

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Robert G. Holmes

Date of Interview: June 24, 2013

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Mark Cunningham: This is Mark Cunningham. Today is June 24th, 2013. I am interviewing Mr. Robert G. Holmes. Interview is taking place in Houston, Texas at the Eagle Trace Senior Living, uh, Seniors Living Facility on Texas 6. The interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Texas [Historical] Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

First off, Mr. Holmes, thank you for agreeing to do the interview, and most of all, thank you for the service, your service, to your country. I want to start with a little bit about some personal information about you like where and when were you born.

Mr. Holmes: I was born in western Massachusetts in 1925.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. What's your birthday?

Mr. Holmes: August 21, 1925.

Mark Cunningham: August 21, 1925. So, that makes you a very young eighty-nine? Is that right.

Mr. Holmes: I've got to think a minute. I think I'm eighty-seven, but I have a birthday coming up.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, alright (chuckles), I don't want to get you to ... I don't want to age you too much here.

Mr. Holmes: (Chuckles). No, no problem.

Mark Cunningham: Now, and you were born in western ... in Massachusetts?

Mr. Holmes: Yes.

Mark Cunningham: Your parents, what were their names?

Mr. Holmes: Francis, my father, and ... and Minnie was my mother. Francis was my father, and Minnie was my mother.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Any siblings?

Mr. Holmes: I have a brother and a sister, both here and live with me.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, so the brother was in World War II?

Mr. Holmes: No, we were four years apart, so he was eight years younger than me; he was in the Korean War.

Mark Cunningham: Oh okay. Alright, what were you doing when the war broke out?

Mr. Holmes: I was in school.

Mark Cunningham: High ... still in in high school?

Mr. Holmes: Well, not even in high school maybe.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: But I graduated in '43.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, so you ... you were ... you were thir ... you were pretty young then?

Mr. Holmes: Uh, yes, and I went immediately from high school graduation into the Army. Everybody did, of course, with the war on.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, now, why did you choose the Army? Or did they choose you?

Mr. Holmes: There was very little choice.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: But actually, I probably enlisted, but I was in the Army within two months or so of getting out of high school. But ... but whether I was drafted or enlisted, it would have been the same; there was no choice of anything.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: I might have had a choice of another system, but I didn't like the sailor uniforms (chuckles).

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Let me back up just a minute. Okay, you were still in school when Pearl Harbor ...

Mr. Holmes: Oh yes!

Mark Cunningham: ... Pearl ... what do you remember about that day?

Mr. Holmes: Oh, I remember ... remember hearing about it on the radio and being so surprised. And how it ... probably going to change my life; it was going to change everything.

Mark Cunningham: Right. Where did you take your basic training?

Mr. Holmes: At Fort Benning. I got Infantry Basic Training.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: 'Cause it was most general, they thought that would be best.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: I wasn't in the infantry then ... yet.

Mark Cunningham: Alright, what ... what outfit was ... were you in?

Mr. Holmes: Oh, in the fighting, I was with the 87th Division.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: Part of the Third Army.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. But when you joined?

Mr. Holmes: When I joined, I ... I passed the test and they were going to send me to college, in fact, they did. I was in that program for about a year, and in that time, I got my basic training in the infantry, and ... and I did complete one whole semester. But then, they suddenly stopped the program, put us all in the infantry, everyone. It seemed kind of strange, they attempted to pick out some of the smarter people and then they made cannon fodder out of all of them. But that's life. And several people here got that same experience.

Mark Cunningham: So, you went to ... you went to the basic and then you went to school for a while, is that what I heard?

Mr. Holmes: Yes.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Where'd you go to school?

Mr. Holmes: Virginia Military Institute, VMI.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, and what were you ... what were you studying there?

Mr. Holmes: Oh, I was studying engineering. But at VMI, we got a whole of military classes in addition.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: And in fact, later, after I got out of the Army and everything, I met other people that had been in this program. And I met one that had been in the Navy program that was similar, and he stayed there and graduated and got a ... a university degree and a commission. But everybody in the Army was cancelled and put in the infantry.

Mark Cunningham: Now, was that because of our age? Did that have anything to do with it 'cause you were a young one.

Mr. Holmes: Yeah, I just think they started that program, I ... I don't ... and then they caught people just coming in.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. So, when did you get out of that and ...

Mr. Holmes: Well, trying to get everything in order and everything.

Mark Cunningham: Let me ask it a different. When were you assigned to the 87th?

Mr. Holmes: Oh, when this program was ... was dropped, and we were sent to the infantry.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: And some people were sent over to be replacements, you know, replacing the killed or wounded. And I didn't do that directly. I was assigned to an existing division.

Mark Cunningham: Which (unintelligible).

Mr. Holmes: And so I trained with them for a couple of months.

Mark Cunningham: The 87th?

Mr. Holmes: Yes, I trained with them for a couple of months before we went overseas.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, was that under Patton at that time?

Mr. Holmes: Not at that time, but when we ... we were in combat, we were in Patton's Third Army.

Mark Cunningham: So, you were preparing to go fight?

Mr. Holmes: Yes.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Yeah. One of our ... the ... gentlemen that ... Joe Ward had exactly the opposite; he was not trained to do anything.

Mr. Holmes: Well ...

Mark Cunningham: And they just sent him over.

Mr. Holmes: ... I hope to come to that later. I ... I wasn't trained to do anything either.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: My ... the training was ridiculous and had nothing to do with anything.

Mark Cunningham: Alright, alright. Uh, alright, now tell me a little bit about that training, what ... what ... let's get into that a little bit.

Mr. Holmes: Okay, you bring on a bunch of complaints (chuckles).

Mark Cunningham: That's okay.

Mr. Holmes: Uh, trying to organize my thoughts. This all came up so suddenly and I'm a little confused on everything, but I think I have a lot to tell, but I ... so, I got into this existing div ... division. And apparently, they had been training people individually and slowly shipping them overseas. Then they got this big bunch of us, so we stuck together. But as it turned out, as I suspected at the time and as it turned out later, the training had nothing to do with what we did or anything. This was infantry training even though I didn't think I was in the infantry and I wasn't at that time. But we spent one day on day on bayonet fighting, and one day on hand to hand training, yeah. Which it turned out I didn't need either, but they ... looked like they might have been important things. We spent our time on marching and disciplining and saluting and things like that (laughter).

Mark Cunningham: Oh okay, so you didn't ...

Mr. Holmes: And ...

Mark Cunningham: ... it wasn't ... isn't ... it wasn't combat training?

Mr. Holmes: It wasn't combat training and also, I wasn't training for anything, I guess, except the Army. And we had a bunch of old, long time Army people and they were especially strong on marching and saluting and, "Yes sir!" and all of that. And ... and that, to me, it seemed like a mot ... motley crew when we went overseas because they were mostly old, middle-aged, they couldn't ... couldn't fight if they had to, and (chuckle) and ... and they were old Army people; they weren't the brightest in the world. In fact, we ... we knew that some of the people there had very low intelligence tests, and they were trying to arrange for them to take another ... another test to see if they could do better.

Mark Cunningham: Right. Alright, now ...

Mr. Holmes: But that ... that's my Army basic training.

Mark Cunningham: Alright, then after you finished that training, what happened to you?

Mr. Holmes: Well, after we finished the training, we went to this 87th Division, a company that was going to go overseas. In fact, I mean, in a couple of months we did.

Mark Cunningham: And you ... did you train during that period with the ...

Mr. Holmes: Oh ...

Mark Cunningham: ... the 87th?

Mr. Holmes: All the time, but it was ...

Mark Cunningham: Was it ...

Mr. Holmes: ... pretty much the same stuff again.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, so this was ...

Mr. Holmes: No ... nobody really knew what they were going to need.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: You know? Your ... United States had been at peace a long time; nobody that ... that hated the Army and everything, they didn't really ... you know, what's going to happen. And that brings up a question. They always say that the generals are fighting the last war which is true because they ... they're fighting what they know, but it's ... but it's out of date. And the Congress is fighting two wars back because they're fighting what they knew from way back. So, the ... that training and everything wasn't up to date at all, I ... I think. I'm pretty prejudice.

Mark Cunningham: Right, right, right. Alright now ...

Mr. Holmes: Well, then I was going to ... well, I'll come to it later, but ...

