

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

**Robert E. Cunningham
Corpus Christi, Texas
March 12, 2010
281st M. P. Company
5th Army**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is March 12, 2010. I am interviewing Mr. Robert E Cunningham at his home at 11016 Sunny Drive, Corpus Christi, Texas 78410. His phone number is (361) 241-1788. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Bob I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview and I want to thank you for your service to our country during WWII.

Mr. Cunningham

Thank you sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

First question is: What is your birthdate?

Mr. Cunningham

November 18, 1923

Mr. Misenhimer

And where were you born?

Mr. Cunningham

Kennedy, Karnes County, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Cunningham

I had brothers and sisters. I had one brother and one sister.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was your brother in WWII?

Mr. Cunningham

My brother was enlisted into the Navy right after me, I don't know exactly the date of them, but he went to San Francisco, Treasure Island. From there he was appointed to be in the 34th Special Battalion of the Sea Bees and he immediately took a ship and went to Guam, Marianas. That is where he stayed for the entire Navy. He was a stevedore and he handled unloading and loading of all ships coming into Guam from 1943 to early 1945

Mr. Misenhimer

Is he still living?

Mr. Cunningham

No sir, he died several months ago. He had a serious ailment.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your sister was she involved in the World War at all.

Mr. Cunningham

None at all. And she passed away also, in Alice. She lived in Alice.

Mr. Misenhimer

You grew up during the depression. How did the depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Cunningham

Terribly. I was at the wrong age, in High School, we didn't have the facilities of hardly anything. I always remember the depression. It wasn't just exactly right for us.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Cunningham

Farmer

Mr. Misenhimer

Did he farm during the depression?

Mr. Cunningham

Well part of the time. Times got so hard so he became a federal officer in the prison camp for German prisoners and Italian prisoners.

Mr. Misenhimer

That would've been in the '40's

Mr. Cunningham

In the '40's so he stayed doing that all during the war.

Mr. Misenhimer

Back in the '30's in the main of the depression there, he farmed all that time, right?

Mr. Cunningham

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you own the farm were you renting it?

Mr. Cunningham

We owned it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you able to keep it?

Mr. Cunningham

No he sold it after he moved to Alice back in '70 something.

Mr. Misenhimer

But I meant during the depression you were able to keep it.

Mr. Cunningham

Oh, yes. He was able to farm pretty well the farm while he was a federal officer with the prison camp.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of course you probably had chicken and all these sort of things?

Mr. Cunningham

Oh yeah, cattle and not very many and a garden.

Mr. Misenhimer

You ate but you didn't have any trouble with that, just no one had any money.

Mr. Cunningham

That's right, if it hadn't been for the corn he raised and take a load, to Kennedy, to make a few dollars that way, we wouldn't have very much kerosene. We had kerosene stove and kerosene was five cents a gallon. Twenty five cents for a can of kerosene.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you milk cows?

Mr. Cunningham

Oh, yes, many of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

By hand, huh?

Mr. Cunningham

By hand. We put the milk in a five gallon can and set it out at the mailbox and a truck would come by and pick them up every so often. Take it town and send the money back.

Twenty cents a gallon and for five gallons.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to High School?

Mr. Cunningham

Kennedy High

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you graduate from there?

Mr. Cunningham

1942

Mr. Misenhimer

December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor; do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Cunningham

Oh yes I sure did. We were in High School, we were in Class.

Mr. Misenhimer

This happened on a Sunday.

Mr. Cunningham

It happened on a Sunday and that Monday everybody said. We didn't have radios or telephones or anything. And everybody said "Did you hear about the news?" You know, "What news." So they told us about the Pearl Harbor and well we didn't know where Pearl Harbor was or too much about it then. It devastated us and I joined a sheet metal shop that was put in by the NRA. We saw military vehicles coming from the valley up to San Antonio and back and forth and this got us interested in joining up. So it was all this gang that you saw in that picture. We went to San Antonio in '29 Model A Ford. It was

22 degrees that morning and the old Ford froze up going along so they had some Newspapers in the car and they stuck it in front of the radiator. That's the only reason we made it into town. So it was decided that if everybody made it that he left the title and left it parked in front of the Post Office in San Antonio and we never knew where that Ford went. It was a rumble seat, what do they call it Cabaret? So we all made it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What day did you go in then?

Mr. Cunningham

January 6, 1942

Mr. Misenhimer

So this was right after Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Cunningham

Right

Mr. Misenhimer

And how many of you was it that joined up at the same timer there.

Mr. Cunningham

Oh I don't know how many it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

No I meant from your group that picture, eleven or twelve?

Mr. Cunningham

About twelve.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were all in the same class in school?

Mr. Cunningham

Some of them had graduated and some of us were still there.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you all went over to join together

Mr. Cunningham

Right

Mr. Misenhimer

And of course then, as you showed me the picture there, the recruiter had a photographer come down and take your picture and then the San Antonio paper ran a story on it.

Mr. Cunningham

Right

Mr. Misenhimer

Then where did you go for basic training?

Mr. Cunningham

Well first we went to Fort Sam Houston.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well back up there just a minute, you said something about that you almost went to Navy but you didn't make it, what's that story.

Mr. Cunningham

Oh that story. I was seventeen at the time and I was living in San Antonio and I don't know I just got tired of things and I told my sister, " I think I'd like to join the Navy" and went up there and it was cold that morning and my eyes were watering and I didn't pass the eye test and so the Navy guy told us to come back when I felt better, you know, but I

didn't go back.

Mr. Misenhimer

This is before the War.

Mr. Cunningham

Before the War, yeah. I'm glad I didn't because Pearl Harbor happened about then and a friend of mine that graduated from High School and he went there and he was in the bombing of Pearl Harbor and he didn't make it. So I figured out it was God had a reason for me not going that morning. So I never did fuss about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go for your basic training?

Mr. Cunningham

From there we decided to go in the Air Force, all of us. So they sent us to Wichita Falls.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sheppard Field?

Mr. Cunningham

Sheppard Field and we took basic training in Sheppard Field and they had what they called flying non coms. So we thought we might go in for flying. Well they looked at my record and saw that my eye sight was just a little bit slow so I missed that part of it. And the reason for it was that I missed twenty one days when I was senior in high school and I missed twenty one days and I got way behind because of my eye sight.

Mr. Misenhimer

You missed twenty one days, because of your eyes you say?

Mr. Cunningham

Right because of the eyes. Originally we went to Wichita Falls and stayed there for basic training and later they sent us to Savannah Georgia, Savannah Army Airbase.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now tell me about your basic training here at Wichita Falls, what all did you do in basic training.

Mr. Cunningham

Well mostly marching, exercising, studying for this and studying for that and filling out papers for what you might be good for and everything and of course all these old country boys all they did was milk cows and ride horses and they weren't interested in that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any weapons training?

Mr. Cunningham

Not at Wichita Falls

Mr. Misenhimer

That's what I mean, yeah, in basic.

Mr. Cunningham

In basic, none there but when we got to Savannah Georgia we had rifle training and pistol but that was about all of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

So actually your training was not infantry training there then/

Mr. Cunningham

No there was not infantry training.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that training at Wichita Falls?

Mr. Cunningham

I imagine six weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in there?

