in that forest there, Windsor – Sherwood. We were stationed in Sherwood forest in tents.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: We slept in tents.

Interviewer: *Okay. What was your duties? What did you do? What did you women do?*

Inez: I had five MOS numbers. I was qualified for different jobs. And they'd throw me into one. Maybe I didn't know any damn thing about it. I learned it.

Interviewer: *What's MOS?*

Inez: That's your number. [*Sic: Military Occupational; Specialty*]

Interviewer: Okay.

Inez: We landed in Gourock and got on them train, all of us. And we had a Debutant, she was, head over us until we got down there. And then they throwed us in them old buildings. Sometimes we would be out in the field when they're fighting out there. There'd be an old building. An old like a shed or an old barn and they'd put plank benches, tables and then benches. And then they had a bar across there. You could get beer and get cigarettes and candy bars and stuff like that. And we was all in there talking. They took five German officers prison(ers) and here they marched them in there and he come as close to me as you because I was sitting on the end of the bench and walked down there – down so far and turn. Boy, they had those boots, those uniforms. Sure good looking. You could hear a pin drop. Everybody stopped talking. There's nothing in there but women and men soldiers was in there. I didn't drink. I didn't like. I started smoking over there. Everybody smokes. I never did smoke until I went in the service. And after I got out, I quit.

Interviewer: *Okay. Now, Ms. Inez, why did they want the women – what were you doing that the men – did you relieve the men of some of their duties?*

Inez: Oh, God. Yes. They'd pull a man out and there's all that duties that we did.

Interviewer: *Okay. Like what? Check supplies?*

Inez: Anything. Anything. I worked in the motor pool supply. I worked in the post office. I worked in all kinds of supplies. Whatever it was. Oh, what was that called? I worked in a telephone deal too. That was called –

Interviewer: *Communication?*

Inez: Yeah. But they had another name for it. I worked in that. And it was

like a telephone office made out in the – made up in some old building.

Interviewer: *Okay. Did you ever have to go behind enemy lines?*

Inez: Any what?

Interviewer: *Enemy lines? Did you ever have to go behind enemy lines?*

Inez: No. We always had to go across the channel. You see the channel comes down and we were right there on that channel.

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

Inez: And it was foggy all the time. You couldn't see.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: Even in the daytime you hardly ever saw sunshine.

Interviewer: *So, you all stayed on this side of the channel?*

Inez: And we went up there and you had to cross over in a boat. And over there, there was a hill up there and them Germans was all dug in up in there and they had guns up there. And when you went there, they opened up. And them boats, they just mowed them down.

Interviewer: *You women were not involved in that though?*

Inez: Those? We were camped in Sherwood forest. And then see when we put us on the ship to cross over, there's when they opened up.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Inez: And them boys had their grenades – their hand grenades. – take your mouth and take out the pin and throw it. They had their gun. I carried a gun all the time.

Interviewer: *Oh, did you?*

Inez: Oh, hell yeah. I did. Shoot, if they'd touched me I'd killed them right away. You're on alert all the time. You're never relaxed even in the night time. You never know when – You're in bed there and then when they're bombing the hell out of the buildings and the people was screaming, and hollering. You never take your clothes off. We had them muddy, laced up shoes, you couldn't get in that straw, slept

in straw. We never saw a sheet over there.

And then cotton they'd give us when we're menstruating. It rubbed— what they call polyps on my uterus, and they'd fill up with puss and they'd break and bust. And all over my uterus it was these scars, and it was giving me trouble. And that uterus was about to fall out. And they had to – they went in there to take it out because they was afraid cancer would be there.

Interviewer: *Okay now, tell me what did you do there in London? You were stationed there in Sherwood Forest there in London, what did you do?*

Inez: I worked in the signal core [*sic: corps*]

Interviewer: *Signal corps?*

Inez: Yeah.

Interviewer: *All right, did you run errands for them?*

Inez: I done what they told me to do. You can't tell what they tell you to do.

Interviewer: *You had women under you because you were a sergeant.*

Inez: I didn't pull my rank. Yeah, I'd rather have friends. I didn't pull my rank, lady. Privates, I treated them as human beings. A lot of girls was just PFC, one stripe. A lot of them. They all didn't make it up. You had to be smart I guess or something to get up that far. It wasn't easy I'll tell you that much. You had to be smart in your mind. Never a dull moment.

