

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Veterans

Personal Experience

O. H. 1157

MICHAEL S. KRUPA

Interviewed

by

John M. Demetra

on

November 30, 1988

MICHAEL S. KRUPA

Mr. Krupa is a native of the south side of Youngstown, a son of ethnic Slovak parents. He attended South High School and Youngstown College, graduating in 1949 with a B.S. in Education.

In 1950 he hired on with the Erie Railroad and worked there until retirement in 1980. Mike and his wife, Mary, have a son, Ted, and live in Youngstown. He stays active in bowling and golf leagues and is also active in the Slovak organization Jednota.

Mr. Krupa is an Army Veteran of World War II, having served in combat in the European Theater.

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Veterans

INTERVIEWEE: MICHAEL S. KRUPA

INTERVIEWER: John M. Demetra

SUBJECT: life during the Depression, Europe during
World War II, half-tracks

DATE: November 30, 1988

D: This is an interview with Michael Krupa for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on World War II, by John Demetra, in Youngstown, on November 30, 1988.

What can you tell me about growing up during the Depression? Any stories come to mind right away?

K: Well, it was tough. T-O-U-G-H or T-U-F. It was tough because we were poor. I mean, we were so poor that when I went to high school we couldn't take our shoes and get them repaired at the cobblers. You know, to pay \$.10, or \$.15 or \$.25. Our father used to fix them. Whenever a heel went bad, he got an old tire, cut the tires, carved a heel out of them, and stuck it on your shoe. Also, when the sole of your shoe came loose, especially while you were in school going from one class to another. . . You know, that sole would go flapping and the other kids would be laughing. You were embarrassed, but what could you do? You couldn't do anything until you came home and tell dad or father. . . In Slovak say, "Father, my sole is loose again," and he would say, "Okay, I'll fix it." Take it down to the cellar. He had a last and everything. He put a few nails in. Sometimes the nails came up through the soles and you are walking somewhere or other and you feel the nails. So, now you are walking on one foot because there is a nail sticking up there.

All fathers were not cobblers. We couldn't afford to get them fixed at the shoemaker.

D: Where did your dad work?

K: He worked at the Sheet & Tube, but during the Depression. . . Well, you probably don't remember, but at that time the workers would go down every morning and stand out there. Maybe there were fifty in that particular department or shop, and the foreman would say, "We want you, you, you." Maybe ten guys would work that day, the rest went home. So, the next day they did it again. Maybe my father would get one, two days of pay. How did we eat? The company, the Sheet & Tube at this time, for which my father worked, they had a company store. Every Saturday we would go down there. My father made a big wagon, hand-made everything but the iron wheels. He got oak or something and carved it out and made the big wagon. We would go down to the company store, we would load it up with fifty pound sacks of flour, twenty-five pound sacks of sugar, cans of milk, evaporated milk in those days, and different things like rice. Whatever my mother needed to make bread, and whatever else we needed, especially corn meal. That was one of the staples, for poor people to make corn meal every Friday. You got a little butter and you made corn meal. It is like a gruel, you know what corn meal is. Then you put a little butter on there. It was good, but it was like a staple. Then, potatoes. . . The farmers used to come in. We had potatoes down the cellar, I mean, a big place in the cellar where you just loaded with potatoes. You didn't go out and buy five pounds or ten pounds or Russet or Idaho. You went down the cellar and mother says, in Slovak of course, "Go down the cellar and get me three or four potatoes and peel them." There were your potatoes. You had them all winter. In those days you didn't have houses like you have now. They were sort of, how shall I say, shabby. The cellar was like a dirty place. Now, you have stereos down there and everything. It is an entirely different situation. Plus, in the Depression we lived in the city and we had a cow. That is the way we got our milk and butter. You know, we churned our own butter. In fact, I used to. . . My mother would get one of these big gallon containers, and she would put the butter milk in. I would sort of put it on my lap and keep rolling it until it started hardening. Then, she would pour out some of the stuff and eventually get the butter out. But we made our own butter, and we had our own milk because like I say, "I was a cow puncher." Everyday, especially in the summer, I would have to take the cow out and then go in the evening and bring it back. You know, the cow would stay. . . You know where Pemberton Park is?

D: Yes.

K: In that area, of course, it wasn't built up. We used to leave the cows there all day, and they would graze. Then, if I went to school, after school my mother would say, "Okay, it is time to get the cows." Either me or one of my brothers would head for the field out there and bring the cow in. So, we always had fresh milk. Then, in the fall my father would kill the cow, so we had meat all winter. You know, we put it in barrels with the salt and everything. We used everything that cow produced, you know, once we killed it. Including the stomach which we blew up and played football with. The hide, we took it down to the Hide and Tallow. We took it in an old sack and maybe got thirty or thirty-five cents for it. The blood, we saved the blood because my mother made blood pudding. She made sausages. I mean everything imaginable. We used the tongue. You never tasted tongue soup or tongue meat, did you? So, we used every bit of the cow. Nothing was wasted.

So, what else did we do? We used to, as kids, we used to go to what you called first and second dump. If we could find a piece of copper or aluminum, because in those days. . .Ragged, we used to call them raggies, they used to come around on a horse and wagon. If you had rags to sell, they would give you a \$.01 pound or \$.02 a pound for old rags. Copper, you might get \$.03 or \$.04 cents a pound. Also, little whiskey bottles. If you could find a pint bottle. . .In those days almost every block, at least where we lived, had what they called a bootlegger. That person, whoever it was in that particular area, you knew who they were and so did the guys who drank because you could see them going in there and coming out staggering. They would give you \$.02 for a bottle. So, us kids used to go to these dumps and if you could find copper, aluminum, or anything that we could sell to the raggie and even iron. I forget what the going rate was in those days. It wasn't much, but as a kid, you know, if you get \$.05 or \$.10, you ran to the store. Well, \$.10 was a lot of money. You could give half of that to your mother. If you got \$.05, you would run to the store and get a Klondike or a bar of candy. Now, it is about \$.35, \$.40 or \$.50.

Also, when I got old enough I caddied. You know, I went to the golf course and picked up maybe \$.35 for caddying nine holes. If the golfer was not a zook. . .If you didn't get tipped, you called him a zook. Afterwards when you met on the corner with the other guys who caddied, you would say, "Who did you have today, a zook?" Or you would say, "I had so and so." Of course, you caddied there all the time and you

knew who the zooks were. So, you would say, "Oh, he is a zook," so you wouldn't get tipped. Of course, if you got a \$.25 tip in those days, that was good. When you came home, you gave the money to your mother. You didn't stick it in your pocket.

