

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH DOMENIC L. MELSO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Joseph Pante: This begins an interview with Mr. Domenic L. Melso on October 18, 2005, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Sandra Holyoak and Joseph Pante. First, I would like to thank you for coming in for the interview today. Mr. Melso, could you begin by telling us where you were born?

Domenic Melso: Newark, New Jersey.

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: What year was that?

DM: [laughter] '22, 1922.

JP: Was that where you grew up as a child?

DM: Well, half of the time in Philadelphia and the other half in Newark. There was divorce action among the family. So, we grew up with Grandma in Newark.

SH: You were born in Newark.

DM: Born in Newark.

SH: Then, as a small child, you went to Philly.

DM: Yes, and then, we came back after two, three years, back to Newark. Pop couldn't take care of us no more. It was three of us.

SH: Where do you fit into the birth order? Are you the oldest or the youngest?

DM: No, my sister's the oldest.

SH: Then, you?

DM: She is two years older than me.

SH: Then, you have a younger ...

DM: A younger brother, another guy; one died a long time ago.

JP: What was your schooling experience like?

DM: ... Finished out grammar school in Newark, New Jersey, graduated there, went [for] one year [of] high school, dropped out of there for one year, went to vocational school, Boys Vocational in Newark.

SH: What was the focus of your studies?

DM: My studies was, we had no choice; what was open, that's what you grabbed. I came in there as a cabinetmaker. At that time, it was a trade, you know. Grandpa said, "Go for cabinetmaking." "Okay." That's the way it went. It didn't pan out, though. [laughter]

JP: Did you play any sports or participate in any other activities when you were in school?

DM: No, no.

SH: Did you have after school jobs?

DM: Yes, ... I went to work for a grocery after school and ... I worked in there after school hours, until about seven, eight o'clock at night, and then, next day, school. I forget how much I was making. [laughter] ...

SH: Which part of Newark were you raised in?

DM: 14th Avenue, one of the Italian sections over there. I forget what ward that was. I forget now. Well, it was all Italians, and they had the *Mafioso*, too. [laughter]

SH: Did you grow up speaking Italian?

DM: Grandma taught us and that's how we learned and, when I was in high school, there were two languages we could take, French and Latin, at that time. So, I picked up the French. Latin, I couldn't understand.

JP: I see that you did not finish high school. Did you consider returning to school after the war?

DM: No, I never returned after.

JP: Did you receive any type of schooling while you were enlisted in the military?

DM: After the war, yes, under the GI Bill. That was air conditioning.

JP: Did you and your family feel any of the effects of the Great Depression?

DM: Not that I remember. We ate, went to work, brought the money home. Whatever we made, Grandma got it.

SH: Was your grandfather also working?

DM: No, Grandpa got hurt while he was working on a job. He worked for the city and he was home. Grandma and my aunt, who lived there also, they used to work for tailor shops, sewing.

SH: Piecework?

DM: Yes, and that's how we lived. ... I think we lived pretty good.

SH: Were you involved with any church activities in Newark?

DM: We had St. Rocco's Church around the corner from us, but we weren't too active in there, you know, every Sunday, like everybody else. We went to Catechism school there, too, and that was it.

SH: Did the family ever discuss their Italian background or roots?

DM: No, only my grandfather. He had a picture on the mantelpiece of his brother, who was in the military in Italy, and that's all I knew about that. We never got too involved with that, no.

JP: Can you tell us a little bit about your mother and father, where they were from, what they did for a living?

DM: Well, it was a divorce action when [I was in my] younger years. So, Pop couldn't take care of us in Philadelphia, so, we moved to Newark, like I said, and we lived with Grandma, and then, my mother came into the picture later on, about two, three years later. She remarried and we went to live with her, in Newark. She worked in a tailor shop, too. So, we went to live with her and that's how we survived that one. [laughter]

JP: Was your father in the service?

DM: Yes, he was in World War I. He was gassed in World War I and he was under treatment from the government, you know, at that time. I didn't know too much about it, but that's all I knew. ...

JP: Why did you decide to leave high school and join the National Guard?

DM: No, I went to trade school after high school and I learned the trade, but it didn't pan out too good. So, I knew a few people in the family, not my family, somebody else's family, that were in the National Guard and they had horses and that's how I got involved with the horse troops. [laughter] I joined the National Guard unit and, of course, we got paid once a month. So, that helped.

SH: What was your job in the National Guard? Did you ride the horses or take care of them?

DM: Oh, yes, we rode horses. That's all we had, ... no tanks, no jeeps, none of that stuff, strictly horse.

SH: Which Guard unit was it?

DM: 102nd Cavalry. One unit was in West Orange, one was in Newark and one was in Westfield and we had the horses and that's all we had, believe me. ... Well, we used to go [out] training two times a week, but I used to go every night, because I loved horses, and I turned out pretty good, I guess, used to ride them around bareback. [laughter] ...

JP: At what age did you join the National Guard?

DM: What age? Well, I was seventeen. You had to be eighteen, I'm thinking, you know, and I lied about the age. So, I went in in 1940, which was horse, and I stayed there until we went to camp, during the summer months. We went [for] two weeks training, with horse, [to] Canton, New York. Then, we came home.

SH: Did you trailer the horses up there?

DM: ... Railcars. We didn't have these big vans you see today for horses, not yet. ... The horses went up by railcar to Canton, New York, and that's where the camp was, at that time. So, we all got up there and we stayed there two weeks, and then, we came back and, [in] January 1941, we were federalized by the United States Government. They took over and we didn't know what was cooking yet, but we thought it was going away for a year. Well, we did go to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, in January 1941. We went [for] training down there, with horse, for about a half-a-year, and then, all of a sudden, they brought the trailers in. I never rode in a trailer before. I never drove before.

SH: Really?

DM: Oh, no, I never drove. I was ... strictly a horseman and we went on maneuvers, a whole month's maneuvers, down in South Carolina, North Carolina, part of Louisiana. Then, the maneuvers was over and we were supposed to come home [in] December 1941.

SH: During the maneuvers in Louisiana, which group were you with?

DM: I was with, they called us the Reds. See, we had armbands, Red Army, Blue Army. So, we were fighting against the Blue Army. We used to take them off, too. When [it was] time to eat, we took them off. We never went into their territory and, after maneuvers were over, we came back to camp and they were getting ready to get home. ... December, we were supposed to pack up our equipment, come back to Jersey and that was it, but ... Pearl Harbor broke out in '41. I didn't get back until 1945, and that's the way the ball went.

SH: What do you remember about when you first heard about Pearl Harbor? What was the general reaction?

DM: I was down in town, in fact. I was in Columbia, South Carolina. I was on overnight leave, you know, things like that, and it came over the radio we were on down there. I was in the restaurant and it came over that the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor and that was it. What could you say? and then, we heard on the radio, "All troops report back to camp," and we did. We went back. ...

SH: During your year of training prior to Pearl Harbor, what was the talk around the camp? Hitler had already gone into Poland, France and Russia. Were you thinking of the Germans as potential enemies?