Interviewer: *All right, were the women abused by the men? The WACs*

Inez: No.

Interviewer: *Or were they treated nicely?*

Inez: They all wanted to date you. Wanted to get a date and when there wasn't nothing much you could do or where you can go, because it was – nothing. It was a hard life.

Interviewer: *All right, you said you met a boy over there. You had a fiancée.*

Inez: Yes. And he wanted to get married, and I said no, I'm not going...

He was a bombardier on a B-17 bomber. And I said, "No, I don't wanna get married [inaudible] get out." His folks were from around Fresno, California. He went over there, and he's on the third phase, that means a third round of bombing on that B-17 bomber. He was a gunner on that. He was a staff sergeant. And on the third mission he got shot down – the plane did. The Germans shot it down. And a letter come back to me that I had wrote to him – because he had wrote to me first. It's missing in action, they killed him. They shot that plane down in the air, and there's nowhere to go, and he's gonna fall and you're gonna kill them all. Kill them all the whole crew on that ship.

Interviewer: *What was his name Ms. Inez?*

Inez: Berge Eckerman.

Interviewer: *Okay. How did you meet him?*

Inez: Huh?

Interviewer: *How did you meet him?*

Inez: Well they give a USO dance, and we had to go. We was forced to go. When we got down in Moses Lake, Washington and he was there. And there was a colonel there on the base, just went for me and he grabbed me and danced with me all the time. And the lieutenant, she was Jew, she didn't like it. I said, "What else can I do?" As I told her. There were 12 girls. Only 12 of us.

And he came, and Berge did, and asked me to dance, he was a bombardier on that B-17 bomber and he just liked me. And we started going together. And he wanted to marry, and I said "No." Let's wait the war was over. And he had to go and leave the next day, in time. We got our pass, and got on the bus, and went to [inaudible] up a short way. And we had dinner up there and then went down the lobby and we just sat in there and just talked because he had to go back and get ready.

The next day they flew to Pratt, Kansas and they got their equipment and then they went on over. And then he wrote me after it got over, and I wrote him back, and he got killed on the third mission out – a bomber. The letter come back, "He's missing in action." And I never did get married then until I was 47-years old, and I married a lawyer.

Interviewer: *Okay. Now, while you were over there in London, you were hurt. Tell*

me that story.

Inez: A hurt?

Interviewer: *You were hurt in a bombing over there in London. Can you tell me about it?*

Inez: Well, when we're not on the job, as I was working in that secret [inaudible] we used to go up to a place they called the Thatch. That building – nobody could go in there but women. And then just the working women. When I went in that door, went out side and went in another door, and there were the men. No women in there, all men. You come out of there and you went to the – called the lounge. Went through another door, there they had a piano player in there, and there's women and men both in there, drinking beer or whatever it was, or you could dance in there.

And we'd walk up the hill from where we was bivouacked at and go up there and to even just get out of the barracks. And we'd steal. You had to be a pretty good thief, because we stole food. You're hungry all the time. That food what you got didn't do you no good. They'd cook potatoes in the iron kettle outside, they didn't even peel them, and maybe there'd be dirt or holes in them potatoes. And you eat out of a mess kit; you had to wash it there in a pot. You first you washed it out with a brush, with some soap, and then you washed it, and rinsed it in another, and then you rinsed it in another one of them – I don't know what they had, some kind of chemicals in there. That's your own mess kit; you had to take care of it yourself.

So, you're hungry all the time. And I went out a foraging, we called it. We'd draw straws. Seven of us girls were all sergeants. We went to this inn and this old man and old woman was running it, and they had a fireplace. So, they draw straws, me and another girl had to go in the kitchen. And they had two baked loaves of bread, black looking bread. And I stole them and put them under my overcoat, cause you had the uniform on. Well, you had pants on and boots.

And there was a dishpan full of anchovies there, so she took the tablecloth and poured them in there, put them under her coat. We come out the door. And we give them the high sign, there were five girls, around that old couple, and we went out the door, went over there at that Sherwood Forest and put that tablecloth down with them fish. Nobody had – had forgot their knives. I said "Get

back", I jumped on it with them boots and I stomped it and broke the crust. Both of them loaves – and you're just tearing off hunks.

