

## Earl Parker Oral History Interview

PETER RIESZ: This is Peter B. Riesz, interviewing for the MOWW, Military Order of World War. We're talking to Earl Parker and his wife, Mrs. Parker, here outside of Shiner, Texas, at their home. Today is October the 13th. Earl, we're just going to talk a little bit about your military experience. Mainly we'll start off with where you're born and what your early education was, and then how you got in the military. The intention of this is to record pretty factually how you got in the service and what your experience was, when and where. Also, if you have any anecdotes or comments about your feelings as you went through your military experience, we'd certainly like to hear them, too. Nice to let me come out to your place, here. How are you this morning?

EARL PARKER: Fine, and you?

PR: Top-notch, once we got this recording going. (laughter)  
Tell me a little bit. What's your first name, first of all?

EP: Earl Rogers Parkers.

PR: How do you spell Earl?

EP: E-A-R-L.

PR: Where were you born?

EP: Frankfort, Kentucky.

PR: What was the date of that?

EP: May 11, 1924.

PR: That's a familiar era from the veterans I've been talking with. What was your early education? Grade school?

EP: I attended grade school in Frankfort, Kentucky. We lived outside of town about four miles. Lived on a retail dairy farm and ran a retail dairy. We went to school in the city rather than going to the county schools, because the city schools at that time were a little more accredited than the county schools were. Went to grade school, then secondary school. Graduated from high school at Frankfort High School in 1942.

PR: What happened after 1942?

EP: At the end of 1942 I decided I'd try to go into the service, since it looked pretty evident that I was going to have to go anyway. So I went to the Marine Corps and volunteered for the Marines. Unbeknownst to me at that time, I had extremely poor vision in the left eye. The Marine Corps looked at me and said, "You won't qualify for us. And the Army probably won't have you. And if they have you, they will give you limited duty." So when it became my time to be drafted into the service, I memorized the eye chart because I knew that was principally all

they'd do, is give me an eye test by reading an eye chart. I passed with flying colors. So on the 17th of March 1943 I was drafted into the service.

PR: Right there in Frankfort?

EP: In Louisville, Kentucky. When I got to the center, they said, "You're a high school graduate, have one quarter of college, and can type. We think you'd make a good Clerk Typist." One of my sad moments of my life. I said, "I am not a Typist. I'm not a Clerk. I came into this Army to be a fighting man, and I want to be a fighting man." So they accommodated me. They sent me down to Camp Wheeler, Georgia, which was near the city of Macon. I took 13 weeks of basic training in the Infantry, learning all about Infantry weapons and Infantry warfare.

PR: When did you travel down to the camp there?

EP: I don't exactly remember the date, but it was very shortly after I went into the service. I didn't go to any other. I went to Camp Atterbury in Indiana for induction. But I went from Camp Atterbury to Camp Wheeler, Georgia.

PR: By troop train or just private travel?

EP: Troop train.

PR: Were you with a local unit, or was it just troopers from all over the country traveling there?

EP: I think it was people from that area primarily going down to Camp Wheeler for trailing.

PR: What was your serial number?

EP: 35698852.

PR: You didn't have to look down at that. (laughter) So that was just regular basic training and military discipline.

EP: Basic training. Close order drill. We served as Kitchen Police. And we took training on every kind of Infantry weapon: machineguns, mortars, rifles, carbines. Everything that they had at that time.

PR: Was Wheeler a well-established camp at that time?

EP: I don't know how long it had been established. I think it was primarily established as a training function.

PR: Did you stay in tents or did you have regular barracks?

EP: We had barracks and lived in barracks.

PR: So the living was fairly comfortable.

EP: It was comfortable.

PR: Food adequate?

EP: Food was good. As far as Army food is concerned, it was good.

PR: Were you issued all your clothing and everything down there?

EP: Yeah, I was issued some clothing at Camp Atterbury before I went down there.

PR: Then you got your other supplies at Wheeler. Where did you finish at Wheeler, and where did you go after that?

EP: I was there for 13 weeks of basic. Then I went to Camp Shenango, Pennsylvania. And then from Camp Shenango, Pennsylvania, I went to Fort Meade, Maryland. And then from Fort Meade, Maryland, to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. And from Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, to Camp Shanks, New York.

PR: Had you been attached to a unit somewhere?

EP: No, I was still a replacement.

PR: Why did they shift you around? How long were you at each of these places?

EP: I figured it was just the good old Army's method of moving people around and trying to determine where they were going to send you. And I had hoped, in fact I was told at one time, they were going to send us back into the States for further training. But it was evident pretty quickly that we were going overseas.

PR: Did you have an MOS by that time?

EP: Machine-gunner. I think that was a 605, as I remember correctly.

PR: When did you get to Shanks?

EP: I got to Shanks in last part of November, probably, of '43.

PR: By that time were you attached to a unit or were you still just a replacement?

EP: That was in October of '43 that I went to Shanks, because I left the country on the second of November '43. And I was not attached to any unit. Still a replacement.

PR: I guess the fighting at that time, Africa was finishing up.

EP: North Africa was finishing up. The division that I joined had come back from over there. They'd moved back to England for further training.

PR: When did you leave Shanks?

EP: Second of November.

PR: Did you leave right from Shanks, or did they take you by boat or something down to New York Harbor?

EP: They took us, I think, by train or by bus. I loaded on the *Queen Elizabeth*. There were about 15,000 other troops aboard the *Queen Elizabeth* for the trip across the ocean.

PR: Right in New York Harbor?

EP: Yeah, in New York Harbor. I was seasick for five days on the *Queen Elizabeth*. I was on D Deck. And of course this hillbilly boy had never been accustomed to being aboard a boat that rocked like that did in the Atlantic, especially in that time of year.

PR: Were you in a convoy or just solo?

EP: We were not in a convoy at all. Full speed ahead.

PR: Did they have to zigzag?

EP: They zigzagged some. But most of the time... We were in Scotland I think on the ninth of November, so it didn't take us any time.

PR: Pretty quick trip. Were there any emergencies on the way over?

EP: No.

PR: Did they have drills for you?

EP: We had drills.

PR: No telling what they'd have done if you actually had an emergency, with that many troops on.

EP: I'm sure we would've been gone.

PR: I didn't know about Shanks, even though I grew up in New Jersey. But I found out that that and Camp Henry in Newport News were the two man debarkation points. In fact, I don't know if you knew, even, there's a place at Shanks called Piermont where there's a memorial now. It's a big pier. They actually bring some of those big ships right up to Shanks and they load right there. I've read that, but I haven't found anyone that did that yet. Most of them shipped out of New York Harbor. I might've seen you in New York Harbor. We used to go into New York all the time. I remember when they armed the merchant ships. At Scotland, the whole ship debarked. What did they do with you after you got off the ship?

EP: We were sent then by train to the 10th Replacement Depot, which had been established in England.

PR: Do you know where that was? Just somewhere in England?

EP: I don't remember where in England it was.

