

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II

Personal Experience

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WILLIAM V. ASHMORE

Interviewed

by

Eurad R. Rouse

on

April 10, 1986

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
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INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM V. ASHMORE
INTERVIEWER: Eurad R. Rouse
SUBJECT: World War II, North Africa, traveling
DATE: April 10, 1986

R: This is an interview with Mr. William Van Ashmore for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Mr. Eurad R. Rouse, in Campbell, Ohio, on April 14, 1986, at 2:00.

Do you remember about your parents and family?

A: I think I had about the best mother and father a man could ever have. Dad was very understanding, very liberal, and very generous. I think they bought me my first car when I was not quite thirteen [years old]. I had one all through school. I never had to walk to school or anything of that nature. I had a very good young life.

R: Where did you grow up at?

A: I grew up in the Hazeltown Area on Cherry Street until I finished high school. Then, I went away to school for one year. When I came back, I moved to Campbell.

R: Did you have any jobs in that limited time?

A: Oh, yes. I had a number of jobs. As a youngster, I worked at Schwebel's Bakery on the weekends. I helped in washing the trucks on the weekends. I helped maintain them on weekends. I would just wash them, maintain them, and change the oil. We did this

all on the trucks, in the evenings after school and on weekends.

R: What school did you go to?

A: From elementary on through?

R: Yes.

A: I went to Hazeltown School. That was on the corner of Center and Lawrence. Of course, today it is torn down. From there, I went to East High School. I completed a year at the University of Wisconsin, in Madison. I spent half of a year up at NYU in New York.

R: Do you remember when you were taken into the Army, one way or another? Did you volunteer?

A: I was drafted into the service in 1942, in November. I went to Camp Forrest in Tullahoma, Tennessee. I was one of a category of eighteen sent from Ohio down to Camp Forrest, to the 27th Quartermaster Regiment. Of course, the outfit we went into . . . we were all there for basic training. There were eighteen of us there from Ohio who taught the other fellows how to read and write, and those types of things. A lot of them weren't able to read and write, so we taught in the afternoons, reading and writing, until we got ready to leave there and ship out to go overseas. We did this for about six months. I remember we left in May to go overseas.

We went to North Africa and landed in Oran. We stayed in that area there--until our battalion was activated--and picked up trucks and things that were necessary for the companies. We didn't go over with anything. We got all of our trucks and everything right over there in Oran. During that time, we stayed in the area by the water. I guess it took about three weeks to get everything together.

We left there and then started going along, all the way up to Tunis. We went all the way over to Tunis. That was where we stopped. After Tunis, we came back to Oran to take additional training courses there. We had a stationed area there that was set up like a city. You would go in and take the hand-to-hand street fighting and that type of thing. We had to take what they called "commando training." That was for the invasion of Sicily. We were there for, I think, a month, going through that "commander training."

We left there to go to Sicily, but we didn't stay in Sicily very long. We went in after they formed the _____ . We went in when they had better than a

five mile radius to travel in. We were pulled back and another outfit was put in. We came back to North Africa, into Tunisia this time. We had to go through another training course, commando training, for the invasion of Italy. We stayed there until the conflict was over in Sicily. Then, we went into Piombino, Italy. We invaded the beach at Piombino. It was about twenty miles South of there. That was where we went in. Then, we moved on up. We stayed in Italy until we chased the Germans out of there altogether. We serviced the entire Fifth Army. We serviced the whole 42nd, which was a black unit infantry outfit; we serviced them and we serviced the 101st Airborne. We serviced the entire Fifth Army. Of course, they changed the name of our battalions once we got into Naples. They changed it to the 49th Quartermaster Battalion. For what reason, I can't say, but we were changed to the 49th instead of the 27th, and we kept that until we left. I served in the capacity of Company Motor Sergeant up until we got into a town called Sanna, in Northern Italy. The Battalion Motor Sergeant was transferred out of the unit, and I had to take his place. I served in that capacity until the war was over in Europe. We went all the way through Austria to Germany. When the war subsided there, we came back down into Italy and back down to Naples. We got a boat there, and from there, we went home. Later, all the supplies were disposed of.