Mark Cunningham: Oh okay, when did you ... when did you ... when did you go overseas?

Mr. Holmes: It was around October. I think D-Day was June, and so that real hard part was over. But as it turned out ...

Mark Cunningham: That would have been October of 1943, right?

Mr. Holmes: Might have been '44, but I ... it ... it was a couple of months after D-Day.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: Yeah, it would have been '44.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Remember the ship you went over on?

Mr. Holmes: Yes, that's easy to remember. I went over on the Queen Elizabeth, the biggest, fastest, most luxurious ship in the world.

Mark Cunningham: Okay now (chuckle) ...

Mr. Holmes: But it had been converted into a ...

Mark Cunningham: Alright, that's what I was going to ask.

Mr. Holmes: ... it was ... it was converted into a troop ship.

Mark Cunningham: You didn't ... you didn't have a suite or anything then?

Mr. Holmes: No, indeed! We had, it appeared to be the tiniest troop room stateroom without a private bath or anything, and everything was out of it except full bunks and that filled it completely (chuckles).

Mark Cunningham: Everything was out of the what?

Mr. Holmes: Out of the stateroom.

Mark Cunningham: Oh okay, but the bunks.

Mr. Holmes: But ... but the bunks for twelve of us.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: And boy, were we full! (chuckles)

Mark Cunningham: Wow!

Mr. Holmes: And of course, there was ...

Mark Cunningham: It was a little cramped.

Mr. Holmes: Yeah, this was the low ... lowest class, I guess, there was no bathroom or anything. There was ...

Mark Cunningham: How was ...

Mr. Holmes: ... no windows.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, other than that, were ... what were you doing onboard ship? Any training or any preparations?

Mr. Holmes: No, they wasn't able to do anything.

Mark Cunningham: Just sailing, huh?

Mr. Holmes: Just passing time, and getting ... most of the people getting sea sick.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Was the food any good?

Mr. Holmes: Well, I couldn't expect anything better in wartime, and an English crew, but it wasn't, and ... and they can only serve two meals a day because of the

crowd and everything there. And understand, the ship carried fifteen thousand people on each trip.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Where did ... where did you depart from?

Mr. Holmes: New York. Right in ...

Mark Cunningham: And where did you ... where did you ...

Mr. Holmes: ... right in the middle of the city.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Then where did you sail to?

Mr. Holmes: We sailed to a (unintelligible) near Glasgow, Scotland.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: Apparently, this was out of the range of the German bombers and everything. And it was a gigantic group of ships there. War ships ...

Mark Cunningham: Okay, now ...

Mr. Holmes: ... of every kind from all over. And ... and the sister ship, the Queen Mary, was there some of the time we were there; it did the same thing.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. When did ... and where did you go after that? Were you ... were you that ... were you in Scotland long?

Mr. Holmes: Well, we were on the ship several days before ... before a ferry took us ashore. And that was interesting 'cause the ship was divided into three ... three parts and we were only allowed to be on our part. So, then I was allowed to walk over the whole ship and see a lot of different things. Buy anyway, after a couple of days, a ferry took us ashore, and we got on a train. We went through Glasgow and ended up in England where we were stationed where ... for a month or two before we went overseas.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. More training?

Mr. Holmes: Yes, but there really wasn't any (chuckles).

Mark Cunningham: Again, once again (chuckles).

Mr. Holmes: Yeah. We marched and things like that (laughter).

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Alright now, uh ...

Mr. Holmes: I might say this was a strange facility, very definite Army camps. This was on the edge of a town; it was a big manor house, and that was the headquarters of it. But then they put up temporary cheap barracks behind

it, and so it was a group for just our company there. Every ... everybody was spread out, and getting released ...

Mark Cunningham: Okay, and the weather is not that great there either, is it? Kind of cold?

Mr. Holmes: No, yeah, and I remember, you know, they ... everything was so smoke ... smoky and smoggy there from ... smoky from burning soft coal and everything, I guess. And we'd go to town, and it'd be so smoky I couldn't find my way, and I'd get back by walking along the curb of one foot on the top and one foot on the bottom (laughter).

Mark Cunningham: (Laughter), now how were the English people; how did they treat the soldiers?

Mr. Holmes: I'd say, well, but they ... they resented us a little bit.

Mark Cunningham: Because you guys had money and ...

Mr. Holmes: Yeah, the ones that were there longer got to meet the girls and everything, and they had more ... much more pay than the English soldiers, and the ... the facilities in our [s/b their?] camp were so minimal compared to ours. For instance a latrine was a separate building out ... outside; there wasn't even a building, it was more of shelter.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: And the commodes was a long, concrete pipe with seats on it, spaced on the top of it (chuckles).

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: And all outdoors and everything.

Mark Cunningham: Okay now ...

Mr. Holmes: But it was interesting.

Mark Cunningham: When did you actually, uh, go over to the continent?

Mr. Holmes: I said we went overseas in October. I think maybe went to the continent in October; I'm not ... little fuzzy about the dates.

Mark Cunningham: This was after ... this was after D-Day, right?

Mr. Holmes: Yeah, but it's after D-Day.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. And ...

Mr. Holmes: So, that ... and (unintelligible) two or three months after; D-Day was June, I think.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: And this was October.

Mark Cunningham: So, the div ... division, the whole division, went over together, right?

Mr. Holmes: Yes.

Mark Cunningham: Alright, the 87th Division, I ... I read somewhere that the (pause) well, I ... I did ... I did a little bit of looking when ... after we talked and said that you entered Germany on the 16th of March 1945. But when you first went over you ... you ... did you ... you landed in ... in France, is that correct?

Mr. Holmes: Yeah, we landed in the harbor; we landed on an LCT.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: And waded ashore, but because there weren't docks or anything.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, they took you over ...

Mr. Holmes: Now, you said ... when did you say March I went into Germany?

Mark Cunningham: Well, it's ... I ...

Mr. Holmes: Oh, let me think a minute. We were already ... already in Germany before but we had ... didn't cross the Rhine.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: So, that's probably when we crossed the German border.

Mark Cunningham: Alright, but ... but you landed in ... you land in L'Havre ...

Mr. Holmes: Yes.

Mark Cunningham: ... France. Alright, and then you started marching again, right?

Mr. Holmes: Uh hum.

Mark Cunningham: Did you march? Where did you ... where did you ... what ...

Mr. Holmes: First we landed ... I guess stopped at a ... in a farmer's field, stayed there overnight, and it was kind of interesting. When we ... when we left ... left to ... left to start for the continent the last day I was on KP, kitchen police, and one of the cooks gave me a big square of ... of bacon, figured it would be useful to me, I guess. And I didn't know what to do, so I took it. But when we got there, we ... we made campfires, and it turned out of potato

peel and they just ... they just harvested their piles of potatoes. So, with my mess kit and a campfire and ... and this big chunk of bacon, we ... couple of us made French fried potatoes (chuckles).

Mark Cunningham: (Chuckle).

Mr. Holmes: But anyway, I guess the next day we marched or something, and we cut through a ... where we were put on a railroad, and we passed through (unintelligible).

Mark Cunningham: Oh okay, now this is in France?

Mr. Holmes: In France.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: And ... and because of the war damage and everything, everybody (unintelligible) the railroads and all of that, and we were on some ancient locomotive and everything, and we were in the forty and eights; they were the French boxcars from ... from the World War I. Forty and eight means they held forty men or eight ... eight horses; they're much smaller than ours.

Mark Cunningham: Wow.

Mr. Holmes: And we rode around on them a couple of days; we stopped at different places. We went through Reims, one of the big cities, and we ... and the train stopped and they gave us all box lunches and we went on again. And ...

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Now, let me back up ...

Mr. Holmes: Yeah.

Mark Cunningham: ... just one minute and ask you questions I should have asked earlier. Okay, you were trained in the ... in ... in ... as an infantryman?

Mr. Holmes: Yes.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, but did you have a ...

Mr. Holmes: (Unintelligible).

Mark Cunningham: ... specific job?

Mr. Holmes: Yeah, along the way, they made me BAR man, that's a Browning ...

Mark Cunningham: A ... a what?

Mr. Holmes: ... BAR man, that's a Browning Automatic Rifle.

Mark Cunningham: Right, okay.