DM: ... Well, we didn't even think about that. We didn't think about it, a war, but we knew something was cooking. The training that they gave us was unreal, ... rifle range, all types of weapons they were teaching us, German weapons, captured, you know, whatever they had, and we knew something was cooking, but we didn't think about a war. ...

SH: How were they using the cavalry in these maneuvers?

DM: ... Well, they used us as horse troops, let's say, fighting against the infantry, or whoever it was, on that side, on the blue side. We were the red side. In other words, like, the enemy forces, you went against [them], circled [them] and took over different positions.

SH: What was your specific job?

DM: Well, mine, I was a pack leader. ... On the other horse that I led, I had a .30-caliber ... water-cooled machine gun on him, from World War I, and we used '03 Springfield rifles, [laughter] from World War I, yet. That's what we had. ...

SH: How shocking was it for a young man from Newark to suddenly be in the South?

DM: They called us, "The Rebels." We got used to it after a while. They called us, "Yankee Cavalry."

SH: They were the Rebels, right?

DM: They were the Rebels, but they called us [the Yankee Cavalry]. Yes, we were the first cavalry troops in South Carolina. We were National Guardsmen. We had two hundred horses from West Orange, Newark and Westfield, so, we had six hundred horses and more, ... not counting the pack mules, ... and they used to come out to the camp, the people, to watch us, but ... they still called us Yankee Cavalry, after, ... don't forget, the Southern Rebel War down there. [laughter] ... That was something, but they treated us very well. It was amazing. They got used to us and they invited us for food on Sundays. They used to come up to the camp. So many guys [would] go to this house and that house and they treated us damn good. ... Then, all of a sudden, they had restrictions, "No more civilians in camp," and, ... [in] the summer of '41, they took away our horses. ... No, wait a minute now; I'm getting confused here. ... 1942, let's go into that, because after Pearl Harbor was '41.

SH: Did you get a leave, as planned?

DM: No, all leaves cancelled. Anybody that had a leave was to report back to camp.

JP: When did you find out you were going to leave Fort Jackson? Did you know where you were going after that?

DM: Well, we knew we were going to Europe. ... They did tell us we were going to England, certain units were going to England. We were cavalry, reconnaissance units they called us, after

they took away the horses. They broke us in, driving scout cars, jeeps. I never drove in my life. [You would] be surprised what was going on. ... We got used to the equipment and everything, and then, we heard we were packing up to head for England. So, the only thing we took was our duffle bags, rifles; the horses were shipped back to Jersey, because they belonged to the State of Jersey.

JP: What kind of rifle did you bring with you?

DM: '03 Springfield, at that time, the bolt-action, World War I, and then, when we got to England, they gave us all new equipment, tanks, the jeeps were the same. Tanks, I said, "I never saw these things before."

SH: You had not done any training with tanks in the United States.

DM: ... Not in the States, no. We got the training over there, in England. We got the tank training. ...

SH: When did you ship out to England?

DM: ... Yes, we went to Glasgow, '42. [In] '42, we ... went into England, yes, September of '42, I remember that now, and we were already getting training. ...

JP: What kind of training did you have in England?

SH: Is that when you were assigned to tanks?

DM: Well, the armored unit, armored recon, they called us. That was our job. In other words, "Go ahead, contact the enemy, no return fire, turn around and get back," but, at that time, the military book, we threw it away, because I'm not going to stand there and let somebody shoot at me. I'm going to shoot, fire back and that's what was happening. The book, we threw away, no such thing. [laughter] You won't survive. That's the way you would survive. You didn't go according to Army rules. That was out of the picture.

SH: When you were training in England, which town were you stationed near?

DM: ... Swindon, Swindon, England. We were in Swindon and the little town we were bivouacked [in] while we were stationed [there] was called; oh, I forget the name now. There was a little town we were in. Well, anyway, it was close to Swindon, very close.

SH: Were the English training alongside you or was it strictly American training?

DM: Well, the English were there, also. They gave us some training, because they put us in Shrivingham Barracks, they called it. That's where the English were, also, and that's where we got a lot of training. That was a commando barracks, they called it. I was no commando. I was recon and we got our training through them, a lot of it. They taught us the equipment, the modern American equipment, that it was in England already. I never saw so much stuff. If the

island didn't sink at that time, it was a miracle. Tanks I never saw before, half-tracks I never drove before, they were there. They were way ahead of us, I'll tell you that much. I guess they'd transferred it from the United States in ... freighters or whatever.

SH: Do you remember which ship you went over on?

DM: The *Dempo*, a troopship. Well, the *Dempo* broke down. They left us behind, but we had the cruisers circling around, you know, for U-sub, submarines. That was a dangerous place, the Atlantic, and, finally, ... we started to get moving and we got back into the convoy, but, actually, that ship dropped out. We didn't even know it. Nobody knew and, all of a sudden, we wound up hitting Liverpool and, from there, we went to Swindon, transported us in.

JP: What was the scuttlebutt among the troops about how the war was going at that point?

DM: [laughter] That was a question. The guys didn't talk much about the war. They were talking more about going back home. We didn't think seriously of a war.

SH: Really?

DM: No. I'll be honest, I didn't. Whatever it was, it was; we were there. ...

SH: Even when you were in England.

DM: Even when we were in England. You never heard the English talk about it. It was amazing. We used to go to these pubs, ... you know, the bar; they never even talked about it. Everything was "under the Q.T." If you were heard talking about different troop movements and things like that, you would be put in ... jail. There was no such thing, the way they talk today. Today, you come out with the radio and all that. At that time, there was no such thing. You wouldn't dare. Even when you went to town or [the] movies, you would never hear talk about the war. So, we didn't think about it, and then, all of a sudden, we knew we were going to get into it, because we were told by our CO, at that time. He says, "Fellows," he says, "we're going to go. We're going to hit North Africa." He didn't give the date. He said, "But it's going to be soon." In the meantime, we had all this training with the equipment that was there already. ... We used to go out as infantry to get training, you know, different things, and then, they took us out to the beach, [showed us] how to use these guns that were on these tanks and .50-calibers, which we already knew, and then, in November of '42, ... we were ordered on the LCTs. ... LCT was a tank landing craft. So, we loaded our stuff on, ... whatever we had, each guy, you know.

SH: Where did you load up?

DM: Where? I was in the tank. I was [in] the tank turret.

SH: Did you drive it?

DM: I didn't drive it; I was the leader. I got my three stripes [sergeant's rank] back again. I got in trouble.

JP: How did you lose your three stripes?

DM: Well, that happened in the United States. I swung at a captain. I grew up in an Italian neighborhood. You had to defend yourself. That's the way it went. We learned [that], but this guy told me to do something and I said, "I wasn't trained to do that," with the horse trailers at that time, and my sergeant came over, another sergeant came over, the first sergeant. He came over and talked to the Captain and the Captain pushed me, because I wouldn't go up into that trailer. It was too dangerous. Them horses would have kicked the hell out of you. Well, they put on confinement. I lost my three stripes because of a Major (McGarry?). He was my major. He knew my family. He was an Irishman. He defended me, so, they let it go. I wasn't court-martialed, but I lost the stripes and that's what happened there.