R: When you made that trip, were you driving your trucks all the way from Munich?

A: Yes, convoy.

R: And, you had a convoy back?

A: Oh yes, a convoy. They couldn't have been assigned to us. That was our transportation; that was what we utilized. We utilized our transportation. That was one thing that I could never understand. After the war was over in Europe, I had enough points to come home the next day. The pass that I was holding . . . I had to get rid of all the equipment and supplies. We brought those trucks and all that equipment all the way back to Naples, Italy. Then the outfit all went home. They went home for discharge, and they got a bunch of replacements to take the trucks all the way to Yugoslavia, to the border. [They] unloaded them and left. I had to take another truck to bring them back, then get another group and take up. We made about three trips to Yugoslavia border to get rid of that material in the trucks. Of course, the office supplies, I don't know who did that. I think it was November 25th before I

got back to the states, after the war was over in Europe. It took me that long to get rid of that sort of thing, Battalion Motor Officer. We had some fine evenings and some trying nights.

I forgot that we had another invasion. I was on about three different invasions. They were Sicily, Italy, and another one in Italy, in Anzio. That was the worst of all of them, really. I wouldn't take a million dollars to go through it. I know that. The experience was enough, but I wouldn't take a million dollars to go through it again! We had fellows who were just blown to bits before they even reached the beach. They were on those PT boats. They were going, and some of those trucks were loaded with ammo and what not. Those German 88's would hit it and would just blow it all to heck. It was just awful, really awful. You didn't know what the next seconds were going to bring. Things were just that tense there, and we only had about a two mile radius that we could maneuver in there. In fact, we were just pinned down on the beach until CB's had a chance to fall in where they could establish, dig in, and have a sound footing to get around some. It was something else. That was where I got hit there. I was injured there by a German 88. One of those shells would hit the ground, bounce up about four feet, and then explode. I got shrapnel, but I survived it. They managed to keep me there. They didn't send me home.

R: Did they give you a purple heart for it?

A: Yes, I got it over there in Italy. It took, I guess, about a year after it happened, before I got it. We earned four bronze stars: one for the Africa campaign, one for the Sicilian campaign, one for the battalion, and one for _____. Yes, four bronze stars. We had some fellows there who went all the way through. We all went through together. Of course, some weren't as fortunate. We lost a few fellows. Although we were supposed to have been a service unit, we lost many guys.

You take a service unit, a trucking company. It is attached to an infantry division. You are taking those supplies, ammunition, or whatever, up there at night. The MP's (Military Police) are in fox holes. Flashlights would guide you along because you weren't allowed to use headlights. You would use blackout lights. You couldn't see and there were shells flying in from everywhere. They didn't pick nights to shoot. They would shoot day and night, whatever. You had to get in there and get out before daybreak. Trucks are

big; they would see those. We had a lot of fellows who were wasted in route. Of course, they had those convoys. Usually there would be about twenty in the convoy.

R: And the sergeant in charge?

A: Yes, [there was] one Sergeant in Charge, and they had one Second Lieutenant. Every fourth truck would have a cavalry machine gun on it. Believe me, they used it, too. There were a lot of incidents where they had to be used from planes. These fighter planes would come straight for convoys, and they really had to use them. They had one maintenance truck. If they were going to be gone any length of time, they had the mess truck. Of course, myself, I didn't go out on many convoys. I was too busy at headquarters. Occasionally, I did have to go. Maybe if they only sent one or two platoons out, I wouldn't go, but if they sent over six, why, I had to get out; I had to go along with the convoy.

Your motor sergeants, they are full-fledged mechanics, and a mechanic has to be on every convoy. When all of your mechanics are out and the convoy goes, you are it; it's as simple as that. Of course, I had more seniority than most of the other Motor Sergeants, so I was the last one in every battalion, but there were occasions that I was there. A couple of trips I went on, I couldn't get back soon enough.

