VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Harry Messmore

conducted by Martin W. Thomas

July 8, 2003

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

Part 1: Introduction:

This interview is being conducted on July 8, 2003 at the Indian Prairie Public Library. My name is Martin Thomas. I am speaking with Harry Messmore. Mr. Messmore was born November 18, 1922 in Atkinson, IL and now lives in Indian Head Park, IL. Mr. Messmore learned of the Veterans History Project through Ms. Cindy Kline, who is a reference librarian at this library. He has kindly consented to be interviewed for the project. With us is Mrs. Marilyn Messmore, who is sitting in on the interview with her husband's permission. Here then is Mr. Messmore's story:

Part 2: Entering the Military:

Mr. Messmore, when did you first enter the service?

I first entered the service in October, 1940, but that was what we called the National Guard. It had already been designated to be going into so-called federal service. For that reason, those of us who joined in October, 1940, were well aware of the fact that we would be inducted into federal service.

Was the National Guard at that time strictly a federal service, or was it the Illinois National Guard?

It was the Illinois National Guard.

Where were you living at the time?

I was living in Altona, IL.

What were you doing at that time?

At that time I had just been out of high school about six months, so I was doing various farm related jobs, harvesting. And I was also helping my father, who was a veterinarian who traveled through the country taking care of large animals.

You told me you enlisted, you weren't drafted. Why did you join?

I joined because it was apparent to me and my friends in this little town that war was likely to occur, and that in September, 1940, a draft law had been passed, and that was considered a sign of things to come. So, we wanted to get in without waiting, because we probably wouldn't get called until we were 19 or even older. We wanted to get in and get it over with. They said, "You have to serve a year when you sign up with this; now you might have to serve more, but right now you are committed for a year, and if there's no war you'll probably be discharged and you won't be eligible for the draft." So we thought this would be a good thing to do.

It looks like you joined just shy of your 18th birthday. Did you require parent permission?

I did, but there were several of us that way, and they said, "By the time you go into regular federal service you'll be 18, so it doesn't make any difference."

You selected the Army National Guard. Was there any particular reason you chose the Army over another branch of service?

I chose it primarily because of the fact that it was nearby, only ten miles away, that I had to go for the training program, and we had to do that at least once a week. So that made it convenient. And furthermore, my friends all went there as well. So, as far as we were concerned, it was federal service to be done and gotten over with.

Did you have any initial period away from home during that time for basic training?

No. We only went on nights and weekends.

Part 3: Experiences:

When did you first get actual basic infantry training? Handling rifles and marching and close order drill, that sort of thing?

Well, these activities were part of our, what we called our drill, which came once a week or sometimes on weekends. And we would have to go through all the basics of that, plus the basics of basic weapons and signal devices, telephones, switchboards, semaphores, which are flags.

And so you got those things on a piecemeal basis, once a week?

Yes.

What happened next?

Well, next we received orders that our group would leave by train to arrive at Camp Forrest, TN on March 5, 1941. We were the first troops to occupy that camp at Tullahoma, TN.

So you were actually in training before war was declared either with Germany or Japan.

Yes.

How long were you at Camp Forrest?

I was at Camp Forrest until May of 1942. So I was there a little over a year. During that time I had been promoted to Private First Class, which I had achieved before we went to Tennessee, and I had been promoted to Corporal. I was Corporal of the Guard on the day that Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, on December 7, 1941. At that time there was a big alert.

So we were on sort of a readiness footing already?

Some of our men were sent to the Mississippi River to guard the bridges, for instance.

We talked a little bit off record, and I know you did go to Officers' Training School. When and where were you when you were selected for officer's training?

I was at Camp Forrest, TN, and I had been transferred from the artillery because the artillery actually was sent overseas in December of '41, right after Pearl Harbor. They went down through the Panama Canal and went on over to the far east, to New Guinea. So I was transferred out to be with the tank destroyer unit, which was actually only a period of three or four months that I was in that, because I had been sort of pre-selected to go to this officers' training school, and they told me it was on the basis of your entrance examination into the army, plus an interview by our group and they selected certain people who were to be future officers, so they were held here in this country to take the training. So, I was promoted to Sergeant and then went to Fort Sill.

That's where you took your officer's training, at Fort Sill?

Yes.

How long was your training there?

It was three months.

What was it like?

It was very, very intensive. For instance, you were not allowed to walk anywhere at anytime. You either ran or sat down or slept. The other point was that it was during the summer, from May to August, so it was very hot in Oklahoma. We had to tolerate that. We lived in tents. I think there were probably four in a tent. We had boardwalks to walk on, and certain larger tents were classrooms. In addition, we were out on the field artillery range, which had been established at Fort Sill many years before. And the range was to practice firing and directing artillery fire, because an artillery officer was required to be able to direct a battery to fire. So, they had school troops there that were permanent on that post, and their only job was to handle and fire the guns on orders of these students that were coming through. And, of course, there were safety officers everywhere to make sure that nothing dangerous went on. We would go to the observation posts and direct fire at a distance, and see the shells exploding out there, and we would adjust the fire to get it to land on a certain target. One of the things we all had to do was to at least know basic trigonometry, which some of us had not had. I had had algebra and so on, but I had not had trigonometry. And logarithms, we had to make sure that we were competent in that, and they would test us. We had to read coordinates and make maps and become skilled in precise measurements.

So, at the end of that time you received your commission as a 2nd Lieutenant?

Yes, that's correct.

And then what happened?

Then I went on a short vacation and went to Ft. Custer, MI. That was at my choice. They gave me three choices: Number one was to go to a tank division, an armored division that had artillery, and that was at Ft. Campbell, KY. Or to go to Guadalcanal and join the troops that were fighting in Guadalcanal because they needed artillery officer replacements. Or to go to a new forming infantry division at Ft. Custer, MI. So, I decided to go to Ft. Custer, MI, partly because I was only 19 years old, and in my own judgment I thought I needed a little more seasoning before going to Guadalcanal. So Ft. Custer would be a good place to go and, furthermore, Marilyn was going to school about 100 miles from there, so I thought that would be good.

That was "furthermore"? (laughs) That wasn't the primary reason? (both laugh) I won't make you answer that because she's sitting here. You were there for three months, at Ft. Custer?

Yes.

And then?

And then we went to Camp Phillips, KS in November, 1942. I clearly remember it, because that's the time that the Americans invaded North Africa. So, we were beginning to take our work very seriously.

What was your assignment at Camp Phillips?

At Camp Phillips, my assignment was to train recruits in the basics of military procedures, weapons handling, map reading, using a compass, digging foxholes, marching at night, physical conditions, going through obstacle courses.

Camp Phillips was a basic training camp, then?

Yes.

And from Camp Phillips?

After we completed all the basic training at Camp Phillips, then we went to Camp McCain, MS, where we were then in more advanced infantry division training. And where live ammunition would be used, and the various units of the division would learn to communicate and cooperate to get a certain job done.

When you went from Ft. Custer- Mrs. Messmore, you were still up in that area?

(Mrs. Messmore) Yes.

So you had a long distance correspondence?

Yes.

And you were then at Camp McCain in November...?

No. We were about five months in Camp Phillips, KS. At that time, in addition to the general basic training, the infantry units trained their men, for instance, on machine guns; we trained our men on the artillery guns that we were going to use. We were there five months, and during that time I think she came out to Camp Phillips one time for a short visit. Then we moved on to Camp McCain.