SH: Did your National Guard unit stay together throughout your training and deployment?

DM: Yes, we stayed together in England. Now, before we went into North Africa, '42, in the year '42, ... they split the regiment. See, we were called regiments and squadrons. So, the regiment was split. The 102nd stayed in England. ... We were renamed the 117th Cav Reconnaissance Squadron. I was in the 117th; the 102nd stayed. We went into North Africa and the 102nd, they went into Normandy in the year '44. See, we went into North Africa at that time. So, on D +2 or 3, we landed in Casablanca. The French were shooting at us, not the Germans. The Germans were already gone, because the infantry, ... the 34th and 36th Infantry Divisions were in ahead of us. They pushed the Germans north. We took the coastline, here, because we were motorized. We couldn't go up this way; we went this way. So, we ... headed for Algeria. We rode the coastline all the way into Algeria. ...

SH: Why were the French shooting at you?

DM: Well, they were under the Vichy rule at that time.

SH: Okay, not the Free French.

DM: ... They didn't know, these people. Of course, [if] your generals say, "Shoot," you're going to shoot. So, we had the American flags on and with these new helmets they gave us, they thought we were German troops, too, the new round helmet. They were used to seeing the English helmet, which was a pie helmet, we called it. Well, we got into Algeria. The only people that were shooting [were firing] stray shots and [we had] no casualties. We rode all along the coastline, but the 34th, 36th Infantry were going inland, against General Rommel, into the desert, and the English were there, also. ... I remember that, but that was our job, to get to Algeria, ... patrol [the] Algerian streets, because that was going to be the Supreme Headquarters, Eisenhower. ... He was going to be [there] with his staff and that was our job. We were the only cavalry unit there. That's the job they gave us, and then, ... we stayed there for ... maybe about six months, I would say, until the conflict was over in Tunis. See, we had different companies that would go up ... with the 34th, 36th Divisions against Rommel, recons. They

called up recon units. They were going up into the north country, up into Tunis, and then, they pushed Rommel out of Tunis, but we took a lot of Italian troops. They were giving up like crazy, the Italians. They were there, too. They used to come out [to surrender]. When we got the prisoners in, they were shipped to us guys. Well, we had to eliminate them somewhere, I don't remember now where they [went]. They sent them back to England, I remember that. ... If you knew Italian, you understood what they were talking about. "I've got a brother in Brooklyn, [pronounced Brook-lean] New York," and stuff like that, you know. I used to look at them, but I understood them. I used to go, "This way. Keep moving," and I had a Tommy gun. I wouldn't fool with them, because they were two-faced. I called them two-faced, I found out later, and that's the way it went.

JP: How did you feel about fighting people who shared your heritage?

DM: You mean the Italians? I had no feelings about it, never did. I grew up in an Italian neighborhood. I knew what the Italians were, but, when I got there, ... I had no feelings for the Italians, no. I was American and that was it.

JP: How did you and the other men in your unit feel when you learned that you were defeating Rommel?

DM: Well, we got the news back later that Rommel was finished in the desert and he was getting ready for [the] Italy campaign, in Italy. ... After the African campaign, we were getting ready to go into Italy, but we didn't know where, yet. So, we came in ... [to] Naples? Yes, I know, I get lost, too.

JP: Where did you go after you left Africa?

DM: We went to Italy. We shipped to Italy and ... they were LCTs there, also, and we put our equipment onboard and we went into Sicily. From Sicily, we were ordered to go to Cassino, but I, as a tank commander, [said], "Cassino?" That was a fortress. You couldn't get near it. So, we rode along the coastline, again, and we saw the infantry try to mount Cassino, go up there, which you couldn't get near it. These Germans, that was the abbey up there; they had all underground [bunkers]. The Germans were in there and we were ordered back to Naples. So, we went into Naples and, as we're in Naples, we see these Flying Fortresses coming over, squadrons. "Oh, my gosh," I said, "all hell is going to break loose somewhere." Eisenhower gave the command to bomb Monte Cassino, too many casualties, Americans. The ones that took the mountain were the Polish troops. Yes, Polish troops, they went up there, bayonet [charge], from what I heard, and we were on our way to Rome.

JP: What was Rome like when you arrived?

DM: Well, as we came in, Rome was declared an open city, no bombing, no shooting, none of that stuff. So, we got into Rome. We went through with our vehicles, you know, but we didn't [stop]. We saw the Vatican that was there; you couldn't go near that Vatican.

SH: Really?

DM: No, couldn't even touch a priest, and we went into Rome and the Germans, arm-in-arm, were walking with the women. [Since Rome was] declared an open city, you couldn't shoot, you couldn't do nothing. So, we called for six-by-six trucks to the rear echelon. We reported back, you know, and they sent six-by-six trucks up there, to start picking up these Germans and putting them at least in the trucks, putting them in prisoner of war camps in the rear, officers, enlisted men. You couldn't shoot. That was the order. So, we detoured around Rome.

SH: Had they surrendered to you?

JP: Were you able to arrest them?

DM: Well, they had guns and things on them, but nobody fired, no. Rome was an open city, they meant it, and we were ordered out.

JP: Did you arrest any Germans while you were there?

DM: Arrest them? Well, we got out of the tanks, you know, pulling them in and putting them in one section. The tanks were there. The guy was on the gun, but he never fired. He was ordered not to fire and we got out of the tanks, got these guys, prisoners, German, put them in one section. Then, the trucks would come and pick them up.

JP: Did they resist at all?

DM: No resistance.

SH: Were there Italian partisans there?

DM: Oh, they were in the hills.

SH: Did you see any retribution against people who had collaborated with the Germans?

DM: Well, there, the Italians went against the Italians, the partisans and the people that stuck with the Germans, Italian people. They went after them, the partisans did, went after them. They were like the Underground and they were there.

JP: What other things did you do when you were in Rome?

DM: ... Well, we were ordered out of Rome. We headed for Pisa. ... Before we even got there, we were ordered, "Return," back to Naples. So, us guys, the war, we didn't know what was going on, yet, until we got halfway back. Then, all of a sudden, we're seeing trucks coming down the road with headlights on. We stopped. Everybody loaded the guns, ready to shoot at these lights. We found out it was American troops and it was declared, "You can use your headlights from that point on, all the way into Naples," but we never used headlights going [out, just] coming, which was a surprise to us guys, and we got to Naples. We stayed there in a little town outside of Naples, recuperate, get our equipment back in order again, like usual training,

camp training. Nobody bothered us. ... We were ordered, "Well, fellows, we're going to take another trip." CO called us in, he said, "Fellows," he said, "we're taking another trip," the Captain.

JP: Before you left Italy, did you have any run-ins with snipers?

DM: Occasional sniper, but no damage.

SH: You were not in any battles in Italy.