I remember once going to town with my brother. In those days, if you know where the Strand Theater is. . . Oh, what a minute, I don't think. . . No, it is all different today. Anyway, there was an Isaly's next door and on the corner was what they called the premium store. They sold cigars and they also gave you coupons. If you got enough coupons, you could get a prize. So, this particular day my brother Joe and I were downtown. We were near the box office of where you pay to get into the Strand, and I looked down and I said, "Joe here is a coupon." Of course, I was pretty young then. I handed it to him and he said, "That is not a coupon. That is a \$5 bill." So, we almost ran home we were so elated. At least he was. I thought I had a coupon, but he said, "That is a \$5 bill." So, we came home and gave it to my mother and, of course, she was overjoyed. A \$5 bill around 1928 or 1930, you know, that was a ton of money, especially for Slovak people. Of course, my parents were immigrants.

D: Where did you graduate high school?

K: 1936, South High.

D: What did you do after you graduated? Did you have a car then?

K: Oh, heavens no. No, cars didn't come into. . . Well, I shouldn't say come into existence, but you see I was born on the South side of Youngstown which was the Lansingville district. It was ethnic. I would say 98% Slovak, maybe 99%. There were a few Italians. In fact, when this one Italian family moved into Lansingville some of the Slovaks said, "There goes the neighborhood," if you can believe that. Here come the Italians, you know. We weren't the elite by a long shot, but if you can picture something like that. When Italian people move in and there goes the neighborhood. A different sort of ethnic group comes in, and there goes the neighborhood. All right, after I graduated, I went down to Sheet & Tube and worked for a little bit.

D: What did you do there?

K: Well, I oiled pipe. When they make the pipe and then they are going to ship it, they can put it on cars and gondola cars, and ship it, they wanted it oiled, so when it gets to the destination it doesn't rust out. That is before they added stuff to keep the thing from

rusting and all that. Anyway, three of us worked and we would dip some rags into an oil container, oil bucket, go along, would meet halfway and then turn the pipe over and come back. So, that as we rolled the pipe over, you know, it came on these beds. We did that for eight hours a day. We got awful dirty and oily, but that was my first job. Then, I chased crane. Do you know what chasing crane is?

D: No.

K: Well, you have an overhead crane. The crane has cables that you put around the pipe, and they lift the pipe over here, and you chase the crane. Of course, there is a hook. Then, you take the hook off, he takes the lift, and then he goes for another. Maybe the other end wants a lift because you have got people who are cutting the ends of these pipes. You know, the crane would put down a load of pipe that would have to be beveled maybe or put threads on. so, he would put them by that particular machine and then this person would put the thread on or bevel them or cut them or whatever it took. Then, when he got finished, the crane would lift them up and put them maybe on a dolly. The crane chaser would chase the crane. Wherever he needed to hook up the cables, he would be there. You would climb up over pipe and everything. You did that for eight hours. Then, I became a . . .I went to the boiler shop, and I was a boiler makers assistant. Then, come September of 1937, about a year after I graduated, and my parents said, "You ought to go to college." Youngstown College at the time consisted of I think Jones Hall. . .Do you know where Jones Hall is? Behind it was a business school which was actually an old house, like a manor. Then, the Rayen engineering building was just down the street. Is that still part of the school?

D: I don't think so.

K: Well anyway, they had maybe three whole buildings. One was the business, one was the college and one was partly engineering. Of course, it has expanded quite a bit since then. So, I went to college for a couple of years and then here comes the war.

D: Did you work during college?

K: No. I went full-time, and then here comes the war and I got the "greetings." You know what that is. They say, "We need your body to fight." This is before the war started.

D: How did you put yourself through college?

K: Well, my parents paid. The tuition isn't like it is now. I can't remember, but they. . . Well, Slovaks have money. They save money. They don't buy anything they don't have to, so consequently they put a little on the side for a rainy day. So, they had a few buck or we did. Not much, but a few.

D: Okay.

K: Anyway, they paid for my tuition. I had no job. Like I said in the summertime if I went to the golf course, I gave them the money. Whatever I had. In fact, when I worked down at the mill, I would bring my paycheck home and you would sign it over to your mother. You didn't say, "Here ma, here is twenty bucks for board or anything." You gave her the whole thing. Maybe she gave you a dime to go and buy a klondike or two or go to the movies for a dime. Those were different times. Okay, then here come the greetings from the U.S. of A., "We need your body." So, I went to Camp Shelby in January of 1941 along with a bunch of other guys from our area.

D: Where is Camp Shelby?

K: In Mississippi, deep in the heart of it. In fact, all the camps were there. I shouldn't say all, but 90% were down South because up here you fight with the snow. You want to train these people, so it was all down South. The pits of the nation, Mississippi, Georgia, places like that and Texas where all you got were wide expanses. No trees, no anything. So, okay. I got into the Army with the 37th division no less.

D: What was your training like down there?

K: Oh, it wasn't all that bad. We were civilian soldiers and we tried to buck the discipline and buck the Army, but the Army doesn't bend too much. You're a civilian, but we are going to make you a soldier. When we say jump, we want you to jump. When we say to dig a fox hole, we want you to dig a fox hole. I wasn't much for digging fox holes. I hated it because the ground was always hard and there is dirt there. It was terrible. In fact, when I was in Germany, I would rather sit in my half track and shelter myself from the bombs and mortars and whatever was falling and the machine guns rather than dig a fox hole to save my life. I didn't like the idea of burrowing into the ground with that little shovel. You know, they give you that little shovel about this big. Oh man, that was the pits. Okay, we're at Camp Shelby, so the training there wasn't that bad.

D: About what year and month was this?

K: Okay, we're talking January of 1941 is when I got drafted and started my. . .

D: So, you were drafted before the war actually started?

K: Oh yes, because they came in with the selective service. They said we are going to have these people ready in case of war. Some people can look into the future and say, "Looks like we may end up there. Let's start building up our Army."

D: Could you finish college?

K: Oh no. I just had a couple years because in 1940. . .I went two years to college and then I went back to work. That is when I got drafted, while I was an assistant boilermaker in the Sheet & Tube at Brier Hill. So Okay, I got drafted and now I am in the Army. In about two months I became a corporal. My pay went from \$21 a month to \$48. I mean, I am making big money now, right?

D: Per month?

K: Yes, per month. I mean, it was \$21 when you were drafted. Draftees, that is all you made. Then, I sent \$10 of that home per month.

D: Of the \$21?

K: I should have sent more. I'll tell you part of it. . .You had to pay \$6.60 per month for insurance, so \$21 minus \$6.60, what are you looking at? We had to pay \$1.50 to get our laundry done every month. I think that might be the right figure. It wasn't too much according to standards now. Now, you take a shirt and it is a \$1.50. That was it, so you paid \$6.60, and \$1.50. What else did you have to pay? That is about it, but I know I sent \$10 a month home.

D: Holy cow, so you're living on what, two or three bucks?

K: Now, I get \$48 after two months because the Lieutenant came over. The reason I got promoted so fast. . .When I was in high school, they had what they called the Citizens Military Training Camp. Now, you would go to Fort Ben Harrison for a month.

D: Where is that?

K: That is in Indiana right outside of Indianapolis. They would take away your clothes and give you Army clothes. You were in the Army. Like you play soldier, you didn't play because the regular Army people trained us.