PR: I know these guys just moved. And you got to a place. And they told you where to go next. (laughs)

EP: I actually really didn't care. (laughs)

PR: What were the meals like on the *Queen Elizabeth*?

EP: I lived on cheese tidbits and candy bars. I was down on the D Deck, and I was so seasick. When they mentioned food... I'd get the guys to bring me these nickel boxes of cheese tidbit crackers. And that's what I lived on.

PR: Would they let you up on the deck at all, get some fresh air?

EP: You could go up on the deck and get fresh air, but it wasn't easy to do.

PR: Were these five-high bunks you were in?

EP: Yeah.

PR: What happened out of the 10th Replacement?

EP: I stayed at 10th Replacement just a short time, and then they sent me to the 1st Division, 16th Infantry Regiment.

PR: You got assigned directly there. Where was that located? Do you know what town it was close to?



EP: Our regiment was located in Weymouth, England, which is right on the coast of the Channel. Then they broke us into battalions and companies, and we were just in a company strength in Quonset huts, right near the Channel at what they call Bexington by the Sea. I think it was near Dorsett, England. That's where we spent all of our training time. We would get with the larger organizations, even our own division and other division, for maneuvers. We made a lot of landings.

PR: Tell me about your Chain of Command. What company were you in?

EP: I was in Company M, which was a Heavy Weapons Company.

PR: Under...? Was the next one up a battalion or regiment?

EP: Battalion. We were part of the 3rd Battalion of the 16th Infantry Regiment.

PR: Of the 1st Division.

EP: Yeah. And the other regiments of the division were the 18th and the 26th Regiments of the 1st Division.

PR: That comprised the bulk of the fighting part of the 1st Division. Were you living in tents? Were there barracks you lived in?

EP: We lived in Quonset huts.

PR: That's the middle of November. Do you recall much about the weather?

EP: The weather was cold. We had a pot-bellied stove in the middle of that thing. We would try to keep it going. But at night, we'd just cover up. I had bunk beds, and I was on the top bunk. I got a little better heat than the guy on the bottom.

PR: Old coal-burning, pot-belly stove. And your meals, did you have a regular Mess Hall you ate in?

EP: We had a Mess Hall that we ate in, and good cooks.

PR: Was your clothing adequate to protect you from the cold and drizzle?

EP: Yeah, there wasn't any problems as far as clothing was concerned.

PR: How many men in your company?

EP: There was about 36 in a platoon. I guess there were about maybe 150 to 160 in a company.

PR: That comprised the platoon, then, the three platoons and the Headquarters. What sort of medical support did you have?

EP: We had our own Medics assigned to the company. But also they had Medics at battalion and Medics in the division. So there was a chain.

PR: Within the division, for medical treatment and evacuation. What sort of training did you have? Did you start right in with field training?

EP: Field training.

PR: Was it right along the beach?

EP: I think the beach was pretty well mined, so we didn't go to the beach even though we were just a couple hundred yards from the Channel. We didn't ever venture down to the beach, because we were told to stay away. I think the purpose of having the division broken up in those small groups was the fact they didn't want anybody to know who we were, what we were doing, other than we were American soldiers there for training. We trained a lot in our own area, but we also trained mainly with the Rifle Companies. Our main jobs as a Heavy Weapons Company was to support the three Rifle Companies in the battalion. And most of the time we were assigned directly to those people, even when we got in combat. We weren't even in our own company organization.

PR: What sort of weapons did you have?

EP: We had 81-millimeter mortars. And we had a platoon of mortars. And the other three platoons had machineguns, .30-caliber.

PR: Was that Browning or something? The water-cooled?

EP: I don't know whether it was a Browning. I don't remember. I don't think it was a Browning.

PR: Did you shoot the mortars?

EP: No, I was a Machine Gunner. I wasn't in the Mortar Platoon.

PR: But you were all scattered through the units. Did you loan onto ships and go out, practice landings on some beaches?

EP: Yeah, we made practice landings off of the HMS *Empire Anvil*, which was a British ship. We did maneuvers, landing maneuvers, along with the rest of the people in the regiment and others in the division.

PR: They would take you out to the ship?

EP: They would take us out in the Channel to the ship. They would take us out into the Channel, and then we would make what would be considered an invasion of the area, in order to get the practice.

PR: How would you unload from the ship, and what did you get into?

EP: We would get into landing crafts called LCVPs, which were Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel. They would hold about 36 people, maximum. So a Platoon usually would --

PR: Would you come down nets, or would there be gangways for you?

EP: Most of the time we came down nets into the LCVPs.

PR: Was that pretty tricky coming down?

EP: Yeah, you wanted to watch your step.

PR: Boats going up and down, crashing in the side. Did you have many injuries?

EP: We did a real good job on the injury situation.

PR: Did they take you into the beach? Would the front drop on those things? Did you have to go over the side?

EP: The LCVP, it'd drop the front. They dropped the ramp and it'd go off the ramp.

PR: Right onto the beach.

EP: Or into the water if they couldn't get into the beach.

PR: Did you have any training on the shore?

EP: Yeah, just like attacking on the enemy. You maneuvered on. Some of the groups served as enemy, and some of them served as advancing American troops.

PR: Would there be ammunition? Duds?

EP: There would be duds and some ammunition.

PR: Some live ammunition? (laughs)

EP: At that time, there wasn't too much ammunition available.

PR: Where would you practice? Were there English maneuvering fields? Camps you'd work at? Or just out in the countryside?

EP: I don't remember whether it was in the countryside or whether it was toward an English tank or what.

PR: Did you get any time off, where you could go into the local towns?

EP: Yeah, we'd get time off. We could go to Weymouth. We could get us something to eat in Weymouth. One of our favorite spots was Ye Olde Bull Inn, which was right off the top of the hill off the Channel where we lived. That was a pub. They had some pool tables and card tables and served beer. We'd go up there and drink some stout and visit with the English people.

PR: Did they seem fairly friendly to you?

EP: Yeah. They thought three things about the American soldiers: they thought we were overpaid, overfed, and oversexed. And they thought just the opposite of their own troops. In fact, I've got a picture of -- we called him our Limey Friend, who used to come down and visit with us all the time. He liked our food.

PR: Your mess?

EP: At our mess. He was in the so-called Home Guard for the British.

PR: Were there many British troops left in the area, or were most of them overseas fighting already?

EP: We really didn't get involved with the British troops much on our own.

PR: Did you get to London at all?

EP: No.

PR: Did you hear any air raids or V bombs? Was that going on?

EP: Yeah. The V bombs weren't, but the air raids were.  
Course, in our remote area you didn't hear anything like they would in larger cities like London.

PR: But there were still German air raids going on. Did they seem to concentrate on that area where all our troops were gathering?

EP: I don't think so. By being spread out in company strengths and battalion strengths, they really didn't know where we were located to try to give us a problem.

PR: How long did that continue? Was there a change in pattern of your training after a while?

EP: Wasn't any train in pattern. We did the same thing repetitiously and continued trying to get ready for the real thing.

