

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. David L. Houston

Date of Interview: May 17, 2016

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Interview in progress.

Mike Zambrano: Today is May 17, 2016, and this is Mike Zambrano. Today I'm interviewing Mr. David L. Houston at his home in Austin, Texas. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

Well, sir, as I always start with, could you please tell me where and when you were born?

Mr. Houston: I was born in Wichita Falls, Texas on June 4, 1921.

Mike Zambrano: 1921. Uhm, what did ... what were your parents' names?

Mr. Houston: My father's name was David L. Houston, and ... and he ... he ... my ... my mother's name was Kitty (sp?) Blackburn; they were in Corsicana, Texas.

Mike Zambrano: I'm curious but what does the "L" in your middle name stand for?

Mr. Houston: L was for Lipscomb (sp?). My father was named Lipscomb in anticipation of his attending the David Lipscomb College in Tennessee which was a, I believe, the Church of Christ and his father want ... intended that he become a minister. He attended for about a year and ... and left the college and was subsequently went into other fields of work.

Mike Zambrano: Well, what did he ... well, what did he work as as you were growing up?

Mr. Houston: He worked as a ... a salesman in heavy equipment for oilfield. The ... the ... had the equipment was (unintelligible) a special group of people who manufactured heavy tools and motors, wrenches, chain, cables, and derricks as used in the oilfield in those early days.

Mike Zambrano: I assume your mother was a homemaker?

Mr. Houston: Yes, she was.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Houston: I had one sister. She was eight years older than I.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Since you were born in 1921, you ... you grow up during the Great Depression.

Mr. Houston: Yes, I did.

Mike Zambrano: Can you tell me a little bit about how that affected your family?

Mr. Houston: I remember the day the stock market crashed in 1929 because prior to that date, my family lived a very modest life as ... and the ... however, we did pretty well, I felt. And after that date, within a matter of about three months, my father was out of work.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm!

Mr. Houston: And ... and was unable to find suitable employment until the beginning of World War II. And just prior to World War II, things began to clear up a little bit because the construction that was undertaken in preparation for the war that eventually came, uh, helped all commerce and industry. And things just generally began to pick up.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: But during the war, uh, the Depression, things were very difficult for us. My father went from place to place trying to find employment in the same field he had been in; it was actually fairly successful a time or two. When we went to Hobbs, New Mexico ... went there for a year, and there was a ... an oil boom in that area. As a matter of fact, and that flat terrain near Hobbs you could stand at night in one place, look around you and see one hundred rigs lighted up, so oil business boomed and crashed. And so, when it ... when a field like that was developed, it was all over and it was ... it was, again, a very desolate place after that. Anyway, that lasted about a year, and we returned to Wichita Falls when that crashed. At that time, Wichita Falls was pretty much in the depths of the Depression. For a year my father operated a service station halfway between Wichita Falls and Iowa (sp?) Park. We were about five miles out of town.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: And it was a center of agricultural area, a little ... little small crops of farms with small crops, few acres, and they provided the business of the Sinclair Station, so we operated ... he operated that for a year. We didn't move to near to town and still in a semi-rural area, so I was exposed to both the urban and the rural atmosphere of ... of the area. I was in the ... about the fifth or sixth grade and ... and went to the little two-room schoolhouses, and had wonderful teachers; they were just marvelous. I didn't realize it at the time, but they had masters' degrees and were working for almost nothing. And one teacher I was particularly impressed with was the principal. There were three teachers for seven grades and ... and he had been a World War I veteran and was a ... was a fine gentleman and very, very supportive of the effort of to improve the educational environment for the boys and girls of that age. At age ... at eighth grade then I went into the schools in ... in the city. The eighth through the eleventh grade were in Wichita Falls school system. I said eleven through eighth [s/b eighth through eleventh] and not twelfth you may have noticed because when funds became very tight for school systems in the '30s, the legislature knocked off the twelfth grade, and you ... a person was intended to graduate at the ... after eleven grades. So ...

Mike Zambrano: I've always wondered about that because a few other veterans had said they graduated from the eleventh grade.

Mr. Houston: That's right. That actually, I think, impeded most people who ... who received that education. I think it impeded them in work in college. It ... it certainly affected me. I didn't ... don't ... didn't for about three years, I worked at odd jobs, after I graduated, I worked at odd jobs as I could find including working for a bricklayer. I worked ... I had a small paper route, and my father somehow had managed to buy a car for me when ... after I graduated. I think he paid fifty dollars for a ...

Mike Zambrano: Wow!

Mr. Houston: ... 1929 Ford Cabriolet, a four-cylinder Ford. Uh, and this car provided me a means to at least move around. Therefore, I had a fifty-mile paper route that I threw from this car.

Mike Zambrano: Fifty mile?!

Mr. Houston: Fifty-mile paper route. The ... the paper route was out into the rural areas of Trav ... of Wichita County, and the car would ... uh, gasoline was eleven cents a gallon.

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckle).

Mr. Houston: And ... and I managed to receive income of about twelve dollars from ... from the ... this endeavor, and ... and I bought gasoline for the car and was able to operate it, obviously on a shoestring (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter).

Mr. Houston: And ... and so, that was quite an experience. After about a year and a half of that, I ... I heard about a job at a local hospital, and so, I went to work in the hospital as what would be called today, I guess, something like a ... a vocational nurse, male nurse. I worked ... it was a forty ... forty-bed general hospital and the only emergency room for miles around. Just ... it provided an intern at least around the clock. I had quite a broad experience there because often I would be the only male in the hospital at night ... at night, and ... and so, we took in everything that had occurred in ... in the ... Wichita County, and the surrounding counties. I was working there and one summer some other youths from other towns had come to visit in our neighborhood and we were walking along one day, and one of the boys mentioned that he was going to Hardin Junior College. Well, that was a junior college in Wichita Falls, and ... and I, you know, I was kind of shocked. I thought, "My goodness, he's going to college?! You know, if he can do that, anybody can!" (Chuckle)

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckles).

Mr. Houston: And so, in September of ... of 1941, I went out to Hardin Junior College and enrolled. Now, I had only eleven years of ... of school and did not have some of the basic courses that ... that people would normally have, even at that time, for entering into Pre-Med. And I thought, "Well, you know, I might ... might work out pretty well in that." And my father's father was a physician ... physician in Corsicana in Navarro County, and he had ... and there were other ... my aunt had married a surgeon in that city, my ... my uncle was a dentist,

and I began to think, “You know, medicine might be my field,” that, and so this fellow saying that he was going to college, my goodness, that was way up the line, you know. So ... so anyway, I enrolled and I think my tuition and everything for that first semester of 1941 was twelve dollars, and I ... I enrolled for twelve dollars, and so I attended and continued working at the hospital at the same time.

Mike Zambrano: What did your hospital job pay, do you recall?

Mr. Houston: Uh, it paid twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents a month. And later I was promoted to about forty dollars a month.

Mike Zambrano: And so, the tuition of twelve dollars, that cover all your classes?

Mr. Houston: It ... I think it covered everything.

Mike Zambrano: Wow! That’s incredible!

Mr. Houston: Yeah, books and everything, I believe. I may have had to put up ... buy a few things later, but that was about it. So, I took basic courses in Pre-Med – Chemistry, Zoology, English, Math, that was about it. I later read the qualifications of the people at ... at ... in that college at that time, and there were quite impressive I think now, even now more. One PhD in Zoology, uh the Master’s I believe and all the other classes, not too bad for that time. So, there at ... that was in September of 1941. Think of that date for a moment. In December of that year, was December 7th, 1941.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: So, then I hadn’t even finished the first semester. Anyway, as a student in ... in Pre-Med, I was allowed to finish the whole year. And so, I ... I would have been drafted in June of ... of ’41, but (cough) uh, ’40, I’m sorry, in June of ’42.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: But I ... I went ahead and volunteered; I felt that my parents would have been more pleased with me as a person if I volunteered rather than wait for the draft, so I ... I went into military service June 30th of 1942.