We had infantry people, not artillery. We had machine gun battalions. They had a band for people who could play instruments. Signal Corp, you know, there were several branches. they brought kids from all over, but they called this the 5th Corp. They brought them from Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio. . .Where else? That is about it that I remember, those three states. They came to Fort Ben. For one month you played soldier.

D: Why did you do this?

K: You really want to know?

D: Yes.

K: For money. Well, they didn't pay us not one cent, but you had a place to sleep, you had clothes, they took care of any. . .If you got sick, they took care of you. They gave you a \$.05 a mile transportation from Youngstown to Fort Ben Harrison. Do you know what that came to? \$17.55. They also paid you \$17.55 when you came back, \$.05 a mile. We would. . .I know the one chap that I went with had a car and I think we gave him \$5 each way. So, you take \$5 from \$17.55 and you have got a \$12.55 profit. In 1933 or 1934 that was money. I would have to caddy for every day for a month to make that, so that was free money. \$12.50, it was like living. I'm talking poor now. You know, you didn't go around picking up like that one day when I found the \$5 bill. It was tough. So, that is the reason we did it. I would tell the other chaps in my neighborhood. Pretty soon half of Lansingville was going to Fort Ben Harrison. We had like twenty guys going from there. So, we got trained in the ways of the Army. So, when I got drafted, I knew all this stuff. I knew which end of the rifle the bullet came out of. I knew how to tear it apart. I knew the machine gun. I knew how to drill. You know, because the other guys had never had any of this. The Lieutenant came to me one day and he said, "Private Krupa, we are going to make you a Corporal." I stood up and I said, "Well, that is good." Right away I was thinking \$48 a month. I knew what a Corporal made. It wasn't too long later that I became a sergeant.

Then, we went on maneuvers. Maneuvers were tough. Training wasn't bad, but maneuvers were terrible. You go on maneuvers in Louisiana. . .In the month of July it rains all the time. When its not raining, they have chiggers. Do you know what chiggers are? Little tiny red animals. Now, we had leggins and any place that is tight, they get right in here. Those chiggers get in there and they bore in there and they start itching. You know, they bite you and they make some type of a poison that you just have to itch. Oh man, you just go

nuts. Right in here where your belt is because you always had a belt hanging with stuff on it. Right in there it drove you nuts. In fact, one of my neighbors who was in the outfit with me got infected. He ended up losing his foot because of the infection with the chiggers.

Okay, so we have trucks. We move by trucks. You're out there and you don't have super highway and you don't have roads. You are out in the boon docks. You end up pushing the trucks through the mud trying to get them out. You are chopping down trees to try to make some sort of a road bed for these trucks to get through because you are having a little war. The blue army against the red army. You want to move your troops from point A to point B and you have to go through the woods, through a field that is all muddy. . .So, it was terrible. You go to sleep and it is all wet, rainy. Also, to make matters nicer they tell you these stories about the coral snakes, which are about this long. Once they bite you, you are gone in a minute. So, you're wondering, "Am I gonna sleep." I didn't like to sleep on the ground. I slept on the truck which is hard. You know, the hard bed. Terrible. . .You don't sleep too much, but I figure that is better than sleeping down where those coral snakes are. You know, who wants to die out here on a swamp of Louisiana. So, then after Louisiana. . .

D: How long were you there?

K: Well let's see, we were there about a year, a little over a year then we went to Indian Town Gap, Pennsylvania. We did a little more training there.

D: You traveled by train?

K: Oh, yes. They put everything on the train, put us on there and we went to Indian Town Gap, Pennsylvania, which is out East of Harrisburg, near there. Then, they filled our companies up, or actually our batteries. I was in the field artillery then, the 135th field artillery. Brought kids up from Fort Bragg, kids from places like Pittsburgh, which is right across the river or across the state line. Then, from there we went to California. From there went to New Zealand. You see, at the time. . .Now, the war is already broken out, okay. Now the Japs are coming down and are starting to take these islands. They got as far as Guadalcanal and this is when the United States started sending the Marines and U. S. Army into Guadalcanal. You might have heard of the battles there. That is probably the first place they start fighting where we stopped them. So, here is Guadalcanal, New Zealand is down here, Fiji is here, the Solomon's are in here, you

know, because they are figuring they are going to come around here and take everything and then they will take New Zealand and then Australia ostensibly. Fiji Islands and take all these islands in the Pacific and then eventually take Hawaii and up into the United States. That was the plan, but they got as far as Guadalcanal so they rushed us to New Zealand. From there they shipped the whole 37th Division to the Fiji Islands. Now Fiji, the biggest island there is about 40 by 90 miles, but still once we got there we started training again and we started setting up places in case the Japs started coming. You know, with their assault boats or whatever. We had places where we put our guns and say our battery would have this area. You know, if they would come through at like 3:00 in the morning and say, "Hey, practice drill", you would get up, put everything on, grab your gun and haul it with your weapons carrier, take it out to the beach and set up, pretending that they were coming. In case they did come, but they never did come so that was good. So okay, I was on the Fiji. . .

D: How did you get across country, by train?

K: Oh, yes.

D: How long did it take you, do you know?

K: Oh, it took us about ten days. I mean, we stopped at every. . . You know, at the time they were shipping oil tankers, whole fleets of oil trains, you know like they do now. What do they call them?

D: The unit trains.

K: Yes, the unit trains. Oil was going back and forth overseas to the tanks and everything. Maybe I'm wrong, maybe it wasn't ten days. Maybe it was less. But we were on there a long time, I'll tell you that. It seemed like we stopped at every siding there was between here and San Francisco.

D: Then you embarked on a ship?

K: Oh yes.

D: How long did it take you to get to the Fiji Islands?

K: To New Zealand it took, I think it was fifteen days. They had the whole division on there. The ship was the Santa Clara and it rocked this way and bucked this way. I mean the first night I think two-thirds of the guys were sick. I got a bit woozy. I never did get sick on the boat but some of them did. They were out there . . . Oh boy! They couldn't eat. I said, "You

going up to eat?" "No." And on the ship you only eat twice a day because you are not doing anything. They said, "You don't need all that food anyway?" You would get in line . . . You been on a ship, a boat or a ship? Well, say the mess hall is here on the, say, C-Deck. You might start the line of food down here on E-Deck and then you would go through the various companionways and I mean that line would be like a . . . Seemed like miles. Then you would finally get to where the mess hall is and you would eat eggs. It seems like there were always hard boiled eggs and marmalade. Those were the two staples. You could figure that every meal. I mean it was the pits. They did not feed you too well on boats or ships. So, then you got two meals. That is the way we got from San Francisco to the . . .

D: Where did you sleep on the boat?

K: Where did you sleep?

D: Yes.

K: Okay, you take a room this size. They had a bunk. This would be one bunk, two, three, I would say there would be four bunks here, four bunks there, four there. You would have about twenty people in one little room this big; one state room. You know, where in the old days the Santa Clara, I believe, was a ship that plied its trade between South America and the United States. Of course, this was a little state room we are talking about. Probably twenty GI's in there and they were stacked.

