

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES MICKETT, JR.

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Charles Mickett, Jr., on October 24th, 1997, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

SSH: Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

KP: I guess I would like to begin by asking you a little bit about your parents, who were both born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Charles Mickett: That is true

KP: Where were they from, approximately?

CM: On today's map, it would be near the Hungary-Czech border.

KP: Did they speak German or Hungarian?

CM: They spoke Hungarian and they spoke a Slavic language, ... although my father could speak a little German, and he also spoke some Romanian, Bulgarian, and Czech.

KP: Did your parents speak German or Hungarian in your home while you were growing up?

CM: Well, they used to speak both languages in the house until my older brother, Michael, went to school. ... When he went to school, he was confused between the English language and what they spoke home. ... Then, my father said, "From now on, we will speak English." ... So, they spoke English at home, except once in a while, when they didn't want us to know something.
[laughter]

KP: Do you know how your parents met?

CM: My father, when he came over, went to the Pittsburgh and Cleveland area, for he had a sister there. He traveled all (over the West?). ... Then, one day, he came to work in Rahway and he met my mother in Rahway. How they met, I really don't know, but, they did meet and they got married. They had three children, all boys.

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Did they know each other before they came here?

CM: No.

KP: Why did your mother come to the United States?

CM: Well, it was a land of great opportunity ... and that's why they both came here.

KP: You also had an aunt here, correct?

CM: ... My father's sister came over, yes. My mother's brother went to Argentina and we never heard from him, ... but, that's all I know

KP: Did your parents have any extended family?

CM: They didn't have a large, extended family, no. As a matter-of-fact, we still don't, but, they did have some cousins. ... That was why ... my mother, I think, came into the Rahway-Perth Amboy area at that time.

KP: What did your father do for a living?

CM: Well, he acted as an interpreter, translating to immigrants, and he worked for Henry Ford. As a matter-of-fact, he still has the hammer that Henry Ford gave him. Well, now, I have the hammer. ... He talked about all his experiences. It seemed that when my father was single, he had good jobs, but, he did not like to stay very long in anyone place, until he met my mother in Rahway, where he ended up working for the Pennsylvania Railroad, as, ... I think they call it, a trackman, and then, [he] became a watchman.

KP: So, your father walked along tracks?

CM: During the war, yes, he walked along the track to make sure that there was no bombs or no whatever. ... That was World War I, okay.

KP: He stayed with the Pennsylvania Railroad for the rest of his career?

CM: ... Yes, until he had to quit, because of health reasons.

KP: What years did they come over?

CM: ... My mother came in 1913. My father came over in 1905.

SSH: So, they came over as teenagers?

CM: Yes, teenagers. ... See, my father died when he was ninety-seven from a double hernia. He was five foot two. ... He never had any formal [education] in the United States, so, whatever he learned, he learned by himself, and ... he would dedicatedly read that *New York Times* everyday, when we could afford it. ... It was just amazing that he was such a good, honest man. ... My mother, she learned to read and do all those good things here. ... When my father retired from the railroad, ... he didn't retire, he had to quit, ... they bought a little store in Little Rocky Hill, which is out there on Route 27, a mom and pop store, which they operated for pretty close to sixty years. ... He was just so proud that he could do things by himself, okay. ... He did not go on welfare, ... in those days, they called it "relief," because he said it was the responsibility [of] ... every family to take care of themselves. ... We were poor, gosh, were we poor. ... We were proud, I guess you could say. [laughter] ... Because of that bringing up, I think I have not as much tolerance for the poor ... [as] I really should have, because I looked at my father, and he

said, "We gotta do it. Chuck, you gotta do it." ... He told each one of us we have to do it ... by ourselves, but, you know, you couldn't believe how poor we were. I'm serious, okay. ... We lived in a house which had a store in the front, ... my mother, my father, my brothers, George, Mike, and myself. We had three rooms. All three rooms measured nine foot wide by twenty-seven foot long. We had no heat, except for a little coal stove. We had no plumbing, really. ... When we washed to go to school, we'd break the ice in the basin and wash. That's the way it was. It's surprising though, I don't think we considered ourselves poor.

KP: Did you get bussed to school?

CM: Yes, we had ... to walk one hundred feet to get the bus.

SSH: Did you have a garden or anything like that?

CM: Oh, yeah, that supplemented our income. ... We had the store and an acre of land and we would plant tomatoes, corn, you name it. Then, my younger brother and I, George, who is the president of the Class of '49, ... we built this wagon with two great, big boxes, one in the front, one in the back. ... We would take the wagon and go into Kingston loaded with tomatoes and vegetables. We would go door to door, selling all of our vegetables. ... Hey, it was really nice, really. ...

SSH: Were you operating on the barter system?

CM: No, we operated on absolutely no trust, but, everybody in the community owed my mother and father money. Oh, well, and then, when the blueberry, we call them huckleberries, season would come up, we'd go out, pick huckleberries, then, I would ... go into Kingston and I would sell blueberries from house to house. ... But, that really supplemented our income and we managed. I don't think we realized that we were poor until I went to Princeton High School and some visitors came and said, "Oh, my god, you live in a shack." ... We didn't have any money, our neighbors didn't have any money. ... That hurt a lot. I still remember that after all these years, but, that's the way it was.

KP: But, your father and mother helped support the neighborhood by lending people credit?

CM: Yes, they did.

KP: You grew up in the Kingston area and went to Franklin Park Elementary School.

CM: I started in the Kingston School, a two-room schoolhouse, and then, was transferred to the Franklin Park School, another two-room schoolhouse, which is the Philip School now, which is the office now. It is located on Route 27, in Franklin Park.

KP: It sounds like you were immediately in the same shape as you were in Kingston.

CM: They were really okay, they were.

KP: I take it that you and your parents were hit hard by the Depression.

CM: ... I think the Great Depression, in many ways, was very good for us. We would have one pound of meat a week. ... For example, we would but one pound of hamburger and my mother would cook it in stuffed cabbage, two pounds of rice, one pound of [meat], ... and we would have a whole pot that lasted three or four days. ... [Because of] the fact that we did not eat too much meat and too much fat, my father lived to be ninety-seven and the only reason he died, he had a double hernia that strangulated his intestines. He was climbing trees at ninety-five. Believe me, okay, my mother lived to a hundred and I hope, maybe, I'll do the same, because [of] the fact that we didn't eat rich foods. They never ate any dessert. [laughter] As a matter-of-fact, when I went into the Army, ... the guys would complain about the food. I thought this was living like a king. Never had dessert and all those good things, like bacon and eggs for breakfast.

SSH: Did your mother go to work outside the home?

CM: ... No, she worked in the garden. She was a terrible housekeeper, but, she worked in the garden and she did a good job out there, but, before we moved to ... Little Rocky Hill, she did work in Rahway. ... When she came over, she had to have a job. She was, I guess, what you would call, [a nanny], watching over youngsters, doing, you know, washing and ironing for people. So, she continued that 'till we moved out here.

KP: You mentioned on your survey that your mother was a Catholic and your father a Christian.

CM: My father was, I believe, the most honorable man I've ever met, but, [to] answer both questions, my father knew the Bible quite well. He was very honest, wouldn't cheat a soul. ... As a matter-of-fact, he was a very, very good influence on my brothers and me, because my brother, George, and I would not do, you know, anything that my father ... told us not to do. He says, "Your word is your bond and if you say something, you have to do it," and that's the way he was, all right. ... I don't recall ever seeing my father go to church. Now, my mother went to church several times when her three sons were in the Army, and not too often then, okay, but, she proclaimed to be a Catholic. ... I never saw her go to church in my life. [laughter] It was strange that she insisted that my father be buried in a Catholic cemetery and that she would have to be buried in a Catholic cemetery.

KP: Did you and your brothers go to church?

CM: Very rarely, very rarely. I did afterwards, but, ... I think I went more to the church in the Army. I went to services in the Army ... whenever they came to our camp, as I was overseas most of the time, except for two months. ... When I was in high school, my friends were Dutch Reform, and so, I went to a couple of their ... young people meetings and I ... liked what I saw and heard.

SSH: Did your parents ever talk about the old country? How did you know your grandparents, only through stories?

CM: Well, through stories, all right. ... My father's father was about the same size as he, five-foot, two-inches. They had villages, and then, outside of the villages, they had farms and ranges. Well, he and another gentleman supervised and took care of all the cattle for the community out there. That's all I know about ... my father's father. ... My mother's father, ... my mother, she liked her father very much, and she tells a story about ... [how] he had a brother who was in politics. In the Austria-Hungary Empire, ... every young man had to go to the army and become a soldier. So, since his brother was in politics, he said, "I'll tell you what we'll do, we'll declare you dead so that you don't have to go." ... [laughter] Well, everything was fine until he wanted to get married. So, they had to revive the dead, and instead of serving three years, he had to serve six years.

KP: You said your parents did not have any political leanings. Did they vote?

CM: Yes, they voted. ... To this day, until my mother died, we couldn't mention the name Roosevelt in our house, ... 'cause he took her three sons and put them in the war.

KP: So, your mother was not pleased that all three of you served?

CM: Not at all. ... Mike was in the Marines, and my brother George was in the armored infantry, and was injured very badly, and I was in the Italian Campaign, ending up in the infantry. These were not good scenes.

KP: What about your father? Which way did he vote? Did they both hate Roosevelt?

CM: Oh, yes. ... Well, they had three children, and so, they were against the war, right, and I don't know if I had three children and there was a war, whether I'd be in favor of war either.

SSH: How close are you, in age, to your brothers?

CM: Two and three years apart. My brother, older brother, who died, was two-years-older than I and I'm three years older than George.

KP: You mentioned that when you were in high school, you hung with a crowd at Princeton High School, very much like ... Princeton was very much a regional high school.

CM: Yes, it was.

KP: What were the differences that you saw? You mentioned the affluent students.

CM: Well, ... the crew that I hung out with was really from the Rocky Hill, Griggstown, ... and the Little Rocky Hill area. They were predominantly farmers, or people of very modest means, because if you farmed, in those days, you weren't too rich, but, the other ... area was the Princeton area, ... I always considered to be very snobbish. ... They seemed to be a little bit aloof. They considered themselves superior, although the people in Princeton, themselves, ... for the

most part, did not have that much wealth. ... I remember, I didn't go out with many girls in Princeton. For some reason, I don't know why, I felt inferior as far as the opposite sex was concerned, but, somehow, this one young lady, whose parents were wealthy and I didn't know it, and I thought we were getting places. She told her parents and her parents told her she couldn't associate with me anymore. [laughter] Hey, that's the way it was.

SSH: What were your interests in high school? Did you have time for any extracurricular activities or a job?

CM: I used to caddy after school. ... Every day, after school, I'd go down to the golf links and caddy. ... Princeton was about five or six miles from home, so, starting at five o'clock, I'd have to thumb a ride home or walk. In the evening, I did my homework. ... My mother never wanted me to play football, because she never wanted me to get hurt. I'm sorry, but, that's the way it was. So, I managed a football team, but, I never [played].

KP: But, you really wanted to play football?

CM: Oh, did I want to play? 'Cause ... I felt I was better than some of those clowns. ... My mother made me take courses in high school that I really should not have taken, but, she made me take stenography and typing. I mean, without those, I probably would have been the number one kid in the class, but, those were the Ds, barely passing, 'cause I didn't like it, didn't want to take them no how, but, that's how it was.

SSH: So, in your household, your mother was in charge of the kids?

CM: Mom was in charge of the kids, except, my father, when he said something, that was it, but, other than that, my mother, yes. ... You know, you talk about sparing the rod and spoiling the kids. Again, in our house, our mother had a (switch?), and I don't think there was one day that I didn't get (switched?), not one day, no big deal, but, then, the problem was, we had no room. We had three kids and [we] would wrestle and fight, it was the only way to keep peace, but, she was a good woman, good. My father never hit us once, never.

KP: You mentioned they had a store for sixty years.

CM: Opened in 1928

KP: What happened there?

CM: It closed in 1995, 1994, excuse me. When my father died, in 1982, my mother maintained it. She was in that store by herself for thirteen years. She had problems with her legs. She was not a very good disciple of medical care, and her legs swelled up, and she ended up in the hospital. After the hospital stay, we brought her home and closed the store down, and then, ... well, now, the problem with having my mother at our house is, she's in her eighties. She had nothing in common with anybody, no friends here, and when she was at the store, she saw many people whom she knew, so, she said, one day, "I'm going home." "Hey, mom, you can't go

home, mom.” She says, “I’m going home.” I said, “No way, mom.” So, she packed up her clothes, opened the door, and said, “I’m going to walk eighteen miles.” So, we said, “Okay,” so, we took her home. At least when she was home, she opened the store, she had somebody. She knew all the neighborhood. What the heck, she trusted everybody, so, she knew all the neighbors. ... She felt important, that she was doing something. As a matter-of-fact, every Christmas, my mother and father would come up to our house and we would ... have Christmas, enjoy Christmas, but, they would never stay more than two or three hours. Why? because they felt that they were needed back at the store to serve people. Hey, God bless them, really. All right, so, we would take them home. ... Thanksgiving, they would go to my brother’s place, same thing. He lived down at the shore. They would have to take them home.

KP: So, it was not as if they ever took a vacation.

CM: They never took a vacation in their life. Matter-of-fact, we never took my mother and father out to dinner, and that sounds strange, and why did we not take them out to dinner? Because, if we took them out to dinner, and we sat down, say, modestly, we bought a ten-dollar meal for each one of us, we would never hear the end of spending forty dollars for a meal. “Oh, how could you do this?” “How could you take the money out of your children’s mouth?” Hey, we would rather not go through that. ... My mother had very wide feet. We’d buy her shoes, and if we had to pay fifty, sixty, seventy, whatever it was, we would come home and Mom would say, “How much do I owe you?” ... We would say, “Mom, that’s seven dollars.” One time, we said it was fifteen dollars. “How could you? It’s impossible to spend fifteen dollars for a pair of shoes. I’d go barefoot first.” She was what I would call “double frugal,” believe me. I’ll tell you a humorous story. When she then moved in with us, after we closed the store, ... I started to play golf. So, I was telling mom, “Boy, mom, this is great, I can play golf for five dollars.” ... What a lecture, “How could I?” [laughter] I like to go ... fishing and I caught some fluke. I had caught these in the inlet and they were nice size. They were ... good sized, and I put ice in the water, so, when I get home to filet them, they’re still alive. ... My wife, Fran, said, “Why don’t you show these to your mother?” So, I showed mom. I said, “Mom look at these.” First thing out of her mouth was not how great they were, or, “Oh, what are they?” or anything like that. “See, when you go fishing, you bring food home. When you play golf, you spend money.” [laughter] I think that’s hilarious.

SSH: What kind of arrangements did you have to make to go through college?

CM: Oh, my father was for it. My father was dead for education. ... I got a job at the Princeton Bank and Trust Company. I graduated high school at sixteen. I was still sixteen when I got the job at the Princeton Bank and Trust Company, and I went to Rider Night College in Trenton at night. After work, I would take the bus to Rider, and then, take two buses back, and I’d get home about midnight. I spent three years at Rider, and got my diploma in accounting. Then, the war came. I was working at Princeton Bank and Trust Company and they started me with sixty dollars a month. That was 1938, and [by] 1939, I was a bookkeeper. The vice-president in charge of the bank, Mr. Cook, said, as I was going upstairs, ... “Charlie?” I said, “Yes, Mr. Cook?” “I’m going to give you a raise.” “Well, that’s great.” “Ten dollars a month.” [laughter] Oh, well, anyhow, then, they made me a teller, then, a loan teller. Then, they opened up what we

called the auto finance department. I ran the auto finance department. So, at this time, I'm making eighty dollars a month running the whole auto finance department, which made more money than the rest of the entire bank, so, I figured, "Gee, I must be worth a hundred dollars a month, now." They wouldn't give me a hundred dollars a month. So, I said, "Okay, I quit." So, I quit. I got a job at ... Camp Kilmer. So, I took the job at Camp Kilmer, 'cause ... I knew I only had a few months before the Army would call me, and then, they called me. The Army called me in October.