Mike Zambrano: Do you ... do you remember where you were when you heard the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Houston: Yes. I was, uh, a friend of mine had gone to visit friends in nearby town which was Denton, and in Denton there were North Texas State Teachers College and we knew some ladies who attended that ... that school, and we had been over there for ... and stayed overnight, Saturday night, and were returning to Wichita Falls on Sunday morning and had a little uh, radio in the car, and heard about Pearl Harbor. I didn't even know what Pearl Harbor was, where it was or anything. I just had no idea. Well, we soon ... soon found out what it was all about.

Mike Zambrano: Wow.

Mr. Houston: And that, again, was complete ... a shock because we knew it was coming, something was coming for sure with the Germans and the ... the German advances, we knew something was coming there; the whole country knew it but did not suspect that Pearl Harbor would be attacked by the Japanese.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: And so, there we were then, and I was ... I was sworn in on 30th of June, 1942. I immediately went to the ... to uh, to the reception center where we were classified according to our uh, background, whatever we had. Well, of course, when the people saw that I had ...

Mike Zambrano: Did you work in a hospital?

Mr. Houston: ... did, yet the astounding record of one year of Pre-Med and about two years in the general hospital and had taken first aid courses and was qualified as Firsts Aid Instructor; no question of where (chuckles) I was going to be sent.

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckles).

Mr. Houston: So, I went to Camp Barkley at ... in Abilene, Texas.

Mike Zambrano: Camp ... Camp what?

Mr. Houston: Barkley, B ... B-a-r-k-l-e-y, a U.S. uh, I believe named for a ... I believe he was a U.S. Representative or Senator and then the camp was named for him.

Mike Zambrano: Did you, I'm sorry, did you ... you enlisted in Wichita Falls though, right?

Mr. Houston: Correct.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Houston: And was sent for basic training to Camp Barkley. That ... and that was an eleven-week course, very basic, medical training – how to carry a litter and what to do ... first aid for a wounded soldier, and basic military training including how to wear a uniform, marching and fitness ... uh fit ... physical fitness program, and uh, and courses that included the Army General Classification, AGCT, I believe, Army General Classification, and I ... I scored rather high on that and was assigned to a medical unit then. Immediately after that, finishing the basic course, the assignment came and I had no idea of who ... of what I was being assigned to, but it turned out to be the Third Infantry Division (unintelligible) around here somewhere. The two ... two-inch blue ...

Mike Zambrano: Blue and white?

Mr. Houston: ... yeah, blue and white emblem with three white stripes diagonal with ...

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, I'm familiar with it.

Mr. Houston: ... (unintelligible) oh, there's one (showing the emblem).

Mike Zambrano: Which one there?

Mr. Houston: That ... there's ... see, History of the Third Infantry Division in World War II, a big book.

Mike Zambrano: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Houston: Can you reach that? Pull it down.

Mike Zambrano: I don't want to knock anything off there.

Mr. Houston: Uh, there you go, take it.

Mike Zambrano: I ... I'm curious, but okay, since you get some basic and medical ... since you get some basic medical training in basic training, do you also because you're ... that they already seem to think that you're going to some kind of a medical unit, do they teach you how to ... how to fire a rifle?

Mr. Houston: No, indeed!

Mike Zambrano: No?! Okay.

Mr. Houston: And ... and so, while I understand that medics in the Pacific were taught defenses with a weapon, uh, for those in the European theater, there was no need for it. We ... it, the Geneva Convention, generally, only generally was

accepted and respected pretty well. There were a few gross violations, but generally it was sort of accepted that medic wore the arm band was kind of (phone ringing in background) exempt.

Mike Zambrano: Uh, so we were talk ... I was asking you if you had received any rifle training in basic training.

Mr. Houston: That's ... that's right, I ... I had not. So, after about eleven ... eleven or twelve weeks of basic training, I was assigned directly into the, well known, well established, highly decorated division which was destined, although I wasn't aware of it, was destined to become part of the initial assault in Europe before World War II. The unit was the Third Infantry Division; this division had a very high record of accomplishment in World War I. It was nicked named the *Rock of the Marne*.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm.

Mr. Houston: You may have heard that (cough) report.

Mike Zambrano: Oh yes.

Mr. Houston: So, it was a well-known division. And the officers and men in that unit, many of them, or some of them, were veterans of World War I. I was assigned to the Third Medical Battalion which is a unit of about a thousand men including about, I don't know, possibly thirty or forty ... forty MDs. I'm guessing that; I had never thought about it before, but possibly that ... that many MDs. The unit was self-contained within a division. The division was an amphibious assault division which is essentially the same function as the Marine unit.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: And it consisted of about sixteen thousand assault men. The division actually was what is called a triangular division which meant that instead of four regiments as in World War I, it consisted ... three regiments and each regiment had a ... a separate company of medics which was a collecting company, and it had the ambulances, and the uh, ambulances and other transport ...

Mike Zambrano: Vehicles?

Mr. Houston: ... ca ... capabilities, yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Well, so, is it at Camp Barkley that you ... that you join the Third Medical Battalion?

Mr. Houston: Well, I was assigned.

Mike Zambrano: Assigned.

Mr. Houston: You see, you're assigned when you graduate, you're assigned to a unit. Maybe anywhere, any division. Some people might have been assigned to the 45th Infantry ... the 45th uh, or the 36th; you've heard of the 36th Infantry?

Mike Zambrano: Oh yeah.

Mr. Houston: The three (?) division moved together generally, so it ... in this part of the war – Third, 36th and 45th. Bill Malden (sp?), by the way, was sent to the 45th. Uh, Audie Murphey was in the Third Infantry.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: And lat ... he was in there later, but I didn't ...

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: ... (unintelligible). So, I ... I was assigned to this well-established Old, called Old outfit, that being ... definitely was not one of the many division (unintelligible) that were created at this time. We went to the east coast and had one dry run in Chesapeake Bay. A dry run was a ... actually, a training operation designed to create, artificially, all of the elements of real combat. And ... and in our case, invasion of foreign territory. After about, oh, a week or two in the east coast, uh, we were called one ... one evening to pack up and move out. We did; we moved out in ships that were all along the east coast and other locations. These troop ships loaded and designed for the ... the amphibious operation that was going to occur on November the 8th, 1942. That was the Invasion of North Africa.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: I went in at Casa Blanca, Fedala and other locations. Our unit went in at Fedala which was fairly close to Casa Blanca.

Mike Zambrano: I'm ... I'm curious ...

Mr. Houston: F-e-d-a-l-a, Fedala.

Mike Zambrano: ... being from Texas, you never ... you've never seen the ocean before, so, I mean, what's it like for you?

Mr. Houston: (Chuckles), my ... my ... one of my buddies from Texas, I believe he was from Stephenville, and he was absolutely sea sick from the time we got within a hundred miles of the coast (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Houston: Sea ... absolutely just knocked out, had ... had a terrible time. We were on the ship for seventeen days assembling ... we were assembling in the North Sea just about four thousand vessels – Navy and Army troop ships, air ... aircraft, everything, and all of this was swirling around in the Atlantic Ocean waiting for that moment we would land. And we landed on November the 8th. We had left uh, New ... Newport News on October 23rd, and landed on November the 8th.

Mike Zambrano: Tell me a little bit about the landing? What ... what wave did you go in with? How were ... well, what were you feeling?