D: In a room that normally would carry maybe one or two people?

K: Yes, a couple I suppose or maybe even one. Oh yes, it was stripped of everything. Right to the barren everything. Now I came back from Europe on the Queen Mary and I think we had 20,000 soldiers on there. It was stripped of course too. In fact on the Queen Mary coming back I had to sleep out on the deck because we were so crowded. You know, the guys were so glad to be leaving and getting back home they said, "Oh we'll sleep anywhere." Which we did. So, any troop movements were the pits because they stacked you on as much as they could. Put as many people on the boat, or on the train, or on the truck wherever you were going. So, transportation . . .

Oh man, let me tell you about crossing. Once I got to Le Havre. From England to Le Havre they put us on, what they called, forty and eight cars. Which meant forty men or eight horses. These are French boxcars. They were maybe a little bigger than this room. But

they jammed us in there with everything, with our guns, with our barracks bugs, overcoats. Once you left, once the train was stopped and you had to leave the . . . bathroom, we used that term. When you came back, maybe you were in that corner, you couldn't hardly get back in there because of all the bodies. So maybe you finally wedged your way in there and then slowly you would try to get a place to lie down because there were so many people and equipment it was . . . Oh man! And for food they would throw the C-rations, a couple of boxes of C-rations according to how many people were in there, just throw them in there and say, "There is your food." You would open them up and the cans were cold of course. There was no way you were going to have hot cans of you know, you couldn't heat them. Unless the train stopped long enough and maybe you would find something to build a fire with and find a pot somewhere and heat them, put them in a . . . Get water in this pot and then heat the cans. Then you had hot beans. But ordinarily it was not great.

D: So anyway, you were out in Fiji?

K: So the Fiji's. . . So then I found out that the Air Force was looking for people to train to become pilots, and bombardiers, and navigators. So, I filled out an application, got examined, and they even looked up my nose. They said, "Well, you can't go up in the air because your nasal septum was too thick," or something. So they even put me in a hospital and they cut it down so I that I could breathe. They said, "You get up there, you are not going to breathe the oxygen," or whatever. So, they chiseled away some of my nasal septum and then afterwards they okayed me. They sent me over here. I came over to Keesler Field.

D: Where was that?

K: Mississippi. El Paso, Texas, San Antonio and then they came around and said, "Okay,"--this is like 1944--,"We have got enough of you guys. You are going back where you came from." Well, they didn't say that in so many words. So now I go to . . . That was nice training. We were a cadet and all that jazz, but anyway that ceased.

D: Were you actually in planes, flying around?

K: Oh yes, you had some training yes. Because when they taught you how to shoot the fifty caliber at other planes, they took you up in a plane and you shot at a target. They had lady pilots who towed the targets, you know right next to you, and you are sitting in this belly of this B-17. Of course, I'm not strapped down, it's bolted down, and then you have got to hit that sleeve. You know what a big sleeve is? Target. You

practice shooting at it. So, then went to Camp Carson, Colorado for some infantry training. Of course, I had the artillery training. "Now," they said, "You are going to the infantry." Of course, I was still a staff sergeant all this time and I had a squad to take care of. Eventually I ended up in Europe, Ninth Armored Division.

D: How did you eventually end up there?

K: Well, because the Ninth Armored was in the Battle of Bulge and they got desolated. I mean they lost like ninety percent of their men. Okay, so the Ninth Armored is in France, we need bodies. So, I was one of the bodies they sent over. We trained, well not necessarily, we were trained as a unit because once . . . When did we start? January of 1945 after the Battle of the Bulge. Then we started heading toward the Rhine River. You probably heard of Metz, France?

D: Yes.

K: Well Metz, by the time we went through it, was flat, because Metz, during the War, first the Americans would come in and chase off the Germans and then the Germans would come in and chase them out. You know Metz was like the battleground. It seems like that half of the week and then the other outfit would take it for a week while they are shooting and dropping bombs it is almost flattened.

D: How did you get across the Atlantic?

K: On a boat, on a ship. . . I don't think it was a Liberty ship, I just can't remember the name but it was on a boat with a whole bunch of other GI's. You know, we were stacked up again on that ship, same thing.

D: You landed in England?

K: We landed in Liverpool, England, took a train, and went down toward near Dover someplace.

D: Southampton?

K: Southampton, that is right. Got on the LST, Landing Ship Tank, big thing. Put a whole bunch of us on there, got off at Le Havre, put us on these forty and eights and took us to a place called Metzerville, France. Cold, snow was that high.

D: This is January of 1945?

K: Yes, I think you are right, January of 1945. Okay, and we trained a little bit, and I mean we are out in the

snow there and running around with our gun and setting the gun up, you know. Hard work.

D: What kind of a gun were you setting up?

K: Fifty-seven millimeter.

D: Like an anti-tank gun?

K: Yes, this was an anti-tank outfit. What you would call tank destroyers. But anyway I was in an anti-tank outfit or a tank destroyer. I forget whatever the name was.

So we would go around setting it up, you know, and practicing to do it as fast as we can. In other words training. You are always training in the Army. Wouldn't let you sit around. Do something, even if it is wrong. And evening go for chow, you are hungry, you could eat bricks. I mean, you stand in line out in the cold with your mess kit. Take everything they gave you no matter what it was. Sat down, found someplace that was sheltered, eat it up, go back in line if they got it. If they have anything left over. You were always hungry because you use so many calories out in the cold. Even if you get bread. Give me some bread and butter, bread and jam, anything. So, we were billeted in Metzerville and the people, you didn't have a camp there or anything. They just put so many people with each family. I think half of my squad was with this German couple. They had two little girls. It was nice living with them. You were almost living like in a house but you slept on the floor. We had our. . . What do you call these zipper things?

D: Sleeping bags?

K: Sleeping bags, yes. We all had sleeping bags, so we slept on the floor. Of course, the family slept in their own room but they gave us the other rooms where we had half a squad. I remember one day the mother came to me . . . Now, there was a movie that evening. The USO always came around and gave you cigarettes. Not the USO, the Red Cross. But the USO would come around, maybe show a movie. So, the lady of the house, Wandí was her name, she came around and she was trying to tell me, in French, that she wanted to go. So then I finally figured it out. Then I told her in my weak French, I said, "Will you come to the movie with me this evening?" And she cried, "Yes, yes, yes." And I said, "Your husband won't mind? Of course, there is going to be a million soldiers." It is not like it is anything wrong, it is just the idea that yes, she wanted to go to see the movie and the husband would stay with the two little kids. So, I did take her.

