

# **VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT**

**Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations**

**Interview with**

**Victor John Sylvester**

Conducted by Martin Willard Thomas

May 31, 2005

This project sponsored by the Indian Prairie Public Library  
in partnership with the Library of Congress

(Note: Corrections made to original transcript by interviewee are noted in parentheses.)

## **Part 1: Introduction:**

**This interview is being conducted on May 31, 2005, at the Indian Prairie Public Library in Darien, IL. My name is Martin Willard Thomas. I am speaking with Victor John Sylvester. Mr. Sylvester was born on October 16, 1920, in Chicago, IL, and now lives in Willowbrook, IL. He learned of the Veterans History Project through Mrs. Frances Brindac, who is married to his nephew, Robert William Brindac. Mrs. Brindac was informed of the project by Mr. Joseph Popowitch, the Indian Prairie Public Library's Manager and Coordinator for this project. Mr. Sylvester has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. Also present at this interview, with Mr. Sylvester's consent, are Mr. and Mrs. Brindac. Here is Mr. Sylvester's story.**

## **Part 2: Entering the Military:**

**Mr. Sylvester, how would you prefer to be addressed during this interview?**

As Victor, please.

**Victor. Thank you. Victor, when did you enter the service?**

I was inducted on December 7, 1942.

**That was exactly one year after Pearl Harbor.**

Right.

**Did that have anything to do; did you enlist or were you drafted?**

Drafted.

**You were drafted. Okay. Where were you living at the time you were drafted?**

I was living in Chicago at 4706 N. Kennicott Avenue.

**Who were you living with?**

My Aunt Pearl.

**And what were you doing at that time?**

I was working at Florsheim Shoe in Chicago.

**At a factory or in a store?**

Factory.

**In a factory. What kind of work were you doing?**

I was an outsole rougher, with the designation of 61718.

**Outsole rougher. And you were about 22 at that time.**

Twenty-two at that time.

**Did you know that you'd be drafted at any time?**

Yes, because some of my friends from the same area were. And they said they had a big list.

**So you had a job. You were steadily employed. How did you feel about being called up to serve?**

Well, I felt that for the safety of America we would have to serve. And that was the way to do it.

**So you went willingly.**

Oh yes, yes.

**Do you think if you weren't drafted you would have enlisted?**

I might have. Yes.

**So, since you were drafted I take it you went into the Army.**

Yes, sir.

**And where were you inducted?**

I was inducted in Chicago in 1942.

**Now, when you were inducted, did you have a chance to go back home before you actually left for training?**

Yes.

**And what did you do during that interim period?**

Whatever you had to get in order and then give good-bye's with everybody – family and wife, you know.

**Were you promised your job back at Florsheim when you got out?**

I was, yes. (But did not get it.)

Part 3: Training

**So, once you said your good-bye's and you're now in the Army, where did you go first?**

We went to –

**Probably boot camp first?**

Yes. We were in boot camp in Ft. (Worth), Texas.

**So Ft. (Worth), Texas – that's where you took your boot camp?**

Yes. (Forth Worth, TX)

**As best you recall, what were your first days like in boot camp?**

Well, it was strange because we went through a lot of examinations by doctors to make sure you were material, you know. Some of the training was rigorous because it was a new concept for us.

**Had you been away from home for any extended period of time before you were drafted?**

No. No.

**That's really your first time away from home.**

Just go to work and come home. Yes.

**So what, how did you feel about this new experience?**

Well, it was new. And, of course, I was lucky to be in with a group of pretty jolly fellows. So that took a lot of the edge off.

**As best you can recall, what types of training were you getting in boot camp?**

Well, I was assigned to a rifle company – 29<sup>th</sup> Division.

**Now were you assigned to the 29<sup>th</sup> during boot camp or after graduation from boot camp?**

No. We were put right in because they needed the fellows.

**So you knew even in boot camp that you'd be a rifleman? And even with what division?**

That's right. The only thing we didn't know was what company and what division it would be as far ... Now I ended up in the 115<sup>th</sup> Infantry.

**Battalion?**

Yes.

**Was it Battalion or Regiment?**

Regiment. And it was Company C.

**So you were saying while you already knew what division you'd be assigned to. Is that correct?**

Yes.

**But not necessarily the regiment or the company.**

No.

**Were all your fellow trainees also assigned to the 29<sup>th</sup>?**

Quite a few of the fellows I got acquainted with were. They were building this division is what they were doing. They were taking from the south and the north. That's why we had the blue and grey.

**Blue and grey to signify the Union and Confederate forces during the Civil War.**

Right, right.

**What types of training were you going through?**

Well, in my case in Texas, they trained us in practically everything but artillery. I shot a 50mm machine gun, 80mm mortar, and of course the rifle training – that was uppermost in their training.

**What rifle did they train you on?**

I had the old Springfield. That was an M1.

**How long was boot camp?**

Quite a long time. They normally would train you for about 14 months and you would get more wherever you were sent overseas. So it was like another go around again over in England.

**In boot camp, or basic training, down at Ft. (Worth). You went in December. Do you remember what month you finally finished up your basic training?**

Yes. I've got it here somewhere. The induction, separation. Active service. 21 December 1942.

**Yes, I see this block 24 says "date of entering active service" was 21 December '42. Earlier we said December 7, but we'll I guess change that.**

That was induction.

**Oh. So you were inducted on December and you actually started your military service two weeks later.**

Right.

**Okay. I understand that now. And for your basic training – generally, basic training is about eight weeks. But I know in your time, sometimes they were rushing the guys through to get them over where they were needed. We don't need an exact date. But does around two months sound right?**

Yes. Around two months. Right.

**So it was roughly about February that you finished up boot camp?**

Yes.

**What did you do after boot camp?**

Well, like I say, they were making preparations for us to take a boat ride over to England.

**No other advance training. Just get you ..**

No. Since they needed riflemen pretty desperately, that's what we were training mostly at. Before we went through the other weapons.

**In your case you're being shipped over as a division. You weren't being sent over to replace casualties from existing outfits.**

That's right. The 29<sup>th</sup> was going over.

**After boot camp, before going overseas, did you get any leave at all?**

Yes.

**A home leave?**

I had 72 hours before actually reported back.

**Seventy-two hours to get from Ft. (Worth), Texas back to Chicago?**

A three-day leave. That's all they gave you.

**Did you get home?**

Oh, yeah.

**How did you get here?**

Get there?

**How did you travel from Texas up to Illinois and back – by train or car?**

It was a double thing. Bus to a train.

**Okay. So what was your home leave like? Pretty quick.**

Pretty quick. That's right. I had to put everything in order and make sure everything was set up – whatever bills had to be paid and that. And, of course, it was the good-

bye's in the family because I had to travel here and there because they were all over Chicago.

**Who all did you have to say good-bye to here?**

Well, primarily my aunt's and uncle's. Since I was, at that time, an orphan – I lost my mother and father, long gone.

**What was your marital status at that time? Were you married?**

Oh yes, yes.

**When did you get married?**

June 26,

**What year? (1945)**

I had it here somewhere. (Chicago, Illinois)

**But you were already married when you went overseas.**

Yes.

**Okay. So, then, you have your leave in Chicago, then you go back to Texas?**

Yes.

**And what do they do with you then?**

Well, by that time they were starting to get everything ready for the trip overseas. All we had to do was make sure we had all our equipment.

**Just out of curiosity, you had a 72 hour really whirlwind trip home, get back – how long did they keep you down at Ft. (Worth) before they actually sent you overseas?**

(Laughs) Some of the guys were saying, "How am I going to do this that fast." But some would probably get special leave for that.

**I was just wondering if this was a "hurry up and wait" situation where you got back to Texas and then you were there for a period of time.**

For a while until they got everything set up. Because they had to get so many different units, you know, different companies together. And then they'd line us up all there and say, "Here you are, 29<sup>th</sup>. You're going in."

**And where did they send you to debark for Europe?**

We left New Jersey.

**So you went from Texas to New Jersey?**

New Jersey.

**Was that by train, bus ..?**

That was train.

**That was by train.**

Because of all the equipment and stuff.

**So they sent you to New Jersey. Do you remember where?**

No. I was trying to think about where it was, but it just escapes me – I just can't seem to put a town to it. It must have been a debarkation for over there, because it wasn't too far away from water. That much I know. They had the boats you know.

**Most of New Jersey is pretty close to water (laughs). I lived there. So, then they put you on a ship. How many ships to take for the division – do you recall?**

I think that they tried to put the whole thing on one ship. We went over on the Queen Mary.

**Oh. And the Queen Mary departed out of New Jersey, not out of New York City?**

Yes. The thing there was they didn't want anybody to know where we were leaving from.

**Oh, I see. And in the Queen Mary. Did you travel in a convoy?**

Oh yes. It was a zig-zag.

**I think somebody told me the Queen Mary was so fast they didn't bother with a convoy. They just...**

No. We had ships around us. It was fast, though. We went over there in four days.

**Do you remember any experiences on that trip over?**

Well, there was one part there, I don't remember just how far in the ocean it was, we were bobbing like corks. (laughs) And you know what was happening there – he's bending over the rail. But luckily I didn't experience anything like that. What I didn't do was eat at the mess.

**On ship?**

On ship, yeah.

**What, how?**

What I needed to do. They had Indian cooks. I got a whiff of that curry that they were using and I thought, oh brother, and I went upstairs. I went across on cookies and candy bars. (laughs) What an experience. I wasn't alone, though. Some of the guys looked and said, "I'm not going down there."

**They actually were feeding the GI's Indian food?**

Well, I know there was curry, so whatever else they were preparing.

**Enough that you didn't want to go down to the mess hall.**

Enough to make you, you know.

**So at the end of the four days you arrived in England?**

Um-hum. We went into Scotland-Firth of Clyde and they had...

**Is that Scotland?**

Scotland, yes. It's the border there.

**And once you got off the Queen Mary, what did they do with you then?**

Well, they had vehicles for us to ride into to go wherever we were supposed to go for our interrogation and be set up in a division.

**So did you immediately then go to your permanent training location, or were there other stops?**

No, we were stopped because I guess they wanted to do more for us. And we went into a barracks that used to be used by the British. They were brick barracks – two story things. And that’s where they put us for several months. In the meantime we went through calisthenics, you know, briefings on what we could experience.

**The training – did they tell you anytime during your training what your mission was going to be?**

Well, we were being made up as the first invasion of Normandy.

**So you all knew.**

We knew

**That you were going to be an invasion force.**

Oh yeah.

**And did they actually say it was going to be Normandy, or did they just tell you, you would be invading France?**

France.

**And where was the training facility? Do you remember what town it was in?**

One of them was West Looe. They had East Looe and West Looe.

**Were there any jokes made about that name? I mean you know a loo is to the British**

Oh yes. I would imagine so. When we first thought of it we thought, "Why are they calling that town name," – we didn’t know what they meant.

**You think the spelling is “Looe?”**

Yes.

**What part of England is that?**

Southwest.

**Southwest? Let me ask you – was it near a coast?**

Oh yea, yeah. Because you had the town of Exeter next to Looe and that was almost south of London.

**Roughly, how long were you there in that training status?**

(drumming fingers on table) Let's see. I went to England in '43.

**So we know what time you arrived in England, we just subtract from...**

From when...

**'44. Do you remember what month you arrived in England?**

No, not really. Probably would have been spring time though.

**So it sounds like you were there for maybe a little over a year.**

Yeah. It was a good year, but I don't know just how far – year, year and a half – because we went through a lot of training.

**Did you know from the beginning that you were going to be an invasion force?**

Not an invasion force, but we knew we were going to France. It was made up later.

**And did your training include exercises of assaulting a beach?**

Oh yeah. We had to climb the...

**Jacob ladders?**

Yeah. From the ship to the landing craft, up and down, up and down, everyday. Guys would miss a step and boom, in the water.

**What happened to a guy if he was carrying his equipment and he fell off?**

Well, they'd save you. They had fellows down below – trained fellows – that would grab them right away. Hook them or whatever.

**And this training – was that pretty much everyday?**

Just about, yeah. You started out – you had breakfast, then we'd go for calisthenics. The strange thing, you'd think calisthenics would be first. But they get you out of the sack about 4:30 in the morning.

**So breakfast, calisthenics, then what?**

Whatever duties you had to perform.

**Oh. You had duties in addition to training?**

Oh yeah. They would assign you to, you might have to be kitchen help.