Mr. Holmes: It's sort of a light machine gun that's ...

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: And in fact, hate to do all this side talking, but I was so dis ... I was very ambitious and anxious to learn and everything. And I always tried to get a job or something. We weren't poor, but I could use spending money, and I wanted to learn something. I was, you know, getting to enter my life except for the Army and everything, I wonder what occupation I wanted ... I wanted and everything, so I anxious ... anxious to get ...

Mark Cunningham: Yeah, pull that a little closer (pulling microphone closer).

Mr. Holmes: ... try and get a job. And ... and because of the war, my last high school vacation, I got a job as a timekeeper for a construction company building a defense plant. And I ... I worked in the ... Christmas season, Christmas rush at the post offices, and so I ... in the Army I figured no matter what I did, I'd learn something.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: Except it turned out in the infantry ...

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: ... (chuckles), anyway ...

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Now, tell me about the BAR.

Mr. Holmes: Okay. Well, maybe I should say something that goes before that.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: We were in a training, and they explained to us what the scout does, what the first scout does, and I was interested. I was listening but all ... and they said, "You, now you show us what you do." And my ... my mind went blank. So, I whispered to the guy next to me, "What do you do?" (laughter), and he said, "Oh, you sneak up cautiously and look what's ahead." So, I ... I did. We ... we approached ... we were in the woods, we were approaching the end of the woods, so I snuck up behind the trees and everything and got out ... the end behind the tree and peered around to see

what was happening, and the Sergeant said, “That’s wonderful, you’re our first scout.” (chuckles)

Mark Cunningham: (Laughter).

Mr. Holmes: (Laughter).

Mark Cunningham: So that means, you’re ... you’re out front, right?

Mr. Holmes: And, in fact ... yeah. But it turns out, the position is probably lead to be Assistant Squad Leader and all that. But anyway, I was so disgusted, they ... I ... I figured the only thing I had ... had ... had learned about rifles, the only thing I could learn was how to take apart a BAR and put it together and everything blindfolded and that (chuckles), so ... so I figured I’d ... I said I wanted to be a BAR man ... BAR man.

Mark Cunningham: And that’s how you got it?

Mr. Holmes: And so I was. For a long time, it was heavy, and so finally I wanted to get rid of it. They asked for some volunteer messengers and I did that (chuckles), and ...

Mark Cunningham: Uh, did that make you a particular target?

Mr. Holmes: Uh, (pause), a little but not much either as a scout or as a BAR man, but we had the (unintelligible) fire power, the tiny bit that was in the twelve-man squad.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. I was going to ask you how many ...

Mr. Holmes: But I ... I didn’t feel that, but I had the extra heavy weight, and we all had to share in carrying the ammunition, but ... yeah, after a while, I got tired of that ... in combat.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Okay, when was your first combat?

Mr. Holmes: Oh okay, I was going to come to that later. I was going to tell you about ...

Mark Cunningham: Well, what have you ... what have you got there? Go ahead.

Mr. Holmes: Well, as I said, I was (unintelligible) a week later. But I ... I started to make a, you know, my mem ... my recent memory is bad and everything, and I’m confused. So I was trying to make a list but I didn’t get very far with it. But I ... I thought about my first days of combat, and I thought describing the first day and the second day especially might be very interesting.

Mark Cunningham: Go ahead.

Mr. Holmes: Okay. The first day we went out walking, well probably the battalion, three or four companies, and we were walking over ... they were all ... rolling, hilly country and everything with occasional trees. And we walked and we walked and I saw where ... when we were on a high spot ... but over on the side was five or six officers with a bunch of maps, and I figured that was the battalion staff. And every now and then I'd see them. But we walked and walked and walked, and I was beginning to think we were probably lost. And then for the second time, we passed the group were burning American tanks. I was pretty sure we were lost (laughter), and we walked all day. But we finally end up where we started.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: Then the second day we ... we had a job to do there.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, now that was ... that was ...

Mr. Holmes: That was the end of the first day, and it was ... it was interesting (laughter).

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: Then the second day we had a job to do; we had to take a hill that had been held by both the Germans and the Americans at different times. And we took the hill, no opposition or anything, but we got on the top of it and it was just littered with German and American bodies. And we ... we had sort of a rule of ... we stopped marching, you're supposed to start digging a trench right away, a slit trench. It would be big enough to lie down in and about two feet deep, and if you had that, you're pretty well protected from horizontal rifle machine gun fire and you were protected from artillery shell if it wasn't too close.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: But then right away, we got an artillery barrage and ... and then we had our first killed and wounded. And then we went on, we ... we fought for ten days. And at the end of it, they said we were going to stop and regroup and get reorganized and everything.

Mark Cunningham: Okay now, you had a twelve-man squad ...

Mr. Holmes: Yes.

Mark Cunningham: ... led by a ...

Mr. Holmes: A Sergeant.

Mark Cunningham: ... a Sergeant.

Mr. Holmes: Buck Sergeant.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Was he an old guy or was he a ...

Mr. Holmes: I don't even remember because at the end of this ten days where we stopped overnight at a house. Of course, we'd been in the rain, we'd waded across rivers and everything, and ... and of course, I'd never taken off my clothes or my shoes or anything. We slept on the ground. So we were in the building, and I took off my shoes and next morning I couldn't get them on 'cause my feet had swollen so much.

Mark Cunningham: Wow!

Mr. Holmes: (Chuckle), but somehow, they found me a new pair in a few hours, don't know how, but that's what the Supply Sergeant and Assistant did, I guess. But anyway, at the end of ten days, we had six officers and there was only one left. He happened to be my platoon leader and I thought he was one of the very few really good officers. But then he was taken away right away; he was put on the battalion staff, so we had no officers for a long ... a long time. But anyway, of these six men, they disappeared. They weren't killed or wounded, they just disappeared, they either arranged for a (unintelligible) job or they were somehow unsatisfactory or sick or something, got out on medical something, and I was amazed. But, you know, in a way, I didn't think we had trained or ... right or anything, and ... and also almost all of our non ... maybe all of our non-comms are gone, too. They were these old Army middle aged people, and they had probably got ... and they weren't killed or wounded, but they were all gone. Apparently, they were just sick, too weak and something like that.

Mark Cunningham: Let me ask you about the camp ... combat. Uh, your ... you said you had about ten days ...

Mr. Holmes: Yeah.

Mark Cunningham: ... right ... right there at the first. Now, was that up close ...

Mr. Holmes: (Unintelligible).

Mark Cunningham: ... and personal or was it from a distance?

Mr. Holmes: Oh, it was close and personal, yes.

Mark Cunningham: Bayonets?

Mr. Holmes: Well, fortunately we never saw any bayonets, never used or saw or any bayonets or ... or personal combat, but ...

Mark Cunningham: It was ...

Mr. Holmes: ... it was rifle fire and machine fire and machine gun fire, and ...

Mark Cunningham: ... so you ... you saw ...

Mr. Holmes: ... artillery barrages.

Mark Cunningham: ... you saw ... who you were shooting at?

Mr. Holmes: Not always because most of the artillery came from far away and we didn't ... couldn't do anything about that or see anything.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: We could see the machine guns and the fire but we couldn't identify people or anything.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, so that ... what happened after the first ten days and you ... you ...

Mr. Holmes: Well, we got a ... like I said, all of a sudden, we ... we had no officers, we had no non-commissioned officers, but we got reorganized a little bit for a couple of days. Then we went on fighting.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Where'd you go?

Mr. Holmes: Well, we just ... we were on the front lines, we just kept trying to move. We'd attack villages and towns and just keep moving on, if we could.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Alright now, how long were you actually in combat during that ... that ...

Mr. Holmes: Almost every day.

Mark Cunningham: Your whole time on the continent?

Mr. Holmes: Well, yes.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: Some, you know, sometimes if ... others would get ahead of us, and we might take the day or something and we'd have to catch up.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: (Unintelligible) something moving.

Mark Cunningham: Alright had ... had you lost some buddies by then?

Mr. Holmes: Oh yes, yes. All the time. In fact, I think there was some figure that combat infantrymen and the average length of time before they're killed or wounded was about two weeks.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Did you get wounded at all?