DM: Very few. The only thing is, ... I was on a tank; son-of-a-gun, he fooled me that time, that guy, and it was raining that day and the guy looks up out of the tank, he says, "Hey, Mels, I didn't know it was raining red," and I'm looking at him. I said, "What the hell are you talking about?" The sniper missed me; he took part of my ear. I didn't even feel it, I'll be honest. Well, I did like this, [put my hand to my ear], "Holy Christ." I went to the medics for a band aid. [laughter] That's when I got hit the first time. All that time over there, ... there was rifle fire, you know, different types of fire out there, but not close. We watched ourselves, because we were seasoned troops. We knew how to handle it, but, now, we're getting ready for the South of France.

JP: Is that where you went after Italy?

DM: After Italy, yes, we went back to Naples, recuperated, and got all our equipment together and got some new equipment, which we needed, extra men from replacement depots, because of the guys that we'd lost or who got sick, didn't come back to the unit, you know, refill the unit. ... They programmed us for France, the South of France, D +1.

JP: What was your reaction when you reached France?

DM: I said, "Oh, God, I can speak the language." [laughter] That's true. It happened. I understood French. I was sort of an interpreter for the Major, but I was still with my company. I was with B Company. I used to go back and forth to headquarters a lot. The Major, he didn't speak [French]. He knew me and he says, "You want to be an interpreter?" I says, "Yes, I'll handle it for a while." I'd stay for a while, then, I went back to my unit. I couldn't take that garbage and I went back in. We landed at Ste. Maxime, which was outside of Marseilles; yes, here it is. I wasn't sure of the name. If I didn't find that map, [laughter] I wouldn't remember nothing. Well, that's where it all started. We went in through Ste. Maxime, D-Day, August of '44. ...

JP: I see that you captured a German division when you were in France.

DM: Oh, yes, we're getting up in there.

JP: What happened?

DM: Well, we went through the Rhone Valley. We contacted the first unit; we were the first unit to contact the Nineteenth German Army on our way up the valley, the Rhone Valley, which was in France, 1944, August, the dates. This here will come out of the book. Well, we made our first contact there and Troop A, ... which was 140 men in that unit at that time, that company, they captured, or [the] Germans gave up, fifteen hundred prisoners. ...

JP: Was there a large struggle with the Germans there?

DM: Well, ... the Germans, a lot of Germans, for some reason, ... in that section, they weren't heavy fighters, yet. They were rear echelon troops, hold us off until the main [force] got going, and most of them prisoners were Russian, German, Polish, [in] German uniforms. They were conscripted by the German Army. That's how we got them.

JP: Did you see a difference between these German soldiers and SS?

DM: And the real [thing]? Oh, big difference, big difference; SS Germans didn't fool around.

SH: When did you first encounter the SS?

DM: In France. That's where we first got in touch with them. They had black uniforms, the skull with crossbones on there, here. They had tanks, also. They had the Tiger tank and they were good with them. That's the first time we saw them. I never saw them anyplace else. We heard about them, but we didn't know. We never saw them.

SH: Was the tank that you were trained on in England the same tank that you used in Africa?

DM: That we used, yes, them little babies up there.

SH: Was it the Grant or the Sherman?

DM: No, it was a light recon tank they called it. The number and name, I don't remember, but it's that thing right there.

SH: Okay. Just for the record, there is a model of a tank in Dr. John Chambers' office.

DM: There is a model. I don't recall it, no. It was small. We had, I was up on the top, a radioman ...

SH: What was your duty on the tank?

DM: What was I doing? Well, ... my platoon, I had two tanks, two jeeps, I was in charge. Whatever I said went, but what we did, we did our job, reconnoiter. "[If there is an] enemy out there, you're going to fire. I'm not playing games." I told the guys, "[If] they're going to fire at me, I'm going to fire back," and that's what happened.

SH: Were you on the tank or in a jeep?

DM: No, I was on the tank. I was in the tank turret and, when fire came, we knew we were close to something. I'd get down, "I ain't going to stand there." I handled the .50-caliber on the turret, in case of big trouble, and then, we got in through the Rhone Valley, France. We engaged the 11th *Panzer* Division. See, the first ... unit to [make] contact [with us] was the Nineteenth German Army in August of '44. Then, we continued up into the Rhone Valley, heading for ... the Vosges Mountains, in fact.

JP: What was your run-in with the 11th *Panzer* Division like? That must have been quite an experience.

DM: Well, it was quite an experience. I was with B Troop. We entered the town of Montrevel. It was open, no Germans. We got in there and, let's say, maybe three to five miles away, there was a German *panzer* division, let's say on vacation. They'd just come back from the Russian Front. They were in that area. We never knew it or nobody knew it. Well, to make the story short, it did get messy. B Troop, I had to go back, with the Lieutenant, back to headquarters, which was a few miles back, you know, and, while I'm back at headquarters, it comes over the radio, "A German *panzer* division is coming at us." So, they called for reinforcements, we did, Troop A, at Montrevel. A Troop got in there, but they couldn't get out. The Germans had the town surrounded, *panzers*. They had Tiger tanks.

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE-----

JP: This is side two of tape one.

SH: Please, continue.

DM: All right, ... after the Nineteenth German Army, we continued on through the Rhone Valley, going towards Montrevel and the Vosges Mountains, and B Troop got into this town; ... I was attached to B. That was my company. The Lieutenant and I went back to main headquarters and, while there, we got the radio message [that] the town was surrounded by a German *panzer* division. Nobody could figure it out. Nobody knew ... they were there. So, they called for reinforcements, which was A Company, A Troop. They got in there to help what they could, but they had no more help than that, a company-and-a-half of men against a *panzer* division. You're out of your mind and the captain that was in charge of B Company, the senior captain; A Troop was in there and B Company, we already had casualties in there, because of this firing, rifle, whatever, ... not cannon fire, yet, or else they would have blown that place off the map. ... He was given the order, "If you think ... you want to surrender, save your men, go right ahead. There's no other help coming in." So, the captain that was senior captain that was in charge, he walked out with a white flag. He was crying, from what I've heard about it, later on. He was a good captain. He surrendered to the German general in charge of the *panzer* division, who'd just got back from Russia, and the German general said to the captain, "This is the best fight I've had in quite a long time." The German ... general gave the order, "Take care of the American wounded, take the prisoners of war to the rear, take care of the wounded." As we were in Montrevel, we had ... some crazy people in there, too, you know. We had one Lieutenant [Daniel W.] Lee. There, he did things. He received the Medal of Honor from

Truman, President Truman. He went to the hospital, wherever it was, and he received the medal and there was quite a few Purple Hearts, you know, Bronze Stars and things. Medals were given out after the war. So, we continued out of there, A and B Troop, and we got more reinforcements in and we continued on.

JP: Did you feel lucky that you were not there at this time?

DM: I was damn lucky, or else I wouldn't be here.

SH: What was it like, sitting there, knowing that ...

DM: ... Your company was being [destroyed]? You didn't feel too good. You thought about all the guys, you know, and you were praying that the German *panzer* division did not open up on them with these Tiger tanks. They would have blown you right off the map.

JP: How did you guys feel about the German .88s?

DM: A German .88, they can land them [shells] in your back pocket. That's how good they were. They were very good. Compared to our equipment, [there was] a big difference. They knew what they were doing.

JP: Where were the American prisoners sent? Do you know?