R: What kind of office did you have?

A: Our Commanding Officer was very jovial. He was Italian. He was half decent until we got into Italy. At that point, he seemed to change his tune a little bit. I think he didn't quite come to the personnel playing with the local girls. Other than that, why, I seemed to think that we got along fairly well. Of course, with me, he and I got along very well. He never bothered me. I guess he had a lot of confidence in me. He had confidence that I knew my job and that I knew how to do the job.

While we were overseas there, our company had wanted us to have ratings in the whole battalion. We had less deadline vehicles throughout the whole war. That was why they tagged me Battalion Motor Sergeant after the war was over, because when it was over, they tried to get me to reenlist. One officer said. . . . After one year, I would go up to Second Lieutenant if I would reenlist, but I've had enough. I wanted to get back home.

R: Did you have any black officers in your unit?

A: Yes. When we went overseas, we didn't. We got those later, after we got overseas. When we first got overseas, we got into North Africa. We did fairly well. That was because we were on a continent that civilian personnel there were of a dark race, dark colored; they weren't white. When we got into Sicily, it was a white race. We had friction. It was something else because of racial tension. They had areas where you could go when you were off duty, and sit down to have a beer or things of this nature. The Whites would come in and there would be problems. The guys made quite a few complaints about some of the white officers that we had because they were accusing the fellows when they were unjustifiable. They did change, and they brought in black officers at that time. We ended up having only one white officer, and that was the Commanding Officer. All the rest were black. We only had one white officer after we hit Italy, because it was in Sicily where they made the change. I don't know why it had to be that way, but it seemed that the black soldier had a strike against him to start off with. For instance, when he was off duty and he went back for rest. You weren't on the front line all the time. There were so many months and then you were sent back for rest for two weeks. One time, we were sent back for a month. When you go back to one of the areas, why, you were able to go out. They had noncommissioned officer soldier clubs, beer joints, beer gardens, and things of this nature that were run by the Army where you could go and sit down and have a glass of beer or whatever, and take a date or whatever. They didn't have black and white in those social areas; they all went to one. After a few drinks, why, some of the soldiers would make derogatory remarks that the soldier didn't like, the black soldier didn't appreciate. They figured they were over there risking their life for their country and they weren't going to take any crap. It was as simple as that. It was true.

When they issued you your equipment, that was yours. You were responsible for it. When they went out, they had to carry that at all times. Those boys didn't have blanks over there; they have live ammo. Some of those in the 101st Test Division, they didn't have anything, but they had a lot of mouth, and our boys just didn't take that stuff. They were just trouble.

After we got the black officers there. . . . Now, one officer usually went out with a group when they were going out. Of course, they had their own social clubs that they attended. He was in charge of that group that was there on leave. He could see both sides of the story with an open mind, where the white officer would not. He was not able to keep an open mind. When

you were wrong, that black officer would yell at you that you were wrong. If you were right, he was going to let you know that you were right. That was the difference.

I don't think we would have had that problem initially, had they had black officers with them. Our battalion or company was all one race at that time. If you were white, you were in a white outfit; if you were black, you were in a black outfit, but you had white officers. After they found it didn't work, why, they changed that format and gave you black officers. . . . Of course, you had to wait until you got overseas for that change. It was tough at times. Some officers I had no respect for at all, because of their attitudes. I had some who would come to the motor pool and would want a vehicle for transportation or something. I would give him a truck and had jeeps available, but because of his attitude, I gave him what I wanted him to have, the old truck.

I found that a man was a man regardless of whether he was blue, black, green, or red. I was in contact with a lot of whites as well as blacks. Color meant nothing to me. Really, I wasn't aware that color meant anything until I got overseas and got in the service. I really didn't.

R: Then, it became all persuasive.

A: Yes. I had a lot of white friends I ran around with, that I socialized with, from the service. That was in 1942, but it wasn't so in the service. It wasn't so, and it was hard for me to swallow. It was something new to me, something I had to adjust to. Later, I found out that they did integrate the different units later on, and I think those people did it very well. I don't think they had any dissension or anything else any more, I don't think.