Mr. Houston: (Cough), the assault units had to have been preceded by the people who went in undercover, very quietly, as much as I think a day or two before. And they had set up markers and a system of com ... communication so that when the major assault occurred, they ... we would have an idea of where we were going, what we were supposed to do. Well, my unit went in and most of the landings where they thought they were supposed to, occasionally there was a unit that would be lost and see, all this occurred in the darkness at the ... at the proper tide position. The tide has to be perfectly right, the slope of the bottom of the beach, the water has to be exactly right, the timing has to be exactly right, all this has to occur, and the weather has to be somewhat suitable.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: All of this that occurred ... very often and so in many cases, our units, the combat units, landed in rough surf and landed on ... on beaches that were not designed for that. The tide was not ... not perfect, and so, the whole thing, you see, matter of imperfections, almost everything that can go wrong, goes wrong. And of course, most of this had been planned for. The planners,

military planners, tried to anticipate as many of these things they can. In my case, we went in the morning after the initial invasion; the troops went in first and secured the beachhead.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: Then our troops went in later, and in my case, we went in at night and landed on the wrong beach. We weren't where we were supposed to be because the command of this unit was MDs, doctors, who are good, good physicians, but in many cases, they did not have the skill or the training of the ... of some infantry or ... artillery or armor, other, and I do not fault them at all. I mean, our ... our officers did very well, but we were kind of ... well, we were lost, didn't know where we were, but we got ashore. We were not under fire because most of that had been terminated after the initial assault ... assault. And there was ... there was air ... air activity – strafing by the ... by the Germans, so ... so, our beaches were strafed and the ... and the artillery was (unintelligible) the enemy artillery was not able to reach in regularly at all, occasionally, yes. And so, we set up tents in the ... in the coast ... coastal area and ... and (unintelligible) tents (unintelligible) much, what you saw in MASH, MASH units.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Houston: Mobile Army Surgical Units, yeah. And our tents were similar to that and we set them up, and began to receive the wounded to transport the wounded on ... on to ships in the harbor, Fedala and Casa Blanca harbor. Our ... our ships, troops ships, were just sitting there like sitting ducks really, and the German submarines got into the harbor and sank five ships just like that. One ... one of being the ship I had just gotten off of. And so, we lost personnel who were still aboard the ship and that had not come ashore. They were lost in the ... as the ... as the ships were sunk.

Mike Zambrano: You don't remember what the name of the ship was, do you?

Mr. Houston: I ... I didn't know it; it ... [USS] Lindenwood (sp?) was one of them, and then one [USS] Bliss, B-l-i-s-s was another. I'm sorry I don't recall the others.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, that's okay; I just thought you might know.

Mr. Houston: Lindenwood and Bliss were two. One of the ships, (unintelligible) Bliss that burned for two or three days, and so we received all of the people who were ... were recov ... uh, rescued off this burning ship. So, we had a *huge* number of burned victims. And this went on for, oh, a day or two. We were just overwhelmed with the burn victim ... burn casualties.

Mike Zambrano: Wow.

Mr. Houston: Our ... our purpose as a military unit was to stabilize the ... the burned, and as soon as possible, ship them back to a more secure area. And so many of them went directly back to the United States. Later we were able to establish general hospital in Naples, so I believe there was a Tenth ... Tenth Army Hospital, the 56 Evacuation Hospital; they were behind us, and just being in terms of the front. Uh, this ... all of this activity was essentially over in about four days. The initial beachhead activity ...

Mike Zambrano: Uh huh.

Mr. Houston: ... in the area was secure and the Germans in the area were either at ... retreated out or were taken prisoner. It also included the Italians. The Italians were there, and ... and under command of the general ... general troop ... German general troops. We were in this area for a few ... two or three weeks I ... I believe, and then were sent across North Africa from French Morocco to Algeria and then on to Morocco, Algeria ... Tunisia.

Mike Zambrano: What was your job at this time? What was your duty?

Mr. Houston: Uh, as a, at this time, I guess, it was discovered that we were in the area that had malaria, a great deal of malaria and I was very shortly assigned to ... to the ... the laboratory analysis of the victims who ... who had high temperatures, colds and had chills, alternate chills and fever, and my job was to take blood samples and then analyze them for the malaria infection in the blood stream.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm.

Mr. Houston: So, that ... that was an awful lot of malaria, so I was doing that which actually is lab work.

Mike Zambrano: So, lab work. And so, I ... I take it there was a ... well, there was a lab set up with the medical company?

Mr. Houston: No, there was no provisions, we just happened to have a microscope and ... and so, we improvised the whole situation. And I did other lab work, complete blood count, CBC and that sort of thing. So, we expanded as much as we could in a very crude way; it was pretty crude, but we did it. So, went on across to ... to Tunisia. Then Bizerte was a ... was a destination and they ... as a kick-off point for the next invasion. We subsequently ... subsequently went from Cascara (?), I believe.

Mike Zambrano: In Sicily?

Mr. Houston: Yes, uh huh. I believe it was Cascara.

Mike Zambrano: Cascara?

Mr. Houston: I believe it was. C-a-s-c-e-r-t-a [is in Italy, not Sicily]. Well, that was another beachhead landing ... we made another and then went to Naples.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, I just want to back up a little bit to North Africa. Uhm, first, what'd you ... what'd you think of it?

Mr. Houston: It was a ... a ... it was a, of course, a Texas boy, it was a ... just amazing to see. The, you might say, we were in the foot of the ... the Atlas Mountains which is the Sahara Desert was south of us and the Mediterranean Sea was north of us. We went along the coast in that area, and we, the natives in that area ... there were many different, of course. It was the French (unintelligible) that was there, there was the Moors, M-o-o-r-s, I believe they were called.

Mike Zambrano: Yes.

Mr. Houston: The Moors, and the (unintelligible) other ... other na ... uh, other nationalities. Are you warm? I am.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, I'm okay. Do you want me to open the door?

Mr. Houston: I'm afraid we're going to ... it's nice, you might try it.

Mike Zambrano: Let's see ...

Mr. Houston: See if that'll ... (sounds of opening a door). I'm getting kind of sleepy. (Unintelligible) a little while, and let's see.

Mike Zambrano: Sure.

Mr. Houston: That's a set louvre closed.

Mike Zambrano: So, were you doing lab work all your time in North Africa?

Mr. Houston: Oh, no, no, I did other jobs, too. We had to set up these tents, so I was ... all ... all of us were involved in setting up the tents. In order to set up, it ... four poster tents, that's the one that, well, it permitted cots or ...

Mike Zambrano: Bunks?

Mr. Houston: Yes. Sort of. They were set up on each side of this tent, maybe forty feet long and about twenty-four feet wide, so you could set up folding litters adjacent and have pathway with the four posts down the middle. You could provide for bed ... bedridden casualties in ... in litters. Litters were on the ground, so this wasn't very fancy.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: But it provided a ... protection from the sun and rain and that's about all it did really, protect you from cold weather. As we went across Tunisia and Algeria, we experienced heat in the day time above a hundred and ten degrees and at night, it was down near freezing, so it was extreme temperatures which made the ... made for difficulty caring for the wounded.

Mike Zambrano: I imagine this wasn't very comfortable. Did you have to take salt tablets?

Mr. Houston: Yes, we did. We took salt tablets and atabrine, a-t-a-b-r-i-n-e, hopefully a preventative for malaria, and eyeballs, eyeballs turn yellow, very yellow, and skin turned ... turned very yellow with those atabrine.

Mike Zambrano: Did you ever contract malaria while you (unintelligible)?

Mr. Houston: I ... I did not. I ... just lucky, I guess, you'd say. Uh, I did take the atabrine regularly. Of course, many troops were exposed to a situation where they didn't have ... they didn't have the atabrine, didn't have the protection or anything, so they couldn't ... contracted malaria. Okay, let's see, we had ... we had, of course, the normal fractures and large wounds.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: Gaping wounds in some cases, and they were all handled as best you can in a field situation. Again, it was ... the effort was to stabilize the patient and evacuate and that's why we were called the ... the ... we were clearing, a clearing company.

Mike Zambrano: Could you go into a little more de ... detail about what a clearing company does?

Mr. Houston: Yes. In the ... in the battalion, I mentioned earlier, three collecting companies who collected the ... the casualties from the ... off the battlefield. There was the one clearing company and it was a ... a ... more a surgical unit; it was kind of like a real operating room situation.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: And we were the go-between of the ... the casualty who been picked up, put on a litter, transported in a collecting company ambulance or jeep or whatever ... it moved, and moved the patient to our ... our unit which was the clearing. The clearing company then made the decision whether it was possible that the ... that the casualty could be sent back to the front, or, you know, very minor would, treated maybe for a day or two, sent back to ... to duty on the front or evacuated further to an evacuation hospital which was ... really became a hospital, that was more like a MASH Surgical Unit, that's pretty much like an operating hospital.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: And so, our ... our unit who was essentially one of the uh, triage places along the line ultimately back to the United States and sometimes relieved of duty, given medical discharge; some died along the way.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah.