Mr. Cunningham

In tents but then in a short time, this is in the winter time, and within a short time they moved us out of tents into barracks and that was nice over there and the wind was terrible and it was cold and the red dirt would be flying coming through the windows and on the bed sheets. It was an awful place.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a lot of inspections?

Mr. Cunningham

Oh, yes we had a lot of inspections but it was a whole lot better in Savannah. It was a beautiful place to live.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall from your time at Sheppard field?

Mr. Cunningham

No sir it was not much going on there at Sheppard field.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get any kind of Air Force training there at that point?

Mr. Cunningham

None whatever.

Mr. Misenhimer

Not there. No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just indoctrinated you and got you in.

Mr. Cunningham

Right

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you moved to Savannah and what did you do or how did you travel to Savannah?

Mr. Cunningham

By train

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that train trip?

Mr. Cunningham

That was a wonderful train trip. I had never ridden on a train before like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Probably the furthest from home you'd been.

Mr. Cunningham

Right it was a good trip. We lived in tents when we first got there then we moved when we got all papers and stuff filled out and we went to a barracks. I decided to, it was a bunch of us talking about being aerial gunners, and so I said well I think maybe I might try that. They had a doctor come in and give us examination and rolled up my sleeve and like that there and he looked at my arm and he said "Son what's all those red bumps on your arm?" And I said "I don't know sir." And he said, "You feel alright?" And I said, "I feel

fine.” “You got the measles.” So he got on the phone and quarantined 6 barracks around there that we had dealings with. I went to the hospital for twenty one days and there wasn’t thing wrong with me as far as what I thought and I missed all of my gang going to Harlingen and aerial gunner school. I missed that. It just wasn’t my thing to do that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened to some of those people that went there. Do you know?

Mr. Cunningham

No, I never heard.

Mr. Misenhimer

You don’t know whether they made it or not.

Mr. Cunningham

I know one of them that joined with us, John Stockton. He went on a B-17 as a radio man and he came back and went to work for Bell Telephone. He had a good experience. He’s passed away now.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else did you do there in Savannah?

Mr. Cunningham

Well, actually guard work, was the only we did. They put me on a thing called a prisoner chaser with a twelve gauge shotgun, riot gun and chasing two guys and all they do is what the call, dive bombers, they had a stake with a nail in it and they were picking up papers on the field. I didn’t like that because they told us that if you had to shoot one of them they’d charge me a dollar and give me a carton of cigarettes in return and I thought I didn’t like it. I told the officer, I said, I don’t like this job here and he said alright so he

put me in a, well he asked me did you ever take typing in high school. I said yes I sure did and made good. I had a B average in typing and so I went to typing. They put me to be a typist in headquarters, typing AGO cards. AGO stands for Adjutant General's Office. Each soldier had a AGO card and we had to type those up and they had to be exactly right, serial number and all and middle initial and if there was no middle initial well you just put no middle initial. Then all of a sudden we got a call to go to England and that ended that right there. So we got on a train and went to Fort Dix, New Jersey and we stayed there through our indoctrination for awhile and then we got on a train and went to Manhattan and got a ferry and went across the Hudson River and boarded on the largest ship in the world at that particular time which was the Queen Elizabeth. It was a troop ship and I don't know how many troops were on it but somebody said eighteen thousand. We went up the Firth of Clyde to Grinick Scotland and the harbor was so shallow the Queen Elizabeth couldn't come up to the docks so we had to get on those barges and go to the docks over there.

Mr. Misenhimer

About what date did you get there?

Mr. Cunningham

June 6, 1942

Mr. Misenhimer

Ok, you had been in the service just about six months at that point.

Mr. Cunningham

Right

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that boat trip over, how was that?

Mr. Cunningham

It was a beautiful trip. We were in state rooms and I was in B-86 on B deck and we had details where we had to serve as food carriers to our bunch at that particular table on a particular deck. We'd go get food and bring it there and then we'd sit down and eat.

Then the next day we would go and pick up bread and bring it to the table. And then after that we were chosen as messengers and we distributed classified stuff, information, to officers on a certain deck on the ship. There were fourteen decks on that ship. There were elevators from one to the other. I enjoyed that and that was good deal. It didn't take by five days and we landed in Scotland.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have an escort going over?

Mr. Cunningham

None whatever, we had a Goodyear Blimp at New York harbor to guard us for 100 miles out of the harbor and he turned around and left and that was all we had and we learned later that we had a very large submarine wolf pack in that area. But somehow or another we were traveling at 38 knot and I guess we just out run them. I don't know because we never heard a thing.

Mr. Misenhimer

The Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mary and several others they did not escort them because they could go fast enough, that the submarines couldn't catch up with them.

Mr. Cunningham

They had to be exactly in the right spot, at the right time to do it. And it was so long that

they couldn't miss.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were the accommodations like on that ship?

Mr. Cunningham

Beautiful. All our barracks bags and belongings were put in a swimming pool on the ship and then they were covered up with tarps and whatever. We just didn't do much of anything because it was such a short run.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many bunks high, where you were?

Mr. Cunningham

Three

Mr. Misenhimer

Only three.

Mr. Cunningham

Yeah, it was a stateroom. It had nine guys living in a state room. So it was pretty good. It had a bathroom there. It was pretty nice.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many meals a day did you get?

Mr. Cunningham

Two, two meals a day. Lunch and dinner and no breakfast. The meals were pretty sorry, they liked these fish that was dipped out of the sea and fry it a little bit and greasy and everything. We couldn't eat those. So everybody was sea sick and I never got sea sick but I felt it one time. One time I was detailed to go get the loaves of bread which was not

sliced. So I got this loaf of bread and I delivered it to the table and the next time I got a loaf of bread I carried it under my jacket and I carried it to my bunk and I ate that loaf of bread for four days so that I wouldn't get sea sick. I didn't get sea sick for the rest of the time

Mr. Misenhimer

The north Atlantic can be awful rough that time of year.

Mr. Cunningham

It was like we were hitting icebergs, little ones at night. We'd be sleeping and we'd here "bump, bump". But not big ones, you know. But the old hull for the Queen Elizabeth is pretty thick, I guess. They had four electric turbines, screws on the back of it. They weighed 84 tons each. We moved quite awhile.

Mr. Misenhimer

You say you each ate on your own deck.

Mr. Cunningham

No we had mess halls that we ate at.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you had to get the food and bring it back or something.

Mr. Cunningham

We had to go down to the kitchen and get the food and we'd tell them, "This is for table 68-B" We lined up and they'd say okay "68- B." and I'd walk forward and I'd get a big tray and carry them, it was just a regular short meal, bread and milk and fruit.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else from you trip over?

Mr. Cunningham

No sir. They had machine gun practice, the British sailors did and 4 inch cannon practice, they'd shoot out in the side just practice is all they did. They was kind of exciting to watch, you would see that old projectile going through hitting the waves just as red hot as they could be, bouncing along. Going up the Firth of Clyde was quite an experience; there was a big old rock in the middle of the harbor. It was green, had a lot of moss on it. We passed it up without getting anywhere close. I noticed one thing that was interesting to me, I was first to get on a barge, off of Scotland, there and I was the first one to get on English soil on that particular barge. And all of the English people were clapping and hailing us you know. The way we were dressed we had buttons this and that and they thought we were all officers. They didn't know who we were.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned earlier, you all thought about being NCO fliers what was that, that didn't work out right?