DM: No, we don't know. ... The last we heard, they were being sent to Germany.

JP: Did you have any contact with any of those guys after the war?

DM: After then, no; after the war, yes, but not during. We never knew what happened to them. We knew it was Germany and that's all we knew.

SH: Do you know the name of the captain who surrendered?

DM: You know, I was going to look in the book last night; son-of-a-gun, I didn't even look. He was a well-known captain, well-known. I can't place his name. ... He passed on not too long ago, too. ...

JP: Since your squadron had surrendered, which troop were you with afterward?

DM: Well, they made up a new troop, B Troop, and [it was] part of A with replacements, before we moved on. I was with headquarters, then, I was told, "Report back to B Troop," which I already knew what was happening.

SH: What was it like to deal with replacements? You were such a close unit before.

DM: You get attached to the guys. I was always attached to the guys I was with, I'll be honest. I never said a foul word [about them]. What I couldn't do, I wouldn't let them do. If I said, ...

“That’s crazy,” ... I meant it, I wouldn’t do it, even if it meant a court-martial. I was with my guys. That’s the way I was.

JP: There was a lot of camaraderie.

DM: What?

JP: They were almost like brothers.

DM: Well, sort of a brother deal, like, you know, brother, cousin, nephew. We all stuck together. That’s the only way you could get through it. ...

SH: How welcome were the replacements?

DM: Well, we had to break them in. [laughter] That was some fun. These guys ... knew a lot of stuff, replacements were from units that were wiped out, and replacements from there, they put them [here] to refill our unit. ...

SH: They were not just green troops.

DM: They were green all right, but they knew a lot of things. We even got West Point officers. We had to teach them how to shoot a rifle. Would you believe it? I didn’t believe it myself. Well, at that time, we got the Garand [M-1] rifle, but us tank boys had Thompson submachine guns. A rifle was too big to get in the tank. So, we carried a pistol and a Thompson submachine gun. These guys, we had to teach them, West Pointers. You’d be surprised what I called them.

JP: What was it like to meet up with the Third Army at Darney, France? Was that a morale booster?

DM: It wasn’t a morale booster. The Third Army was with [the] D-Day [Normandy] invasion and the 102nd Cavalry was at D-Day, so, what happened was, they were attached to the Third Army and they came over into our section, where we were, and there were a couple officers, two jeeps, a couple officers, and about five, six guys. Two of them, I knew; I knew the officer. I was there. His name was Major (Burke?). I said, “Holy Christ, what the hell are you doing here?” and he’s looking at me. We both started laughing. He was looking for Captain (Barnaby?), which was in B Troop, and I was in B Troop. I says, “Down that way,” and that’s where they headed. I knew ... Ed (Traer?) and another guy in there. We were old National Guardsmen. We’re like brothers. ...

JP: What was the engagement in the Vosges Mountains like?

DM: In the Vosges, let’s go back here again; ... after the Third Army contact, we went into the Vosges Mountains in September ‘44. We headed for Strasbourg. From Strasbourg, we went into Strasbourg, no Germans in sight, but artillery was coming in, ... German artillery, which didn’t do much damage. They were hitting the open fields outside Strasbourg. We were in Strasbourg already and the people, they were all French, they greeted us, you know, and we kept moving

and we got out of Strasbourg and we headed up into the ... Rhine River. That's where we got. Oh, that's a mess. We were into Strasbourg, alongside the Rhine River, it tells you right here. That's what I'm going by and we were told, "Go to the eastern section of Strasbourg, a place called Bitche." That was really the name of this place. It was a National Guard training center for the French, but the Germans occupied that. So, we ... made this one line, we got up into Bitche and we planted mines out ahead of us, personnel mines, but we knew something was cooking. So, [the] CO says, "Come back, back and forth." Headquarters was back five miles. To our left, we had Wingin, ... Alsace Territory, and the 100th Division was in there and, in-between the 100th Division and us guys, we had the Second Rangers in there, holding this line, because something's cooking, and, to our right, ... well, we had A, B and our own tanks in there, regular tank, strictly tank, that was C Company, strictly tank. ... Well, we got hit. ... General [Karl Rudolf Gerd] von Rundstedt of the German Army made the last push at that front, after Belgium [the Battle of the Bulge]. ... Von Rundstedt was a German general, *Wehrmacht*, regular army. He wasn't SS or none of that stuff. He was strictly regular army. He was supposed to make the push. That was the last push of the war, on January 1st, and we were on that line

SH: This is January 1, 1945.

DM: That's when they hit us. All hell broke loose. There was only one road in and one road out and we were on that line. We got orders to pull out. They were going to swamp us. We left a few vehicles up there, which you couldn't get out. We carried ... whatever equipment they could, but we left about two or three tanks in there. You couldn't get through.

SH: Did you dismantle them somehow?

DM: Yes. We put devices on the cannons ... and the half-track, the track that was there, explosives; after a certain time, "Boom." They couldn't use none of it, but they used the gasoline. They siphoned the gasoline. We found out later on, because we went back again. ... After that, we wound up at Wingin. ... Our colonel, (Hodge?), at that time, he was scheduled to go back to the United States on leave and Major [Harold J.] Samsel was supposed to take over, after Hodge left. He stopped off in Wingin, which was to our left. We got the hell out of there. There was no way [to hold it]. You couldn't stay there. They made a big push and they were all sixteen and seventeen-year-old soldiers, kids.

JP: Do you think the fact that they were so young made a difference, maybe they did not care?

DM: Well, you thought they didn't care, but they really did. They weren't in a fighting mood too much, but they had the orders, "Push," and that's what happened, after Belgium, Bastogne. ... That was the last push, right there, and Colonel Hodge, he stopped off at headquarters ... in Wingin, which was over to our left, a matter of five miles, talked to the Colonel, whoever was in charge there, from what I've gathered, told them, "Get the hell out of there. The Heines are on our tail." [laughter] We had no replacements. We had to get the hell out of there and we took that route out. ... Wingin, the 100th Division, they saw some action there. I don't know what the casualties were, but they didn't pull out. They stayed there, I heard.

JP: There were a lot of casualties for you guys.

DM: For us guys, yes.

JP: You were wounded again here.

DM: Yes, I got hit getting out of Bitche, on the leg, which was shrapnel, you know, because you couldn't help it. ... I took the road. You see, the Germans, when they sent in mortar fire, ... mostly, they would go one, two, three [bracketing fire?]. That's the way they did it, for the road, and I was on that road. I got hit on the sides of the legs. I got out of it though, no problem.

JP: You found a pattern in where the mortar fire was coming in.

DM: Their mortar fire, ... they had a pattern and we knew their pattern, because of the artillery observer who was attached to our unit. He already told us about that. That's how we did it, but we got the hell out. We left something there, which was to be expected.

JP: Did you use this pattern to your advantage?