We were all sitting around there, and the moon started coming through there. It was eerie like. And I raised up and I looked, and I said "Listen." Everybody stopped. They said, "What's the matter Sarge?" I said "Look. Look at everybody. Sitting around, that tablecloth on the ground in the damned snow. We had this chunk of bread and we had grease around our mouths, and them anchovies fish in this hand – And they're just starved, you're just like a bunch of starved dogs. Said, "What is it?" I said, "Well, look what everybody looks like. Don't ever forget this in your life." I said if you ever live to get through this soup – because when we get through one, we got in another mess.

And we sat there – I'll never forget it. And when we got through, we got up and we took that table cloth, rolled it up, went farther in the woods, and took a log and rolled it back, put the table cloth down, put the log down. I had a whistle – my damn whistle's up here is what I used [on wall] – I blew that whistle. That means to line up. And they lined up and I said to that first girl. You called the last name; you never used the first name, Woods, or Jones, or Smith. I asked that girl, "How do you feel?" She was a sergeant, too. "Oh, Sergeant Wilbur, that's the first time my belly's been full since I left New York."

And at the tail end, the girl, I asked the same question. So, I said "Now –" And she said that she was full. You were hungry all the time. You's hungry, you're starved. Your food you're getting wasn't doing no good. Then I said, "Well, everybody bend the head and let's all pray, and pray out loud." And I said, "Thank God that tonight we can sleep because we have our stomachs full." You can't go to sleep when you're hungry. I know what it's like; you can't tell me nothing about it.

And we prayed, and then got on the trail, and just a trail through them woods, that forest, and got back. We were sleeping in tents in army cots in them tents. And they leaked water was running down through the floor of them. There was no floor – dirt. It was on the side of a hill. It's a wonder anybody ever lived through that. I never dreamed that –

Well, I almost died. They thought I was gonna die, really. You just go, and go, and go, until you just drop. They picked me up and throwed me in the ambulance, and then went up there – I don't know how many miles. I come to, I was undressed. They had took

my money. I had a money belt, they took my money, all the money I had, and they went through my pocket book and they took my earrings and took my wristwatch off of my hand. They stole all that stuff. I just don't see how I ever lived to get through.

Interviewer: *All right. but when you were hurt in a bombing, what happened?*

Inez: I got blown in the damn air. The damn bomb hits you, you're running. There are trenches around, and you know where they are. And you're running, jump down to that damn trench, and fall down. And when they're bombing you, you hit the ground. You got your helmet and you got that gas mask is on you. You carry that with you all the time, and you hit the ground. We were going down to take orders, so I had to go, and I had a driver. She let another girl go, she wasn't supposed to go, and we're going downtown to deliver these orders. She was a driver of that car, see, I had the orders I had to deliver them. And a bomb come over.

She stopped that car, we hit the gutter. And that bomb hit not too far from us. It just cut them buildings off. And there were people dead, laying up in there on the floor and all over. And after you come to your senses, you get up, and in the middle of the street out there, there's a woman dead, and she had a little baby in her arms. And this baby was a crying. And this one girl that went with us, wasn't supposed to go, she got hysteric. She just froze and just couldn't move and a screaming. And I slapped her with my hand and on this side, and on that side, and took her by the arms. I told that driver "get hold of her arm." And a bar was there, and the door was open and nobody in that –

Inez: – there. And there's all kinds of boozes in there, and this one bottle of whiskey was open, and it had a picture of a black snake all curled up and its mouth was open. And it was almost half gone. I grabbed that and got a glass cleaned out. I poured that glass full enough and said "Here, drink this." Made her drink it and she got drunk, but it calmed her down. We threw her back in the car – and I left some money on the counter with that dirty glass that she had drank out of it. I don't know how much it was, a £1.00 note I think. That's worth \$4.00 and something. £1.00 note was. \$4.00 and so many cents.

Got her back in there – got back in that car, took those – she had to go around that woman, and go deliver those orders I had to take down there. They're sealed. They seal them with wax. They put the orders in that envelope and they take a match and burn a certain color of wax. And they burn that three times, and that's on the ECN in the middle. And that better not be broken because if it did it's your ass.

You don't read them see.

