

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. John Joseph O'Malley, Jr.
Date of Interview: June 12, 2009

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Interview in progress.

Dr. James Lindley: Good morning; this is Dr. James Lindley; it is 12, June, 2009. We're at the Museum of the Pac...National Museum of the Pacific War operated by the Texas Historical Commission and the Admiral Nimitz Foundation. The purpose of the National Museum of the Pacific War Oral History Project is to collect, preserve and interpret the stories of World War II veterans; home front experiences and life of...and the life of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz and the old Nimitz Hotel, by means of recordings and/or video tapes, interviews with individuals who had an experience during those times. The audio and video recordings of these interviews become part of the Center for Pacific War Studies, the archives of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Texas...and the Texas Historical Commission. These recordings will be made available for historical and other academic research by scholars and members of the family of the interviewee. This morning we're interviewing Mr. John...John J. O'Malley in Fredericksburg, Texas. Good morning and thank you so much for doing this.

Mr. O'Malley: Good morning.

Dr. James Lindley: Would you please start by telling us your name, your full name, where you were born and a little bit about your...early life and how you came to be in the...and if you'll move just a little closer to the microphone; there you go.

Mr. O'Malley: Yeah. Well, my name is John Joseph O'Malley, Jr. I was born in Winchester, Massachusetts in...September the 8th, 1924, and grew up in Reading, Massachusetts which is a suburb of...north of...north of Boston; went to public schools there. And I remember one very vivid experience I had in public school when I was in the fourth grade looking out the window of my...four-room school which faced on the town common of Reading which was eight miles from Lexington and being told by my teacher, my homeroom teacher, that...at that very common on April 19, 19...1775 the Minutemen from Reading had congregated and...marched the eight miles...through...Woburn, Massachusetts to Lexington, and I suppose on to Concord. I didn't pursue that, but I remember clearly looking out the window of that school and imagining what that town common looked like because men were gathering there in 1775. So the other experience that I recall from grade school was...my teacher telling us as we were singing...I think we sang every day the hymn, America, My Country 'Tis of Thee and telling me about Samuel Smith who was the composer of America who taught at Andover...Phillips Andover Academy and drove back and forth to Boston in his buggy and drove through Reading. Reading was a...direct...pretty much north of Boston on direct route to Andover, and as he passed through Reading, composed one of his

verses of America, I love those templed hills and so forth because next door to us was the Old South Methodist Church and that was the templed hill that he had in mind according to my teacher. So it's always had a very special meaning for me to hear that hymn. So, let's go to (unintelligible). I went through in Reading; had some wonderful teachers...I and graduated in 1941 from Reading High School with honors; I didn't realize it. I didn't even look at my diploma...for years...later; I put it in a trunk and by George, it says, "With Honors." And I was very surprised because I didn't think I was that great a student, but evidently they saw something in myself that I didn't...that I missed (chuckle). Anyhow in 1941, I went to work after high school; I graduated at age sixteen from high school and went to work...for the Boston Herald Traveler. And in...December the 7th, 1941 I was home on a Sunday afternoon, and I don't know what we were doing. We had the radio on and the radio was interrupted; the broadcast was interrupted...had to announce that an attack had been made at Pearl Harbor. And as the broadcast went on, it became more and more certain that we were in a terrible, terrible war with the Japanese. So, at that point, I think everybody...every young man that I knew thought, "Well, how are we going to get into the service; what are we going to do?" So we...I went on to...I had already decided to start college and I was too young to go into the service really; I couldn't have gone in except with my parents' permission even in 1942...so up until my birthday. So I decided to go to college; this was what was recommended to me by some of the veterans of

the First World War who were very knowledgeable people; people I respected at home and they said, “John, get some good education; get as much education as you can so when you go into the service you’ll be a more valuable person and more mature.” So I spent one year at Boston College majoring in Physics and found out in 1942 when I matriculated there that I could get a three-year deferment; that is to say deferment until I got my degree from the Draft and if I so chose. But I decided my friends, schoolmates, were going into the service and why should I take a deferment; I didn’t feel as if...it was quite right. So, in 1943 I presented myself to the Draft Board and they obligingly drafted me. I went into the...Army and entered the Fort Devens, Massachusetts Reception Center and then was transported with a large group in a troop train to Fort, what is now, Fort Hood, Texas. And on July 1st, 1943 we arrived at Fort Hood, which now Fort Hood...was then Camp Hood, and it was like walking into...from a refrigerator into a glass furnace. I had never seen such heat in all my life! It was complained...by the Vietnam soldiers who were deplaned at Tan Son Nhut...in summer, and...Tan Son Nhut, Vietnam and said that they’d never experienced such heat in all their lives...

Dr. James Lindley: Uhm!

Mr. O’Malley: ... as they got from the...stepped off the aircraft in Tan Son Nhut. Anyhow, we were assigned...those of us who had been in college were recruited, shall we say, into the Army’s Specialized Training Program which was to train officers in a number of different specialty lines. One of

those specialty lines that the military was concerned about was engines; engines for auto...internal combustion engines for tanks. Our tanks had radial engines which required high octane fuel and were considered to be a...a death trap. The Brit...the British soldiers particularly called our M-4 tanks Ronsons because they lit up like a lighter when they were hit; I saw one of them hit when I was in the Siegfried line as we...we were holding a line for...in November of 1944...holding a line for an attack by my...one battalion of my regiment and it was really a very sobering sight to see a column of black smoke about a hundred feet in the air after it had been hit with an '88. Well anyhow, going back here, the Army had this program that they were trying to develop and slowly convert their radial engines to diesels which would have much less...dangerous effect than the radial engines. And so, after basic training which was a Tank Destroyer Replacement Center at Fort Hood, we went to...uh, I was sent to Lehigh University...and...in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania to study automotive engineering with the idea of becoming eventually...commissioned as an Ordnance Officer. So I'd like to say that while I was at Fort Hood, the training was very intense. We...my battalion lost five men; five men died in the first few weeks of training. And so the Army made an investigation; they...they sent Inspectors and one of them talked to me about the training, and I had survived it, but believe me, it was...it was a...a rough experience. So anyhow, they...would...they relieved all of the officers in the battalion and we were sent to...into a new training