DM: We had to; there was no other way out of it. We had to go according to that, and then, they shifted their fire somewhere else. In the meantime, we were getting out of that road, couldn't help it. ... After Bitche, ... right there, 1945, January 1st, they hit us. I don't know what happened to C Company or the other companies. I was with B Company and part of A Company. I got the hell out of there, too. Headquarters was down in Mouterhouse, which was five miles down the road, and they were off. When I got down there, with my boys, headquarters was already moving out. They were heading toward Wingin, getting the hell out of there, and, from there, ... I wound up in Strasbourg. We were ordered back to Strasbourg. Recuperate, then, we made the last push. That was it.

JP: You next ended up in Mannheim.

DM: ... Well, from Strasbourg, we crossed the Rhine into Mannheim.

SH: Was that a crossing under fire?

DM: ... The war was still on. The Germans were in Germany. See, Bitche was finished. ...

SH: Was that river crossing contested?

DM: That was the crossing at Mannheim.

SH: Were you under fire?

DM: Well, we were under fire there, yes. Being as we had the light, fast tanks, we were crazy. I was the second tank to cross it and we made an opening for the rear to come through. We had one tank here, one tank here, ... with the guns, in case something happened. Well, there wasn't

much that happened. There was firing, but, ... for some reason, they weren't aiming at us. They were aiming at the bridge, to blow up the bridge. They never made it. The Air Force came in, knocked them out, whatever firing was there. ... That's all I can tell you about that deal. We crossed into Mannheim, "March 29th, across the Rhine River at Manheim, March of '45." There it is; that's what I'm going by, ... and then, we headed for Austria, no casualties. We were told, "The war is over," after that deal.

JP: After all the action you saw at Mannheim and Bitche, did you think that things might still get worse?

DM: Well, we knew the Germans were up to something, but we had found out [that] that was their last big push and whatever they had in Germany wasn't much, much firepower. The Germans were ready to surrender. So, we ... wound up in Austria. Yes, we continued on into Austria, and then, we got ordered to return to Frankfurt, Germany, I.G. Farben Building. ... President Eisenhower was there. He was waiting for us. He knew who we were, from Algeria, and he came over and shook hands with Colonel Samsel, who was in charge at that time. Colonel Hodge went home after Bitche. He was home. Samsel was in charge. He's the guy that made this [*The Operational History of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz.), World War II* (Westfield, New Jersey: 117th Cavalry Association, 1982)] and wrote a book, [*The Battle of Montrevel, France, September 3, 1944: 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mechanized)* (Princeton, New Jersey: Triangle Reproduction, 1986, 2nd edition)], Samsel.

JP: You also went through Stuttgart and Fussen. Did anything happen there?

DM: Stuttgart? No, there's not much doings there. The German was ... sort of dying out. We didn't hit many young troopers, neither. ... We [hit] a lot of the old guard, old-timers with rifles ... walking around town. ... Hitler got these old ... people trying to defend Germany, World War I veterans, ridiculous. They fired, but they never hit.

JP: You guys basically cleared the town.

DM: We had to clean the towns out and that was it. That was our job. We were finished. ...

SH: How did the German civilian population react?

DM: Well, we got back to Frankfurt. We were told, "We've got to do the same routine we did in North Africa," with B Company and all them other boys, A Company and them, patrols, and each little town they went into, these patrols, American, the people, they weren't mad at you. They were mad at Hitler, because of what he did. They didn't fight us or anything. They were good to us, after the war was over.

SH: There was a non-fraternization order.

DM: How did you know about that? [laughter] Well, we were ordered, non-fraternization, you know, you couldn't go [out] with the girls and things like that. Well, we did it at night, when nobody's looking, because you're here today and gone tomorrow. That was the name of the

game. When we got into Germany, we got orders, through main headquarters, Supreme Headquarters, no fraternization and things like that, and you couldn't do it in the daytime, but, at night, we wandered. That's the way it went. The German people, they were like any other country. They were starving. They weren't full bellies; they were starving. We gave them, you know, candy, things for the kids. We all did that, all of us. As for the elderly, well, we were stationed in this one town and the *Burgomaster*, who was the mayor; for the elderly people, we used to give food for them, also. See, we had K rations left over and C rations and we gave it to them. In the meantime, we had our cooks going, doing our thing. That's the way it was. There were no hard feelings or anything. It was amazing. We opened up a building over there ... which turned out to be a club for us guys, turned out to be a club, dance hall, and [there were] Germans civilians coming in. They enjoyed it. They had a ball and we had no problem with them. ... Now, we're going back to France. That's something I didn't mention. Along our route in France, we saw what the Germans did to the *Maquis*, who was the French Underground. They put them up against a tree, and then, used them for bayonet practice. That was no lie. We cried. Well, you couldn't do nothing there and the FFE [French Forces of the Interior, i.e., Charles de Gaulle's Free French Army], they helped us all the way, all the way.

JP: Was it the SS that did that to the *Maquis*?

DM: Well, they claim it was, but who the hell knows? You don't know who it was. The SS, God knows where they went. We had one conflict with them and that was it. We didn't see them no more. They were gone and the FFE, ... Free French of the Interior, they called themselves, FFIs, we called them FFEs, they were Underground, also, and the *Maquis*. The *Maquis*, for guerilla fighters, they were good. They were good. They stuck with us when we were in France. They [were] always out there with us. They came with us, jumped on whatever vehicles we had. What are you going to do, say no? They knew the Heines. They can smell them. That's how good they were and that's the part I forgot, about what they did to the *Maquis*. That was bad, bad. It's a grudge fight after that.

JP: The French, as you say, were a big help. Did the Italians help you at all?

DM: The Italians? They didn't help us in the southern part of Italy, where we were, but they claim, up in the mountains, they were very active, the Italian ... Underground. They were mostly active up in the north country, not down where we were. They wouldn't associate with us. Nobody would, but, yet, ... we weren't bad with the people there, no. We gave the food for the people; they were starving, also, in Italy. We had pitched camp. Our cooks came up with the stoves, trucks. Anything we threw in the garbage, the kids would be over there with containers, catching the food, anything you threw out. They were starving, too. That's the way it went. They had no food. They were giving their mothers up for a price and they were doing it, too, in Naples.

SH: While you were in Germany, before the war was officially over, did you see any of the displaced persons or the labor camps?

DM: Yes, I saw one, up ... near the Polish border, right outside Austria. I forget the name of the place. We kept going; we're getting close to Austria. Nobody knew anything. We hit this one

place, ... big fence all around it, towers. We thought it was a prisoner of war camp. That was what Mr. Hitler was doing to the people, concentration camp. We never knew it. I don't even remember the name; that's how we went in there. I called back. CO says, "Fenced in?" I said, "Yes, nobody around." He says, "Knock it down and go in there." We knocked the fence down. Then, the people came out. They were afraid to come out. We cried, gave them what we had, everything, all our food. You should see them people. It was unbelievable. So, that's the way it went.

JP: What happened to those people after you left? Did they just leave the camp?

DM: Well, the Red Cross came in, Salvation Army, you know, they went in there, separate the people who were German, Polish and tried to get them straightened out, where they came from, ... which was a job by itself. You didn't know where they came from, no, pitiful. ...

JP: How long were you in Frankfurt?