Interviewer: *What about the woman with the baby?*

Inez: She is dead.

Interviewer: *You all didn't go to get the baby?*

Inez: No. You don't dare to touch it. You better not. And that girl, the driver, the carryall she was taking there, she said, "What'll we do Sarge?" I said, "Leave it. Leave it. You can't touch it. Don't touch it. You don't touch anything like that. And there'll be a watch laying there. You better not touch it. If you did it'll probably blow your damned hand off. It's triggered." No telling what's done to that woman there. She might be laying there a long time dead, and they might've had a bomb under her. You can't tell. You can't trust nothing. Nobody. You wonder how you ever lived to get through it. God, I was sick for years, and years.

Interviewer: *All right, Ms. Inez, how old were you when you were over there?*

Inez: I was just 22-23, somewhere around that, young.

Interviewer: *Okay. But you still didn't tell me when you got hit with a bomb.*

Inez: Well I was going down there to take those orders – Oh! We had to walk. We had walked in towards the – Let's see, that must have been the north – No, it must have been the west of London, out towards Howard Hall. We had been in a little old bitty dinky town and you could get fish and chips there. And they give it to you in a newspaper. And we had all been in there we'd walked what must have been a mile or something out from there. Might have been more, I don't know, but – you couldn't go – nobody could go alone. You had to have two people or more to go. You couldn't go by yourself. And you knew everybody, see?

And we were coming back from there. It was just had gotten dark. And everybody started running, and a pushing, and a hollering. They were a hollering. It was women and men both, soldiers both of them. Because we had been in that little old place where we got them fish and chips. You had money, but you couldn't buy nothing, there wasn't nothing to buy. And all of a sudden, I got hit. Something hit me, and I remember just raising up through the air and then landing. I hit the ground and I was knocked out. All of them kids went on I guess. I don't know what happened to them.

I come to; it was dark, foggy, cold, damp. I tried to move, and I couldn't. I was paralyzed from here down. I tried to move my toes, my feet, I couldn't. And I started praying for God to help me. And I got turned over on my stomach, and I so far on the floor and then I passed out. I'd come to, I'd crawl. I don't how far I crawled. You couldn't see. I remember crawling over rocks. And I come to some bushes and I grabbed out, and it had stickers on it, and it hurt my hand. I turned loose, I passed out.

I come to again, and that time I got a different one and it didn't cause my - them stickers went in my hands. I got a hold of them and I tried to stand up, and I couldn't... I fell on my knees... fell down. See, I was paralyzed from the waist down, hitting the ground. And I don't know how long I come to until I finally held on. There was no feeling in my legs or my feet. And I was praying all the time out loud when I come to, for God to help me.

And I finally got stood up, and I tried to move, and I couldn't. But I kept on. And the feeling started coming back, and then I could move my toes and I got so I could move one leg. Then I moved the other. I don't know how long I worked at myself, but I was still praying out loud to God.

Interviewer: *Grandpa Bennet. You remember grandpa Bennet teaching you to pray?*

Inez: So, then I turned loose, and I thought "Dear God, help me." And I started taking a step a little, just easy like. And I finally got to that little old road. And down west that little road I saw a light down there. That was our bivouac and I just staggered in there. And I heard a gun click, and a flashlight came in my face. And a sergeant said, "Who goes there?" I had my dog tags, I just shook them like that. I was so shook up I guess, I couldn't talk. I don't know. So, said, "Sergeant, at daylight we were gonna come a hunt you." I think I finally got out - and no use to - I'm here now. So, he said, "I'll take you up there to your bivouac ." So, he took me up there. I took the muddy shoes off and fell up there in that straw.

Now that was on a Saturday. And I lay there, all day Sunday - Saturday, Sunday, I woke up - They had a [inaudible] that was washing my face, said, "Sergeant, get up from there. You haven't been to the latrine" that means the toilet. He said, "You haven't eaten." I said, "I'm not hungry." But they said, "Get up." They got a hold of me and sat me up in that straw where I was sleeping, because that was our bed. And they sent another girl to the mess hall down there and they brought some coffee and some old, hard

bread... stale bread. And I didn't drink coffee, but they made me drink some. I said, "You're gonna make me puke if you keep making me drink that damn coffee." I said, "You know I don't drink coffee."