Mr. Holmes: Uh, I was going to go into that later. Uh, actually I was never wounded. I was cut up and bruised and everything from ... everything from opening C-ration cans to falling and getting through the brush and everything, and ...

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: ... cutting branches for camouflage and ... but there's two ... I think it was ... (unintelligible), uh, there was always a battle, a question in the Army, should the tanks and the infantry fight separately or should they fight together and that was from World War I and was still on. And ... and occasionally we had tanks with us but very seldom. But on this one day, apparently, we met and a tank group met and sort of passed except that made the tanks especially good targets that we were under the heaviest artillery barrage I ever was.

Mark Cunningham: Uh huh.

Mr. Holmes: And all I could do was hit the ground and try to lie low, and you know, the German shells would ... when they'd hit the ground, they'd explode and they'd send all the shrapnel out in every direction, most of it just a few feet above the ground. So, you couldn't stand, and if you found a low spot, you ... you had a chance. And I always sort of figured that I wasn't going to last long. In fact, I never bothered to brush my teeth or anything (laughter), and ... but also I felt that an artillery barrage or even machine gun fire was a chance; I might get hit or I might not, and so in ... in a way, it didn't ... it didn't scare me so much. I figured maybe it won't happen to me now. But

I tell you ... time I figured I was only good for a couple of weeks or so. But anyway, this was the heaviest we ever had.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, now all this time, no change of clothes, nothing?

Mr. Holmes: No. Not for my whole time in fact.

Mark Cunningham: Any hot meals?

Mr. Holmes: Occasionally. Sometimes I ... sometimes our cooks were brave to bring us a hot meal. But sometimes the cooks were brave to bring us a hot meal, but very few. Sometimes we weren't fighting or something or we were a little bit behind the lines.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Now by this time ...

Mr. Holmes: Is it on or off?

Mark Cunningham: I'm sorry?

Mr. Holmes: Is it on or off? Is that still on? Okay.

Mark Cunningham: Oh yeah.

Mr. Holmes: I just wandered 'cause I ramble so much.

Mark Cunningham: No, no, no. Yeah, I'm ...

Mr. Holmes: But any anyway ...

Mark Cunningham: ... I'm ... I'm watching you and I ... I can tell when your voice is not picking up.

Mr. Holmes: Well, I ... I could ... I could go on for a week.

Mark Cunningham: 'Cause you're picking it ...

Mr. Holmes: But ...

Mark Cunningham: You (unintelligible).

Mr. Holmes: ... that's ... trying to cut it down a little bit.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, now ...

Mr. Holmes: But anyway, this day in this heavy barrage, because the tanks were with us, they were a better target, I guess (cough). In fact, all of a sudden, everybody said, "Did you see that?" And I missed it. But apparently a tank commander was standing up in the turret and he got himself with a direct shell and just splattered all over it, but I ... I didn't see that.

Mark Cunningham: Oh, my goodness.

Mr. Holmes: But anyway, I was laying there, and I could hear the ... the shell fragments whistling past me and hitting the dirt around me and I was being splashed with dirt from the explosions when they hit the ground. And that was the roughest I ever had. And then when I got up, I wasn't wounded, but I got up and the pack on ... on my back was just torn to shreds. And the canteen on my belt on the back had holes through it.

Mark Cunningham: And you didn't get a scratch?

Mr. Holmes: But I ... but I didn't ... wasn't wounded. And then another day, we were advancing and suddenly got some shell ... some artillery fire, and the man next to me fell wounded. But I didn't feel anything, and I kept going which we had to do; we weren't allowed to stop or there would have been no attack. Somebody else could ... (unintelligible) a long way, but anyway, that ... that night, and we stopped in the woods and sort of regrouped and not fighting. And I was carrying a canvas bag of ammunition, and it was ... uh, it was the ... the shells in the ... in the metal magazines, and I found ... and I saw my bag was torn. So, I (unintelligible) and a shell fragment just about the size and shape of a nickel had gone through two ... about two magazines and was embedded in the third. I tried to keep it for a souvenir and put it in my pocket, but I lost it.

Mark Cunningham: Wow.

Mr. Holmes: But that's ... that's two times that ...

Mark Cunningham: Pretty close, huh?

Mr. Holmes: ... of course, it was lots closer other times, but that's the two times that I had some evidence of it (chuckles).

Mark Cunningham: Now, by this time, the weather is prob ... probably getting bad, right?

Mr. Holmes: Well, first thing was the heavy rains, everything was a sea of mud.

Mark Cunningham: Yeah, would that have been in the fall?

Mr. Holmes: Yeah, the end of the summer or the ... well, the fall, yeah. It was very rainy, everything was muddy.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. When did the ... when did the snow start snowing? When did it get cold?

Mr. Holmes: Oh, I'm trying to think. It cert ... it certainly did. (Pause) I think around Christmas time.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Now, how did that affect the combat?

Mr. Holmes: Well, it didn't affect it all, except that finally we were racing across, so fast across France, that the ... the high command thought we'd won the war, it was going to wind down (chuckle) which was absolutely wrong.

Mark Cunningham: Right. Alright now ...

Mr. Holmes: And we were even told we might stop where we were and stay there for the winter.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: So, right around Christmas time. But then the Battle of the Bulge came and ...

Mark Cunningham: Okay, when ... before you ...

Mr. Holmes: ... and we ... except we got involved in that thing.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. I want to ... I want to ... I want to get into that.

Mr. Holmes: Yeah.

Mark Cunningham: But I want to ask you one other question, I forgot, I want to back up a minute. When did Patton take over?

Mr. Holmes: Well, he was already ... uh, one ... in the beginning there was an elaborate plot. The Germans expected that our best soldier was going to lead the invasion.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: And there was a big plot to pull that and ... and the Army and everything made ... acted like he was going to lead it and everything. And they had all kinds of dummy, blown up balloon tanks and dummy airplanes scattered around and everything.

Mark Cunningham: That was in England, right?

Mr. Holmes: That was in England, yes ...

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: ... before the invasion. And then when the invasion came, the Germans were waiting to see, "Well, where's Patton going to be? That's going to be

the big part.” And so they were confused a bit for maybe a couple of weeks. They didn’t really know what was going on, and they ... and they didn’t really know how to plan their defense.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: But then ... but then Patton took over in the second wave. In fact, they wanted ...

Mark Cunningham: Were you already in Europe when he took over?

Mr. Holmes: (Pause), we were ... were still in the States on ... in when the invasion.

Mark Cunningham: I’m sorry?

Mr. Holmes: We were still in the States when D-Day happened.

Mark Cunningham: Yeah, I know. But when Patton took over the 87th or the Third Army?

Mr. Holmes: Uh, I’m not sure.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Alright now ...

Mr. Holmes: But, like I say, talking more about tactics than myself, but D-Day was a success, very, very bloody, but ... but the ... the Army to maybe twenty miles and they couldn’t get any farther.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: And I was going to talk about Patton later. But he spent his whole life studying wars and everything.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: It was his only passion. And he had been in World War I, and most of the General’s staff and the leaders in England and everything, they didn’t know much about what was going on, and especially Eisenhower. His job, this is not about me, but his job had usually been assistant to Generals and things like that.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: He had no combat experience and didn’t know anything about it all, and that led to a lot of confusion. I guess the reason that he was ... the main ... his main job, I guess, was to work with the English and keep peace because the English Generals hated the American Generals and vice versa.

Mark Cunningham: Alright, now ...

Mr. Holmes: So, anyway, the whole crazy War Department and everything ... they had a rule that you couldn't get ahead of the people on each side of you because your flanks were exposed which was a very, very good rule because the enemy could come in behind you and wipe out your communications and your supplies, and then from back was ... wipe out your army. So, that was a good rule, except that that meant that nobody could ever move because the people beside them hadn't. And so, they were in a kind of a stalemate until Patton came in. And he ... and he raced ahead, didn't worry about his flanks. But then suddenly, the enemy had to worry about their flanks, so they had to back up (chuckles) to match him.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: It reversed everything, and it worked and the other one didn't. But that's the way Patton was.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Alright now ...

Mr. Holmes: Back to us (chuckles).

Mark Cunningham: ... where were you when the Battle of the Bulge began?