DM: I stayed in Frankfurt with a half a company of men from A Troop, B Troop. We had to get all our equipment set up and return it back to the government, you know. We had to sign it back over, get our guns, put them in Cosmoline, ship them out. The war was over for us guys. I stayed there until December and I was with the, they called it the Army of Occupation. ... We never got medals for any of that stuff; all they did was give us ribbons. That's all we got. Medals, we weren't looking for medals. ...

SH: What was your job as part of the Army of Occupation? You were getting your equipment ready to be sent back.

DM: Yes, we were getting the equipment ready to send back, or they were going to sell it to another country, probably, and we had patrols going out, yet, until somebody else took over, but my company and A Company, we stayed to get the equipment straightened out. You see, we had other companies ...

SH: Bringing it in, and you were getting it ready.

DM: Within the area. Of course, that was still the job, yet. It wasn't cancelled out, ... part of A and part of B. Most of the squadron, they were sent back home.

SH: Do you remember hearing the news that Roosevelt had died?

DM: Yes, we knew about it. We found out about it.

SH: Was there any kind of reaction among the troops?

DM: No. We had no feeling, I'll be honest. After what we saw, we were there for so long, how much feeling can you have for anybody? He was the President of the United States; we knew that. He was a good man, but you've got to die some time.

SH: Did you have confidence in Truman?

DM: We liked him. He dropped the atom bomb. We loved him.

SH: How did you react when you found out that the war in Europe was over? How were you told? Where were you?

DM: ... I was right outside Frankfurt. We were still doing our job, when the war was over. No, wait a minute now, I'm going ahead of schedule here. When the war was over, we found out about it, well, we didn't fire any guns or anything. We had flare guns. We're shooting them up in the air, flare guns, and then, we got the MPs from the airport, who were stationed near the airport, [laughter] "Cut it out. You're disturbing the planes up there," and that was over. We went out and got drunk, just like anybody else, had a ball. The next day, you couldn't figure the war was over. You said to yourself, "Now, I'm going home?"

JP: It was that big of a shock to you that the war was actually over. You were so used to it.

DM: We felt [we had] nothing to do. Don't forget, we traveled. We were always on the move. We'd never stayed in one place [for too] long, got used to it. ... I wound up, in December, while I was still in Germany ...

SH: Before we move on to December, what about when you found out that the war was over in Japan? Was there any danger, or maybe rumor is a better word, not danger ...

DM: Well, there were rumors.

SH: ... That you were going to be sent to the Pacific?

DM: Yes, there were rumors, but, all of a sudden, the outfit, some went home. "[Are] we going to get replacements again?" We didn't know. Well, I was ordered, with part of A, "Cosmoline the guns, ship them back to main headquarters." That was their job.

JP: How did you feel about the rumors that you might have to go to Japan?

DM: We didn't like it too much, but, when we heard about the atom bomb, I said, "The war is over." I did come out with it. I said, "The war is over." That was it. So, we didn't go anywhere. I stayed there until December, did my job, what I had to do. I came back to the United States. December 25th, I was discharged. [laughter]

SH: Really, on Christmas Day?

DM: December 25th.

SH: Where did you leave Europe from?

DM: Belgium. ... We went to Antwerp, Belgium. That's where we got on the boats, carrying duffle bags. ...

SH: Do you remember the name of the ship?

DM: No, I don't remember. I remember, the Red Cross was there. They were giving out cigarettes and, well, us guys, we took them. We didn't care. We took them, but there's one incident about the Red Cross. We were on the line [in] a certain place. I don't remember where the hell this was, now. ... We were holding this line. All of a sudden, this jeep's coming up. We see these heads, Red Cross uniform. Coffee and doughnuts, they're bringing up. Me, I'm the head up there, I says, "How did you people get through that patrol down there?" "Oh, nobody was there and we came up through the other road." I didn't know anything about another road. They came through, though. They probably gave the guys coffee and doughnuts, ... three Red Cross people. ...

JP: Were they selling coffee and doughnuts?

DM: They were selling the coffee and doughnuts. I looked at one; I didn't pay her. I took the coffee, doughnuts, my guys came, they took them, too. I said, "We're not paying you, because you're not supposed to be here in the first place. This is off limits. If a bomb came in or something came in, you'd be dead." They turned around and got the hell out of there. They didn't stay. That's what happened, Red Cross.

SH: In your time overseas, were there any USO shows or any liberties?

DM: ... Liberties? Well, I'll tell you, there were Red Cross shows. ... I never went to any, because I wasn't into it, for some reason. I never was. I can't remember that I went to any. One I went to, that was in North Africa, ... Greta Garbo, I think it was, yes, Greta Garbo. She was there.

JP: Do you think the shows helped as a morale booster?

DM: The guys had a morale booster outside the camp, [laughter] okay.

JP: What were your feelings towards officers while you were at war? Do you feel as though they acted like they were better than you?

DM: No, no, they never showed [that] they were better than us guys, because you never would think or dream about it. You protected him like he protected you. That was the name of the game there. We never "Sir"-ed the officers, or, "Major," "Lieutenant," things like that. Okay, the Major and the Colonel, yes, but the lieutenants, no, no. We were buddy-buddy. I never "Sir"-ed them.

SH: You talked about bringing in replacements. Before, you were all New Jersey men.

DM: Oh, they came from all over, New York, the South, different places, all over, we got them. We had a lot of Rebels in there, too, you know, from Alabama or Georgia. There was quite a few of them. ... We had three Jew boys within my company. One guy, I forget his name, he took a prisoner in; he was a Jewish boy. He ... brought in a prisoner and he looked at this man and he says [to] this German prisoner, "I'm Jewish. What are you going to do to me?" See, we knew about what was happening, but he came right out with it [to] this German prisoner, "Jewish, what are you going to do about it?" and he walked away. I forget his name, what his name was. It wasn't (Glastrom?), no. I forget him. One of these days, I'll think [of it]. ...

JP: What kind of decorations did you receive for your service?

DM: Like I said, they gave us ribbons. We never got medals until after the war and a lot of medals, we did not receive [them] the way they were supposed to do it, because it was a fast deal, "Get the hell out and that's the end of it." ... When we got back to the States, here, they looked at your discharge, see what medals you got, [but] instead of getting the medals, you got ribbons, but there were a few medals we got overseas. After the war was over, everybody, each company, was called out, the officer that was in charge, the captain, gave out the Purple Hearts, Bronze Stars. Whatever medals you got, you got. As for Battle Stars, I had ... five, plus an Arrowhead. The Arrowhead was for spearheading the 34th, 36th Divisions and we got that in Italy, too, with the 45th Division. So, that's what we got out of that deal, North African campaign. Purple Heart, I got. I got the Jersey Medal also, after fifty years, from the state. It's in the drawer, like the rest, and I had the Good Conduct Medal, for being a good boy. ... Yes, that's good enough. All right, you're waiting, aren't you? You had to tell her, didn't you? I got a Silver Star.

SH: Can you tell me about it?

DM: Mannheim, second tank over the bridge, that's how I got it. There was an officer that saw [it]. See, the only way you can get decorations is if an officer is there. I was crazy that day, I guess. First tank went over and I say, "Okay, I'm going." So, I went over that bridge and opened it up. ... I was awarded that.