Mr. Cunningham

Flying non coms. They outlawed that right after the time. They just didn't have enough people that had ever flown before the war and they realized that all these boys just barely got along and they couldn't fly. They didn't have enough money or whatever it was to fly so they thought maybe that there was quite a few that would fly in small planes. I flew a couple times Stinson Field in San Antonio in a Piper Cub but I didn't fly and they were all just interested in it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now this is before the war?

Mr. Cunningham

It was before the war, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you got to England what did you do?

Mr. Cunningham

Well we went to a little town by the name of Chavinton. They had English gliders, huge gliders, and the biggest plane they had. I don't remember what the name was, no more.

But it was big bombers they had.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it a Lancaster?

Mr. Cunningham

That was it, Lancaster, and what was the other one?

Mr. Misenhimer

Wellington.

Mr. Cunningham

Wellington, right, is what they were and they had long cable and they pulled these gliders and these gliders were the same size we thought as the Lancasters and they just sailed along. We could hear it whistling as they'd come over the barracks. That was quite a thing and then they'd fly by and drop this long cable and two guys would come up and catch it and attach it to another one. Then we went from Chavinton to North Hampton and transportation from one town to another one was hard to come by. They didn't have much transportation. There was no fuel, I'm sure. So I went to a small town by the name of Bedford and I went to a bicycle shop and I saw a bicycle I wanted. The name of

it was Regent. One of the best bicycles made and this lady asked me are you interested and I said "Yes, I am." She said they are very expensive. So I said well "How much is it?" She said, "13 pounds, 10 shillings". And I just shelled it out. She just couldn't believe that I had that much money. Cause the British soldiers only made six pounds a month. And we made triple that almost.

Mr. Misenhimer

How much was the pound in dollars?

Mr. Cunningham

Four dollars, back then.

Mr. Misenhimer

Four dollars, okay. So forty dollars and change is what you paid for it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were you paid when you first went in?

Mr. Cunningham

Thirty dollars. No, it was twenty and if you went overseas you got thirty, over seas pay.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were you living in there in England, in these different places?

Mr. Cunningham

Well in Chavington we had what was known as huts.

Mr. Misenhimer

Nissen huts.

Mr. Cunningham

That's right, huts. Not very big, it wouldn't hold but 25 guys. They all had air raid

shelters right near by. They were built like round igloo's, like things, like stack on it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Looked like a Quonset hut.

Mr. Cunningham

That's right like a Quonset hut. But I never lived in a Quonset and they had plenty of them. They used them for supplies mostly. When I was in the service. Then we went to Paddington that was near London. We guarded airplanes that they flew in from the States and they were C-47's. These were the transport planes. We guarded those. They had a unique way of parking those planes, C-47's. The English were really up on that. They had long runways and they had a little short run off of that to a round circle as the plane come in and the next plane was so many yards, there, and then another one off it and it wouldn't go out as far as the other. So there was no way that you could line up planes. So the German's would send over planes. We had lots of them at night. If they come down and machine gunned they were getting just one. The English Spitfire. They'd run them off before they got started. I saw several dog fights there and I learned one thing. They said don't stand around and watch them because when they start shooting they could be anywhere and you would be right in line on the ground. Then we went from there.... Oh, they were closing the thing because there wasn't, we had enough C-47's over there, at that particular time and the other fields took B-17's and there was one field plumb full of B-17's. Of course I never did go close to one of the fields where they were. They were going to bring it up and so they sent us to this installation guard thing at Air Force Headquarters in London at a place called Bushey Park. It was a beautiful place. It had two large buildings. It was nothing more than guard work.

Mr. Misenhimer

You weren't with the MP's then were you.

Mr. Cunningham

Yes, that's what I'm getting at. So they said it's a Military Police Outfit and they and all that want to join the Military Police Stand over there and all the ones who want to stay with the Air Force stay over here. Well I thought I don't want any more of this guard work here or this thing so I went over to where the Police was. An officer told me, he said, "You really want to go out of the Air Force, I have a place for you if you'd like to stay." I thought about it a little bit but I thought, no, I'll just go over to the Police Force. Let me tell you why the Officer asked me, he had a place for me. One night we were going on guard and you couldn't see nothing and you felt the thing, that went over to the side by walking on the concrete. When we got to the last 2 or 3, I didn't have enough men to fulfill the guard for that plane and we had 42 planes to line up and so. I went ahead and stayed with this plane here and when the officer of the guard would come by at night. He'd come into this plane here where I was and I'd run to this other plane to let him know that I was guarding that. He recognized my voice. He says, "What are you doing here, when you were back down that way?" I said, "Well officer, I said, I have to admit it, I didn't have enough men to fulfill the detail. He said, "Were you in charge?" I said, "No Sir, I have nothing to do with it, I just filled in with the other guys." He said, "I'll see you in the morning." He came down there and he said, "Cunningham, I want to congratulate you, for taking care of these two planes that night." So I said, "Alright." He said, "Tell me who this was that was supposed to take your place?" I said, "I don't know his name." He said, "You know his name, who is he?" "Well, no sir, I really forgot what his name

was.” So he realized what the situation was. I didn’t want to turn him in. That’s why he asked me, “You sure you want to go with the police, and I have a place for you in this unit.” So no telling what, he probably, would’ve rated me pretty well. Made me Sergeant or something else. But I went ahead and went to Air Force headquarters and of course Eisenhower was there and General Arnold was there and General A. B. Frank, all the big generals were there. There were more general’s and officer’s in that one place then ever before. That’s where I wound up.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did you have then?

Mr. Cunningham

PFC Just promoted to PFC. They got the information from this officer, I guess. The TO was very low. T O stands for table of organization, you know this. They just didn’t have enough rank or rates in the Military Police. So we got orders in October, late October, to ship out and don’t tell nobody. I can’t remember the date when we left here but we went straight to North Africa. I bought a bunch of maps in London to find out where I was going so I was a pretty good navigator and we were going along and we discovered that we were by looking at the sun. I said, “We’re heading due west”, after we got out of the Irish Sea. All the guys said, “Where do you think we are going Cunningham?” I said,” I don’t know, but we’re heading back to the States.” And all of a sudden one day we turned around and I said, “We’re heading due south”. So I went and got my maps and I looked West and then due south, where it was at. I said, “We’re heading towards Africa“. So I walked by an office there on the ship and there was a huge map on the wall the officer’s were poring over and the only thing I saw before they pushed the curtain closed

was ORAN and I never heard of it before. So I went and got my maps and I looked at Oran and I said, "My goodness, there's Gibraltar, Oran, Algiers, I said and all the guys asked, "Where we heading, Cunningham?" And I said," We're going to Oran." "Where is that?" Well anyway we landed there and there were quite a little battle going on there.

Mr. Misenhimer

We had the invasion there in November.

Mr. Cunningham

November 8.

Mr. Misenhimer

Torch

Mr. Cunningham

Right, Torch, November 8, 1942. But we weren't in the thick of it. The Navy had already gone in there and really shot them up good. We got there about the 12th. 12th of November.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were with the MP's at that point.