**KP?**

KP. And some of them had to spruce up around the barracks, their own barracks. Or they'd put you out on a detail doing something else – farming over there.

**Some of it was just busy work waiting for the right time to...**

That's what it was.

**But as far as the training, besides going down the Jacob's ladders getting from the ship down into your landing craft, what type of assault training did they do? Did they actually have you doing exercises going onto beaches?**

Yes. What they did, they took over a village. Uncle Sam bought out this village but kept the buildings and stuff.

**Oh. Moved all the inhabitants out?**

The inhabitants out – relocated them – must have cost of bundle. And we actually would have our battle gear on – helmet, and M1 rifle and pack – and actually go in there and dropped in there and hit the beach. Only there it wasn't much of a beach, being a town. But they'd go as close as they could.

**So you actually had some practice going from the landing craft onto shore. Did they have exercises where others played the enemy forces? Simulated fire?**

Yes, they did. And they'd shoot blanks of course. We didn't shoot – they did.

**So, your practice was not to shoot back but to take cover in advance?**

No, no. We'd call in and they'd say, "Let's reassemble," get back on the boat and go back out there. Maybe have lunch or something. Do it again to make sure. As time went on we got more and more ships with us.

**What's your best guess about how many of those simulated invasions you made?**

(laughs) Quite a few. I don't know the exact number. But they wanted to make sure that we knew what the purpose of it all was. And make sure that the guys got off the boat properly. There wasn't too big of an opening there to get off of that landing craft.

**I had a question and I was debating to ask it now or after we talk about actual D-Day. At least I'll ask it now and maybe again. Looking back, how valuable was the training?**

Oh, very good.

**Very good?**

Yeah.

**Did it really prepare you for the actual...**

Yes, because they had combat oriented British (you got enough there?) training in addition to our people.

**You say they had veterans who had already been fighting**

Yeah. You know, because England was all over. You know, they brought guys from all over.

**Was your training, was it joint forces or strictly U.S.?**

It started out as joint. But then, you know Washington – Oh, this is America, especially an American division like this. And you had the fourth and the first – oh-ho. So it was our baby.

**You were training with the people specifically that you were going to be making the landing with.**

Right, yeah. Even the guys that were piloting the boats.

**Was there other type of training that went on that you recall that was to prepare you for your actual landing?**

Well, like I say. We, uh, used every weapon that they thought we would need. In my case, I don't know why that was. But they said there were concrete bunkers that we might have to hit. So I had the experience of the flame thrower.

**Really.**

That's a heavy son-of-a-gun, too. Then you've got a guy behind you with spare tanks.

**I didn't know that.**

And the thing itself, it's almost like watering the lawn, you know. Except you've got a trigger, you've got to aim it and zingo – out come the flames.

**What was the range for the flame thrower?**

You had to get pretty close to be effective. But the thing of it was, whatever they were using, if you had like a gel combined with it, it would stick.

**Almost like a napalm?**

Almost. But I don't think that was what it was yet.

**Some gel mixed with it so it would actually stick and continue to burn.**

We were surprised. Because they told us, "Be sure you're with the wind." Because if it comes this way it would burn the hell out of you.

**And that was primarily for clearing out a pill box?**

Right, yeah.

**Well they had made up pill boxes for you there to attack?**

Yeah. Some of those training areas where we were, like I say, they made sure there was water and a little rise. Because when we went in, in Normandy, we were here and we had to look up like this. And in order to get a pad for us to actually get off that beach, they had to use Bangalore torpedoes.

**To clear the barbed wire? So you trained with Bangalore torpedoes as well?**

Well they had the engineers with that.

**You said, I think, that your training beach was a narrower or shorter beach than the one you actually landed on.**

Yeah. The training area was small, but that was all they had.

**And when you were making your practice landings, there were men and vehicles all advancing together?**

Well, they stayed in the water, but they had them. They had the vehicles and the tanks.

**They did have tanks.**

Oh yeah.

**And were the tanks**

Patton wouldn't let them go without them.

**So was the idea that the tanks would wait for the infantry to all get ashore, or was the idea that they would all come together?**

Then what they would do later, as the tanks were progressing, they have about 12, maybe 15 GI's behind them.

**I see. And you saw the tanks close up. How did they float them? Do you remember what the device was like?**

Yeah. They had some kind of a bridging device. It was a flotation thing.

**Like a collar that went around it?**

Right, right. They'd take one and test it to see if it would go like this. Depending on what the weather was and how the water was. While we were waiting to go in, oh man, they were afraid we were all going to get sick because a little squall started and these boats are going like this, you know, like corks.

**Is this one of the practices you're talking about, or the actual landing.**

No, actual.

**Were the exercises themselves dangerous? I mean do you remember anyone getting hurt or killed in the exercises?**

Not killed. But, like I say, a couple of them fell off that ladder.

**So you told me of several activities you trained in: the Bangalore torpedoes, the flame thrower, the rifle. I think you said the mortar.**

Yeah, the 80mm mortar and the machine gun, 50 caliber.

**Oh, 50 caliber machine gun. What did you think your job was going to be in the actual invasion? I mean you trained in all these various things. Did they say you were going to have a flame thrower, or you were going to have...**

I don't know if they did it for all of them in the 29<sup>th</sup>, but the 115 company C, we were briefed on what we could expect.

**Was this a one time briefing, or was this a continuous briefing?**

Well, it would change

**Every so often.**

First of all they changed the day we were supposed to go in. We went in a day later than we were supposed to go in because of that water.

**Just one day delay?**

Yeah. Because they kept in touch with the weather, you know. This guy said if the planes can go, these guys can go.

**Now. Dwight Eisenhower was in charge of the whole thing.**

That's right. He was – they called him in London where he was at, at Sheaf headquarters, and said, "Hey, how long are these guys going to be in the water? They're going to get sick and they won't be worth a darn on the beach." He said, "Put 'em in." And that's when the order came. So we were out there almost two days.

**Was Ike pretty famous? I mean did you all know about**

Oh I saw him close up.

**Oh you did? In England?**

Yeah. Oh yeah. Quite a statuesque guy. He was very friendly, always smiling. You know. "You fellows know that this is an important thing for America." Cheer you up. But what he did first, was visit the paratroopers – 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne – and he gave them that little speech about why you're going to be dropped here and there. Of course, they dropped them in the wrong place, everybody that went.

**But he actually came to your division and made a talk that you personally heard?**

Oh yeah, yeah. What they had, they had us line up like he's inspecting us and be talking at the same time. He had Bradley with him also. That was his second in command – General Omar Bradley. He was the “soldiers’ general.” They were figuring on doing something. He said, “How about the men. How many casualties are we going to have.” He was always for the guys who were fighting. Then there was another General – Simpson – which we met later. But Ike was it. Ike was it. Ever hear of Simpson?

**Name sounds familiar, but not like Bradley and Eisenhower.**

Our General for the 29<sup>th</sup> was Girou. Gh maybe. Ghirou.

**With that pause, we had a slight interruption. Somebody wanted a picture for the library newsletter. We're back on record now. And I was asking you about your own commanding General, and we're not sure of the spelling of his name, but it was General Ghirou.**

Leonard C.

**Oh, you know his first name? Leonard C. Ghirou?**

It's coming back.

**Now, within your own company**

Okay. I'll give you the non-com's. Corporal Coudery – now that's another one I don't know how to spell – and what he was I don't know. But he was from one of the Guard outfits.

**The National Guard outfits?**

Yeah. And our Sergeant was Sergeant (Wheatley) – that's just like ... Those were the two main ones.

**And in your squad. First of all, how many were in your squad?**

We had a squad of twelve guys.

**Twelve men squad. Did you become close with your squad members?**

Yeah, while we were together.

**What was your rank at that time?**

I was just a soldier.

**PFC at the time?**

Yeah, that's what shows here. Private PFC.

**Were there any of your fellow soldiers you became more close with?**

One in particular, and he was from Wisconsin. And his name was Hood. I'm trying to think what his first name was, and it escapes me also.

**If it comes back to you at any time, just break out with it. So, that was one of your better friends.**

Yeah, we were in the same barracks and everything, you know.

**So, you've already told me they had a lot of – I don't want to call them "make work" activities – but things to keep soldiers busy when they weren't training. And you also said you were up at 4:30 in the morning. Did you have any time or energy left for any outside recreational activities?**

No, there weren't so much with that. Although they would bring in "girly's" for a "girly" show.

**Oh? Okay, let's talk about the "Girly Shows."**

That was the General's idea. He said, you know, "These guys are going to leave loved ones, family." He said, "We've got a place where we can have them dance and that." You know. They held dances.

**These are dances for show or dances to dance with you?**

Well, either way. They danced for show and then, if you wanted, it was okay as long as you didn't get too familiar. We had the Army band doing – our Army band playing for them.

**So they brought these show girls on the base and they'd dance.**

From the town, yeah.

**Now, before you said, “dance and that.” Is there anything else you can tell me with your nephew’s wife in the room?**

(laughs) No, no.

**She doesn’t need to leave?**

No, she doesn’t need to leave.

**She’s motioning to go.**

No, no. There was nothing other than that. That was just a diversion for us so we wouldn’t be all tied up with this military.

**And you were there over a year.**

We did get leave, like I say, we said we went to Looe.

**I was going to ask you about leave in a minute. But since we’re talking about the shows, besides what you describe as the “girly shows,” did you have other USO shows – USO performers?**

Yes, yes.

**Any famous entertainers come through?**

(drums table). Oh. The guy with the fiddle – do you remember who he was?

**Country fiddle?**

No, regular – well, he played everything.

**Not talking Jack Benny, are you?**

No, no, not Benny. But he had been on radio. Anyway. They’d have that US troop, they’d have dancers also, and they’d have a couple of comedians, you know, with some comedy. They’d have bantering, you know, “Oh, so you...”

**Did Hope ever make it there?**

We saw him once.

**In England?**

Yeah, in England. He went over. And where we saw him, we were out – I always call it a swamp land, because you'd put your foot down on the doggone soil and water coming. We were out there on a bivouac. He heard about it and knew that we were going to go in. And he said, "Heck. Why am I over here?" So he brought his whole troop – with Mustache, and he had Frances Langford with him.

**The actress?**

Yeah. Hope's Band. And he, you know, like if he was doing a show – they'd have skits that they'd go through. He says, "You guys better be careful. I understand when you get over there it's not all you think it might be. Look at this – he'd go like this – oh, I'm stepping on swamp."

**That was Hope saying that?**

No that was Cologne. He'd have banter with Cologne. "Hello" he'd say. "So you guys are going."

**Now that we've talked about the shows, how about leave. Did you say you'd get some passes to go into town?**

Yes. But it had to be a close town. You couldn't go, I had one prior to us going in, to go to Paris. Not Paris.

**London?**

London, yes.

**Now, it's interesting they trusted you to go off base even as far as London. Did you give you any briefings as to what you could talk about, what you couldn't talk about?**

Yeah, oh yeah. "Mum" is the word. Loose lips sink ships – make sure you don't say where you're headed for if you know. And how many and all this kind of stuff. You're liable to meet up with someone, and they're going to be wanting to get this stuff out of you, he says. Be careful of the girls. He said they can be just as cagey as a guy can.

**Did you ever hear from any of your fellow soldiers if anyone did try to get information of that sort out of them?**

No. No, I didn't. But I wouldn't say that there weren't. You had some guys, they didn't want to be in service to begin with. They figured it'd be a good way to be out. But that didn't happen.

**It didn't work for them?**

You had to be actually unfit for duty before they'd even consider it. And then you wouldn't go back to the States. They had barracks in England where they could put you.

**Disciplinary barracks? Did anybody from your unit try anything like that – try to hurt themselves or get into trouble so they couldn't be sent over?**

One guy, I don't remember his name or anything. But one guy we did know was put in detention.

**What did he do?**

Supposedly something with a girl. We always thought, you know, knock-knock. But we never did find out.

**By knock-knock, you mean he became a father?**

Yeah. (laughs)

**Okay. How about London? You got a pass to go to London?**

It's quite a place, I'll tell you.

**How long was your...**

The only problem is, you didn't have that much time to really see anything, you know. I saw Parliament – House of Parliament. And then Thames River and things like that.

**How many nights did you get to spend in London?**

They'd only give you three days.