(Mrs. Messmore) Got engaged.

When did you get engaged?

(Mrs. Messmore) Out there.

Yeah, at Camp Phillips.

You were then at Camp McCain until?

We were in Camp McCaine for a little over a year, until August of '44.

Before we move off from McCain, you mentioned that you did your training for the artillery

you would be using overseas. What pieces were you using?

We used 105 millimeter howitzers. Four guns to each battery. My charge, as 1st Lieutenant Battery Executive, was to be responsible for training and firing of the guns. I had 40 men on the guns, ten men on each gun. That included one truck driver. Then I had an ammunition section that took care of the ammunition.

A 105 mm howitzer is going to fire a projectile, and you adjust as far as distance. You do that by elevation and amount of charge, is that correct?

That's correct.

Could you explain a little bit about how those charges work? How you section them off?

As the ammunition comes, the projectile weighs 33 pounds. The shell casing, which goes with it, contains seven bags of explosive powder. It's not really in a powder form, it looks like little rabbit food pellets. Those pellets are in little silk bags. Each bag is attached to the other bag by a string. So, if we left all seven of them in there, say if we were going to fire for, say seven miles, which would be out there at 12,000 yards, then we would have to use "charge seven," so we would leave them all in. But if we were shooting at a shorter range, then we would take out some. For instance, if I was going to shoot "charge five," I would give the order "Charge Five" to all the men. They would pull out the two top bags, break the string over the edge of the shell casing, leave five in and throw two out. The two that they throw out they have to throw into a hole. Before they throw it into the hole, the sergeant in charge of the gun has to verify that two bags went out. If three or four went out, that would be an error and we would fire into our own troops, so he had to check that. The other thing we had to watch out for was that we had those bags in that hole. If an enemy shell came in just right and hit into those bags it would set the whole place on fire. Which did happen to B Battery, which was our adjacent battery. They had a fire which finally spread throughout all four guns because an enemy shell hit into the powder bags.

How would they ordinarily dispose of that after they were done?

We simply buried it.

So, in August of 1944 you left McCain, is that correct?

Yes.

And then where did you go?

From there we were headed to go overseas, so we went to Camp Shanks. That's in New Jersey, right across the East River from New York City.

Before we went on record you showed me a nice, cartoon map I guess is the best way to describe it, that we're going to try to copy and put in at the end of the transcript. That pretty much identifies your route to get overseas?

That's correct. At New York we were in Camp Shanks only approximately a week, and then we moved into New York City on 42nd Street. Went into a building, went up elevators to about the tenth floor, walked out through a corridor on the tenth floor, right into the side of the Queen

Elizabeth. (all laugh)

Now, before we ship you out here, there's one critical piece of information I want to get on record. I know this because you mentioned it, I think off record. At some point you got married?

Yes, we got married in November of 1943, after I had been at McCain for about six months. Even though she was still in school at the Art Institute, she got permission to come down there and live with me there. She had to live in town and I could come back and forth. She lived in an adjacent town in Winona, MS, and she stayed there until we were ordered to go overseas and then she went back to school.

(Mrs. Messmore) I went to school four nights a week and Saturdays and graduated with my class in '45.

Oh, you caught up with them even though you had taken the time off. (to Mr. Messmore) So now we've got you going off this tenth floor right on to the Queen Elizabeth

Queen Elizabeth. It was docked there only one day, I think, before we entered it. It had just come back from England. The Queen Elizabeth had been built originally for the carriage trade going from London to Sydney, Australia, through the Suez Canal. And from Sydney to Montevideo, Uruguay, and then to New York City and then back South Hampton, England. Well, it was turned into a troop ship, and there were 20,000 of us on board, whereas during its regular days of carrying carriage trade it was 2,500.

(Mrs. Messmore) It had your equipment on it too, did it?

We had very little equipment. One thing we had that the Germans couldn't deal with was speed. Even though that ship was 95,000 tons and 900 feet long, it could still go 32 knots.

I saw a little caption on your map to that effect. It showed a German submarine commander looking and saying you were going too fast. Does that mean you didn't travel in a convoy?

We did not travel in a convoy.

(Mrs. Messmore) You zigzagged every so many minutes.

The Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth were similar ships, sister ships, and they could each carry a division, so each time one of those left New York it had a division on board. There were eventually 67 divisions of infantry fighting in the European continent, and those all had to be taken overseas. And get over there quickly, and the Queen could make it over in four and a half days and make it back in four and a half days.

How long was your trip?

Our trip was four and a half days.

Four and a half days. That includes all the zigzag maneuvering?

Yes. They changed course about every five minutes, all the way over. And they went south by the Azores and then up through the Irish Sea, the Irish Channel between Ireland and England, and around the corner and into the harbor at Grennock, Scotland**.**

And they had no escorts?

And they had no escorts.

To your knowledge, in any of those trips were either of those ships ever engaged, ever intercepted?

There was one torpedo that barely nicked the Queen Mary. But otherwise, while they were shot at many times, they were missed. Of course, as you know, thousands, hundreds at least, of American ships going across were torpedoed. But they were going slow. They required destroyer escorts, and planes and so on.

(Mrs. Messmore) The captain's orders, he didn't know what they were going to be.

There was a security officer on board to tell the captain which way to turn each time. He had no idea.

He didn't know his destination?

Well, in general, but basically it had to be that kind of security, otherwise they would have caught that.

Where did you arrive?

We arrived in northern Scotland at Port of Grennock, where the river Clyde enters the ocean. Our ship was too deep to come right to the dock there. We had to be offloaded onto smaller boats and taken to shore. On shore we went right straight to a train that was standing on the siding, waiting for us. As soon as we got on board we had a 12 hour trip to southern England. And ended up down at Trowebridge, England at a camp that had recently been vacated by another division that just went across the channel.

And then from Trowebridge you were sent to...?

We were in Patton's army. Patton's army was held back because of it being mostly armor, to not lose it in the beaches. So we had to wait until the line got far enough inland, at St. Lo for instance. It's about 50 miles inland. That was relatively safe. Then Patton's army started moving across. We went from Trowebridge to Weymouth, which is a little harbor right on the coast of England. We loaded on to LSTs, Landing Ship Tanks, they were called. And on the LST then, we took the 22 mile shot across. At that particular point the channel is 22 miles wide, and it took basically all night. Extremely choppy. Everybody got seasick. It was dark; we couldn't see out. But we landed then in France in the morning, and this was a place called Utah Beach. They let us drive right out. We had our trucks and everything with us, right on the boat.

Your field pieces went with you on the LST?

Yes. The field pieces did not go with us on the Queen Elizabeth. The equipment for an entire division was sitting there for us in England. We went there and picked it up, got it all together, checked out the trucks, checked out the guns, cleaned the guns, and get everything ready to go.

Part 4: Combat

You landed at Utah Beach, and you...?