organization, and I was finally...I completed my basic training October of 1943 and went on a troop train again to...Lehigh University, to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania where I...I don't know how many...soldiers were in this group but we were of various and sundry...of...disciplines...the Army saw fight to create them. Well, one of the problems the Army had was that they...they gave into just about every university president around to have a unit at their particular college or university, and the thing got out of control. So anyhow, we had a...I had a very, very good experience at Lehigh. Asa Packard [s/b Asa Packer] who developed the Packard motor car, was a graduate of Lehigh and there was a laboratory there that had been endowed by him; they had a very fine automotive engineering section and I learned a great deal about internal combustion engines, and I was all set to...to go forward with this program of the Army; pulled the rug out from under it; the whole thing collapsed in April of 194...March of 1944 on the thought that...the...we were needed for...immediately for combat roles. Well, that was the reason given by the Army, but I think that what happened was the program, like so many other programs, start out well meaning and well defined, and for some reason or another just expand and develop all sort of criticism. Anyhow, I was another troop train in March of '44 headed for Camp Claiborne, Louisiana where I was to be a replacement in the 84th (unintelligible) Division. So the 84th had...was sending officers, at that time, uh, they weren't sending them; the officers were volunteering out of the 84th to go to the 101st. Airborne

Division for the landing in Europe. And so they had a goff (sp?) of officers and they had a goff of enlisted men, and of course, all of the ballots...all the billets worth talking about, leadership billets were gone, and so we wound up going on advanced squad training; advanced company training and all of that sort of thing. And then we took over the...the area that had been occupied by the 101st Airborne Division at Camp Claiborne. And we...or the div...the Army divided...decided again to give us Airborne training; they were going to convert the division, the 84th Infantry Division, to an airborne division. We were all given examinations and given training in gliders; in glider...loading of gliders; securing of jeeps and so forth in gliders, and the paratroopers would have come from the 100 and...from the 13th Airborne Division at Camp Mackall, North Carolina. And the men who were not qualified for the airborne training were to be transferred out of the division. Well, that got about...to that point...when the Invasion of Europe had occurred and they were examining the role of the Airborne there. And although the Airborne troops, the 82nd; the 101st principally on our side, or the 6th British Airborne on the British side...committed...did a very fine job; very, very fine...the officers, the men and so forth. But the division, the invasion, at least, for the 101st was a disaster. The...a friend of mine who was in I-Company of the 502nd was killed on D-Day. And I went to school with him right from the very first grade to the twelfth, and it hit me pretty hard. He was a...a great young man, and to digress just a little bit, about two

years after I'd gotten out of the service; 1946 I was out...so about 1947 I was at a gasoline station in Stoneham, Massachusetts which is about ten miles north of...of Boston and about three miles from Reading where I'd lived. And in those days, of course, a person drove his automobile up to the tanks, the gas tanks, and stood there until the attendant came out and...and he put the gas in his...his tank. So I stood there waiting for the attendant to come out; I looked up over the door; I saw the name of the manager of the station, Roy J. Sherrod (sp?). And the man came out of the station office, and it looked just like Roy J. Sherrod. Of course, Roy J. Sherrod I knew was Roy J. Sherrod, Jr. And I thought, "My gosh, this is Roy's father; what do I say to him?!" He went about...without saying very much, and started to pour...put gas into the tank. I debated, "Should say anything to him?! Should I say I'm sorry to (unintelligible)?"

What...what (unintelligible) should I say to him? And so I thought, back and forth, and finally I said, "Mr. Sherrod, I was awfully sorry to...to be told that Roy didn't come home." I don't know whether those were my exact words, but the...but the thought was..., "very sorry that Roy didn't come home. I was an Infantryman myself in Europe, and I was sick of the whole war and I knew Roy from first grade to twelfth and I think of him often." And he looked at me and he said, "You know, when we got that telegram from the War Department," he said, "oh, about the 10th of June of '44 that Roy had been killed in the Invasion," he said, "it hit his mother so hard that I had to give up my very good office job in Boston and come

out here and take this job as the manager of the gasoline station because I could not leave her an entire day by herself.” And it really (pause)...(phone ringing in background). And that bothered me (recording interference). So, I thought of that and I was always proud of Roy, and I was over there in 1994 and I had seen some of these...101st veterans and I was very sorry that I hadn't made a serious infantry...enquiry to find out what happened to Roy, but I assume, since no mention was made of I-Company 502 at the...the...in the Division history that his plane was either shot down; his troop carrier plane was either shot down or...it crashed into a swamp area or his...his (unintelligible) of paratroopers was carried too far out into the Atlantic Ocean and dropped into the ocean. The assumption I made was that he never fought in Normandy in the...in the Second World War. So anyhow, going back again, we received some airborne training; the airborne training being the glider site which was non-volunteer. If you were qualified, you go (chuckle). It didn't bother me at all, because I hated the old...you know, doing these old squat exercises and going over and over again; I wanted to do something different. And so, I...I was not to get my wish there. The Army just gave that idea up and they created...they reorganized my division, the airborne division, at the beginning of 1946 at the end of the war. However, before that time, they had decided that they were going to make a...a large airborne invasion across the Rhine in the final stages of the war which was in March of '45. They were going to have six divisions there. The First

Airborne Division of the British Army was annihilated at Arnhem; it never occ...it never fought again as a...as a division. The 6th Airborne was...was still operational on the British side. There was the 17th Airborne; the...rather than the 17th Airborne, the 82nd; the 101st. In my division, they were going to drop them all, either transport us over to a...an air...an airfield or airfields on the other side of the line, and finally they could grand-push to finish off the war. However, that was all changed; we didn't go through that either because the...(unintelligible) Remagen...across the Rhine had been left unguarded; that is to say, it was to be...destroyed by...by the German army which was charged with it's...with it's protection. And, unfortunately, for one reason or another the explosives didn't go off and units of the 9th Armored Division were able to cross the Rhine and cut the wires of the explosives, and they...they were able to...to land troops...bring troops across the Rhine and that ended the need for this big operation the Army had in mind. In any event the Remagen Bridge which has sometimes been considered somewhat of a...of a significant taking of the Remagen. It's considered some part of a significant part of the Second World War. Actually it was not because the...it was a railway bridge which was...which provided a...a means of crossing the Rhine for the German army...the First World War so that they could remove from the eastern front...the western front; it never was a...a significant element of...of the Second World War, and even the First World War. Anyhow to go back, I went into combat in November of, and