Mr. Cunningham

Oh yes. So I watched these motorcyclists come in and out, you know, and I said and I thought; now that's what I want to do. So I got with the main guys around it and I said, "Would you let me ride that thing a little bit?" Well he let me ride it and I learned how to ride one of them things in a little bit, because I was a bicyclist and I..... So I rode the bicycle, I said "Sergeant, I'd like to get into the traffic section." He said, "Oh, we only take motorcyclists that know how to ride one." I said, "I know how to ride one." He

said, "How in the world do you know how to ride one?" I was just 18. I said, "Well the guys out here let me ride one." He said, "Take one out there and let's see." So I circled around a little bit. He said, "hey Sarge". So it wasn't long that we had to convoy out of there and go to Algiers. So there was one motorcycle left and they let me have that one. They put me on escorting the whole convoy from Oran to Algiers, which was 250 miles. We had to go through the Atlas Mountains. It was up above the clouds and everything was wet. That's where I got on the motorcycle. I might mention too is that while we were in Oran, they picked me for some reason to go at 2 o'clock in the morning down to Mer de Cavier. That was a dock in Oran. That's where the ship came in. It stands for the sea of Cavier. I didn't know what it was for so they briefed me on it. And said what they want you to do, MP, is to park your bike over there and count those tanks that's coming down this thing. General Patton has 300 tanks coming down this mountain over there. They're gonna load them on the LST s and the LST s were lined up one right after another. They had no idea where they were going. So he said, "Count them and then a patrol lieutenant will come by and say, 'I've got 30 more tanks coming.'". So they didn't want the German s to slip in a tank in the middle of that and let it blow up in there. So that was my job, doing that. I don't know if you know too much about a Sherman tank but on the back of it they have a piece of steel that points down and that's where the fans blow all that hot air off the end and it was blowing up dust there. And I was as dirty could be.....and I would count those things. Here come a man from at the back and he said, "MP if you don't stop these tanks from running down this road, there going to ruin this whole side of this mountain." I said, "Oh how is that?" He said, "Well this road is built over businesses all along there." It was actually shaking it down, 300 tanks that we had,

30 tons each. So I went and told the head officer down there. He was a Major. And he says, "Oh, it can't be." I said, "Yes, sir he said, all these are businesses under there." And I said, "They claim this whole road is cracking, and it's never done it before because there was never 300 tanks that were coming through the thing." So he stopped them and sent a special detail up the hill to stop it and only ten tanks would come down at a time and when they would get through then ten more, then ten more. We got them done and I found out later that this was the Sicily invasion.

Mr. Misenhimer

There in North Africa, were you anywhere close to the fighting.

Mr. Cunningham

No when we first got there, the closest we got there was they sent me and other MPs to patrol the town of Oran and with an infantryman with a rifle, an M1 took with me, they knew about what's going on and there was snipers all in the area. This guy, I had to tell him, to quit standing out there in the light. Stand up here in the shade. I don't know if he was a rabbit hunter, I guess. So that was the only thing, close to that as we could get that is snipers. They had rounded up a lot of snipers. We had our barrels of water and soap to wash our mess kits. There was a whole bunch of us that were standing in line and one of them stopped and he grabbed his arm like this and then just started running down and then what happened, a bullet, from up on the mountain, a sniper, went right thru his muscle right there. I heard it, it was right in front of me, and I heard it go, "pop!" So the Lieutenant grabbed a jeep and four guys and Thompson machine guns and said, "Go up there and find this guy", so they took off and about two weeks later. I was on guard at the corner and here come an Arab with a flat

trailer with a bunch of guys on it and I was looking at that there. The wind blew one of the flaps off of his tarp and it was a German officer's uniform and went out there and I grabbed his burro and I told the Arab to "Stop it, right there! No, stop now." He stopped it and I took the cover off. It was eight German officers in that thing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they alive?

Mr. Cunningham

They were alive, oh yeah. I escorted them up to headquarters and I marched them in the door and then the lieutenant was standing there, sitting at his desk. And he says, "Cunningham, what in the world you got here?" I said, "Well I found them down there on an Arab cart." And he looked at them and so he grabbed this guy, he spoke German, he said, "Talked to these guys and find out what they are doing here." What happened was: They were up in the mountains hiding when we invaded the place, and the Arabs were feeding them. They didn't have no food. They were paying them by arms and ammunition and what money they had and trinkets and this and that and that played out and the Arabs said they needed more than that so the Arabs quit feeding them. They had to come down toward the food so they gave up.

Mr. Misenhimer

They were coming down to surrender?

Mr. Cunningham

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now were they laying on this cart or what or standing or sitting?

Mr. Cunningham

They were squatting down with tarp over that and it was over there head, it was about this high. Like 4 ft high and this wind blew this tarp up and I could see the uniform.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of weapon did you have at that point?

Mr. Cunningham

Forty Five automatic

Mr. Misenhimer

So just a pistol.

Mr. Cunningham

Yeah, I carried that for....

Mr. Misenhimer

I mean, you captured all of them with a forty five pistol?

Mr. Cunningham

With a 45 automatic yeah. Of course they didn't have no arms. They gave them to the Arabs and so they brought them in and they called G-2 down there and they picked them up in a school bus. Which we had, was an Army made vehicle, painted O. D. This young MP had a sub Thompson Machine gun. He started swinging it around and telling them to get up in there. And I said, "Mohan, put that thing down!" And I said, "They don't want nothing but to give up." They not bothering nobody. So he finally put it down but he had ride with them back up it to the prison, where ever it was. I don't know where it was.

But that's one of my experiences there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now let me back up, when you were in England, did you get a chance to visit with many of the local people there?

Mr. Cunningham

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How were they?

Mr. Cunningham

Wonderful. They were easy to get along with and talk with. I met a girl that at Bushey Park and she said that she lived in Richmond. Are you familiar with London?

Mr. Misenhimer

Richmond, England? No.

Mr. Cunningham

Okay, Richmond is a suburb of London. She said she lived in Richmond. So she said, "Why don't you come out sometime and visit us?" I live with my mother and my father is a dignitary of the Indian Government." And he's dark, real dark complected. She was light complected but just a little bit of dark there. Her name was Lea; I forgot her last name now. Anyway, I rode my motorcycle of the Thames River for 15 miles right along the dock that was good paved and I climbed a hill there into Richmond and she told me that she lived out East Shene to Beachcraft Road. So the next time I went there I went on the bus. So I asked a girl on the bus, would you tell me when we get to Beachcraft Road. And she said, "Oh you mean Beach croft Rd? And I said, "Alright, Beachcroft road." So I went to the house and they were really, real nice people. They had a cage inside the house about 3 and a half ft wide, about 4 ft high and about 8 ft long and they'd crawl into

that thing there during air raids to keep shrapnel, which would be pieces of brick, you name it. The government put those into homes that were owned by people.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was this cage made out of?

Mr. Cunningham

Steel

Mr. Misenhimer

Steel, okay.