That was on August 4, and we went then inland directly to the southern part of the Cherbourg area. That's called the Brittany Peninsula. That's south of the Normandy Peninsula. So, Brittany had three major ports that were servicing German submarines. German submarines came in for refueling and they would then go back out and shoot up the ships in the channel. Their troops guarded those very heavily, so when the first part of Patton's troops through there they simply bypassed those. Didn't take the time to clean them out. So, Germans were still there in large numbers in the Port of Lorient, St. Nazaire, what we called submarine pens. Our job was to contain those German soldiers in that area for an indefinite period. No one knew exactly how long we would be doing that. Well, the German lines collapsed, so that Patton within three or four weeks was sitting on the German border. We were part of his army, but we were still back in Brittany. We did have some action in this area, and that's where I got the Bronze Star. It was in Brittany, going on a small expedition to knock out some large pillboxes on the Quiveron Peninsula, which is a part of Brittany. That had these large pillboxes that were guarding the entry for the U-boats to go up to Lorient Harbor and St Nazaire Harbor. Our commanders wanted those knocked out. My job was to organize a small "new battery," we'll say, of taking some of my key men, going back to Utah Beach, picking up some what we called "three inch rifles," which are anti-tank guns.

Like a recoilless rifle?

No, these were not recoilless. These weighed two tons. They were good sized. They had a very long barrel and a high muzzle velocity. They shot a shell that was armor piercing, and they wanted to use that to shoot into the doorways and the embrasures of these large pillboxes. So I went there with those men. We got the guns on the beach, got all of what they call cosmoline off of them, cleaned them up. We had to bore sight them, which means to make sure that your sight is parallel with the barrel. We went to that area then where the attack was going to be, and then we had to get this new kind of ammunition that went with those particular guns. Then, under the cover of night we carried the ammunition in and put it at preselected spots, up where we could see the pillboxes. We had gone there on a little reconnoitering the day before, crawled in and looked across to see where we were going to be shooting. Put the shells for each gun in each spot, and then went back down and got the guns and pulled them in by hand. It was kind of uphill, so it was a pretty big job, but we got them up there.

You were pulling two ton guns uphill, just with manpower?

Ten men, yeah, on each gun. When the pulling got rough they put a block by the tire and everybody got a rest. We didn't dare to use the trucks because that would tip off the Germans.

Did you say you were doing this all under the cover of darkness?

Yes. We started at about 11 PM, we got them in position by three a.m., and at three a.m. I see that all the guns were in position. And I saw a small light up ahead of us, which we didn't see before. We just didn't know what it was, related to what we had seen there in the daytime. I took three or four men with me, I said, "We'll have to go up there and see what that is," because this was crazy. We went up there very cautiously and found, as we got closer, that it was a small stone building. Light was coming from a crack in the doorway, so there was obviously a light on in there. So we got on each side of the door, and we didn't know how to speak German, French or what. We said, "Who's in there?" And a voice came back, "I'm in here and know you American boys are out there, so you might as well come on in." So I said, "Open the door." I don't know if it was me or one of the other fellows went inside; the others stayed out. Here's an old man. He said, "I'm from Baltimore," shook hands (interviewer laughs). He said, "I'm retired from my job in Baltimore, and I was French so I came back to Brittany, and I trap lobsters. Even though the Germans are here, I trap lobsters anyway." He said, "In fact, if you boys want some (interviewer laughs), come on in. He had one of those big old kettles there, boiling water, boiled some lobsters for us. We left a guard outside and had some lobster. That was the first time I had even tasted lobster. Being here from the Midwest, and a small town, and this may sound a little peculiar, but I had never really been close up with Negroes or many other ethnic groups, and so this whole experience of doing things in New York City, or eating lobster and all, were part of World War II.

Well, you were what? About 19 or 20 at that time?

I was 21 at that time. At any rate we went back, we did our job on those pillboxes in the morning. The infantry crawled in under our fire. We had tracer ammunition, three-inch tracer, and we could tell whether we went in or hit and went straight up, or what happened.

You said you were using armor piercing rounds. At that time, what made a round armor piercing? Was it just dense, or did it have a heat source on it?

It had a hardened nose. Usually that consisted of at least a core of tungsten, which is extremely hard. Then, of course there was no powder charge inside. It couldn't explode.

You mentioned that you were aiming at a door. Would it be effective against the concrete of the pillbox as well?

No. But the doors are steel doors. They were heavy, they were about an inch thick, but with a muzzle velocity of 3,000 feet a second a 30 pound shell could smash the door in. It probably would make a hole in it. I recall seeing during World War II where German 88 shells which had muzzle velocity of 3,000 feet a second, with armor piercing, one of them hit the barrel of one of our Sherman tanks. The projectile put a hole right through that barrel, from one side to the other. (both laugh) If you can believe it, there's this three-inch hole through the barrel. So, anyway, if we shot right in their embrasure, which is the place they shoot out with their guns, they have a little room in there, and that room has six feet thick concrete, lined with half inch thick steel. If you take a projectile going 3,000 feet a second, hits into that little room, you can imagine how round trips it makes before it comes to a stop. (both laugh)

Well, I've seen those pillboxes and I know those embrasures that your talking about. You couldn't just hit at the outer edge and hope it would funnel down. because they were stairstepped going in and it wouldn't just follow the path in. If they hit one of those outer stairsteps- I don't know what else to call them- it stops there.

At least, if it was an explosive shell it would explode right there. This might ricochet in, but actually we did get one in and it made the barrel of the gun in there, if you've ever peeled a banana, this was the barrel (gestures peeling motion) with the rifling out. That was just peeled back, so one of them had to hit right on the end of there. I think it was about a 37 mm cannon.

Did you have a photographer in your unit? Did anyone ever get a picture of that, do you know?

I don't know that they got a picture of that. However, we did have division photographers who were quite active all over. They had numerous photographs, and in fact the photographs of our division, the originals, are in the archives in Washington, DC, as they are of every division. You can trace all that material. It's amazing how well the military works in record keeping.

Well, this particular incident earned you the Bronze Star. This was very early on in your assignment.

Yes, it was. It was in the first couple, three months. The aftermath of that was that the Germans, of course, sitting down in Lorient, St. Nazaire, heard all about this by radio from the guys in the pillboxes, who never really got hurt. They were asleep on the job. We attacked early in the morning. They were down two stories, in bed. We really surprised them. At any rate, their artillery was notified and they fired on us from a distance, and our trucks got holes in the radiators, blew out the tires, shrapnel went through the tires. But fortunately, at least in my group, nobody got hit. Two men on a cannon with the infantry got killed. Artillery had a direct hit on them. It did destroy our trucks and we had to wait to get the trucks sent out to pull the guns out. But I tried, I remember very clearly, trying to hide under a telephone. (all laugh) You know, try to hide under a piece of paper, under those circumstances. So, I think I got the Bronze Star primarily for getting those men up there with their guns and doing their job. So, they didn't get anything in particular, and that's unfortunate, but that's the way it goes.

Before we move you on out to follow the war, so to speak, what was the designation of your unit?

I was Battery A of the 356th Field Artillery of the 94th Infantry Division. There's a curious incident that happened around that time. I told you it was indefinite how long we would be there, holding in Lorient and St. Nazaire, and we probably would have sat there throughout the war. However, a division that was coming in from England the same as we had done a few months before, was coming in from England on New Year's Eve. A German submarine hit them, right out in the channel. There were 800 men on the boat that was hit, all of them lost. And that ruined their division. So consequently they said, "That's a ragtag division. Put them down where the 94th is, and get the 94th over to the Ardennes," where the battle was going on over there. So that's where we went then, from Brittany over to the Ardennes area, near Luxembourg.

When was that, that you moved to Ardennes?

We moved over there the last week in December of '44. The Battle of the Bulge had started on December 15.

Were you close enough to fire in support of that battle?