Well, I got up then and went to the toilet. And then they left me alone, I go back to bed. Monday morning at 4:00, the lights come on and a girl comes through blowing a whistle. "Front and center," they hollered. That means you fall out. Five hundred of us fell out, lined up in lines. And the sergeant had a tape there and he says, "When you're called out your name, you take two steps forward and stand." So, my name was called out. There were 92 of us called out. And then the rest of them, they said, "Go back to the barracks." The blowed the whistle for them was to go back. So, the rest of all of them went back where they're from.

And they said, "Get your gear we're moving to the front." Well, what our gear was - my pistol and my barracks bag with the extra shirt or whatever, and your gasmask. One time we had old, long gasmasks. Then they gave us little square ones. We got the little square ones when we got ready to go overseas. They loaded us - two truckloads of us and took us to the front.

Interviewer: *Now, this was after the bombing?*

Inez: After the bombing. And I was bruised up, God woman you should've seen what I was like. Lord, Lord. I don't think there's a place on my body that wasn't blue. But it was fortunately no - I had a finger broken. I think it was that finger. Yeah, this finger here was broken. And I rubbed it with Johnson baby oil, so it wouldn't be no big knuckles on it. Because I've seen them when they didn't and the big knuckles. This is arthritis you see here, but I keep rubbing that every night. I rubbed this. And then that finger -

Interviewer: *Where did you go overseas?*

Inez: Huh?

Interviewer: *You said there was 92 of you on a -*

Inez: - on them two trucks. They sent us over into France and all. And that was worse.

Interviewer: *Why was it worse?*

Inez: Because you're closer to the fighting over there. All around you there are guns.

Interviewer: *Where did you sleep over in France?*

Inez: I don't know. We never had no bed to sleep in. We had to sleep on the ground and keep watch there. We had no beds. Lucky to have food. Maybe there'd be a "put-put" we'd call them. It was like motorcycle where they might be coming around, round out in there and maybe bring you some food.

Interviewer: *All right, what were you doing? Why were you there?*

Inez: Don't ask me, ask them. We wondered why in the hell was there ourselves. You didn't ask questions honey.

Interviewer: *But what were you doing? I mean, what was your duty?*

Inez: Whatever they put you to work in there. If they put me to work – they put me to work in the signal corps I worked.

Interviewer: *Okay, but now in France.*

Inez: Yeah, over there. But I didn't stay there very long. They brought me back. Brought us all back.

Interviewer: *The WACs in France, I can't imagine what they were doing over there. I mean did you –*

Inez: – in the damn war you'd know more about it.

Interviewer: *Okay. But, so you all just did different things –*

Inez: We worked in the office, like an orderly room or something – they got the orders in there, My God, thousands of jobs that we did. Answer the dang telephone. They had those field phones. Whatever they done they told you, you done it.

Interviewer: *Okay. So, you answered the phones, you typed orders and –*

Inez: – you work in the signal corps. I worked in a office. Sometimes they'd have you to do a – be a stooge, we called them for a officer of some kind. It might be a captain, or up higher, and you was his stooges. Whatever he wanted you to do – he wanted you to go get him coffee, or go get him a paper, or go do this, or go do that – you did that. You had to do it. You had to do it. You better make a good

job at it. If you don't sure in hell you get something terrible happen to you. I know some of them kids got kidnapped –

My friend, I went over the ship list and stuff. They kidnapped her, and they took her to Turkey and put her in prostitution. She never got out of there. When they get through with them, they killed them. They killed her. They had to lose a lot of girls like that. You couldn't go anyplace alone over there. You never know who they are. They could be an enemy dressed in American uniform. You didn't trust nobody – nobody. It was hell. I can't even begin to tell the hell it was over there. I don't even like to think about it. It makes me sick.

Interviewer: *Some of our boys that have been over there don't like to talk very much about it, either, but some of them are beginning to talk a little bit. All right, Miss Inez, when you came home, why did you come home on the hospital ship? Did you not ever recover from the bombing?*

Inez: Hell, damn woman, I couldn't even walk. I couldn't walk. I prayed to die, for God to take me – go ahead and take me. The hell you're going through every minute. Life was no pleasure. I couldn't even wait on myself, and they carried me on that ship, two soldiers did. And they carried me off down south, put me in that hospital. Then they put me on a plane with some people I knew. One boy had tramped on a booby trap, and they blew his dinger off. All he had was the stub.