Mr. Houston: Many who got some medical attention survived, but not as many as today. Today they just ... just save an awful lot of the wounded.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah, it's come ... come a long way.

Mr. Houston: They have medically, that's true. Of course, evacuation now includes a helicopter where they come right in, pick them up very quickly, get them out of there and not to a clearing company, uh, a collecting company, an aide station or an evac hospital, but right on back.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: And they do, I understand they do a fine job. So, we then had made about four ... four beachhead landings and the last one I ... I was involved in was An

... Anzio Beachhead. That was a ... a beach where two little towns are kind of on the shin of Italy, just about twenty or thirty miles south of Rome between ... between Naples and Rome.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: And as it was just a little time in the village that became ignobly or not ... not very well known because of its location and the beachhead that was established there. It was a ... when we landed on Anzio, there wasn't ... absolutely no resistance, total, just got on the beach. I happened (chuckle) I should ... shouldn't have done it, but I had a temperature of about a hundred, I was pretty sick, about a hundred and three degrees, didn't know much of what I was doing or anything, and somehow, I got a ... astraddle of one of the Long Tom[s], that's a 155-millimeter artillery pieces. I got on there somehow, and rode in, didn't even get in the water, just ... just came ... it was pulled ... pulled up, and I got onto the beach. And for three or four days, it was just no (unintelligible) at all. Ger ... Germans were taken by surprise and so we had a wonderful element in our favor. And it is said by many technicians, well, critiques, critics of the whole operation that we should have advanced at that time on up to the high ground, and we did not. Since the general made his decision based on the fact that if ... if amphibious operation fails, it is a total failure. You just don't fail in an amphibious assault; you do it! So, he did that, and he thought well, I guess he thought, I'm here and I'm not going to risk losing the whole Army, you know, by going on up to higher ground. Well, of course, that resulted in the Germans having those three or four days to bring their troops ... occupy the high ground.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: Look down from the cliffs right onto the beach and they had this (unintelligible) eighty-eight, artillery piece, and they could hit an Army blanket at about fifteen miles, you know? Just lay it right in.

Mike Zambrano: Wow.

Mr. Houston: So, it made it awfully bad, and our troops suffered.

Mike Zambrano: And ... and you, what was your experience?

Mr. Houston: Well, I was down on the beach in a medical unit and they were trying to avoid hitting us because we had red crosses there. And so, we was supposed ... supposed to be protected. In fact, by that time, a nurse's unit ... unit was Army nurses had been ... that ... landed just a few hundred yards from us, and one, I believe it was in the afternoon, the ... their unit came under fire and many of the nurses and patients were killed, and I still don't know whether it was friendly fire or was it ... was uh, German ... German fire.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm.

Mr. Houston: While we were on the beachhead ... that ... we landed on the beachhead on January the 22nd of 1944.

Mike Zambrano: What ... what date was that again?

Mr. Houston: January 22nd, 1944.

Mike Zambrano: What would you normally wear? I mean, uh ...

Mr. Houston: All across Africa, we were in wool ODs; hot or cold weather. These are one hundred percent wool shirts and trousers and khaki leggings, and just ordinary high-top shoes. We did not have a ten-inch boot which was later issued to almost everybody, but we had khaki leggings and the wool shirt and trousers, a steel helmet. And we had a light jacket, uh, longer than the ... I ... I carried it longer than that. We had gloves, a wool glove, and that was ... that was the uniform of the day.

Mike Zambrano: Did you have any ... any Red Cross markings on you? Any armbands, anything on your helmet?

Mr. Houston: Right, we had on the helmet, had Red Cross on each side of the helmet, had an armband with Red Cross, and that's it. We had a web belt, a little one half inch web belt with a brass buckle.

Mike Zambrano: Did you have a weapon?

Mr. Houston: No weapon.

Mike Zambrano: No weapon.

Mr. Houston: No ... absolutely. Uh, we had a ... a pistol belt on which we hung a canteen of water, a mess kit and a personal aid compress bandage, and that's about what we had on that pistol belt. That's ... that's a three-inch-wide pistol belt. We

had rain ... rain coat, and that was about it. We slept two men pup tents about three feet high, about three feet high.

Mike Zambrano: So, you had ... kind of squirm to get down in there?

Mr. Houston: Oh, you ...

Mike Zambrano: Pretty bad (chuckles).

Mr. Houston: ... you could barely get two ... two sleeping bags in there. Of course, our sleeping bags were lost when the ships were sunk, and we ... we were lucky to have a ... Army blanket and its right on the ground. So, Army blanket ... about it. Wasn't luxurious or anything, but sustainable.

Mike Zambrano: Now, you said when you went to Sicily, was that also part of the amphibious invasion?

Mr. Houston: Yes, it was.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Houston: That was an amphibious invasion in Sicily.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, in ... in the three places you described – North Africa, Sicily and ... and Anzio, uh, did you ever run across German prisoners? German or Italian prisoners?

Mr. Houston: Uh ...

Mike Zambrano: Do ... did you ever see any German prisoners of war or ...

Mr. Houston: Oh yes, yes. They ... when ... when (unintelligible) came right through, just like American, weren't treated any differently, German prisoners of war, the wounded came back as just the same as our ... our own men.

Mike Zambrano: And how did they act? Especially the Germans?

Mr. Houston: Uh, most of the time, they were unconscious (phone ringing).

Mike Zambrano: Oh.

Mr. Houston: They were badly wounded. And they were unconscious or semi-conscious because they had received morphine in many cases, and so they were just there.

Mike Zambrano: But what about the ones that were conscious though? Were they ... did you ever have any that were disruptive or ...

Mr. Houston: Oh, no. Never saw anything like that. I'm sure it happened, but we didn't see it.

Mike Zambrano: And was it odd to have them there? I mean ...

Mr. Houston: Yeah. Yeah, it was. You can't help but think, you know, I could be a ... I could be a wounded prisoner being taken ... taken back by German medics. Interesting thing about that – uh, when I went to graduate school at the University of Texas later, uh, my principal ... well, uh, principal on my thesis, we became close friends and worked together later when I was in Austin Planning Department, and he was a consultant. We were talking along and one day, we discovered that in World War II I had been a medic in the United States Army. In World War I, he had been a medic in the German army.

Mike Zambrano: Really?!

Mr. Houston: Yeah!

Mike Zambrano: Wow! (laughter)

Mr. Houston: He was ... he was, of course, fluent in ... he was raised ... he was German. And I thought, "Isn't that interesting? All this hostility, hatred deriding of another person's background, ethnicity or what?" All that, so unnecessary because we became close friends.

Mike Zambrano: Uh, he was your professor you said?

Mr. Houston: Yeah, yeah.

Mike Zambrano: I'm curious, but what was your thesis on?

Mr. Houston: I had a program, I was with the State Health Department as an Environmental Health Engineer, and ... and one of my programs was municipal solid waste, that is the administration of all the environmental activities over the state engineers out in various regions doing engineering analysis of environmental problems. And so I ... that's ... I wrote my thesis on that subject how the state might organize itself to maximize re ... recycling recovery and that sort of thing.

Mike Zambrano: Hum, interesting.

Mr. Houston: And so, anyway, he was the ... he was the professor on that. It ... I thought it was just ironic that ... to us shinnying up like that after all those years (unintelligible).

Mike Zambrano: What year did you graduate from the graduate program?

Mr. Houston: Uh, 1970.

Mike Zambrano: When we spoke on the phone a few weeks back, you said that at Anzio ... from Anzio you get shipped back to the United States?

Mr. Houston: Uh, I left Anzio in what was called the ro ... rotation. Today its an accepted activity, and these people serve when they go over ... to go over for a tour. They go for usually what are ... nine months or a year and a half, whatever; they don't know when they're coming back. When we went in service, we were told that if we went overseas, we would be there until ... termination of the war, plus six months.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: So, we had no intention or thought of ever coming back. However, they started in 1944 ... they started what was called a rotation (unintelligible) situation and they took the ... they took one or two people out of each company and sent them back to the States. They selected those people was on the basis of a point system – how long they had been in service, what they had done and so forth, and I happened to be one of the high-point people in my unit.