We were considered to be engaged in that battle. However, when we were brought up Patton had by that time sent his tanks over to Bastogne and stopped the point of their attack, and stopped their attack. But it was still felt that what they could do, would be to back up a little bit and redirect themselves, because they were headed for Antwerp, if possible. That was one of the big ports where we were bringing in a lot of supplies. We were put around to put us in their way by moving us a bit west of Luxembourg. In case there was a breakthrough we would be back there to stop them. We were back there in snow a foot deep, temperature down to zero, and it was miserable. But we were waiting for them, and fortunately they gave up and went back to Germany. So, consequently we moved forward then and went into the line along the Siegfried Line, just across the Moselle River from Luxembourg. We went into that line the first week of January.

So, you spent New Year's right on the battle line?

Yes.

At this point I want to find out about you and your life at that time. You already mentioned, that's what prompted me, that you were down to zero degree weather. What were your accommodations like at that point? Were you sleeping on the ground? In tents?

We slept on the ground. We had been issued special sleeping bags that were conical shaped and very thick with eiderdown, so that we kept warm. The problem was, though, that you were up and around and doing things all day in zero degree temperature. At that time the troops had only what they called combat boots, which were a quarter of an inch thick, period. And one thin pair of socks. So consequently the men were freezing their feet all over the place. We had not been issued those special boots that we were supposed to get for winter. The men were advised to wear overshoes. We did have overshoes, so we wore them over the boots and that helped somewhat. But actually, to fully avoid frozen feet what you had to do was avoid the boots, put on three pairs of socks and wear your overshoes. That's what I did. But some of the men didn't do that, and they had been strongly advised. We had many men who had to be evacuated because of frozen feet. (end of tape)

At the end of the tape Mr. Messmore was telling me about the cold conditions and the effect it had on the men's feet, and what was suggested for them to do and what he did. The tape ran out and I see it didn't catch the question I asked, and that was did he ever hear any rumors that men were deliberately freezing their feet to get out of the combat area. And Mr.

Messmore, your answer was?

I said, “No,” I don’t know of any. I know that some men had apparently shot themselves in the feet, but I had not heard of them using this to get out.

So you slept in these sleeping bags, eiderdown filled sleeping bags, on the ground at night. Were you in tents?

No.

Just out in the open?

Yes. Out in the open, but mostly down inside of a, what they call a slit trench, where you dig a place to sleep. The infantry, they slept sitting up in their foxholes, but we in artillery would sort of dig a long place where we could get down in, lay down in there and not...

For what period of time would you be in one location?

Oh, one or two days during that particular period.

You were constantly on the move?

Constantly moving around.

How did they feed you?

The kitchen crew received their supplies daily from the service battery, which each artillery battalion for instance had a service battery. Their job was to go to quartermaster at division headquarters and pick up their supplies, and they’d pick up, for us, we were 110 men, our kitchen crew would get 110 rations. There would be, for instance potatoes. They had fairly good food most of the time.

Would they set up a field kitchen near you?

They would set up a field kitchen near us. It’s a kitchen truck, actually. You think it’s just a truck, but inside it’s made into a kitchen. And they are cooking meals for 110 men in huge pots. When the time came for meals, then they would make a setup outside their truck for these big pots, and the men could walk by then and ladle it out into their mess kit. Everybody carried their own mess kit, with knife, fork and spoon and a metal cup. And you ladled out your food and got a hot cup of coffee and moved on so the next guy could get some. That would be in the evening. We did have hot rations before daylight in the morning. That would be like 5:00 a.m. But at noon, when you went through the morning line you would pick up a box which is called a K-ration. That was a cardboard box, about eight inches long and four or five inches wide, two inches deep, which contained cookies, crackers, little can of meat, little can of butter, and a piece of chocolate. And three cigarettes.

And three cigarettes. (laughs) Do you know how many varieties of K-rations there were? How many days could you go without having the same one twice?

I’m not sure. My guess would be there were about three.

And you mentioned canned meat. Did you ever have Spam?

There would be Spam in some, and there would be something else in others, but Spam was pretty much the basic stuff. It was a sufficient variety that actually the vegetable in there would be the thing that would be most variable. Some would have cheese instead of a piece of meat.

Was that just the noon meal?

For us it was. I think the infantry would have it under certain circumstances, nothing but that, three times a day. We were lucky, in terms of having our kitchen truck. We would have two meals as a rule. Our forward observer crew, each battery had a forward observer crew, they stayed out with the infantry, so they were separate. Our communications crew, which was a part of our battery, would be a wire laying crew, they had a wire truck, in the back of it a big wheel, had telephone wire wrapped on it . They could take off from our battery, with us holding this end (gestures), let's say, with our telephone on the end, and they would drive several miles along a road, and turn here and turn there to get to battalion headquarters, where they would drop that end of the line so that we would be hooked into the switchboard at battalion headquarters. So, I'm A Battery. If I want to talk to C Battery, I could ring there and get the switchboard at Headquarters, and they would plug me in with C Battery.

Was there any reason to have it go land line, other than just so your transmission wouldn't be intercepted by the enemy?

That was primarily it. And the reception was a little better, but still that was it. It did come in very handy at one time while we were still in Brittany. During the World Series of 1944. (interviewer and Mrs. Messmore laugh). In the World Series of 1944, this would be in October, I happened to have a radio, and I was able to pick up the World Series through BBC. So, I could plug in my telephone for A Battery. It would go through battalion switchboard and out to each of the batteries. So they would take turns listening on their phones.

They would hear your radio broadcast over their telephones?

Yeah.

Fantastic.

You could plug your wires in and it would carry.

Maybe they should have given you a medal for that, for morale boosting. It certainly took some ingenuity, initiative. During this time, were you able to get mail?

We got mail very regularly. We had one man designated. His whole job was to take care of the mail. His name is Walter Golumbewski. He lives on the north side of Chicago. Since World War II, he has been the greatest organizer of our 94th Infantry Division veterans' organization. He has worked as doggedly at it as he did the mail. He brought a letter from her (indicates Mrs.. Messmore) practically every day. And she only got a letter from me maybe once a month, I'm not sure. Furthermore, it would be censored, so I couldn't say enough. But, I could say whatever was necessary, I guess.

Who did the censoring?

The censoring was done at a so-called army post office, APO. The letters came there, and there was a major censoring center, but at the battalion, our mail orderly had to give it to battalion. And at battalion they had various officers who would have an assignment to read mail. Of course, it was spot checking. So maybe three of them would work in an evening for two or three hours, spot checking the mail that went out.

So they were actually checking mail of troops that they knew?

Yes.

Somebody else told me that, and that's why I asked. Did you use a specific mail form, for V-mail, for example?

The V-mail was a particular size sheet of paper which had some printing on it. It was a very thin single sheet of paper about maybe five inches wide and eight inches long.

How did they communicate to you what subjects you should stay away from so you wouldn't have your mail censored?

Well, you cannot tell where you are. You cannot say precisely what you are doing. You can in general say "we are fighting" or whatever, but not to give anything that would give a clue to someone reading it in the states where you are. So we were not able to name any object that could be readily identified as a landmark.

But you could actually give discouraging news? If you felt things weren't going well, were you allowed to say that?

No, I don't think so. That would be censored. Simply personal things, and not impact of the war or what's going on, we lost today or we lost ten men or whatever.

Did you ever have any relief from the line, to go on a pass or to take a break? What we later called R&R?