KP: October of what year?

CM: '42.

KP: Before we get to the Army, you graduated from Princeton High School in 1937. How did you get the job at the bank?

CM: ... They called the high school up and they had interviews. So, I guess I must have impressed somebody.

KP: You worked in downtown Princeton?

CM: Well, I guess it was downtown. ... It was good, working at the Princeton Bank and Trust Company, because, when you worked in a small bank, you learn all phases of banking. If you work in Citibank, you're a specialist in this, you were a specialist in that. In a small bank, like Princeton Bank and Trust Company, you learn bookkeeping, telling, loaning, the whole thing. Then, we had a gentleman by the name of Zarker, Hal Zarker, came in. ... He used to be a member of the staff of the bankers here at Rutgers. ... He decided that what he would try to do, because Princeton Bank and Trust Company almost went bankrupt and had to get a reconstruction finance loan to tide them over, said, "I would like to reconstruct as to why we went under." ... The amount of loans that they had that were never paid was unbelievable. ... Let's put it this way, a lot of the loans that they made were unsecured loans, and never paid, , and they ... never took the defaulters to court. That was the thing that surprised me. Now, these supposedly were nice, well-to-do, or lot of money, people, but, for a little bank that had six million dollars in total resources, they had almost three million dollars in bad loans. Now, the capital of the bank was three or four hundred thousand. So, you know, they were in trouble.

SSH: Were you still living at home while you were working there?

CM: Yes, I was still living at home, and I was going to Rider, and then, ... when I got my diploma at Rider, I went to Rutgers Evening School for two years, and then, the Army.

KP: Was Rider, at this point, based in Trenton?

CM: Rider was in Trenton. Do you know which building it was in Trenton?

KP: No.

CM: On Market Street, it was in one building smaller than this.

SSH: When you went to evening school at Rutgers, was your major still accounting?

CM: No, I was going for my degree, so, I was taking a math course, and Spanish, and languages, things of that sort, in order to get my degree at Rutgers.

SSH: At Princeton High School, was there any one teacher that really stands out, maybe gave you direction in life?

CM: So, as far as that is concerned, the only thing, it's ironic, when I had American History, and I had ... a teacher by the name of Spessard, he was in World War I, and he was hurt a little bit in World War I. ... When we came to the part in history on World War I, ... I'm sitting there in my chair, wondering, "Where did these guys stay in the winter time? ... When it rained, what in the world [did they do]? Just how did they survive?" [laughter] I found out, but, isn't it ironic, that I would think of it at that time, and then, oh, gee.

KP: It sounds like that came back to haunt you.

CM: Right. It did, right? Isn't that amazing? I guess that was an omen that that was going to happen.

KP: What did you do during your free time? It sounds like you had very busy days, because you were working full time and going to night school.

CM: Only free time I had, and this [was] the only free time I had, because, ... for example, at Rutgers, I was taking three subjects, ... I permitted myself ... to go to one movie on Saturday afternoon and that was it. The rest of the evening, I was doing homework. I didn't get home until late, and then, I had all this homework to do, but, that was it. ...

SSH: Were you around your brothers at this point or were you with friends? Who went with you to the movies?

CM: I went by myself in the afternoon, Saturday afternoon.

KP: What were your favorite movies?

CM: Let's see, ... I think one of my favorite movies was, I guess it didn't rank very high, but, it was an old Brian Donlevy movie with Atkim Timmeroff, and it starts off, ... Brian Donlevy is coming into the political headquarters and he gets an assignment to vote. ... He goes from poll, to poll, to poll, and they were kind of impressed with this guy who looked like a bum. I think he voted seventy-nine times, or something. So, they're kind of impressed with him and he works himself all the way up to be an associate partner with Atkim Timmeroff, who was the boss, for all this crooked activity. Everything is fine until Brian Donlevy falls in love. There it goes

again, right? [laughter] ... The girl he falls in love with wants to reform him. So, Brian Donlevy, who is crooked all his life, and he gets convicted for the one honest thing he ever did. [laughter] ... One of the things I recall very much is [that] they want to construct a dam, and the young lady tells [Brian], ... “No, no.” Okay, so, Brian Donlevy says, “No, I’m against it,” and Atkim Timmeroff says, “What’s wrong with you? You’re not thinking. Where’s your brain?” Brian Donlevy says, “What do you mean?” He says, “We build dams out of concrete, concrete always cracks. We always get contracts for repairing concrete.” Well, anyhow, I’ll never forget that. Anyhow, ... you see them afterwards and they’re arguing, fighting, still together though. I’ll never forget, “Dams, they’ll always crack.”

SSH: Did your parents ever go to a movie?

CM: Never. As a matter-of-fact, when my wife and I were married. We visited ... my mother and father at that little store now, okay. ... We would bring our son, Chuck, and we told my mother that we went to this movie, and she said, “And what did you do with your son, Chuck?” I said, “Well, we got a baby-sitter.” She said, “You took that precious baby and you gave it to a baby-sitter while you and Frances went to a movie to see nothing but whores?” ... So, we never talked about movies from there on, okay.

SSH: Did you see *All’s Quiet on the Western Front*?

CM: Yes. Yes, I did. I don’t look at too many war movies. I look at war movies, I see them take a hand grenade, and throw it into a building, and the building blows up, I remember my experience. This is digressing a little bit. We were on the front, ... this is in Italy, and there are fields and trees. Hey, all of a sudden, a building is there, not much of a building, but, there’s a little shed-like there. ... There’s a little shooting at us. Funny, machine guys, don’t bother you too much, and, in true, good fashion, we attacked this building, open the door, and I throw a hand grenade in, close [the door and] back [away]. The hand grenade goes off, we rush in, and out flies a flock of chickens. There, we all stood and laughed. You couldn’t believe how hilarious this was. We didn’t even kill one chicken. [laughter] ... You gotta have some fun. That was hilarious. ...

KP: When did you get a sense that you were going into the war? You were subject to the peacetime draft, correct?

CM: That’s right. Yeah.

KP: Your number did not get called?

CM: ... Yes, it did. As a matter-of-fact, I was drafted in October, ‘42.

KP: But, before that, during the draft of 1940, you were eligible for that, right?

CM: I must have been. Let’s see, at ‘42, I was twenty-one-years-old.

KP: You were too young for the peacetime draft.

CM: Probably, yeah.

SSH: What about your brother?

CM: Yeah, he volunteered to go to the Marines.

KP: When did he volunteer?

CM: In 1941.

KP: Before or after Pearl Harbor?

CM: After Pearl Harbor, ... 'cause he ended up in, ... let's see, what are some of the islands? Guadalcanal and all those over there.

KP: Where were you when Pearl Harbor occurred?

CM: I was home, listening to the radio. I can still ... hear Franklin Delano Roosevelt saying, "This date will go down in infamy," or something of that sorta, yeah.

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CM: Well, I always had the feeling that we would go to war, 'cause I always had the feeling that Franklin Delano Roosevelt felt that he should be in this war, but, I guess that we were just hoping against hope that we wouldn't go into the war. But, as far as I was concerned, it was just a matter of time.

SSH: Was it discussed at the bank or at the school at all?

CM: No, not at all. We never discussed it at home, either. That would've been a very sad affair, to discuss it at home. My mother would, you know ...

SSH: I was just thinking, because of their backgrounds, that they would discuss what was happening.

CM: I would think that. No, they didn't discuss it, but, they were hoping, since they came from Austria-Hungary, ... that there wouldn't be any war against Germany. I really felt, you know, that they felt that we should not go against them.

KP: Your older brother was enlisted, right?

CM: Right.

KP: What about your other brother?

CM: George, well, he was younger than I. They drafted him, too.

SSH: How close in time?

CM: Less than a year

SSH: What were you doing when you were working at Camp Kilmer?

CM: I was in the Engineering Department. ... We were building Camp Kilmer, and there was a lot of equipment that was on lease, and they would lease the equipment. ... It was our duty to make sure the equipment was there. ... Then, we had a staff that would run out and make sure that the various trucks were working, and that they didn't take the trucks out and ... [use] it on private work, and, you know, bill us, so, and all of the bulldozers, and all of that stuff. That was what I was doing at the time.

KP: One of the things that has struck me while interviewing people was that Camp Kilmer went up almost over night.

CM: It was. While I was there and I would walk out on the street, I would get these remarks, excuse the expression, "What the hell are you doing here? Why aren't you in the Army?" [laughter] Well, they outnumbered me. I didn't say anything, ... because I knew it was just a matter of time before I was going to be drafted.

KP: So, it sounds like you were just waiting for your number to be called.

CM: Right.

KP: Did you think of enlisting?

CM: No

KP: Well, your older brother enlisted. What made him choose the Marines?

CM: I guess he felt he was going to be drafted. He says, "I'll go where I wanna go, rather than have them draft me and put me where [they want]." ... So, he went there.

KP: How did your mother feel about her first son volunteering to go? Did she not want him to enlist?

CM: She did not. It didn't hit her that hard. What hit her hard [was] when they took me. That's the first time I ever saw my mother cry, and my father, he was very, very sad, but, I was the middle person, so, I guess I was the favorite, really. ... When I left, my mother did cry, 'cause I recall the bus picking me up, my mother was on Lincoln Highway, my father was there, and they

were waving. It was sad. Let me just put it this way, it was sad. Matter-of-fact, I almost get a tear in my eye when I think about it, 'cause our family ... this is the truth, we didn't have any money, but, we could cut the love with a knife. It was that thick, but, we didn't show it. In other words, we were not a hugging-and-kissing-type family. As a matter-of-fact, I still don't hug or kiss anybody, except my wife, 'cause we never did it when we were young, and I don't do it now, but, the first time I ever saw my mother cry was then. She showed tremendous emotion.

KP: How often did your parents write to you while you were overseas?

CM: I never received a letter from my parents.

KP: No?

CM: No. I would receive a package once in a while, but, no letter. I would write at least twice a week.

KP: Before the Army, did you ever travel much outside of New Jersey?

CM: Well, let's just say, prior to the Army, New York City and Philadelphia, that's it.

KP: Really? So, you had never really been outside.

CM: Never

KP: Never to the South?

CM: Never, and Philadelphia, that was when my father had the pass on the railroad, he would take us. That was it.

KP: You took the bus on Lincoln Highway.

CM: Right.

KP: Where did it take you? Where were you initially inducted?

CM: Fort Dix.

KP: Fort Dix. How long did you stay for?

CM: One week. I got the biggest cold in my life at Fort Dix. Came there one day, next day, I'm on duty. This was October. I have my fatigues on and the duty that I'm on is carrying frozen meat out of a freezer. The only thing I had on is less than I have on now. What a cold, and then, when I get back, they didn't have any supper. I had bologna for a sandwich. Anyhow, then, I ended up in Camp Edwards, in Massachusetts. ... I was inducted in October. In December, I was in Scotland.

SSH: Where in Scotland?

CM: We landed in Glasgow. We went outside of Liverpool and I got my rifle going on the *Queen Mary*.

KP: Where did you get your basic training, at Edwards?

CM: Well, ... if you call that basic training, the answer is “yes,” but, I had two weeks basic training, and then, ... went to Indian Town Water Gap to get all gas impregnated clothes and all of that kind of stuff, but, marching, we did, and then, we went onto *Queen Mary* and that took about three days, four days. There’s an interesting article about the trip that we made, the only thing I brought. This is the *Queen Mary*. Read this.

KP: Did you write this?

CM: No, no, somebody sent it to me.

KP: I think you should read it.

CM: All right. ... This is page 153 of, ... somebody sent it to me, I forgot where it came from, and comments say, “Remember this.” They’re talking about October 2, 1942, about this experience on the *Queen Mary*. Now, the *Queen Mary*, [you’ve] got to remember, carried about nine thousand troops. It was top heavy. It had five-inch guns on the top. So, when we went over, the sea was kind of rough. So, when we went to the mess hall, they had these big tables, I guess they were thirty feet, or something, and they had these four-inch panels on one side and four-inch [panels] on the other side, because we would eat from either side over there. On this trip, we would go over, and the *Queen Mary* would lean to the right, and all the food containers would come down past you, and you would grab what you wanted and put it on your plate, and then, you would wait for the boat to come down the other way, see. ... Anyhow, this one was a rough trip and it says here, “Several months later, in mid-winter gales, seven hundred miles off of Scotland, bound for Glasgow with a full complement of GIs, the *Queen Mary* was struck by a freak mountainous wave.” Actually, we were in the middle of a hurricane there, strange as it may seem. “It slammed her broadside to the seas and, for what seemed like minutes, she lay on her side in a trough with her upper decks awash. Nobody aboard thought she would ever right herself. Later, it was estimated that if she had heeled another five inches, the *Queen Mary* would have reached the point of no return, capsized, and gone straight to the bottom, but, somehow, the old, gray lady righted herself, steamed on. It was never revealed how many of the thousands of GIs on board were injured when they were hurled against the bulkhead and fixtures.” Well, I slept through the whole thing, never knew what happened. [laughter] I got up the next morning and there’s no lifeboats on the one side. You know, they had metal covers on the porthole, all of those were snapped off. As I understand, the water come through the portholes and GIs were screaming, “We’re torpedoed!” What else would you think, if there was water coming in, right? I don’t recall anybody really being seriously hurt and I slept through the whole darn thing. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like you did not get seasick.

CM: The only time I ever got seasick was in the Irish Sea. We were going from Liverpool to Africa, and we were on D-level, all the way forward, on the *Franconia*. I think that was the name, *Franconia*, and, remember, my mother ... sent me a package, and I saved the package of dates. Then, I went up, mid-ship, I took the package of dates, and I ate them. They were tasty. Oh, gosh, they were good. Then, I said, "Well, I'll go down, and I [have] nothing to do. I'll go down and rest." As I was coming down, oh, this is awful, there were buckets of (vomit?) every place. I can't stand that, and I tell you, those dates tasted just as good coming up as they did going down, only it was quicker. [laughter] That was the only time I ever got seasick. ... Oh, it was awful, but, then, we got out of the Irish Sea, it settled down, and everyone was great.

SSH: So, how long were you in England before you left there?

CM: Three months.

SSH: What were you doing at that time?

CM: See, we were in anti-aircraft. The only anti-aircraft training I received was when we went to Whales for one day and shot at a target plane pulling a target. Our effort was disgraceful. What were we doing? We were marching, in a parade ground. ... We were building huts, prefabricated huts. ... Well, let's put it this way, we were putting prefabricated huts together. The prefabricated material was kinda not straight and not aligned. ... I don't have to tell you what the result was. It was awful. We had holes that big. So, somebody, engineers, had to come in and fix whatever we did. Soon, we ended up in Africa.

KP: Did you get assigned to this anti-aircraft unit back in the States or were you assigned to it when you got to England?

CM: I was assigned to an anti-aircraft unit in the States.

KP: Did the other people in the unit have the same amount of training that you did?