even the First World War. Anyhow to go back, I went into combat in November of '44...in my...in the Siegfried Line at the Dutch-German frontier and well, it was an experience that was...well, how do you describe it? It was...it was a horrible...warfare; the losses were very, very high on our side because the line was...was thoroughly defended with bunkers, concrete bunkers, and...and they were all inter-connected by telephone lines...which...they were telephone lines which were buried about nine feet deep. And with very few troops, the Germans were able to intercept and control that part of the...of the western front. The...in my interviews later with...with German civilians and veterans, I learned that if the American Army (unintelligible) side had...gone forward in...September of '44 when they had the German army pretty much in place...had...had kept going just as General Patton had suggested, and people...we thought very highly of General Patton; he was a man who was his own worst enemy because he had a very foul mouth. He was a...he was a...really more like a common soldier in the way he talked, *but he knew his business*; he was a great, great Commander! And, as far as I was concerned, when we got the Stars and Stripes newspaper the question that was always on my mind was, "Where is Patton today?!" He personified the Third Army, and in any event, his recommendation then to Eisenhower was to...keep pushing; don't give up; don't stop when you've got the German in front of you; just keep pushing. And if the...Eisenhower's answer was, "Well, the tanks have run out of gas, and so we'll get the

troops out of the tanks and keep moving on the ground.” I thought the man was, you know, off the deep end there, but this is exactly what should have happened because in my interviews with...with those people in that area, and they were extensive, they told...the...the word I got was that...from people who were there and who knew the situation on the ground...they could not understand why the Army, the United States Army, was not moving forward through the line...through the Siegfried Line. The Siegfried Line, called by the Germans “The West Wall, “was built in 1938 until 1944 and by 1944 the farmers in the area of the line which was mostly a rural area were using it to store farm implements and...and all this sort of thing. The...there were locks on the bunker doors, but the keys couldn’t be found; there was no protection around the bunkers and so the...when the American Army and the British, particularly the American Army got to the Siegfried Line they simply stopped. And the General scrambled them immediately to dig trenches around the line to protect the bunkers; to clean out the bunkers; to man...man them, and inside, of course, the bunkers...I...I was in...in one, and I noticed that they had on a metal plate the ranges from that particular bunker...particular target, potential target locations. So they had...these were in very strategic locations and cost an enormous number of casualties. Our...our tanks were not anywhere close in technical...in technical effectiveness to the German tanks. The M-4 tank that we had was a...lightly armored; it started out with a seventy-five millimeter cannon; it was upgraded later to

a seventy-six and then as...as the war wore on in 1945 it was replaced by the Pershing which is an M-48 which was a very much better tank. Of course, this was close to the end of the war. The...the Germans had some very, very effective tank gunners and in Normandy they created enormous casualties among the...well, the British 43rd Division which fought aside of us in the German-Dutch area lost God knows how many tanks. However, on the other side of it, we had excellent fighter bombers. A German general, a former German general, told me...and...and we out in this area, a former battlefield, and he showed me a bridge across the Ruhr River where his...his...he...all of his tanks had been...where the...to which four of his tanks were moving...and as they moved down this road to this bridge. The Ruhr River was much smaller than the Rhine, but nevertheless, a substantial river in Germany...in the Rhineland. He...he said, "Out of nowhere," he said, "came these fighter bombers, and he said, "swooped down." He said the first fighter bomber dropped a bomb on the bridge; knocked it out; the next...

(end of tape 1, side A)

Mr. O'Malley: ...that they could move during the daytime (cough). Because of the excellent tank, uh, fighter bomber support that we had received, I can say without any question at all, that I don't think I would here today if it hadn't been for such effective fighter bomber support on our side. We had excellent aviation and I...regret, very much, that when accounts are displayed when...or broadcast of...of the Second World War, particularly

the Normandy Invasion, so little has been said and so little clarity has been given to our airborne forces. A friend of mine of many years was a pilot in the Troop Carrier Command, and he was one of the very best in the Troop Carrier Command. On D-Day he...his aircraft towed the...the glider of General Don Pratt who was the Assistant Division Commander of the 101st Airborne Division into Normandy. He was one of the first to take off from England about 1:30 in the morning on D-Day. He was an excellent pilot and he told me and, more than once, that he never dropped his gliders and that was his specialty. (Unintelligible words) at any place but exactly where they should have gone which is not, of course, true of many of the other planes. But at any event, he towed General Pratt's glider to Normandy and it was dropped...well, I say dropped, the...the pattern was, of course, for the troop carrier aircraft to fly over the drop area at about two hundred feet, and...and then signal back to the pilot of the glider...cut the tow line. And the...the glider would make a one hundred-eighty degree turn; come down and land in the landing area. And...and in General Pratt's situation, the wind shifted which is something I believe that they hadn't considered possible at all. Instead of landing into the wind, he landed down wind...with the glider, and the glider plowed into a tree. And the pilot of the glider was a Lieutenant Colonel named Murphy; Murphy's legs were smashed and Pratt was killed. Apparently he had a jeep in there with him which crushed him against the tree, so Pratt was the first casualty of the 101st, probably the first casualty

of the...first casualty of the entire operation. And so, this friend of mine who was the pilot also participated regularly in the dropping of supplies to Bastogne during the...during the battle of Bastogne, December of '44. And his aircraft, I know, flew over my position which was not far...that far from Bastogne...maybe eight or nine miles, and he flew over one hundred feet altitude; that would be a lot because they...they had dropped supplies on...on...in the Bastogne area and, of course, that was no easy mission with the Germans firing at them, and trying to get supplies to the 101st, some of which ended up on the enemy side. But I'll not recall one day when we were...(unintelligible) Ardennes Battle and went over to the offensive in the...Jan...January 3rd, 1945 and attacked from the Manhay area which you can find on a map (unintelligible) which was the...about eight or nine miles north of Bastogne...attacked toward that area caused the...the bulge so to speak. And the attack was...was through very heavy snow and wooded areas and so forth, and so it was...it was hard going. I broke my left hand and foot because I went to sleep all night and slept on my left side, and as luck would have it, we were called back for...a rest area where we could warm up. A Medic came through and...and saw my leg; my foot and my feet...(unintelligible) and he...he said, "My god," he said, "that...that foot of yours...very, very swollen." I said, "Don't worry about it." I said. "We've got snow packs which were boots." I said, "I...I'm not going to wear my...my regular boots...I'm going to put on my socks; wear these and I'll be perfectly comfortable, but I don't to go back to the rear."