Yes. I did on two different occasions. That was while we were in the heavy fighting between the Saar and the Moselle rivers. One time I was just ordered, we'll say, to go for three days back to a rest camp. Because it is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and it goes on and on. We were in battle 180 days straight, our unit was. So I went back there, and that point they have a tent, and they have Red Cross people there, and they have coffee and doughnuts, and magazines to read, radio to listen to, music if people want to dance with a Red Cross girl, I guess they can. But most of them just really relaxed, and collapsed and laid there and slept and that sort of thing until it was time to go back. And they had been into it so much that, really, they were ready to go back in two or three days. They were sort of going nuts we'll say, and they were ready to go back. Nothing to do, really, there.

You said you had two rests off line. Were they both to this type of a camp?

Yes. On another occasion, and this was after we were a little farther on, and this would probably have been in March of '45, before we got to the Rhine, I went on a five day pass to Paris. Three of the five days was spent traveling. (interviewer laughs) To drive, it was 500 miles to Paris in a truck, in the back of a truck. So you went for a day and a half riding in the back of a truck, in the same clothes you've been wearing all the time. You'd get off at a Red Cross place in Paris. They had commandeered a hotel, and these hotels would have primitive facilities in terms of cold water and no soap, and things like that. But, nevertheless it was a place to get in, and it was reasonably warm. Of course, total blackouts, so that if you went outside at night you'd better watch out. You'd be lost, the blackout was so total. At any rate, during the daytime you could walk around the streets, and you could see what it was like for the civilians, and meet people from other outfits that you never heard of, and talk with them.

How were the people living at the time, from what you could see?

I would say that the people were very hard up for food. That was the main thing. But that was only number two. Number one was, hard up for cigarettes. Anytime you encountered anybody, they wanted to know if you had any cigarettes. Now this is how bad cigarette addiction is. People under those circumstances would beg American soldiers to get a cigarette.

Ask for the cigarette before they would ask for food?

Yes. But we did find that there was a double level of some kind, because of the fact that we were during the day and a half or two days that we were there they took us to a showing of the Folies Bergere. Now, of course I had never heard of the Folies Bergere. I had to learn what it was. We go into this little theater and here's some dancers. This was the Folies Bergere. It went on for a half an hour or something. We went from there then, they said, "Now this is a Paris nightclub." Totally blackout, but we went to this place and there were lights on in there. And here were bottles of wine and so forth, but you had to buy them. The wine was $20 a bottle, and in those days $20 was big cash. But there were some people that actually bought a bottle of wine. Once in a while the French would offer you something. They were in there, we were mixed in with them. I could see that they were having some food that probably was what they call the black market. All kinds of black market things went on. In fact, we knew of the black market in Paris as being the place where the men unloading supplies that came from the US to be put on trucks to go to the front, they would swipe a few items and sell them to the Parisians. Cigarettes were no small item of exchange. So they had to have guards on that stuff.

Speaking of the shows that you saw, at any time that you were over there did you see any USO shows?

No.

You never saw any famous entertainers that were touring around?

Yes, I did. That was right after the war, when we had gone through Germany and the battles there, and ended up in Czechoslovakia as the war was completed. At that time, I saw Bob Hope. He and Jerry Colona came. Bob Hope at that time was in his 40s. He was up on a big stage, and we had a huge field there, and it was like a natural amphitheater of men sitting on the hillsides and pockets of grass.

This was where in Czechoslovakia?

That was near Pilsen. That's also near Bud, where Budweiser came from. And pilsner beer of course came from there. At any rate, Bob and Jerry were up there, and they naturally had their stooges down in the front lines. They always get some GIs to cooperate with them one way or the other, they were in the front row, to ask questions. So, Bob says, “Does anybody have any questions?” after he and Jerry Colona have been telling some jokes. So Colona leans over and says, “What was your question?” and the fellow said what it was. And he turns to Bob and says “Bob, this fellow want to know why you are not in the service.” And Bob Hope said, “I tried to get in. I volunteered. And I went and they signed me up, and when I went for my physical they checked me over and they said, ‘You look fine,’ I turned around and they said, ‘I’m sorry, we can’t use you.’” And he said, “‘Can’t use me? What for?’ and they said ‘it’s your back.’” He said, “‘My back? What’s wrong with it?’ They said, ‘You know, you’ve got a yellow streak down your back a foot wide,’” (all laugh) So that brought a big laugh.

Well, I think that took my next question. I was going to ask you if you remember any particularly humorous or unusual events. But, outside of what went on on-stage, was there anything at all that your experience over there gave you that you look back at and chuckle?

Well, there were some interesting events. As we were getting toward the end of the war, the Germans were surrendering. They didn’t have to be captured. It became somewhat of a hazard because there were some Germans that didn’t quite agree with the surrender of Germany. Consequently, it would be like it is now in Iraq. You’ve got some dissenters among them. We were right near the Rhine River, out in a farm area, but it was only about 20 miles from the river. A German came up to our men there and said, “Did you look in that haystack back there?” and they said, “No, what’s that?” He said, “I’m warning you. That’s all I can say.” They sent some guys back there, and it was full of Germans with guns. They were just waiting for a chance to ambush us.

What happened?

They were surrounded, of course. They just gave up and threw their guns down and said, “No harm meant.” (all laugh) So that was an interesting event. Another interesting event was one time when some men came to me and said, “I understand your father was a veterinarian.” I said “Yes, he was.” They said, “We need you right away.” Our battery position was at a farm area and there was an old barn there, and some of the men went into that old barn, and they found a mare having a colt. And the colt was stuck, it couldn’t get out. The two front feet were out, but it couldn’t come any farther. She was straining and straining. What could we do? I said, “Well, OK, if somebody’ll watch my job here I’ll go over there to see.” Now my dad had brought me along when he was delivering foals and delivering calves, and he had taught me a trick about tying their front legs together. And then you take a piece of wood, like a baseball bat or a two by four, and put it between the legs, and then you turn that. When you turn that, that turns them and sometimes they’ll come out. And sure enough (claps hands) that colt popped out. So, I was a big hero for the day.

Were the mare’s owners there? Did they see you do it?

No, the Germans, they had left, and these animals were just walking around on their own. So that was an interesting anecdote. Another time I thought I was going to capture some Germans, even though I’m artillery and not supposed to be out capturing Germans. I knew that we had to have an observation post in an area where you couldn’t find one, and I noticed that there was a nice hill right out in front of our battery. And I thought, well I’ll go up there with a phone operator, and if I could see anything I'll phone back and maybe we can put somebody up there then as an observer. I went up early in the morning, before daylight. It was foggy, and as I got up there to the top I saw some shadows going across, and I thought "these look like Germans." So I pulled my carbine up, and I said, "Halten sie!" They didn't do a thing. I fired, and everything disappeared. We just laid there, and nothing happened. Soon the fog lifted and it got light, and we went up there. Here was a dead deer. So, we took the deer down, and of course we notified on the phone that we had seen some deer but no Germans. And battalion headquarters said, "Have that deer sent up here. We'll send it to General Fortier, the commanding general of the artillery, as a delicacy." What they got back was, "Didn't you read general order so and so, which says you do not shoot deer or any animal? We are not hunting, we are fighting war. But, since it's now dead, send it over." (all laugh)

You mentioned that you fired your carbine. And that was one of the questions I was going to ask you. For your own self defense, you and your men, what sidearms did you carry?