CM: Well, I was the only one who had two weeks basic training, if you want to call it that. The rest of them were a little bit longer than I, so, I can't [say]. They had a little bit more training than I.

KP: They did not actually put you through the basic training course?

CM: I would have hoped so, but, based upon the result of firing in Wales on that target, I would say that they were awful. They were awful.

KP: Do you remember your sergeant at all?

CM: Yes, I did.

KP: What was his background?

CM: How he got to be sergeant, I really don't know. His background was that he was a merchant. He was, in my opinion, a very terrible sergeant, in that he wasn't disciplined. He wasn't knowledgeable, follow me? ... As I say, I don't know how he got his job.

KP: He was not a regular?

CM: He absolutely was not.

KP: Did he remain a sergeant?

CM: Well, they sent him back home because he was over thirty-five.

KP: When did they send him back home, in England or was it in Africa?

CM: In Africa, but, in England, he didn't do anything. ... When he marched, he was a terrible marcher, too. I don't understand it.

SSH: Where were most of the people from that were in your unit?

CM: New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and some from North Carolina, but, basically, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

SSH: Were you all pretty much the same age?

CM: I would say, yes, ... except there were a couple of older guys in, as a matter-of-fact, at least four or five. ...

SSH: Have you kept in contact with anybody?

CM: No, we used to have company reunions, but, the number of people who are surviving is dwindling down very, very fast. We had General Pace, who was my lieutenant, at the time, and I hated his guts. ... I guess I brought it upon myself, when I was in Africa. ... I wanted to become an officer when I was in England. ... I felt that I was smart enough, I had, basically, two years of college education, and, I applied twice while in England. When we arrived in Africa, I asked about the status of my applications and I was getting the cold shoulder. So, finally, the sergeant sent me over to the battalion headquarters and I met the battalion commander. He said, "What are you doing here, soldier?" and I said, "I want to apply for OCS." Says, "You're too late." I said, "What do you mean, I'm too late?" He said, "You should've applied in England," and I said, "I did apply in England. I applied for OCS Finance, which I am qualified [for], and I applied for the Air Corps," and I said, "In the Air Corps, I was backed up and supported by members of the Air Force, 'cause we were erecting pre-fab buildings for the Air Force. I struck

up a good friendship there.” The Commander said, “I’ll check it,” and then told me, “There’s not one record in your file here.” I said, “I don’t understand this, because I filed twice.” He said, “Well, it’s too late now. You’re over here on [the] battleground now.” So, when I got back to, ... this time it was a gun crew, because we were an anti-aircraft, my sergeant said, “I don’t know what you did, Chuck, but, if anybody is on the shit list, it is you,” and I couldn’t do anything right from there on. [laughter] ...

KP: You were one of the first troops in England. Were there a lot of American troops when you got there?

CM: Yes, there were.

KP: I guess it is relative, compared to, say, 1945.

CM: ... That’s correct.

KP: Where were you living? Were you on a base?

CM: We were in a sort of a Quonset Hut-type thing. Our battery was there. ... Well, at this particular time, it was the 505th Coastal Artillery Regiment. They were spread all over in that area. It was ... about eight miles outside of Liverpool. ... We had a little marching ground in the back of our hut, that was where our battery marched. Other batteries were in other places. There wasn’t too much associating between one battery and another battery, though. It was kinda like a family, or something.

KP: Did you ever get to go into town?

CM: I went to London once.

KP: What happened?

CM: At this time, I’m in good standing with this lieutenant. I’m in real good standing with the lieutenant. So, I get a pass to go to London, ... not too many got to go, but, I got to because I was a good soldier. This may sound strange, but, when I saw England for the very first time, I was very disappointed. The reason I was so disappointed was because I expected so much more, because, while in school, you read in the history books how great England was, but, ... at that time, it wasn’t. I didn’t take into consideration that this was war, and things were in rough shape. ... In London itself, I didn’t have too much time, but, I tried to see as much as I could. ... Saint Paul’s Cathedral was very impressive.

KP: You mean the cathedral at the center of the Blitz?

CM: ... I’ll tell you one thing, the first night that we were there, outside of Liverpool, and you could hear sirens [from] someplace. ... We had double deck beds, and they wobbled a bit, ... so,

when the bed hit against the wall, they would make a thumping sound and someone shouted, “What was that?” Well, I could understand, too, ‘cause I felt that way, too.

KP: You mentioned you had been given a rifle aboard the *Queen Mary*.

CM: That’s right.

KP: How did you learn the things you were supposed to have learned in basic training? How did you pick them up?

CM: That was one of the things we did in England. We learned to take the rifle apart and put it together, although we were in the anti-aircraft. I got pretty good at it.

KP: What were your responsibilities in the anti-aircraft battery?

CM: ... We were in forty millimeters, I was the elevation man. ... When you’re not under remote control, they had a remote control, but, very rarely used it, I would provide the elevation lead setting on the gun itself. You had ... a grid with lines into it, and ... my job was to move the barrel up and down. The horizontal man was to move it horizontally. So, in other words, as the plane is coming, it took so many seconds for the projectile to go from here to the plane. ... Now, you estimate the speed, mentally, of the ... airplane, and as he got closer, you have to elevate the barrel accordingly. Going away, you’d elevate. My job was to give it the lead vertically, so that the projectile would hit the plane as it flew over. ... It’s not easy.

SSH: Did your equipment come with you on the *Queen Mary* or was it there when you got to England?

CM: I don’t know when ... the equipment [arrived]. No, it didn’t come on the *Queen Mary*, because we had 9,000 troops. When it came, I don’t know.

SSH: Did you have any interaction with the people in England at all or were you pretty self-contained?

CM: Oh, I would try to go out as often as possible when I was in England. Yes, I tried to have a relationship with people there, ... talk to people. I considered them to be very nice, really. ... The people at home were always dedicated, ... every night, they were on duty, watching, some kind of an alert duty, or some [other] kind of a duty. ... Liverpool was sort of out of the way from London, but, it was very nice. I enjoyed it very much.

SSH: Did the war conditions affect you at all in that area?

CM: It did, but, not to any great an extent, really. I didn’t see any damage in Liverpool.

KP: The British had very tight rations during World War II.

CM: Yes, there were.

KP: As Americans, you were eating more.

CM: We were, we were. For example, we went to Wales ... on this target practice. When I went over on the *Queen Mary*, one of my buddies, Joe (Rufo?), was a barber, see, and he said to me, I was losing my hair, okay, ... “Hey, Chuck, you shave everyday, don’t you?” I say, “Yeah.” He says, “Look how thick your beard is.” He says, “What you gotta do is shave your hair off.” So, I shaved all my hair off, okay, and I was bald as a honeydew melon. As a matter-of-fact, when we invaded Salerno, Italy, everybody would say, “Keep your helmet on, Chuck, we don’t want the sun to shine.” Well, that’s beside the point, but, anyhow, ... the point here is, when we were there, the English, now, controlled the mess. So, we would go through and get this little portion of the mess, but, I had a good appetite. So, I went through with my helmet on, ... take my helmet off, and go through [again], ... imaginative, right? [laughter]

KP: Did you ever go to any English pubs?

CM: No. I didn’t drink. As a matter-of-fact, I didn’t smoke until a little later. ... I learned to smoke in Africa.

KP: One image I have of troops, after watching war movies, is of a lot of gambling, particularly while you were not doing anything.

CM: Not that much, really. ... They had some gamblers. The problem was that, in our outfit, every once in a while, you would gamble a little bit. We would play Pinochle. ... Can’t lose too much money in Pinochle, but, dice, that was something else. There’s some unscrupulous people, so, we didn’t ... trust them much, but, Pinochle, what can you do? But, nobody loves to lose, nobody.

SSH: Were there any outstanding characters that you remember during this time?

CM: Which, part of the Army now?

SSH: I will ask that question again when we get to Africa, but, while you were basically training in the States and in England.

CM: No, no, not really, because ... I didn’t know very many soldiers. The only person I remember was when I, being a good Samaritan, I guess, this gentleman, I forgot his name, said, would I take his KP for Thanksgiving, and that he was going to pay me, I think it was five bucks, if I would take his KP duty so he could go home. ... I said, “Gee, fair enough,” I said, “I’m here, not going to do anything, I’ll do it.” ... Never got the five bucks, never got a thank you, never got anything. ... That’s about what I remember and the food in the United States was good, very good, except for Fort Dix.

KP: You mentioned your fear of torpedoes and submarines. I imagine that your trip on the *Queen Mary* was a real threat.

CM: ... Somebody else may have been frightened, but, I was not really that worried, because the *Queen Mary* could outrun a submarine and we had a good submarine alert system on the *Queen Mary*. ... When we went from England to Africa, I wasn't worried, because, now, we're in a convoy, ... and we've got battleships and destroyers, and all of those good things. So, I didn't worry about it. I slept very well.

KP: Where did you land in Africa?

CM: Oran.

KP: What were your impressions of Oran?

CM: Well, that's a very, very good question. It didn't take me long to figure out. I said, "How long was it going to be before the Arabians revolt against the French."

KP: Really? You thought that back in 1942?

CM: 1943. ... I said, "It was just a matter of time." They, the French, treated those people very poorly.

KP: Do you remember anything else that struck you?

CM: No, just the whole attitude. ... I looked at the movies of the Arabians, sort of (gallant?) people. And, I was kind of disappointed, one time, when a guy on the street puts down his skirt and passes nature. ... I said, "Oh, my gosh, they never showed this in the movies." ... It's a hard country, it's a very dry country, and that's about all I can say.

KP: How long were you in Africa?

CM: From March until we left in the beginning of September to invade Italy.

KP: So, you were in Africa for several months?

CM: Let's see, March, April, May, June, July, August, finally.

KP: What did you do in Africa?

CM: We were guarding airports, saw absolutely no action.

KP: Guarding them as in anti-aircraft?

CM: Anti-aircraft.

SSH: What other presences were there besides the Americans?

CM: None.

SSH: Just the French?

CM: Just the French.

SSH: Were they building up at all there?

CM: Not really.

SSH: So, what did you do on leave there?

CM: Went into town. I tell you, I looked for women. [laughter] What else was there to do, right? I was single, you see.

SSH: Did you ...

CM: Did I succeed? Yes.

SSH: I was going to ask, did you go as a group of guys or did you go alone?

CM: No, I went singly. They all went singly.

KP: North Africa, you already mentioned your impressions of it. It was a very different place from Jersey.

CM: Oh, very different, yeah.

KP: What else surprised you? What else did you observe? On the one hand, it is very different, on the other, it is also very exotic.

CM: Well, see, you were really restricted to certain areas. You couldn't go into the areas which were off-limits. If you did, and you got caught, that was something else, and it wasn't worth while. So, really, you were very limited to your exposure to these people.

KP: What was off-limits?

CM: ... Certain sections. Why they were off-limits? Well, they figured if you went there by yourself, or without a group, that you would probably get mugged, robbed, or something in this order. Probably, they were also worried about the spread of sexual diseases.

SSH: Did you see any other Europeans in that area?

CM: No, I don't recall.

SSH: Expatriates?

CM: No. In Italy, yes, but, not there.

KP: Sounds like you and your unit got pretty bored.

CM: In Africa, we did.

KP: It was also very hot.

CM: The coldest I can recall ever being was the second day outside of Oran in the month of March. It never got to freezing, because there were orange groves there, but, it was cold. The day was in the seventies, eighties, and it got down [to] ... the high thirties, and I can recall being on guard duty, and I'm not dressed for this. Oh, gosh, it was cold. ... I thought I would freeze, but, it never got to freezing. Yes, it got warm in the summer months. It got so warm that I had salt rings in the back of my fatigue jacket, because I would perspire so much during the day, and it would dry at night, and then, form these huge salt rings.

KP: What about a shower? How often would you get to shower?

CM: Not often. ... I'm trying to figure, in North Africa, did we go to get the showers in town at a USO? USOs were nice, by the way.

KP: You mentioned USOs were very nice. Where did you go to the USO? Did you use them in England?

CM: No.

KP: Was it in North Africa?

CM: Yes, and ... in Italy, yes. ... It was nice. In Italy, the Army, every so often, would take us for a shower to a farm house, and they took us in trucks, and ... you gave them all your old underwear and they gave you new underwear. Now, you imagine they had this nice, hot shower outside, by a well. You'd run out there naked, and you'd get your shower, you'd come out, and then, they'd give you your clean underwear, in the winter, gosh, but, it was cold, but, it was well worth it, let me tell you. [laughter]

KP: Did you get any further training in Africa?

CM: We did our own.

KP: No practice training?

CM: No, no. We would ... sort of try to track an airplane that went over every once in a while, but, really, I would say that our training and expertise was below par.

SSH: When you were sent to North Africa, did you know what the ultimate objective was?

CM: Nobody told us.

SSH: How much information were you given?

CM: Nobody told us anything.

SSH: There were no rumors?

CM: No.

SSH: Now, when you were in North Africa, you were on this famous list.

CM: That I am, because that's where it started. That's where the list started.

SSH: Were there other people in your group that were, maybe, more informed?

CM: No. As a matter-of-fact, ... I can recall asking, when we were in Italy and on the push. Nobody seems to know anything, really. We're just going, that's all. ...

SSH: When you were guarding these air bases in North Africa, was there a build up of troops?

CM: No, not that we could see. There had to be a build up of troops because Oran, that's where the invasion force [assembled] ... to go to Salerno, Italy. That's where they departed from.

SSH: But, you were not aware of their coming?

CM: No, no ... And we were in the Army, right?

SSH: Were there any other branches of service represented there?

CM: No, we were just sort of by ourselves, but, there must have been many others, as an entire army was assembling.

SSH: What kind of mail service did you get?

CM: Well, in my case, it didn't make too much difference, but, it came. We got it. It was good.

SSH: Did you try any local foods?

CM: No, ... there were no restaurants that we would go to, but, to the USO.

KP: How much training did you have for aircraft recognition?

CM: Our training for aircraft recognition, strange as it may seem, came in Italy.

KP: Before that, did you really have any?

CM: Not officially, no.

KP: Who would be in charge of your unit?

CM: The sergeant was.

KP: The sergeant.

CM: Yes.

SSH: Who took over for the sergeant when he went back to the States? Did he go back to the States soon after your arrival?

CM: Yes, ... he was in Africa only a few months, then, we got another sergeant.

KP: What was this new sergeant like?

CM: I can't tell you, because I transferred out of this to another gun crew.

KP: Is that because you were on the famous list?

CM: Yes.

SSH: By request or were you requested?

CM: They transferred me. While I was at the new gun section, Lt. Pace, who hated my guts because of the Battalion incident, went on leave to another battalion. In his absence, Capt. Woodward promoted me to corporal. It wasn't long after Lt. Pace returned to our outfit that he busted me.

SSH: Do you want to tell us why you got busted back to private?

CM: Lt. Pace came over to our gun section to make an inspection. This was a surprise visit. Our sergeant was sick. He was laying on his cot in the tent. The Lieutenant wanted him to get out of bed, dress up, and inspect his rank, but, he didn't. I said, "Lieutenant, Sgt. Holden is sick and I will escort you." He wasn't pleased at all. Our inspection was going well until I contradicted one of his comments about our gun.

Just as soon as he got back to headquarters, he had the sergeant and me busted. I think I was responsible for the sergeant being busted.

SSH: Because you spoke up?

CM: That's right.

SSH: How spit and polish were your inspections?

CM: Well, to give you a good idea ...