But, of course, the rest of us were there. It wasn't like taking a girl to a date, it was just the idea that she wanted to go and I took her. Oh, and another thing, when we were billeted in this little town of Metzerville, every morning you had to stand reveille. Do you know what reveille is? You come out there in the morning about 6:00 with all your clothes on. You are standing there and you report, you know, make sure everybody is there and make sure no one has gone over the hill or left. While you are standing there, there were dung heaps in the front of the houses on their street. Well, it isn't street like. It is more like country. This is where . . . Because their chickens and their livestock live with them. You know, you might have the horse and cow over here, and pig. And then you maybe have a little door, and then this is your house. They were almost part of your building. So naturally the dung heap went out to the front of the house. Of course, the bathroom was outside too. You didn't have like we got here. If you wanted to go, you go outside where it is chilly. What do they call? The one and two holers. So, it was rough living. As I was saying, you are standing there at reveille and this odor . . . It is cold now. You know that, how can I say it? The odor is coming up from the dung heaps and you are standing at attention there. Maybe you do a little exercise too in the morning, you know reveille. You report in and then you do some inhaling and exhaling. Oh boy, that is nice breathing that stuff in.

So then, from Metzerville, when they finally said, "Okay, you guys are going to do a little fighting now." Now we headed toward the Rhine River. This is January, February. I guess we are looking around February now. We are heading down the road in a half-track and all at once the Germans decide they are going to shoot at us. They are just waiting for us. So, I jump out of the half-track, so does everybody else in my squad. I am afraid.

D: This is the first time you have come under fire?

K: Yes, the first time I have come under fire. I'm down on the ground and I'm trying to make myself weigh 9,000,000 pounds so I can make a little dent. I'm thinking, "Boy, if I could just get a little lower." I mean I am scared, I don't know what the hell to do. I'm just laying there and I'm just hoping. Then there is a little let up in the fire and I look around. I see Lieutenant Biondi walking around, he was our Lieutenant. I'm thinking, "Who the hell does he think he is? Won't those bullets pierce him? Is he a ghost? They are just going to zip around him like Superman or bounce off of him? What the hell, if it doesn't bother him, why does it bother me." You know, because when it

let up I pulled out that little spade and I'm trying to dig a hole. And that is when I noticed him. He's walking, he's saying . . . Telling some of guys where to hide, where to do, "get into that ditch over there, get that half-track off the road," and things like that. You know, he is doing his job; Lieutenant. I'm praying that things would stop. I don't like it here. From then on it didn't bother me, just the first time I got shelled. I didn't know what was going on. So after that, no more fear. You have trepidation but not too much fear. Because if you are going to get killed, you figured, so kill me. They got more boys over there coming every day.

So then after that we head toward the Rhine. We got to Remagen. Our outfit took the Bridge, what they call the Ludendorff Bridge. The only bridge left across the Rhine.

D: That was the Bridge at Remagen, right?

K: The Bridge at Remagen, right. They made a movie on that. So then we crossed it. Not my particular outfit, but part of my division took the bridge. And when they got the bridge they called up Eisenhower and said, "Hey Ike, we got a bridge." That wasn't the plan. What they wanted to do, they had assault boats built and everything in the back lines. They were going to assault and put these assault boats and cross at certain places. There were no plans for a bridge to be left. They figured the Germans would blow all the bridges. They were going to make pontoons, bridges across and everything like that. This sort of foiled their plan but then when it finally sunk into their heads this was good, we poured everything--not we, the United States--poured everything they could into that. Here is the river and here is the town of Remagen and they started sending people down both sides of the river, across the river, and starting to fight the Germans. In the meantime here come the Germans with their airplanes. They are trying to blow the bridge because the people who are supposed to blow it they did partly. Part of it was beat up. We could still get tanks and trucks and all the supplies across. So, they come across with their air force and drop everything they could to knock that bridge out, including the old Stuka dive bombers, which I think were made after the First World War. They had the pants on the wheels. I don't know if you remember what kind of plane that is.

D: I've seen them.

K: They pressed those into the service.

D: Those are the kind that whistle when they are coming

through?

K: Yes, right. Because they had what they called the pants on the wheels, the Stuka dive bombers. We would shoot everything we had, including our pistols when they would come. We would shoot carbines beams, rifles. Of course, we had the . . . Not we, but we had ack-ack guns placed there. We are trying to shoot them out. Some of the Germans were chicken, they wouldn't even get to the bridge. They would just drop their load and go because they see all that ack-ack. You know, "Hey, I'm getting the hell out of here." So, that is what they did. Eventually the bridge fell in but in the meantime we had build . . . Not we, our quartermasters built two pontoon bridges on either side. And by then they were pouring everything they had.

D: What were you doing at this time?

K: At that particular time I was on the other side from Remagen was the little town of Erpel. The Germans were dropping mortars on us, trying to get us, you know, kill us, get us back across the Rhine where we belonged. I remember that first night. We still had our gun there placed. I had two guys guarding all night. I'm sitting in the half-truck. Like I said, I hated to dig trenches, so I sat in that half-truck and I'm smoking, and chewing chocolate bars. I'm not afraid. I'm just getting nervous because if one of those borders drop right in your half truck there goes my whole squad. I had thirteen guys in there except for the two that are out on the gun. In case, a tank or something comes along, why they are to shoot the tank or truck or whatever. So, that was the first night. Then we start going down after we start shoving them back. Then we start spear heading. We went down to the town of Limburg and it became our job--our Company C, we were the end of tank platoon of Company C--to clean out the town of Limburg. Now to get into the town . . . Well, what had happened, I think four tanks crossed the one bridge, there was a river there and they were like in the square of Limburg. The rest of the bridges were blown, so they told me to take my squad, cross over one of those bridges with the girders and everything half in the water and everything, and go and help these four tanks to try to get them out of there. You know, to kill the Germans that are trying to kill them. Of course, the tank were sitting there but they are still shooting at them. In the meantime we get down there and I take my squad. The rest of the outfit is there too, we are just not thirteen people going there. We ended up going through the town and I was telling this guy . . . Because my sergeant told me to go and find a certain--I forget which platoon--of Company C. So, I'm

going up this one street. It is like a street downtown, you know in Youngstown. I go up and I come to a field and I'm getting ready to cross that field and I hear a voice, sort of on the side, "Hey, where are you going?" I said, "I've got to help the second platoon. My sergeant told me to come up here and help you guys, give you a little rifle fire." He said, "You keep going there, you are going to end up in the German second platoon. Come back here." So that happened a couple of times. Another time I was sent out a mission of mercy and almost ended up with the Germans. That is another story. We finally cleaned Limburg out. If I remember, I think those tankers were killed.

D: American tankers?