**And how long did it take you to get...**

See, they had a bus scheduled for us – Army stuff. It wasn't regular civilian. It was these khaki colored buses.

**And in London did they provide a place for you to stay or did you have to...**

Yeah, they had places in advance. They'd take over a hotel, you know. Of course, the MP's, like you were saying – they were like bees. If you got into trouble they'd cuff you right away and take you somewhere. At the time I was there they were utilizing the constabulary over there – you know, the jail over there – until they could move them to military.

**So the first stop would be a British jail?**

Um-hum. And then take all the information they needed.

**Any other experience in London that comes to mind that you want to...**

Well, the only thing that comes to mind. There were fish and chips places. Fish and chips of course, we know as fries. Well, they called them chips. And there were a lot of those places there. We'd make it a habit to eat there, see. Then you'd come back to camp and eat again. But other than that, no. I didn't have any "dollies" over there, being married and all. But some guys did. Some guys...

**Had a regular girlfriend in town?**

Yeah. Girlfriend. Yeah. But the idea there, the girls wanted to come to America. They were tired of all that bombing and everything over there. I'll tell you. We were on the edge of a firebomb attack. They weren't explosive bombs, but there was fire when they'd come out.

**Incendiaries.**

Yeah, incendiaries. They'd burst into flames. So they'd stick us into a shelter.

**This was in London?**

Yeah. I happened to be on leave there one time and "woo-woo-woo."

**Alarms?**

Yeah, everybody running. We were staying out because, you know, civilians are first. "Oh no, fellows, come in, come in." What they were using was what they call underground – subway – for shelters until it blew over. Wouldn't last long. These guys would just fly over. It was harassment is what it was. But the actual coast, they seen facing the Atlantic, they did bomb.

**London, or the other**

No, the other towns that were along the coast there.

**So, roughly, how many trips did you have into London during your**

Only about three, I guess. They tried to get almost everybody they could to get to see what the other side of the world was. We left from Plymouth, which is significant. That's where the pilgrims supposedly left from.

**In Looe – was Looe the vacated town; I guess one was West Looe and one was East Looe? So one of those towns was still occupied?**

One was, yes.

**Did you ever take passes or leave to go there?**

No, we never did. I think if I remember right they were more or less restricted. They didn't want us to get too familiar with the people either. They were afraid of guys going AWOL. They didn't want to fight, you know.

**Now, during that year you were there, how did you stay in touch with your wife?**

They had what they called "V" mail. And that's how I kept in touch with her. She said, "These are so small." You expect to be able to take paper and write. Censor's going to look it over anyway, and they just shoot it away. And they censored every doggone thing you did. Because I sent her one, I almost slipped and said we were going in. And she said it was blacked out.

**So, with the V mails you started to tell me that something you wrote did get censored? They actually took it out? How did they physically take it out – was it by marking it out?**

Yeah. She said it was a black mark. You couldn't read through it.

**Do you know what it was that you said that they found offending?**

I told her probably later about I almost spilled the beans that we were going in after training. They told us we were headed for France.

**About how often did you correspond?**

Well, it was a while before you'd get any kind of an answer because the mail was not the best. Sometimes, when even we were in bivouac (**tape ends, turn over**)

**With V-mails. Did either of you keep your correspondence?**

I imagine somewhere in some box that she used to squirrel things away, which is probably back in Florida.

**At some point, if you're all interested, you might offer those to the Library of Congress. I don't know if they'd want 'em. They might be very personal.**

But I would think they've got quite a bit of that already.

**They've got the samples of V-mail to be sure. Before we actually have you get on that ship to go across the channel, are there any other experiences you had in England that you want to talk about?**

No, except for some of my training. They'd actually have, if you were on water, they had the tank, you know, crossbars there to hold the tanks back. And of course we were supposed to be hitting a beach and you'd see the wire up there, of course. But other than that, no. It was a routine thing.

**What did you call your landing craft?**

Well, we first went in with Landing Ship Tank.

**LST's**

LST's. They were big suckers – big openings – they'd go forward. And then you had your personnel. Your little landing craft.

**LCI?**

LCI's. They accompanied these big guys. Because they could only go so far. And these guys would come around and, like I say, get off that rope and jump in the thing. They'd only hold maybe a dozen, fifteen guys.

**LCI's?**

Yeah. They weren't very big.

**So now I think we're ready to put you in your LCI – what kind of ship took you across the channel? Was that an LST?**

Yeah. An LST. Like I say, they could only go so far because of the craft. So they had these little guys.

**So when that LST drops its front it's still out pretty far. And what comes off – the LCI's?**

Yeah.

**Okay. So you're in the LCI.**

Some were in the water all ready. They knew what the deal was that they couldn't get in that far. These were our Navy guys that were piloting that ship.

**Now, you told me earlier that the weather delayed your invasion by a day. And did you say that you spent that whole day sitting on that LST?**

Yeah. Like I say, we were like a cork in the water. When they either radioed or phoned Ike, they said, "What are you doing here. These guys are going to be sick."

**So, what time, if you can recall, what time of day on the 5<sup>th</sup> did you get on the LST? Was it early morning?**

Yeah. Most of anything like that was early.

**And then, did you move out of England to start the trip over? And when the weather came up, what did the LST's do then – go back to England or sit out there?**

They were out there like corks. Close to the bigger ship – the LST – so that they didn't have to bob too much.

**As far as you know, were there any German reconnaissance planes flying the area at that time?**

Uh-uh. [no]

**They didn't have any idea that all of a sudden all of these ships were out in the water?**

No. Because we were sending sorties over there – ... [British and] American planes.

**Keep them out of your hair?**

They were a certain distance from the beach because they didn't want them to go on the beach. They'd go more inland and just drop all kinds of stuff on them. German stuff was held up in Calais. When Ike found this out – because they had spies; the French were the biggest spies in the world, you know that, not that Kraut head. When he found out that most of their stuff, especially the big stuff, were out in Calais, he called the staff together. They were looking at the map and one of the staff said, "Ike,

what about Normandy?" He said, "its hedgerows and sort of like pasture – they ought to have a pretty good time of it once they get off the beach. Of course, there might be a problem on the beach. We don't know what they had there." So they sent a reconnaissance plane. They'd take pictures of what it looked like. And then, of course, before the invasion – a lot of people don't know this – we had a fake invasion. We knew that when we found out that most of the stuff was in Calais, they went between Calais and where we were with fake. They thought, "Oh, here it is," see, the big generals. And the thing about it, Pluskat was the main guy for protecting the beach. He happened to be back home in Berlin because his wife wasn't feeling good. And they always said that was the big break we got.

**That he wasn't there to coordinate the defense. So finally your LST is on its way across the Channel. Once you got in sight of land, how did you feel about this?**

We were glad to get off those boats. (laughs) Naturally, once you got off it you were wiggly, you know, because there was a big difference between water and being on land.

**So, roughly, what distance did your LCI have to cover?**

They could go, well he would go this far, and then he would go like this, and they would take soundings to see how far more he could go and they'd drop you to where you'd be maybe up to your belly in water.

**So, at this point, ramp drops. Would you describe in as much detail as you can what happened? What you did, what you saw going ashore?**

And once they got an idea that something was happening, they started to shell the boats that were out there. We got battle ships behind us. And one of them. Oh, first of all, when we went in there we had a radio man with us. He would strap it on himself and you could call back. And he would observe what was going on and give coordinates. And this one boat, I remember it was called the Exeter, and he turned around and got the canons this way, and he'd start going, "Far," "close," and then "medium." The range. And they were bracketing them back there. If they had known stuff was in Calais, I imagine they'd have gone after that. But they didn't know.

**So, were you at the front of your LCI?**

Um, hum. [yes]

**So the ramp goes down and then what?**

Then you're off. I mean, they'd go so far and, "Let's go." And that's it.

**Personally for you, how far up was the water on you?**

Almost to my belly. Yeah. Because you had all this stuff on you. By the time you had a shovel, your mess kit, your shelter, all your ammo – I had two bandoliers across me here – foolish me, a grenade here strapped on; the worst place to put it – it would blow your heart out if it ever kicked on. But they were pretty good.

**So, for example, I heard the motion of the water threw some guys off their feet because they were kind of top-heavy with all that. Did you feel any risk of falling?**

Yeah. You got that feeling as you were going down. We had these new gas masks that were square instead on the old one. The first thing I did because it started pulling me down, I pulled that thing off and just let it in the water. A couple of guys seen me and said, “Oh, that’s what you’re doing.” Boom. Boom. They were off. We would have been gassed it would have been a different invasion. But you could tell till you hit where it wasn’t as deep.

**Did you see anyone losing their footing going in?**

There were some guys that took a drink. Yeah. But not that far. They could get up.

**Was there fire directed at you as you were going ashore?**

Well, since they had big guns back there – no small arms because that was all cleared out. Once we start shelling and the planes came over, they made sure that there was nothing there, see.

**So you’re saying that the pill boxes and other defenses right in front of you were all wiped out.**

More or less, yeah.

**More or less, yeah. Well let’s talk about the less – those that weren’t totally wiped out.**

Well, you know they had the swivel machine gun, of course. And as far as accuracy, I think these guys were just pulling the trigger and that was it.

**Spray and spray and spray? (Pray & spray)**

Yeah. And one of the goofiest ones they had was what they called a Schmeiser. They could point it right at you and never kill you – the bullets would go all over.

We didn't encounter too much of that. It was the more experienced guys – they had guys that fought in the Crimea once they knew the invasion was on. And these guys, I mean, they were soldiers.

**These were German defenders you're speaking of.**

They had the patch here, Crimea, and all that. How I know that is that's the kind of guys that dragged me. They were along with that tank.

**The invasion – from the time you left the LCI until the time you got out of the water, how much time would you say elapsed?**

Maybe a half an hour.

**Oh, it took that long.**

Like I say, they could only go, you take depth, and they could only go that far. And they, well, the guy running the thing, pilot, I guess, "I can't go any further or I'll be stuck here. I've got to get back. I'm going to drop this ramp and you guys are – lots of luck." So I was almost up to my belly.

**What was the distance that you actually had to wade?**

Well, to me it didn't seem like it was that long. But some guys did. Because it depended on how close those boats got. But to me it seemed like a hop, skip and a jump and I was on the sand.

**But it took you a half-hour to do that, right, wading?**

Yeah. That water, you know. ... [Then this gas mask was bobbling so I pulled it off.] But you still had 90 pounds of stuff on you.

**Once you got ashore, then what did you do?**

Well, like I say, it would have been a straight run, but there was a bluff there. And that's why they had to get the engineers to bring the Bangalors which took time, and we were all huddled down there. And our General Coda, he's running up and down, he says, "It won't be long. They'll get these Bangalors. Just hold on. Try to shoot a guy."

**How high was the bluff?**

I don't know as far as feet go. But you'd look up like this and it was up there.

**One thing I'm not understanding. What were the Bangalore torpedoes going to do to help you get up the bluff?**

They'd blow.

**Right. What were they going to blow?**

It's like a pipe with a charge and they blow. Since that was sand it wasn't that big of a deal. If it had been cement it probably would have been. But this was sand that they were trying to make a hole in so we could get off the beach.

**So they were trying to part the sand so you wouldn't have to go up over the sand.**

That's right. Yeah. And they did it in certain different places so everybody wouldn't bunch together. "Whatever you do, don't bunch together." But you know how guys are, they're running this way and this way.

**So how long were you guys huddled at the base of the bluff?**

I don't really remember anymore. But it was a while before they got these guys.

**Like a matter of hours?**

Yeah. I would say. Because we didn't know just how far back these engineers were. They were the ones in charge of the Bangalore torpedoes. Then you had to bring up guys, like I say, with the flame thrower, when we hit the pill boxes, if there was anybody in them.

**At any point did you have any targets, did you fire your weapon?**

Before all of this, yeah.

**When you were still in the water, you mean?**

No. No. It was go as you go. See an enemy, shoot.

**I should have asked you earlier. We know that you trained with the Springfield rifle back in the States.**

When we went in we had the Garand.

**You had the M1 Garand? And you trained with that, I guess, back in England – is that correct?**

Yeah, a little bit of training to familiarize. First of all, we had to take all of the gook off of them.

**The cosmoline?**

They assign you this rifle. It was yours. So V. Sylvester got so and so with a number. And they'd pitch all the guys together. They had some kind of stuff that would almost melt that cosmoline off. Make sure that your breach is clean. You don't want a shell coming this way.