PR: When did you get the feeling that something was imminent? They have you treat your clothes or treat your equipment?

EP: We knew it was imminent from the day we started.  
(laughter) These guys that had fortunately come back from North Africa insisted they knew exactly what we were getting ready to do, even though they didn't know when, where, or what. They knew that we were getting ready to make a true invasion.

PR: Were some of those men, with the experience in Africa and Sicily, were they mixed in with your company?

EP: Yeah. In fact, our Company Commander was in Africa and Sicily. And some of the non-commissioned Officers were, and a few of the men.

PR: So they knew what was coming. When did they start to get you loaded up to go on D-Day? Do you recall the events as that came along?

EP: We moved out of the area where we were encamped on probably the last two weeks of May of '44.

PR: Where did they move you down to?

EP: To Weymouth.

PR: Some barracks there you lived in?

EP: Boarded the HMS *Empire Anvil*.

PR: That was a British ship.

EP: That was the one we had practicing all the invasions on.

PR: That was a small troop ship? There were bunks and billets and things in there? Food? The whole works? So you could subsist on that ship as long as you wanted to.

EP: Yeah.

PR: And of course you knew the invasion was on then. Had they isolated you from the local town or lock your camp up before you boarded the ship?

EP: They just moved us out and abandoned the camp. Our Officers lived in a couple of houses in this area. And we



lived in the Quonset huts. We had one old house that some of the platoons lived in.

PR: During that training period, did you have any time off? Entertainment? USO shows?

EP: No.

PR: Did you go seven days a week, or did you have light weekends?

EP: Most of the time we had some breaks. Main thing we did, is we participated in athletics. We had our own company softball team. We played softball with the other companies or against the other companies. And we got to play some basketball, although there wasn't a very big place to play in the little town where we were near.

PR: Was there a lot of physical conditioning? Calisthenics? Long marches? Things like that?

EP: Lots of marches. I think that's the reason they put us down where we did, is so we could climb that hill all the time.

PR: (laughs) Full-load packs? Heavy packs?

EP: Yeah, everything.

PR: What sort of equipment would you carry?

EP: We would carry a full-field pack. I carried a .45-caliber pistol with a canteen and a first aid kit. I carried a gas

mask and then a machinegun, which weighed about 50 pounds, and a helmet.

PR: Any personal items? Mess kit?

EP: You'd carry a raincoat and toothbrush if you wanted to fool with that kind of stuff. Most of us didn't.

PR: Shelter half?

EP: Shelter half if you wanted it instead of a raincoat, or with a raincoat. That was principally the things you carried.

PR: Would you carry your machinegun by yourself, or was there a team?

EP: The Machine Gunner was responsible for carrying the machinegun. The Assistant Gunner was responsible for carrying the tripod, which also weighed about 50 pounds. And the rest of the people in the squad were ammunition bearers. They carried two boxes of .30-caliber ammunition in belts. And they carried .30-caliber carbines as their weapons.

PR: You had a sidearm and they had carbines.

EP: We had .45-caliber pistols. (laughs)

PR: That was a squad; how many men in that squad?

EP: About eight.

PR: You probably had three or four of those machineguns in your platoon.

EP: Yeah, each squad would have a machinegun.

PR: When you boarded the ship, did you haul that same machinegun with you?

EP: Yeah.

PR: So you got to know it better than a wife. (laughs)

EP: You wanted to know it. You wanted to know everything about it. You wanted to be able to take it apart blindfolded and put it back together.

PR: Were they in good condition?

EP: Yeah, real good condition.

PR: Did you have any problem with supplies at all?

EP: Not at that time.

PR: So you loaded onto the ship. This is still just middle of May?

EP: Middle of the latter part of May.

PR: You lived on that ship until...?

EP: Until the fifth of June.

PR: When did you set sail? On the fifth?

EP: On the fifth.

PR: Was that the time they called you back because of the weather?

EP: No, we were supposed to make invasion on the fifth. The weather was so rough that they decided to change it. But they got the word, and we didn't start out till the fifth.

PR: What time on the fifth?

EP: I don't remember.

PR: Late evening?

EP: I think we got over at our rendezvous point off the beach about two o'clock in the morning.

PR: Were you with a big flotilla of ships going the same way?

EP: Yeah.

PR: Did you have the idea your whole division was tied in together, whole 1st Division?

EP: It was.

PR: How many ships did it take to tote you over there?

EP: I don't really know.

PR: What's your first recollection when you got off of the beach and the engine stopped or something happened?

EP: We knew when the engine shut down that we were at least at the rendezvous point. We could see all the other craft around us.

PR: That must've been quite a sight.

EP: It was.

PR: Was it pretty impressive?

EP: Yeah, for a country boy. (laughs)

PR: Were you on deck for most of that?

EP: No, but you could go on deck. Most of the time we spent, we were oiling, cleaning, checking, and being sure that our

weapons were right and also looking after personal equipment that we were going to have to carry to go in there.

PR: Was that a rough crossing, or didn't you worry about seasick?

EP: We never thought about seasick.

PR: When did you have the knowledge of where you were going?

EP: Probably when we left Weymouth on June fifth.

PR: Did you have any knowledge of what Normandy was at that time, or did you just learn about it?

EP: We just knew it was a beach.

PR: Across the Channel.

EP: Yeah. I knew that they'd try to do our best to get us on the beach.

PR: When were you slated to go in?

EP: The 16th and 116th out of the 29th Division were the two Assault Teams. We, to my knowledge, hit at 6:30 in the morning.

PR: So your 16th was one of the initial Assault Teams.

EP: We were the Assault Team on Omaha with 116th and the 29th. And the 18th and the 26th Regiments followed us in.

PR: Within a few hours.

EP: Yeah. Hopefully shortly. (laughs)

PR: In all the confusion, do you remember the gun shooting the *Texas* or the battleships, or any of the bombers coming over you, or was it all noise and confusion?

EP: I remember them very well, especially when we got to try to rendezvous there in those little landing craft and we're getting ready to head to the beach.

PR: About what time did you go down your net and load onto your LCVP? Hour before 6:30?

EP: Probably an hour. Forty-five minutes to an hour. Had a lot of problem unloading.

PR: In what respect?

EP: The *Empire Anvil* couldn't carry enough landing craft to make the landing. So some of the landing craft would have to come from our Navy ships. They would come over and we would go down a net, on down the net off of the *Empire Anvil* into the landing craft. And the water was swelling so bad that day and the weather was so rough that those landing craft would come up about the time a man got ready to go in it, and then suddenly go in and hit the water. And you just had to be extremely careful. In fact, some people were crushed between the ship and the landing craft because of that.

PR: Had you timed it so you jumped off the net when it got up to the top? Was that the best thing?

EP: Well, you had to.

PR: So you had some landing craft on the *Anvil* which they lowered down into the water? Or would you load up above and they'd lower you down?

EP: Those that were available on there they would load up above and then lower them down. But they didn't have enough to do that. So they would have to bring in landing craft from other ships.