R: Not on those grounds. How was your laundry, dry cleaning, handled?

A: During that period of time, they had a laundry unit that was. . . . You would take your dirty clothes to some black sergeant, and he would see that they would get the laundry to be cleaned and brought back to you. We didn't have to pay for that. They had a regular unit that took care of the laundry. They did a very neat job, very neat. I thought they did a fantastic job.

R: And your wool uniform?

A: Yes, they took care of those, too. Wool and khaki, I wore a lot of those. Even though we were in combat zones. They expected us to stay neat and clean at all times. That was one thing. We had a battalion commander there who was a stick in the mud about cleanliness. He felt that a soldier should show the people that they are a clean bunch of people and that, that had a stigma on the people in the area. He made sure. When you left that post for any reason, even going on a convoy, you were clean. You had a clean unit on and everything else.

Sometimes you went out on a convoy and you didn't get to camp for two or three days. You made sure that you had a clean outer unit on, and that you carried undergarments and socks. Socks were changed every day. He insisted that you had to take that stuff with you and your pup tent. You had to use pup tents when you were away. You found a wooded area and would park your vehicles. You didn't stop going up, but on the way back, you didn't drive day and night. You would stop in a wooded area where you had some camouflage for the vehicle. When you were near the front, you couldn't drive during the day anyway; you had to do your driving at night, so you had to find an area that you could pull in and camouflage your vehicles with. You slept during the day, and at dusk you would pull out and head back to camp. So, you had to take a change of socks and a change in undergarments and things of this nature to sleep in. Of course, some of the drivers slept in their trucks. There were two drivers to a truck, and it was kind of hard for two to fit in there and to sleep in the cab. Then, you had that fourth truck with the fifty caliber machine gun, and nobody slept in trucks. One man was on guard. There were two [men] driving it. One of them had to be on guard on the machine gun. If you weren't driving, you were gunning; when you weren't gunning, you were driving. When you stopped for a rest or to spend the night, you took turns watching the gun. That was mandatory when you were in a combat area, and that was a must. Really, it meant life or death.

I don't think, in my book, that a fifty caliber machine gun is very effective for bringing down an airplane, but it kept the planes up high enough where you had some protection. It kept them right off of your head, because we had some dive bombers that came down pretty low. Those fifty calibers did send them up. They would go up at a higher rating.

R: A higher rate of climb, and they wouldn't come down as low?

A: They wouldn't fly as low, yes, altitude.

R: They stayed up there.

A: Yes, they flew at a higher altitude when we had a fifty caliber machine gun. We found that to be true, because we had one convoy that went out and all the trucks had gone out. An order came in for small arms ammunition, and it had to go out; they were running low. They sent the convoy out without the fifty caliber machine guns, and I think they only got two trucks out of that convoy. They made it up there, but they got wasted coming home, trying to get back to camp. Yes, they were very effective, very effective.

A lot of things that were done over there, I think, could have been done better, really. I was not a General, but I take for granted that he is a General, and a General is supposed to know. Your Majors and Colonels, a lot of those were from West Point. Of course, some of them came up through ranks. They were professional soldiers. Evidently, they should have known what they were doing. I questioned some of their decisions that they made over there.

When you are attached to an infantry unit, your Battalion Commander is supposed to inform your Company Commander what way they should carry themselves on the convoy going out, where they should stop, how far they should go, the first leg of the trip, and this type of thing. I mean, they had them stopping on some of those trips that I thought were unnecessary. I think it would have been better if those trucks went right on through and got as far away from there as possible before daybreak. A lot of them went in there and loaded, and they made them stay there until the sun went down. That was a whole day that those trucks were laying around there. We lost many trucks in this company.

In fact, one trip that I went on, I asked the Second Lieutenant Platoon Officer that went along with the group, "We have about five hours before daybreak. Let's get out of here and get as far away from here as possible."

R: Five hours, that's 250 miles.

A: Yes. We were close enough that you could see the gunfire, the light, from the rifles. That was how close we were.