I carried a .45 caliber automatic pistol. The men carried carbines. At this particular little venture that I went on, I borrowed a carbine from one of the men because you might encounter something.

During the time that you were actually in a combat situation, do you have any estimate of how many engagements you had? How many different times you had to fire artillery at a target?

Yes. As I say, we were in combat 180 days, and our four artillery battalions consisting of 48 guns fired 208,000 rounds during the war. On some days, and I showed you that one picture of the gun after firing all night, in the snow, and all the cartridges laying around, that day we fired a hundred and some shells. A hundred would be a huge amount for us to fire. I knew for sure that we fired, our battery alone, fired 28,000 rounds, because the lifetime of a barrel on one of those guns is supposed to be 7,000 rounds, and my two recorders had to keep track of how much we fired, and at what charge, because the charge used also determined the wear on the barrel. That would all be factored in as to the total of 7,000, the equivalent of 7,000 rounds of charge seven. Some of them were charge three, four or five, so we would actually shoot maybe 12- 14,000 rounds. All of that had to be shipped in from the US, of course. That's where Eisenhower was asking Patton, "What is going on, in terms of all this artillery requirement that you are having? We're having to ship tons and tons and tons." Patton then called our General Maloney of the 94th Division and said, "Where is all this firing going on?" He said, "We're down going through the Siegfried Line. The infantry has to have protection, and the only protection they're getting is from the artillery shells falling up front."

No air cover?

No. Too foggy, between these two rivers. Occasionally you would have air support, P-47s. You could call them in, but most of the time it was overcast and foggy. We had infantry screaming for fire, and we gave it to them. And we were screaming back to headquarters, saying, "Get that ammo up here," and that's where the Red Ball Express came in.

Oh, the trucking…

You probably heard about the Red Ball.

Oh, sure. You mentioned early in the interview that the rounds were 33 pounds. Did you have different types of rounds depending on the type of target? Did you have antipersonnel rounds versus high explosive rounds?

There was quite a variety. One type, which we'll say was the standard high explosives, which we would order by saying "Shell H.E.," that could be allowed to just hit the ground or we could have a timed fuse on there. During the early part of the war, while we were still in France, we were using a fuse in which we had to set the timer on it, which was like a clock. It ticked away the seconds until it was 50 feet above the ground and then it would explode when it arrived at its target area. However, while we were in the Saar- Mosselle area we received what were called Prosit, P-R-0-S-I-T, fuses. Now Prosit was sort of a short term for proximity fuse. The proximity fuse was actually a small radar in which the shell emanated signals which would hit the ground or target, and come back and when the time interval was just correct, the shell would explode. It was not armed, it would not do its thing until it had twisted in the barrel of the gun as it went out, so it had to rotate and there was a system in there where a ball bearing was against a spring, and that ball bearing then, the centrifugal force, flattened the spring and opened up the mechanism so that it would be ready to fire when it came near something. Then we had to be careful, because our rounds sometimes went 15,000 feet in the air, and the little L-5 spotter planes that were directing fire, they could get in the way. If they got within 50 feet, why it could blast one of them. So we had to be cautious of that.

Most of your mission was firing in support of advancing infantry? Would that be correct?

Oh yes, most of the time.

During the time that you were there, how did you feel? Did you feel particular stress, like this was a higher risk situation than you cared to be in?

Well, yes. I felt that on two occasions. One was during that early encounter that I told you about on the Quimper peninsula where we were attacking the pillboxes, and when the fire came back I was so scared I thought I could protect myself by hiding under a telephone. The only other time was when I myself went out as forward observer because our forward observer had been wounded and it took time to get a replacement. So I was up with the infantry and we were advancing along a blacktop road at the edge of a German city in a hilly country. As we were advancing we began to get machine gun fire, and fortunately there was a stone wall right along where I was, so we could get behind the stone wall. But still, you could hear the bullets going by and overhead, and there I was scared. That was probably the closest I came to being really scared. The other experience that was somewhat devastating is the fact that being in the job that I had, I had to watch so many things all the time about the men and the guns and the ammunition. I got very little sleep. I was almost always not having enough sleep, and it was just deadening, exhausting. Under those circumstances you can get kind of depressed wondering, you know, "How long can I go on, and can I grab a nap or do something?"

At this time, how many men did you have that you were responsible for?

We had 110 men in the battery. But until I became battery commander, which was not until actually after the war, I had 45 men, that is the ammunition crew and the men on the guns.

Did any of your men become casualties?

A couple of them got hit by shrapnel, but none of them were killed. Of our forward observer teams, there were one seriously wounded and one killed. And that man, unbelievably, was killed on his first day. He had left the US, we'll say in the middle of February, and arrived in France a week later, was trucked to us as a replacement, went up to the line the next morning, and was killed before noon.

How was he killed?

He was in a little stone tower in a village, acting as an observer, and a German 88 shell hit that and a piece of shrapnel hit him straight in the chest. He died instantly. It took a number of letters from our commanders to his wife to allow his wife and family to believe that could be possible, that within two weeks he could be dead.

Now, we're getting near, I guess, to V-E day. Did the actual hostile action in your area halt before V-E day?

It halted. We were transferred. As soon as we hit the Rhine, which around the middle of April, then some divisions crossed the Rhine and headed towards Frankfurt and Bavaria. We were ordered to go north to what was called the Ruhr pocket. That area was a pocket of resistance. They were guarding their factories. That was at Krefeld and Dusseldorf, and places like Solingen where their finest steel was made. We went up there and we were in action for about a week and a half. But it was very sporadic. We fired on some Germans and they fired back, but it was mostly Germans surrendering. It was very light. We were ordered to do something that was a very interesting part of my final three months and that was to organize my men to bring in the displaced persons who had escaped from prison camps, and that Ruhr area was full of labor camps where the Russians and others were slave laborers doing the work in the factories. They got loose, and they were all over the place, slaughtering German farmers and their cattle and their chickens and whatever they could get. There had to be some order brought, so we were ordered to take care of a certain "Landkreis," which is like a county. I was able to get a factory that had been large enough to have a cafeteria and had toilet facilities, so I rounded up 1,500 of these displaced persons, under guard, got them in there. Fortunately, the factory had a wall around it, so we were able to guard it, make sure they stayed in there. Then we had to assign cooks, get our cooks in there. Then we requisitioned food from the Germans. Had to go to the Burgermeister and say we needed so many pounds, actually tons, of peas and this and that. Well, they said, "This is what we have." It's amazing how they knew what they had on hand in that area. They knew, and they brought it in. They had to bring horsemeat. They couldn't bring meat from cattle because all the beef had been killed, and the milk cows were being saved for the milk for the children, and they were guarded. So when we served the Russians horsemeat, they got mad. We couldn't do anything about it. They were complainers. Since they had been locked up for five years they were mad. Since '42. And there were both men and women. The Germans kept them separate, but when they got out they were together. By the time I got them, some of the women were beginning to show a little potbelly. (all laugh). They came to us and said, "Can you marry us?" I said I was an officer in the army but I didn't know I was authorized to marry anybody. So some of my men who were both German and Russian speaking that I had as interpreters, they said, "Go ahead and marry them. Who's going to know the difference?" They said, "Let's have a mass ceremony." I said all right, so this guy sort of took charge, he was from New York City and an organizer, probably with a union. He said, "All right, somebody go out and get some flowers. Get these Germans to get in some flowers." And so they brought in a lot of flowers. He said, "Now bring some marriage certificates.” They said, “We don’t have any marriage certificates.” He said, “There must be something around here somewhere.” They went back to the administrative offices of the factory and found these forms which would list various things. We would write in their names, that they were officially married on such and such a date, and then we took a stamp, their official company stamp, and stamp it “Sie mussen es stampieren.”