Mr. Holmes: Well, we'd been fight for a while, right around Christmas somewhere. And this is interesting that the Third Army, I don't know how wide a front the Army had, fifty miles, a hundred, maybe more, and on one side was the First Army and on the other side was the Seventh Army. And by some strange chance, the Battle of the Bulge, the German attack started on one border of the Third Army ... in the First Army, and we were on the other border next to the Seventh Army. And then something else ... when this happened, our Generals forget the war is almost over, and they were coasting toward the end, and like I said, there was even talk like we might stay where we were in ... in houses for the winter, then this caught them by surprise. And it was aft ... I ... I read a ... being involved with Patton and everything, and everything was just absolute confusion. I didn't know what was going on; my officers didn't go on; nobody did because soon as the battle started, everything changed. And so, I was very anxious after the war to read about all this and read about Patton. And anyway, the ... the

counsel ... (unintelligible) like counsel and everything in England, what I read later, was absolutely confused. They didn't know what to do. And then one thing ... Patton ... he studied everything, he considered what might go wrong and he had a contingency plan for every ... what he'd do in case something went wrong. And so, everybody was hopelessly confused and Patton said something, I don't remember the numbers at the meeting, "If you can get me transportation, I can have fifty thousand men there in two weeks," or something like that. And apparently, they got him his transportation and he did. And I think the first ones to go over us on the other end of the Third Army; we just abandoned the area. The Seventh Army was supposed to come in and take over.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, was that the relief of Bastogne?

Mr. Holmes: Sort of.

Mark Cunningham: Were you in that?

Mr. Holmes: Sort of; I never knew exactly where I was, but they were ... the streets, the mileage signs were still up everywhere, and I saw a sign, "Bastogne – six miles," and things like that. You know, they all removed all (unintelligible).

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: About the (unintelligible), whoever it was invading, but where to go, but they were still up in that area. And the Ardennes was a funny, funny place. For hundreds of years, all the European wars went around it; they didn't go through it because it was very, very hilly, and very giant pine trees and everything. You could hardly maneuver an army through all that, and tanks had trouble but they helped a lot. But not ... not about this ... this move. We must have been one of the first ones to move, and we ... we pulled back quite a ways. And then we were loaded, and it turned out they were Air Force supply trucks that brought the ammunition and the food all the supplies from the coast to the ... to the Air Force bases. And these were giant trailer trucks. They were ... sort of had civilian and half military. So, we loaded onto them, and we rode for a day. And we stopped overnight in

a ... in a small town that only civilians had moved out of. And we stayed in houses, and in fact, I happened to stay in the town jail. Some of the people slept in cells. And then next ... and we had a (unintelligible), and I guess we had a breakfast the next morning, and the trucks are all lined up. Then we started getting on the trucks. And then we were ... we were strafed by the Germans. The only time I was ever strafed or had any account of the German air force at all. They were short of gasoline and everything. In fact, we kept coming by trucks and tanks that had been abandoned for lack ... lack of gasoline all the way through. But anyway, we got strafed; it wasn't bad. Then the second day we ... we arrived at the ... at the area then. We had one of our rough days. We went into an area that had been abandoned. Some of the troops where this happened were brand new and untrained, and they almost left in panic, I guess. And this was in an empty space, and the Germans were coming. And the retreating ... or I mean, built a bunch a road blocks every ... every few miles or maybe farther. And they were made of these giant logs; they were really big. And a pile of (unintelligible) they were chained or wire-rope together and booby trapped and everything by those retreating Americans. And we were set up in an empty place. We were set up around one of these road blocks to try and stop them, but we were only a ... one company there. And then we were set up sort of like a wedge around the road block. And our scouts knew that the Germans were coming ... (unintelligible) the next road block down. I don't know if it was a mile or twenty miles, but they'd sneak up and see what's happening. And they ... we knew they were coming. Then ...

Mark Cunningham: Now ... okay, was this are ... are we still ... are ... in and around Bastogne at this point?

Mr. Holmes: Nobody ever told me, but like I say, it (unintelligible).

Mark Cunningham: So, you don't know where you were?

Mr. Holmes: I saw the signs; we were within a few miles certainly.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: And I suppose we were trying to stop them, and ... and trying to defend Bastogne.

Mark Cunningham: Okay now, when did we actually recover from the ... start recovering from the German advance and start pushing them back? Now what ... what day ...

Mr. Holmes: Well ...

Mark Cunningham: ... weren't they trapped in some kind of a ...

Mr. Holmes: Well, Bastogne was a crossroad, and so that was very important for anybody advancing. And we were lucky, I think maybe one of the airborne divisions was there or something, and they put up a real tough defense. And they're able to hang on. And it just happened for a month, the weather was so bad the Air Force couldn't fly; it's probably why we had the trucks available to us. But for a whole month, the Air Force couldn't fly, and they couldn't defend us or anything, so it was tough. But these defenders did a fantastic job.

Mark Cunningham: Okay now, how ...

Mr. Holmes: Because there were even some Germans between us and Bastogne. It was absolute confusion.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: I want ... I want to tell you about the German advance, too, before we forget. But anyway, we got there ...

Mark Cunningham: I'm sorry, you want to tell me about what?

Mr. Holmes: Well, I don't want to forget to tell you about our first advance ... adventures with the advancing Germans, but let me come to this. We were dug in, kind of a wedge around this road block. The road went down with half of us on one side and the other, and we were in ... in foxholes. I don't know, maybe thirty, forty feet apart; there weren't many of us. And we were in the second, and in the first one there were two men. One of them was my new squad leader, his second day as a squad leader. Fact, he irritated me a little bit while we were advancing 'cause he'd say, "Spread farther apart, get closer together." But he was just trying to do his job; it didn't bother

me any (laughter), but he just kept saying that all day. But anyway, then all ... all of a sudden, shots started ringing out that morning; it was still dark. And two men came running up and my partner and I both said, “Don’t shoot, he may be ours!” And it was the two men from the other foxhole, but it was still dark. And a shot rang out and they flopped down at ... my foxhole. One of them, he was dead from that shot.

Mark Cunningham: Uhm!

Mr. Holmes: From ... who knows where.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: But anyway, I guess they had a handy-talkie radio and ... and he’d be told to ... he’d been told to retreat, so he was started to do that, so we did. And by that ... there’s confusion everywhere from every direction ... shooting and everything. And ... but we’d ... we’d pulled back and finally got farther back, and eventually a truck took us back, and so, we left that area. And it turned out, you know, two-hundred-man company but some of the cooks and the supply sergeant and the first sergeant ..., “Don’t fight; keep your eye, but don’t fight.” And ... and we were ... of course, are way down from casualties, but very few replacements. So, we might have been a hundred men fighting. But we pulled back, and it turned out there were just twenty-three of us, and we never even really knew what happened. And then we went away in that truck. A couple of days later, we went back to see this though, and I saw my pack (laughter), and everything I had left. My gas mask ... still there. But anyway, we never knew what happened. But then, after the war, I was ... well, after the European War, I figured I was done, I could relax a little bit, but then they sent us to Japan ... to go to Japan. But with all of us, on the way back in the States (unintelligible) a warning that ...

Mark Cunningham: Okay now, alright let’s ... let’s ...

Mr. Holmes: I’ll tell you a lot about that later but ...

Mark Cunningham: ... let ... let’s back up a minute.

Mr. Holmes: Yes.

Mark Cunningham: Uh, okay, when do you ... did you start moving forward after the Battle of the Bulge? Where'd you go after the Battle of the Bulge?

Mr. Holmes: Well, the battle lasted for months ... till ... till they were finally beaten all the way back to where it started.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: Then we just ... Third Army, and we soon came to the ... soon we came up to the Rhine and the Mosel.

Mark Cunningham: When did you cross the Rhine?

Mr. Holmes: Well, let me go back to this where there were only twenty-three of us (unintelligible).

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: And at the end of the ... oh, at the end of the war, I was on the way back to Japan and the war ended when I was in the States. And so, our division was disbanded. It was probably the First Combat Division, but I don't know, and I was sent to work in the Separation Center. And we got off the train, we got onto trucks at the Separation Center and we were a group that, you know, has been together, and all of a sudden, our truck driver was one of the people that was there at that battle.

Mark Cunningham: I'm sorry?

Mr. Holmes: We got off the train and got onto trucks, and our truck driver was one that had been at that battle. He'd been taken prisoner.