**When you were making the invasion, at what point were you firing your rifle and what were you shooting at?**

We weren't actually shooting at anybody close up. It's when we encountered them.

**So then**

You'd go into a skirmish, here and there.

**They breached the sand. Then what did you do?**

One at a time we got through. But these guys – the first that went through, they'd be like sentinels watching to see if there's any enemy. And, "okay, okay, okay." At the same time they were marking where we were going with a ribbon like.

**Was that for landmines?**

Oh you had to be careful of that, once you got up there. They said they were probably mined.

**Now, before we get through that breach. We talked just briefly on the phone about this yesterday. I mentioned, "Saving Private Ryan," and you saw the movie, right?**

Um-hum.

**How accurate did you feel that movie was portraying your experience?**

Pretty accurate at the beginning when they showed the guys going in. It was just about like the way we went in. But then, of course, Hollywood, you know.

**Did any of your squad become casualties on the actual invasion – going ashore?**

Yes, there were some guys. Not in my group, but behind us we saw 'em falling in the water. If they're falling in the water they're getting shot. But that must have been probably sniper fire if anything, because they didn't have anything close on the beach there at all after our planes went in. What they were concentrating on was the big guns, like I said, the Exeter that went, boom-boom-boom. A big flash that we could see and they probably figured they got the battery.

**That got the artillery battery on shore? I can't remember if we mentioned and I want to be sure we get it on record. The beach that you landed on was Omaha Beach. Is that correct?**

Omaha Beach. The second was, I think, Juno. I think the first went into...

**Sword?**

What was the other one – Utah?

**Utah, Sword, Juno and Omaha.**

Utah. So we were flanked actually by two other divisions. But we were the main force. 29 as it. That's why they had the saying, "Let's go 29."

**Then what happened after**

Then it was a matter of taking land. We were doing pretty good. We had the hedgerow cover. You'd look over to see if there was anybody there. Boom, right away. Kill 'em.

**Did you have any training on hedgerow fighting?**

No.

**It was all surprise, then.**

Yeah. But they had aerial photos of it.

**Two dimensional.**

Yeah. So they'd tell you, we're coming in here and these hedgerows. And they were like blocks almost. "Be careful when you look over. Once in a while there might be an enemy there." So then they got smart and they put these teeth on those tanks and they'd start banging.

**Making holes through the hedgerows?**

Yeah.

**Do you actually have any of these skirmishes yourself in any of these hedgerows?**

No. We were lucky that way.

**So, then what happened?**

So, like I say, we thought we were going to be gaining pretty good ground. We were.

**Are we still...**

We're in France.

**Are we still on June 6?**

Yeah. Yeah.

**The longest day.**

Yeah. From early morning. We probably were actually [in France] about Noon. You had rations, you know, because they weren't about to put a kitchen on. Although we did see them later. Now what was I going to say. Oh. Okay. So we're going along and thinking, "This is a piece of cake. Look over there and see if there's anybody there. Nothing firing at you, except once in a while you'd hear boom-boom-boom. We didn't know what that was. And we're going along. And, like I say, we're not too far from St. Lo – I'd say a mile, give or take, and here comes this damn scout outfit with a tank.

**German scout outfit? Now this is still on June 6?**

This was all June 6. Yeah.

**So out comes this – was this a motorized scout outfit?**

Yeah. Well, the tank. Yeah.

**Oh, tank.**

The medium tank. Not the big guy. They only had about a dozen guys with them. Like I said, the Crimean patch. Now they were seasoned guys. The first thing the guy does, boom-boom with the doggone canon. They were going to annihilate us right there. Trouble was, we were on unfairly stable ground at the time, too. I mean,

it was almost like a swamp. You make a move, and “what the hell is this” kind of soggy. Once he started to fire that tank, somebody to the right of me started waving – I don’t know if it was a soldier or one of the sergeants or what – waving a handkerchief. He put it on the end of his rifle, and with that, what are you going to do? First of all, you cannot flag a tank with a rifle unless you’re shooting at the guys, and they were smart enough to be to the side of it so they wouldn’t be a good target, you know. Shell would just bounce off of the doggone thing. But once, one of them hit ahead of me, and when they hit they come this way. And I got a piece of shrapnel in my thigh. That’s how I got the purple heart.

**This is still on June 6?**

On June 6. Yeah.

**I want you to continue, but I heard earlier that you weren’t taken prisoner until June 9.**

Oh, well. No. Like I say, if the timing is not right – because if they took a prisoner there was a officer-captain back there, in the back. They had to take you there, and he was supposed to interrogate, find out what outfit, you know, what division, how many are out there and all of that. [Tell name, rank, serial number only.]

**Now this incident. I want you to continue. You said you encountered the scout tank was some infantry, Crimean veterans.**

They took us. Yeah.

**And so they fired their tank, rounds hit around you, somebody in your unit – a sergeant maybe – waved a surrender flag.**

So then they said boom-boom-boom. And then we saw the riflemen.

**Oh. You didn’t know they were there.**

No. They were behind tank. They weren’t going to expose them because they figured maybe these guys might have a Browning automatic, you know – brrrr, burr, burr – knock ‘em all off. So they were seasoned guys.

**How many of you were grabbed up at once?**

One squad first. Twelve guys. We were the first ones. Yeah. Because everybody was to the back. And once they could surmise they couldn’t hear any counter fire, they thought, hey, them guys might have made it or they’re prisoners. So they held back, see. The whole force didn’t come in all at once. ‘Til they knew they had

ground that they could cover. It wasn't a while until we saw our own tanks out there. And then, when they did come, it wasn't Patton that had the first bunch. They were spread out, see, so they could shoot this way and that way. Because the barrel could move.

**But you were already out.**

Yeah. We were already prisoners. Yeah, he was, "What's your name, soldier, and what outfit."

**Let's go back to when you were first taken prisoner. I mean, through your eyes. You see somebody else waving the white flag, and you look around and see your fellow squad members. Did you all stand up?**

Yeah.

**What was going through your mind?**

What the hell was going on. And like I say, once we did, these Crimean guys disarmed you. That's the first damned thing they did. Drop your rifle. Some of these guys thought this is it. We bought it. We all actually thought when they said to take your helmet off, and then the process of that I had a picture of my wife, I had candy bars up there, you know. And we thought, aw-oh, what's this. They patted you down. They wanted to make sure you didn't have a sidearm.

**Did they come up to you or make you come up to them?**

No. They came up to us.

**Really.**

Like I say.

**So your squad was all by itself, then. You had nobody else.**

Nobody to rely on. No.

**Were you afraid.**

Oh, ho, ho, ho, ho. Yeah!

**It sounds like a silly question; literally, or just..**

Not that far. But I thought, “What the hell is going to happen.” Especially when they lined us up and they methodically, each guy had to take his helmet off, they took the grenade. You know. You didn’t have, they put the rifles on the side, they patted you down. And you thought, this is it.

**Did they let you keep your personal belongings, your wallet, the photograph you talked about?**

Wallet. The wallet they didn’t take. But the photograph, and I had one of our d-bars. And this guy, “Oh, chocolate, chocolate.” And you know, you only ate this much of it at one time.

**Weren’t you afraid he was going to be a little ticked off once that hit him?**

Well, when it hit him. We don’t know where it hit him. You know, after all, he might have been going along and said, “Oh, yigh.” (laughs)

**Well, he might have remembered and come after you!**

Oh, we laughed about that. The guys said, “You gave him the d-bar!” I said, “Yeah, what the hell – candy!”

**So, he let you keep your personal photograph, your wallet.**

Yeah, whatever I had. Yeah. They wanted addresses and that.

**What about your steel pot?**

Oh, we got it back after he went through it.

**He wanted to make sure you weren’t hiding anything in it.**

Oh yeah. Like I say, that’s where he got the picture. A color photo. She’s blond haired. He said, “Oh, cute little thing.”

**I saw the picture. You had already been wounded, now, right?**

Yeah. It wasn’t that bad of a thing, because I’ve only got a little tick in my thigh here.

**At the time, how bad was it? Were you bleeding badly?**

No. No. It took a while before I noticed, “What’s this red stuff here?” I started feeling. I couldn’t feel anything like a piece of metal.

**Was this shrapnel?**

It was shrapnel. It must have zinged me and went.

**Do you know what size canon? Was it an 88 on that tank?**

I don't think they had the 88's then.

**Not on the medium tanks?**

Yeah. Mediums. Yeah. Those were mediums.

**But you were wounded. Did it affect your walking at all?**

No. I really didn't realize it. Because that metal must have been so hot that it just hit and went.

**Oh, it didn't stay in you?**

No. Because when I saw the blood I started feeling and there was nothing there. So then when we got back to this here interrogator, he said, "Oh, you got wound. Yeah." He had a what-you-call-it – medical kit. I don't know. I suppose in case he ran into something. They put a little bandage on it to hold the blood.

**What time of day did this occur?**

Like I say, it was about noontime. Close to noon. Whatever time there.

**So you were in custody from the early afternoon on. So, how long did it take them to move you out of the combat area?**

Oh, God. I don't know. They put us on trucks. And we didn't know where we were to begin with. I mean, we knew we were in France.

**Now, besides your squad, did they have a round-up area where they've got other prisoners and truck you all back together?**

No. I didn't see that.

**Just your squad.**

The only time I saw that was when they took us to this prisoner of war compound. That's when we first got a sight of British.

### **Other prisoners**

And some of the French they grabbed.

**So, on the 6<sup>th</sup> is when they actually got you in custody. And that same day they moved you out of the area?**

Yeah.

**And where did you go?**

Whatever village it was. Because they took over everything toward the beach. ... They told the French to get the hell out. You know. And they'd take over. Of course, you know they probably had maybe machine guns or snipers up there in the buildings.

**Bell towers.**

Yeah.

**So. What kind of facility did they put you in that first night?**

Well, it was a small compound with, they had the fencing and wire, you know. And they had guys walk the outside of it with German shepherds.

**Did this look like a permanent facility or one they just put up?**

We wondered what was going to happen. Like I say, in the back of our minds was, "Oh, this is only a little contingent. Let's get rid of them. Why are we playing with these guys. We thought we were going to get whacked sooner or later.

**Were you allowed to talk amongst yourselves?**

Not too much. They tried to, especially if there was a non-com with you. He was put away from you so that he couldn't direct or, remember your name, rank serial, you know.

**Your feeling was that they might execute you on the spot.**

Especially when they made us take the helmets off. Because they lined us up, patted us down. He looked in the wallet but gave it back. He took the one color picture of my wife.

**Oh. He kept that?**

Yeah. We thought that was it. One guy said, “Oh, start saying your prayers.”  
(laughs) But no, see. Being first like that, they didn’t know what was back there.  
That Captain wanted to know what was going on.

**Oh. This German Captain?**

Yeah.

**This interrogation. Did that happen back at this compound, or?**

No. It was in the field yet. Yeah.

**And you were interrogated by a Captain. Was he the one that dressed your wound?**

He’s the guy that gave me whatever it was, a little patch like. Unlike ours. Their stuff was all different anyway. The first thing he told me – I happened to be standing there – the guys were all around. We were ringed with these guys with rifles. He said, “Hi. How are things in LA?” I thought, what the hell. He said, “Oh, you’re surprised.” He said, “Oh, I spent some time in the States.” He knew all about Los Angeles, Reno. “I don’t know,” I said. “I been in the service in training and everything. How would I know?” He says, “Well, it’s over for you.” He said, “Forget the war. But I want to know a few things.” And then he started spilling, name, rank; which we gave him. Division, you know, what company, battalion if you knew it and how many were back there. None of that! Name, rank serial; name, rank, serial. Whatever he asked: name, rank, serial. He said, “You’re a persistent cuss, ain’t you?”

**He said that to you?**

I said, “We were instructed not to reveal.” He said, “Well, I can see that. We’ll find out later.” He said, “What’s the ... [blue and gray 29<sup>th</sup> Div] patch?” I said, “Huh?” I said, “You find out.” Some guys maybe did blow the whistle. We don’t know. Because, after we were taken way back there, they thought that there was another counter attack toward the beach. Because they didn’t know what was back there unless some guy said, “Oh, there’s a bunch of stuff back there.” You know. Well, then they would naturally release that stuff from Calais.