R: I thought you were going to say cannon.

A: No.

R: With rifles, sure. You were right there.

A: Yes, we weren't that far down. With the rifles, you could see.

R: Yes, well, rifle fire you can see for 500 yards.

A: Yes.

R: Cannon fire you can see for miles.

A: I said, "Let's get out of here." He said, "No." He had orders to stay there and to come back after dark. I said, "Oh, my God." He said that those were his orders. He had to follow them. We lost two trucks coming home. See, if we would have left that night, we wouldn't have lost anything because we would have been far enough down the line. Then, we would have stopped.

Any time I went on one, I wanted to get out of there as soon as it was feasible and get as far away from there as possible. When you were close enough where you got your MP's laying in foxholes, flashing lights, and blinking them telling you to keep going, that's bad.

R: You were kind of close.

A: That's bad. That's too close for comfort. Then, you still had to go another few miles before you got back. Those ammo duffs they had. . . . They were usually in a wooded area. They did have some camouflaged with some cover, but we had those nets that we used to pull over the trucks when we got in there. They were going to stay there all day so we had to cover the trucks and all this sort of a thing. Had we used those three or four hours of darkness. . . . At least, we couldn't have seen the fire from a rifle or either a thirty caliber machine gun. That was what they were using. That was how close you were.

Every so many rounds there was a tracer. You could see those really good. I said, "Oh Lord!" You were scared the whole time you were there. I couldn't sleep a wink. Those were about the worst encounters I had over there, with the exception of the air raids.

We had raids all over North Africa. They started diminishing once we got past Rome, because the German airplanes were sort of failing out there. We didn't have them as frequent. But, up until then, we used to call them "Bed Check Charlie." About nine o'clock every night, we had an air raid. I know that, [we had]

one every night. In Sicily, every night we were bombed, strafed. When we got into Italy, we had quite a bit of strafing.

They sent this 99 squadron. This was a black aviation outfit, Sue Squadron. They protected our area very well. We didn't have near the incidents of strafing as we had prior to that. Those fellows did a beautiful job. They made life a little bit easier for us there. Up to that point, we had no air cover at all. It was all the . . . all the fighter planes were coming from North Africa or Sicily. They only had one strip at Sicily so there weren't too many planes that we were getting up there to keep that air cover a little clean for us.

You would see a lot of dog fights. Dog fights were very frequent, but we weren't getting bombed or strafed. Boy, before then, we were getting bombed and strafed and everything else. We lost a lot of guys from just strafing. After we got the 99. . . . I think that was the first sue squadron we had in there. When they were ready to go, I never saw them; I never did see them. Of course, they had an English outfit officer in the Adriatic. That was on the other side of Italy. It was on the Adriatic coast.

R: Was there anything unique about those airplanes? Could you tell them at a sight?

A: I didn't have to see them; I could listen. After you were over there a while, really, you could hear. You could tell what it was by the sound of the motor. In the German fighter plane, the roar wasn't consistent. When you took your American airplanes, they were smooth; the motor ran smooth. It was a consistent roar. You could tell whether it was a bomber or whether it was a fighter plane. You learned the sound of the motors, and you could tell right away whether it was "Bed Check Charlie" or whether it was our boys going to rouse them a little bit. It was no problem identifying the planes.

Initially, when I was sent over, I just ran every time I heard a plane after dark. After I was there for a while, it was very simple to distinguish the sound of the engine and tell whether it was a . . . [It was] very simple. I don't know if there was a difference, but our planes just ran smoothly.

R: They had those Allison engines, which were made from the Rolls Royce engines. It was the P-51 that they had over there, right?

A: Yes.

R: Well, that was the Allison engine. Of course, the Rolls Royce engine had been one of the leading ones.

A: Yes, darn good engine.

R: So, that was the reason why.

A: They ran smoother; they ran very smoothly. Even those P-38's, boy. . . .

R: They had Allison engines.

A: They were remarkable, too.

R: Did you know that the engines turned in opposite directions?