PR: What's your recollection of your regiment? You would load up and then they'd circle around until they got everyone loaded?

EP: Till everybody was loaded and ready to go.

PR: How do you suppose they got the signal to head for the beach?

EP: I don't know. Probably radio.

PR: And then the whole flotilla headed into the beach. This is 6:30, right on D-Day. Unbelievable. Do you remember anything about the trip in?

EP: Yeah. (laughs) I remember it was rough as the devil. And we all got sopping wet from swells going over the boat. I can remember seeing ships out there fire those big guns. We were hoping that we were going to have enough support from the fire standpoint to assist us in making the landing, which didn't occur, of course. Those big ships

didn't end up knocking out those emplacements on the beach. And the weather was so doggone bad the bombers had to go way in to drop their bombs instead of helping us on the beach area. And they tried to make artillery floating on barges to come in, and most of that was swamped and sank. They had tanks that were supposed to give us support; the 714th Tank Battalion was supposed to be our support from the tank standpoint. And as I recall, we had two tanks that finally made it. The rest of them had flotation collars on them, and they brought them in a certain area by barge and then put them off, rather than go on in their own power. The flotation collars didn't stay because of the swells in the sea.

PR: It was a disaster. They all sunk.

EP: As I recall, we had two tanks that were there finally to support us.

PR: You basically went in bare, then.

EP: Yeah.

PR: What area on the beach was your regiment slated to land on? They have all these Easy Red, Easy Green, Dog Red, or something. Do you recall where you were supposed to go?

EP: I think our beach was called Easy Red, but I'm not sure.

PR: Do you think you actually ended up there?



EP: No. Not far from it, but close. Weather just took its toll on trying to get anything to the right location.

PR: Were most of your regiment together as you went on the beach?

EP: I know our battalion pretty well was. I don't know anything about the rest of the regiment.

PR: Those were confusing times, I'm sure.

EP: Our Rifle Company that we were supporting, and they were supporting us in the battalion, I can remember them. Had Company L, Company I, and Company K. They were all in our battalion. Course, we sunk about 200 yards from shore, our landing craft. So when I got to the beach, I had a .45-caliber pistol and a gas mask. And that's all I had.

PR: Were you hit? Did you hit an obstacle? Why did you sink that far out?

EP: The guy that was paddling our boat threw the ramp. I don't know whether he got shot, whether he decided that he was going to dive off and try to catch him one going back towards ship, or what. But he threw the ramp. And when he threw the ramp, my Sergeant went off the ramp. I was right behind him. I thought, "We're getting close enough to walk." They told us that they'd try to put us in as close as they could. He didn't come up. In a few minutes, he did come up. A few seconds. When he did, I said, "This is

no place to be," with them firing everything out there, from artillery and machinegun fire. So I went off. And I got everything off of me but my pistol belt. And we had these little May West life jackets which are supposed to support us. They inflate it with a gas cylinder in them. You squeeze them and the cylinder would inflate it. It didn't inflate. The force of my body hitting the water, that broke and left me. So I didn't have any helmet. I didn't have anything but a .45-caliber pistol and my gas mask. And I couldn't get my pistol off.

PR: Was the water over your head?

EP: Oh, lord, yes. Way over our heads. So there wasn't anything to do but swim. That's why you got rid of all your equipment. And of course those clothes had been treated for gas. And all they did was help hold water, the gas-impregnated clothing.

PR: Was your landing craft ever hit by fire?

EP: I don't know what happened to it.

PR: Not a shell burst that you know about it. Do you remember obstacles on the beach as you went in?

EP: When I finally got in, I laid down. Got up on the beach and I laid down to rest a minute. You could see those big cross-iron pieces that the beach had. Then they had posts everywhere to prevent landing craft from coming in. I laid

there by a post for a minute. I looked up on top of that post and there was a mine about that big around on top of that post. I decided, "This is not any place to be," because if a shell hits it or a rifle hits it, it'll explode and probably get me. So that's when I tried to move on. I picked up, I believe, a Navy helmet. I wore red for the first couple of days, because I didn't have any steel helmet. We moved up then behind kind of a cliff and stayed there, trying to get reorganized and trying to help our wounded, pulling them up as close as we could. The Medics did a wonderful job treating them. Some of the Medics themselves were wounded. We pulled them up behind a cliff to give as much protection as we could.

PR: Do you remember the beach? Was it a gentle, sloping beach and then the big, high bluff above it?

EP: Yeah, it was a gentle sloping for a few yards, maybe 100 yards, and then that cliff. And then up on top of the cliff were all the German defenses.

PR: And all this fire coming down on you constantly. That must've been a harrowing experience, I'm sure one you don't like to think about very much. Were your troops still pretty much together? Organized?

EP: No, nobody was together. There was complete confusion. You didn't know where your officers were. You didn't know

where your non-coms were. It was nothing but to look around and try to help as much as you could, with what was going on, and then hope that you'd get organized.

PR: Get up off the beach at the base. Were you a little more protected at the base at the bluff up above?

EP: Yeah, because all you had to do was use high-trajectory stuff to get to there. But the artillery would go over you, and the machinegun fire and rifle fire would of course go over.

PR: Were there troops coming in behind you, landing all the time?

EP: Yeah.

PR: They just kept coming in?

EP: And what the Germans would do -- and I guess we were fortunate, even though we got dumped way out. We were fortunate because what the Germans would do, they'd let the LVCP come in just as close as it wanted to and lower the ramp. And the minute they'd lower the ramp, those Germans were pumping artillery shells. But there wasn't anything there but destruction and destruction of people and equipment, landing craft and everything.

PR: Shells?

EP: Tanks, shells...

PR: Do you remember the noise? Just tremendous noise? Fire?

EP: You really don't think about the noise. When it gets real close to you, well, you think about it.

PR: Just trying to think about what you can do to save your body and get to a more protected area, I'm sure. Do you remember brown rocks on the beach at all? Shingles, they call them. About a 10-yard-wide stretch as you came across.

EP: I don't recall.

PR: What happened after you got up to the base now? Are we looking at 7:30, an hour after the invasion?

EP: Probably. Then we started trying to get organized and find our own people, our Sergeants and Corporals and some of our own people.

PR: How would you do that? Just shouting back and forth?

EP: Yeah, and move around trying to find each other.

PR: Did you have any distinctive markings on you that sort of identified what unit you were in?

EP: No, you weren't allowed to. The only markings anything had on them was Officers had that white stripe down the back of their helmet.

PR: That's almost as bad as a red cross.

EP: But that's the only thing. Course, at that time, so many of them didn't even have any equipment, anyway. You didn't know who was who. But there was a Captain named Captain

Richmond of K Company. And he was able to start pulling people together in our company, battalion. I guess he was one of the people that was responsible for getting us to move some. And then there was a Colonel Taylor, our Regimental Colonel, who made the comment, "We're being..." (pause) (crying) In fact, he yelled, "We're being killed on the beaches, boys. Let's go inland to be killed." And that seemed to get people to really move and to know that they had to get out of there.