And that satisfied them?

And that satisfied them. So we held the ceremony.

Was this after V-E Day?

That was right after V-E Day. So, some of these rascals got misbehaving and I notified headquarters that we were having trouble with our prisoners. They were misbehaving, to the extent that some of them will be shot. So right away that drew their attention. They said, “No! Those are Russians. You mean you’re going to shoot a Russian?” I said, “What are we going to do when these guys are doing such and such and so and so?”

Were they committing crimes that would be considered felonies?

I’d find four or five dead Russians here every morning. We’d have to take them to the German cemetery and bury them. They said, “What’s going on?” I said, “The White Russians are being killed.” The White Russians were the ones from Ukraine. “Mir Ukraino,” they would say. The Red Russians hated them, they’d kill them and stuff them in the toilets, plug up the toilets, plug up the sewers. So I said we were going to take action. They said, “No, don’t do that. We’ve got a connection with the Russian army, and they’ll send somebody. He’s coming tomorrow.” So, sure enough, here came a guy driving an American jeep which had all kinds of Russian words on it, which means it was a Russian, American made jeep. He was a lieutenant wearing boots all the way up to his knees, big shiny boots, medals covering his entire chest, one of these fancy caps, had a man with him with a rifle, and a driver sitting in front. They pulled up out there, and my interpreters talked with him. They said, “He’s a third lieutenant, and he’s here to bring discipline to your camp.” I said, “All right, what does he want to do?” They said, “He wants to come in and address the people here, so assemble all the people.” So we assembled all the people out in that big courtyard. He got up on a stage that was out there, and he said who he was, where he was from, and he said, “We’re going to get you people back to Russia, but it won’t be for several months. In the meantime, we don’t want any trouble. If there is, Captain Messmore here, he’s going to write down your name, and when I come, I’m coming once a week, anybody who’s name is on there will be shot. And I’m going to show you this right here,” and he pulls out a match. He says, “If anybody in this camp steals anything as small as a match, their name will be on the list.” He says, “That’s all. I will be back next week.” I never had a bit of trouble after that.

After V-E Day, how long were you there?

I was in Czechoslovakia, until November. We were stationed there, actually as a buffer against the Russians. There was a line down there called the Morgan Line. The Russians were not supposed to step across it and we weren’t supposed to step across it. Actually, we were supposed to watch each other.

So already there was mistrust between us and the Soviet Union. Were there any near

confrontations?

Not really… (end of tape)

We ran out of tape again, and after the tape stopped, Mr. Messmore was telling me about the Russian troops that were across the line from them in Czechoslovakia. I asked him if they had any confrontations, and he said actually they did a little bartering, and he mentioned a Russian soldier giving him his Red Star medal for a carton of cigarettes. I then asked him about other souvenirs, which he told me about and we will cover again. He also told me an interesting story about another Russian that they encountered. Would you tell me that again, please?

I had encountered a Russian in the camp that I had established for displaced persons, and this Russian came to me to say he had important information about a downed American pilot, and he knew where this pilot had died and was buried, and did I wish to go out and find out about that. I told him I would certainly like to do that. I wanted him to go with me, as well as a couple of my men, and we would go to the place. It was a few miles away. As we approached that farm house, the occupants, and older man and woman came out on the porch, and as we got out of our jeep and they recognized this Russian, they both fainted. That was on seeing this Russian. He then went up to them and helped them get up, and they were shaking and he said, "Where is the uniform?" They went back and got the uniform where they had hidden it. This was the uniform of an American pilot who had crashed out in one of their fields, and they had gotten his body and taken it to a local cemetery and buried it. So Mr. Scherbakov then took us, along with the Germans, up to the cemetery where we located the gravesite. We then transmitted that information to the graves information people that we had in each of our units.

You also mentioned, when I asked you about any other wartime souvenirs, that you did get some German weaponry?

Yes, I picked up a German carbine, and a German pistol called a P-38, which is a semiautomatic pistol. This one happened to have been worn by an SS officer who had kept it in a holster, so I got the belt and the holster. On the belt buckle it said, "Blut und Era," which is German for "Blood and Honor." Then it has the symbol of a lightning streak across there.

And that was the SS symbol?

Yes.

Now I guess it's time to bring you home. You mentioned that you had accumulated the requisite number of points to be sent home. How did you get home?

I was ordered to go, along with many other troops in Czechoslovakia who had enough points, we gathered at a central place where there was a train waiting for us. It looked like an American freight train. Actually, the cars had wording on them in French. These were French railroad cars. It said, "Quarant Hommes." Quarant is 40. And "Ouit Chevaux." Chevaux is horses. So this was even from World War I, the old "Forty and Eight." The Forty and Eight was popular among the American Legion men; when they came back from World War I were talking about the Forty and Eight. They even made their own Forty and Eights and drove them around at their celebrations and meetings. But at any rate, there was straw in there, and we laid on that, straight through to the port of Brest in France.

How long of a trip was that for you, in terms of hours?

That was about two days.

How did they feed you?

We stopped at special spots. They got off and ate. Of course, there was a problem with taking care of the call of nature, but that just had to be managed the best it could be managed between stops if they happened to be necessary, so drinking very little fluid was the order of the day.

This was in November?

November.

Was it very cold by then?

It was only moderately cold, because the port of Brest has what is called an ocean climate, in which it is moderated by the ocean, so it was neither hot nor cold, just miserable.

(laughs) Just miserable. Then from Brest, how did you get back to the United States?

We came back on what they called a "Victory Ship." These ships were seaworthy, but they were slow, and when we got out into the North Atlantic in November, if you ask any seagoing people "What is the North Atlantic like in November?" they'll tell you the waves can be as high as 20 or 30 feet. The waves were actually breaking over the prow of the ship. We could tell when the prop came out at the back, because the ship would shudder. It was rocking so much that the prop would come out. One day it actually lost four miles.

(all laugh) It was pushed back four miles?

Usually they make at least 100 miles a day.

So, you went over in four and a half days. How many days did it take you to get back.?

It only took ten, but that one or two days was horrible. Then things cleared up and we made good time. Fortunately, they had a little ship's library there, so I went to the library and I read a book called *The Brothers Mayo*. Now, I didn't know whether I was going to go to medical school or what. But I read that book thoroughly all the way across, and was quite inspired by it. Furthermore, 3/4 of the men on that boat were doctors. A certain military hospital had been sent back at the same time. So I became acquainted with quite a few of them. One of them told me, he said, "I wouldn't go into medicine if I was you, because it is not interesting anymore." He said, "It used to be interesting. They were discovering things all the time. But in my experience about everything that can be discovered in medicine has already been discovered." (all laugh)

You came back to the United States, and did your wife know that you were being sent home yet?