Mike Zambrano: That may be attributed to the fact that you were involved in ... in at least three amphibious landings?

Mr. Houston: That ... that and other activities you might have been awarded for. And so, I was lucky to get back, and very happy to come home from Anzio.

Mike Zambrano: You said that it was March of 1944?

Mr. Houston: Uh huh.

Mike Zambrano: Was it around there?

Mr. Houston: I left ... I was on the beachhead for ... from 22nd of January to the ... about the ... yeah, must have been around the middle of March of '44, very short time.

Mike Zambrano: What about friends, friends that were in your unit? Do you recall any of those?

Mr. Houston: Yes, I do. I had ... I made friends there with people that never would have met otherwise like, very likely, I'd never have met them. And, you know, in the military, you're all thrown together. Not only thrown together, but we were not there while I ... I was technically, I was there voluntarily, but really, it ... we were all drafted 'cause I ... I would never have been in the Army had ... had the war not brought me into the ... the service.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: So, we were thrown with a lot of people, just every shape and form you can imagine. And some were characters, some were studious, dedicated, acca ... academicians, others were farm hands, just everything you can think of.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: Some ... some from wealthy background, some very poor, right off the street, and I ... I just met some very nice people. A couple of them were ... one was my buddy who always was sea sick from Texas.

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter).

Mr. Houston: Another was a person who was, actually, he was a registered nurse and had been drafted in like the rest of us, and he was from California, but middle class, up ... upper-middle class. Others were artists, artists, students, uh, just everybody you can imagine. And I really felt ... felt very close to those people. You know, we were in situations together where we were uh, we were very dependent on the other, and that ... that ... its kind of the idea the brothers ... what's ... the movie, something about a brother?

Mike Zambrano: Oh, Band of Brothers?

Mr. Houston: Probably, or something like that. In our unit, there were no colored troops in our ... anywhere in our unit. There were transportation and other units of black solely black, usually commanded by a white officer.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: Later when I went to OCS, after I came home from Anzio, I was sent to OCS, and there ... it was the first time that any black troops had been assigned to ...

to a ... it was the first creation of a mixed background, I think or whatever you call it, of blacks and white. And I was in that type unit, and in my unit of thir ... thirty men, there were two black candidates, and they were real, they were top ... just like the guys (unintelligible), I was concerned or anybody else integration possibly could have been, to me, just didn't make any sense, that ever been any other way. But as I understand it now, after looking back on the '50, '60s and '70s, it couldn't have been earlier, and I'm surprised it worked when it did.

Mike Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Houston: Yeah. But anyway, these were ... one was a ... chemical engineer graduate.

Mike Zambrano: Hum.

Mr. Houston: And he was a candidate for ... for the ... we were in a transportation school and he was a candidate for commission, I don't know, anyway, I didn't see any problem with it.

Mike Zambrano: When you're overseas, do you have a ... much of an opportunity to write home?

Mr. Houston: Uh, yes, there was actually time. It was not always to do because it was quite a bit going on even when you supposed to be in a quiet situation. In those times, I tried to write home, and I think my mother, I'm pretty sure I have the collection of email, uh V-mail.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm.

Mr. Houston: You heard about V-mail?

Mike Zambrano: Oh yeah, those ... those little ones?

Mr. Houston: I've ... I've got a whole box full of them there ...

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckles).

Mr. Houston: ... of where I wrote home, and they wrote to me regularly just ordinary mail. And then they wrote email when ... V-mail when it ... it became possible.

Mike Zambrano: What would you do in your spare time if you had any?

Mr. Houston: Sleep, just rest. Try to find out if there was some civilian food available somewhere. You had somebody liberated a bakery or winery or something like that.

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckle).

Mr. Houston: One place we could get a five gallon GI can of cognac for a dollar thirty-five, I think it was.

Mike Zambrano: Wow!

Mr. Houston: (Laughter).

Mike Zambrano: Don't think you can get it for that today!

Mr. Houston: I ... I didn't drink though. I didn't drink, but I was responsible for the alco ... alcohol in our medical unit; that was a five gallon can of a hundred and ninety-proof alcohol. You could make any drink in the world out of it. And I had ... I mixed a ... a thing ... it was called Elixor of Turpenhydrate (sp?) with Codeine. That was a cough medicine, and you'd be surprised how many people developed coughs.

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter).

Mr. Houston: And they did ... they needed that; it was a pretty good drink (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckles).

Mr. Houston: But I was lucky, I guess lucky to be ... to be assigned to guarding of that alcohol.

Mike Zambrano: You mentioned from it ... there; what did you think of the Army food?

Mr. Houston: Good; it was nourishing. It had been ... it was better than I had enjoyed most of my life because it was ... it was ... you could a variation; it wasn't always the same thing. Except when we were in certain combat situations, you know, then it had to be just GI.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: GI food, packaged, cold and, you know, but when you were any ... in any kind of reasonable situation, the medics always got good food because the wounded really deserved the best you could give them. So, we had good food most of the time.

Mike Zambrano: Hum.

Mr. Houston: Of course, we also had the K-ration, C-ration, the D-ration. The D-ration was a little piece of high ... highly concentrated chocolate; it was like a Hershey

bar, and you couldn't eat the whole thing at one time. You weren't supposed to, it's so ... so concentrated energy, had a bunch of calories.

Mike Zambrano: D-ration, I never heard of a ... of a D-ration before.

Mr. Houston: Uh huh, yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Do you recall who your commanding officer was for the Battalion or your ... your ... the clearing company?

Mr. Houston: Oh yeah. In ... in my ... when I was in training my ... the officers ... it was a ... I did remember his (unintelligible). It was a medical replacement training battalion, MRTC, Medical Replacement Training Battalion, at Camp Barkley in Abilene, and it ... we trained as a battalion; that'd be ... that'd be four ... it was ... we were training as four uh, companies for the battalion, and the officer ... officers names of the four companies, each company is a hundred, a hundred and twenty men, something like ...

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: ... and the names of the four companies, of A, B, C, D and D company, Warren, Walker, McGee and Jones were those commanders of those four battalions, uh, of four companies.

Mike Zambrano: And which one was yours?

Mr. Houston: I don't ... I can't remember. I told ... I'm sorry, I don't know.

Mike Zambrano: That's okay.

Mr. Houston: And I ... I don't know the battalion commander's name. He's a ...

Mike Zambrano: Since you're part of the clearing company, that wasn't one of the lettered companies, right, not A, B, C?

Mr. Houston: It was D Company.

Mike Zambrano: It was D Company, okay.

Mr. Houston: Yeah, D Company. A, B and C were ... were collecting companies, and mine was a clearing company. The ... the officers in that, let's see, the collecting ... no, it was D Company, and that was (pause) Captain Stewart ... Stewart. The battalion commander was uh, McCardie (sp?). He was a Lieutenant ... became a Lieutenant Colonel after we got overseas; he was wounded, I believe, Captain Warren, yeah. They were all four Captains.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: Most of the ... the other medical officers in our company that would have been Captain Stewart and then four ... four or five Lieutenants and we had two dentists in our battalion, in ... in our company, in D Company; no other dentists anywhere. And you ... you ... they were Captain, uh, Lieutenant Nottingham, often his name shortened, anyway.

Mike Zambrano: Did you ever have to get medical treatment yourself for anything at all?

Mr. Houston: Yep! Uh, we had the dentists, and if you had some kind of dental problem, you could ... turn ... turn yourself in on the sick book. Every ... every company in the whole outfit had a sick book, and you reg ... you logged in; in the morning you turned into the Sergeant staff, your Platoon Sergeant or your First Sergeant and you were sent to the medics and you ... your name went on the sick book, and so if you had a cold or you had a ache or pain or whatever, toothache, or let me see, we had what ... called a short-arm inspection after we'd been anywhere was in contact with the civ ... civilian population, had prophylactic stations set up and you could receive prophylactic before you went and after you went to the uh, local uh, where ... whatever it might be called.

Mike Zambrano: Was there ever any ... any problem with any kind of venereal diseases?