**So after you were interrogated in the field, they put you on the truck and took you to the – how long were you there at that first?**

Well, they went through a process with us there where they wanted to know your particulars, and this was going through the International Red Cross. And they had people from the International Red Cross there – you could tell by the crosses and insignia and that – and they had people like stenographers taking this down so that it could go back to – I imagine it was going back to London. So from there they could tell your folks, you know.

**Was this still the first day?**

The first interview was the first day. So they could get a line on who they got, see. Well, there we had to tell the division because they wanted to know. But as far as anybody else, or if we knew what was back there, no. They were methodical son-of-a-guns I've got to tell you. They had this one Captain, especially. He knew just what the hell to ask.

**The Red Cross people. What nationality were they?**

I don't know, to tell you the truth, what they were. But they weren't German. Because it's International Red Cross, so it could have been anyone. It could have been people from the Netherlands for all we know. You know.

**After your interview with the Red Cross, then what happened?**

Then, like I say, they had to figure out – they had a little pow-wow there among themselves – you know: “These guys, we have to get more information, find out what's back there and all that.” And that's when we were put on the trucks and taken back into that little compound where they started interviewing you.

**And you were interviewed again by the German military people?**

Yeah. Yeah. They were wearing uniforms.

**This is all the first day – June 6<sup>th</sup>?**

All on the first day. Yeah. We didn't actually change another day until we got on those trucks and they started taking us. When they were loading us in trucks it was getting darker and darker.

**So this final interview, I mean this interview with the German military again, what was their demeanor? I mean, did they try to be friendly, have a conversation?**

Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

**Talk with you?**

Oh yeah. “Want a smoke?” I didn’t know what the hell that was. I said “Uh-uh.” He said, “I don’t have any food of any kind. You’re probably hungry.” I was just listening to the guy. You know. Then they’d ask again: “What’s that patch?” Oh, they were smart. But other than that, no antagonizing or nothing. They didn’t want to do that. You piss off a guy he ain’t going to tell you nothing.

**So after the interview was over?**

That’s when we got the truck ride.

**They put you on a German military truck. And where did they take you?**

Uh. Geez, can I remember the day? [the town?]

**Were you on the truck all night?**

Almost, almost. They were taking us quite a ways. Because they wanted to get us away from the combat bases.

**How did they secure you? I mean, were you handcuffed, or under guard?**

No, they had guys, two or three, with their rifles sitting right there by the tailgate there. We were more into the truck on benches.

**So when you arrived at your next destination, what happened then?**

Well, then, some more – go through all of this again. Where are you from? “Oh, I’m from Chicago.” Name-rank-serial number. These guys could talk good English. No, nothing. I was sure I wasn’t going to tell them anything but what we were told: name, rank, serial; name, rank, serial. “I know this already,” he says, “I want to know some other things.” Like I say, some of these guys might have been chicken and they did. Might have figured, “If I’m going to die, might as well tell ‘em.”

**How were you feeling by this time?**

Well, like I say, my worry was that we were going to get knocked off.

**And when that didn’t happen, did you feel relieved at all?**

Sort of, yeah. Especially when they put us in the truck. I thought, “We’re probably going to, going to be a big party.” You know. Boom-boom. Because you know what they did at one time during the war, they had trucks and they had a machine gun

in it. They'd line up the guys. Malmady was one of them. Brrrrrrrrrr. Dead. They didn't want too many prisoners. And they figured these couldn't tell them nothing anyway. And that's what our fear was. Whenever we saw a truck. But we were put in this, I call it a cage.

**I think when we were talking on the phone yesterday you mentioned that you were in two stalags. I thought you said the first one was 12B.**

12B. That's where they process you.

**Oh. That's the one we already talked about?**

Yes.

**Okay. And how long were you there?**

Oh geez. I don't know.

**Hours or days?**

Kind of sketchy. No, not days. Because, like I say, they wanted to move us as far back as they could. And that's how I wound up on Stalag B4. That was more or less a permanent.

**Now on the phone I think you said it was 4B. Was it 4B or B4?**

4B. That's what the stalag was designated.

**And how long were you there?**

How long? Oh. They were moving us around, moving us around; we didn't stay in one place too long. I wound up, by the time I was recaptured by Patton's bunch, I was in a place called Buda. It was more like eastern Germany.

**Oh, so you weren't in 4B the whole time?**

No.

**Oh. Roughly, how long were you in 4B? Was it a matter of days, weeks or months.**

Probably weeks. 'Til they got everything assembled again. Like I say, it was a surprise to them. And I would think change of command and whatnot. You know.

We saw different kinds of officers and stuff. Some had different uniforms and stuff. Some were in black like the SS. Some were the red with grey.

**How many different camps were you at? How many stalags?**

What was the last one – Buda. That was as far away from the front as they could take you. That's where we got our train ride. From St. Lo over there.

**Was Stalag 4B, was that at St. Lo?**

No. That was already in Germany. They didn't want to keep you in France too long because of a counter attack.

**Okay. I'd like to talk about each of your stays. That's probably the easiest way to do it. So 4B. What location was that? That was in Germany, right?**

Yeah. Um. Well, I did know that some of the soldiers, Germans, used to go to Leipzig. So it had to be in that area somewhere.

**And roughly how long were you there?**

Um. Boy. I wish I had written all of this down. Then I could tell you.

**Would you say you were there for a matter of weeks?**

Matter of weeks. Yeah. Until we got everything organized and they had to let Hitler know the Americans were invading and all this.

**Roughly, how many POW's were there?**

In that one?

**In 4B.**

Oh, quite a few. That's where I first saw these Englishmen. You know. They were mostly guys that were grabbed in Africa.

**So they had been there a while.**

Yeah. Yeah.

**What other nationalities besides US and English?**

Wherever they were with fez's on their head.

**Turkish troops?**

I don't know if they were Turkish. There were French, of course. And I mean, like I say, from the lowlands; they had prisoners from the lowlands, too.

**Were you segregated by nationality?**

No. No. Not by nationality. They tried to keep Americans with Americans and so forth. But being a big compound you could walk around and talk to different guys if they could understand you.

**What were your living conditions like at 4B?**

Not bad. They had tiered bunks – 1 and 2. We had straw mattresses, which we had to go out, get our own straw to put in that damn thing there.

**What was the sanitation like there?**

Oh, ho, ho. I hate to say it with her here. They had a long building and you walk in there and you saw holes. It was wood. You'd sit on there and do whatever. Then they'd have somebody clean it out. What they called the "shizenwagen." They had a hose, a big hose.

**I know what you're saying. Yeah.**

(laughs) I wish I had one of them bastards here now.

**What was your food like in 4B?**

Well, I'll tell you. The first time that I ever had cabbage soup – I mean soup – you could see the cabbage in it because wherever they were getting it from that was the main menu. Once in a while you'd get, well they had a loaf of bread say about this big, and they expect four guys to share it. So we had to cut in four pieces. And that was our main substance. You don't eat it all, because you're going to need it later. And there were some guys, and they were looking. And they had one incident in one of the camps where some of the guys were trying to steal from others. We don't know what happened to them, but they took 'em away. None of this! A guy'd put his ration of bread away and some son-of-a-gun would come along and think "Oh, I'm going to have an extra ration." But they took 'em.

**You said "they took them." The German's took them? So you think somebody turned them in?**

Probably was, yeah. Say, “Why is this guy putting bread away?” You know. You had soldiers. You always had an armed soldier in any of these barracks. We weren’t free. And we don’t know how many were on the outside either. Like I do know this one place they had dogs, and they were outside the compound.

**How were you treated there?**

Oh, not bad, really. No.

**I mean, they were civil to you – no brutality?**

Civil? Oh, yeah.

**Did you have any recreation while you were there?**

Oh. As far as that was, nothing that **(tape ends)**

**You were telling about your stay for at least a number of weeks at 4B. And you were just telling me about the recreational activities they had. You mentioned soccer, which didn’t interest you too much. What other types of recreation did they have – either physical or mental or whatever?**

Nothing that I can recall. Because they had so many British, they must have wanted something. So they talked the guy into it, I guess.

**Well, Victor. How did you spend your days?**

Well, I’ll tell you. What mostly we did was we would sit on our bunk and just wonder if we were ever going to see America again. But they would haul you out and say, “Oh, you got to work. Ten cents a day you got to work.”

**This is at 4B now.**

Yeah. They truck you. And they trucked us to a farm. His help was all conscripted. He had a barn that hadn’t been cleaned.

**When you say conscripted, were these prisoners?**

No, no. They grabbed these guys from the farm. In other words, the farmer had helpers, okay? With his chores and that.

**But they were forced labor?**

Yeah. Yeah.

**What nationality were they?**

I don't know. That much we don't know. But we do know that they were grabbed. We learned that from the owner of the farm.

**And they supplemented these conscripted workers with you prisoners of war. How many of you went to the farm?**

Oh, a whole bunch of us. The reason for that is, if I don't go too far ahead, he had a barn, okay. And he had nobody to keep it clean. And you know how animals are. So, I'm telling you. They give you a pitch fork and a shovel. And you're up like in a loft of this barn and you look down, and all you see, oh my God, all the crap. And we had to go like this and through an opening like a window, drop it down.

**I don't understand. This manure was up in the loft?**

No, no, no. They had an opening in the loft, okay. It wasn't all that high from the ground. Because this place, I mean it was just crawling with fecal from the animals.

**What kind of livestock was being kept there?**

They were mostly cows. Mostly cows. They had a few dray horses – these big dray horses. And we did see gang plows out there. So it must have been a pretty good operation. But, naturally, he was under control of the Germans. I mean, Hitler, you know. “You do what I say.” And you know. So that was a godsend for him because he had somebody that could clean that barn.

**How long did you work at that?**

I think we were there about a week. That was, oh, I thought we'd never get to the bottom of that thing.

**Were you fed on the farm then?**

Oh yeah. Get back at this. The farm lady would make a broth and they'd bring it out in a cauldron. And she had tin plates. And this was like a barley thing. Boy, I mean it was tasty. And it kept ya. Since they had fruit there, also – pears, apples, and what the heck else was it. I remember the pears and apples because we were allowed, as we'd be going along in the truck to reach up and pull it down. He said, “Oh, you can take fruit.” We always looked for that bowl of whatever she was making.

**And did you go back to the POW camp at night?**

Yeah, yeah. Oh sure. They had to bring you back each day. You'd stay until your time was up again for the day and bring you in. It was almost like an eight hour day.

**And did you say you got some money for working there?**

Ten cents a day. When you were on the farm, though.

**In US money?**

(laughs). German Phennes

**Did you ever actually get it?**

Never got it. Never got it. (laughs) I'll bet them guys, they just, "Oh, how much did this guy make?" Never saw that money. But like I said we were supposed to be paid ten cents a day.

**So, besides the work for the week or whatever on the farm, did you have any other work stints like that at 4B?**

No.

**Just that one.**

Yeah. Because I guess this farmer was bugging 'em, "Hey, I need people. You took mine." And that was a choice, a nice group. Shifted them over there. They had barracks there, of course, if you had to relieve yourself or whatever, you know. But we didn't stay. They'd bring you back on the truck. It was stupid, we thought, but...

**When you ended your stay at 4B, what caused you to move?**

Well, they must have got word that we were really getting a force to come in and really end it. So it was primarily a move so they couldn't recapture us.

**So you couldn't be liberated by your own forces. Did you ever hear the sounds of battle coming closer to where you were?**

Only when it was almost at the end, we could hear that tank. We figured it wasn't theirs because it made a different sound than theirs did. Theirs made a lot of racket. We had these six bogie, seven bogie tanks.

**So it was a smoother sound.**

It was a smoother sound. And we were – they were still using some kind of a fuel that wasn't diesel. Ours were diesel engines.

**They were running low on fuel.**

Oh, yeah. That's why they took over the Ploesty oil field. Because they needed the fuel.

**Did you have any warning that you were going to be moved out of 4B?**

No. Uh-uh. They just, "Oh, you're going to move." We said, "What?" They had the tanks all lined, I mean the trucks all lined up. They call you, said, "Make sure you take blanket and whatever in the truck." We didn't know where we were going.

**What time of year was that?**

Well, probably around summer time. Close to it. You figure June, July, August.

**How long was the trip from 4B to Buda?**

Quite a long time.

**A matter of days or hours?**

No, it was hours. But they'd have a pit stop, you know. Because they didn't have nothing on those trucks, you know. Of course the guard was with you all the time. Took you in the field there, do whatever.