A: They do?

R: Yes. On the P-38, the one on the right, turned to the right; the one on the left turned to the left. Otherwise, you could see what would happen.

A: Yes. Well, I was never that close enough to see. All I saw was what was up there in the air. Our boys did take gasoline over to their stationed area, but I never made trips over there. They always sent four or five trucks at a time. One mechanic was all they needed for that. They were back in an area where it was quiet. Yes, they had close security around those airfields, those airstrips that they had. When you went there, it was like fun time.

R: How did you eat when you were on convoy and you only had four or five trucks? What did you eat?

A: If you had over ten trucks, they took a mess truck; it went along with the group. They didn't prepare a full meal. They just heated your C ration. They kept C rationing you. If you only had half a dozen of trucks, you carried your ration. You opened it and ate it cold.

R: You guys didn't heat any on your exhaust?

A: Yes. Some guys did. I heated water on it for coffee. They had coffee in your ration.

R: Cocoa sometimes?

A: Yes, hot chocolate. Well, that was a rare occasion. We didn't get that often. We carried K ration, I know that, because of the climate. Those cans would get hot and swell. A lot of them, that stuff would spoil.

When we got into Italy, we got C rations. That was like a step forward. K rations weren't bad. You had bacon and eggs, cookies, and a chocolate bar. It wasn't too bad.

R: Cigarettes?

A: Yes, it had cigarettes in each one.

R: Toilet paper?

A: Yes, it had everything in it. When we got over in Italy, we used to get the K rations, which was a Cadillac in eating. You had spaghetti and meatballs. They were half decent.

R: That K ration?

A: Yes. It all depended on how close you were to the forward duffs, whether you could utilize making a fire to heat your food. Most of the time, you just had to eat it right out of the can. You couldn't light a fire, no way. Now, some of the fellows would take and heat the water over the exhaust manifold, which was good. A lot of times when you stopped, you didn't want a noise.

R: Right. How would you heat it on the exhaust manifold? Would you just leave it in the canteen?

A: Yes. You broke the seal and set it on there, and it heated it right up. In some area where you stopped, you couldn't leave your motor running; you had to shut that motor off, because you didn't want any noise.

R: That exhaust manifold was around 700 degrees when you started it up?

A: Yes.

R: You had a lot of heat coming out of there.

A: Yes. I used to heat up my coffee all the time when we were out. Of course, as I said, there weren't too many times when I was out. But when I was out, I noticed that fellows do this. That was how I learned. If I would have been out there alone, I wouldn't have known; I would have been lost.

Of course, we were up in one part of Italy. They called it King's Forest. It was a group of pine trees. Boy, they were tall. We were in there, and we used that to camouflage those vehicles on one occasion

there. We went hunting in there, too. That was the first meat we had, from the time we left North Africa until we got into Italy.

R: What did you shoot?

A: A wild hog, a wild boar. Some of the fellows had those carbines. We hit him three or four times before we knocked him down. The first time he was hit, he took his tusk and hit the side of the tree, and knocked a gash in there two inches deep. Boy, that was some delicious meat. We cooked him all night long.

R: How was the weather in Africa and both places that you were going through?

A: Africa was. . . . It all depended upon what area you were in, in North Africa. When you were on the edge of the Sahara Desert, it was cold at night and extremely hot during the day. The ground was so dry that it just cracked, and they had those lizards that would come in and out. There, we slept in pup tents. We didn't have any _____?_____ tent at that time down on the edge of the Sahara. Once we got our _____ tents, we moved out of there. It was warm; it was extremely warm. We didn't have any cold weather at all in North Africa.

R: Except at night?

A: At night, the only time we had cool weather was when we were on the edge of the Sahara. Other than that, farther toward Tunis, it was beautiful weather. It was extremely hot at night. You did get some relief, but it was still warm at night.