Mr. Houston: Always, yeah. And a lot of it. I had a case and ran these slides for the decisions including the analysis of the smear on a glass. And that was just part of the ... let's see, the medical facilities that were available; discouraged but available to the troops. Anytime there was a ... assignment of troops, say a large battalion or something, was assigned near a village or a large town, uh, facilities were set up so that before a person could check out of his unit to go and say for a twelve hour pass, or maybe, not often, more than about twelve hour pass, then he'd have to be back on time, so he could go into town and come back. Well, they had the medical facilities were set up for prophylactics. The Army was very ... they had lectures and information made available on venereal diseases and other diseases that might be contracted

from local area. That ... that was about the extent of it; nothing elaborate at all.

Mike Zambrano: Was there any punishment for a soldier that would get a venereal disease?

Mr. Houston: Yes, there was. There was because if you had had the opportunity to protect himself and didn't do it, the idea was that he had ... he had kind of ... he had kind of ... evaded duty in a way, and so there was a ... a monetary sum that they was ... withheld, not a lot, but some.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: And occasionally, there was other disciplinary action for ... for him ...

Mike Zambrano: Uhm.

Mr. Houston: ... for taking advantage of what he should have done.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: Its kind of like going AWOL or whatever he ... he had done wrong (chuckle).

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter). You leave Anzio on March of 1944 and you, uh, you head straight back to the U.S?

Mr. Houston: Uh, yeah. Well, I came through Naples; I was there the last night it was bombed by the Germans. They were (unintelligible) to get (unintelligible) little bit by then, and so that was the last bombing raid, I believe, on ... on Naples. And at that time, Vesuvius had erupted.

Mike Zambrano: Really?!

Mr. Houston: Uh huh. It was in March of '44, I believe. And it was spewing a lot. Of course, we had seen Mount Etna; clear across Italy you could see Mount Etna. It flowed ... flowed at night.

Mike Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Houston: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Wow, that's ... that amazing. I mean ...

Mr. Houston: So ...

Mike Zambrano: What did you think of Italy?

Mr. Houston: Wonderful (unintelligible); the ag ... agriculture, of course, where we ... southern Italy – grapes and then so they ... they produced all the good ... a lot

of the wine; they had crops and there were farms and with very rudimentary instruments (unintelligible) almost animal drawn.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: They had a way of life was pretty much what you see sometimes in documentaries. They didn't ... didn't involve a lot of fancy equipment; they just lived pretty simple lives.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah.

Mr. Houston: In south ... southern Italy. I didn't ... never did get up above uh, Rome, so I ... I don't know how things were. I understand they were quite different. One time we got to visit the opera house in Naples, La Scala, I believe may have been it; that sound right?

Mike Zambrano: Oh, I don't ... I don't know what the name of ... of the opera house is, (unintelligible).

Mr. Houston: But anyway, it was closed, of course, but I did get to see the outside of the opera house.

Mike Zambrano: What did you say it was called again?

Mr. Houston: I'm sorry?

Mike Zambrano: What did you say it was called again?

Mr. Houston: May have been La Scala.

Mike Zambrano: Alright. Did you do anything else while you were in Naples?

Mr. Houston: Well, I got to see the gardens; I'm trying to think ... I've used the term Caserta, I've used that term before, so it wasn't ... there was a ... a building, beautiful building and gardens, and it was like a ... kind of a copy of the castle at Ver ...

Mike Zambrano: Versailles?

Mr. Houston: ... Versailles. I think that was it; have to check on these (laughter) these.

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckles).

Mr. Houston: Oh! And one time, quite unexpectedly, I found myself (unintelligible) stationed incamped kind of out in the boonies and here was a ... one of the six castles, royal castle, of the royal family of Italy. This castle had not been bombed, but troops had been in and kind of torn things up a little. And one

afternoon, three or four of us had gotten a pass of two (unintelligible) so, we just took off from our unit and walked over to where this castle was. And there was still crystal in the cabinets, so I took two little wine glasses, yeah, hope to return some day. I've still got them.

Mike Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Houston: Two little glass ... uh, glasses, and I think I'd like to return them; they're beautiful, just very simple. But ... and I shipped them home in a ... in a little box that the artificial blood is shipped in. It's a little box about ten inches square, about that there, and that had a kit for artificial blood. And so, they made ... once in a while, could ship something home, so I put these two little glasses in there and shipped them home.

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckles), and they made it back without breaking?

Mr. Houston: They what?

Mike Zambrano: They made it back without breaking.

Mr. Houston: That's right. So, anyway, I still have those. That's the only one ... the only thing that I got home that ... oh, one time, (unintelligible) and this was on Anzio. Somebody had brought in some ... sidearms that had been collected off the battlefield, and they ... we had the German Lugar Automatic Pistol, and Italian Beretta, and I bought a little Italian Beretta, not much of a weapon as a sidearm. I believe it was almost a thir ... a thirty caliber, must have been a little smaller than that, and I brought it home, and paid five dollars for it.

Mike Zambrano: Wow!

Mr. Houston: Yeah. (Unintelligible), that's only ... only one of the times I had a weapon and it too, was illegal. And I had it ... shipped the little pistol home. But we were somewhere in uh, I believe it was Sicily and we had been given passes to go to the beach and swim, and the water was up to the ... as clear as a crystal. You could see a dime on the bottom, twenty feet deep, and I loved to swim; I was pretty fair swimmer, so I went out and was ... swam on the beach. And somewhere about there, somebody had gotten a hold of a bunch of uh, rifles. They were ... they were bolt-action, uh, clip fed, rifles, and the rifle I got,

appears to me ... appeared now, a piece of the same rifle as that one Lee Harvey Oswald used in Dallas.

Mike Zambrano: Oh boy.

Mr. Houston: In the assignation. It was a ... it was an Italian (unintelligible) city police, carabinieri, that's the Italian police.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: And this was a weapon, I believe it was an Italian weapon that had been in Yugoslavia as a weapon that somebody had taken over the weapons from Yugoslavia, and they were shipping them somewhere. And so, I had this rifle for a week or two. One of the truck drivers let ... let me put it under the seat of his truck. So, if we'd been caught with it, it would have been pretty serious.

Mike Zambrano: Hum. Uh, this is all in Naples that this is going on?

Mr. Houston: South of Naples, I believe.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Houston: Uh hum. Well anyway, that ... these were things people shouldn't have been doing. I mean, we shouldn't have been ...

Mike Zambrano: Oh, I think it's the temptation of ... of bringing a souvenir home.

Mr. Houston: Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Well, what rank were you when you ... when you left Anzio to come back to America?

Mr. Houston: I believe I had been promoted to Pfc by then. Never know ... mostly in my unit because it was an old unit, well established and all the positions were filled.

Mike Zambrano: I wanted to go through your book here, because I ... I came across your name before ...

Mr. Houston: On ...

Mike Zambrano: ... you started the ...

Mr. Houston: ... on the Third ... Third Medical Battalion.

Mike Zambrano: Ah okay! So, here's McCarthy (sp?), Lieutenant Colonel William J. McCarthy.

Mr. Houston: Right!

Mike Zambrano: Let's see, okay, he was the commanding officer until, oh, I guess, October of '44, so, he was commanding long after you left, I guess.

Mr. Houston: That's ... that's a few months after I left, that's right. That was Colonel McCarthy. Is it McCardie or McCarthy?

Mike Zambrano: It's McCarthy.

Mr. Houston: McCarthy, okay, yeah. And one of the ... my good friends was Ed Everett, E-v-e-r-e-t-t. Ed ... Ed Everett.

Mike Zambrano: Oh! Edward L. Everett.

Mr. Houston: Right, Long (unintelligible), California.

Mike Zambrano: Long (unintelligible)?

Mr. Houston: Long ... Long (unintelligible) ... (cough). And ...

Mike Zambrano: Did you ever keep any ... in contact with any ... any of the men you served with?

Mr. Houston: Yeah! Yeah, we ... the Third Medical Battalion got organized sometime in the late '40s and I ... I joined them in the (pause) '60s I guess. Yeah, I joined them in the '60s, and we went ... reunion every year, and that was ... finally included the whole Battalion. Started out as one company, one guy in one company, you know, and got them going.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah.