And (unintelligible words), he said, “*You are going back*; I’m...I’m not going to allow you to stay here.” So I was ordered to go back with some other soldiers who had...I...I don’t know how many were there, I wasn’t paying much attention, but I went back. One of the reasons I *hated* to go back was...was that I’m back there...I’m foreseeing (unintelligible words) treated this particular problem. Here I’m having a warm meal and all here and all my buddies in my machine gun section...my machine gun section, and they have one less man to look out for, so I didn’t feel good about it. And so after about three days I persuaded them that I wanted to go back with my squad. And in the meantime, the very following...the following day after I’d been evacuated for medical treatment, the company, my company, made an attack in Belgium on a...on a village and for some reason...I’ll never know the answer to, the Company Commander decided to go to bring the machine gun section into a barn on the edge of a...of a village, and...what he planned to do there I don’t know because there aren’t any small windows in it. And for what I understand, I was...had been a machine gunner; I was on the order to fire a machine gun at a hay stack which was about a...maybe a hundred yards away to set fire with the tracers because it was a German tank under it. Well, our...the gunner did that, and I had a burst, and of course, the...the German tank knew exactly where the fire was coming from, so they just...obviously turned their...their cannon and...on the farm and let go of the round. So when the first round hit, the Company Commander’s leg was torn off, and he bled to

death. And my assistant gunner who had been in the squad maybe a fortnight at the most was hit in the stomach. And the report I got was he...staggered outside and died in the snow there. A third man was...I'd known and still know very well, was hit by a piece of shrapnel which stuck in his sternum and believe it or not, he never bothered to get it treated; he never got a Purple Heart, and the...the piece of shrapnel stuck in his sternum until he was setting off all of these detectors at the airport whenever he traveled. So he went to a doctor and told him he had a piece of shrapnel in his chest and the doctor dug it out, the surgeon dug it out and he looked at it; he could not believe that his man had been carrying this piece of shrapnel in his chest for twenty years. And so they felt, "Well, look he got no Purple Heart..."

Dr. James Lindley: Huh!

Mr. O'Malley: ...no citation, nothing! And which, maybe again, to the point that a great many people are out there wearing decorations that maybe they weren't entitled to or claiming service in a particular organization to which they'd never belonged and others are out there who had...acquired all kinds of...well, who were entitled to all kinds of...recognition for wounds or valor or whatever; never did wind up with anything like that. Well anyhow, the long and the short of it was...we were on this...moving down this road slowly when I got back toward (unintelligible) making maybe a mile a day at the most through the snow and I looked up and there was a...an American fighter bomber; I think it was a...a P-47 which was

moving in the same direction we were, but I was amazed that it was moving so slowly! I thought, "No wonder these guys are shot down!" I said, "You know, they're sitting ducks up there." But the pilot of that P-47 had rockets under his wing...in his wings, and as I watched I saw a white puff of smoke from a rocket which he had fired up ahead of us. And I paid no attention to it really until, I guess, it was the next day we finally got to the place about a thousand yards...maybe fifteen hundred yards down the road, and I saw this German M-4 tank, this Panther...*huge* and very, very well built piece of equipment with...with enormous holes in the side of its hull, and it could have only been made this rocket because we...we had no...even our tanks didn't have...uh, ammunition that...the caliber of the tank gun was not anywhere close to...enough to provide that large of a hole. And the...the tank was burned out; it was across the road and four members of the crew were...were all lying on the road...burned out and killed. And I thought, "My gosh," you know, it's...it's just a...it was just an experience that I've...I've...it's always been in my mind and I've always thought, "What great men these pilots were." They...and with little credit they seem to have gotten; it means to me that everything that I read about has to do with some...particularly the airborne units because it's very easy to write about them; they were a small units; very, very fine soldiers; no question about it. But the...even at Normandy, the...the support that the Army got from the Navy, for example, was a Navy destroyer, and as you probably know, that...and I say...I would suspect that

someday somebody will write a definitive story of the Second World War which will address the question of attacking at Omaha Beach – whether that was a wise decision or not. My feeling was that the...General Marshall was right...that the attack on Normandy should have come much earlier...1942, '43 because in that period of time the Germans had a chance to build these enormous bunkers which were essentially impregnable. And I'm sure that the soldiers of the 29th Division, 116th Infantry, 5th Battalion who made the...one of the initial landings on Normandy outside of the First Division, 16th Infantry were told, "You're going to have now a bombing of these...of the beach...our strategic bombers, B-17s, and they're going to drop a carpet of bombs the like of which the world has never seen. You're going to have the naval guns; the guns of our battleships out there in the...in the channel, and they're going to be firing into this area. In fact, I was told that the...the naval...the naval...fire control men that were in Normandy, I don't think there were that many of them, but whatever, are called down naval gun fire on some German armor," and that was a seventeen-mile range and they knocked these armor out; very, very accurate; very fine support. In fact, I was also...read a destroyer with perhaps less than ten feet of good water undertow came up very close on the beaches and knocked out some of the bunkers with direct fire. So the point I'm making is that when you read or you hear accounts of...of valor, and I think that for all intents and purposes, they're very well based. There's always some story that seems that is not being told for one reason

or another. Naval support at Normandy is one that doesn't seem to get too much attention, and the...the support of the...of the fighter bombers in Europe to...to back up my...my division and other divisions. My...my thought is that our bomber was...was very, very much deficient; it was very, very far behind the Russian...uh, the Germans. The tank destroyer...tank destroyer...armor or the tank destroyers were far more advanced than the...than the tanks in design on our side. It...it came very, very late. Another deficiency was we, in attacking the bunkers, at the Siegfried Line we did not have...we did not have a...a vehicle like the strongeshutz (sp?) which were the strong gun, strong gun that the Germans had to attack the (unintelligible) line. I was amazed; if we had weapons like that, it would have been reduced casualties, you know? Anyhow, we got through the war and...met the Russians up on the Elbe River, and my knowledge of German was (unintelligible). I had a knowledge of German as I've mentioned to you, and they were telling me that as first (unintelligible) I should be his interpreter, and the Company Commander took me over as...as his interpreter and then the Battalion Commander. When that happened, I was in great shape...I...'cause I was the most feared man in my company (chuckles) because I had the Battalion Commander's ear, and I served him well. I...he was a regular Army officer; I served him very, very well; I did my job. And when we were up on the Elbe River we had four villages in my battalion area which I was required to check every morning with a jeep driver and make sure that the...no incidents occurred