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

CM: He liked the gun to be shiny, and what the other gun crews would do is, they'd take a nice oil cloth and polish the entire gun. What we did was, we cleaned the gun off. I had them cleaned the gun, because oil accumulates dirt. I cleaned it off and the gun was as clean as I think it could have been, but, it wasn't shiny. The Captain said, "That gun is filthy," ... so, I said to him, "Captain, we're in a war zone and, to me, it is stupid to have a gun shine, ... to reflect the sun so that any airplane over [head] can see it. That gun is clean, we cleaned it with a toothbrush." It was a good answer, but, it was the undoing of Chuck because I embarrassed him in front of all those soldiers.

SSH: How many men were in this unit?

CM: Twelve, the sergeant and eleven, and the sergeant wasn't one of his favorites either.

SSH: Do you know where he was from?

CM: Jersey City.

SSH: Do you know his name?

CM: Yeah, his name was Bill Holden.

CM: I have no regrets. As a matter-of-fact, ... when I was working, I used to work for Burroughs Corporation, ... now Unisys ... Corporation. I was a rising star. Vice-president in charge of sales, chairman of the board, and I were in Boston for the sales convention, our company [came] out with a new product. The vice-president in charge of sales said, "Chuck, ... how do you like [it]? Isn't that a great product?" ... I told him what I thought of it. I had to be right, unfortunately. He said, "You know who you're talking to? This is the chairman of the board." I said, "Yes, but, you asked me a question." I was so hoping that I would be wrong, so that I could go to Ray and say, "Ray, boy, that's why you're the chairman." It almost bankrupted us.

KP: You were transferred out of this unit to a new unit?

CM: Yes, to a new gun crew.

KP: What was that crew like?

CM: Lou was a pretty good person. ... A little of everything, really. He was kind of a hustler.

SSH: Where was he from?

CM: He was from North Jersey. He was from either Teaneck or one of those places up north. He would send his money home to his wife, and his wife took all his money and divorced him. Isn't that awful? Lou was a good gentlemen. ...

KP: You sound like you had a lot of respect for him.

CM: Yes, he was a good person. Actually, the gun crew was good, too.

KP: They had the same background?

CM: Same background, North Carolina, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

SSH: How long were you with this crew before you went into Italy?

CM: ... This happened in Italy, where I got the busted, ... because, in Africa, we didn't have any war zone. The holding came in Africa. We made the invasion in Salerno. I'm sorry if I threw you off there.

KP: I thought this happened in Africa.

CM: No, because, in Italy, we had to fire, we have planes coming in, strafing, ... not often, but, every once in a while.

KP: With the invasion of Salerno, when did you land?

CM: September the 9th, 1943, D-day.

KP: Were you on a British ship?

CM: Yes, ... we came in on a British LST. Next to us was an American LST. Now, the difference between the British LST and the American [LST] is that, when the American [LST] put it's ramp down, vehicles would roll off. It was much longer than the British [LST]. So, the ramp comes down on our [LST], in the meanwhile now, we're there, and, of course, the Germans, Jerry is up in the mountains shooting some, you know, throwing some good stuff at us, a half-track ... comes out. Well, our [LST] couldn't get too close to the shore, the ramp wasn't long enough, and so, a half-track goes into six feet of water, completely submerged except for ...

all the air hoses sticking out. Now, you cosmoline the entire [half-track] like you cosmoline your gun, you cosmoline the truck, and what that means is, you put this grease over all parts that can be effected by water, so that no water can come in, so that the motor can run. ... So, I don't know how long it took for that half-track [to get ashore], ... but, all this stuff on the [LST], your guns, your half-tracks, all the equipment must be taken off. So, we finally got them off, but, that was something, watching that half-track slowly sink.

SSH: Where were you when this was happening?

CM: On deck, watching it, kind of laughing. In a way, you know, "Hey, we're [here]." A lot of funny things happened.

SSH: How long did it take you to get this done?

CM: I think it took us ten hours. ...

KP: How many hours were you at the shore?

CM: ... We hit shore about five p.m.

KP: Your mission was anti-aircraft?

CM: Yes.

KP: What was the battery's?

CM: ... We didn't get into position until that evening, that night. We have to dig our gun in, first experience. Italy does not have rain for, I don't know what period of time. The ground is as hard as you can imagine. Now, ... we're digging our gun in, we didn't get too much sleep the night before. ... So, now, we have to dig into this cement hard dirt. ... It is hard, let me put it this way. So, I have a pitchfork, no, excuse me, a pick, and I'd get little pieces of dirt about this big. It must be, by now, one o'clock in the morning, two o'clock in the morning, hard to believe, but, I fell asleep picking. I woke up and I'm still [picking]. Now, if that's possible, believe me, I never thought, but, it happened. We finally got our gun in, I think, something about five or six in the morning, only to have to move it before noon.

SSH: When you left North Africa, you knew you were part of the invasion force.

CM: Oh, yes.

SSH: How long before you actually went out did you know?

CM: ... They moved us to an area and my friend, Joe Ruffo again, says, ... "Hey, Chuck, while we are waiting and while we're not doing anything, let's grow your hair again." So, every day

now, he'd lather up ... and shave my head. [laughter] So, I say we were there maybe a week or so before we got our [orders]. ... Then, they took us on a truck and put us on board.

SSH: So, did it seem like a large amount of people at that point?

CM: No, still no, at that point, 'cause each one of us was on a different ship, see, and I don't know whether the entire force came from Oran, because there were a large number of ships in Oran, but, there was a larger number in the fleet, so, they could've come from some port, about two hundred miles east.

SSH: As you were coming across the water, did you realize was happening or did you not?

CM: Yeah, it was a good-sized force, all right.

SSH: What kind of air cover did you have?

CM: I don't recall having any air cover, really, but, I'm quite sure we did. The night before we are to land, we got the aircraft alert, but, nothing serious happened.

SSH: Was there any bombardment prior to the landing?

CM: Not that I can recall. The invasion was funny though. ... When you see the NBC documentary invasion of Italy, and you see the whole hour program, ... you will see a plane coming out of the sun, got hit, going down. That's one of ours. The boats, or ships, in the ocean shot at anything coming in from the sun, because they can't recognize it, and this one came in from the sun. First plane we shot at, you talk about airplane recognition, was a Spitfire. We got seventeen rounds off, and he started to move his wings, and I said, "Hey, I think he's trying to tell us something." [laughter] So, we stopped.

KP: How soon after the invasion was this?

CM: We got strafed the first day. It was the second ... day.

SSH: How long was it until you had to move your gun again?

CM: Oh, ... the next time we moved the gun, if you see the *Invasion of Italy*, you will see a burned out truck, ... that's our truck. We're positioning our gun along the shore. We're in a minefield, we don't even know it. Oh, yes, and ... the sand is very deep, ... so, I'm in back of the truck, and somebody else is in back of the truck. ... We don't have a full gun crew now, okay, on the invasion, we had eight people, we're pushing this truck as hard as we can, we have [not] had too much sleep, and we're cranky and everything else, "Come on, push." ... All of a sudden, I'm flat down on the ground. ... I jumped up, I thought somebody hit me. I'm trying to figure out why. I look up and the cab is burning. ... I look around and I'm the only one around. I guess they all took off. So, I see somebody over there, and I say, "Hey, where's Steve?" Steve is the driver of the truck and the cab is in flames. I said, "Hey, we can't leave Steve in there." ... So, I

ran, opened up the door to get him out, not because I'm a hero or anything, but, because it's my moral obligation to do that. He opened the other door and took off, and, again, there we are in something of a serious situation, and I have to laugh. I never, in my life and to this day, saw anybody run as fast and took such long leaps in my whole life. He just took off and went. I'm there laughing and I said, "Well, at least he's okay." So, I see Steve at one of our reunions. I said, "Steve, I haven't heard from you in forty or fifty years." I said, "Steve, I'm glad to see you," and I related what I saw, and he said, "Hey, when you were as frightened as I am, ... anything can happen." So, there he was.

KP: So, no one was hurt from that mine?

CM: Yes, there were.

KP: Were there any fatalities?

CM: No, no, nobody. ... I think there were four people left in our gun crew. We lost everything and that's my next ... two experiences. Jerry Sirkin and myself, since we got nothing to do now, we [had] no truck, no nothing, we're laying down in the sand, and there is this terrible smell, this stench, and I said, "Jerry, there's gotta be a dead German, or a dead Jerry, around here someplace." ... I looked all around, I couldn't find nothing. It was his feet and his feet stunk that bad. So, if you ever see one of those Mauldin cartoons in the war, where they're coming off the side of the ship on an invasion and one guy says to the other, "Next time you hit the water, swish your feet a little bit," believe it. ... In that same minefield, this is an experience, Lefty comes over, he was from headquarters, it's funny, you remember certain things, you don't remember others, so, he says, "Hey, Chuck, let's take a look around." This will show you how smart we are. We're in a minefield, "let's take a look around."

SSH: So, what kind of equipment was left?

CM: Nothing.

SSH: You did not have anything?

CM: Nothing, no. So, I said, "Why not?" ... So, we're walking in this minefield, looking around. All of a sudden, I step on this mine, it's a teller mine, and has a grid like this on the top. ... I felt the impression on my right foot. Now, it only takes two hundred pounds for that thing to detonate, and I hit it, and I said, "Jerry, I just stepped on a mine." He says, "You're full of [it]." ... I said, "I'll show you." Took my bayonet and dug around it, "There it is." It then dawned on me, I should have blown up, ... and, now, I can't move, I'm paralyzed. [laughter] So, I fall down on my hands and knees. ... Now, I take out my bayonet, probe, and I finally crawl out of there. I don't know how long it took me, but, boy, what an experience, all because we acted, ... shall we say, in an untrained or an unknowledgeable way.

SSH: So, how much time has passed since all this has happened?

CM: All day, same day. So, ... Lefty takes off. He didn't want any part of it either.

KP: How many days were you there?

CM: I don't really recall. Not too many, I guarantee you that.

KP: How often did you move?

CM: Oh, you moved ... regularly. You wouldn't stay in a place more than one or two days. You're always digging and always moving. Always digging and always moving.

SSH: After you pulled out of the minefield, was there a rendezvous place? How did you know where you were going to go?

CM: Lefty from headquarters came and got us.

SSH: Right. ...

[Tape Paused]

KP: I guess we left you in Italy and you were telling us some stories, one about stepping on the mine, and about your vehicle with all your equipment exploding because of a teller mine, and your firing on a Spitfire.

CM: This was on the invasion, second day. Fired seventeen rounds and it was amazing. We didn't knock any planes down.

KP: You said you were moving a lot during the first few months of the campaign. What type of people were you attached to, an air wing?

CM: Originally, we were attached to the 36th Texas Division, ... and then, basically, we would be attached to field artillery units, and they were vulnerable to attack, so, we would protect them against any aircraft that may come in. At this time, Germany was having less and less aircraft that could come in and do any strafing or bombing.

KP: How often would you see German aircraft and fire at it?

CM: Oh, very infrequently, really. ... After a while, they disbanded the whole [effort]. They tried different tactics with the ... gun crews, and then, converted us [into] infantry, because we weren't seeing that many Germans coming over.

KP: Did your gun crew ever shoot a German airplane down?

CM: One, just one.

KP: What year was it?

CM: I think it was in August in '44. Took us that long before we got one and not long thereafter, we got converted to infantry, really.

SSH: How far had you progressed at that point, from the landings in September?

KP: Until they disbanded your unit.

CM: We were close to Bologna. ... Bologna is up above ... Rome. It's above Sienna. ... I guess it's on a line with Florence, Italy, but, a little bit to the right, and that's when we got converted to infantry.

KP: What was your sense of the Italian people and what were they like?

CM: I'll give you my impression of Italy when we hit Salerno, the Bay of Salerno. We saw this old Roman building. I just stood there in awe. Wow, really, ... and then, the people in Italy, they talked a lot about what they consider Partisans, which were the people who, supposedly, were fighting the Germans, undercover-like. They were most ineffective. Now, my impression of the Italian people was that we, as Americans, instead of being liberators, we acted as if we were conquerors, that we were superior to them. I didn't think that was right at all, but, that's the way the soldiers were, and I'm saying, "We're the freers?" ... I think that the German troops treated the Italian people better than we did, because I can recall going into a town in which, unfortunately, we killed a couple of Germans, and the people were very broken hearted that we were coming in, liberating them. They didn't think very highly of it.

KP: Would you say that a lot of Americans thought they were conquerors instead of liberators?

CM: Well, that was our whole attitude about the way we treated the people.

SSH: Were the Italians considered the enemy?

CM: No, they were just considered inferior people, unfortunately. ... Maybe I'm strange, but, I couldn't help but feel compassion for these people. They had a war, their buildings were bombed, there were no factories that I could see running, and, yet, they had to live. ... I felt so sorry. Now, there weren't too many men around, but, I felt so sorry for the young ladies. ... What could they do to survive? There's only one thing that, basically, they could do, unfortunately. ... I look back and ... war is rotten. War is terrible.

KP: How did you arrive at that conclusion?

CM: Well, ... how do you live. ... The young women who have children, how do they support the children? It's a shame. It's a real shame. It's heartbreaking, but, that's the way it was, all right?

SSH: Did you encounter any Italian troops at all?

CM: No.

KP: After the invasion, how close were you to the front?

CM: Oh, we would always be about five or ten miles behind. We were really in no great danger. I never considered ourselves to be, neither do I consider field artillery to be. The danger is [in] the infantry. ... We found that out when we got converted. Now, before we got converted into infantry, General Mark Clark, who I consider to be a "horse's ass," in quotes, ... said that it would be a good idea if they would make the anti-aircraft forty millimeter guns [into] anti-tank guns. Now, a forty-millimeter gun has two wheels in the front, two wheels in the back, ... [and] is pulled by a truck. When it gets into position, you put the outriggers down and you make a position. It has to be towed by a truck. It has to be towed, can't be pushed, not over terrain, but, they decided that they would bring our unit into the front lines. Picture it, if you can picture it. Where they did it was on the Rapido River, and the Rapido River, ... I'm thinking, what was the ...

KP: Monte Cassino.

CM: Monte Cassino was here, and you could see Monte Cassino, [and the] the Rapido River [was] in front, here. Germans were all over there and we're coming in with a truck, a huge truck, an Army truck, you know what an Army truck is, pulling this forty-millimeter gun. The infantry is dug in over here and they said, "Where the f__ are you guys going?" We said, "We're going," ... He said, "You gotta be crazy. You're out of your mind." ... I was pretty good with cuss words those days. So, we ... put our forty-millimeter up there and, all of a sudden, we're under fire, 'cause we're exposed. We're supposed to be standing up, just like we are here, on the ground, shooting at tanks that are coming at us. They're armed with a nice armored tank, ... we're completely exposed. So, all of a sudden, we abandon our forty-millimeter. We take cover. So, somehow, the truck never got hit. I don't understand why it never got hit. We go back. They decided, maybe, that was a (faux pas?), right? I'll call it a (faux pas?), right. So, we're going back now, and the guys said, the same guys that we passed going the other way, "Well, that didn't last long, did it?" So, now, we got the forty-millimeter up there, all right, so, orders come down that said, "All those forty-millimeters have to be retrieved." [laughter] So, now, we got to go up there and retrieve them. Now, we're smart enough that we are not going to retrieve them in the daytime, 'cause we already had that bad experience, and so, we're out there that night, and we finally got the forty-millimeter, and we took it back. Now, how could anybody in his right mind, and I kid you not, ... conceive that this is going to be a tremendous anti-tank gun.

KP: Was that your first experience on the line itself?