PR: I remember reading about that. Is that what inspired you to get moving together?

EP: That and Captain Richmond. You got a lot of people that moved. And a lot of them didn't move. A lot of them couldn't move, because they were wounded or dead. And a lot of them didn't move because they were psychos at that time. They were just babies, standing behind that cliff, crying like pure babies would.

PR: So the strong men just got together, and went out and started... What was your first movement, up the hillside?

EP: Up the hillside.

PR: How did you do that?

EP: You had mines. And you had people that had little old mine detectors. They would help you try to find the mines.

They had booby traps. It was just loaded with devices to either kill you or maim you.

PR: Do you remember the draws, the valleys? Did you try to head for one of those and go up it?

EP: That's what they did. We went up a draw.

PR: Do you know which draw it was?

EP: Right to the right of those first emplacements, those big concrete emplacements, as I recall.

PR: Have you heard of the Vierville Draw? Does that ring a bell at all?

EP: No, I don't remember the names of the draws. The one that we went up... And I remember the first prisoners that we took. We took prisoners out of an emplacement. I drew my .45-caliber pistol out of my holster. Some of the other guys were with me. And I was visibly shaken because that was my first prisoner. And we'd been through hell anyway. They said, "Parker, holster that pistol. If you fired it, it would squirt water anyway. And you'd better be careful or you're going to shoot one of us." (laughter)

PR: They detect the mines; would they mark a field somehow with some marker?

EP: They'd mark it with tape and mark the mine, either paint or a marker so that you would know it was there, to avoid it.

PR: So you followed tape up the draw. Do you remember getting all the way to the top?

EP: That night.

PR: It took all day to get to the top? Golly.

EP: I remember being on the top that night.

PR: Did most of your platoon make it to the top?

EP: Some of them.

PR: I mean, the ones that were still alive, not wounded.

EP: Yeah, we gathered people together and started getting equipment and getting some replacements coming in there that night.

PR: Already?

EP: Trying to.

PR: Do you remember how many of your platoon made it to the top?

EP: I don't recall. I know a lot of men didn't.

PR: Did you rest at all that night, or was it just constant action all the time?

EP: You really didn't rest. All you did was dig you a good emplacement, good foxhole, and see if you could protect yourself, because you figured that they were going to counterattack right now. And if they had, we wouldn't have had a chance. Their weapons were... Oh, lord. Their weapons were unbelievable. And they were well-trained



people. The only problem they had is they didn't have the judgment or the freedom to change if things weren't going exactly as their officer said they should. And they couldn't do anything without the officers telling them to do it, from a command standpoint. Basically that's why we ended up beating the butt of them, is because of that one thing.

PR: Over-organized. That was the beauty of the American Army. They had an objective to do. It doesn't matter who the Officer was. If he got killed, someone would say, "Let's get the job done and get out of here."

EP: And when they counterattacked, you knew they were going to try to use the main roads and the main areas. When we moved, the way we gained ground is we moved in the remote areas and the backstreets and the back ways. That's the reason we were able to move.

PR: When did you have the idea that things were starting to come together and things were organized again into units and you could advance? How did you know where to advance?

EP: I think in two days we were pretty well organized. The Rifle Companies were. And our Mortar Platoon was. And we knew that we was supposed to supply support to them. And wherever they needed us to go, we went.

PR: Did your squadron finally get a machinegun back?

EP: Yeah, we got a machinegun that evening.

PR: How did you get that?

EP: I don't know. But they got it in there. I know most of us had picked up weapons off the beach. I had an M-1. I didn't fool with trying to fire the machinegun, because I knew it was probably going to fail.

PR: By the next day, were most of the German bunkers and things right along the edge of the plateau above the beach knocked out?

EP: Yeah, they were knocked out or they were not manned because we had taken and captured the people from them.

PR: Did you get the idea that first day that the beach was pretty secure? The invasion was going to be a success?

EP: Yeah. Of course you worried about counterattack. And you worried about planes.

PR: Could you just see these ships and supplies and the men coming in?

EP: Yeah.

PR: They had it pretty easy when they came in.

EP: Yeah, they didn't meet the opposition that the Assault Team did.

PR: Was there shelling?

EP: There was still shelling going on, even that night, and the rest of the time. You always had that shelling.

PR: What direction did you start to move out on the second day?

EP: I don't know. I know we started moving through France. I remember a town named Caumont that was one of our goals to try to capture. But I don't know how far away it was or where it was.

PR: You moved off the beach; did you go toward Cherbourg?

EP: No, I don't think we went toward Cherbourg.

PR: Where do you think you went afterward? In what direction did the 1st Division go?

EP: I have no idea. (laughs)

PR: We're going to look that up.

EP: I don't have any idea where we went. I know that M Company history that I have talked about the town and cities and areas. I don't know who remembers any of that.

PR: You have the history? Would you mind loaning it to me so I can fit that in with the story? I'll take good care of it.

EP: It doesn't have any of my people in it, and I don't know why. I'm getting ready to write him a letter to tell him, give him the names of guys that I have that they don't even show as members of the M Company.

PR: Is this through June and July you're moving along?

EP: Yeah.

PR: How would you go? Would you fight every day? Or would you just advance to an objective?

EP: We'd fight every day. You attacked, and then they counterattacked. If you had things going your way for a while, you'd stop and go into the defensive position and hold. Lots of times, we'd get out ahead of the people on our flanks. And we didn't want to get cut off that way. So you'd stop and hold till the flanks caught up with you. And most of the time we were assigned to a Rifle Company. We didn't know anything about what our company was doing. We were assigned to Rifle Company to provide support for them.

PR: Did the 1st Division have a front? This was your territory to advance to? And you had other divisions on the side of you?

EP: Correct.

PR: How about at Saint-Lô? End part of July, they finally broke out of Saint-Lô and things started moving fast. Do you remember anything about the Saint-Lô breakthrough?

EP: No.

PR: You just kept advancing at your own speed. You remember Patton and all the Armored Divisions?

EP: Used to hear about it.

PR: Where did you end up as your division advanced? Towards Alsace-Lorraine or toward Belgium?

EP: We went all the way through Belgium and were going to the Siegfried lines.

PR: Do you remember passing through or bypassing Paris?  
Crossing the Seine River?

EP: I don't remember Paris at all. I remember some of the smaller towns in France and some of the locations in Belgium.

PR: Were the towns pretty much beat up, blown up, bombed out?

EP: Some of them were destroyed to a degree. But fortunately there wasn't a whole lot of destruction in the towns.

PR: How did you live? Did you dig a foxhole every night or set up a tent every night?

EP: You dug a foxhole every time you stopped. You might dig several during the day. As I've often said, I wonder how many yards of dirt I moved between the beach in Normandy and Germany.

PR: What sort of food did you get to sustain yourself?

EP: You had C-rations, K-rations, and D-rations in your pack if you were lucky to have a pack. The company had a kitchen, but you didn't see the kitchen. They couldn't get meals to you most of the time.