during the night which were breaches of discipline by our soldiers or incursion...cursions by the...by the Russians; the Russians were across the Elbe River from us and occasionally they'd come over to our side. And I was...uh, as a good Christian, at least I thought I was a good Christian, I was very cool to the Russians. They had a *bad* reputation in Germany; they were...some of the units were very badly behaved, and I was was...it was uppermost in my mind to do what I could do to keep them out of our area and make sure the Battalion Commander knew about any incursions. And one evening...well, I...my...my standard operating procedure was to go to the Burgermeister of each of these village...villages and ask in the morning what he had in the way of information for me. One of them told me that Schnackenberg (sp?) which was later an entry point into the East German area across the Elbe that some Russians had come across the River during the night and had threatened a farmer whose...who was living there on the...on the River. And so I went with the...with the jeep and my driver and interviewed the farmer and he told me that...some Russians had come there the night before and had told him that they were coming the following night, which was the night of the day that I was there, and they were going to kill him if they didn't have a cow for them. They wanted to take a cow back to the other side of the...of the River, and so, he was concerned. But you know, there's one thing about...I found out about those little experiments is they...they were concerned but they didn't go to pieces. He was concerned, so I...I went back to the...the (unintelligible);

told him what the situation was and we had in the...in the battalion...a...a unit, a weapon's carrier, and we had about a dozen infantrymen. A...a fellow who spoke Polish...probably speaks very little German, uh, poor Russian....I spoke German and we had a mix of...mix of troops...the idea of being to confront any sort of a situation that required a, you know, some force, display of force. So he...told me that he wanted this group, this group I'm talking about, to go to that farmer's area and...and protect him at night. So in doing that, we made a plan; there would be myself, and...who spoke German, and the Polish fellow, Polish soldier, who spoke their language, and we'd sit in the living room with the farmer and...and wait and see if the Russians showed up. Meantime, the rest of the squad would be outside and secluded in areas where they could quickly come to our assistance if that was needed; the weapon's carrier would be hidden some place. So sure enough after dark a couple of Russians showed up; came inside and because they spoke some Polish...the Polish...my...that the soldier spoke was enough to get them to understand what was going on. And they were told that...that they were surrounded by American troops, and they said that if they didn't go across...he was cold...they were cold...the two of them, that if they didn't go across the River immediately and stay over there, they would be shot to death and their bodies...bodies buried in the pig sty in back. Well, (throat clearing) the more I thought of it, the more I thought that should have thought though a little bit better because we would have wound up in Leavenworth had we done something

like that. So anyhow, they...realized that discretion was the better part of valor and they took off and they ran across the River and never had any more problems from them; never at all. And the only other incident on that river that I recall is one evening I went out there on a levy; there wasn't much doing...was rather quiet, and I sat there and watched the river go by, and the Army Corps came up on the other side and gave me a concert all by myself. But the one thing that (cough) really bothered me a great deal was the policy, the U. S. Army followed, of handing back any soldiers who cro...any...any military personnel who came across the Elbe River to our side; they were given no refuge but simply sent back to the...to the Russians. And that was a...I thought, a horrible thing to do. In fact, it happened in one case and the...that I know...I know of personally. A Medic, Physician and his Nurse and somebody else came across and the word was...that, "I have to go back across the river to the Russians." (Cough) The Engineer Officer, Army Engineer Officer, who ran the (unintelligible) across the Elbe River said, "I'm not going to take them back unless I get a direct order." So he went back and...and got the direct order and...and took them back across the river; it was a horrible thing. I...I never had much respect for Franklin Roosevelt for the...lackadaisical attitude he had toward the com...Communists; his administration was chock full of these people. One thing I learned after the war in my readings was that...at Yalta there was a conference, as we all know, of...involving Churchill and Stalin and...and Roosevelt in which the Army

of...(unintelligible) of occupation was set up in Germany...and regardless of whether the armies came to a final stop; these would be the zones of control. Well, the Germans as...as I found out confirmed time and time again, had hoped that they could collapse their...their defense against the Americans and the British and the French...could be collapsed, and...on the western front and they could move to the eastern front; defend Berlin; defend eastern Germany, and...and whatever...however far we had gotten into Germany...we would be the occupiers. However, the Yalta Conference ended all that hope and the zones of occupation which had been established at Yalta, which were top-secret, and not...not readable, uh not...how do you say...not available to anybody under the rate of Major-Generals on our side. Well, it leaked; there...these results were leaked to the Germans I'm sure by somebody like Burgess, Maclean, Philby or others who were in top-level positions of the British service who were Communist agents. And once the Germans found out that it made no difference, how...how far they...how hard they fought...how...how much lee-way they gave to the...the Americans and the Allies...that it was all going to end up the way that Yalta had proposed it. So they continued to fight on, and even when we were on the Elbe River waiting for the Russians, one of our soldiers was captured...and morning...went out...was (unintelligible) there was a little blood around it; I couldn't imagine the Germans still fighting at the Elbe River. And I remember the night...looking up and seeing a...a dog fight between night fighters and a

German night fighter, and we could see the tracers; I could see the tracers – red from our side; yellow from the German side, and still fighting on.

Some of our...our bombers went across the...well, went into Austria and on the 25th of April, we bombed the...the City of Vienna, and a friend of mine was (unintelligible) here, a Cannon of the Cathedral of St. Stephen, (unintelligible) he could never understand why the Allies bombed and destroyed the city...the Cathedral of...of St. Stephen, and destroyed a good part of Vienna when the war was only about two weeks from the end.