I'm not sure that she did know that, no. I sent her a telegram. It was sort of automatic. As soon as we hit the Boston Harbor, we sent telegrams. It was the proper thing to do I guess because sea accidents do occur, and people would be shocked if you were on the way home and never got there. And then I called home, which they allowed me to do. I lived in Altona, IL, population: 400. The telephone office and the whole telephone company consisted of one man and one helper who helped him at the switchboard when he was sleeping. When I called I got an answer "Altona Switchboard." I believe his name was Oscar Johnson. I said, "Is this Oscar?" He said "Yes, who is this?" I said, "This is Harry Messmore. I'm trying to call home." He said, "Well, they're not home right now," and I said, "Well, I'm in Boston. Tell them I'm going to be coming in to Rockford at Camp Grant the day after tomorrow, so meet me at Camp Grant." He said, "I'll tell them." So that's the way that went.

Well, Mrs. Messmore, where were you living at that time?

(Mrs. Messmore) I was teaching in Davenport, IA. About 50 miles away.

Part 5: After Service:

So then you got to Camp Grant in Rockford, and then what?

I arrived there and then my father was there, and my stepmother, and my stepmother's daughter, who is her (nods at Mrs. Messmore), Marilyn.

(Mrs. Messmore) That's how we met. When our folks got married.

Our parents, her father and my mother, died in the late '30s. My father then married her mother, and that's how I knew her (nods at Mrs. Messmore), and so that while I was in the service then I did come home and communicate with her a little bit.

(Mrs. Messmore) Well, the folks called me and told me that they were going to come pick me up and take me to Camp Grant to pick him up.

So then what was your reunion like?

Tell him what it was like from your point of view.

(Mrs. Messmore) To me, I couldn't believe it, you know, if I was dreaming all the time. He kept saying, I think he was tired, he kept saying, "I feel so strange. Because one day you're in the war and not long after you're home. It's totally ...... Right?"

Was it disorienting?

It was a very strange feeling, to be sort of out of it, and back a civilian. I mean, am I a civilian or what? And then the thing that happened is that I had all this stuff that I wanted to tell people about this year and a half experience, tell it all to them in ten minutes. There was an attempt at that. And I noticed that, then after I had been home awhile, my brothers, I had three brothers in service, when they came home each of them did the same thing. They were talking a mile a minute, telling their entire experience over a short period of time. Couldn't get them stopped. They were debriefing themselves.

What did you do in the days and weeks after you were discharged?

I immediately made plans for my future. I had decided already I was going to try to be a doctor.

You mentioned that earlier. Did you have any idea about being a doctor before you read *The Brothers Mayo* on the ship back and before you met these other doctors?

I did have the idea about it, but it was sort of a vague and ill-formed idea. Never thought it really possible. I was so concerned about the war and whether I would even come home, I couldn't give it serious thought. So at this point I decided to give it serious thought.

You applied to medical school?

I applied to the University of Illinois. I had to go first to the undergraduate school. I went down to Champaign-Urbana, along with 30,000 others, and we all made preparation for where we would live when we got there. I found there were no places, so I bought a trailer for $800. I had saved up my money, didn't spend any money, hardly, in the service. I had saved up $5,000, so I had enough money to buy a trailer. Went down there and lived in the trailer with my brother, who was in the Navy. He got out around the same time, so we went to the University of Illinois together.

And where were you then, Marilyn?

(Mrs. Messmore) I was still teaching in Davenport. He came home, and I couldn't even be with him. Except on weekends.

So, on weekends I went up there, and we were sort of committed to getting this job done, and I knew I wanted to go year round. I didn't want to take time off during the summer. I finished in the spring of '48. I finished what would be called three years, and I did it in about two years. I then went on a vacation. First one I had ever had in my life, actually. People in those days, in the depression, didn't go on vacation. In fact, before I went in the Army I had never eaten out with the family in a restaurant. We didn't do that. We had eight children. My mother had died when I was 16. So, we took that summer and I went out Wyoming. My father had retired as a veterinarian and moved out to Wyoming. He had a small ranch there, so we went out there and I put up hay all summer.

(laughs) That was your vacation, putting up hay.

Yes. And at that time our first baby was born, right at the end of that time. So, that was in 1947. We came back and then I was admitted to the medical school here at Chicago. I went there for four years and graduated from there.

Where did you graduate?

University of Illinois College of Medicine. In 1952. We just had our 50th reunion this past year.

(Mrs. Messmore) He made Phi Beta Kappa.

I served as an intern in Detroit. And then went to practice in an old order Amish community in eastern Illinois, known as Arthur, IL. Where they have an old order Amish community of 4,000. So I did country practice for 11 years, and then left that to come to an academic career at the age of 41. I started over again, so to speak. And took four years more training in internal medicine and hematology, and became a specialist and professor in the medical school at Loyola and Hines Veterans Hospital. There I stayed then until I retired from my active practice in '92 at the age of 70. But I have since worked in research that I did during my professional career in drug treatment of blood clots and blood clotting, things like coronary thrombosis, deep vein thrombosis, pulmonary embolus, and I work on the development of drugs as a volunteer. In fact I am writing two papers now on the history of the development of the drugs against thrombosis. We had four children. They grew up around here, and they all went to college. My oldest was our daughter, who's married to a pharmacist and lives in La Grange. We have a son living in La Grange Park who graduated from business school in Iowa, and he runs a machine shop. We had two other boys, both of whom died in their 40s from heart attacks. So, we've had our trials and tribulations.

Certainly. Did that have anything to do with you studying blood clotting?

I was already studying blood clotting at that time.

The next question I have, and I already know the answer. Have you joined any veterans' organizations?

After the war we had some go-getters among our colleagues in the 94th Infantry Division who wanted to form a national organization. Our local one happened to be my mail orderly from Battery A, 356 Field Artillery, and he organized the Chicago area. He communicated with other parts of the country, and ours was the first infantry division organization formed following World War II. I've been an active member since. I went to a few other veteran organizations meetings, such as the American Legion, which was active when I was in practice, but invariably I was called out to deliver a baby or care for someone with a broken arm.

How many reunions of your organization would you say you've attended?

Well, out of the 50 I'd say I've probably attended 20 to 25.

Let's get on record the name of the organization, in case anybody reading this wants to follow up.

The 94th Infantry Division Association. It is on the Internet. You can pull it up. It will give you the history of the 94th.

Do you know the Web site address offhand?

It's www.94infdiv.com

Part 6: Closing:

I'm ready to wrap up the interview. I would like to ask in closing how you feel that your time in the service and those experiences have affected your life.

I attribute my ability to solve problems and face problems squarely, to work long hours, to the discipline of my five years in military service. That has stayed with me. I don't polish my shoes as much (all laugh), but I do a lot of other things.

Is there anything you would like to add that we haven't already covered in the interview?

Well, I think one of the things that we wonder about is, we'll say non-veterans, people in this country who have never been in the service, they are well aware of the fact, I think, that the American Legion was quite political. The vote was very important, and politicians always catered to the Legion. However, since World War II, it has not been my observation that that is very much the case. While veterans, of course, are important in terms of the Veterans Administration, which is a huge organization with 155 veterans hospitals, it nevertheless is true, I think, that they are reasonably and relatively apolitical, with the exception of that particular facet of their interest. And that is the welfare of their buddies. Many of their buddies are down and out, didn't make out too well in life, don't have insurance. Those men are well served by the Veterans Administration, which to a great extent has come about as result of pressure from veterans' organizations like the one I belong to. So that has been, I think, a positive aspect.

In closing, I thank both of you for coming here and participating in the interview. And I would like to go on record in thanking again Cindy Kline for bringing this project to your attention. Thanks again.

Thank you.