SH: Was it a pontoon bridge or was it a real bridge that was still intact?

DM: No, that was the original bridge. They didn't knock it out. They didn't knock that bridge out, for some reason, I don't know. ... We had pontoon bridges, but ... I don't remember going over a pontoon bridge. I don't remember it. I know we went over the main bridge. ...

JP: When you were back home, what was the adjustment like?

DM: It wasn't easy, because we weren't used to it, coming home. We had ... no apartment, no place to live. You couldn't find a place to live. I went and lived with my mother and stepfather in Newark. My sister was living on the third floor. My brother was living up in Union, with one of my cousins. You couldn't find a place to live.

SH: Had your brother been in the military?

DM: Joey, yes, he was in North Africa, too. He came back with a load of prisoners of war from North Africa into the United States. ... He got in trouble on the way in. Anyway, that's the past. What else you want?

JP: Did you receive any furloughs when you were overseas?

DM: No, no such thing as a furlough. [laughter] What for? Where are you going to go?

SH: When you came back, you were not able to find a place to live.

DM: It wasn't easy for us guys.

SH: Did you ever consider staying in the military?

DM: Oh, that. Well, being as I was in the National Guard before, I met Major McGarry again, in Newark, and we talked. He said, "Danny," he never knew me by Domenic, he was an Irishman, he said, "Why don't you come back into the Guard? With your rank," he said, "you'll do pretty good." He said, "You can teach a lot."

JP: What was your rank at that time?

DM: When I got out of the military, I ... was a staff sergeant and, when I went back into the Guard, through McGarry, he put me back in B Troop again [laughter] and I got to be a master sergeant. I taught the guys, you know, and I retired out of there after fifteen years. See, five years with [the] Army and fifteen years [in the] National Guard, twenty years, that's how it operated and that's what happened to me. I stayed there and I had a good time. We used to go to camps and all that crap.

SH: Did you ever find out what happened to the horses?

DM: They came back to the State of Jersey and I asked the guy; ... we called him the stable sergeant, he was in control of all the horses. He's got a place down in the Shore, a horse farm, and I said, "Whatever happened to the horses we had?" "Right now," he says, "they're horsemeat." All them horses, after five years, how many are going to survive? The State of Jersey took control of them and a lot of them were bought by horse people, in the State of Jersey alone. Don't forget, up in Jersey, the West Orange area, there were a lot of big shots up there. They belonged to the polo team and they used to go to the reunions in the Newark Armory. These people had money. They were big people. Ballantine, that was one name I never forgot, because he was good. I taught his kids how to ride in [the] Newark Armory. They were young. ... There's quite a few names, big people, but that was it.

JP: Besides the nickname Major McGarry gave you, did you or your group have any other nicknames?

DM: Oh, yes. ... Before the war, we were down in South Carolina and ... all people, we weren't prejudiced or none of that, no, with an Italian name, anything with an "O" on it, they put us in this one company, Headquarters Company, and we never walked a horse. They called us the "Gallopings Guineas." [laughter] We'd get every garbage detail in camp, believe me, because we got caught all the time. We'd be out in the field, somebody would rat on us. We'd go across the field full gallop. We'd never walk a horse. We got caught.

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO-----

JP: This continues an interview with Mr. Domenic L. Melso on October 18, 2005, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Sandra Holyoak and Joseph Pante.

SH: Please, continue.

DM: We were talking about what?

JP: Your horses.

DM: ... They belonged to the State of Jersey and, as for us being called "Gallopings Guineas," that is true. [laughter] To this day, I hear that name when I go to a meeting, as [there are] only a few horse troopers left.

SH: You stayed involved with the Guard. How often do you guys meet?

DM: Yes, every three months, we meet in Westfield. They send you a notice when the meeting is due. Now, I'm due for a meeting [in] November. See, that would be for the end of the year and we go to this meeting and, ... for a Christmas party, West Orange Armory, in December, has a Christmas party. So, sometimes, I go up there. I used to go up every year. ...

JP: They have a flag with your name on it there, correct?

DM: Oh, the *Gestapo* flag.

SH: The what?

DM: Well, there was a flag that was brought in to the Armory, a small, not a big, a flag that size, of that picture. ...

SH: Two-and-a-half-by-four feet.

DM: Yes, that's the size of the flag. It was brought in and I'm looking at this German flag and the guy ... that found this flag [said], "One man had this flag. He had it in his barn. He died and his wife mailed it here." He was still on the roster and my name was on it.

SH: Did he want to make sure you got it?

DM: No, and my name and part of my company; when we crossed the Siegfried Line, we put our name on that flag and he kept the flag.

JP: You lowered a flag yourself when you were over in Europe, correct?

DM: Oh, the German flag. I got that in Italy, (Formosa?). ... There was a big German flag when we entered Formosa and we see the German flag up there. I said, "Uh-oh." So, [I] went into the city hall, Italian people were in there; they were afraid to go and take this flag down. So, we went up there. I took the German flag down and I threw it in the back of ... my backpack that I had and I've still got it, home. So, every year, I used to hang it out on the clothesline, in the backyard. The guy next door to me, he was something, he said, "What are they, bullet holes in that flag?" I said, "No, moth holes." [laughter] He fell for it. ... I've still got that flag.

SH: Did you bring home any other souvenirs?

DM: Quite a few things, but it's illegal.

SH: Were you discouraged from doing that?

DM: What do you do when you're ... carrying a gun [for] so long? What are you going to do? You can't get away from it for a while. So, that was it.

JP: Did that happen after the war? Did you still carry a weapon?

DM: Carry a gun? Well, we carried them in Germany, yes. After the war was over, we carried them a good three months. We were carrying weapons. I always carried my .45 and [the] Thompson submachine gun was too heavy to carry. That's why I went to town, you know. ... I carried the .45.

SH: After the war, when you were part of the Army of Occupation, were there ever any incidents between your men and the people?

DM: ... No. ... I could tell you, there were no incidents at all. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

JP: Did you hear anything about the possibility of being called up for Korea?

DM: No, the National Guard was not touched after the war. They took Reserves in, but not National Guardsmen, that I know of. My unit was never called, because I think ... we had enough. How much could you go? It was political, and Korea, no.

JP: Did you pursue any type of schooling after the war?

DM: Yes, I went to GI Bill refrigeration schooling. We used to go two, three nights a week, down in Newark. It panned out in a way, and then, it didn't pan out no more. They had us working on big units. Where the hell am I going to go?

JP: What kind of career did you pursue after that? Did your schooling help you in that?

DM: No. I went to work, just like everybody else. I worked for the phone company. ... The last job I had was with Mobil Oil in Edison, and then, a part-time job with Ray Catena Mercedes Benz. ...

JP: I would like to thank you again, Mr. Melso, for coming in today. Your information will be very useful for the Oral History Archives.

SH: My thanks as well.

DM: Well, I hope it works. That's my story. There's a lot more, but I can't remember them all.
...

SH: Thank you so much.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Joseph Pante 11/28/05
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 12/2/05
Reviewed by Domenic Melso 12/12/05