Well, the idea of our...of our leadership was to show the...(unintelligible) we were friends and so forth and so on which I...I thought was shameful, absolutely shameful. The bombing of Dresden...the same way...occurred on the 13th of February, '45 and I was...Dresden was considered an open city and with thousands of refugees there from the east...and thousands were killed. And as far as strategic bombing was concerned, I had great feelings of sympathy for the air crews. A young man I knew who went to school with me...was ahead of me in school by about three years or so was a former pilot and was..and was...his plane was shot down over Germany, I don't know - 1943; his parachute was seen to open but his body was never found and I suspect that he was murdered because the feelings against our bombers, strategic bombers, whether they were terror bombers and some of them...I recall one...one (unintelligible) who...it...which involved a...a man who was a Catholic and had a rosary...crewman had a rosary around their neck and they were planning to...to kill him, and I

guess a Catholic, German Catholic priest, intervened and...as he would for anybody I'm sure and says, "Well, you can't do this; you...you simply can't do it," and talked them out of it. But I often felt later if I'd had the money and some leads I would have liked to have gone back to the area where this man was shot down, at least hopefully to find his body with the help of the Germans there in the area; many of them, I'm sure, knew, some of them at least, knew...knew something about the incident and could at least solve the problem. But the...the other side of the thing is in...when we were waiting on the west side of the Rhine and across the River...you want to make a switch?

Dr. James Lindley: Not yet; go ahead.

Mr. O'Malley: Alright, at night it was the flight...

(end of tape 1, side B)

Dr. James Lindley: ...continuation of Mr. O'Malley's conversation concerning his experiences in World War II.

Mr. O'Malley: Okay, when...so I looked up at night and I couldn't see these aircraft, but I could see the anti-aircraft shells...what the Germans were firing. The...the eighty-eight millimeter gun that the Germans used was perhaps the most efficient gun to come out of the Second World War. It could...it was...it could be used against personnel to fight...to fight; anti-personnel, uh, ammunition; it could be elevated to ninety degrees above ground, and depressed to three degrees below level...minus three, and it could be used against tanks and against aircraft. And I'm sure that, although I can't

prove it, that when the B-17 bomber was being developed and went into production the...the eighty-eight millimeter gun that the Germans had developed was either not taken into account, or it was too late to make any changes because the B-17 as I saw it, and I'm not an expert in it at all, was pretty well protected against fighter aircraft which came up...which would have come up to their altitude and...and try to destroy the aircraft, but not against these...these shells for the eighty-eights. And I...I remember being near Hanover in Germany as the war came to an end and seeing the...the number of anti-aircraft guns...in our area around the city and it was amazing – the number of them! And one of them (unintelligible) had hit one of our tanks and...and in front of our tank...looked like piece of swiss cheese. I don't know how many rounds had gone through it, but it was a very effective gun. And I looked up and I could see the...the shells bursting, and they were just so high up they...about thirty thousand feet...they looked like twinkling stars. And of course, the idea is to stand away from the open because as that...as those pieces of shrapnel started falling, they could kill, and they did kill one man in...in my division who was standing out...watching this display...or a display similar to it in the Rhineland, and a piece of shrapnel came down through his....through his collar bone area and killed him. So I was always careful to stand where my head was protected. I looked up and I saw that one of these shells had hit one of our B-17s and I saw the fire getting bigger and bigger and bigger, and finally I couldn't see the aircraft but I knew it had flipped over

and started down. So I thought, "That is one heck of a way to die." So, these men who, I think, had to accomplish twenty-five missions to come home...who I *envied* when I was a Camp Claiborne...in...in the maneuver area...they were up there with their case of cold beer...cold beer in the...in the aircraft and I thought, "Geez, I mean...these guys have it so easy!" It didn't *look* so easy (chuckle) when I was on the ground looking at them. They had some terrible, terrible casualties. Two boys that went to the school with me...we are very close at home in Reading...both...*three* of them had been Gunners on bombers and all three of them were killed. And I don't know what the casualty rate was on the bombers...on the crews, but it was said to be very heavy and it must have been a very, very, very hard thing for them to get up each day and do it...to fly and...and drop their bombs (cough). And a friend of mine who was...or worked with me after the war and when I was in the executive office about five years...was a retired Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force, and he was...he was in a bomber crew which...and the bomber was shot down and he was captured. And of the ten members of the crew, only one managed to escape detection and he found his way back to England, and he was the guy that failed to follow any of the directions that they had given to escape capture. So the...the war took some very funny twists. I'll go back and end up...I ended up...in the summer of 1945 in...in...near Heidelberg...our division...my battalion was occupation area included, not Heidelberg, but...which was the headquarters of the Seventh Army, but some villages

to the west of Heidelberg, and I was still my Battalion Commander's eyes and ears, so to speak. I...I was a Pfc at the time, and he called me in...in July to his office and he said, "You don't have enough points," he said, "to...to go home." He said, "The," at that time, the Army had been allocating points to...depending on the...principally the number of months of service...the person was in the Army, and those earliest in were earliest out. And they were given say...maybe five points if they had a Purple Heart and an additional (unintelligible). Well, I didn't have enough points to...to get out. And he says, "You know, well," he said, "my division...the division here is going to stay as an army of...a part of the Army...of occupation," but he said, "I don't think that they are going to allow you to stay here; you're going to go to Japan." He says, "Here's what I'm going to do;" he said, "I'm going to recommend you for Officer Candidate School." He said, "And I'm sure there'll be no problem with that." And he said, "You will be...once you're...separated from the division, you will go back to the United States and you will have thirty days furlough," and he said, "after that, you go to Fort Benning and you'll have ninety days of...of Officer Candidate School." He said, "After that, you'll have thirty more days, then you'll go to Japan." He said, "That's the best I can do for you." Well, I really appreciated that because I never did ask this man anything..in the way of favors. I simply did what I would want him to do if he were...if we were...if our positions were reversed. He was...he was out to...maintain a good battalion, and...and he did! A...a friend of mine

who was a Colonel and a military judge, he retired as a...one of the judges on the Army Court of Appeals...in Washington. And I had lunch with him every day when I was in the Labor Department (unintelligible words), and we talked about the service and one thing or another, and the matter of discipline came up. And I know in 1945, at the end of the war, discipline came apart; there was no discipline. There was...it was...it was a god-awful mess. So he asked me about...the discipline in my battalion, and I told him there was one incident in which somebody broke a glass which protected a...an announcement panel on a rathaus town hall in one of the villages we were in. He said, "You mean to tell me that that was it?!" There was nothing or you had no murders; you had no assaults?" I said, "No, no, we hadn't...we didn't have anything," and he couldn't *believe* it. Well, what had...what I had done was...pass the word in my squad and in my platoon, to be spread around the company and every other place in the...in the battalion, that I had no friends. I said, you know... "I have no friends," I said, "anybody does anything that's a violation of...anybody does anything wrong, he's going to be reported. No, no way around it; no two ways around it." And I was also...so that...as the word got around that...that...and I was to...when the Battalion Commander went through the area in his jeep, I was on the back seat of his jeep. He was looking at a map of something, and they'd give him a salute and I'd salute back (chuckle). I don't know that I was to...you know, chief cook, at least. They knew that I had his ear, and (chuckle) regardless of grade or rank or