And they put me on there with a Captain Lone. He was from Kodiak, Alaska. And I knew him. I had worked in his office for him. And he was on that airplane. And they flew us four times, and the last place we went to was up in Nebraska someplace. I don't know why – Omaha, I believe it was. When the plane would go down, the ambulance would come, put us in the ambulance, take us to the hospital. We stayed overnight. They fed us – the next morning they fed us. They put us back in the ambulance, take us to the plane, and put us on the plane. And then we flew.

Then they flew to Spokane, Washington. And at Baxter General Hospital and they put me in the hospital there. I was the first woman that came back from Europe. They got one that come back the next day from Asia – what in the damn – it was a hell hole down towards Australia, down in there. She had jungle rot. You know, that's terrible. We had her toilet, and then she had the next room because we both used the same toilet in Baxter General Hospital. That's where I got discharged from.

I was in there, I don't know how long when I landed there. The war

was already over. And I passed out in there. I come to my right mind, and it was nighttime. There was a ward boy sitting there taking my temperature and keeping track of it. He put the temperature in my mouth, and I bit it and swallowed the lower end, he said. And I passed out again. I had a real high temp. He sat there all night by me. And that temperature finally broke, so they come with the wheelchair, and a bathrobe and put it on me.

And they had – one of the ward boys took me and went so far. And another one come, and he had white clothes all on, and a mask over his face – no, over his head and a mask around his nose and mouth, white stuff over his shoes. He took the wheelchair then and took me into a room. And there was a bed and everything in there. And he put me to bed. Put me in isolation, is what it was. And I don't know how long I had stayed there.

And then when they'd come in there to bring me food, they'd all be dressed like that, all covered up. They thought it was some contagious disease or something, I don't know what in the hell was all about. Well, anyhow, I said to them, I don't like it here. It's lonesome. I want to go back to my damn room. I said, what in the hell is going on anyhow? I said, I know I'm still alive, that's all. I said I wish to God I'd have died. I told them that.

They said, well, we're gonna take you out of here tomorrow, and take you back to the room. And I said, are you lying? They said, no, we're not. They lied to you, see? Make you feel good. So, they come with the wheelchair and put me in there and took me back to my room.

And the board met. And Captain Lone, I knew him. He was there because I'd known him in the States, see? They took us all, put us on that plane, and flew us in there to Spokane, Washington, because I'd went in the Service there. I'd been in the Service a long time before they ever went and did that.

And they said, here come a boy with the orders. And they told us to get ready, that they're flying us. And the nurse and them, they help you, get you on that plane. They carried me on it.

Interviewer: *When you got out of the Service, where did you go when you got out of the Service?*

Inez: Well, I had got acquainted – you see, I was stationed in Moses Lake, and that's up there by Snow Lake and Spokane, Washington. That's where that was taken at, Moses Lake. That was an Army base there at that time. And I was stationed out there in B-17s. I went out to my

friends'. They lived there at Farragut, Idaho, just across the line from Spokane is Idaho. And they had a nice, great big farmhouse to live in. And we'd go out there and have dinner a lot of times. And they had a boat. We could go out on the lake. They'd take us all out.

I just loved that woman. She was from the South, God bless her. And she had a son, and she tried to get me to get married to that son. He was married, and his wife had left him. And she liked me. She just treated me like a daughter. I'll tell you that. I stayed there for a week or two with her after I had got discharged, out before I ever come back. I got on the bus before I ever come back to California. I stayed up there quite a while, and just rested, just to get away from that hospital routine. And I was so skinny.

Interviewer: *Okay, 89 pounds, did you say?*

Inez: Yeah.

Interviewer: *All right, when you came back to California, where did you go to in California?*

Inez: I had a home there. I had a home in Pasadena. I had the [inaudible] type house. I had it rented out, and I went and got an apartment down in Redlands until their lease was up. And then they had to get out, and I went home – back to my own home. And I sold it later.