Mr. Cunningham

They had a garden in the back of the house there and it was pretty nice. One time Lea asked me, said, "Would you like to go to see my dad?" And I said, "Where is he?" And she said, "He's over at a town on the East Coast of England called Chumsford". And I said, "Yes." So we went to the train station. They had a big train station that had twelve locomotive trains lined up underneath this big place. We was on train 11. What you do, you go up the stairs and walk the cat walk till you come to #12 and then you take one down and you to a place where you get on the train. And those trains, as you know, have compartments. So we got on it and rode, I don't know how many mile, quite a few miles, for Chumsford. We got off of the train and walked down to this rest home, is what it was, where dignitaries stayed over, permanently. He was sitting in a chair around the corner. We walked around and he saw Lea coming and "Oh my God, I'm glad to see you, my gal" and so forth. She introduced me to him and he was very nice and glad to meet me. He said he hadn't seen an American soldier before. It was just a rest home and nobody went over there up at the East Coast. He just took me in and I felt real good about it.

But he was, he got some pay, I think, pretty well for being a dignitary of the Indian. Well I used to know what the name of the place he was. It was some kind of important place.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you were talking about the shrapnel, was there much bombing while you were there?

Mr. Cunningham

In Algiers it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

No I mean in England.

Mr. Cunningham

Oh, yes, in England. We had the fighter planes come over to North England there where we were, and Peterborough. Almost every night. And we, a friend of mine, decided to go over to a place where he was going with a girl, over to Bedford. So we took a bus. So we went over to Bedford and this girl's father owned a boot factory. They made boots there for the soldiers and everything. We were going to stay all night. So they told us where we could go to rent a place there for, I don't know, about 10 schillings or something a night. It had one bed and there was three of us and we all three slept in that bed that night. We'd been told that the German's sends these ME109's over to bomb and they drop nine bombs and if you here one, an air raid go off, and if you here a bomb fall, and it's getting louder and louder, you count them and it's still 7, 8, you better start looking for a place to hide. That thing came over and hit this boot factory right in the middle. The last bomb, #9. And it blew shrapnel all in the window where we were sleeping all over our bed and everything. It hit the other side of the wall. It scared us to death, because we never seen anything like that before. But that was the closest we ever

had to being bombed in England. We heard a lot of sirens go off but nothing close.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about your camp, where you are staying. Was it bombed at all?

Mr. Cunningham

None, whatever. I don't understand why they didn't bomb Bushey Park. Because that was and Air Force Headquarters. Everybody that had anything to do with the bombing of Europe was right there in that one spot. General Carl Spaatz, General Eisenhower, General Arnold, and all Air Force officers.

Mr. Misenhimer

I just want to go back and see about England there, did you to there Pub's very often?

Mr. Cunningham

Oh yes, they had lots of Pub's. Our most important thing was the places where they had Fish and Chips and we would be put on the front door of the buildings there called Bushey Park but it was named Wide Wing. I guess you know why they called it Wide Wing, because all of our bombers, you know, had wide wings. Camp Wide Wing. So we would tell one of the guys to go down there and get us some fish and chips because we were on guard. So an officer would come and we'd hide it behind the door and he could smell them things from a block away, those fish and chips. The officer would come and go, "Well, where is it?" He'd go on; he wouldn't pay no attention to it. I was guarding on the outside one time and they had deer that run into Bushey Park, they just run wild at night. We had to be very careful about, if it was deer that was making the noise or an infiltrator. So General Carl Spaatz was a 4 Star General and he saw me going over there to pet the deer. And he didn't like that worth a thing and so he reported me to the

BLACKOUT

sergeant and so it wasn't long after that. They didn't do anything to me about it. They just told me just to watch it, you know, and don't pet the deer. They left their black³lot curtains apart one night and there was light coming through there. The English were very strict about blackout. So I walked into the building and I opened the door of General Carl Spaatz office where they had maps all over the wall and they all these place where the planes were flying with little lights on them and everything. Spotters moving stuff around. That was the planning part. They rushed over there and pushed me back and said, "You can't come in here!" So the next day the sergeant told me, he said, "They got chewed out, all them General's got chewed out for leaving them blackout curtains open you stopped the whole thing." So I said, "Maybe I made point there." General A. B. Frank was the commanding General of the 8th Air Force Service Command and Carl Spaatz was the 8th Air Force Base command. General Eisenhower, of course, he was the Commanding General of the whole outfit there. I stopped him one time at the gate when he was coming in, and I asked him for his AGO card. He fumbled around and he was looking for it and whatever. I wouldn't leave till he finally found it. The next morning my sergeant asked me, he says, "Cunningham, did you recognize that was General Eisenhower." I said, "Yes sir." "Well, don't stop him anymore." I just wanted to be GI about it. But I didn't stop him anymore, I recognized who he was. But I was about this far from General George Marshall when he came in the limousine, we saluted him and everything. We had an air raid in Algiers one time where they dropped several bombs on a poor area and I was guarding a certain place. So I got out of the way and went into a little cave there and heard this stuff just splattering all around me there. I saw what it was and I reached down and picked it up. It was red hot, and I dropped it, and it was a piece of shrapnel about

that long.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was a couple of inches, huh?

Mr. Cunningham

Right, it was hot. There's when I realize, shrapnel, how dangerous it is, because it's sharp pieces and everything and it goes into you and just tears you apart. It was from our own guns. They had so much ACK. ACK in the air that you could read a newspaper at midnight. It was completely light. So we motorcycles decided to go up to one of our 90 MM antiaircraft. 90 MM gun positions and watch what they do. And they set off. They shot in the air one of them and it took all of the oxygen out of the air, just instantly, you know. Me and Chuck we just took off, we said, "This is enough of this." But those guns, I don't know how these guys shoot those guns. 105's field artillery

Mr. Misenhimer

105's?

Mr. Cunningham

Yes and then some 155's. Coming in. Now those were pretty good

Mr. Misenhimer.

The 155. They had the howitzers and they had the long toms.

Mr. Cunningham

The long toms they were what 30 ft long?

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm not sure about that.

Mr. Cunningham

The only ones that carried a carbine in our outfit was the non com. We had garands or M1s. On our motorcycle we would carry the Thompson in the holster and the 45. But I carried a 45 for 4 years in the service almost. We had to straddle a cot with a non com vet sitting there. Blindfold us. We'd take a loaded 45; take the clip out of it blindfolded. Take the shells out of the chamber, disassemble it completely into 15 pieces and put it back together blind folded and we got pretty good at that. In early 1943 we had 2000 German prisoner come from the desert and they were marching in a single line and they were told when they got to the gate of the compound to take every, all you stuff off and put it in a pile over there. So they piled all this stuff in this pile. So they had an American Officer standing there and I said "Lieutenant, do you mind if I take anything of this?" He said, "Take your pick." So I took all this stuff here.

Mr. Misenhimer

He is showing me some of his souvenirs here.

Mr. Cunningham

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

This is a mess kit or not a mess kit but a knife fork spoon.

Mr. Cunningham

Right, Knife fork spoon with a coat of arms on it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Got the deathhead from the Gestapo.

Mr. Cunningham

And then a Luger. I don't know if that's and 8 mm or not, but it works.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is this badge, up there?

Mr. Cunningham

This here is the, what the German officers wore on their cap.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, yeah, okay. It's got the eagle with the swastika under it.

Mr. Cunningham

And this hear was the Gestapo deaths head.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of course there is an iron cross, huh.