anything else...they had to conform and it worked very well. I was also in charge of the liquor supply. We had a small...it was small...what do you call the...the...enlisted man's club and then there was... battalion had some kind of...of a small officer's club. And I was...I...got myself involved in providing cognac for it and my...I found a farmer...uh, I mean a ven...who had to...a good supply of grapes and he made...he could make casks of wine without any great problem, so I made a deal with him where we'd get one...we'd give him...let's see, how...how did we do it? Uh, we...for seven casks of wine...we...we'd go to a distillery which was...which was run by some Puerto Ricans, and that's the only place I'd been in the Army where I never heard any English...it was all Spanish, and I would give them seven casks of wine and get back from them one cask of cognac. And, of course, I delivered the casks of cognac to the...to the Spearhead Inn which is the...club's name, and I turned it over to them. And I found out that it lasted one night and I thought, "This is not going to go on!" So we're going to...we had a ration program to ensure that these guys would not imbibe too heavily. And so...in any event, somebody told me that there was a pretty good sup...liq...a supply of liquor in the basement of somebody's home in our area, so I went over to this place with my jeep driver and then went into the basement, the cellar, and there it was! It was a huge supply of all kinds of good liquor – cognac and everything else. So the next thing I saw was a pair of shiny boot come bouncing down the stairs, and on it...topside were a couple of chrome bars of a captain and he

looked at me and he said, “Soldier, what are you doing in my liquor supply?” I said, “Sorry, Captain, this is *our* liquor supply.” (chuckles)

And so I said, “I am...I’ve been tasked by the Battalion Commander to allocate this supply of alcohol to...various places, so you’ll get your share; don’t worry about it.” And that took care of that problem. But I never had any problem with anybody there; nobody! I got...I made a deal with a photo company to get...a...a large packet of photo paper which I managed to give to a...a German who was running a photo shop, and he used what he needed to use and he also made pictures for the group. So they had a good deal! And...and anyhow, the war ended thankfully in the...in the far east with the explosions of the bombs and I was sent in the middle of September to...the Transportation Corps where they needed somebody who spoke some German...to Alsace, and I was there for six months. I made a deal with the Army that I would...if I could get...I’d stay six months...because I’d made...could leave (unintelligible) at that time if they’d allow me thirty days to go to the British Isles to visit my relatives in Ireland and England. And they said, “That’s okay, that’s fine; go do it.”

So I spent thirty days traveling on the surface to...to England and Ireland from Alsace in eastern France. And on the way over I...I met some...some...on my troop...(unintelligible) compartment of the train, met some Scottish soldiers who were in the British army and had been called up in 1936, and in 1946, seven years later, they were getting out! And I thought, “My gosh, what an amazing thing!” And so they...the one thing I

remember about them was they had a bottle of scotch-whiskey which was very good and they told me that they were going to share it with me. I said, “Nah, I don’t want a drink of any of it.” And they said, “What kind of a man are you; what kind of an Irishman are you,” and all of this, so I took a drink from them. But then they were...we got to...New...New...or was it...Newbria, I guess,...Newtown, Newtown, England, and they had a canteen there...the...for the British soldiers – tea and...and sandwiches and all. So I wasn’t a British soldier, so...they dragged me over there, say, “You are now! So, come on, help yourself.” So they were very fine, friendly people, and I had no...nothing but good things to say from them. My cousin who was...I told a physician one time that he could tell this story because it was perfectly true...she was living in Coventry, England in Warwickshire in 1940 when the city was bombed; I believe it was bombed in October and November of 1940. It was heavily bombed, and there were some pretty heavy casualties. So she lived in downtown Coventry in...lower Ford (sp?) Street, and she shared her flat with an...another lady and so she told me on the...the afternoon of the bombing, one of the bombings, I think there were more than one, of Coventry...the air raid siren sounded and she and her flat mate went running to their designated area shelter in Coventry, and they sat down on a bench inside of the shelter and her...her friend said...looked to the (unintelligible) and said, “I’ve left my cigarettes in the apartment...in the (unintelligible), and I’m not going to spend the entire night here with these strangers and not have a

cigarette, so I'm going back." So (unintelligible); my cousin said, "If you go back; I'll go back; I don't want to be staying here with these strangers either!" So they...anyhow they went running back to the apartment; she...retrieved her...her cigarettes and went running back to the designated shelter. They got to the designated shelter...the place was...the shelter was filled to capacity; the door was closed and that was it. So they had to run and run and run till they...find a...a place that had a couple of vacancies where they could occupy...which they could occupy for the night. So they went in; they closed the place up, and they could hear the bombs; they could hear the...the fire...department fighting the fires and all. And the next morning when it was all over, they were released from the shelter and they went back not knowing whether they would see their flat ever again, and as luck would have it, her flat apparently escaped damage. But they had passed their designated shelter which was no more; a bomb had hit it directly! So the name of the game...or the bottom line is, don't ever say that cigarettes will always shorten your life, because sometimes they lengthen a person's life (chuckle). So that...that was a...that's a true story, no question about it. She lived in Coventry all her life after that; she was born in Ireland, and she died about ten years ago there. But Coventry suffered some...some very, very serious damage. There's a *beautiful* cathedral there which was designed by Sir Basil Spence and incorporates the old cathedral or what remains of it with a brand new one which is a...a very, very beautiful uh, structure. So the...anyhow, I...I...when I got back