Mark Cunningham: Oh okay.

Mr. Holmes: And ... and been released and they had him working in the States in the Separation Center. So, he told us what happened with the main part of it was on the other side of the road, and everybody on the other side of the road was either killed or capture, and he was captured. He'd been a prisoner of war; we were so surprised to find him and talk about this!

Mark Cunningham: Wow.

Mr. Holmes: But now, back to everything else. Oh, well we ... we lost that day, but ... other people to go over, and the Germans didn't get much farther, so they stopped. But they were still around Bastogne and everything, and fighting

there went on for ... for at least weeks. And what I was going to say, this was ... this was a surprise to everybody, but the Germans, first of all, like I said, Patton ... he had contingencies. He knew what was going to happen, and he knew what he was going to do about it, so he ... he was ready to make this move when everybody else at headquarters was dumbfounded, but he was able to get the transportation and we did it. So, then eventually we started pushing back. But when this was started it had been carefully planned. In fact, Patton ... Patton knew it was the logical thing to do and everything, he knew it was coming, so he (chuckles) he had ... he had plans.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: But the first attackers, they were English speaking and they were wearing captured American uniforms and using captured American trucks and everything, so it was tremendous confusion. And so, everybody challenged everybody, "Who goes there?!" Nobody ... nobody (chuckles) knew who was who. And so, the people on our side, they just asked questions. They'd ask about movie stars and sports figures and everything 'cause that was something that we knew and the ... the other side didn't (chuckles), but that was ... that was a crazy confusing time. But my big memory about all that.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: But then we just eventually ... but Bastogne was saved and we slowly pushed them back.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Now, where did the Third Army go after that? Where did ... where did you head to?

Mr. Holmes: Well, we headed to Germany.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. And ... across the Rhine?

Mr. Holmes: Uh hum. Uh, we'd already been in Germany, but we hadn't crossed the Rhine incidentally.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Now, didn't you ... didn't you ... didn't ... didn't the Third Army go into Czechoslovakia eventually?

Mr. Holmes: Yes, we were ... everybody that was headed for Berlin, but near the end, they had already decided on the occupation zones and we were in the Russian zone.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: And we figured their ... headquarters figured there was no point in fight too hard to get further, and so everything diverted to the south. Instead of Berlin, they headed for Austria where the Germans supposedly planned the last-minute retreats and everything like that.

Mark Cunningham: Uh hum. What did you think of Eisenhower's decision not to go into Berlin?

Mr. Holmes: Why, I think that was the genius of his ... amazing that they ... public, the politicians or ... or Army people could ... could see that. Saving an awful lot of lives.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: Plus, the Germans and the Russians got to hate each other, and they walked (unintelligible).

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: So, let them get killed. And ... and actually we went into Czechoslovakia (throat clearing).

Mark Cunningham: Now, by the time you got down there, there was not a lot of resistance, right?

Mr. Holmes: It lessened as time went by. In fact, I want to talk a little bit about that, but later. Now (throat clearing), yeah, they raced all the way through, you know? They were running out of men and gasoline and supplies and everything. So ... so, every day was almost was a little bit easier except for the Bulge, and then it was just every day fighting; I didn't see anything different. But apparently that was the big battle of the whole war. I didn't realize it at the time, and ...

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: ... and it took a couple of months before we were back to where we started.

Mark Cunningham: Right. You must have ... you were in combat, constant combat, from the time you went on the ...

Mr. Holmes: Uh hum.

Mark Cunningham: ... on the continent. That would have been sev ... couple of months after D-Day which would have been sometime in the late summer.

Mr. Holmes: Yeah.

Mark Cunningham: Right?

Mr. Holmes: I don't remember ... when it was but ...

Mark Cunningham: All the way to the time the war ended?

Mr. Holmes: Yes.

Mark Cunningham: That's a lot of fighting?

Mr. Holmes: That ... that is. Especially since people didn't last long. And I don't know how I lasted so long, except maybe ... maybe I learned something when I ... when I went along. I learned how to duck and (chuckle), and how to hide behind trees (laughter). Things like that.

Mark Cunningham: Yeah. When ... when the ...

Mr. Holmes: But it was on ... in fact, there were only two men in our company that fought all the time and lived through it. Oh, the others went through it, they got wounded and went to the hospitals and everything and eventually came back, but there were only two of there the whole time in combat ... in the ... I ... I think I'll (unintelligible) this (unintelligible) or something. If there are only six men or something left after ... after the whole thing from D-Day.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Alright, now where were you when the war ended?

Mr. Holmes: We were in Czechoslovakia.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: And not fighting very hard.

Mark Cunningham: Alright, (unintelligible).

Mr. Holmes: In fact ... in fact, we just stopped and waited at the ... the end. I guess they were negotia ... negotiating and everything, but (unintelligible) probably.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Now, were you figuring that you were going to get sent to Japan?

Mr. Holmes: No, I was figuring I did my part, and my war should be over (laughter).

Mark Cunningham: Was that what happened?

Mr. Holmes: Well, no. Almost immediately, oh, it was confusion for a month or so, and we were taking in prisoners and by the thousands and everything. And ... but then ... then we picked to Jap ... go to Japan, and so we got started on moving back and everything. We stayed at a couple of camps near the town and do the last things before we shipped out. Oh, this time I was in the hold of a freighter, and the bunks were seven high (chuckles) in the hold.

Mark Cunningham: You remember the name of the ship?

Mr. Holmes: Uh yes, it was a Like (sp?) ship, Like's line from New Orleans; I don't know the name of the ship.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: Yeah, I do; it's the Perfect Likes (sp?), but they had a lot of ships.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, but it was a freighter?

Mr. Holmes: It was a freighter, yes, and probably one these new wartime ones that was ... very minimum of about everything.

Mark Cunningham: Not very comfortable accommodations.

Mr. Holmes: Absolutely nothing.

Mark Cunningham: Right, when ...

Mr. Holmes: We had this high row of bunks and everything and the bunks all around them, and many of the people slept on deck because it was more comfortable than the bunks.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: Which brings up an interesting thought (throat clearing). Along the way, we ... when I was a child, we moved back (unintelligible) between Pennsylvania and Massachusetts several times, and my father got transferred to Massachusetts and we took up a ... took up a summer house on the beach for the summer before we got a permanent house. And I had an uncle who was a Navy officer, and he just happened to be stationed nearby, maybe New Haven, Connecticut or something and he visited us a

couple of times. And ... and then one ... one time he had a son in the merchant marine; this was before ... long before the war. And we went to visit him, and we went to Commonwealth Pier in Boston and we visited his ship and everything. Went to ... looked over the engine room and all that. And then when I came back, we came to Boston, we came to Commonwealth Pier (cough).

Mark Cunningham: Wow.

Mr. Holmes: So, the same thing again.

Mark Cunningham: Yeah.

Mr. Holmes: But anyway, where was I?

Mark Cunningham: Okay now, uh, when did you come ... when ... when did you come home?

Mr. Holmes: Oh, we ... we were on our way, and we, of course, stopped in the States and we got a furlough. And ... and they dropped the bomb in Japan and the war ended. And then we went ... we were reassembled again at Fort Benning, and then ... and then we were de ... deactivated; I believe probably the first combat outfit to be deactivated.

Mark Cunningham: So, that meant you got out?

Mr. Holmes: No, that meant I got transferred.

Mark Cunningham: Oh, where'd you get transferred to?

Mr. Holmes: Got transferred to Separation Center.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: And interestingly, it was in Pennsylvania where I was from. So, sometimes I ... I wanted to go home on the weekends, but ... but we were real busy at first. And we worked seven days a week, I mean, every day. And then later, well, first what happened, we were ... I was on a real long alphabetical list the way I got into the, you know, the infantry when everybody went. And they went down the list and "You ... you, a hundred and seventy men, you're going to go to this place and work, and you two hundred men, you're going to work in this place."

Mark Cunningham: What kind of work were you doing?

Mr. Holmes: I didn't know; I was told I would have a chance of a clerk or a truck driver. I was still a Private, and I didn't know. But we went down this list, then there were six names, "Go to the Army Finance School," and I was in it. Fabulous change of luck! No reason, no knowledge or experience or anything like that. Just like ... just like I went from college to the infantry. No thought about anything about qualifications or knowledge or anything. Instead of being a clerk, I went to the Army Finance School for two months in Indianapolis, then I came back and worked on the final payment of the men being discharged. Army was crazy, but at least, I had a little good luck for once.