Mr. Cunningham

Iron cross, yes, they had to be pretty good officers to earn that.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned that you were loading those tanks to go to Sicily. Did you go to Sicily?

Mr. Cunningham

Oh, no, when we went from Algiers to Naples we passed Sicily. On the side you could see it over to the right. There was smoke still arising. But when we went from Naples to Rome on a Port Road. I have never seen so many pieces of military armor just blown all to bits like they had bulldozers pushing it off a cliff. Just thousands, and thousands, of trucks.

Mr. Misenhimer

German, American or both?

Mr. Cunningham

Both. But we was clearing the road so we could pass by. We had a convoy of about 30 or 40 vehicles. The reason we were coming up there is because we was taking over security guard of Rome right after the troops moved North in to the Podo Valley. I was chagrined there for awhile; we stopped the convoy under a bunch of trees while combat convoys would pass by. They had priority. I looked up there and they was Olive Trees and I was pulling those olives off and putting in my coat. Then Gino Evangelisto was our sergeant. He said, "Bob, what in the world are you picking them up for?" I said, "I'm gonna take home and eat them." He said, "You can't eat those things, there green." So I said, "Well alright." They were olive trees, beautiful, all blooming, had olives all of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you go from Africa over to Italy, by ship?

Mr. Cunningham

By ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of ship did you go on?

Mr. Cunningham

It was a troop ship. At first they had an AK lined up for us, AK stands for...

Mr. Misenhimer

Transport, I mean, it's a cargo ship.

Mr. Cunningham

Army Cargo, but they said it won't hold enough so they put this one. And you know for the life of me, I can't think of the name of that ship. I know the ship I went across the

Atlantic on. I know the ship by name from England to Africa, for the invasion, was HMS Arangitici. But I can't think of the name of the ship. I know what was the name of the ship, of the hospital ship I came back on.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, when you landed at Naples the fighting was kind of done there right>

Mr. Cunningham

It was. The harbor was loaded with ships with nothing but the mast sticking up out of the water. It was plumb full. We had to go in and out. They had a destroyer that was pushing them away, while we was coming. I never seen so many ships wrecked. All sunk there on that Naples Harbor. Naples is a pretty old town. All the buildings were old, if they weren't blown up. On instance there, we went into Naples to see the town. And we left and that building blew up. I mean it just completely come apart. It was the Post Office. They said what happened was: the Germans had buried a timing device with a large explosive and it was timed for 1530. They knew that we closed down at 1630. But that day was a holiday and everybody left at 1500. It blew up completely; devastated the whole building but we didn't lose a soul. Lucked out of that one. They just timed it and forgot about the holiday.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was in what town?

Mr. Cunningham

Naples

Mr. Misenhimer

Naples was before or after Anzio?

Mr. Cunningham

Well Anzio was in a Northern part, it was before.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you said you went to Rome, because they went to Rome from Anzio.

Mr. Cunningham

Well Anzio was North of Rome. We lost the 36th division, just about at Anzio. I remember I was escorting or was patrol work and a lieutenant came up and he says, "MP I wonder if you could assist us in a bivoual area?" And I said, "Where is it?" He told me and I knew where it was and I saw this badge on him. He was the 1st Cavalry Division. We had the 1st and the 2nd Cavalry division there. So we escorted him to this place and I got a commendation on it. I have it written up there on one of those albums by this officer. In '45.

Mr. Misenhimer

'45, okay. They may have transferred over there.

Mr. Cunningham

Probably, they just came in. I understand from the troops that were it was a very devastating place. It rained and rained and our tanks was bogged down. General Mark Clark was the 5th Army commanding General. He was mine. I was in the 5th Army. Attached to the 5th Army. They sent the trucks and the troop back from Anzio and on up in there back to Rome for a rest area. We had a huge rest area just there just form combat troops. And I noticed when one of my post, one of the guys couldn't get out of a 6x6 and went over there. I said, "Soldiers, do you need some help?" He said, "I sure do, my feet are that big around, been in the water and mud for two weeks without." And Mark Clark

found out about it, he said, he told the supply outfit, "I want four pair of socks for every troop in my outfit sent down immediately." And that stopped a bunch of, what do they call it, foot rot.

Mr. Misenhimer

Trench foot.

Mr. Cunningham

That's right, trench foot. Had to help him out of the truck.

Mr. Misenhimer

What outfit were you in? What MP company or what?

Mr. Cunningham

281st MP Company.

Mr. Misenhimer

In the 5th Army.

Mr. Cunningham

Exactly, the 5th Army.

Mr. Misenhimer

But your company was not part of any division or any thing like that, it was a separate company right?

Mr. Cunningham

Well, I don't know how they classified that. I know we were attached to the 5th Army, cause we were at the 5th Army rest center at Rome. It was a huge rest area.

Mr. Misenhimer

You said you went into Rome for the security, tell me about the security in Rome. What

all did you do?

Mr Cunningham

Just patrolled. It was considered an open city. You didn't have to do anything. All we had to do was take care of our troops that went bad. AWOL and drunk. Talk about AWOL. I was patrolling Algiers back there and I saw this jeep come down the street here and there was a guy in it with a khaki shirt on. This was in the time of the year that you wear OD. So I spun around there and went to catch him and he took off and turned right on the stop and I turned right. A block on this side of that and went there and I saw him come out and he was coming right towards me. I pulled him over and asked him where his identification was. He looked in the glove compartment and he couldn't find anything. So I said I'm going to write you up." So I wrote him up and took him to headquarters. I said, "I won't follow you, you go to headquarters, you know where it is?" I said, "You watch my light and will tell you which way to turn." And so he did. I loaded my 45 while he was standing there and let him know that wasn't gonna out run me. A jeep couldn't out run one of them motorcycles. I took him there and found out that he was AWOL, his insignia was the 7th Army. That was the Northern France. He was living on a ship where the Navy had given him Navy uniform shirts and he was living on that.

Mr. Misenhimer

He was driving a jeep there, huh?

Mr. Cunningham

He stole that jeep. So it wasn't very long and they called me to headquarters and they said, "Cunningham you've got to go to the....." I'm trying to think of it, there's three of them: The summary, special and general court martial. He said, "You've got a special

court martial coming up.” I’d never been on one that was special before. I’d been on a general. I went up there and all I did was identify him as AWOL there and so they gave him 6 months in the brig.

Mr. Misenhimer

What’s some other things that happened?

Mr. Cunningham

Well it was an interesting thing that happened. I went to Maison Blanc Airport in Algiers and there was an officer there and he asked me certain things. And I told him, I forgot what it was now, and he said, “How would you like to go up with me tomorrow, I’m testing a P47?” And I’d heard about them 47’s and I didn’t like them too much. If they ever dove it had to be 4000 ft. before they come out, they were so heavy. They had a 3000 horse power radial engine. I said, “Yes, I’d like to ride with you.” He said, “I’m gonna test it out, I’m not gonna do any acrobatics.” He said, “You be back out here at 8 o’clock in the morning.” And I said, “I’m off Thursday and Friday.” So I went out there at the Maison Airport and I told the control tower what I was out there for. He said, “Okay, who are you flying with?” I said, “Lieutenant Carson.” “Are you sure?” And I said, “Yes sir, he invited me up to go with him.” And he said, “Well that’s alright, but we just picked his plane up off the run way and him in it.” He went into a dive and never come out of it. So I guess I wasn’t supposed to be on that plane either.