from my furlough of Ireland, my C.O. was a Captain, in this railway transportation office where I'd been given the responsibility for moving freight, American military freight, to...through the place, told me that if I would a stay in the Army just one more year they would've made me a Master Sergeant. He said to my Commanding Officer, the Commanding Officer of the...of the railway...it's a group, transportation group, he said, "Colonel," and he said, "you'll go to Strasburg," and he said, "if you want to stay in the Army another year, uh, you've got it." He said, "That...that's what it'll be." Well, I decided that I'd lost three years of...of academic training, and I would be...it would be just my luck to meet some very, good looking French girl; get married and regret that I had never taken advantage of the GI Bill; that was what made the great big difference. If I had had no GI Bill to support me after I left the service, I would have stayed in because I didn't have enough money; I couldn't bank enough money from my pay in the lower enlisted ranks to...to sustain me. So I surely would have stayed in the Army; would have taken advantage of that...of that offer that was made, and I think I would have been pretty successful at it because I...I rather liked the Army; I had no complaints. People complained about the food and this and that and the other thing, but I *never* complained about the food except when I got to basic training at Fort Hood where they had a battalion mess, and the eggs were...were cooked with about one third of them hard-boiled; one third of them soft boiled and one third of them mostly *raw* and if you wound up

with the mostly raw eggs, you had it. But the...for the...for the most part, I would say the Army was a...was a...was something like a...a computer or a data processor – very cold, and sometimes you put something in and...and got garbage out. And the...well, anyhow to make a long story short, the...I went back and started my college all over again, and...and got a degree in B.C. in 1951...finally. I had...also, during the time I was in the service, I picked up tuberculosis. I was an interpreter, and in my interpreting activity I had to visit places where troops could be billeted, and to write out the places, or scratch out the place that had communicable diseases and all. It never occurred to me, never occurred to me...nobody ever mentioned...how you pick up all these diseases, so I did. And I...I finally...they finally (unintelligible) two years (unintelligible words) in service; it was moderately...moderately advanced at the time...in one lung; no cavitations, and so I recovered naturally with the help of Streptomycin. And...but that pushed my graduation back to about 1951. I got that, my bachelor's degree; I got my master's degree in one year, and I...then went on to...to Washington where I found myself on the Intelligence Research Specialist Register in Foreign Affairs Officers Register. So my Division Commander had been a...I perfectly recovered from all my illness; no problem; never had a problem after that. My Division Commander had been G-2 in the...Army G-2, Chief of Intelligence, and so I decided to go into the (unintelligible) Pentagon and he had...by the time I got there in the fall of 1952, he had been transferred and promoted to Lieutenant General

and he was Third Army Commander. So, I...I don't know how I wound up in the Army G-2 Section, but I...I think I just made an announcement (unintelligible) register, and a professional register, and you know, what does it have to offer? Well, there was a Colonel there on that staff who knew I was from General Bolling's division, 84th, and he told me, he said, "You've got a job here; no question about that." And he said, "At the moment," he said, "I think Air Force Intelligence has a need for some people." So he said, "I'm going to take you over to Air Force Intelligence," and he said, "you can talk to them." So he put his arm on my shoulder and he took me over to a fellow of German birth, I guess, who...he seemed to be in charge of something or other there, and he told him that I was from General Bolling's division, and I was interested in a position in...in Intelligence. And so he bid me good luck and I was left to the tender mercies of this guy whoever he was. And he said, "You speak German, right?" And I said, "Yes, I do," so he started speaking to me in German. And there was another...there was an officer that came in, I don't know what grade he was, and he was listening to all this and he said...to the officer he said, "He speaks good German...*with an American accent.*" Of course I was over here at the...at the St. Joseph's Hall at the Mai Fest; met a fellow who was here from Shlazen (sp?) (unintelligible words). I was talking German with him and he said, he asked me where I was born up...brought up, and I told him New England. He said, "New England; you sound like a Hungarian!" So anyhow, the long and the short of it was

he said, "Would you like to go to Berlin?" *Aye, boy*, I don't know whether I'd like to go to Berlin or not. And in the meantime, as this happened, I got a scholarship to law school; I took a shot at this thing...at Georgetown Law School in D.C.; thought, "What the heck, nothing ventured, nothing gained." I never ask for anything; I had been admitted to Harvard Law School, and that had been another thing that amazed. They had a four-page application for Harvard Law School, and I filled it out within...they got a transcript of my grades and in college and in graduate school...and...that was it! I...I thought I'd take a shot...I never...all within three weeks, they told me I'm admitted to George...uh, Harvard Law School. And so then I tried to push my luck a little harder by asking them for a scholarship which I didn't get. But I never really made an effort to...to get it. And I thought, "What the hell, I'll go through Harvard Law School." I knew some graduates; not many, but I thought, "Gee whiz, there's no guarantee to success with that and besides working...like a dog for three years, yeah, where am I going to be?" So anyhow, at Georgetown they notified me that they awarded me a three-year scholarship; not one year, but *three* years! So I went back to Air Force Intelligence and I told this officer that I'd been awarded a scholarship, and he said, "Well, boy, that's...that's something to think about." He said, "You can always come back here if...if you don't want to hang...if you, you know, if you change your mind." So then I went to CIA; I talked to them about...one thing and another. They gave me a couple of tests and,

of course, one of the things they do...it's kind of a simple-minded thing; they leave you in an office; you step out of the office; they leave a file cabinet open...open, and it's, you know, security material inside and all. I guess the idea is they're going to watch you from some place and see whether you get up there and look in the file...in which then they'll come back and smile and say, "Sorry, you flunked the test because we don't like guys around snooping in files...where they're not entitled to look." So anyhow, they decided they were going to hire me, and I said, "Well," I said, "I've got this scholarship to law school and what should I do about it?" They said, "You should take that because that will never come back again. And if you want to come back here after you graduate, go ahead; we'll be glad to have you because you have a good knowledge of Germany," which I thought was pretty good. I thought that other people certainly knew a lot more than I did, but at the same time, I...I worked at everything and...I thought I could do a credible job no matter what they put me into. So in any event, I went to law school; graduated; went to the General Counsel's Office of the FCC; was in the Litigation Division; wound up...working for an Army General, a retired three-star General, the finest man I've ever worked for...who had been Chief Signal Officer of the Army, and he was Special Assistant to the President for telecommunications. And so I wasn't *in* the White House, but I was...close enough. I...I know I've mentioned a couple of times to people in the industry that they didn't have to worry about me because I was only

a spear carrier and they started laughing. So the point was that I...I was very much interested in him; he was a very fine, able, competent man, and uh, that pretty much...I became a administrative law judge eventually on...based on competitive examination. Wound up for seven years in the Coast Guard as an administrative law judge – excellent experience; excellent people, and that’s the end of that chapter.

(end of interview)

FINAL copy

CD – #OH02591a,b – Mr. John Joseph O’Malley, Jr.

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