PR: Did you ever get a warm meal?

EP: If you were in a defensive position and you were holding, they would do their damndest to provide a meal to you.

PR: Otherwise it was just the rations.

EP: Mostly rations. On the first day, we captured German rations and were using German rations because we didn't have anything when we lost all of our stuff at the beginning of the invasion.

PR: How about your clothing? You never worried about changing clothing or getting a bath, brushing your teeth or shaving or combing your hair? (laughter)

EP: Personal hygiene wasn't that high a --

PR: That was a low priority.

EP: In fact, I have a picture of when I had a three-day pass back to [Err?], Belgium. And this was the first hot meal and bath and change of clothes I've had in three months.

PR: You were just constantly on the line. Is it just sort of run together? You survive the night, and you get up the next day, and you advanced or held?

EP: A lot of times you were fighting at night, too --

PR: One day ran into the outer?

EP: -- because attacks and counterattacks a lot of times took place at night.

PR: Did you ever have any really significant counterattacks against you which set you back? They never overran you or anything like that?

EP: No, but they would sure attack you. Fortunately we had good support from other forces, the Artillery and the Tanks, and our Mortar. Our Mortar also was probably one of the best in the world. Boy, he had been over in Sicily and North Africa, and he knew how and when. He kept a .50-caliber machinegun with his platoon. I've seen him stop counterattacks with a .50-caliber machinegun. He was a wizard. He wouldn't fire on a church. He'd never fire on a church. But he'd let the Germans know that if he'd wanted them that he'd have them. He'd throw one over the church, one short of the church. And he said, "Then I'll put the next one right in the middle." And they knew.

PR: Did they have observers in these churches?

EP: Yeah.

PR: Or troops.

EP: They were ingenious, where they could hide. But you talk about destruction... The worst destruction I ever saw anywhere was Aachen, Germany. That town was completely obliterated and destroyed. I've got some pictures of it showing the (inaudible) after World War II. And they gave them a chance to surrender, and they wouldn't surrender. So we just blew the town apart.

PR: Do you remember where you passed into Belgium or when?

EP: I remember going into Belgium, but I don't know where.

PR: November or December by this time?

EP: Yeah. Well, we were in Belgium before. Yeah, we were probably in Belgium in October, November.

PR: Do you remember passing over the Siegfried line into Germany? Did your division go that direction?

EP: I remember when we went into Siegfried.

PR: Any idea of the dates? Would that be in the company history?

EP: Yeah, probably. But I can remember Aachen being torn up and what a hellacious battle Aachen was. And then right after Aachen is when we started into the Siegfried line, as I recall.

PR: Had you had any relief from the line at all this whole time?

EP: We would get pulled back for a day, maybe, sometimes.

PR: Just rotating the company. Your division was constantly on the line. No break from the line. You're getting over toward the Battle of the Bulge time. What was your attitude at the time the Bulge started? Were you involved with that at all?

EP: I didn't even know anything about a Bulge at that time.

PR: Where were you located?

EP: I don't know. We had no way of no knowledge of knowing it was a Battle of the Bulge.



PR: It was just the same old same old. (laughs)

EP: Just attacked and counterattacked. Dig, dig, dig.

PR: Where did you proceed onto? Where did you go to next, after you got through Aachen?

EP: We went from Aachen up through the Siegfried line and then into the Hurtgen Forest.

PR: That was a terrible battle, too, wasn't it?

EP: Yes, sir.

PR: That worse than the Normandy invasion or equal to it?

EP: It's so tough to try and compare them. They all pretty much run together.

PR: Lot of casualties?

EP: Yeah.

PR: You know Oscar [Vote?] in Victoria?

EP: No.

PR: He was in the 4th Division. Was the 4th Division in there with you?

EP: Probably the 4th Division.

PR: He was in the Hurtgen Forest. He was a Medic with the 4th Division. They landed on the Utah Beach. They ended up in Hurtgen.

EP: Yeah, they landed on Utah and didn't run into near the opposition.

PR: No. His funniest story was about a whirring noise he heard as he hit his first foxhole, and he thought a rattlesnake, being from Texas. He realized that was ridiculous. Looked around. There was a combat photographer with one of these windup cameras, was buzzing. (laughs) That's one of the funniest invasion stories I've heard, if anything can be funny about it. Did you get through the Hurtgen, then, and go on?

EP: I got up near a place called Hamich, Germany, H-A-M-I-C-H. And I got hit in an artillery attack. That was right before they were really trying to mount a counterattack. I went to the Aid Station. They sent me from the Aid Station back to Division, and then from there to a hospital in Liège, Belgium.

PR: What date were you wounded?

EP: One item says the 18th of November, and the other one says the 19th of November.

PR: You were ahead of the Bulge, then. And they evacuated you.

EP: To Liège, Belgium.

PR: Did you require surgery or just bandaging up?

EP: I thought I'd got to the Aid Station and be right back. When I was in Liège, Belgium, on Thanksgiving Day, the Germans had gotten their V-1s in good shape at that time. And they blew that hospital up completely with a V-1 bomb.

So they loaded us on airplanes and flew us to Wales. And I was in the 156th General Hospital over in Wales.

PR: In Liège, was this a Field Hospital or was it a fixed hospital?

EP: Old big hospital.

PR: Under tent?

EP: No, it was a building. I'm sure what they'd done is taken over a hospital.

PR: Was your treatment, as you recall, adequate treatment?

EP: Everything was fine. People knew what they were doing.

PR: What do you recall about the V-1 hitting the place?

EP: I just remember it blowing it up and just saying, "We need to get the heck out of here someday." Fortunately they got us out.

PR: They had an airfield there where they could fly you all -- the survivors. How many were killed in that hospital?

EP: I don't have any idea.

PR: Significant casualties, though --

EP: Yeah.

PR: -- because those things were huge bombs.

EP: I can remember when we first saw them when we were in line. We'd see these things go over. And the first time we saw them, we looked at each other and said, "Who is that crazy

SOB flying with his lights on? You know somebody's going to knock him down." And you had no idea what it was.

PR: That was the old buzz bomb, the V-1.

EP: Yeah.

PR: Did you see a lot of them go over?

EP: Oh, lord, yes. At night, man, you could just observe them all the time.

PR: You flew to Wales. Where was that located in Wales?

EP: I don't remember the town in Wales.

PR: But that was a regular General Hospital, 156th General Hospital. How long did you stay there?

EP: Until probably the middle of December. Then I was discharged from the hospital and went back right to the 10th Replacement Depot again.

PR: (laughs) Where did they assign you then?

EP: Then they assigned me to General Eisenhower's Headquarters at Versailles. That's when I became a Clerk Typist, (laughter) which they tried to get me to be the first time.

PR: You finally saw the light.

EP: My MOS was a 405. I had no idea that that --

(break in audio)

PR: Was that a pretty high-priority assignment? Pretty lucrative? Pretty easy assignment?