Mr. Houston: Grew, and finally they accepted any ... anybody who was in the Battalion. And so, we met annually; we met all over the United States; went on one cruise together, and it was a great outfit. I looked forward to that every year. Harriet and I would ... I was married ... we ... we were married by then, and I ... and we'd stay in each other's homes, and we'd visit other times than the reunion, you know, so we got to know them. Ed Everett was ...

Mike Zambrano: So, what happens when you get back to the U.S?

Mr. Houston: (Cough), I was assigned to the uh, New Orleans, you know (unintelligible) Port of Embarkation, Station Hospital, and I was assigned to surgery. And I was a surgical assistant.

Mike Zambrano: You said it was the New Orleans Port of Embarkation, what hospital?

Mr. Houston: Station ... Station Hospital.

Mike Zambrano: Station Hospital.

Mr. Houston: Uh huh.

Mike Zambrano: Did you decide to stay in the military?

Mr. Houston: I did, yes, I stayed in after the war. I ... I was in the Station Hospital for ... four or five months, I guess, and was sent to Leadership ... a leadership school and subsequently took Officer Candidate School in New Orleans. But the ... but the branch (chuckle) was transportation. That was the big transportation training school was in New Orleans, and so I was assigned to that. I had applied for Medical Administrative, but they ... when they made it available to me, I was given three choices, and I applied to that, and I applied to Quartermaster, and I applied for ... I mean, my third choice had to be Transportation. So, I was chosen for Transportation. And I was commissioned in July of '45.

Mike Zambrano: July of '45.

Mr. Houston: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Do you remember where you were when you heard that President Roosevelt had died?

Mr. Houston: I tried to remember that.

Mike Zambrano: Well, I guess you ... you might have been in New Orleans 'cause I think that's ... April of '45?

Mr. Houston: Sounds about right, yeah. I think I must have been. But if I ... if I was, I was very much in ... involved in the Transportation Candidate School.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: That was pretty ... pretty busy time.

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckles).

Mr. Houston: The ... after you had been selected as a candidate (cough), they called us all into a big auditorium. One of the speakers ... there were four hundred and fifty of us there in ... in that auditorium. The speaker said, "Each of you look to your left and look to your right." Said, "Neither of those people will be here when you graduate."

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckle).

Mr. Houston: And that was it! A hundred and thirty-five of us graduated out of that class of four hundred and fifty, so it was pretty selective.

Mike Zambrano: Wow.

Mr. Houston: And I ... I guess I was fortunate. I ... I finished in April, yeah, April of '45. No, no ...

Mike Zambrano: Oh, April ... April ... July.

Mr. Houston: ... July, July. Yeah, July the 18th.

Mike Zambrano: Where were you when you heard that the war was ... well, two questions. When you heard about the atomic bomb?

Mr. Houston: That was, I must have been in OCS; I'm trying to think of the date of the bomb.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, August of '45. So, it would have been two months after you'd graduated from the (unintelligible).

Mr. Houston: Then I was ... I was in San Francisco. I was a ... I was assigned to Fort McDowell.

Mike Zambrano: Fort McDowell.

Mr. Houston: Uh, Fort McDowell, and we were ... I was Transport ... a Second Lieutenant and we were processing returnees from the Pacific. And we had a boatload every day which was three ... about three thousand returnees every day, and we would have to make railroad assignments for them to return to their home or some ... some other selected place, and (laughter) we were just busy as could be.

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter).

Mr. Houston: And so, I guess, it was August when ... when did Roosevelt die?

Mike Zambrano: Uh, Roosevelt dies in April of '45, but the bomb is dropped in August of '45.

Mr. Houston: In April of '45, I would have been in OCS or I was in the hospital with a broken ankle.

Mike Zambrano: You broke ... you broke your ankle at one point?

Mr. Houston: (Chuckle), I had been in OCS and was in the last week of training, and we had very little to do the last week. They had process procedures and stuff, and so

we had time to play softball. So, playing softball, and it was just a week before we were going to graduate, and so, I came up to bat, we were playing on a grassy field in GI ... uh, uniform, you know, and tennis boots. And so, I came up to bat, and the guy pitched one, it looked to me like it was going to be a slow pitch, it was coming pretty slow. I thought, "Boy, I'll really knock the cover off this!" I wasn't a very good batter, and I wasn't one of those big, healthy guys, but I was ... I was pretty strong. And I swung at that thing, and whatever happened, my right foot doubled under me, and it hung in the grass, I guess, and doubled under me. Went (snap sound) like that, just snapped.

Mike Zambrano: Wow!

Mr. Houston: I heard ... I heard it (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter).

Mr. Houston: Oh, there I was, a week from graduation, and so I went into the hospital. They put me in the hospital and gave me a quarter gram of morphine, and when I had a quart of a gram of morphine I become a stand-up comic, and the nurses went up and down the halls, said, "Get in there and listen ... listen to him," (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckles).

Mr. Houston: And I prepared to think of all kinds of funny stuff. And so, anyway, they got the ankle set, and I had a ... a cast up to my hip ... like ... like that.

Mike Zambrano: Really?!

Mr. Houston: Cast all the way up because that broke and it went through the joint, I think (cough). Anyway, I was in that cast for two, two or three months, I guess, a long-time in ... in the hospital. And so, finally, I had been in class thirty-five, yeah, I had been in Transportation ... so they ... after four or five weeks or whatever it is, they come up to the ... they came up to thirty ... thirty-five ... class of forty and class of forty happened to be the same unit that had been attach ... tactical officer ...

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: ... and everything. So, I just went right back in the same class, completely different bunch of candidates with me, and I graduated from Class 40 on July the 18th of '45.

Mike Zambrano: Wow.

Mr. Houston: So anyway, that ... that's where I had been. And I guess it ... during that time that Roosevelt died ...

Mike Zambrano: Uhm ...

Mr. Houston: ... April?

Mike Zambrano: Yeah, it would have been April, April of '45.

Mr. Houston: It ... I could have started, yeah, I was probably either in the hospital or in OCS at that time.

Mike Zambrano: Now, when you say OCS and you mention Transportation at the same time, was it ... was this at OCS that specialized in Transportation?

Mr. Houston: Oh yeah! This was a branch of service; it was a branch just like Medical branch.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: Or Artillery or Infantry; Transportation was a branch. It used to be part of Quartermaster, and then it blossomed and was its own, and then later, I think, they recombined it with uh, Quartermaster, may have in re-organization.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah.

Mr. Houston: And so, I still wore the Transportation emblem throughout my commissioned career in the, yeah, in the Army reserve. I was in for twenty ... twenty-eight years in the reserve.

Mike Zambrano: Did you ... did you get called back for Korea?

Mr. Houston: Nope; didn't get called back for Korea or Vietnam. And I was in through both of them all the way through both of them.

Mike Zambrano: When ... when did you leave active duty?

Mr. Houston: Did active duty from June 30th of '42 to July 18th ... 17th of ... just 17th of '45.

Mike Zambrano: So, when you graduated from OCS, that's when you're at when you ... your active duty terminated also?

Mr. Houston: Uh, I began active as a Second Lieutenant on graduation from OCS and I was in about three months and the war was over, and I went into the reserve and was in twenty-eight years in the reserve.

Mike Zambrano: Well ...

Mr. Houston: So, that put me out in (pause) ...

Mike Zambrano: '72?

Mr. Houston: '72.

Mike Zambrano: So, were you in San Francisco when you heard that the war was over?

Mr. Houston: You bet! I was ... I was on An ... Angel Island.

Mike Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Houston: You know (unintelligible) ... you know Frisco?

Mike Zambrano: Yeah, I was born and raised there, so I know Angel Island; I've been there.

Mr. Houston: Yeah. To get out there ... I was living ... I was married, my first marriage, I was living in ... out towards Twin Peaks ...

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum, yeah.