Mr. Misenhimer

Another close call.

Mr. Cunningham

I had another on too. Not a close call. But I was out on the port road by a beach. We

went swimming in a beach, Blanco beach. And I saw this command car. You're familiar with a command car, I'm pretty sure. And coming down there and he just really roared along so I pulled right around there and caught him. And I told him, "Pull over." And the officer in the front said. So the driver just went over. So I pulled up beside that and I said, "Pull that thing over!" And officer went.... And the driver just kept on. And I rode up in there and shot right through the engine, right by the driver and boy did he pull over. So I told the officer, he was from France, "How come you didn't pull over when I told you to?" He said, "I've got an appointment at the airport to fly somewhere." I forget where he said there. And I said, "Well didn't you pull over, I would have escorted you to the airport?" He said, "Well I didn't think." I said, "Well if you gonna make a flight out of here, I'll escort you over there now. Don't you ever pull that on me again." It was a French officer. So I escorted him to Maison Blanc. It was 14 miles from where I was to the airport and I went. The AP stopped me at the gate and I told him what I had. And he said, "Go ahead." I went to control tower and I says, "This French officer here, he's supposed to fly out somewhere outta here." He said, "Where is he?" I said, "Right over there." So they had a guy that spoke French ask him where he was going. He said, "I'm flying to Nancy." I believe he said. So I said, "Well you're lucky, because if you didn't fly out of here, I'd arrest you, right on the spot right here for not stopping and not abiding the laws of speeding." And he said, "Well I sure thank you." "Merci beaucoup monsieur."

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you shot there, you didn't hit the motor or anything like that?

Mr. Cunningham

Well I don't think the bullet went through the cowling. But I shot at the engine.

Mr. Misenhimer

You didn't put it out. It was still running?

Mr. Cunningham

It still runs, yeah. But don't you imagine what it was. The guy was sitting there and a shot right.... I bet that scared that little driver to death.

Mr. Misenhimer

He was American, right, the driver?

Mr. Cunningham

No, no he was a French driver. They drew all our equipment, the French did. Cause we was state police. We had jurisdiction over the French, American, and British. One interesting thing. A friend of mine said, "Bob, would you like to go to a little town near the desert." And I said, "What on earth for?" He says, "I have a girlfriend that lives here and she went to visit her aunt there in Terate." And I don't even know where that place is. So he said, "I know where it is." So he said, "Alright you be ready at 5 o'clock in the morning. We'll take our motorcycles out of here and nobody will ever know the difference." So we gassed them up and got ready and got our 45's on just like we'd be on duty. And we lit out. But over the Atlas Mountains down toward Oran and turned off at, I can't think of the name of the town, I have it written down in my outfit there. And we went to this little town, it was 300 miles away. It was on the edge of the desert. It was a little town Terate. The motorcycles won't go but 50 miles to the gallon and it had 3 gallons and 150 miles left to go. And I never asked him where we were gonna get enough gasoline to get all the way over there but he said, "Oh we'll make out some way." We got about half way and we're about at empty and here comes a commander car, with four

sergeants in it. So he stopped them and asked them. They all had Jerry Cans on the back of it. We filled our tanks up and we on to Terate. We stayed all night. 2 nights there and we left and come on back. Rich I don't know how I ever got back to Algiers. I don't remember anything about it. I don't drink. It got dark. We went all that whole distance that way and how we, where.... We have an American fueling station in the Summit of Atlas Mountains and that is where we refueled. But I don't remember it. Only thing I remember is when we left Terate until we pulled into the camp area. Into the place where we lived was Ecole de Garzone. I don't know why I don't remember that. His name was Orville Kosky a Finlander, American, of course. I told Margie, I said, "If he ever comes to see me, I'm gonna kick him all the way back to Rudward, Michigan.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else did you do there in Italy? After guarding Rome then where did you go?

Mr. Cunningham

Well that's where I come to an end right there. On April the 23rd, 1945 I decided to make one more run on my route on Precinct 5. It was in the upper part of Rome. I was gonna cross the street, in front of a streetcar and the streetcar stopped and my traffic went ahead and that's the last I remember. An Italian courier on another motorcycle passed the streetcar on the wrong side and hit me broadside at 30 mph right into my left side.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you walking or were you on your motorcycle.

Mr. Cunningham

On my motorcycle. And it knocked me some 30 ft over to the curb on the other side. The only thing I remember was I woke up in an ambulance. It was really bumping along and it

went to an Italian hospital. They asked me some questions and I couldn't answer. They asked me, "What happened?" I said, "I don't know." So they diagnosed me as amnesia because I didn't know. But how was supposed to know. I never even saw him or anything. It broke the left patella. It broke my jaw in 3 places, left submaxillary and lower mandible, knocked the teeth out here and had a concussion up there. So that's when the war was over. The war was over on May 8 and this happened April the 23rd. I stayed in a 300th General Hospital in Naples. That was a pretty nice outfit. I was in the 100th General Hospital in Rome and they flew me to Naples to the 300th General in Naples in a C-47. I was the only one on the plane except a medical attendant. I was strapped down in a stretcher in the base of the plane. They radioed ahead. There was an ambulance waiting before then. I got off and it took me to the General Hospital and I stayed there 'til I healed. You figure from April 23rd 'til... I don't have the dates when I left but it was somewhere in May.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were there for 3 or 4 weeks then?

Mr. Cunningham

Probably 3 or 4 weeks. We got on the US Hospital Ship, I can't think of it. One night they turned the lights on in the hospital ship and they said they had a report of all the German submarines had been found and accounted for. We turned the lights on and it just looked like a pretty thing by itself out there at night. Landed at Charleston, South Carolina. Stayed there a little bit at the Stark General Hospital for general information. We got on a train that had 10 cars on it. It was so lined up that it stopped at every hospital and lost a car. Went on to another hospital, lost another car. Went on to a Stark

General Hospital in El Paso. That's where I got all my fixing up.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there then?

Mr. Cunningham

'Til October the 3rd, I believe. I got an emergency pass, priority, in El Paso at Stark General Hospital. Got on a C-47 and flew to Kelly Field in San Antonio. There we went into discharge preparation.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you pretty well recovered from your accident by then?

Mr. Cunningham

Yes I was. I had a tooth that had to be extracted. It was broken off. I had a time with that and patching this up. They took the cast off. Everything was off the cast, though. But I'm still only 10% disability.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall from your time over there?

Mr. Cunningham

Well let me think a minute.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you some questions. On April 12th 1945, President Roosevelt died, did you all hear about that?

Mr. Cunningham

Yes I did, let me tell you about that. I was patrolling down one of the main streets of Rome and we was told that on the 12th of April, where ever you are, stop, and stand there

for one minute. So we heard about him dieing you know and everybody was kind of sad over it because we figured he was the one that did any good to us during the depression.

Mr. Misenhimer

He was really the only President that most people would have known at that point.

Mr. Cunningham

That's right, 1933 to 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

Because you know at your age, 23, you didn't know any other Presidents, who they were.

He was the only President that most of you'll knew.