K: Yes. I think they. . . They got bazookas of course too and they would shoot them in there and that would start the things moving around in there and before you know it you are dead. While we were in Limburg. . . Now they have super highways in Germany, like you have our freeways, turnpikes. They had them built. Hitler had them built already because he wanted to transport his troops as fast as he could and they skirted all the cities. So we took advantage of these. I don't say we, I mean the United States, the Army. So, we started to spear head. We were the southern belly of this particular encirclement of Germans. The British and the Canadian and whoever else were on the northern flank and we were the southern flank. We finally met up there in Koblenz and I think Paderborn. We finally met and we picked up like a third of a million Germans, prisoners. You know, once you encircle them you cut off their escape route. Then you go across here and now you got a half of them and then you go across here and you got them in the fours and pretty soon they are coming out with their hands up. You know they dropped their rifles, they dropped everything they have and they got their hands up like this. They are kriksgafungen, which in German means prisoners of war. So we just sent them. . . They started walking back to the rear. I was going to say, while we were in Limburg the super highway went along side and day and night they sent trucks, and guns, and equipment. It was just a steady pounding. We won the war because of equipment. We overpowered them with everything we had. Like I say, day and night those supplies were going and going and going. Millions, and thousands of trucks and pulling artillery and all that stuff. So finally we got into the flow of it. We are traveling again part of the spear head.

Let's go back to the night of the 12th. We are talking about February 12, 1945. We are spearheading. You know what spearheading is? You go out in no-mans land

and you are cleared of Germans only to the shoulders. So you want to get up through there as far as you can and the columns behind you. We were part of the spear. We were in the front.

D: Of the point?

K: Of the point. Okay, and everyone behind you. You wanted to get up here and here's another. Maybe we are combat command B, combat command A would be here. You meet here. So now you have got all of these people befuddled. You got them sort of cornered. So this was the idea of spearheading. Going like this, and meeting up here, and then these people were prisoners or practically give up. We spearheaded all day of the 12th. We finally stopped to have supper. Supper which usually consisted of D rations, C rations whatever. Anyway, sometimes we had hot meals; what you call hot meals. Because we did have a kitchen, you know a kitchen truck. Maybe if they had the supplies, they made a warm meal for you. So you would get back there, maybe you would stop over here in some nice place and have a meal. So word comes along, we are going to spearhead during the night. You know, night! It is bad enough at the daytime where you can see, because you can see Germans out there. You take potshots at them but they are 200, 300 yards away. You are not going to hit to many anyway. The idea is to get up here and meet someone else and then these guys are gone. So, we are going to do this at night. Okay, so we did. We started after supper. Pretty soon it gets dark and the only thing you can see, this is pitch dark, on the end of the gun you have the gun covered and they have a . . . Not a night light, a black out light, just like a little reflector. You know and you are looking, peering at the gun ahead of you. After awhile here comes . . . Time is going, you know you are getting tired. You have been spearheading all day and you are standing in this half track. "Okay, Corporal Butts"--he was my driver from Canton--"keep going, keep going I see them." So finally, it must have been about 4:00 in the morning, and I see the guys in the half-track in the back of me they are all laying around, trying to half sleep, and I'm getting pooped. So finally I said, "Moll (Molinsky was his name but he had shorted it to Moll from Chicago)" "Harry." "How about you standing here for awhile?" So I just laid down in the half track, trying to get a little rest. I hear the track, you go up over bumps. Finally, Harry wakes me. "Sorry Chief," this is after I don't know how long, an hour, an hour and a half. I said, "What's a matter?" He said, "I lost that. I lost the column." "What do you mean? All you had to do was look at that little blackout light." "I lost it, I don't know where it is. I can't see it." "So, that's alright. Keep

going." So now I'm awake, one hundred percent. We get to a fork in the road, now this is dirt roads not paved. I'm not talking about super highways in the dirt. We are out in no mans land somewhere. So here is a fork in the road, where did the column go. So I get out. It's dark. I try to look down at the ground. We don't want to shine the flashlight or anything because a German might be right over there, ten yards away from you. Going up this way, I'm looking. Trying to sniff for some dust. No way did I know which way they went, so I guessed, go down this one, go as fast as you can. Now I'm shaking. I'm not really shaking but I'm thinking the column might have gone the other way. I might be going right into the Germans. I got to do something. So, sure enough, go as fast as we can, we hit the column. I said, "Oh boy." Okay, so then I said, "Alright Mole, now we got the column. We can stay with them. I'm going to try to catch a couple of winks." I must have fallen asleep and now it is Friday the 13th but during the night. . . It was after midnight already and someone said, "Do you know what day it is?" And I could see Butts, my driver, turning colors. He was superstitious. He said, "Oh my God, it is Friday the 13th." We should have never mentioned that because he turned green. Even in the dark I could see. I wake up and the half-track stopped. Everybody is out of the half-track and the Germans are shooting .88s. Now this is a big curve the road, this way. They were over here shooting their .88s right at us. Here is the column stretched out about twenty-three yards apart. Medics with the jeep are over here. They got hit, a direct hit I think. Six out of the eight got killed, and know they are shooting what we called tree-bursts. They shoot about this high and they explode. They have got this little bits of shrapnel just filling the air. You get one of those and they sting. They kill you. Anyway, I get up in the half-track and this .88 come right by me. You know on the half track you had, I can't say wires. . . What do you call these things that you put in cement to reinforce?

D: Reinforcement bars?

K: Like a bar. Okay. After that happened, later the next day or something, I looked at that bar. You could see where the . . . You know what lands and grooves are on a rifle or on a shell? You could see where that .88 just went by it. It was a good thing it didn't explode because I'd have gone. I wouldn't be here to tell this story. That is how close it came to me. The guys are yelling, "Sarge, bring my rifle." I said, "You want your rifle, you come and get it." So I took the half-track, slipped over, and took it off the road. Because, you know, you are a sitting duck there. So we

got it off the road. Well, we got pretty well banged up there. I didn't lose anybody but like I say we lost six out of the eight medics. I think the other two were wounded. Bad day at Black Rock, you know February the 13th. Then later we found out that Roosevelt died that day. We weren't worried to much. We were worried about our skin. So anyway, eventually we ended up near Dresden and Leipsig. We stopped there. We chased the Germans as far as we could. They say we stopped here. What for? You know the Russians are coming from the other way, of course they are miles away. Well, we found out later that according to the Yalta agreement, that was our line. The Americans go so far, the Russians have the rest. That is why they went into Berlin. We could have gone to Berlin. We could have gone to Moscow, if they would have let us. According to the agreement they had to stop. We ended up playing softball. Now it has come to spring already. We are looking at April. When did the war end?

D: VE was in May.

K: May 7, yes. So we are playing softball and the war is still going on but the Russians are doing their thing, coming toward us. We went up to . . . What river? Was it the Elbe? We go that far and the Russians come. That is one reason you have got Berlin sectorized because of that agreement. Like I say, if they would have let us we could have probably gone all the way, like I said, to Moscow. So that was it. It was interesting. You know, the war.

Well, they sent all the rest of my guys back to the United States because they were going to put them in other outfits and send them in to fight the Japanese.

D: That was because they didn't have enough points?

K: Right, that is what I was about to say. They didn't have enough points, I did. So then they sent me to England to the Shrivienham Barracks and they said while you are waiting to . . . Because they didn't have enough boats or ships to transport us, we are going to send you to college. They had a little sort of a military college there and I studied some Algebra and German. I forget what else and some college subjects. Then finally they said, "Okay, we have enough ships." In fact during that time, I think there was a ship strike. It was another reason we couldn't get home. So they finally sent me back home and I think it was November 21, 1945 they finally says, "Okay, your tour of duty is over, you can go home." And I became a civilian again.

D: You came home on the Queen Mary?

K: Yes, on the Queen Mary. Like about with 20,000 other GI's, who were anxious to get home.

D: Come through New York harbor?

K: New York harbor right. Out of New York harbor and came back in. So, that is it John.

D: Do you remember seeing any black troops over there?

K: That is a good question. I can't remember seeing any but if I did they seemed to be in the quartermaster's corp. The quartermaster was the supply. They supplied everything. They maybe would even be driving the trucks. Maybe they had a truckload of ammo or food or whatever; oil, gasoline. That is all I can remember. As far as fighting units, no, I never saw any. None over in the Pacific, none over in Europe, and wasn't even near any while I was training in the states.

D: Do you remember seeing any of the big military leaders like maybe MacArthur, or Eisenhower, or Patton? Any of these people?

K: No, the only biggy I saw was the big fellow from France. What was his name?

D: De Gaulle?

K: De Gaulle. We were in Metz, France, like I told you, training. On this particular Sunday they let us go to town, to the town of . . . Might have been Metz, I may be wrong. We knew he was going to be there so we stood along side the curb and he come walking down and he was going like this-- you know he is a tall fellow--with his hands up. People were saying, "Vive De Gaulle, Vive De Gaulle." And he was about as close as that wall from me. That is the biggest, biggy I ever saw.

Over in the Pacific, Joe E. Brown, the comedian, came once and performed. Other than those two biggies I can't remember anybody else.

D: Where you aware of the massacre of American prisoners at Malmedy?

K: No.

D: And the German atrocities towards Americans?

K: No. At the time I would say no, we weren't aware of it, but we got the Stars and Stripes, which was the newspaper and we read . . . And this made the guys in my squad leery at night. You know, every night we

stood guard by our gun and by our equipment. So I would have two guys stand guard every night and they would rotate. "So how do you guys want to do it, one hour a piece or two hours?" They want to go one hour. I said, "I don't care if you go one hour. You are going to break up your sleep, you are going to have to do it twice." They said, "That is alright, one hour is better than two." But anyway that the Germans were sending people with United States uniforms and they have wires and they would sneak up behind you and garret you, you know with a wire. They were leery to stand guard. They said, "Oh, if it happens it happens." Other than the atrocities no, no we didn't know about them.

But getting back to another thing. While we were in Limberg, we came across a building. It looked like a large warehouse. People started to come out and as they came out they turned out to be war prisoners, Pole's, probably some Czech or Slovak's.

D: Like slave laborers?

K: Yes, slave labor. This is what they were. In fact I can talk a little Slovak. I talked to them and they tried to tell me that they were the workers. They were, like you say, slave labor. Must have been hundreds of them.

D: What did you do with them?

K: Well, I said, "You just stay here, people are coming behind us." Because we were still in Limberg and we were looking to fight, you know, because the Germans ostensibly were gone from controlling these people or running this factory, whatever it was, and we still had to do other things. "Just stay here, the people from the rear will take care of you."

D: Were they in pretty good condition?

K: I would say they weren't . . . Like you see some of these people in Auschwitz, they are not that bad. I would say they were in pretty good condition. They must have fed them because they were workers. You can't work a person and not feed them, because he was going to die on you like they did other places. Well, some of them they just kept them there until they finally sent them to the gas chamber, but these were workers. In other words they were helping the war effort, not that they didn't want to but they were forced, forced labor. Slave labor.

D: Did you run across any camps, like your Auschwitz type camps?

K: No, I never did.

D: How about black market activities? Was there very much of that going on?

K: In our outfit we had moved so much . . . I would say a black market thing is more stationary. Where you have a supply depot. We moved so much, how could we black marketize? I had a half track with thirteen guys and all their equipment, all their guns, all the ammo, their extra sleeping stuff. You just didn't have a sleeping bag, you had two or three blankets. Whenever we stopped in some town, the people are gone, so the guys would go in there, whatever they could loot. Guys had little boxes of stuff; anything they could pick up. Because in a lot of cases the people, the Germans, as we came they just run to the hills or whatever. Then, as we would pass, then they would come back. A lot of them had white sheets hanging from the window so we knew a lot of them . . . They were there but there were no soldiers. They were just like giving up. "We are not fighting you, we have no soldiers." And some would just leave, like I said, head for the hills or where ever, the woods, and then come back. So we would find houses where there were a lot of lamps. Little globes on desks, nice desks. Downstairs they have their peaches, cherries . . . What am I trying to say? Glass containers, you know that they canned. Their canning stuff. Wine, we would find wine. We would find their silverware left. Some of the guys would grab the silverware thinking, "Hey, I've got silverware." In fact I had a box of silverware. I don't know what I eventually did with it. My hobby was to take those. See those goblets? I'd come to a house and I would . . . You know when you have say a 90 millimeter shell it comes in a case, it comes apart. So I would take those goblets, put them into this case, wrap them with newspaper, and so now maybe I've got ten of those big shell cases with various sized goblets and champagne glasses. This is all in my half track, all of my junk, the Army's junk, and thirteen guy's junk. So if we tried to black market anything, how are we going to do this. Sell it to the guys in the next half track. They are our buddies, they've got the same kind of junk as we have. That thing there came from Germany, that tea set. This was after the war was over.

So then one day . . . Every Saturday, whenever we would stop, I would say, "Gentlemen, you have got to get rid of some junk. You know everyday you add more junk. Look at this place. It is a pig pen. You have got to get rid of stuff." So finally I looked at all my goblets and I said . . . So, what I did, we are along side a wall. I remember, I can picture it very well, a

stone wall. So I took those goblets, each one, and I pretended I drank it and I threw it against the wall and broke it. Must have been seventy of them. I said, "How am I going to get them home? What if I get killed tomorrow. What good are they?" What am I going to do? Lay them right there on the sidewalk. So I got rid of them, destroyed them and that was that. People, like I say, our guys would go in. They would start pulling open drawers, maybe they found watches. Never found any gold; silverware yes, watches. Most of the watches were mickey mouse things you know, not very good. One day we ran across a warehouse full of electric shavers but they were terrible construction. I took a couple, of course they have a different voltage system there which is beside the point. Terrible construction. When I got there in 1944 the Germans were hurting. Everything was kaput, whatever they could make out of whatever they did. A lot of it was poorly made, poor construction. So there were these thousands of boxes of shavers, electric shavers, practically worthless.

Another time, in fact it was in Limburg, as I was going up the street to where I was to find the 2nd Platoon, there is a cigar store. We go inside, boxes of cigars, you know I'm loading myself up. I'm smoking cigars for weeks. Filling my pockets up. Remember the. . . Well, you've probably seen them around the campus. These, not Eisenhower jackets, they have deep pockets on them. So I'm putting cigars all over there.

D: Did you smoke at the time?

K: Oh yes. Smoked, like I say when we were getting shelled I'd be smoking. Now cigarettes, the Red Cross gave you a carton of cigarettes every week, every soldier. They also gave us candy bars and toothbrushes, toothpaste. Which you couldn't get back here; going overseas to our boys. So, we had all the toothpaste, toothbrushes, cigarettes, candy bars. Candy even came in the various rations; solid chocolate. So, like I say, when we were getting shelled I would be smoking and eating chocolate bars to pass the time.

Another time we ran into this building, store. There are packs of fifty mark bills. Now, if you remember when Hitler, or pre-Hitler, when the German economy went downhill they were . . . You could plaster your ceiling with a billion dollars and it wouldn't buy a loaf of bread because they devalued the mark so much. But these were fifty mark pieces, which later after the war we were in the town called Rehav and they were still making shoes and boots. For fifty bucks I could get a new pair of boots made. I must have had six, seven pair. I sent a couple home to my brothers. So, the marks were good, I could use them. Here I was

lighting my cigars with them and everything because at the time we figured the economy is going to go bust here in Germany anyway. I could have been a half a millionaire if I had saved them. So, that is about it.

From New York Harbor they shipped us again, by a railroad, to some camp in Indiana. I can't remember. But that is where we got deactivated or whatever you call it. Where they gave you a check for whatever they owed you. I think there was some severance pay. And on another train, came home. I got a job again at the Sheet & Tube. In the meantime the GI bill said I could go to college. I went to college, got my degree in teaching, never taught. Ended up on the Erie Railroad, and it was the Erie Lakawanna. Then it became Conrail. Worked there thirty years all told and retired in 1980. In 1988 here I am, seventy years old, and a veteran.

D: Okay, is there anything else you want to add about the war?

K: No, except it was a tremendous experience. Something, of course, you'll never forget. Like I said, a lot of this is imprinted indelibly on your mind. You can recall certain things vividly. Especially that first time I got shelled at. Something like that you have got the adrenalin flowing. There were a couple times, what they called the observer planes; L-11's. They would observe right at the front line while we are spearheading. Of course, they have got a radio there and they are radioing to the people down in the line, telling us where the pockets of resistance are. Twice they were shooting ack-ack at the planes, now they were pretty low, maybe 100 yards. You could see them right there. A direct hit, smash, and you could see. . . Not the propeller but half of the wing would be coming down like this. You could see two bodies just hurtling--it was the pilot and the observer--just come down and you could almost hear them hit the ground. Boom, they are dead. That happened twice. It was like from here to Bears Den Road over there, that is how close it was. It just tears you up inside to see something like that because it is your own people up there. Things like that you remember.

Then, one night we were walking from point A to point B, whatever the reason was. Like we were on a road here and the artillery was above us. We were walking along this road and all at once the loudest noise I ever heard in my life. They are shooting right over my head, our artillery. It is night. Man, it just about deafened me. I hit the ground, figuring we were getting shelled but it was our own people shooting. It was like the loudest noise I ever heard. Now, what the hell is going on? Are they shooting at us or what?

I'm hitting the ground and finally I realized that it was our people shooting. It was loud and scary.

What else? One time, we were . . . It was a Sunday. And like I say as soon as you stop . . . This happened to be a farm house. The guys go in for the chickens, get the eggs, because you can always have hard-boiled eggs. We also had amongst our junk in the half track, we had a pot. Because whenever we wanted to cook something we would get water and cook the eggs, you know, have raw eggs. So, this day we were going to have chicken. Because a couple of the guys fancied themselves as cooks. So, they kill a couple of chickens. The people were gone from the house, so we got the fire going. They are cooking the chicken. You know they got the pot on the stove, with the water in it and the parts of the chicken. We were going to have a chicken dinner it was Sunday. So, half cooked here comes BSMO, which means Break Station March Order, so grab everything. The chicken is half cooked. I said, "Grab, pour the water out, bring it on the half track." So, we are going down the road and we are grabbing the hot chicken, taking pieces off it. It is still half cooked but we are still eating the blasted thing, eating the meat off of it.

Then one time I captured, I can't say I captured, a little rabbit. Of course you are always in the field, and I got him. So I put him on my seat, little tiny thing. Tried to feed him some grass. We had him two days I think. So about the second day. . . What did we call him? I forget what I named him. But I said, "Whatever happened to Henry--or Harriet, or whatever?" "Well, I don't know. He was in your seat there." So now the seats on the half track are made out of iron of course, and they were heavy, and they could fold. Then we could fold up and lie down. So, I lift up the seat and there is the poor rabbit, squashed. So, I don't know how that happened but we had a little pet for about two days; a little rabbit.

Oh man, Samniego was in the other . . . No, I shouldn't tell this story. He was in the other half track. He was the doctor because in his scrounging around he got a top hat, which he could flop. You know, one of those where you could close up, and you hit it and it opens up. Then he also found a stethoscope somewhere. So he put that around his neck. So, we called him Doc but I won't go into that other part. It is a little . . .

D: Go ahead.

K: Well alright, anyway he was in the half track ahead of us, not behind us. He got the diarrhea. Now you can't stop anytime you want to go to the restroom, you know,

when you are fighting a war. So, Samniago he had to go. So now what he did, he straddled himself. Now here is the half track and here is the gun behind it, you know the trails were attached to the half track. So, he straddled himself, holding on to that half track, pulled his pants down, and he had to go. There is no way they are going to stop the column just for him to go to the bathroom. He didn't want to do it in his pants. He is there, we are looking at him. We are following and we are going over bumps and he is trying to hold on. That was the funniest thing in the world. He was a Mexican. He come from around Texas, someplace. Remember Captain Jack? It was a comic strip. No, you probably don't. They had this Mexican person in there, sort of chubby. Well this kid looked exactly like him. That was one of the funniest things you ever saw. Him trying to do his job and hold on to that half track and standing on those trails, the trails of the gun. Man, we almost died.

While I was over in Germany I got to be sort of a pseudo-correspondent. I captured two typewriters. So, now you got a typewriter in your half-track, you know, along with everything else. I got two typewriters in fact. I got some paper. Anytime we would stop, I would punch out a little poop sheet. You know, I would write about the guys in our platoon. I would say Doc Samniago did this or did that or something. You know some little goofy thing. I made three copies, one for each platoon. Every week I would punch one out. So, the captain heard about it, the captain of our company. He called me in one day and he said, "How would you like to do that for the whole, you know, put out--I called it the poop sheet--for the whole company." I said, "Well, there is only one thing wrong, I'm in with my platoons, we are the anti tank platoon and I never get to talk to the guys in the rifle company. What could I say? I would have to try to go amongst them where I got my job with them." I said, "It sounds good but I don't know enough about them to take over the whole company and write about them." So, that was that. In fact I got a few of those copies down in the cellar, you know, that I had written then. Because I sent them home to her.

So, that is about it John.

D: Okay, I really appreciate it. If you think of anything else, let me know.

END OF INTERVIEW