Mr. Houston: ... and I was living there and I had to take three or four streetcars to get out to the ... Fort Mason where I caught a ferry that went first to Alcatraz, picked up the laundry, I mean, left ... yeah, I picked up the laundry then went on to Angel Island. And (chuckle) anyway, uh I ... I was there, and each day I went out to the island, and each evening, I came back on the ferry back to ... by ... Alcatraz. We stopped each time at Alcatraz, picked up the laundry and left the laundry and then went on into the docks at Fort Mason, anyway, and then I caught a streetcar. It was about a two-and-a-half-hour trip morning and afternoon.

Mike Zambrano: (Unintelligible). So, why would you pick up laundry at Alcatraz?

Mr. Houston: Because they ... somebody was hav ... having the people on the ... inmates on Alcatraz was doing laundry for a ... I don't know what it was one of the hospitals or what, but the laundry was being done on Alcatraz.

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckles).

Mr. Houston: Did you know about it?

Mike Zambrano: No, I had never heard about that.

Mr. Houston: Well, one time (chuckle) I was Officer of the Day at ... on ... on Angel Island. One day after I had left duty, one of my buddies was assigned Officer of the Day, so he was OD when a young person came through going to Angel Island, and he, yeah, he was going to ... to Angel Island, and then he ... his pass ... he had a pass, a three-day pass, and he had a complete uniform on, and (cough) and my buddy saw him going ... getting off of the ferry on Angel Island, and he saw him without his cap. Well, a lot of soldiers, you know, went without part of the uniform, you didn't think much about it. Then he got to think, "Well, he's ... he's supposed to have a cap, so I'm going to call him in." He called him in, and it was one of the convicts. He had made it ... he had gotten out in a complete uni ... had found a pass in somebody's uniform, had pulled that to one side, had every piece except the cap. He ... he'd had the cap, he would have been the guy who escaped from Alcatraz. But my buddy, this other officer, were both Second Lieutenants, he saw him and that ... he caught him right there. He had looked at his pass, and he, of course, he said dog tags didn't match up with his pass, too bad.

Mike Zambrano: Wow!

Mr. Houston: Anyway, he didn't ... I don't know who the guy was who caught him. I don't ... I don't even remember the guy's name, but he ...

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckles).

Mr. Houston: ... and I could have been ... I could have been on that day, but I had been Officer of the Day, I think, the day before (chuckles). It's ... it's crazy how those ...

Mike Zambrano: Yeah, it ... it is! I mean, all the planning he must have gone into doing that. I guess he was too impatient to wait for a cap.

Mr. Houston: Another time, the boat that ... the ferry boat had its ... its level was estab ... they ... loaded so that the deck, main deck of the ferry boat, was the same as the dock that ... there at the ...

Mike Zambrano: Yeah.

Mr. Houston: ... at the harbor, so people would come in from Pacific theater, and they'd be at Angel ... Angel Island overnight. Well, they let them go into town that

evening, so they'd go into town and they'd come back, and you know, ferry boat to ... the following morning. Well, the guys that came back were in pretty rare shape many a time after a night ... after three years in the Pacific and a night in San Francisco, and so, they were in pretty bad shape. So, they'd come in, they'd line up and come across the dock and then get in the ferry ... the ferry boat. Well, the ferry boat could be loaded from either side. So, you had a deck right across the ... middle of the boat.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: Well, this ... somebody was always coming in late. Well, the boat was just about to pull away from the dock, and this guy came running down (chuckles) down the hill, across the dock, onto the ferry boat, right out to ... his side, just right to (laughter) ... to his ...

Mike Zambrano: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Houston: ... of this ... you know, interesting things like that were happening all the time.

Mike Zambrano: Well, I ... I think you've answered all the questions.

Mr. Houston: Good. Let's see, I can't think of anything ... anything too much else. I ... let's see, oh, I was ... I was in R&D and its in the ... in the reserve most of ... a lot of time, we met at ... at the university, and we had scientists and engineers in that unit. And we had weekly meetings, so I attended weekly meetings all those twenty-eight years. Almost ... most of the time, I had two weeks active duty every summer.

Mike Zambrano: You know, I didn't ask you ... what ... for you to get your graduate, you had to get your undergraduate ...

Mr. Houston: Oh, mechanical engineering, 1950, bach ... bachelors, 1950.

Mike Zambrano: Did you use your GI Bill for that?

Mr. Houston: You bet I did. One of the greatest things that ever was.

Mike Zambrano: Did you get that at UT?

Mr. Houston: Yeah! Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. And ... and your ... your grad ... what was your graduate work in?

Mr. Houston: Community and Regional Planning, masters, MS ... MS in Community and Regional Planning.

Mike Zambrano: Still have one last question for you. There's been talking in the news lately of President visiting of Hiroshima and ... and you know, every now and again, people talk about the United States apologizing. Not that that's going to happen, but on this trip, but do you have any ... any feelings about the dropping of the atomic bomb as far as, you know, you think we should have done or, I mean, what ... any ... any feeling you have about it?

Mr. Houston: I ... if there hadn't been, well, if things hadn't turned out the way they did, I guess I would have been a conscientious objector. I'm fundamentally opposed to killing, and but that's by natural nature.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Houston: And, of course, I ... I trained with weapons in OCS. I obviously 'cause I was trained to command a small infantry unit in combat, so I guess, I would have been a conscientious objector. In as much as I was already predestined for (unintelligible) I didn't have to make that decision. Had I not been a medic, I don't know ... hard for me to imagine how I would have ... would have reacted. I know how I'd of felt, but still there's this thing that I had a duty that I had to do, and so I ... I might have gone either way (cough). So, when the bomb was dropped, of course, my natural instinct is to think of the personal tragedy, the pain and suffering that those people had ... endured and still to this day endure that pain of those burns, and that really bothers me. And still, when you take this other point of view is, well, let's chose a smaller number, (unintelligible) number. Obviously, we would have lost a million casualties if we had tried to invade Japan.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Houston: A million as opposed to ... what is it, five hundred thousand, and the two ... how many casualties was it? In the two ...

Mike Zambrano: Oh, I think eighty at Hiroshima and I'm not sure about Nagasaki. It was ... I'm going to say, I'm going to guess, maybe sixty or seventy.

Mr. Houston: So, a hundred and fifty ... a hundred and fifty, two hundred thousand. Look how easily we toss off a number. Each one of those is a person or was. So, you take two hundred thousand as opposed to a million, you know, the answer ... has to be ... take the ... take the two hundred thousand of somebody else instead of a million of us. Us and them. And that ... that really ... just awfully hard, awfully hard. And today, somebody will have to make that same decision. Of course, like I say, if World War II was fought with armor, and World War III is fought with nuclear weapons, World War IV ... World War III will be fought with spears.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, you were a Lieutenant Colonel when you left the ... when your retired, is that correct?

Mr. Houston: Uh hum, yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Uhm, actually, would you like to say something about Honor Flight before we sign off here?

Mr. Houston: It ... it was just great, just great. Just, you know, that cap ... I go around now and wear the cap to ... on purpose, just wear it to places, always somebody sticks his hand out, "Thank you, thank you for your service." And I think, you know, they're thanking me, but in my mind, they're thinking the guys who really did the fighting 'cause I didn't have to kill anybody; I was a medic. I might have had to, you know, if the occasion had arisen while I was ... while I was commissioned in ... in Transportation, but I didn't have to. So, when somebody comes up to me wanting to give me a big hug, "Thank you." Looks me in the eye and said, "You know, my father was in service," and I say, "What branch, "He was in the Navy, Air Force, the Pacific," and they tell me a little of their story. And I think they're actually talking to my buddies that did all the dirty work. Makes me feel good that they have an opportunity to express their feeling to somebody, they don't know who it is, might be their priest, you know, that they say this. And I think, "Isn't that great." So, it's the, of course, the experience of seeing the memorial in Washington – that's tremendous! That was a wonderful weekend, overnight; we did it overnight.

Mike Zambrano: Oh yeah?

Mr. Houston: So, I ... I got to see everything. But this afterglow of the flight has been marvelous.

Mike Zambrano: Well, I think with that we can conclude our interview.

Mr. Houston: It's been real great.

Mike Zambrano: And I'll take my turn to say thank you for your service.

Mr. Houston: You're welcome and God bless you.

Mike Zambrano: Thank you.

(end of interview)

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CD – #OH04612 – Mr. David L. Houston

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