**Did anybody talk about trying to escape?**

No. A lot of talk. But there was no way you were going to do it. Once we were in Buda there was a group of five guys made a get away. How they did it, they got out of the wire, okay. And they were going to see if they could escape and get maybe friendly German or somebody to hide them, you see, so maybe they could be in contact with our guys and be out of the war. (laughs) We knew that there were four guys, five guys, wanted to go. It was about two days and they're back in the barracks. "What the hell, I thought you guys were escaping." "Well, yeah, we were escaping. They go brrrrrrrr, brrrrrrrrrr, brrrrrrrr. You don't escape." Because,

**So you're saying they got shot at?**

Yeah. They took what 'cha call – every evening before you go to sleep – they'd line you up and count, how many guys. "Oh, ho! This lists so many in this barracks. How come this guy isn't here?" Oh, sometimes they 'd lie and say, "I think he snuck

out to the PX,” or something like that, or, “He’s in the can,” or something like that. But they’d always bring them back.

**I want to come back to that. I want to ask you about your story there. But moving you from 4B to Buda, you say it was a matter of hours. Do you have any idea at all how far it was in distance?**

Um-um.

**I mean if it was done during a day?**

Our concern was, being in a truck, was what are they going to do with us now. Because we knew they were knocking people off, you know.

**Did that happen to anybody in your barracks?**

Not in my group, no. We were lucky.

**But you heard of it happening in 4B?**

Yeah.

**What were the reasons for killing prisoners?**

Well, I guess, you know, you got food, shelter – that’s taking it away from the German soldiers, see.

**So they didn’t single somebody out for**

No, no.

**Disciplinary problems**

No. Well, yeah. If you tried to do something, yeah. They’d put them in a disciplinary barracks and we’d never hear from them again. They’d never come back. Either they whacked them off or whatever. If you did anything that they thought was wrong – death sentence.

**So, when you got to Buda? How [long] were you at Buda before you got liberated?**

Oh God. Quite a while. Because with Patton it was a steady thing, you know. He’d take over an area and then maybe move here, move there. And then, finally, one of

his outfits came across this camp. It must have been sheer luck. I'll bet they were out there scouting, and sure enough they see this. "Oh, what is this building?"

**What was the date you were liberated from Buda?**

Ninth.

**Of – what month?**

It had to be a, a, close to August I would think. Because things were starting to change as far as foliage and that.

**So, August of '44?**

Yeah.

**So, while you were at Buda. First of all, did that stalag have any number designation – like you mentioned 12B and 4B earlier.**

Oh. I think that Buda was 12D.

**12D.**

Because I've got a – there's where they issued a dog tag to us. Plain piece of metal, and my number was 20059. It said Stalag 12D. And it was imprinted on that.

**Did you still have your Army issued dog tags? Did the Germans confiscate them at some time?**

Yeah. They said that it was to verify to folks back in America. But we wondered about that. My wife did say there was a courier came to the door and he had papers there to say I was a POW and where they think we were made prisoners. And that's how she knew. And they told her to inform anybody else that would be interested – relatives of all kinds.

**And what organization was it that notified her?**

It was part of the Red Cross.

**And they came to her door?**

Yeah. A courier. You know.

**What was her reaction?**

Well, she was glad. They thought that, since they didn't hear anything when the V-mail stopped, you know, and they knew we went in, she thought maybe I was dead – you know. And it would take a while for them to get ours together and inform people. So she was pretty happy that I was alive.

**So her first notification of your status was from the Red Cross courier.**

Yeah.

**I meant to ask you earlier when we were talking about 4B. At any time when you were a prisoner of war did you have communication with your wife or anybody back home? Did they offer to get letters in and out?**

Only that V-mail. That didn't last too long, though. And it wasn't very big. It was maybe like this, see. And whatever you could write there.

**And while you were a prisoner, you able to continue the V-mail? And did you get mail there?**

Yeah. But of course they would censor the thing. Half of the stuff. She said, "I'm reading here, then I have to jump here and there." She said, I couldn't make head or tail out of it. They censored different stuff. They didn't want anybody to know what was going on.

**While you were a prisoner, did you ever see Red Cross packages?**

Yeah. We got one place, when we were in Buda. One of the guys, how he found out we don't know. But he said, he found out – he was talking to one of our other guys; he was from another barracks – they got a warehouse not far from here. And from this guy tells me, because he was on a detail, "loaded to the ceiling with packages." He didn't know what they were. "I think," he said, "it was supposed to be food for the prisoners. I'm not sure," he said. But we finally did get to see that.

**So that was the only time you got a Red Cross food package was at Buda?**

Yeah. Once in a while you'd get one of them. About once a week, and you had to divide between the guys.

**So after you got to Buda and after this fellow prisoner told the rest of them about it, then you started getting these**

The cat was out of the bag, see.

**Now, before, were you losing weight?**

Oh yeah. I was like a skeleton almost.

**You were living basically on cabbage soup or barley soup?**

Whatever they fed you, yeah. Except, like I said, when we were at that farm, when she'd come out with that soup. She said, "Oh, you poor boys." You know. We could have fruit off the trees. That was the only other thing.

**So, at Buda, how did the living conditions compare to Stalag 4B?**

Primarily all their camps were more or less the same. You still had that straw sack you had to lay on and a double bunk. They had one big barrack that was your mess hall, you know. Same thing with

**Sanitary facilities?**

Sanitary facilities, yeah. When we went there was nothing but this thing with the holes in it.

**How about showers?**

Well, there's a story here. We heard that, since the guys were complaining. First of all, we wanted razors. I had a beard you wouldn't believe. We started hollering. They gave us soap so we could wash. \_\_\_\_\_ At first they said, "You put water in hammock and take." And the guys said, "What the hell. We want to take a bath." Finally there was a hospital, and they had, naturally, showers. So I guess one of these guys said, "Well, Jesus. I guess these guys are going to start to smell." So they put us in trucks to take us there. And as we were approaching the thing, here they're dragging somebody to truck out. (laughs) They got him on a stretcher and putting him in an ambulance. We wondered, "Jesus, what are they going to do now!" We didn't know we were going for a bath. He just said, bath. Well the thing of it was, this guard, before we actually got in there, he said, "You get shower but sometimes they go in – he didn't say who – and gas comes out of the nozzle." We said, "What? Holy God!" You expect water and gas comes out. And they had it fixed so it was closed in. They actually lock you in this thing. It wasn't too big – how big is a shower? You know. And after a while you could hear the exhaust blowing the gas out. And then they'd open those doors and drag these guys out. They're all laying. You know.

**It was the German guard who told you this?**

Yeah.

**Now, why was he telling you that?**

Well, in case that was going to happen to us – which he didn't know either, I don't think – we would more or less figure, well, this was it. But we were there for showers. How they had that figured, I don't know. But they must have had a special way they could control that – gas here and maybe water here.

**I just wondered if maybe he saw the real thing at one of the concentration camps.**

No. It was all hearsay, he was telling us. But he said, "I believe it. I see bodies."

**So this was at Buda.**

We think there was – they had a crematorium, you know – where they put the undesirables. You know, kill them, stick them in there and burn them up.

**Did they have one at Buda are you saying?**

Yeah. Yeah. It looked like a – I don't know – did you ever see a bakery oven where they have the bread and that in there? It was similar to that, only it was deep. I don't know how many they could put in there at a time. They'd just cook 'em. "Eee – what are you eating?"

**Speaking of eating, how was your food at Buda?**

Oh, like all the others.

**The same.**

Yeah. Germans. Oh, oh, oh. I forgot. This lady again, she would drop in maybe leftover meat. She'd cube it up and she said, "You boys need something," you know. And with that barley and that would be the only other thing. But other than that it was more or less the same.

**So, besides the ration of cabbage soup and the short ration of bread, were you being fed anything else at any other time?**

No.

**Oh. And your Red Cross package at Buda.**

Red Cross package. Then we thought, “Oh, here goes the bread,” you know, because we were getting this. But they kept the bread going. You know why? Because the soldiers would go with a truck to any bakery they wanted to in Germany, “I want so and so many loaves of bread.” He didn’t dare refuse. That’s how they were getting it. In other words, they were stealing it.

**What was in your Red Cross package?**

It had canned powdered cheese. You had powdered egg. There was one candy bar – one of theirs, whatever the hell it was. Of course it would be chocolate. You had cube sugar. What else? I’m trying to think now – besides that stuff. Oh, I think there was a package of cigarettes. And if it wasn’t anything you smoked they just took them. You know. No matches or anything like that. They didn’t want you to start a fire somewhere. And. Oh. You know how they had this hard bread? Well, they had a packet of it about this high to supplement. You had to mix the egg with water. If you wanted the milk you had to add water to make it. There wasn’t too much stuff there.

**With the Red Cross packages, did any of you and your fellow prisoners combine your food and...**

Oh, yeah, yeah. Once we got settled to a place we were going to be for a while, like Buda, we’d, you know – “What you got in yours? What you got in yours?” – we’d get together and make an actual meal out of it, which was kind of okay to do. So the guys said, “Well, I’ve got some egg here, and here’s some milk, and here’s some bread.” Of course we had that one loaf, you know.

**Did anybody ever get inventive with foods to make up special meals?**

Yeah, they tried. But you know the results weren’t all that good. They’d wind up being the same as you would have eaten. One guy would say, “Gee, I wish I had some ham or something, with these eggs.” I said, “Yeah, dream some more.”

**What was your morale like when you were at Buda?**

I must say we all stuck together. We figured if we don’t cause any trouble, we’re not going to be in any trouble. So, you know, let’s play it by ear and see what happens. And we, more or less, there was no altercation of any kind.

**No fights among the prisoners.**

No fights among them. No. Because, like I said, it would be to our detriment, then, if we did.

**At Buda, do you have any memorable experiences that you want to share?**

Ah. Let's see. Like I say, it was named 12D. I think that was where the place where they took us to the farm where we encountered that cow stuff. But other than that. Once in a while they'd gather the guys in the compound. You'd have to walk around the wire so you had some – so your muscles would

**Some exercise?**

Otherwise you just stayed in the barracks.

**I think I mentioned before the interview, or maybe when we were talking on the phone. I understand it was a very serious time in your life. And I know that prisoner camps were not like they were portrayed on "Hogan's Heroes."**

Oh, ho, ho, ho.

**On TV. But was there anything at all humorous or anything that you found humor in during the time you were a prisoner?**

Well, this one guard, his name was Schultz by the way, and he was a pretty husky guy – he was attached to our barracks. See, they had a soldier for each barracks. The guy's were going to – "Oh, do you know what playing cards are?" "Sure, I know what playing cards are." "Well, how about getting a deck and we'll play." Know what they were trying to do? Get some of his money – he had marks, see. (laughs) One guy was shrewd, see. He was really good at it. He must have played a lot either while he was at camp or at home. You know. He'd boom, I got \_\_\_\_\_. He'd say, "Oh, I got 5 francs." That was about as much as we got.

**Did you have any way at all of knowing what was going on outside the camp? Did you have a radio in the camp? Or did they allow any newspapers?**

No, nothing like that. But we would query the guard about what he was hearing about the outside. And he'd kind of was hesitant – should I tell them, am I breaking a rule or something. So he probably got the okay from one of the officers that if they wanted to know something, sure, tell them. "Oh, the war going bad for America." "What?" "Oh, we got troops all over. Pretty soon you're going to be back in the water." "Oh, shit! Now it's the other way around."

**Do you think he knew or was he just...**

Oh, you know. But, boy, I'll tell you. When they knew the troops were coming close, into civilian clothes and away they went. Man. They weren't so dumb. "I go back to wife."

**So you're saying that before you were liberated they disappeared?**

Yeah. Just before. Because we were looking – where in the hell is this soldier at? What they took with the rifles and that, I don't know. What the uniform. But they had on the side, in their rucksacks, civilian clothes. Off went the uniform. Even the commandant. He, right away – boom, boom – he was no more commandant.

**Did he stay or did he leave?**

Oh, he had to stay. Yeah. He was, what did they call him – meister – over the camp.

**You said you weren't treated badly.**

No, no.

**I wonder why he didn't want to stay in his identity as the commandant of the camp that treated you well.**

Yeah. In fact, this one – he wanted to know a lot about America. So we said, "What, do you intend to invade?" (laugh) Oh, he didn't like that. He said, "dumbkof - I slap you." Oh, they didn't care. They'd take the butt of the rifle and boom.