EP: Oh, after what I'd been through, a fantastic assignment.

PR: Probably thought you were in heaven.

EP: Like dying and going to heaven.

PR: Clean uniforms?

EP: Oh, meals...

PR: Hot and cold water?

EP: Oh, yeah. Good facilities to work in.

PR: What sort of a mess did you eat in?

EP: They had a full mess for the people there.

PR: The enlisted men?

EP: Yeah.

PR: Did you see Eisenhower frequently or infrequently?

EP: I didn't see General Eisenhower very often.

PR: He was in a different area?

EP: Yeah.

PR: Was it a huge Headquarters?

EP: Pretty good size Headquarters. You kept going all the time. The size of those things...

PR: What would you actually do?

EP: Any incoming mail to the Headquarters, we would receive it and we would handle it. And then we would deliver it to whatever carrier that it went.

PR: From different Headquarters.

EP: Yeah. Whether it went to Transportation, whether it went to Purchasing, whether it went to any of the organizations that ran the Headquarters.

PR: Were most of the messages by radio that came in?

EP: Most of the things we handled wasn't.

PR: Regular old mail. How long did you stay there at Versailles?

EP: I don't remember when we moved from Versailles to Reims.

PR: By that time, I guess our fighting was well into Germany by the time you moved to Reims.

EP: Yeah.

PR: And the whole Headquarters moved to Reims, or just a portion of it?

EP: All the Headquarters moved to Reims.

PR: You did the same function there?

EP: Correct.

PR: Did you witness the surrender there at Reims?

EP: Correct. I didn't witness the actual signing of the surrender. But I witnessed the Germans coming in to sign the surrender, goose-stepping through the doors into the building. I witnessed that.

PR: Who was it? Do you remember who the German personnel was?

EP: General Jodl was one of them. He was the head army man. Their navy man was...

PR: Admiral Doenitz?

EP: Don't remember whether it was Doenitz or...

PR: I think it was Doenitz.

EP: Then there was another. Was there a Rundstedt?

PR: Yeah, von Rundstedt.

EP: I think he was with them, too. But I remember seeing them all goose-stepping in. Of course, at the time I didn't know who they were. The guys with me laughed at me. They said, "Here we are, laughing and grinning, and you're over there with tears running down your face. What's the matter with you?" I said, "I just thank God it's over."

PR: "I've been here from the start, you guys." That must be tremendous emotion.

EP: It was.

PR: I've seen that little red schoolhouse in Reims and gotten to go through there. It's a nice little museum. In fact, that might even be US sovereign territory now. I'm not sure if we took over that museum or not. Did you know the surrender was going to occur?

EP: Yeah. We knew that was the purpose of their being there.

PR: They were just as arrogant as ever?

EP: Always.

PR: Could you tell?

EP: Oh, hell yeah. They didn't change. They were just as arrogant as you wanted to be. Of course, General Ike wasn't even there to even sign it.

PR: They had Beetle Smith sign it?

EP: Beetle Smith signed it for him.

PR: What happened after that? Do you remember the events after they did the signing? Did you stay around to see them come out?

EP: I didn't see them come out. We went on back to perform our duties. And I never did see them coming out.

PR: What time of day or night did you see this?

EP: I thought it was in the morning, but I don't remember. Times and dates meant nothing.

PR: Just flood together.

EP: Yeah.

PR: So you continued the [Shafe?] Duty there in Reims. The war is over, and then...?

EP: They moved their Headquarters to Frankfurt, Germany.

PR: You went into Frankfurt.

EP: And we were located in the IG Farben. That was where General Eisenhower's Headquarters was, was in IG Farben. We were located in another building, down in another part of the town.

PR: Was Frankfort pretty much blown up also?



EP: Frankfurt wasn't really destroyed very badly.

PR: I guess it really wasn't an industrial area like there were.

EP: A funny thing happened to me in Reims, France. After the surrender was signed, I was walking down the street one day and there was a railroad nearby. The steam train let off steam, and it sounded like a shell coming in. I hit the deck. And then I realized, "What's the matter with you?" I was so embarrassed. I raised my head and looked all around to see who saw me, (laughter) because I knew they'd say, "That guy's a psycho. Lock him up." (laughter)

PR: Fortunately nobody saw you, right?

EP: That's right.

PR: I'm sure you did a lot of defensive things which it took a while to break the habit on.

EP: Still do. (laughs) We went to *The Alamo* couple weeks ago. We went with some friends to San Antonio. He had an open house down there for some people that he supervises. He asked us to go, and we went. We decided to go the IMAX and see *The Alamo*. We sat down in there. When that first shell went off, (laughter), I damn near went down between the seats.

PR: Hit the deck again. (laughter)

EP: Yeah. Marilyn said I was just like this. (laughter)

PR: How long did you stay at Frankfurt?

EP: I stayed at Frankfurt until... When did I leave Frankfurt?  
Last of November in '45.

PR: So you got the privilege of staying on. Did you qualify for rotation back because of your experience and time in the lines or whatever?

EP: I had enough points to come back. That's when I started back home.

PR: When did you go to from Frankfurt?

EP: I don't remember. But I know I went back into France, I thought. And I boarded a ship called the *USS Lejeune* and came home on it.

PR: Was it around Le Havre?

EP: I think it was probably at Le Havre.

PR: Do you recall the cigarette camps? Do you remember if you were in Lucky Strike or Old Gold?

EP: Lucky Strike rings a bell, but I don't know whether that was the one or not.

PR: There were about six camps, I found out, around La Havre that were named for cigarettes. Old Gold, Lucky Strike, Camel... That's where most of the troops -- they were just temporary camps for debarkation. Was that a regular old troop ship?

EP: Yeah, it was a troop ship.

PR: Not as luxurious as the *Queen*.

EP: Not like the *Queen Elizabeth*. At that time, who cared? I thought it was the most luxurious thing I'd ever seen.

PR: How long did you have to wait in camp?

EP: I was back in the US on December the sixth. I got married (overlapping dialog; inaudible).

PR: You were pretty lucky.

EP: They were rotating us pretty fast.

PR: Of course the trip home, I'm sure, was a lot more fun than the trip going over. (laughs)

EP: Very enjoyable. Knew I was going home, was going to get out.

PR: Did that land in New York City? Where did they take you?

EP: Put us on the train. Took me back to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. At Camp Atterbury, Indiana, they discharged me on December the 12th.

PR: Wow, within five days of the time you hit the States, you were out. Did you have to have a physical at all, or did you just sign papers?

EP: (laughs) No, you just signed papers. (laughs) If you wanted them to give you a physical or something, you could request it.

PR: You could wait another month.

EP: Nobody wanted to do that. They wanted to go.

PR: Eager to get out. Was there ever any talk while you were in Europe about your outfit going to Japan or any of the troops going to Japan?

EP: I never heard any of it.

PR: Course, you were pretty set, being at Eisenhower Headquarters. If you were in the 1st Division, they might have said, "We're going to ship you out."