Mark Cunningham: When did ... when did you actually get discharged, do you remember?

Mr. Holmes: Oh, pretty quickly 'cause I had a lot of points from my combat.

Mark Cunningham: (Throat clearing), but it was after the war?

Mr. Holmes: Oh yeah! Yeah. After ... after the end and after my stint in the Separation Center. And I worked in an office there ...

Mark Cunningham: Now ... now, okay, I ... I got to ask you ... I got to ask you a couple of questions.

Mr. Holmes: I ... I got so much to say and I'm so confused and don't know how to say it and when (chuckles).

Mark Cunningham: No, no, no. Well, this is an interview; we'll do what we can.

Mr. Holmes: Uh hum.

Mark Cunningham: What you've given me so far, it's fantastic. Uh, okay (throat clearing), all that combat ...

Mr. Holmes: Yes.

Mark Cunningham: ... how did that impact you after you got home? Did you have the nightmares, the flashbacks?

Mr. Holmes: I think I saw as much combat in war as anyone, but I ... I didn't, strange kind of. I got out of the ... the Army, I forgot about it and never thought about it. (Chuckles), until this question of the interview came up, then I thought about it a lot, and I ... all kinds of memories came back.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: And if I don't forget, I got a lot of different individual things, but that never bothered me. I just ... just forgot the whole thing and went on to college and went to work. And I didn't rise from Private till the last couple of months (chuckles), but I did pretty well in civilian life. I traveled all over the world.

Mark Cunningham: Okay now I was going to ask about that.

Mr. Holmes: (Unintelligible).

Mark Cunningham: Now what ... what ... did you go back to school afterwards?

Mr. Holmes: Yeah, I went right back to school as quick as I could.

Mark Cunningham: And what'd you ... what'd you ...

Mr. Holmes: Uh, they didn't give me credit for anything I ...

Mark Cunningham: I'm sorry?

Mr. Holmes: They didn't give me any credit for what I did though, but of course, it was later and forgotten, and I ... I was exempt from physical education in reserve officer training course (laughter).

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: But I missed something not taking gym. In high school, gym was calisthenics and sometimes we'd chose up sides and play baseball or basketball.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: But I ... I didn't know what I was missing. In physical education in college you get ... learn golf or tennis, bowling, horseback riding (chuckles), fencing ...

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: ... wrestling, anything! And I ...

Mark Cunningham: But where'd you go to school?

Mr. Holmes: I went ... Penn State because I was in Pennsylvania and it was far enough, what, a couple hundred miles from home.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Uh, what was your degree in?

Mr. Holmes: Mechanical Engineering. Oh, when I ... was going to say, when I joined the ... when I graduated from high school, I had ... my ambitions was

getting interested in travel ... I wanted to visit all forty-eight states, and when I got out of the Army, I wanted to go to college to study engineering, but I didn't know how I'd pay for it. But I figured I'd work ... I'd just go to school, when the winter was gone, I'd work till I had enough to go back to school again, and I'd do it that way. But then, of course, the GI Bill came along.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: And they got a wonderful group of people, people that you know had already seen ... seen the war and everything, knew they had to get a good education and all that and they ...

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: ... really hard working.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Now, when you graduated, what'd you do? Did you ... what ... who'd you work for or did you work for yourself or what?

Mr. Holmes: Well, there's a (unintelligible) so the first couple of years after the war, they were catching up on everything, then I got out in 1950 and things slowed down and jobs were scarce. But I ... I had sev ... I had several choices though from school, and I picked the one that I thought was the best. Uh, it was a central engineering department, and I preferred that over working in one plant because you ... you have much more experience, and you probably travel to the other plants and everything, and I was interested in doing all the traveling I could.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: And ... and this was in New York; this was after the ... the war in Europe and everything, and all the engineering was in the U.S. and New York was the engineering center of the world. But a funny thing happened. Uh, the company had six major plants and they ... and they hired six people. And we started off ...

Mark Cunningham: What was the company's name?

Mr. Holmes: Oh, that was National Biscuit.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Holmes: And everyone said, “What does a ... what does an engineer do at National Biscuit?” ... especially the friends of my girlfriend (chuckles).

Mark Cunningham: Huh.

Mr. Holmes: But the answer is, “They did everything.” They designed and built the plants, they designed ... had the ... all the manufacturing equipment built and everything, so they did everything. And of course, almost everything either had to ... the air had to be dried or humidified or certain high temperature or certain low temperature.

Mark Cunningham: Yeah.

Mr. Holmes: And so I was ... we were each sent to one of these six plants, and we spent a year going through every department doing every job. And our assignment was to learn as much as we could about making crackers and cookies (chuckle).

Mark Cunningham: (Chuckle).

Mr. Holmes: And it happened, one plant was built just be ... just before the end of the war. Everything was modern, see? Changed everything a hundred years in the baking industry. And then while I was going to college, they built a second one in Houston, but the four others were old ones. And I guess ‘cause I was in Pennsylvania, they sent me to Pittsburgh. But by a strange chance, they ... they were starting to make these improvements in the existing plant there, so I got a chance to see the old and the new.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: And all the engineers were coming out from New York making the ... help them make the changes and everything, so I got to talk to them, and got to help them. Of course, I was a ... a (unintelligible), but I got to help them learn about it, and I got a reputation for breaking in some (unintelligible) stop watches and if we used the ... called the sling cyclometers that just flung around in the air and it ... and you got some ... different thermometer readings and from that you calculated the humidity, and I broke a few of those (chuckles), but it was good natured.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: So, eventually then we got ... got ... this isn't about the Army, but ...

Mark Cunningham: No, I was going to ...

Mr. Holmes: ... I think its part of it. Let me ...

Mark Cunningham: ... I was going to take you back to the Army a minute. I wanted to ask you about your buddies. About the ... specifically if you kept up with them over the years.

Mr. Holmes: Uh, I was real close to just one, and we the two that lived through it somehow. In ... in training in the States, sometimes we'd go to town and ... and buy a big lunch, just to break the monotony. And it turned out that he was from a small, very small town in Massachusetts. And my grandparents and my father were born in the next town, so we had something to talk about and we got to know each other real well. And we ... we were often together, and we were the two that survived. And I don't ... I don't know why I did, but just went a day at a time and did what I was told and (chuckles) ... I was still there.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: But that was my ... my only closest buddy, but I knew a lot of ... well, we were together in ... in the unit. We weren't ... coming as individual replacements, so when I went overseas, I knew everybody in the company. And then on the ... when the war ended in Europe, the ones that had been wounded and everything were coming back, so I saw my old friends, some of them.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: And that was interesting. Then we went to the Separation Center and we were still somewhat together (unintelligible). Most of us were there, but we all had different jobs and ... and all kind of different things. But the first thing I did when I got out, I looked up everybody that I'd gone to school with, high school with, and we'd moved in ... in several different places, but I found them. What ... what did they do in the Army and everything, and I found many of them had been killed. And I found one ... one that I had gone to school with in the fourth grade or something. Oh,

and again, in the ninth grade, he'd been in the same program. He'd gone to college and served in the infantry. And then my ... in fact, the six of us who were hired, another one of them had been ... had been in that program, too. And then when I went to work, everybody was a vet ... veteran and we'd talked to each ... where we'd been and everything, and occasionally, I found somebody else had been in that program. And I found several here that had been in the program.

Mark Cunningham: Wow.

Mr. Holmes: And I ... I was going to say though, most of them ... were sent to college and they were like civilians. They were ... they were the only men in the college, everybody else were women. They had very little Army regulation and everything but I went to VMI which was just like West Point.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Holmes: And in fact, the General of the Army, Marshall, had only been to VMI, and Patton had gone there a couple of years while he was trying to get into West Point. So, besides all of our regular studies, we'd learn a little bit about military tactics and organization and everything. But I was ... I wanted to learn; I was happy with that.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Have you got anything else on your list that we didn't cover that you want to talk about?