**Oh, they actually...**

We saw them do it one time. I'll tell you another story.

**Well first that one.**

(laughs) I'm telling you. They were marching us somewhere – I forget now – probably on one of these jobs. And we seen these guys in striped uniforms. They were Jews. They had them that grey and with that blue stripe, and with – they were standing there, there was a group standing there, they had the German dog watching them. We heard them say, you know, in his own lingo, "Watch them." The dog sat there, and he was just watching them. And while we were there, I guess the guy leading us had to take a pee or whatever, he left somewhere there, one guy moved. I don't know if he had an itch or what. Here's the dog, boom, right at his throat. When that happened they pushed us as far and as fast as they could so we couldn't see what happened. But we figured he probably got him here – good-bye. That's the only incident we saw that we saw that's how those dogs were trained. All he had to do was say something to him, and he'd sit there and just look at them, I guess.

**Now, were you also saying that somebody got hit with the butt of a rifle?**

If you did something he didn't like, they would, yeah. Remarks, you know? Like I said, a lot of times they'd like to speed it up because they had old guys guarding. They'd say, "You want to go home?" And the guy would be sort of dragging back and boom with the rifle, right in the ass – "Get in there." That's the time.

**Now, were there any other works details besides the one you described – the cleaning out of the barn?**

No, no.

**That's the only one you recall.**

Yeah. Because, by that time our forces were really getting it going. It wasn't too long after that that we were rescued. But, like I say, all of a sudden we heard that rumble of tanks. We knew it was ours by the...

**Let's talk about the day you were liberated. You say that the German guards were all, mostly gone?**

Yeah.

**But there were a few left?**

Yeah. But they were in civilian clothes.

**Civilian clothes. Then what happens?**

Well, they were pretty lax then. And they actually, being acting like civilians, they weren't going to say, "Oh, you can't go out of the barracks." So, I was able to get out of the barracks with a couple of guys and here I see something coming up. And I think, "Oh, oh – what is this?" And there's a soldier in front of the tank – one of ours, one of Patton's scouts. And he says, "Hey, how many of you guys in there?" What the hell! We say, "There's a whole bunch of us." He says, "We're here to rescue you." He said "The war is going in our favor." And that's the first time I saw an American GI after all that time. And they had, naturally, the tank commander in the tank, and they said, "Fellows, it's over for you now. You'll probably be processed back there and be sent back." And that was it. They rounded up these guys in civilian clothes. Because I think they had an idea they were doing something. You know. Because our officers were pretty shrewd. They were pretty smart guys.

**So, when you heard the word that you were going out of Germany**

No kidding. I don't believe it. I said, "Are you going in the barracks?" He said, "Well, we're going to move the tank up closer," he said, "a couple of riflemen there."

You know. What they did, like I said, they lined up these guys in civilian clothes and he said, "You're not a civilian, you're the commandant." He had that stature, you know, of a leader.

**He could have asked you guys, too.**

Yeah. So. They put a guard on 'em. About four or five guys and held them right there. Because they were going to be interrogated and all this and that, and taken somewhere. Because they were considered POW's then.

**By putting civilian clothes, weren't they risking being considered spies – if they're out of uniform?**

Well, the problem – that's probably what our guys figured they might be. But we knew, being in the barracks, that they changed. The colonel was there in his uniform with all the big guys, and the purple, you know, the cross. And all of a sudden he's dressed like one of the guys going into the pubs. "What the hell is this?" You know. When they lined them up, we go, "This is the colonel." "Oh?" One guy's ready to stab him with the bayonet. "No, no, you damn fool. We've got to talk to the guy." He says, "No, no, I'm no soldier." Sure he is, that sucker. How shrewd they were that they had civilian clothes.

**Did you have to spend another night in the compound?**

Yeah. Until they got, they had to get the trucks there. That's the only transportation they had.

**Military trucks you say?**

Yeah.

**How many of you were there, actually?**

They were the camouflaged thing, you know.

**How many of you were there in the camp at that time?**

I don't know. Because there were several barracks, you know. We had only, between us and the next barracks, interchange or talk to each other, go to chow and that.

**So you got in the trucks and where did they take you?**

Uh, let's see. Where did we go. I think, if I remember right, before any of the serious interrogation, they took us to the rail line to get us out of there to more friendly territory. And, of course, that was more or less the end for us, because they kept telling us, "You're going back to England. You're going back to England." Once they got your name and everything – "We've got to notify for folks and that." We said, "Weren't they notified?" "Oh, that you were a POW, yes. But now we rescued you."

**How did they transport you back to England?**

On ships.

**On ships again. Not by plane.**

No, uh-uh. From there we flew to the US.

**From England.**

Yeah. On our planes. Yeah. But from there, no.

**So, they get you back to England. At what point did you actually have contact with your wife back in the States?**

Once we were in military control – our military control. You were allowed to make up a telegram. They said, "Don't be afraid. These will go."

**Oh. Was this before you left for England, or after you got there.**

No. Before. To know that you were rescued.

**So you were able to give her a telegram saying, "Honey, I'm fine," or something.**

Yeah. Not too long. Because they didn't want a whole story – you could tell her when you're home. (laughs)

**So, they take you to England, and then what happens?**

Well, then, as far as we was concerned, the war was over. We had been in the combat zone, and they just rustle you up and more or less interview you as to what transpired, and they made plans to take you back home.

**When did you actually leave England to come home?**

Um. Let's see. That was when. We got a time there?

**You were liberated roughly in August of 1944.**

I don't have nothing here, I don't think, that says anything.

**It says that you were in the Army until November of '45. So we've got a little over a year from the time you went to England to the time you actually discharged.**

Yeah. Because we weren't hustled out of the service right away. We went through so much doggone many different, "Strip fellow," you know. You'd have short-arm stripping and they wanted to check you over and you get tired of that. What they were afraid of is that we wouldn't come back with a disease, especially tuberculosis. They didn't want anybody coming home with TB.

**How long were you in England, then?**

Oh. I spent the better part of three years there training.

**No, no. I mean how long were you in England after you were liberated?**

Oh, oh.

**Before they sent you home?**

I'd say maybe a couple of months. Because they had to get the transport, you know.

**And you said they were also doing medical screening**

Medical screening. Make sure you're clean and look you over. That's where he said, "Oh, you got wounded, huh?" That's when he put it down to go for Purple Heart. He said, "You'll be given this when you're back in America."

**So when they sent you back to the States – did you say they flew you back to the United States?**

Yeah. What they did, however those planes were configured at the time, they made it so they could get troops in. We were only on benches over the water.

**And when you came back to the United States**

And those were 47's what they were using.

**DC47's?**

Yeah. Because they didn't have any big stuff then, over there.

**Where did they put you when you came back to the United States?**

Oh, uh. Let me see. This wasn't until. I'm trying to think of the name of the place. I'm pretty sure that was in New Jersey, too. A barracks of some kind.

**Somewhere in New Jersey – Fort Dix?**

I can't remember the name.

**Camp Kilmer?**

No, not one of the recognized camps. Something for the guys being brought back and processed. That was a processing center before you got your ride back home. I think maybe a week or so.

**So, back stateside. What did you do until you were discharged?**

Well, really, nothing. (laughs) Yeah.

**Did you get leave to go home?**

No, uh-uh.

**Did your wife come out to visit you in New Jersey?**

No. She wanted to come. I shouldn't lie. She wanted to come. But I said, "Things are not what you think they might be. You're better off right where you are. We'll see each other soon enough." She didn't like that too well. But I got that from some of the other guys. One said, "My wife even wanted to drag the kids." He said, "No way!" So, we'll have our time when we get back home. I don't know of any that did come.

**So you didn't see her for a visit until you got out?**

Yeah.

**Wow.**

Except that, like I say, through the communications, that she was healthy and that.

**Oh, so you did**

How the folks were and that.

**Now I know long-distance telephone calls back then weren't like they are today. But did you ever talk to her on the telephone after you got back stateside?**

Nope. Just communications.

**Just letters.**

Yeah. It would have cost them so much, see. You know how the Germans are. "Oh, Hitler would crap if they found this out." (laughs) Oh that bastard [mustache]. Every time I look at it, "You lousy (tape blocked out comment)." No wonder they wanted to kill him and they damn near did. If that bomb didn't go off so fast they'd have had him. He wasn't all that good with his own people.

**So, really, back in the States you're just pretty much marking time?**

More or less, yeah. Marking time.

**They didn't have any duties for you to perform?**

Not really, no.

**You'd just sit in the barracks?**

They'd line you up and take a count and exercise. Other than that, no. We did get movies, though. They had like a stage. Oh, something you saw years and years back. People you didn't even remember. "Oh, there's a movie tonight," he'd say. The first sergeant would tell you that. "There's a movie tonight and I want to see all you guys there." You'd look at it and say, "Shit. What kind of movie. I want to see women. Bring me some can-cans here."

**So you finally**

Oh, I saw can-can's in Paris. Follies. They didn't do nothing much but show their butt. "Oh, there's a girl here."

**At the time you were discharged you were a corporal. When did you get your promotion to corporal?**

After I got back.

**After you got back to the States.**

Whatever they raised anybody, it was after you were back in the military – our military. They didn't give anybody anything over there.

**Now, we're about to talk about the day you got discharged. Before we get to that, I want to ask you what medals or citations you might have received.**

Okay. First of all we had the infantry badge. That's the rifle.

**Combat Infantry Badge.**

Yes. The next thing you got was the European/African/Middle Eastern Ribbon medal and ribbon. Then you would get the Good Conduct next. Then they gave you, on the Good Conduct they'd have a bronze star and a bronze arrowhead showing that you were in combat. And the star denoted what campaign you were – what battle you were in. I only had one. I only had one bronze star – arrowhead – for the invasion. Then they came up with the Prisoner of War medal years later. You got that Victory/World War II medal. That's what I had. I had, oh yeah, the Purple Heart, of course. And the Presidential Citation. That was a little blue thing. Because of that doctor. He said, "Oh, you were wounded."

**That was the first time they had that on record that you were wounded? They weren't notified before.**

No. Communication was, I'm telling you, not the best in the world. They had these phones and they'd crank thing, and he said, "Hello, hello, company so-and-so."

**What was it like the day you got out of the service?**

Well, I'll tell you. It was like exuberation, like a weight came off of you. I mean, you knew you weren't incarcerated anymore. You knew you were in your own people's hands. And you said, "This is probably it for you, unless they argue." Which they did. They took us to Percy Jones in Battle Creek – the whole regiment again – and look in your nose and eyes and whatever.

**Now you went to Percy Jones before you were discharged?**

Yeah. We went right to Percy Jones, and that was to get you ready for discharge to civilian life. To get the records all together, you know.

**So you were discharged at Battle Creek, Michigan, then? And then what?**

Well, we had to wait until they said we were discharged. And you had to sign your name and all this. And if you wanted somebody to come for you, see you and that.

**How did you get home?**

I think I was on a train.

**Took a train back to Chicago?**

To Chicago, yeah. Because they were starting to use the aircraft for other things. We thought we were going to fly. But at the last minute they said they needed the aircraft for something else. Wouldn't tell you what.

**Did anybody meet you at the train station in Chicago?**

Geez I don't remember if Virgie did. I think she wanted to, but I put a veto on that too. Because Union Station, you know. I said, "We're going to meet. Go to your folks' house, and I'll see you there. In full uniform.

**So that's where you met up? (tape turns over)**

What kind of tape are you using?

**As we ran out of tape, Victor was being asked about his reunion with his wife. And it prompted his nephew and wife to remember that they'd already had a reunion up at the camp in Michigan.**

Yeah.

**So, let's talk about that first. And, then you're not off the hook – we will talk about your reunion in Chicago. You say she came up to see you while you were in Michigan?**

Yeah.

**Now that's the first time you've seen her since you went overseas, right?**

Yeah. I was at one of the movies they were showing there. They'd keep the guys there so they wouldn't get at each others' throat, probably. And the guy says, "Private Sylvester, Private Sylvester. You are wanted in the colonel's office." I wondered, "What the hell did I do now?" They were smart. They had her by my bunk. I didn't know nothing about this. Because I would have seen right away. He said, "Soldier, you've got a visitor." I said, "Oh, visitor? Maybe one of the guys I knew?" "You are ordered to report to your barracks now." "Yo, Victor!"