EP: Hopefully they wouldn't, after all those things that those guys had been through.

PR: Did you stay in the Reserves at all?

EP: I wasn't in the Reserves. But when I went back to college, I decided if I ever went back in the service I wasn't going to be a damn foot soldier. So I enrolled in ROTC. I got a commission in ROTC in Field Artillery in 1947. Then I went on to graduate school. And I was trying to earn enough money to go through school. I got smart and went into the Kentucky National Guard so I could earn some money while I was still in school. I was very, very fortunate that I got out about a week or two before they were federalized.

(laughs)

PR: Wow. So many of those guys got called back in the Korean conflict. Someone was smiling down at you.

EP: Good Lord was looking after me again.

PR: Where did you go to school for your degree?

EP: Eastern Kentucky University. Then I got my Master's over at the University of Kentucky.

PR: What degree did you get from Eastern Kentucky?

EP: Physical education and health.

PR: And how about your Masters?

EP: Master's in Education. Then I had about eight hours above my Master's in Education.

PR: When were you discharged finally from your Reserve component?

EP: I think '49.

PR: Just in the nick of time. What did you do after that?

EP: I taught school and coached football for three years in Louisville, Kentucky, at Jefferson County schools. The superintendent of Jefferson County schools had been a principal of mine while I was going to school in Frankfort. And he later became superintendent of the schools. So I applied for a job with him as soon as I got out of college, before I got out of college. Then there wasn't any problem to go to work for him. He (inaudible) my family and me (inaudible). But I stayed at it three years and decided I couldn't make a living. I had two sideline jobs. Teachers in Kentucky weren't paid very well. So that's when I went to work for Tennessee Gas Pipeline in Kentucky as a skilled

laborer, making more money than I was making teaching.

(laughs)

PR: When did you get transferred into Texas?

EP: I came to Texas in '55. I went to work for the company up there in '52.

PR: Were you assigned here, in this area? How long have you been in Shiner?

EP: I've only been in Shiner -- we bought this place when, Babe? Used it for a weekend, '79. Then when we retired from Tennaco is when we moved out here for good. We had a boy that came along, and we wanted him to go to school somewhere other than Houston schools. So when he got ready to start school, we moved down here.

PR: So most of your work with Tennaco was out of Houston.

EP: Yeah, the last part of it. At first, of course, I was all over the country working for them. But the last part was back in Houston. I spent a lot of time in Pasadena at a chemical facility that they had out there. But I retired.

PR: What an experience you've had. That's unbelievable. I'm amazed at how you guys came back home. I'm sure you had some internal scar, but it's not like these other conflicts we've seen where these guys come back and complain about how bad off they were. You guys went and -- you were in for three, four years?

EP: Almost. About 28 months.

PR: You came back, you went to school, you got a job, you started a business, you got married, and you just went on with it and never -- seems to me, you didn't bitch about how it messed up your plans and your education and your family life or whatever. You just went and did the job, and came home and got on with your life. I just have to admire you.

EP: Well, you knew you had a job to do, so why not get started and get it done? And that was one good thing about the ROTC program when I came back to school. Most of the guys that were in ROTC had been through the service already and had been separated from service. A lot of us wouldn't talk about our experiences at the time. And then we decided, what the hell, let's get some of this stuff out of us, because we could talk to each other without any problems about it. And that really helped get some relief from the internal problems that you had from remembering those things.

PR: Do you think the men at that time, World War II, are more agreeable to sharing their experience now than when they were so close to it and it was such a hard thing to think about?

EP: Yeah. Some of them still won't. In my way of thinking, those that won't are making a terrible mistake. The best thing they can do, just like any other problem that you've been through, if you can get it out, ventilate it, you're that much better off.

PR: That's the feeling I have. They're much more eager to share it. They realize they're mortal. Many of their kids have no idea what their dad or granddad went through. It's so important to document that, at least get it down. They don't have to read it, I guess. But that's part of what I like to do, is be able to write it down so it's there if they eventually wanted to see what Grandpa did, find out what he did and where he was, and get the map out and look at these places. It's unbelievable.

EP: The service has changed so much, just like our whole living situation in our country has changed so much. These youngsters unfortunately are being so pampered and handed things, handed things, handed things, that they don't have any appreciation of their country, their parents, or other people in a lot of instances. It's unfortunate that that's the case.

PR: Okay, well, I'm going to end. I forgot, what time did we start? About 9:30, 9:40?

EP: Mm-hmm.



PR: It's eleven o'clock. I'm going to stop the talking part here. Anything else you want to add on?

EP: I might tell you a funny situation that occurred when we were training in England. We had an Italian Colonel named Horner. He would come down to our company to inspect on Saturdays and give us a company inspection. He would walk through the lines with the First Sergeant and the Company Commander. And he would ask you questions. Then he'd ask to see your weapon. You'd hand him your weapon and he'd say, "Soldier, when did you clean this weapon?" "Last night, sir." He'd yell, "Bat shit!" And of course we dubbed him quickly Bat Shit Horner. And every time we'd get ready for Saturday inspection, we'd say, "You think old Bat Shit's going to come down today?" We got a new recruit that had joined us over there. We kind of set him up. We said, "We got a Colonel that comes in here. He's going to ask to see your weapon and everything. If he asks you what the Company Commander's name is, you know it's Captain Edmond. What your First Sergeant's name is... When he asks you his name, it's Colonel Bat Shit Horner."

PR: (laughs) No.

EP: And he pulled it. I'm telling you, you're talking about guys almost bursting. Colonel Horner didn't appreciate it at all. (laughter)

PR: That's good.

EP: That's one of the things that ended up helping us win the war, too, is our ability to laugh at ourselves and the humorous situations that occurred, to help us get some relief from that stuff that we were going through.

PR: Adapt to it and make the best out of it. Unbelievable.

EP: People don't realize how it is to carry that load of a machinegun, 50 pounds, all the time; to have dirty clothes, dirty socks, dirty underwear, cold meals, rations; running... I also wonder how many miles I walked across those three countries. Digging a hole to try to protect yourself, trying to protect your buddies. When an artillery attack occurred, the first thing you're doing is checking on squadron members to see if they're okay. I can remember one time one of our guys was off. We tried to dig us a little trench for a latrine if we were holing up for a little while. And I can remember one of the guys from the squad saying, "Man, I got to go to the latrine." He got over and he dropped his britches. And just as he dropped his britches, the Germans started an artillery attack on us. (laughs) He was trying to run and pull his britches up at the same time. And he couldn't get them up. He finally hit the ground. It was very appropriate that he hit the ground when he did, because that shrapnel would be going

out this way, and it would miss him. Well, he'd get up and start again. (laughter) We watched that character. And we died laughing.

PR: All the way across the field. (laughs)

EP: It was another one of those good humorous things that would help keep you going.

PR: Isn't that amazing. (laughs)

EP: People don't realize that a guy can suffer that kind of stuff and still do the job that he's required to do.

PR: Yeah.

END OF AUDIO FILE