Interviewer: *Now, you're in your 20s, early 20s, and you're out of Service. What's your first job out of Service?*

Inez: I worked for – it was a canning place, where they canned Brussels sprouts and broccoli and all that stuff. They had a name there in Pasadena. I had a job down there, and it was piecework. And I made big money. I was so fast that I made more money than the landlord – I mean the floor lady. We had a boss, was a woman. And I worked packing all this Brussels sprouts and broccoli, and some other stuff. They'd come down on the belt, and you had to pack them in boxes.

Interviewer: *All right now, you said the lady in Idaho – Farragut, Idaho, that you stayed with when you got out of the hospital –*

Inez: Yeah.

Interviewer: *– she wanted you to marry her son?*

Inez: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Why didn't you marry?*

Inez: Because I didn't want to marry then – me sick like I had – I felt – I didn't want to marry nobody. I never got married, then, damn it, until I was 47 years old. I had nobody. I didn't want anybody. You see all them men around you, and yet, life that you had to live – I just stayed at my house there in Pasadena and rested up. I went down to visit where I work, and they wanted to give me a job. I said no, I don't want to work right now. I said, I don't want to work. And see, I had mustering out pay.

Interviewer: *Did you get a medical discharge?*

Inez: Yes.

Interviewer: *Did you get –*

Inez: Compensation?

Interviewer: *Yeah –*

Inez: Yeah, I did. Yeah, I did. I did.

Interviewer: *When you joined the WACs the very first time, I mean that first organization –*

Inez: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Why did you join?*

Inez: I thought it was my duty to my country. That's the way I looked at it. It had been good to me. I had had a job. I worked, and I was raised up with plenty food. And my stepdad, I hated him. I didn't like him. He didn't treat me right after he had two kids – mom had two kids by him, a girl and a boy. The boy went in the Service over in Japan. He talked Japanese, and he married a Jap. And he got murdered after he got out. He'd separated from them, and he got shot. He was murdered. He was murdered up in there close to the Oklahoma, and Missouri, and Kansas line, so I heard. That's what they told me. I didn't bother about looking out because I wasn't close to him. He was six foot tall.

Interviewer: *Did you receive any medals for being in Service?*

Inez: Yeah, I got the ribbons. They're up there someplace.

Interviewer: *Okay, we'll look at your album here in a minute. Now, you said you*

knew Johnny Carson.

Inez: Yeah, he comes home on the hospital ship. He had a ulcerated stomach. They'd put me in the wheelchair and take me down there in the hospital ship. He sat right across the table from me. And they were always kidding him to borrow money from him. And he was just a little old shavetail. He didn't have no money. His cousin, Jack, was on the television and the radio. He said, Jack's got the money. He didn't have any, but later he did.

He was a nice kind of a guy. He was a regular down to earth guy. You couldn't help but like him.

Interviewer: *But now, that was before he became famous. Okay, so, you're in California, and you're working at the plant there in California.*

Inez: Yeah, it was called Consumers. I can't think of that –of it – it's where they make frozen food. There are Brussels sprouts, and lima beans, and all that kind of stuff and that. I had a good job there. I made good money. That's why I liked it.

Interviewer: *How long did you work there at that plant?*

Inez: After I got out of the Service? I never did go back and go to work after I got out of the Service. I bought a home. I had saved my money in the Service.

Interviewer: *So, you didn't work after you came home?*

Inez: I saved all my money, and I bought bonds. And I sent them to the Chicago Reserve Bank. And I had two hundred and some thousand dollars. I didn't even think about it. I had too hard a time over there.

Interviewer: *Now, Miss Inez, it's been a joy talking to you about –*

Inez: Well, it hasn't been much of a joy to me because I don't like to bring back those old memories because there's stuff in there, kid, what –

Interviewer: *I know – that you don't like to bring up.*

Inez: No.

END

Inez Edna Wilber
Press Argus Courier,
Van Buren, Arkansas

Inez Edna Wilber, 97, of Van Buren died Sunday, January 9, 2011, at a Fayetteville hospital. She was a homemaker, Army veteran of World War II and a member of the First Allied Airborne of the European African Middle Eastern Campaign. She was the widow of Frank Wilber and the last immediate member of her family.

Graveside service will be 10 a.m. Thursday at U.S. National Cemetery in Fort Smith under the directions of Ocker Funeral Home of Van Buren.

She is survived by her friend, Janie Crews of Van Buren.