Mr. Holmes: Yes, a lot of things. Uh, one of them ... was my strange experience. In fact, this was another thing. A couple of crossroads crossed at a ... at a town, and so big groups coming both ways were stopped by this one town, a little bit like Bastogne. And for some reason, we were sent to take it, but you know, they ... they were ready to move on and everything. We had an artillery barrage while we were coming and machine guns when we got close, and rifles, and we had killed and wounded. But somehow, they'd arranged that ... the last minute they ... they escaped. Then we got into town and then there was an artillery barrage on us on ... on their own people. And I hit the ground and I looked around and I was near a big sturdy stone house, so I figured I'd run in and get inside that house. And I

ran in and looked out the windows, and there were German civilians were in the house. And I looked at them, and they looked at me, but I was there peering around the window and everything. And then they ... they pushed the furniture back, they rolled up the rug and there was some big logs on ... big lumber on the ... on the floor, and they picked them up and had a room underneath it. And they all went down into the room, and then they called me to join them.

Mark Cunningham: This is a German family?

Mr. Holmes: Yes! They called me to join them, and I was so surprise, and ... and I thought a minute, and I did (chuckles). And when the shelling stopped, we all got out and I don't think a word passed between us or anything, but it was so strange.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: And then, it's of no importance, but I had one other little event like that I remembered. Now in the beginning, were going to capture a small town or a village. We get into position for a couple of days and finally we'd attack them and maybe it'd take a couple of days to take over, and then we'd have to reorganize for a couple of days. But late in the war, they finally ... then the new people ... one thing about the old people in the Army, they were ... they had no initiative or anything. You couldn't think of any ... just follow the rules, salute and everything. But the new people, you know, (unintelligible), they're ... they're trying to stay alive and they figured out things. And so, near the end of the war, we were finally organized, but one thing of course, it was flatter, so we advanced a battalion of men walking one at a time on each side of the road, and we'd have maybe four tanks who were riding with us on the road, and we'd go all day and we'd get tired. But when we got tired we'd jump on a tank and ride for a while, but not too long, ten minutes maybe till we were a little bit rested 'cause they were so uncomfortable. But we went along at walking speed all day. Sometimes we'd have a ... have a little battle along the way, and sometimes we'd be in a high spot and we'd see the Germans retreating a couple of

miles down the road. And sometimes we'd have ... little battles and ... and between the tanks and infantry, you usually made pretty quick work of them. And then ... then at the end of the day, they'd pull into repair defenses that had already been set up for them, and they'd put in a (unintelligible), and we ... and we couldn't ... we couldn't take them, and we probably didn't try too hard anymore 'cause ... 'cause in the night they'd be gone, and we'd go ahead the next day. And one thing I had ... nothing to do much else was one of the things I remembered. We ... we were moving fast and, you know, when we were coming, the Germans were just scat ... get out of town, get out of the way; they could see what was happening, I guess. And many town or villages, they draped sheets over things, kind of a surrender. They didn't want any fighting there.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: And we came to this one town and the whole thing was covered, like I never saw anything so white before. It had nothing to do with anything, but just that it was different. And the people in town were standing along the road watching. And it was nothing, just very different that I remembered it. But there's one hairy old man with long beards and mustache and everything, and he was standing firmly there and he was right where I was headed, and he wasn't getting out the way, and I wasn't getting out of the way. So, I ... (laughter) (unintelligible) and everything and I ...

Mark Cunningham: You did what?

Mr. Holmes: I just brushed against him, we rubbed each other and we ... we just moved a little bit and kept on going, but ... but he was ... with long whiskers and moustache and everything and looking so stern (laughter), I just remember that; it was interesting. It had nothing to do with the war.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: But anyway, we ... we finally had things figured out and we ... we moved maybe all day, and maybe we'd get some ... some machine gun or artillery fire, and have a skirmish, eventually move on and keep moving again till

night. But one day, another time, (unintelligible) said, "Did you see that?" And I missed it. But there were two shots. A shell exploded right around us and another shot and it turned out that second shot was our shot and they shot a ... a German artillery piece a couple of ... a couple of miles away. And then next morning we left town, and we went by this shattered German gun, so finally knew what ... what happened (chuckle). And we spent the night in the town, and it had a brewery. And the Germans are all gone, but the story was that both the German soldiers and the American soldiers would go in there and getting beer and so, everybody drank a lot of beer that night (chuckle). And a lot of little things like that. Started to make some notes, but I can't read my writing, my hand shakes. (Scribbling sounds). I think I talked about the first day and the second day and the tenth day. Oh, there was absolute confusion; I didn't know what was happening, and my officers didn't know, then ...

Mark Cunningham: When ... when was this?

Mr. Holmes: Well, that's when (unintelligible) in combat.

Mark Cunningham: I'm sorry?

Mr. Holmes: When I started in combat. Everything was confusion and nobody knew what was going on. In fact, when the battle started, everything happened where it wasn't expected and ... and I ... I wonder why Patton was trying to kill me, so ... my first priority after I got out of the Army was to read what really happened. And I read up on Patton, and I decided that he was a military genius, smartest one we had ever had.

Mark Cunningham: Yeah.

Mr. Holmes: 'Cause he ... he studied it his whole life. (Unintelligible) he learned everything he could; he read the books by the former Generals and ...

Mark Cunningham: Right. Did you see the movie, *Patton*?

Mr. Holmes: Yes.

Mark Cunningham: And? Your thoughts.

Mr. Holmes: Uh, somewhat pretty good, not exact ... he was never at the front. But of course, he had people ... he had soldiers (unintelligible), but he was never

at the front. But they showed him saying, you know, some guy with a ... with a wagon and a donkey stuck on a bridge and holding up the Army, so he just said, "Shove them out," but that was it. Nothing would stop him which was good. But the things is he knew ... he knew what he was doing, and nobody else seemed to.

Mark Cunningham: You didn't see ... did you actually ... did you ...

Mr. Holmes: I saw him at a distance just once. And once a bunch of officers, I couldn't tell who was who, but they had a whole ... they had brought in a bunch of anti-aircraft with a ... I'd never seen an anti-aircraft gun.

Mark Cunningham: Uh, how was he actually viewed by the troops? I mean, I'm ... you're tell me ...

Mr. Holmes: Well, I'm saying that I thought he was trying to ...

Mark Cunningham: To kill you?

Mr. Holmes: ... almost like he was mad at me.

Mark Cunningham: (Laughter).

Mr. Holmes: And he didn't seem to care much about human life. And many times, you know, for his sacrifice of soldiers ... where if they'd taken a day or two and figured out a different plan, they'd probably done it with all the bloodshed, but ... but even there maybe it was right; the important thing is to go and not stop. And ... and I think that ... that saved us our lives even (unintelligible). We'd go along and we were so tired we could hardly take another step, and we'd keep going and ... and ... but the thing is that the enemy was the same way. And they didn't have time to organize any defense or anything, they just had to keep falling back, so it ... so it was a winning strategy. But no, we were ... we were just so exhausted sometimes. I wouldn't hit the ground because I too tired to get up.

Mark Cunningham: Yeah.

Mr. Holmes: Yeah, but it was right ... when I started to read about it. And he was ... he was a genius. And he studied the former battles and he'd studied the enemy generals and ...

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: ... and every time ... he always had a battle plan; he knew what he was going to do. And he ... and he also had a contingency. If something went wrong, what would he do?

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Holmes: And then nobody else had that. In fact, I followed that in my work later, so it was a big help to me. And ...

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Well, we ... let's ... I think that's got a pretty good view of your ...

Mr. Holmes: (Unintelligible).

Mark Cunningham: ... of your military background.

Mr. Holmes: Uh hum.

Mark Cunningham: And ...

Mr. Holmes: I wish I could have organized it quickly and ...

Mark Cunningham: Well, that's ...

Mr. Holmes: ... might have ... better, but ...

Mark Cunningham: ... I ... I think we're doing ...

Mr. Holmes: ... if you think you sort out this ... we can really miss ...

Mark Cunningham: Oh, we'll sort it out. But I want to thank you again for doing the interview with me.

Mr. Holmes: Well, I hope it's ... I hope it's some help.

Mark Cunningham: Well, I hope ... I ... I know it's going to ... I know it is; I know it's going to be a good one. I'm going to go ahead and shut the tape down then.

Mr. Robert G. Holmes
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