CM: Well, except for the invasion.

KP: The actual invasion.

CM: The answer is yes.

SSH: What kind of trajectory did you set?

CM: Well, you have to hit straight on, and the question came up that our gun barrel could only go so low, ... and you can't dig in, because you got to be mobile. Nobody got killed, though.

KP: Really?

CM: Nobody got hit. I can't believe it.

SSH: Did you get to fire at all?

CM: No, heck no. How could we? Now, the infantry, ... you get [in] the infantry, you can dig a foxhole. ... I just can't believe it. The more I think of it, the more I can't believe it.

KP: So, this was abandoned?

CM: It sure was abandoned. I'm surprised it wasn't written up any place.

KP: That is why we are doing this oral history. Speaking of Mark Clark, you were not the first to criticize Mark Clark.

CM: He was stupid.

KP: What did you and the other men in the unit think about him?

CM: I never discussed it.

KP: Really.

CM: No, because I look at Anzio, my brother was in Anzio, when they took Anzio, they went all the way up to Rome, then, they pulled back to Anzio. This is like forty miles. Who would order such a thing? Then, they're in Anzio. Now, Anzio is here, eight miles in length, I think about eight miles. Germans up in the mountains. They could cover every inch of where the Americans were. Now, if they had our supplies, there wouldn't have been one live American soldier there. Unfortunately, or fortunately, they didn't have, depending on which side, our supplies. I couldn't consider him bright at all.

SSH: How many of the forty-millimeter guns were left on the front?

CM: I really don't know, okay. Our battery did, ... that was eight, that I know of.

SSH: Did you have any cover at all?

CM: None, ... none at all. We were in an exposed truck and a forty-millimeter on [the back]. ...

SSH: How far back did you take them?

CM: About five miles or so, from where we started.

SSH: How soon after that were you converted to infantry?

CM: Well, I guess within a month.

SSH: Do you know what happened to the guns that were there?

CM: I haven't the faintest idea.

KP: When were you converted to infantry?

CM: Later part of the Fall of '44.

KP: Did you get any additional training?

CM: Well, in-house training. We got nobody from any infantry regiment or infantry division to train us, and I can recall Captain Pace, who I was on the bad list [with], saying, "Anybody here know anything about it?" I say, "Yeah, my brother was in the infantry." "Oh, fine." He told me, "Big deal." ... That was our infantry training. ... So, we got into infantry.

SSH: They did not send you anybody who would know what to do?

KP: They did not take you out for two weeks and go somewhere for training?

CM: Nobody from any infantry outfit.

SSH: What about communications, nothing?

CM: No.

KP: Where was your first experience as an infantryman?

CM: ... Let's see, where was our first? I think our first infantry assignment was Mount (Belvedere?), and we were in a holding front then, ... and we didn't see much action there at all. It was in the wintertime and it was so cold that, when you had your hand or your machine gun, your hands froze, you know, stuck to it. ... Then, after we left there, we went to the east coast, where we went up from (La Spezia?) to Genoa, all the way up to San Remo.

SSH: So, you marched across Italy?

CM: Yes.

SSH: What kind of supplies and communications did you have?

CM: Well, if an infantry person could receive a hot meal and hot coffee, nice place to sleep, you wouldn't mind it too much, ... being shot at, but, believe me, ... it was nothing. For example, I can recall, in the winter, wow, you ate C-rations out of a can, and you scraped the fat off, and you ate it all, that was it. You did or you didn't eat it, all right. ... Now, it comes back to that teacher in high school, where are you going to sleep? ... February, it's snowing and raining and I'm in a foxhole, water is that deep. ... So, I got some limbs or something, I put it down so that I would at least [be dry], ... the question of the lesser of two evils. So, you get these limbs poking you in your back or you get to sleep in the cold water. So, you take the limbs, right? It's not a good time.

KP: It sounds like you got more meals while you were in the anti-aircraft.

CM: Got hot meals three times a day. They delivered [it] to the gun crew in a container. You got hot coffee, you got a hot meal, [it] wasn't a bad life.

KP: Where did you sleep, in a foxhole?

CM: No, you slept in a tent, 'cause you were pretty far back, like the field artillery. ... They had the same thing.

KP: What about showering? How often would you get a shower?

CM: Not often.

KP: Not often?

CM: No, not often. When you went on R-and-R, which was not that often, or, every once in a while, the truck would come and say, "Okay, now, we're gonna take you," and they'd take you to a place, you'd take a shower, get a change of clothes. ...

KP: Did you ever make it to any tourist destinations, like Rome?

CM: Oh, yes. ... Yes, we were in Rome. We made Rome. I'm trying to figure out, we made Rome because we were outside of Rome, we had a sergeant, we were in the anti-aircraft, he was good. He said, "You're entitled to one day off a week." Hey, that was pretty good. ... If you wanted to read a book, you read a book. If you wanted to just loaf, you loafed. If you wanted to go someplace, now, that was tricky, ... going someplace. So, I would go. One day, I received a V-letter from a wounded soldier in a hospital in Leghorn (Livorno) that my brother, George, was in the bed next to him and was hit very badly. George was in the Seventh Armored Infantry and was hit by a Jerry .88.

We were outside of Bologna, it was my “day off.” To make it official, I went to Battery Headquarters to get a pass, but, was refused.

Since it was my day off, I took off, bummed a ride all the way to the hospital in Leghorn. That evening, I’m bumming a ride back and got into an ammo truck. I said, “Where are you going?” He says, “Out to Bologna.” I said, “Great.” To this day, I tell you, the Lord looked after me. It was foggy, it was night, you can’t have any lights on out there, ... I don’t know where I am, but, I felt, after three or four hours, we must be pretty close. I’ll be darned if I don’t hear our gun crew talking. They’re moving, so, I holler out, “Hey.” They stop the truck, I get off, and we move out that night.

KP: Otherwise, you would have been separated from your unit.

CM: Boy, then, he really would’ve given it to me. And then, it was shortly after that that we got converted to infantry.

KP: Did anyone in your anti-aircraft unit get killed or seriously wounded?

CM: Except for the invasion, no.

KP: Except for the invasion?

CM: No, not really, because, except for the invasion, we were strafed infrequently.

KP: You mentioned you went to services in the Army.

CM: We had a chaplain that would come in and visit our gun crew. ... Surprising, he was a Protestant chaplain. Never saw the Catholic chaplain. At that time, I considered myself to be Catholic, not that I was a good Catholic. I think I was more Protestant. So, all of us would listen and go to ... his service. ... He was a very nice gentleman. So, they would come to our gun crew and hold services. ...

SSH: Do you remember the names of any of the chaplains?

CM: No, I don’t remember the chaplain’s name.

SSH: When you were going to see your brother, were you basically just bumming rides off of whatever truck passed by?

CM: With whatever truck that came. I don’t know how we ever found the place. I was very good with directions, for some reason. Got there and back.

SSH: Was your brother surprised to see you?

CM: Very much so.

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

CM: It was awful. Every time he'd move, his bones crackled and he would moan. ...

SSH: So, you were just able to get back to your unit?

CM: That's all, yeah.

SSH: Where was your other brother serving?

CM: In the Pacific.

KP: Did your brother in the Pacific ever write to you?

CM: Very infrequently.

KP: You did not know what was going on in his life?

CM: No. I guess I didn't write to him either.

KP: Your other brother was in Italy. How did you know where he was?

CM: He sent me a V-letter and we met several times thereafter. Then, one day, I got a letter from his company, after they came back from the front, saying he had been injured. So, I thought I would get his belongings. ... They took 'em all. All his buddies took 'em all. There wasn't anything left, clothes or whatever he had. He had a German Luger, some other good things, ... trophies that he picked up. They were gone, took 'em all. As a matter-of-fact, after George was hit on the battlefield, his buddies thought that he was dying and robbed him of his wallet and money, "nice bunch."

SSH: How much longer did he have to stay before he was sent back to the States?

CM: When was he sent back? ... I can't recall what month he was sent back, but, he'll tell you that.

SSH: When you found your unit, at that point, had any of you talked about trophies? Was there a lot of collecting going on?

CM: Not really. No, ... there wasn't anything to collect, for we were not on the front.

SSH: You talked about being impressed by the ancient Roman building as you traveled up through Italy. Did you see anything else?

CM: Outside of Rome, oh, gee, it was great, you know, these great, big aqueducts and all of those things, and outside of Naples. ... I was quite impressed. That was the first time I saw women, outside of Rome, jumping on grapes. Really, I couldn't believe it. "What are you guys doing?" I could talk, not fluent Italian, but, ... I would rate myself a C-minus as far as Italian is concerned. ...

SSH: Where did you pick that up?

CM: You pick it up yourself.

SSH: You did not study it at all?

CM: I talked to a lot of Italian people over there. You know, they were nice, really. ... [I] would ask them, "What is this? What is that? What is something else?" and they would tell you. Now, I wasn't ... able to give it in the proper tenses, like, present, but, I came pretty close.

SSH: So, did you find yourself doing anything on your days off? It is amazing you even had a day off.

CM: Right. I would read a book or ... fall asleep.

KP: Where did you get the books from?

CM: I don't know. ... We got books for some reason. We had a lot of books.

KP: You do not remember where they came from?

CM: No. I don't remember.

SSH: Were there any USOs following you around?

CM: No, ... in the major cities, when you had a day off, we would go to the cites. We'd go to the USO. It was nice, though. We were able to get a good cup of coffee and ice cream. For heaven's sake, that was wonderful, and a doughnut. You had to pay for it all, but, it was great, just being able to get that, and then, they had some kind of amusements.

KP: Did you get to go to any USO shows?

CM: Every once in a while, ... you know, for the troops, ... they would bring in entertainment. ... The singer was Ella Logan, that was her name. She was a recording singer. That's the only one that I remember, and then, there were Army bands. They would have singers and they were pretty good. We enjoyed the big crowd.

SSH: How much news did you hear from home about what was going on in the States?

CM: Not that much, because we had no radios.

SSH: Were you aware of what going on in the Pacific or any other theaters?

CM: I would say so. Yes, because we got the Army newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*, and they would bring us up to date. So, we knew what was going on out there. They also had some good cartoons.

KP: Sounds like, from your experiences, that you had it pretty good with the artillery, but, you had it good compared to a lot of the infantry.

CM: Absolutely, absolutely, and, of course, the infantry lineman, ... that's a terrible life. The people in the back, like in company headquarters, even though they're in infantry, they have a pretty good life. Like field artillery and anti-aircraft, there's a big difference between that and the infantry. An infantry person, his life is one hell of a life. Now, a tank man, his life is not a very good life either, if he's combating tankers. ... It was getting so that Jerry didn't have that many tanks, either, but, it's still a hell of a life, because, in the winter time, the tanks are so cold, you freeze. In the summer time, they're so hot. That's not a very good life at all. Armored infantry, that's the roughest, I think, because they come in half-tracks and they push them to get to troubled areas fast.

KP: You got three hot meals a day and you had easy access to coffee.

CM: In the infantry, on the front, you get no hot meals. Well, you missed it. Let me tell you, you missed it, ... because you get up in the morning, if it's winter time. You get up in the morning, if you're on the march, you're freezing, and then, as you go on, you get warm, ... then, at night, you freeze again. You got to bed freezing, you get up freezing, but, in-between, sound asleep, amazing.

SSH: How fast did you move forward, once you became an infantry person?

CM: Well, in the beginning, in Italy, it was a holding line, ... and then, when you started to move, I guess in February, March, and April, May, then, you start to move pretty fast, because we had a superior Air Force, we had a superior artillery force. We'd be able to give the Germans a beating before we'd go in to advance. Now, when you're on a push, first day I'm ever on a push, I said to myself, "This is stupid." Gosh, you're walking, they're shooting at you, and you've got the field artillery. It's like the 4th of July for keeps. [laughter] You know what I'm saying? ... Two experiences, this is when H Company was ahead of us. Now, we're relieving H Company, because H Company ... [was] getting hit pretty hard, all right. We're outside of (La Spezia?), in Italy, which is on the east coast, and they got a German fortress in the harbor of La Spezia. They were throwing these really heavy naval guns at us. Now, these were big guns. It's funny, machine guns don't seem to bother you. What bothers [you is] artillery, because, when they hit, they make a big hole and they throw shrapnel [around]. ... I guess most everybody had the same perception, I could tell ... just by the sound of the projectile, where the shot was about to land.

“Don’t even worry about that one. That one is going to go there,” but, these naval shells were aimed at us, okay, because we were coming up the hill and were in their range. ...

SSH: Were you coming up a hill?

CM: Oh, there’s a lot of hills in [Italy]. ... Downhill, uphill the next, ... they may not be the biggest in the world, but, they are the most in the world, I tell you. The hills are terraced. We’re relieving H Company, and I hear this crack. Now, I don’t know how long it takes before you hear the crack, okay, because sound travels faster than the projectile, but, I could count forty-two before the explosion, and I hear this one, I said, “God, this is mine.” I started praying. Now, I’m on a terrace. ... On a terrace, they would have wheat here, wheat here, and they’d have olive trees in between. I said, “God, this is mine,” and I started counting. I didn’t know I could do, all this in counting to forty-two, but, I said the Lord’s Prayer, I said Hail Marys, I said the Apostle’s Creed, I said the Twenty-third Psalm. Today, if I were to do that, I wouldn’t be able to finish one, ... okay, counting forty-two, but, it was like something was pulling it out of my brain or something, all right? And then, all of a sudden, a voice said to me, this is how I know there is a God. It said, “Chuck, I want you to lead a sin-free life.” Out of the blue, “I want you to lead a sin-free life,” and I’m counting, see. I say, “Lord, ... I can’t promise you that.” Then, I said to the Lord something about, “Lord, you know, I don’t think my mom would like it if something would happen to me.” I still didn’t just have the guts to say, “Lord, I just don’t want to die,” and he said, again, “Chuck, I want you to lead a sin-free life.” That terminology, I never heard. I said, “God, I can’t promise that.” I said, “I just don’t want to die,” and I think saying that, and being honest saved me, and I’m still counting forty-two. See where your coat is over there, that is where it landed, a projectile the size of a 500-pound bomb.

KP: Just a few feet away?

CM: Right over there. I’m covered with mud, I’m covered with sulfur smoke. First thing I do is I feel my legs, my arms, breathe a little to see if I were alive, or if I was [in] heaven, or wherever. I said, “Thank you, God.” You know, I made a deal with him. I didn’t change too much in Italy, but, when I came back to the USA, I did. I can’t steal, I will not lie. I feel that if I do anything wrong, I’m betraying the Lord, because, really, I should be dead, ... but, you know, I didn’t even get a concussion, nothing.

SSH: Nothing

CM: No, I didn’t, nothing, crazy. I heard the voice one more time. Boy, the Lord and my guardian angel are keeping me out of harm’s way. I’m working for Burroughs Corporation, putting in computers. [While] putting a computer in the First National Bank of Englewood, [I] worked the day before something like twenty hours, started that morning at six. Six o’clock the next morning, we finally got the computer up. I was in charge of computers for the region, for the district, rather. Don Reardon was the gentleman who was the technical support. We’re leaving, we’re driving in my 1963 Mercury station wagon. We’re near Exit 11 on the Turnpike. I’m talking to Don, just like I’m talking to you, except I’m looking straight ahead, doing sixty-five miles an hour. Next thing I know, I hear a voice that says, “Chuck, Chuck, Chuck,” and

then, I wake up. First thing, I want to see is where I'm driving, 'cause ... the first thing I'm concerned about, did I hit somebody? Do you know what I'm saying? I didn't want to kill [anyone]. ... If I did, oh, gosh. So, I said to Don, "Thank you, Don." Guess what, he was sound asleep. I hit him in the ribs, "I said, hey, Don, I gotta tell you this." He said, "I'm going home to Mass." [laughter] I don't know whether that was interesting or not, but, these were true experiences, so help me.

SSH: In Italy, after this point, did your experience change any perceptions that you had?

CM: I knew that when I got back off the line, I knew there was no way that I was going to stay in camp, that I was going to go in[to] town and see if [I could] find a woman or something, and I knew I couldn't make that promise to the Lord, no how, all right? You know the funny part of it is that, since I've been here, in America, after the war, never have I been unfaithful to my wife. I couldn't possibly be unfaithful without feeling that I betrayed the Lord, what a betrayal. How could I do it to him, right? I couldn't do it to him. Now, I know this is not a war story, but, this is it, all right?

KP: You had a pretty safe experience after Salerno, right?

CM: I would have to say, yes, absolutely, all right? ...

KP: While you were on the line, losing people, how many of your original group did you lose?

CM: Well, ... after that, we made an attack. Unfortunately, we were on a flat plateau, the mountain's here, Jerry's throwing everything at us. He's throwing more. ... Again, this is our experience. ... We are there, point for our battalion, our squad, and they're throwing the kitchen sink at us, and, finally, they pin us down. When we got back, there were just two of us left. Now, all of them weren't killed, don't get me wrong. What I can recall, this young soldier, never have I seen anyone with such great fear, ... oh, gosh, and rightfully so, because, to be out there by yourself, with the banging of the field mortars. We thought nobody was there, okay, and they were just waiting for us, and nobody backed us up, not a soul. So, we had to come back. ... As far as infantry, we were well prepared. Baloney, okay, we didn't know from bananas.

KP: So, while you were infantry, how many replacements did you get?

CM: I don't know, but, we got quite a few replacements, all right? We got a lot of replacements. Now, I couldn't tell you how many were killed or not, okay. ...

KP: It sounds like it became a more common sight.

CM: Oh, yes, indeed, and the funny part of it is, ... now, we got replacements during and after. It's funny, the replacements that we have after, you know, would describe experiences on the front that they never experienced. And, they said, "Chuck, isn't that right?" I'm looking at the guy and I don't know whether to say, you know, ... he wasn't even in the outfit at the time.

KP: He had sort of absorbed all the stories.

CM: He absorbed all the stories, that is correct.

KP: It must have been hard to see members of the original unit get killed.

CM: Maybe this is callous, but, it wasn't really that hard.

KP: Really?

CM: No, because I think you expected it. You're just hoping it ain't you. I use the word ain't, but, ... I think the gentleman that I felt the sorriest for, we were in the mountains in Italy. Just before we made our push, we were in a holding [line]. We were making a raid at night, because the Germans were in a certain area we were going to be [attacking]. ... Sergeant (Carnaghan?), he was the guy who was going to be leading the patrol, it was a combat patrol, and we screwed it up. Our own man thought that Sergeant (Carnaghan?) was a German and shot him right between the eyes. You know what, on the firing range, that guy couldn't hit bananas. That was the saddest thing, 'cause Sergeant (Carnaghan?) was one fine person. He was married, never betrayed his wife. He was great. ... That was the first casualty that I recall. It was sad.

KP: This was your sergeant?

CM: This was a sergeant of a different platoon.

SSH: What happened to the guy who did the shooting?

CM: I really don't know and I say I really don't know because I didn't see him afterwards. Hey, I guess it was just one of those things.

SSH: There was no investigation?

CM: No, how could you? ... It was at night. ...

KP: When you were on the line, how often would you fire?

CM: Not often, not really, okay? That's the funny part of it.

SSH: Did you ever physically see the Germans that you hit?

CM: No, they were always at a distance. If they were killed, you would come across the bodies or they would come across our bodies, if they were coming back, but, they never come back at us, okay? ... What was very unfair, two things, we made the invasion of Italy, two soldiers in our battery, okay, went AWOL ... you know what their punishment was? Thirty days

KP. They goofed off in Africa.

SSH: They did not come with the invasion force?

CM: They made it clear they weren't going to be in the invasion, thirty days KP. After the war, a gentleman by the name of Martinez, very good soldier, he was in my platoon, I said, "My platoon," remember that. After the fighting, he took off for two weeks, he met a nice, young lady, they prosecute him for deserting. This guy never even missed one day of fighting. The fighting was over. I didn't think it was fair.

KP: What happened to him?

CM: We heard that he got ten years.

SSH: So, you asked the question, "my platoon" ...

CM: Oh, my favorite, Captain Pace, now, he's company commander. Oh, yeah, ... he's company commander. ... Now, they made me squad leader. In a platoon, you have eight squads. I'm now squad leader. They would put me in positions that were really unbelievable. For example, they put me in a place where I'm five miles from one post and three miles from another, and I got twelve men here, including myself, okay, and we're by ourselves. So, we relieve the 92nd Infantry Division, or the Black Division. They had a whole platoon of men there. I had one squad when we relieved them. ... They would have a whole company and we would have a platoon. It's true. ... One night, we got raided. Jerry came down and thought we were in another house. We were in this house, but, they bombed the other, and I said, "Call on the telephone. We have to maintain the," in other words, "the clearance," to make sure that supplies from one post would get up to the other post. So, I call in and I said that we're being raided. "They think we're in the other building." He says, "Fine, we will put artillery on your position." I said, "You're telling me that if they don't kill us, you're going to kill us with your artillery?" He says, "That's tough shit soldier, but, that's how it is," Captain Crawford. So, he said, "But, I want you to go out and I want you to investigate." So, now, I take my men, at least half of them, anyhow, and go out and investigate what they are doing up there. Okay, the building is ablaze up there. Sure enough, they have this whole building, in the front, mined and they had a machine gun nest in front of it. Fortunately, they abandoned the machine gun nest. When we come to the mines, I said, "That's it, we're going back." So, we went back, called them up, and said, "They're gone." I said, "We hit mines. ... They abandoned their machine gun nest in front of the building." "Good work, soldier."

SSH: Just routine stuff.

CM: Same captain called up our company, I'm still on the Captain's list here, and headquarters called me up, and said, "You have to lead a patrol," that night. Now, we made a patrol raid in the day time. They said, "We think we did something, but, we want you to go out to make sure they are not restoring their machine gun nests, and the mortars, and everything else." So, I said, "Okay." They call me and I got to lead them. The moon is beautiful. I take my squad and we now start to go. So, we come down this mountain, we're walking through a wheat field. There's

a stream alongside, and there's this hill on the other side, and Jerry is digging in a machine gun nest on the top, a rock comes down and we think it's a hand grenade, that they spotted us. So, we say, "Duck!" nothing. ... So, we go all the way around, my two scouts up in front, and I'm coming behind them, and here in this field, there is an area a little bigger than my fist that is not green. Another area is not green, another area is not green, and they walk over them. There's only one thing in here. These are Shoe mines. A Shoe mine [is] designated to blow your leg off or ... blow your elbow off, if you are crawling. So, these two guy are up there and they're in the middle of this minefield. I said, "Hold it, minefield." They didn't hear. "Minefield!" Well, now, everybody heard, "minefield," including the Germans. ... The Germans are in front of us, too, ... and, all of a sudden, we hear the clicking of the machine guns. ... So, I said, "We're in a minefield," right. So, I go up to these two guys and I said, "Look, follow me, okay." So, I take my bayonet and prod our way out. So, they all said to me, "Mick, we've gotta go back." I said, "No way, we're still gonna go," 'till I come to these mines again, and I said, "You know, you guys are right, you're right." ... They're in no mood to. They're ... frightened and I ain't particularly brave either, at this particular time, because, if we went forward and they started [to] open [fire] now, what do we do? So, I go back. I go to the captain, at battalion headquarters, and he is not one of the bravest guys in the world, I'll tell you right now. He's in this building with walls like this. "Captain." "Report." "Yes, sir." I give him a report. I tell him of the rocks coming down. ... He said, "Soldier?" "Yes, sir?" He said, "I know I'm not you, but, if I were you, what I would've done is take my men and climbed over that mountain, that hill. I would've blown that machine gun nest out with my hand grenades." This guy was not, believe me, ... the bravest man in the world. So, I said to him, "Well, the men were a bit shaken up. ... Two of them crawled over mines, should've blown up." I said, "This was not, I don't think, the proper time to do any climbing and blowing up." So, I said, "But, I'll tell you what, if you decide that you want to lead a patrol, I will be the first one to volunteer to back you up." I'm still waiting.

KP: So, your captain was not the one.

CM: That was not our captain. That was from the battalion.

KP: That was from the battalion.

CM: ... He was not a hero, but, you know, you look at it and you laugh at some of these things. We had a big laugh when we got back.

SSH: You had a good laugh there?

CM: Not there, but, afterwards, yeah. See, he really couldn't court-martial me, because I said I would be the first to volunteer. He knew I was giving it to him. That was my problem, I was just too [sarcastic]. ...

KP: Did you ever take any German prisoners?

CM: Yeah.

KP: How often would that happen?

CM: Not too often. The one I particularly remember, he was wounded, ... I can recall, we were ... kind of compassionate with him, really. After all, he got hurt, we had people hurt in the same raid. ... So, we were taking his bandage off, very gently, and he says, "Stop." ... Pulled the bandage off of himself and said, in English, "We can put sulfur on the wounds." I'll never forget that. It's just that he was tough. Then, I don't know, see what happens, ... you don't know what happens with anything after that. Or, if and when any of your buddies get hurt, you don't know what happened with them.

KP: How good were the medics?

CM: I think they were good, yes.

KP: So, I get a sense that if you were wounded, you felt that you would get the best treatment.

CM: They would give you the best care they could, yes. The corpsmen were up in the front with us, I know that. Do you know what a high burst is?

KP: I think it is aimed at the trees.

CM: It's aim and burst, okay, and they were shooting in high burst, and, again, these were terraces, and I was here, and they were shooting high bursts, and the medic was up here, and he jumped down and landed on my head. I ended up with a spinal fusion, fifteen years later. Oh, God, did that hurt, but, he was there to give us attention. That was the wrong attention, but, he was there.

KP: Did you ever get wounded at all? It sounds like you got out of the war all right.

CM: No, remember, I told you I need a knee replacement? That happened in Italy.

KP: When was this?

CM: Oh, no. It was a series of things, okay? ... When you advance, you don't walk in a straight line and the terrain is very rough. Well, it was a series of twisting my left knee, all right, and it was this big, and I'd have the medic tape it up from one end to another end, so that at least I could walk, but, I did a lot of damage to it, really.

KP: So, in some ways, you are still paying for the cost of war?

CM: Lieutenant Pace, now, is a retired general, he was at one of our reunion meetings. He said, "You have no idea how much war and, especially, infantry can take out of a person. You pay for it." And, the answer is, "yes." I'm gonna have to [have] knee replacement. ... You were asking about food and the difference between food in the artillery and the anti-aircraft as compared when you eat [in the infantry]. When I was eating all this cold stuff, when we would go through

any town or past any building, I would see if it was possible to trade my C-ration for a piece of cheese or a piece of bread, because this stuff was giving me heartburn like you wouldn't believe, right. ... They thought it was great, because they could warm it up and get some meat and beans, whatever it was we were having, but, it was awful, bad as far as our part is concerned.

KP: You mentioned you got very little training throughout the war.

CM: Very little.

KP: It sounds like you learned quite a bit.

CM: It's survival.

KP: What sort of things did you learn to survive? One was clearing mines, that you learned.

CM: Oh, boy, do you learn fast, okay, and I think that the thing that brought that to [my] attention was when I stepped on a mine, but, that was a teller mine. That was a mine to blowup a vehicle or a tank, but, these little Shoe mines were something else. We were in Belvedere and we were relieved by the 10th Mountain Division. Here was this field, and some of their soldiers walked in the field, and lo and behold, it's a minefield. So, bang, one leg goes off, another leg goes off, and then, a flock of soldiers run out there to help 'em. Now, we have massive blowups. So, somebody said, "Hey, enough is enough." So, you don't need too many of those. ... When you see somebody's leg blown off, that puts reality into it and knowing you can do [nothing] about it, it's gone, but, Jerry had other kinds of mines. They had Bouncing Bettys, mines with wire [running] across that you could trip, or from one tree to another tree with something hanging, so, if you hit it here, the thing would explode. There were other devious ways. I guess, now, today, they got mines that make these mines look sick.

KP: Is there anything else, besides mines, that you learned?

CM: Yeah, I learned field artillery, ... you know, those shells, ... I knew exactly where they would land, and it's funny. ... If anything, I think I was careless, as far as machine guns were concerned, because I wasn't afraid of them for some reason, or hand grenades. I can still see the hand grenade bouncing down, ... 'cause, you know, the Germans had these funny looking things, ... potato mashers, and ever since that incident where we didn't kill a chicken.

SSH: Did you spend most nights in a foxhole?

CM: Not really, no.

SSH: You stayed in buildings?

CM: No, you know, sometimes, you don't have time or you say, "I'm too tired. I'm not going to dig a foxhole." That almost killed me.

KP: What happened?

CM: 'Cause I had a shell land about six feet from me, really.

KP: You did not get hit?

CM: No, I slept right through it. "Where did that come from?" right, but, I could sleep at night. It gets you so tired.

KP: So, you were able to sleep on the line?

CM: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

KP: You were always sound asleep?

CM: Except if somebody walked near me. I'd wake up like that, and that's strange. If anybody walked near me, I'd wake up like that, and ... after I got married, if I heard anything while sleeping in bed, I'd jump up like this. Ready, right? [laughter] I used to scare my wife. Took me I don't know how many years to break that habit, but, once I fell asleep and there was no noise, ... nothing. ...

-----END TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO-----

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Charles Mickett, Jr., on October 24, 1997 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler ...

SSH: Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

KP: This is a simple question, but, one that historians focus on a lot. What did you think of the Germans?

CM: I didn't hate them at all, and that's a surprise, that I didn't hate them. I figure, I'm supposed to shoot him, he's supposed to shoot me. ... It's stupid, but, that's the way it is.

KP: So, it sound like you were very rational about it.

CM: That is correct. Maybe I'm weird, I don't know, ... that's the way I talk about it.

SSH: Were you aware that the war was winding down at any point?

CM: I think we knew that the Germans didn't [have a chance]. We had too much supplies, too much resources, there's no way they could win. They pulled out of Africa. ... In other words, they were moving up [and] out of Italy. It was just a matter of time. ... I'm just surprised it lasted as long as it did.

SSH: How far up into Italy did you go?

CM: All the way up to (San Remo?), against the French border. ... After the war, when we were ... guarding prisoners in Florence, Italy, ... I would go into the prisoner camp, and I would talk to the captain, and they talked very good English. ... Oh, I never did tell you how I became a platoon commander, did I?

SSH: No.

CM: Well, I'll get to that one. Well, anyhow, ... the Captain said, "We are not your enemy. Your enemy, whether you realize or not, it is your ally, Russia. You are going to have tremendous problems with Russia." Okay, this is June of '45. The war is over, I think, in June, and he said, ... "We think you should let us fight Russia. We will eliminate them as your enemy." He said, "You don't have to get involved." I don't know how, to this day, that they could communicate from camp, to camp, to camp. Then, he said, "This is a message your leader should know." As it turned out, he was basically right. ...

KP: At the time, what did you think of this?

CM: I thought he was right.

KP: Really?

CM: Yes, I thought he was right. Yes.

SSH: Where did you take his message?

CM: I think I discussed it, but, it didn't ... go very far. I guess they thought that they would be severely criticized if they put this forth. Unfortunately, I wasn't in a position to put it forth or I would've, really. ...

KP: Now, there is the story of how you became platoon leader.

CM: Oh, I was saying they were putting me in these difficult spots. All of a sudden, our platoon commander got hurt, okay. Now, they need a platoon commander for the First Platoon. So, Captain Pace calls me in and says, ... "Sergeant, I'm making you First Platoon commander." I didn't know why he called me in, okay. I said, "Oh?" "Got anything to say?" I said, "Yeah, you hate my guts, why are you making me First Platoon commander?" He said, "Dismissed." [Laughter] That was it, but, you know, it was the job that I did in these places that he put me [into], and, fortunately, the war ended. By the way, Captain Pace was a good officer, but, he just hated my guts.

SSH: How aware were you about what was going on in the Pacific at that point?

CM: Oh, they asked, afterward, whether or not you wanted, you know, [to go there]. ...
[Laughter] What a joke.

SSH: They asked?

CM: Oh, yes, they did, they did.

KP: You had probably had enough of the war by then.

CM: Right, I had. I was overseas. ... I was overseas for pretty close to three years, because ... all my time in the Army was overseas, basically.

KP: So, you were not worried about going to Japan?

CM: No, not at all.

KP: You were asked if you would like to go?

CM: Oh, yes. ...

KP: Did they ask if you wanted to stay on in the Army?

CM: Oh, sure. I'm sure they did, yes.

SSH: What did you think of Florence?

CM: I liked Florence. Yeah, I did.

SSH: How was the harbor protected? Was it in any way fortified?

CM: No, I didn't notice any damage there, either. Sienna was nice, Pisa was nice, although the only thing in Pisa was the Leaning Tower, really. It's nice, but, I was not too impressed. I don't know why. Florence, that's something else. Rome was nice. ... You were asking about how I met my wife. You mentioned bus, that's what reminded [me] of her.

SSH: How so?

CM: Well, ... we went to Franklin Park School. Now, here's the Lincoln Highway, this is Middlesex County, this is Somerset County. At that time, since this was Franklin Park, all of the children went to Franklin Park school. Then, all of a sudden, there was a decision. Middlesex County [children] will not go to Somerset County schools, but, she was there, I guess for about a year. That was the first time I saw her. Well, I think I saw her maybe once or twice, after that, then, I got this job working at Camp Kilmer and I rode the bus to Camp Kilmer from my house on Lincoln Highway. My wife, at this time, was working for Johnson and Johnson. So, I would sit behind the driver and Paul, the driver, would give me his newspaper. So, I would read ... *The*

Daily News. Frances sat next to me and I said, “Well, do you want to share the paper?” [laughter] So, for the time that I was [at Camp Kilmer], and I guess it must have been five months or so, we would share the paper every morning. ... Big sport, right, that I would share [the] paper that I borrowed, but, I never thought that anything great would happen from this, but, we communicated, I wrote her once in a while, she wrote me once in a while. Then, after the war, I was going to Rutgers, she was still working at Johnson and Johnson. I met her on the bus again. So, we took off. From there on, we got engaged and we got married, big spender. We still kid about that, ... how much money I spent on her. [laughter]

SSH: Did you have the same bus driver?

CM: Yeah, it was Paul. ...

SSH: How long were you in Italy after the war's end before you could return home? How did you come back? You were in Florence.

CM: [The port of] debarkation was Naples. So, we came out of Naples. ... [It] took us, I think, twenty days to get back.

KP: How long were you in Italy after V-E Day?

CM: We sailed [at the] end of September.

KP: So, after the war, you were not really there for very long?

CM: No, we were there, what? June, July, August, September. ...

KP: What did you do in that time?

CM: What did we do in that time? Bored stiff. We did calisthenics in the morning, we did all the things we should have done in basic training, like learn how to take a rifle apart, learn how to put a rifle together, learn how to make a strap. All right, I learned the nomenclature of all the parts. Now, the bad part of it was that, here I am now, the acting platoon commander, and I'm supposed to be directing all of this. I don't know the first thing about all of this, because I never had it, and we got a lot of replacements with new lieutenants that, you know, [knew] hot shot stuff, ... and they expected us to do all of this stuff. ...

KP: What did you think of the hot shots?

CM: As a matter-of-fact, we got one lieutenant replacement. ... He changed a lot, okay. ... We're going on a patrol and we're supposed to have a password. I guess the only time I heard a password was in, I guess, the first three days of our invasion. One of them was 'mace,' and whatever the others were, I don't remember. So, all of a sudden, we're on this patrol and he introduces a password. None of us ever used a password in our life, okay. So, we're on this patrol, I'm second in command, and, ... somehow or other, we get separated a little bit, and I hear

this noise, and I said, "Who is there?" So, he wants me to give him the password. So, I figured it had to be him, who else would be dumb enough, all right? So, I said, "Lieutenant Gardner." He said, "Yeah." So, I said, "You know what?" I said, "I almost shot you." So, he said, "Why didn't you give me the password?" I said, "We haven't had a password [in] like, say, maybe a year. ... Ask anybody in the patrol, 'Do we know a password?'" I said, "We're not used to it." Anyway, I forgot the password because we never used it before. So, he said, "Oh." So, I don't think we had passwords anymore. We'd have like the guy in front of you and let's say his name is "Lou." You'd either get an answer or you don't, all right.

KP: Did you do any sightseeing at this time? Did you manage to organize a trip?

CM: I never had an Army organized trip, no, no way.

KP: Nothing?

CM: Nothing, nothing like that.

KP: No athletic teams?

CM: No athletic teams, nothing.

SSH: [Question unknown]

CM: Really? ... Well, he wasn't in the infantry. ... They treated them like dog faces, that's what they called them. That was it. They treated them like dog faces.

SSH: Where were you discharged?

CM: Dix

KP: How did that feel?

CM: Very nice, very nice, and I had a suntan like you couldn't believe.

SSH: What did you come back on?

CM: An old Victory ship. It took us twenty days, or something, and we'd sit out there and get a tan. As a matter-of-fact, when I was calling on my wife, her mother and father died. She was raised by her grandmother and grandfather, who had no use for me, because I was taking their daughter, or granddaughter, away, and, in a way, she was their support. So, believe me, I was dark. So, I'm there, she says to me, this grandma, "Don't you ever wash? You're so black and dirty." [laughter] ... But, that's what I did. We got big tans.

KP: Did anyone ever give you a VD talk?

CM: The answer was, no, but, we had short arm inspections.

KP: Did you ever consider remaining in the military?

CM: I knew I didn't want to stay, didn't want any part of it. Now, the lieutenant, he became a captain, stayed, became a general, General Pace.

KP: You do not speak too highly of him.

CM: Well, I don't. In other words, last time I saw him, he didn't bother me. We talked. I'm sure I didn't want to remind him of the hard time he gave me and he didn't want to remind me of the hard time I had. We got along all right, really. He was a good officer, but, never forgave me.

SSH: When did you decide to go to Rutgers?

CM: Before I left the Army.

KP: When did you learn about the GI Bill?

CM: I don't remember when I learned about the GI Bill. I don't remember where I learned it from. ... I think they must have told me something about it in Kilmer, or in Dix, but, I was in Kilmer, and then, they sent me to Dix.

KP: I remember you mentioned that you were relieved, at one point, by black troops.

CM: Yeah.

KP: Do you have any contact with black troops while you were overseas?

CM: I hope you [don't] consider this as me being prejudiced or anything. My first impression of blacks troops, we first saw them when we were coming up to the front line. They were part of the 92nd Division stationed in the rear. I can remember saying, "Boy, I feel sorry for the Germans," for they were carrying their tommy-guns, rifles, carbines, and making all kinds of noises. I really thought that these guys must be real mean fighters. I was never so disappointed in my life. They were rotten soldiers.

For example, we relieved a company of troops in one area with a platoon of men. One of their platoon commanders said, "It's late and I'm tired. I'll stay here 'til morning. By the way, where is the rest of your company?" We said, "We only have a platoon." He couldn't get out of there fast enough.

Another example, in a house a couple of hundred yards ahead of the position we just moved into, a black platoon of approximately fifty men were positioned. It was a holding front and they were to maintain security by patrolling the area, but, what they did was put two soldiers outside of the building, "guarding it," while the rest of the platoon stayed inside, "safety in numbers," making

all kinds of noises. Jerry came up one night and blew the place apart. Rumor had it that they were still buried in the rubble when we got there and they were still there when we left.

... As a matter-of-fact, the Fifth Army ... pulled the whole 92nd Division off the front line. They were that bad. Now, you didn't ask this, but, the 442nd Division, which was the Japanese regiment, we were the 473rd Infantry Regiment, we're both attached to the Fifth Army. Now, they were outstandingly good. They were short people. They carried those mortars and ran up those hills. They put us to shame, almost. I'm telling you, they were great soldiers. They were so proud and great that they made a movie about their outfit.

KP: How often did you see them in action? How close were you?

CM: We were right next to them. We were buddies.

KP: You got to see them a lot.

CM: Yeah. So, ... in other words, they were good, they were good. That reminds me of one other thing that I have to tell you. In this area, we were coming up, and the Germans thought that we were in this town, they shelled it, and this is what is so unfair in war. ... When we came through, I could still hear the screaming and the cries of wounded kids and the wounded women. Oh, gosh, and I looked up in the sky and said, "God, why? Why? Why? Why can't you do this to us? These people, ... they're innocent, really. We're the soldiers." I didn't get an answer, of course, but, that's when you know. ... I just hope we never see [a war like that again]. ...

SSH: Did you help in any way?

CM: No, because we're on a push. What could we do? No, I don't know what happened to them. Before we entered, they were fine. When we left, [they got hit]. ...

KP: You were still in Europe when they dropped the atomic bomb.

CM: Yeah.

KP: How did you hear about it?

CM: The paper, *Stars and Stripes*.

SSH: Were you surprised?

CM: Not really.

SSH: You expected it to happen?

CM: I guess we didn't realize the implications, ... the impact of it, all right. I guess that was the thing.

KP: Did you come back with your unit or did you come back by yourself?

CM: ... We came back with the 88th Field Artillery, I think.

KP: But, you came back together?

CM: Most of us came back together. ... Yeah, we came back not as [the] 473rd Infantry Regiment, we came back as [the] 88th Field Artillery. ... That's what's on my discharge. The first I had ever heard of 88th Field Artillery, right. Who were they?

SSH: How long were you at Dix before you were allowed to leave?

CM: Well, I was only at Dix two days, I guess, and they sent me over to Camp Kilmer.

SSH: How long were you at Camp Kilmer?

CM: I guess, maybe, five days or something, a very, very short time.

SSH: How did your parents react?

CM: ... We came back in October, cold as heck. ... My mother and my father, in the three years of which I was away, had aged quite a bit, quite a bit.

KP: Do you think it was because of the stress of having three sons in the service?

CM: Most of it, ... because, at that time, they were, maybe, in their fifties, and they lived to be a hundred, but, they aged in those three years a heck of a lot. My father didn't age too much afterward. He looked pretty good. That's too bad. ...

SSH: What was your first goal when you got back?

CM: I guess to get a college degree.

SSH: Did you already have your applications filled out?

CM: No, I started from scratch. I decided to go to Rutgers.

KP: When did you arrive at Rutgers?

CM: November, I took a short semester, until the regular semester began. I think I took two subjects.

KP: You were back at school in November, 1945.

CM: Right.

KP: What was it like to be at school after the war?

CM: As if nothing [had] happened.

KP: Really?

CM: Yeah, as if nothing happened. That's strange, that it was as if nothing happened.

SSH: You were going to school during the day and traveling in the morning?

CM: That's right.

SSH: Did you notice any changes at Rutgers at all?

CM: I didn't. No, I didn't. ... (Valentine?) was there, the library, basically the same, but, it sure has changed. Now, I look out there and I can't believe it.

KP: Did you ever talk about the war when you came back?

CM: Not really, no.

KP: My impression is that the veterans on campus did not talk much about the war.

CM: No, no.

KP: Did you tell any anecdotes?

CM: If I discussed anything, it's a funny one, like a hand grenade, ... you know, when you get a laugh or you did something stupid, okay. ...

KP: Did you join the American Veterans Committee or the American Legion when you got back?

CM: No, as a matter-of-fact, I didn't join any until about, maybe, ten years ago, at the most, ... Disabled Veterans and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

SSH: When you came back to Rutgers, did you come back as a freshman with the idea that you would just do the whole thing over?

CM: When I came in, I tried to get as many credits as I could from going to Rider, and the Rutgers Evening School, which I did, okay. ... I came in November, '45, and I graduated, August of '47.

SSH: You have done quite well in your career.

CM: Yeah, well.

SSH: What was your degree?

CM: It was a Bachelor of Arts in Economics.

SSH: Did you work at all while going to school?

CM: No. I still kid my wife about how she supported me when I went to Rutgers. She was a secretary over at Johnson and Johnson.

SSH: Now, you were traveling on the bus together. Did you date until you graduated or did you marry before?

CM: I married her in June. We got engaged in April of '46, we got married in June of '46. We lived on Nichols Avenue, which is opposite Cook College. We had one room and kitchen privileges, that's what we had.

KP: Was that very scary?

CM: It was scary, my gosh. This was an Irish family and the name was Drury. They were nice people, and Fran and I, when we first got married, didn't go to church, see, and they were Catholics that went to church every Sunday, see. Finally, Fran and I decided we would go to church. We went to the Livingston Avenue Reform Church, which is on the corner of Suydam and Livingston Avenue. We went to church and when we got back from church that first Sunday, she greeted us, "I'm so glad you went to church," because why? Because she couldn't explain to her children, "How come they had to go and we didn't have to go?" and it was a good thing we went, because we have been going to church ever since.

KP: You were fairly active, I read in the yearbook.

CM: Yes.

KP: What did you participate in?

CM: I especially liked debating. ... That was good because I liked arguing. When we were home, we always argued. The one who argued the loudest always won, not that you were right or wrong. ... So, my brother, George, and I do this to this day, okay. He'll say to me, like, "Just 'cause you're loud." I'll say, "Just 'cause you're loud," all right. ... I can't press upon you the home life that we had. We're broke as anything. ... My father, I think, is the one that spread the love around. He was great. Oh, I gotta tell you, in April of '46, when I came, how I bought my wife an engagement ring.

SSH: In '46?

CM: Yeah, here in '46. I'm home, we're going to Rutgers, and I told my mother and father, "Mom, I'm engaged." She says, "You're what?" [Laughter] I said, "I'm engaged, I'm gonna get married." You never saw such an irate person in your life. So mad, she took all my clothes, which wasn't very much, threw them outside, said, "You go with them." [Laughter] True, true. I grabbed my clothes and I put them back. "No," she was mad. I mean, if she had a stick, she would've hit me. My father, God bless him, said, "Charley, you promise me one thing?" I said, "What, Pop?" "You'll finish college." I said, "I promise, Pop." He said, "That's it." That was the end of it.

SSH: Had they met your wife?

CM: No. [Laughter]. So, I brought my wife. Now, ... we still live in this little, old house. That's all we have, all right, no bathroom, and my mother is not a very good housekeeper. So, I bring my wife to meet my mother and father in this environment. She still can't get over why I didn't clean this house up, but, they liked her. ... [laughter]

SSH: Had your brother gotten out before you?

CM: Which one?

SSH: The older one.

CM: The older one. You see, my brother, now, George, yes, he was, as I said, wounded, and he would come home regularly.

SSH: Your other brother was serving in the Pacific?

CM: Yes, he came back, he met this girl. I don't know how, I guess he was at Quantico ... [with the] Marines, and he met this girl, and he got engaged, and got married. So, he never really did come back, okay.

SSH: What else did you do at the university? I mean, about your debate, the louder wins.

CM: That's about it, okay.

KP: You also joined a fraternity?

CM: No, I did, but, it's not the fraternity that I'm listed at. It's at the fraternity ... that I joined at night school, and that was, we didn't have a fraternity house at all, but, we'd have meetings. We did a lot of good things.

KP: This was the fraternity you were in?

CM: After I got out of the Army and got married, I led a good and clean life, at least I think so, like when I was active in community affairs. I was elected to the Board of Education and to the Township Committee.

While I was running for office, on several occasions, I was offered a goodly amount of money supposedly, "to cover election expenses," but, after my, "infantry sin no more experience," there was no way that I could accept it. They read my refusal and said, "There is nothing bad with taking a little. Everybody expects you to get your share, but, what is bad is when you get too greedy and want too much." Strange thing, the offer was not made by folks from my party, but, from folks from the other party.

SSH: Oh, my.

CM: No, you see, in politics, I've learned one thing. They don't really care who is in as long as they can influence him. You can be Democrat, Republican, as long as they can influence you. At least that's my opinion, interesting.

SSH: When you graduated from Rutgers, you were still living on Nichols?

CM: Nichols Avenue. Yes.

SSH: Nichols Avenue?

CM: Yes.

SSH: Then, where did you go?

CM: Burroughs.

KP: How long were you with Burroughs?

CM: Forty years.

KP: That is a long time.

CM: Yes.

SSH: Did you move out of the room on Nichols Avenue right to where you live now?

CM: No. From Nichols Avenue, we went to a place on (Codwise?) Avenue, which is, ... I guess, Kilmer Avenue now, because we were a good influence on that family. I guess Fran and I made so much noise making love that they made love, too, and they got a child. [laughter] So, they needed our room. ... So, we moved to Codwise Avenue, and then, we moved to some other places, and, finally, we bought the place out in East Brunswick.

SSH: How many children did you and Fran have?

CM: Two, I have a boy and a girl.

SSH: Are they still in the area?

CM: No, one of them is in Oklahoma City and the other is in Kansas City.

SSH: Did they go to Rutgers?

CM: No. One of them went to Rider College and graduated with an MA in education from Bridgeport University, and my daughter, ... she got her doctorate in Minnesota. She graduated from [the] University of New Hampshire.

SSH: After you got your degree, did you ever think of going back for an advanced degree?

CM: I should have, but, I didn't.

SSH: So, when did you get into computers? I mean, you were at Burroughs for forty years.

CM: Well, Burroughs got into computers in 1960, so, I got into computers. They were in business machines and computers. They got into other good things as well.

SSH: When did you go into politics?

CM: Oh, that was a long time ago. That was in 1962, when Kennedy was running.

KP: There was an article in the *Home News*, it talked about you running for the committee and that you were the leader of the fight against building the Garden Apartments in East Brunswick.

CM: Well, not only Garden Apartments. Okay, East Brunswick, when I moved to East Brunswick, we had five thousand people. East Brunswick started to grow very rapidly. Taxes on my house, before I moved in, was ninety-six dollars a year. ... It was a hundred and twenty-eight dollars when I moved in. Taxes were going up and up. In ten years, taxes had multiplied by a factor of six. So, I decided to run for the Township Committee in order to hold down the escalating tax rate.

While I was on the Board of Education, I learned a lot about educational cost factors. I figured out the average cost per student, which included new building costs, bond amortization, salaries, supplies, transportation, etc.

I determined the average number of students per family and the revenue we would receive from the average new home being built.

The builders would brag about all the new rateables they were bringing into the community, but, in reality, the taxes on the new homes couldn't even begin to pay their educational costs.

So, at a Township Committee meeting, I began to explain that, "The principal reason our taxes are escalating is because of the new homes being built in our town. These homes average slightly over two children per home and these children coming in require education. You have to build schools, you have to provide education, you have to provide teachers, etc." ... I said that, "Taxes that we get today from each new home is only half of what is required to educate that family." So, I said, "We have to put a moratorium on building until we get something to offset this deficit and this would be industry of some kind. Now, I don't want big industry," but, I said, "we ought to have some kind of a medium or light industry. Now, when we get a balance," I said, ... "we can expand," and I said, "That is very doable and that's very reasonable." So, the next thing you know, there's an article in the paper saying, "Mickett is against childhood." "Mickett is against children." ... Then, I see the article in the paper, "Mickett considers families with more than two children as second rate." ... I mean, they had it organized. I was a Republican, they had all these Democratic people putting in these [articles]. So, at that particular time, the editor of the *Sentinel* and I were talking. We were buddies. ... I'm stopping over there, he's saying to me, "Chuck, I know what you are trying to say." He said, "I happen to agree with you." Now, there wasn't a builder in all East Brunswick who was on my side, I'm gonna tell you this right now. They thought that I should have never gotten elected. ... So, he says, "You got to do something, because no matter what you say, if you say it too loud, they'll think, 'Where there's smoking, there's fire,' okay. You gotta do something that will kill this." So, we stomped and we stomped and we thought and we thought. Finally, he came up with this idea, "Why don't you go to one of your parishioners, or one of your Republican households, and get as many children as you can. We'll come in with a photographer and we'll take your picture." So, I'm sitting in this big chair, a youngster here on one leg and a youngster there, one hanging on my foot here and there, one on my shoulder, and I've got them all around. They take a picture and they show the picture on the front page of the *Sentinel*, "Mickett and Motherhood." [Laughter] Guess what? That was the end of the whole bit, right.

KP: Your stay in politics sounds like it was a short-lived one.

CM: It was a short-lived one because, at that particular time, Burroughs was getting [in]to computers. So, all of a sudden, I was the computer supervisor for the entire New York district. This included Connecticut, New Jersey, and, next thing you know, unlike the Army, they sent me out to the coast to get some training on computers and all these other good things. I am away from our town for training and supervising almost fifty percent of my time. ...

SSH: So, your job constraints made you resign from politics.

CM: That was right. Oh, I would've loved to [have] stayed and fought another fight. Oh, boy.

SSH: Had you been on the school board and the town council?

CM: Just one at a time.

KP: You were part of computers when they were just starting.

CM: ... That is correct.

KP: That must have been very exciting.

CM: It was, it really was. That is ... when I told you about when our chairman of the board came up with this product, ... called the Visible Record Computer. Right now, all the information you have is stored on tapes, and on disks, and other forms of memory, okay. ... Since he had a banking background, and the banks loved to see a ledger card, and they like to see the record in front of them, he didn't think that the bankers would want a transition to tape, where you could see nothing. ... He figured that you would like to have an automated ledger card. That is what he came up with, an automated ledger card. It would feed automatically. It would read the information automatically, but, update a ledger card. Slower than molasses, okay, ... prone to jams, a lot of things. That is why I told him, "Hey, we're in deep trouble." I was right. We wrote off I don't know how many millions of dollars worth of equipment that they built and development costs, right. I was so hoping that he would be right, so I would say, "Yes, that's why you are the CEO," and then, get back in his good graces. It didn't work that way.

KP: What happened? You called the product VRC?

CM: VRC.

KP: What happened to the chairman? Did he recoup from that?

CM: He recouped from that. As a matter-of-fact, ... he came out with a lot of good products, really. The first computer that put the first Atlas missile into the air was a Burroughs computer. It was sort of a first, ... a fail-safe computer. It was two computers operating with one database. In case one went down, the other one would take over, all right. ... He came up with that. ... The unfortunate part about it, the Burroughs Corporation, I say this in all sincerity, Burroughs had more good stuff than IBM, but, they had the sales force, they had the size, and they had a good sales approach, where we didn't. We had the product and they say, "if you build a better mousetrap, they'll come." Forget it. Ray Eppert was replaced by a man named Ray McDonald, and McDonald took a lot of his credit, and he made the corporation go way up, and then, it came down again. Now, it's going up again.

SSH: When did you retire from Unisys?

CM: '86

SSH: Did you continue consulting afterwards?

CM: Yes, I consulted for Unisys for three years, and then, for Chemical Bank. At Chemical Bank, I consulted for Joe DeSimone, vice-president in charge of advanced electronic branch

service development. Joe used to work for me at Burroughs. He was what I consider to be brilliant, but, not too tactful. We were well on our way to developing the “staffless branch,” when, because of severe loan and acquisition losses, they did away with “future development” in order to continue today’s operations.

-----END TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE-----

SSH: How involved did you stay with Rutgers, in the alumni, once you graduated?

CM: Well, I became their class president about fifteen years ago or so, and I got that, I guess, thrown upon me, because ... I volunteered for the phone-a-thon. So, I guess, four times a year, I would come here and call all my classmates, most of which are not really good givers, ... because they’re war people, and they came in [on the GI Bill], and [the] Class of ‘47 is a class that had roots in ‘42, ‘43, ‘44, and all the way up to [‘47]. ... They will say, “I really belong in,” “I don’t belong,” and so forth, and those that graduated were, after the war, ... in here to get their education and get out.

SSH: Did you find that being involved in Rutgers and the community has made it easier for you, being from the area?

CM: Yeah, oh, yeah. ... I think our ... fiftieth anniversary, you know, that was a very, very fine group meeting. The association was good, it was so friendly. I can’t believe there was nobody picking on anybody. Believe me, it was outstandingly good. It was a, ... you know, nice group.

KP: You mentioned how well you all got along. Were there any divisions here on campus?

CM: Oh, sure.

KP: What were some of them?

CM: I guess ... different individuals who wanted to be the leaders, and then, we had some causes.

KP: What were the causes?

CM: One of the causes, if I recall correctly, ... a little one was on the communist drive.

KP: You had some active communists?

CM: A little bit, not that great, but, I was surprised, after the war, that we would see this, okay. You know what surprised me, when I came back from the war, ... I felt we dedicated our lives, ... to hear advertising, when we came back on the boat, we listened to the radio, WNEW, and they had “Make-Believe Ballroom,” and then, they had all this advertising. I couldn’t stand the advertising. I didn’t think that was American. Then, after a while, you get acclimated, right?

SSH: So, did you and Fran go to any of the dances and things?

CM: We went to every football game, every basketball game. We lived in Nichols Avenue, way out there. We had no car, so, [if] we went to a basketball game, we had to walk. If it rained, it rained, but, hey, we didn't mind it. We did not mind it a bit.

SSH: You said Fran was raised by her grandparents. Were they still living when you got married?

CM: Oh, yes.

SSH: Did they live here in New Brunswick?

CM: They lived in Franklin Park, on the corner of Deans Lane. The house has been torn down, but, it was Deans Lane.

SSH: Did you notice a big expansion on campus as the GIs started coming back?

CM: Yeah, but, ... I don't think today I realized just how much Rutgers has expanded. ... In other words, I haven't grasped ... the extent of how great this university is.

SSH: I think it is really huge.

CM: ... The unfortunate part about it, a lousy football team, a lousy ladies basketball team, and, you know, lousy sports records have taken away from the credibility of Rutgers, and that's unfortunate. In other words, I hear a lot, "How can you pay \$400,000 for that [coach]. Best, highest paid, and what has she done? Bring disgrace to Rutgers." Not, "Hey, look at all the good things Rutgers is doing." You don't hear that. "Look at the football team, oh, God." The thing that is surprising, though, and they showed this in the *Star Ledger* the other day, [is] that the SATs for our athletes was most disappointing. I always read ... we are in the first ten of universities in the country that graduate athletes, but, I don't think I'd want a university with a lot of athletes that can't read or write. I don't think that's fair.

SSH: Not fair to the others?

CM: Not fair to the university for someone to come to the microphone and say, "Duh," etc.

KP: Is there anything we forgot to ask you?

CM: I don't know, we covered everything, didn't we?

SSH: Pretty much.

KP: You mentioned you used to watch a lot of movies, but, were there any movies that accurately depicted some of your experiences?

CM: I didn't give it much thought, really, because if it's a war movie ...

KP: You do not like to watch war films?

CM: I don't watch it. ... They'll show you how dumb the Germans are, and, actually, they were good soldiers. ... I hate to say it, but, if they had our resources, oh. Anyhow, but, they show us, ... we're so good, they're so bad. We're so honorable and they're not honorable, because, when we think of all the bombing we did in Germany, flattening out all those cities, I don't think that's too honorable. It's inhuman, but, I guess that's war.

KP: Have you ever been back to Italy?

CM: No, but, we've been talking about it and I'm trying to get my brother, George, who was in Italy, and his wife. Now, his wife wants to go back. I want to go and my wife wants to go, but, I can't get my brother, George, to go, okay. So, when he agrees, and it better be soon, because we're going to be too old, ... you know what I'm saying, but, ... I'd like to go back, take a look at it, to see how much nicer it is now. Now, I've been back to London. London looks pretty nice.

KP: What did you think, at the time, of the Korean and Vietnam Wars?

CM: No, I didn't have a thought about it. Only thing I thought about was Ted Williams being called back and some of the other ballplayers. That's how much I thought about it. Ruined his career, because Ted was such a great ballplayer, but, he wasn't very [good after Korea]. ...

KP: What about Vietnam?

CM: Well, in both cases, they're the bad guys, we're the good guys. ... It's just unfortunate that so many people got hurt and killed. I don't know who won that one, really.

SSH: Were you ever concerned about your son?

CM: Yeah, sure, absolutely.

SSH: Did he enlist during that time?

CM: No, he didn't, and I'm glad he didn't, ... 'cause I don't know what would have happened, because when you look at it, a lot of bad things happened to the people. You know, in our case, when we were over in Europe, they didn't have any drugs. ... The only thing they had was wine, okay. You could become an alcoholic, maybe, and some of them did, really, but, over there, it's a different ball of wax.

SSH: Since you have come back to the States, and gotten your education, and worked with a good company ...

CM: Good company. It's so good that they haven't given us a raise in my pension in ten years and not only that, they cut out our hospitalization. That was sort of guaranteed, but, they cut it off. I now have to pay my hospitalization cost.

SSH: Okay, I will take that remark back.

CM: Since I have worked for this company?

SSH: What has been your passion? What has really kept your interest? Do you have a hobby? I mean, it sounds like you are active in your church.

CM: Well, I am active in my church. I'm more active. I help my wife in the crisis room. We do Meals On Wheels. I have a garden. I play golf, when my knees permit it. I like to go fishing. ... We like to, you know, go to art museums, occasional plays. There are really not enough hours. I can't understand how, when I worked, I was able to do all these things, and, now, there's not enough time to do all these things. ... I can't figure it out, but, it's true. Of course, I didn't play golf, I didn't go fishing all those times.

SSH: Is there anything you would like to leave with the archives, a message about what we talked about?

CM: Yeah, ... with my whole heart, I hope that we will never ever have another one [world war], 'cause that would be disastrous. That would be destruction like we've never seen and the suffering would be, oh. ...

KP: Thank you very much.

SSH: Thank you so much.

CM: Glad to do it.

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

Reviewed by Bojan Stefanovic 11/24/99

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 11/27/99

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 12/3/99

Reviewed by Charles Mickett 3/00