In Sicily, there was snow, and it was cold. We had some cold weather there, and we had freezing rain. Down in Naples and all down in there, it was like the weather in the South here. They had freezing rain there sometimes. During the rainy season, you may fall asleep at night and wake up in the morning, and your shoes would be floating out there on water. It would form a little creek out there. And, you had some cold, freezing rain there. It got cold, real cold. They had three seasons there in Italy. In Northern Italy, you got snow and everything else, just like you do in the northern part of the United States, like Youngstown. You had weather similar to here; you had your three seasons. You had your rain, you had your snow, you had your ice. You had your spring, your fall, and your winter. The weather was comparable to here in the northern section. Down in the southern section, it was more or less like it is in the United States. You had cold weather, but it was freezing rain. You didn't

have much. If you had freezing rain, by noon, it was gone. In January or February of 1944, we had the freezing rain there, and the ice formulated on the trees so thick that it broke the branches. But, by 11:00 a.m., it was all thawed away. We had real nice weather in the southern part of Italy all yearlong. There, I guess it was just like weather throughout the South. It was real nice. All they had was that rainy season. Other than that, why, it was beautiful weather all of the time. It was beautiful. We went swimming there out in Naples, in the Mediterranean, in January.

R: Was it warm?

A: Yes, it was warm. After about 10:00 or 11:00, the sun comes out and it warms up. We used to fish down there. When we wanted to get away from that Army eating, the instant mashed potatoes and all that sort of thing, and we wanted something fresh, we would go down to the Mediterranean there and fish. We got a lot of eels. I learned to eat eel. I always thought eel was something that you cooked at night, and it would get raw again the next day; that's bologna. When you cooked that eel, he was done. It was a very tasty piece of fish. We caught catfish; there was a lot of catfish in the Mediterranean down near the docks. You got good fish there. [You got] a lot of pike, walleyes, widemouth, and perch. They had some of everything up in there, and we ate pretty good there. Why, we would catch enough fish to take it back to the company. The sergeant would pick it up for us. A couple of times, the boys were down there on their leave. Instead of going to town and chasing the girls, they would go down there and fish. They caught enough fish there to feed the whole company once. Yes, we had a good time.

Usually, not in all situations, where they had the facilities down near the docks--where the trucks had to go and pick up supplies--it was convenient for a motor pool. They set up a motor pool right near the Mediterranean Sea. In the evening when you had all of the trucks in, the guys would go out there and fish. We did our own cooking down there. Of course, the mess truck used to come down every day, two times a day, to bring down lunch, breakfast, and dinner there. A lot of times, we had our own dinner. We had fish or whatever.

R: What could you buy from the local people?

A: Yes, the local stores that we had around there. . . . There were a group of civilians who worked down there, who helped out. They had one fellow there that was their interpreter. We would send him out. He could get stuff cheaper than what we could

buy. They didn't have too much to start off with there. I guess, through the black markets, you were able to get fresh meat and stuff, but we would get him and he would find you anything you wanted. Of course, you had to pay a little more over there, and you didn't have anything else to spend your money on. Those who liked to drink, drank; those who liked to gamble, gambled. That was how they spent their money. This way they bought what they wanted.

We lived pretty good down there, better than staying at camp. We didn't have to worry about reveille and all that sort of thing.

R: You knew everybody there?

A: You didn't have to worry about any pass; you had a permanent pass. You could go anytime you felt like it. We were stationed right down in the heart of town. We had our motor pool in a central area downtown in Naples; we had it in Rome, and we had it in Pascin, Torribraco, and Salerno. We had a motor pool right down along the Mediterranean. We had a nice, big garage there to house all the trucks. It was really neat. We had living quarters up over it. We slept in beds while we were there. We didn't have it too rough at that point. The company did. The driver did. Just the mechanics were at the motor pool. The rest stayed out in those _____ tents, because you were never in one place long enough to try to get any permanent quarters for the company, the battalion. As the Army moved, we had to move and that meant we were ready to go. It was nice in the areas where they had the facilities. It was real nice.

R: Did they furnish you movies and things like that, while you were there?