**You had no idea she was going to be there?**

Man I'll tell you, it was like a massacre. Kisses all over. "Oh, I missed you." And here's grandma standing at the side. "Grandma." \_\_\_\_\_ I don't know where Grandpa was, he must have parking the car. The two of them were there.

**Was that this her grandmother and grandfather, or your?**

No, that was her mother.

**Oh, I see.**

Oh, her mother and father.

**So they drove her up to see you?**

Yeah. Because he had told her, "If you ever find out where he's at, and it's fairly close enough, we're going to take you. So they did. Grandpa was a good Joe when he wanted to be. Probably Grandma said, "You aren't going to let those kids come home without seeing 'em." She had the fist, you know. That's what it was. I didn't expect her to be there.

**It looks like you hadn't seen her for over two years, right?**

I don't know.

**You hadn't seen your wife for...**

Oh, yeah. She wanted to come, see. And I said, "No, no."

**How long did she and her folks stay up there in Michigan?**

Not long, because I was ready to go anyway.

**I see. But they came back, and then you came back separately. And then we have the second reunion in Chicago. You're still not off the hook. But at least you'd seen her fairly recently. You said, "I'll tell you?"**

It was hot springs tonight. (laughs) "What're you talking about? Hot Springs, Arkansas?"

**Well after your reunion with your wife, what did you do with the days and weeks afterwards? I know you did say off record you went back to Florsheim to get your old job back. Do you want to talk about that?**

Oh, yeah. Unbeknownst to any of us, I went there figuring my job is open. That's what they promised. Well, you know, "There's the superintendent's office. Go in there and talk to him." Then, looking around, I don't see anybody familiar. Even the guys I was working close to. "What is this?" You know. I look in there. Here's a guy. He's got almost a Hitler mustache, not quite. And he's the superintendent. I said, "Where's Mr. Edward's?" "Oh," he said, "I think he retired. But that's not why you're in this office. What's this all about?" I said, "My job." "Your what?" I said, "Well, I was a sole scribe. And I give him the number." And he said, "Oh, that's been over a long time ago." "What do you mean," I said, "I go into the service and fight for the country and right away," "Well, you know," he said, "work goes on. I can give you a job, but you might not like it." What it was – unloading the goddamn sheets of leather. The damndest job you could ever get. I wasn't strong enough for that to begin with. They were about like this, see, this long. And they had some pretty burly guys to pull it off the truck and into the shop there where it was laid out, and they'd have all the different patterns for the shoes. And I'm watching a guy do this. And I thought, "Boy, if you ever put your finger too close you're going to not have a hand." Because he put that guide down and it had to be a pair. And he'd have about six leathers. And that's how he'd do it, so much at a time – about six pairs at a time.

**I don't know if I understood. Did you say they eliminated your job, or that they replaced you with somebody else in that job?**

No. They replaced me. They couldn't eliminate it because that was part of the shoe process.

**And there was no law that returning servicemen had to get their job back? It was just up to the company?**

That's what they told us. That your job would be waiting for you when you come back.

**The company told you that.**

I said, "Why not?" That's when he sprung it on me, "Oh, I can give you a job if you still want to work for Florsheim. Oh, right there. If you still want to work for Florsheim."

**But not your old job. So what did you do?**

I didn't work for Florsheim. What did I do after that, do you remember? Oh yeah. I remember. I had a Aunt Mary, his Aunt too, and she said, "The hell with that shoe outfit," she said, "I know people." Because she was big in the VFW, the ladies'

auxiliary. And she was talking to some of her people there. And they said, "Say, railroads are going to need people with all those young guys that they grabbed." So she directed me, and we went downtown to the main office of the Burlington – that was the CB&Q then, Chicago, Burlington and Quincy. He says, "Oh, you were a soldier." I had the thing, the ruptured duck and all that (laughs), ruptured duck. And he says, "Well, we need people. Do you know where Belmont and Crawford is?" "What the hell, I'm from Chicago." "We have a plant there," he says, "and they could use you." And he says, "I'll get in touch with the superintendent." He said, "Just wait here." And ding-ding-ding. He says, "You got anybody, bring them. But don't let him travel by himself – bring him. We can use him." So there I got my job back, but only not what I wanted.

**And what company was this?**

Florsheim Shoe in Chicago.

**Oh, you went back to Florsheim.**

Oh, beautiful. I looked at some of those shoes when they were done. Phew. Beautiful.

**So after Florsheim, Burlington Railroad.**

Then I went to Burlington Railroad. Yeah.

**This was after you got out of the service you went to the Burlington Railroad.**

Yeah. After service I went back to Florsheim to get my job. And he says, "Oh, oh, oh."

**Yes, you didn't get that job. So then you went to the railroad. You said when you went with your Aunt Mary, you pointed to your lapel and said you had the ruptured duck. I really don't know what that is.**

That's your discharge eagle.

**Oh. Okay. Was that a medal or ribbon.**

It's cloth. It was stitched on you right here.

**And did you work for the railroad for your entire career then?**

Yeah. Thirty-five years.

**Thirty-five years with the railroad. And what was your job with them?**

I was a clerk. I went up the ladder. First jobs they gave me was being outside as a train would move from one division to another end, I would walk it from the engine back and take the initials and numbers on tags – they had tags – it was all pencil work. From there they had a bulletin board, and any jobs that came up you were able to bid on – it was a bid thing.

**Were you union?**

Oh yeah. Boot and shoe union. Always union.

**So you moved up the ladder. And what were you doing?**

I found out, I looked on the bulletin board, and this one job was open. Where, what he used to do again was, when we'd have cars leaving our yard and go – like, say, they'd go to the Baltimore and Ohio, okay – his job was to gather the way bills. Every car had to have a way bill, with destination and what it had. It was a big thing, about like this. You'd gather them together, and before they would leave the yard you handed them to the conductor of the train so that he, while they were going, he would look through all of them and go car by car, bill by bill, see. And if you had an empty, and you didn't have a regular empty car bill -- they had slips that said "empty" -- and you'd put the initial and number on it.

**So you got this job next. What were you doing when you retired?**

It was called an interchange job.

**Interchange job. What were you doing when you retired? What was your last job with the railroad?**

Oh, hm. What did I do last, remember? [Nephew's comments: Oh, you see the posting on the board to go into the office. You were doing something.] Oh, oh, oh. Yeah. Since we were a trailer carrier, I wound up in what they call "house 9" – Brake-house 9 – where they put the bands in line for going out. And my job when I got there, since they didn't know what to do with me, I look in there and all I see is boo-bok. Know what boo-bok is?

**No.**

Blackie.

**Oh, okay.**

(laughs) I'm talking to a stranger!

**Oh. I've never heard that term.**

We used to call them anything. And friendly as all hell. "Oh, yeah, white boy, hey, white boy." (laughs) They put me at a desk to punch the file there. Naturally they tell the black girl to tell me what the job is. Holy Christ. She says, "Victor, don't worry. I'll tell you everything you want to know." So, you had "in" and "out," and they would give you a list of outbound, and you would match the cab to the – what did they call 'em? [Comments from nephew and nephew's wife: car, rolling stock]. Yeah, yeah. So they knew that this was with this and where it was going. And that's the job I wound up with.

**How long have you been retired?**

Over 20 years.

**Now, Victor, from the time that you got out of the service until the present, did you have any contact with any of your wartime buddies or fellow prisoners?**

I tried to get in touch with this guy, Ziewicky. Like I said, his name was "Hood." And she said, "Well, he wasn't feeling too good." And next phone call I got from his wife was that he passed. And so I never did get to see him. And that's the only contact I ever had with any of 'em.

**Did you ever join any veterans' organizations?**

VFW. Post 74.

**Post 74 is where?**

Chicago. Chicago. I never transferred to one of ours here.

**Have you ever attended any of the reunions of the 29<sup>th</sup>?**

No, no. Mostly because they'd hold them, if it wasn't in Maryland where the thing actually started, it would be on the east coast. I wasn't about to go from Chicago there. You know. Well, my regrets. I don't think too many did gather, to tell you the truth. Maybe the guys that were the closest to each other. But other than that, I don't think they did.

**Well, I'm about ready to wrap up the interview, Victor. Before we close is there anything that you thought of this afternoon that you'd like to add to the record?**

No, not really. Like I say, most guys were happy to be released from service and get back in civilian life like they should, and say good-bye to whoever you were close to. Of course, that black girl, she hated to see me go. You know. But other than that, no. I had one incident there where the superintendent, he calls me and I go to his office. He says, "Let's go where the workers are." This was all key-punch at the time. And they had desks there and openings. He said, "You all know Victor Sylvester." He says, "He's going to retire." He says, "Let me tell you." I'm sitting there like a dumbbell. He said, "He's one of the best workers I ever had. Never late, always on time to work, never trying to go early, never took too much lunchtime. All in all, an all around guy. If you want to say good-bye to him, you can come up." One guy, his name was Patrick – that was his last name – a blackie, and he took a shining to me. I thought the guy was going to kiss me, for heaven's sake! "Oh, Victor, you leaving? Oh, gee." I said, "Hey, hey, back off." And they'd start coming up, the girls, like the black one I was working with. "Oh," she said, "have a good life in your retirement." This and that. "Sorry I never got to see your wife." Oh, this and that. And that was it. I got my money they gave you for leaving, and – what was it, about; I forget now – 50 bucks or something like that.

**In closing, the last question I would have, especially in your (interruption). Oh, she wants me to ask you, anything else about D-Day that you wanted to mention?**

Oh. Oh. D-Day. Well, you know we were going in. And I hate to talk about this. Like I said, I was in Normandy, France, World War II, June 4, 1944, a member of the US 29<sup>th</sup> Division, Company C, 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry, and a rifle company. I trained at a fort in Texas for the coming invasion of Normandy, France. After an encounter with a German infantry scout tank, soldiers, which is no match with a rifle, I became a POW. On June 9, 1944, near St. Lo, France – these soldiers were seasoned troops, having done battle in the Crimea. They patted us down, like I said, took the helmet off and whatever else you had. They marched us to the rear to be interviewed by a captain who asked what division, company. Name, rank and serial number is all I would give 'em. He wanted to know how many divisions were back there to invade, and all we gave him was name, rank and serial number. So, I had a D-bar, which was issued by the Army as a supplement. It was called a D-bar. It looked like a chocolate bar, about the size of a regular Hershey. Only it was very thick. And you were instructed to consume it only a quarter at a time. Otherwise you were going to be running in the woods (laughs), which he did. So, naturally, when they patted us down, this soldier had that in his hand and said, "Oh, chocolate." I said, "Yeah, candy, chocolate." And he didn't know that you were only to eat so much at a time. So, not knowing you just ate a quarter of this bar at a time; if you ate the whole bar it gave you the runners. I said, "I bet he got a shock when he suddenly had to go. We laughed about this later. The joke was on him. This bar acted as a laxative if eaten all at once. So I spent the next ten months as a POW before being rescued by a General Patton tank crew. After being examined by our doctors – US Army doctors –

I was flown to England and sent to be rehabilitated for the trip home to the USA. And I was taken to Percy Jones. And the first place they took us to was – hm, boy these names, and they’re hard to remember, because we were in these Quonset huts. And all this rigormorow – they wanted to know what happened and this and that, and you’d go from one guy to another. And they’d examine you and make sure you weren’t going home with TB or anything. Next thing I know I’m heading to Percy Jones hospital. Flying in this darn thing. Well, Percy Jones looked you over again, and then they shipped me to General Vaughn – General, I don’t know the first name – but it was a General Vaughn hospital in Maywood.

**Oh, in Maywood, Illinois?**

Yeah. From Battle Creek I wind up in Maywood, and that’s where I was released.

**I see. I should say for the record that Victor was just reading from some notes he had made beforehand, and that’s a pretty good summary of what we did cover earlier in a kind of concise form. Well, if you don’t have anything else. Frances, is that what you wanted to see covered, what he just read? Okay.**

About the D-bar? Oh, that poor guy.

**Well, Victor, I want to thank you for spending the afternoon with me. It was a very enjoyable interview. And Frances, thank you for approaching Joe Popowitch here at the library. And Robert, thank you for bringing them all in today.**

[Another person’s comments here: “Yes sir. Our pleasure. I enjoyed it. I listened through the entire interview.”]

You did, did you? Well, there’s going to be a quiz later! (laughs)

**We’re going off record.**