Mr. Cunningham

Here is something that might interest. I'm sorry that I didn't take a part in it but I was on patrol one day in Algiers and I came back to the headquarters to sign in, which was routine. They said, "Cunningham, we have orders here to tell you to take over until the guys come back from Oran." And I said, "Where have they gone?" They said, "They have gone to Oran. President Roosevelt is coming in on a Cruiser to Oran." For a talk with Churchill and Stalin and our people have gone down there to help in the escort. They came back and told me that they had an infantryman with a rifle standing along the road 16 miles, 30 ft apart while he come by in a limousine, President Roosevelt. And I said, "Did you happen to see him?" And he said, "Yes, he saw us all standing outside of the plane, he come in a B-17 and he raised his hand to our boys." So I said, "Well good." I was in charge of the traffic section for that short time, two days. I have a one picture of him; he's standing there while I was in charge.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Cunningham

PFC, like I say the TO were pretty sorry.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the morale in you outfit?

Mr. Cunningham

Very good, we was just like brothers. I've never seen a closer knit organization than the Military Police.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider the most frightening time you had? That's shrapnel by your bed or something?

Mr. Cunningham

Well I wasn't exactly frightened about that. I'd seen so much of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well you showed me some souvenirs, did you get any other souvenirs besides those to bring home?

Mr. Cunningham

Yes but insignificant.

Mr. Misenhimer

Like what?

Mr. Cunningham

Oh it was a little old casket thing that they made of the Vatican City and that thing that came from Rome had a little something down there and I have it somewhere. Nothing. I

did bring one of my riding belts back with me. A motorcycle belt. That's a piece of leather about that wide.

Mr. Misenhimer

About a foot wide, huh?

Mr. Cunningham

Yeah, it goes all the way across that. And the reason why it is to keep the kidneys from getting bruised around. 'Cause we had on guy that lost a kidney from riding in the rough.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Cunningham

Oh, yeah. We had a beautiful USO show. The main guy. I stopped Bob Hope. We had a road block going from Algiers to the Airport. I was on the side and I stopped this vehicle. It was one our limousines. I opened the door and I asked the driver for his permit. And the guy in the back leaned forward and he said, "Hi MP!" And it was Bob Hope. I said, "Well hello Bob Hope." We had a few words. He said, "When you get off of here, come out to the thing there and watch my show." And I said, "I'll be glad to." So we were off at 1600 and we drove on up there. It was so many guys seeing the show from the Air Base to the others places that I couldn't even see him hardly. So I just turned around and left. He stayed in the Excelsius Hotel in Algiers for a couple of nights with Frances Langford.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who were some other ones you saw?

Mr. Cunningham

A navy lieutenant. I can't remember his name now.

Mr. Misenhimer

Some pretty good shows though, huh?

Mr. Cunningham

Oh, yeah, it was pretty good shows. We had beautiful theatres there we went to. They had all the latest things, our latest.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross, good or bad?

Mr. Cunningham

Good, I couldn't see anything wrong with them. We had one of the most beautiful Red Cross's in Rome. It was huge recreation area. One thing I noticed about that recreation area it had an Olympic sized swimming pool and we sat over there writing letters at the desk and everything. I looked over there at the swimming pool. I saw this diving board rising up out of the floor and it went up about 25 ft with the ladder following it. I said, "What in the world is that?" They had that modern diving board where it was push button and it ran up out of the floor. I never even see one here in the states like that.

They huge people carved in granite, acrobats and that up in there?

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get your mail with any regularity when you were overseas?

Mr. Cunningham

We got mail good.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Axis Sally on the radio?

Mr. Cunningham

No, I never did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Never did here of her, huh? What did you thing of the officers you had over you?

Mr. Cunningham

They were wonderful. They just right down our lanes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of course, you don't remember when Germany surrendered, because you were unconscious in the hospital.

Mr. Cunningham

Don't remember what?

Mr. Misenhimer

When Germany surrendered on May the 8th.

Mr. Cunningham

Yes I do. I was laying in a hospital bed and I heard all this commotion going on and the nurses running about and congratulating everybody. "The war is over, the war is over."

The nurses brought each one of us in a bed a glass of medicinal brandy, they called it. It wasn't very much, just a little bit.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when Japan surrendered on August 15th, did you hear about that?

Mr. Cunningham

I was discharged. No I wasn't either; I was still in the service then. That was '45? I got in October of '45. I was in the hospital for several months.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were probably in the hospital in the states somewhere, when Japan surrendered.

Mr. Cunningham

Right, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got out did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Cunningham

No I didn't have any difficulties with it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Cunningham

Well I got: Good Conduct, and ETO, American Theatre. I guess I could look at my stuff there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your G. I. Bill for anything when you got out?

Mr. Cunningham

Yes, I used readjustment. I decided to go to the University of Texas and they said that they'd pay that and I was drawing a pension too. I went in there and it was full up and the guys was living in little old trailer houses and laundry was hanging from one tree to the other and I said I don't want nothing like that. I went back and got some brochures from some business colleges and I like the one at Drauchn's Business College in San Antonio and I lived in San Antonio. I knew San Antonio well. So I went to that. So we joined that and we took up accounting. An accounting college and a good one. We to

everything commercial law and Income Tax anything in the business we took it. That's where I met Margie.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is that your career now? What did you do in Civilian life?

Mr. Cunningham

Well I came out and went to work. Got an appointment in a motor company. Bill Hield Motors. I kept books for them and I got an appointment from Gunther Orsinger Motor company, it was a Hudson dealer there in San Antonio, south Main. I just did a little bit I kept books for them and I was a overhead crane operator. I kept the accounts receivable and the accounts payable of books for the motor company. They were good people to work for. They just wasn't paying enough there. The government told me I better pick something like that because of my disability here, because probably after about 10 or 15 years I won't be able to use that leg, you know. So that's the reason I picked a sitting down job.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions of you Army outfit?

Mr. Cunningham

No I tried several times. All of my outfit were from Grand Rapids, Michigan. I got a notice from them to have a reunion up there the 281st Military Police Outfit and I didn't have the money to go up there and stay at the hotels up that way.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you say you joined the 52-20 club? The unemployment, \$20 a week for 52 weeks.

You didn't get unemployment when you got out there then?

Mr. Cunningham

No sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, anything else you can think of?

Mr. Cunningham

I was just trying to think of it. I think I brought out most of the important things.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think I asked all the questions I have.

Mr. Cunningham

You sure did, you asked a bunch of questions there and pertinent questions.

Mr. Misenhimer

Bob was showing me information about when he was in the Texas State Guard. You made Captain in that right?

Mr. Cunningham

Went up through ranks, second, first.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in that?

Mr. Cunningham

About 10 years.

Mr. Misenhimer

10 years, okay, and this is the 301st?

Mr. Cunningham

301st Internal Security Battalion.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, in Woodboro, Texas. You were Corporal at this point it says in this letter. Went up all the way, huh?

Mr. Cunningham

Up through the ranks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Bob thanks again for your time today.

Mr. Cunningham

Well thank you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Thank you for your service to our country.

Transcribed by

Francisca T. Montgomery

Alice, TX

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Oral History by

Richard Misenhimer

P. O. Box 3453

Alice, Texas 78333

361-664-4071

Cell 361-701-5848