A: That all depended on where you were located. If we were close enough to the forward areas, we didn't have any movies because after dark, you didn't light a light. You didn't even light a flashlight. If we got far enough ahead, yes, we had movies and we had everything else. We had a little place where we could go buy beer and stuff like that. Other than that, why. . . . They furnished us with beer and whiskey.

R: But, you paid for it?

A: Yes. It was about two dollars for a fifth, or something like that. I didn't drink, so I sold mine to someone who did drink. I think you got two cases of beer.

R: What did you do after you came back home? How did you come back home? How did you travel back and forth?

A: From here?

R: Yes. Go from how you went over and how you came back.

A: We went over in a troop ship. It was a converted ship called the U.S.S. Dixon. I think that was the name of the ship. I was a sergeant of second degree. I stayed on the top deck. I didn't have to sleep down with the other men. They slept on hammocks. There were about four, one on top of each other. That was the way we traveled going over. We ate real good on the ship. It took us about thirty days going over because they had to change course every so many minutes. It took just about thirty days to get overseas. We left from Newport News, Virginia. We boarded, and it took us almost thirty days to get over into North Africa.

Coming home after all the equipment was turned in and gotten rid of from our battalion, I had a military flight from Cassana. They had an air base out there. I got a military flight from there down to Naples and I had to wait in a stationed area in Naples until I could get a ship to the United States. That took about three weeks. It was one of those slow ships. It was a merchant marine vessel.

R: It wasn't a liberty boat?

A: No, it was a merchant marine. Wait a minute . . . that was a liberty ship. It was from India, because the Indians were running the boat. People would squat down to eat and everything. Yes, that was from India.

R: The guys had the turbans on?

A: Yes, [they had] turbans on. That was the type of ship that brought us home when I got here. Our battalion, the guys who I went over with, they were all gone already. Those who didn't have enough points to be discharged, they were sent east. The rest of us came straight to the United States to be discharged. We landed back in Newport News. I got a train there to Indiantown Gap. That was where I was separated, Indiantown Gap.

R: Which is right out of Harrisburg, right?

A: Yes, Pennsylvania.

R: Did you see many other different kinds of soldiers there, like Americans?

A: Yes. I saw English, Japanese, the guys with the turbans, and French. I saw quite a few from the other countries. They had French troops down there. I couldn't understand why we would have French troops down in Italy when they needed them on their own shores. Germany was inside of France; they were in France.

R: Sure, from the beginning of the war practically.

A: I never could understand why they didn't go over there and help them.

R: I was in England. There were French troops over there.

A: That was why the French were down there, because they were in France. The military sent some to England and sent some down to Italy, and they were sending them all over to try to keep intact, I guess. They had some of their forces with Russia and down in Italy. They had quite a time chasing troops down in Italy. They had most of them down in there. I don't know how many divisions they had there, but we caught hell trying to go through. They threw everything at us but the gun. It was quite an experience, really. I wouldn't want to go through it again by any means.

R: When you got back, did you get any jobs?

A: When I got home?

R: Yes.

A: When I got home, yes. I had no problems getting a job. I could have gone back into the steel mill, because I was working as an auto mechanic before I went into the service. The garage was still open. I thought that maybe if I went into the steel mill that I might get deferred, because I had twelve kids at the time. When I went back, I went back to the garage. I didn't go into the mill, because I really hated the steel mill with a passion. I figured the only thing you needed there was a strong back and a weak mind.

I think I had enough educational background to deserve better. I thought I deserved better. In fact, I thought that after spending three years and a few months in the service that that would give me leverage for giving me something better. So, I started working in the garage. I went back to the garage where I worked before I went into the steel mill.

Earning power just wasn't good enough. I felt that I could make more in the mill. I worked in the shipping department. It didn't take me long to move up to tally

clerk. I made half decent wages there. I stayed there until I got a chance to get out.

R: That was about in 1960 or somewhere along in there?

A: [It was] 1960.

R: And, you retired from Campbell?

A: Yes.

R: Do you want to call it quits?

A: Is there anything else?

R: Nothing I can think of. Thank you.

A: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW