

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAYMOND A. SHIPLEY

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Raymond A. Shipley in Totowa, New Jersey, on November 5, 2004, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

Jason Kulak: Jason Kulak ...

Kenneth Karnas: and Ken Karnas.

SI: Mr. Shipley, thank you very much for having us here today. To begin, could you tell us where and when you were born?

Raymond Shipley: I was born May 27, 1924, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

SI: Could you tell us where your father was from and what he did for a living?

RS: My dad was from Nottingham, England, and he was a lace weaver.

SI: Do you know why he came to the United States?

RS: The trade over there was real bad and they were bringing the machines over to the United States. He came over then, in the early part of the 1900s.

SI: From what I understand, lace weaving is a very specialized trade.

RS: Yes, it was. They made lace for dresses at the time, and then, they made the lace for the lingerie, yes.

SI: Do you know how he got into that profession? Was it a family profession?

RS: Not really. ... There was a lot of manufacturing over there of lace and, as a kid, he got a job in the mill and just worked himself up to a weaver.

SI: Do you know approximately how old he was when he came over?

RS: No, that, you got me. It was funny. He used to change his age, because he was afraid they wouldn't give him his driver's license, and so, I really didn't know, actually, the correct age [he] was. The first time he came over, he landed in Boston. Then, he had to go back, and then, the second time he came over, he landed at Ellis Island. His records, my nephew traced [them] and, when he came back into Ellis Island, that was listed and everything there.

SI: Do you have any idea why he had to go back?

RS: Yes. His wife, ... not my mother, his first wife was sick and he had four daughters and he had to go back. Then, she died and he came back over here to work, and then, he met my mother and they got married in New York.

SI: Before we discuss your mother, did he bring your three sisters over?

RS: No, he left them in England, and then, after he married my mother, my mother went back to England and got the girls and brought them over here.

SI: Could you tell us a little bit about your mother's background?

RS: She was from the same town. She was from Nottingham, England, yes, but they didn't know one another in England. They met in the lace trade in New York. My mother was what they used to call a mender. When weavers were running the looms, if they made a hole, the women used to try to put the pattern back in and mend it by hand. So, my mother was doing that and that's how they met.

SI: Both of your parents were from the same town and the same industry. Was that the main industry in Nottingham?

RS: Oh, yes, yes.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about where your parents settled and where you grew up?

RS: Being born in Philly, I don't remember that, because they moved out of there when I was still a baby. We moved to Clifton, New Jersey, and that was ... 1927, yes, around 1927, I guess, and we lived there, because (Van Rawlties?) was in Paterson and my dad got a job lace weaving there. That was a lace outfit. That's why we lived in Clifton.

SI: Did your mother continue to work after she got married?

RS: No, and two of my stepsisters had died, so, there was two left, and then, I had a brother. He was born in Philadelphia, too. We were in Clifton during the Depression, but Dad worked all the time, because the lace industry catered to the higher bracket of people. I mean, it wasn't the poor people that were buying lace dresses and stuff like that. So, they didn't work continuously, but they did work very well. We never suffered like a lot of people did.

SI: Was your father in a union?

RS: Oh, yes, oh, sure.

SI: Was he very active? Do you remember any kind of labor activity?

RS: Oh, they had bad strikes in the early part of the 1900s. They had some rough strikes, yes. I know he was in jail a couple times and stuff, you know, how they used to [arrest them], ... but it was a good union.

SI: There was not much protection for strikers.

RS: Oh, no, no. They didn't have too much trouble with scabs, because it wasn't a job where you could come in off the street and do. The apprenticeship was three years; I know, because I took it. I was a lace weaver, too.

JK: How did the rest of your neighborhood fare during the Depression?

RS: Very bad, yes. ... I know, my dad was a great cook and he used to make big pots of soup and stuff, and then, pass it around, you know. I remember, if you got a couple of pennies, you're on top of the world, but everybody got along, everybody, you know. Nobody had nothing, so, you never worried about it.

SI: Did your parents maintain any Old World traditions from England?

RS: Just the food.

JK: What about religion? Growing up, did you have to go to church all the time?

RS: No, they didn't insist on that. I was brought up as a Protestant and he made us go to Sunday school, until we could decide ourselves whether we wanted to go or whether we didn't. There were no fast rules that you had to go, but just Sunday school, never church, you know, because we were kids.

JK: How long did you live in Clifton?

RS: Let's see, we moved to Connecticut about 1934, 1935, I guess. We moved to Connecticut, again, for work. He got a job up there and we moved up to Connecticut, but, then, we didn't stay there long. We only stayed there about a year. Then we come back to Paterson. We lived in the Lakeview section of Paterson, and then, from Paterson, we moved to Haledon. I graduated from Haledon Grammar School in 1937. I went to Central High School in Paterson. In 1938, we moved up here to Totowa. I still went to the same school, because Totowa went to Central, too. My father got sick in 1939. He got cancer. It started out as appendicitis and, by the time they got him to the hospital, it burst and, when they opened him up, he was full of cancer. So, he only lasted just before Pearl Harbor, and then, [he] died. That's why, my brother and [I], we quit school, because we had to go out and work, you know. At that time, there was no relief at all. I mean, [if] you quit work, you get no money. So, Bill and I went out to work.

KK: Where did you work?

RS: I went to the Caldwell-Wright Airport. I was line service at Caldwell-Wright Airport. My brother, Bill, he worked at a gas station in Clifton, someplace. Well, we had a little gas station here in Totowa, but I was running that and Bill went out and got another job, but it was only a little two-pump joint and it wasn't that great, and then, when the war started, we went out of business, because of there was no gas or nothing, but, before that, we closed up, because it was bad, and I went to get a job. I was better off in the airport. So, I worked up there and, when the war broke out, the FBI came up and fingerprinted everybody, because of [Curtis]-Wrights, and they found out I lied about my age to get the job and I got fired. Yes, I got fired. So, that's when

I went into tractors. I worked for a guy on old farm tractors and stuff, repairing them, and then, I got drafted from there, when I worked for him.

KK: Those jobs were all after Pearl Harbor.

RS: Yes.

SI: Had you worked before you left school? Did you have any part-time jobs?

RS: With the gas station, yes. I went to school and my brother was running the gas station and, when I came off from school, I ran it, you know. That was from 1939 until about 1940, I guess, or something like that. About 1940, we quit.

JK: What was the age difference between you and your brother?

RS: Two years.

JK: He was older.

RS: Yes, he was two years older than me.

JK: Did you graduate from high school in Paterson?

RS: No, I didn't graduate. I quit. I had two-and-a-half years and I quit.

JK: Were you able to pursue any sports while you were there?

RS: No, we didn't have the time. When I was done with school, I had to come home and run the gas station, no sports at all.

SI: Did you have time for any extracurricular activities outside of work and school?

RS: No, that was it. I was not a very good player, anyway.

KK: Were you a good student?

RS: I was pretty good in math, but I was awful in English. I think, in high school, ... *Ivanhoe*, I think I read it four times, for crying out loud, but that was the trouble; I never did read it. Yes, I think it was English 1 or English 2. I must have taken it two or three times, yes, but math, I was all right in math, great in math, and I took a mechanical arts course. So, there wasn't much else, you know, just shops.

SI: You later went into the lace industry.

RS: Yes, after the war.

SI: Did you consider doing it before the war?

RS: No. The reason why I did it after the war is that, being in the hospital in the service, when I come out, they had what they called the Public Law 16 and you had to go down to Hoboken, down to the school in Hoboken. What's the big college in Hoboken?

SI: Stevens? St. Peter's?

RS: No, Stevens Institute. Yes, we had to go there and we took these tests, and then, from the results of the tests, they wanted to put you in the right job, so [that] it wouldn't bother your disability that you had. So, they wanted to put me in the Barbizon factory here, repairing sewing machines. So, in the meantime, friends of my father's and everybody that's still in the lace trade, you know, one, I used to call him Uncle Joe, but he wasn't a relation, and he said, "How would you like to go in the lace trade?" I said, "Well, if they want to put me in fixing sewing machines, I might as well go in the lace trade." So, that's when I worked it out with the government that they would do the same thing for me in the lace trade as they were going to do for me in the sewing machine outfit. This was [that] they paid you so much an hour and the government did it to make up for what the boss paid you, you know, to make it up to a decent living, because I was married. I got married while I was in the service. Yes, so, the government was paying me in this Public Law 16 and they supplied you with tools and whatever you needed for the work you're doing. It was a good deal, that Public Law 16 was, but, then, when you reach a certain amount, then, they stopped. I had three years apprenticeship in the lace trade, but, before the three years, you had to work on the floor, what they call working on the floor. That was around the machines, helping the other weavers, you know, tying beams and stuff. So, then, there was an opening that came up and I got on a machine. Then, it started my three years apprenticeship. The first year, I only got half of my pay. We were on piecework. Whatever you made, you got paid for it, but, because I was an apprentice, the man that took me on his machine with him, he was going to hurt, because I wasn't going to produce as much as, you know, ... a regular weaver. So, he got half my pay for a year. In the second year, it got down to a third. In the third year, it got down to ten percent, and then, after that, you get the full [amount]. So, once I got on the machine, it wasn't too long before I had priced myself out of this Public Law 16. So, then, I was on my own, you know, and the lace trade was a good trade until the 1960s, and then, we didn't work full-time, you know. You worked three days, you know, that kind of stuff. Then, in 1960, I opened the lawnmower business in Totowa here, which was a bad move, because we had a drought for three years and, at that time, there was no snow throwers or none of this other mechanical stuff that they come out with. At that time, it was just push mowers, you know, and they had power mowers, but none of this fancy stuff, so that the only work was in the summertime, and then, you have a drought and nobody is cutting their grass. So, it only lasted six years and I went out of business, and then, I went back in the lace trade again, when I closed the shop up. I went back to work at (Van Rawlties?) and, in 1970, we had a strike. The union had a strike and they settled the strike, but, then, they sold to (Peabody?), which was a big outfit, a conglomerate, at that time. They didn't want any unions. So, they settled with our union and we went on vacation in August. We went on two weeks vacation and, when we came back, the doors were locked. They shut the place right down, while we were on vacation. Then, they moved the machines from Paterson to South Carolina. So, they broke the contract and we were all out of work. They wouldn't hire any union men down in the Carolinas, yes, so, that was the

end of that. So, then, I got a job with the town here in the DPW [Department of Public Works], because of my experience with the lawnmowers and stuff. So, when I first started out, I took care of all the machinery here in town, all the lawnmowers and stuff, and then, eventually, I got on the street sweeper. I was on that for about fifteen years, I guess, and that's where I retired from, from the town.

SI: Back in the 1930s, what did you know about what was happening in Europe?

RS: Not a lot. My dad had a Zenith radio and it had a shortwave in it and he used to listen to the news from England all the time and that's the part I knew about Hitler and that was from my dad listening to the news all the time. When he was sick, he used to turn it on. I can still see him swinging that, it had a big dial on it and he used to swing it. Until Pearl Harbor, we didn't really worry too much about it, you know.

SI: Did you still have relatives in England?

RS: Oh, sure, yes. In fact, all my dad's brothers and sisters were all over there and my mother's relations, too. So, when I was in the hospital in England, in May of 1944, I got a seven-day furlough and I went to Nottingham and I looked up my aunts and my uncles. I found one uncle who had a haberdashery store right in the center of Nottingham and the other uncles were scattered all over. They were somewhere in London and I didn't get to see them, but I spent the full week with my one uncle and an aunt, who was still there. I met her, and then, I met my mother's family. They had what they called the green grocer store. They had the vegetables and greens and everything. So, I met them. That was during the war.

SI: Did they tell you about what life was like in England during the war?

RS: Well, they lived on Spam, I guess, just about all the time and, when I was there, I took them to where I was staying. We had our meals there, twenty-five cents for a meal, and I was allowed to bring my relations in there and we had roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and stuff. They didn't have that and it was really great for them to have it, but they were doing all right, you know. Then, I found out I had a cousin who was in the Brooklyn Navy Yard for eight months. His destroyer, a British destroyer, was in there for repairs for eight months and this Uncle Joe that got me the job in the lace trade, he used to go over there on weekends and get two sailors and bring them back here to Paterson for the day, you know. They had the whole day over here, but he never got one of my cousins and none of us knew that he was even in Brooklyn, you know. I've lost contact with them now. I think two of them are in Australia. I think they went to Australia after the war was over.

SI: Do you remember, before Pearl Harbor, if there were any debates on whether or not we should get involved in the war?

RS: No. We never got involved in that at all, but you didn't have the coverage like you've got today. I mean, all you had was the radio. When you went to the movies, they had the newsreels. You'd see the Japs, you know, coming out of the White House and stuff like that. I mean, as far as that [is concerned], if you didn't read the paper, you really didn't know anything, you know.

JK: Do you remember what you were doing that day when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

RS: I was home. This was on a Sunday. Yes, we were home. That's about it, you know.

JK: What was everyone's reaction to the attack?

RS: Oh, everybody was *gung ho*, oh, yes, everybody, even the older people. They had air raid wardens and stuff like that. We used to have meetings and blackouts, you know. We used to go out and patrol and, if somebody had their window showing light, they'd blow the whistle and, you know, stuff like that. Oh, everybody was into it, yes.

JK: Do you remember FDR's speech after that, the radio message?

RS: Yes, the speeches, really. Everybody listened to his speeches, you know. One of the biggest hardships was gasoline rationing, because you get no gasoline. A civilian had an "A" coupon. I think it allowed him three gallons of gas, and then, the businesses had a "T," I think it was, or something like that, these little coupons that you get, but gasoline was thirteen cents a gallon. Some places even had it for ten and eleven cents a gallon, but you couldn't buy it, because you didn't have any stamps. Food rationing wasn't really that bad. I mean, I don't remember doing without anything, to tell you the truth.

SI: We hear different stories from men who either wanted to run down and enlist right away or wait until they were drafted. You were in a family situation where you had to support your family by working. Was that a conscious decision, to wait until you were drafted?

RS: Oh, yes, oh, sure. Now, my brother, he enlisted in the Air Force, but he knew he was going to get drafted and he wanted to get in the Air Force. He didn't want to just be thrown around like anybody. So, he went down and enlisted in the Air Force. It was just, maybe, a month before he was going to get drafted, anyway, but I waited right until they drafted me. I lived here [in Totowa], but the draft board was in Haledon.

SI: Since the war was on for around two years before you went into the service, did you ever encounter any of the, "Why aren't you in the service, yet?" type sentiment from other people?

JK: Well, you were drafted just as you turned eighteen, right?

RS: No, nineteen. You heard a little bit that there were young people that were in a defense [job] that didn't have to go. They got deferments and there was a little bit of, you know, "Why the hell isn't he [in service]?" and then, stuff like that, you know, but it was like the guys working in Wrights and all that kind of stuff, but not too much, I mean.

JK: You never considered enlisting, like your brother did.

RS: No, because I was living at home still and my mother wasn't working. It was just me, but, then, when I got drafted, then, my mother had to sell the place. She couldn't keep it. So, it was a

little hard on her and she moved into an apartment in Paterson, and then, she went to work. She went to work in Wrights. She was on a coffee wagon, going around with coffee and stuff.

JK: What did she think about you going overseas?

RS: Well, she didn't know I went overseas. She died before I went overseas. She was alive when my brother got sent over, but I wasn't home at the time. I was in the service, too, so, I didn't really know what her feelings were about that. My brother, he went to North Africa with the Air Corps. He was in the 15th Air Corps, so, he went to North Africa, and then, into Italy.

SI: Could you tell us about the process of entering the military, like getting your draft notice and going for your physical?

RS: Yes. You got your first notice. I got my first notice and I had to report to the Haledon board and I got a blood test and stuff like that, and then, I can't remember how long it was before I got notice that I had to report back to the draft board, to go to Newark for a physical. So, we all met at the school in Haledon on Barber Street. We got on a bus, and then, from there, we went down to the Armory in Newark and we had our physical there. Then, after the physical, there were the Marines, the Navy and the Army and you had your papers, your physical papers and everything. You're bare-assed, too, by the way; when you're in line, everything was. So, you went to the Marine and showed him your papers and they'd look at the papers. No, he didn't want you. Then, you went to the Navy and the Navy looked and, no, they didn't want you. So, you got to the Army. He didn't even look, boom, you're it. You were in the Army. Yes, it's no kidding and they said, "Well, you have your choice. You can go any way;" like hell you did. They took who they wanted. So, then, you had seven days from there when you had to report back to your draft [board]. It was like a seven-day furlough, and then, you reported back to your draft board. So, then, seven days later, I'm back to Haledon, and then, off we went. Then, we went to Fort Dix. So, that started it. I was only in Fort Dix for two days and I got called out on a troop train and I ended up at Fort Knox, Kentucky, in the Armored Force for basic training. So, I stayed there until November, I guess it was, yes, November, but it wasn't all basic training. After I got the basic training done, I stayed as what they called an OCS holdover, an officer candidate holdover. So, while you're waiting, they put you in a cadre and ... I was a medium tank instructor, and then, from medium tanks, I went to two-and-a-half ton trucks instructor, and then, I went for an interview for OCS and I failed. So, they put me on a shipping list and I ended up in Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, with the 16th Armored Division. From there, ... they shipped all the privates and PFCs from the 16th Armored and we went to Camp Meade, Maryland, or Fort Meade, Maryland, whatever it was, and then, while I was in Fort Meade, Maryland, they had the invasion, D-Day. From there, we got shipped to Camp Miles Standish, in Massachusetts, that's a Port of Embarkation point, and we left Boston Harbor. We went first to Firth of Clyde in Scotland, and then, from there, we went down to Southampton. We went over to Normandy and we were in a repple-depple, what they called the replacement depots in Normandy. That's where the Fourth Armored broke through St. Lo and they lost a lot of men and they sent back to the repple-depple for replacements and I was one of the replacements. So, that's when I hooked up with the Fourth Armored, when they made the breakthrough at St. Lo.

SI: Before we talk about going into combat, what stands out in your memory about basic training? Was it intense training?

RS: Yes, it was. When you're [nineteen], it was great; there was nothing wrong with it. I mean, it was physical, but I didn't see anything that bad about it, you know.

SI: How was the transition from civilian life to military life? Was it difficult? Did you have any problems?

RS: No, I didn't. I didn't have any problems, but some of them did, I guess, you know. A great bunch of guys, everybody was; we were all the same, you know.

JK: Did you know, during basic training, if you would be going to Europe or the Pacific?

RS: No, you had no idea. You didn't know what you were going to do. You never did. You never knew what kind of a uniform [you would get]. The guys who went to [the] South Pacific, I don't even think they issued them summer clothes or not. You know, ... we had no idea where we were going to go, except we didn't think too much about the South Pacific, because, hopping from island to island, there wasn't much use for armored divisions at that time. I mean, it wasn't that type over there, where, in Europe, it was. North Africa was the first place where they went.

SI: Would you rather have gone to Europe or the Pacific?

RS: I would rather have stayed here, if you really want to know the truth. I'd just as soon stay in Jersey, myself; no, you didn't have any preference or nothing. You couldn't decide. When they needed somebody, if your name was in, there you went. No, you didn't get to ask nothing.

SI: In basic training, were you working with tanks at all?

RS: Oh, yes, not in the basic training, no. We did, at the end, ... we had the vehicles and we went on bivouacs and stuff like that with the vehicle, but, in the beginning, it's mostly just training and marching and learning how to take orders and paying attention, you know. Then, we finally got on the vehicles, but you had more vehicle training, like, when I got to the 16th Armored Division. That was no basic training, that was strictly the training with the division and you did more maneuvers and stuff like that.

SI: You were an instructor before you went to the 16th Armored.

RS: Yes, yes. I was an instructor in Fort Knox.

SI: How did you arrive at that?

RS: Well, I was waiting there as an OCS holdover, waiting to be interviewed to go to officers' training school, and, while keeping you there, they put you to work, naturally. So, they put you in a cadre and the cadre that you replaced got shipped out. They did rolling over.

SI: When you were doing this training with the tanks and the half-tracks, what was your position?

RS: Well, you picked that up in your basic training. You start out in the crew. Then, you end up either as a driver, as the assistant driver and, you know, everybody is a gunner. Everybody fires the weapons, yes.

SI: You were trained to do any job in the vehicle.

RS: Not in basic training, not necessarily. You were, more or less, getting acquainted with it.

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SI: Please, continue.

RS: In the 16th Armored, ... I went to an armored infantry battalion in the 16th Armored and I went to Headquarters Company. Headquarters Company was broken down into a machine gun platoon, a mortar platoon, a recon platoon and headquarters, I think it was, yes. So, I was in the machine gun platoon. Then, you're assigned to a half-track, and then, you get your job from there, you know. They pick a driver and assistant driver and all that kind of stuff. At that particular time, I was just in the machine gun squad. I had nothing to do with the vehicle, but, in your training, everybody learns the radio, just a little bit. You'd pick up a little bit about the radio and stuff, and so, when I became a replacement in the Fourth Armored, they needed a radio operator. When I stepped off the truck, they said, "You're the radio operator." I didn't know anything about the radio, really, and the sergeant said, "You'll learn," and he was right, you'll learn. I had no training as a radio operator, other than just on a half-track a little bit.

SI: What would be a typical job for a radio operator? Were you transmitting in code?

RS: You learn the phonetic alphabet, and then, you just take care of the radio. When your call comes through for you, you answered the call. When a lieutenant left the vehicle, if he wanted communication, you had to take that whole radio out and carry it and take it with you. Then, you had to stay with him, so [that] he could have his communication and they were heavy, two goddamn suitcases. If you had decent guys with you, they'd help you, you know, but if not, you try to carry a rifle and the goddamn radio, too, but we didn't dismantle it too much. In combat, you mostly stayed with the vehicle. ... A few times, you'd have to go and dismantle [it] and take it out, but, most of the time, you didn't and those small walkie-talkies, they were useless. You get a big tree in front of you and you couldn't [hear], very bad. Most of the communications was just sending somebody with a message, you know.

SI: You were still in the repple-depple when the St. Lo breakthrough actually happened. What did you hear about the operation, since it was such a large operation?

RS: We didn't hear anything about it. We used to get bombed every night, because they used to come over and bomb every night. In fact, I had, well, they weren't really buddies, but they were with us in our outfit; they got killed in the repple-depple. They never did get into action, but, as

far as knowing what was going on in Normandy, you didn't know a goddamn thing. You didn't know anything, but, then, when they pulled your name out, they stuck you on a two-and-a-half ton truck and away you went. You didn't know where you were going or what the hell outfit you were going to or nothing.

KK: Where was the first place that you went when they called you out of the repple-depple?

RS: Well, to the Fourth Armored Division, after they made the St. Lo breakthrough.

SI: What was it like to join a unit that has been together for a while as a replacement?

RS: The Fourth Armored?

SI: How did you fit in with the unit?

RS: No problem at all. You just got there and they accepted you, because they needed you, you know. There really wasn't too many of the original guys from the Fourth Armored there, because the half-track was under an apple tree in an orchard and it got hit and all the guys were there. So, that's quite a few of them who got wounded and everything. The lieutenant got killed, so, the new lieutenant was on the truck with me, coming from the repple-depple, and his name was French, Lieutenant French. He was from Texas and he was a straight infantryman. He didn't know a damned thing about the armored at all. Again, he was just a replacement. They needed a second louie and he was there. So, he was the second louie in charge of the platoon where I went. So, he was a replacement. The staff sergeant, he was an old guy. He was still there and the driver was the original driver, so, they had the driver and the staff sergeant. I think there were two other guys that were with the original Fourth Armored and we were all replacements and Lieutenant French, he was funny, he says, "How do I get you guys to get out of the vehicle?" and the Sergeant says, "Don't you worry," he says, "they'll get out," and it was funny, because, as soon as that half-track stopped and they started shooting at you, everybody was out. They don't wait for no order to get the hell out of that and the funny part of it is, that's one reason I don't belong to the division [association]. I belong to it, but I don't go to the meetings, because I wasn't originally with the Fourth Armored when it was formed in Pine Camp, New York, and everybody that seems to go to the reunion, they're all original guys that trained [together] and, you know, really knew one another. I didn't know anybody other than the driver, sergeant and the lieutenant. They were all replacements, like me, you know. So, they have meetings over in New York and I don't go over, but I belong.

SI: You did not feel like you were an outsider coming into a unit that was already formed.

RS: Oh, no, no.

SI: What was the half-tracks' job within the unit? What is the communications center?

RS: No, no, it was just our transportation. They took the squad. You had a .50-caliber mounted on a rack and you had two .30s on the side, but it was used primarily as just transportation, just

getting your guys, keeping up with the tanks and everything, you know, rather than walking. Now, they don't have them anymore. They have the full-track vehicles they use.

SI: The Bradleys?

RS: I guess they are. I don't know what the hell name they go under, but, yes. They open up in the back and the guys come out, personnel carriers or something they call them.

SI: How soon after being assigned to this half-track were you committed to action?

RS: Right away. Oh, sure, yes. We were dropped in the line, yes. Oh, yes, immediately, when you went as a replacement, you were in whatever they were doing.

SI: They were not in reserve or anything at the time.

RS: No, no.

SI: What was the first action like for you?

RS: The first action was all artillery. It was all long distance stuff, very little shooting at somebody or anything like that. It was just, you're going along the road and they throw the artillery at you, you know, but that's what most of it was; it was artillery stuff. Then, as you were going along the road, you'd change positions on leading the column. Every day, there'd be a different outfit in the front, you know, leading. When you were in the front and they come upon roadblocks and stuff like that, you'd see a little action with the small arms fire and stuff like that, but, then, again, they just back off a little bit and call in the artillery that was already set up in the back of you and they just throw artillery. We didn't have that much small arms fire, but, like I say, most of it was artillery and you're moving so fast. We used to do thirty, thirty-five miles a day, yes. We covered a lot of ground. I think I crossed one river four times, the Meuse, I think it was. We covered it, because you cross it, and then, you go up someplace else, and then, you have to cross it back, and then, go back again, you know.

SI: During this period after St. Lo, when things were moving very fast, what was a typical day like? Did you run into any resistance?

RS: You would, yes, but not that great, you know. You get to a place, and then, you'd set up for the night and, yes, originally, after St. Lo, we were going up the Cherbourg Peninsula. We were going to go to [Cherbourg], and then, we got changed. I guess the plans all changed or something, and then, we turned and went towards Le Mans, I think it was. It was one of the places we were going to, but we originally were supposed to go up to Cherbourg, but we didn't get up there. I can't think of anything else.

SI: In most of these engagements, you were operating the radio in the half-track.

RS: Yes, and, at night, I was on duty, almost, you'd say, twenty-four hours, because I used to sleep with the radio by my ear, because you never knew when you're going to get called, you know.

SI: Would the calls just be like, "Move out of here. Move out there?"

RS: Well, they did; maybe they wanted Frenchie down at the headquarters, to tell him something, you know, and so, they'd call him, and then, I'd wake Frenchie up and tell him to get down there. Yes, I was on duty, ... you know, almost twenty-four hours, but you didn't get called that many times. It wasn't that bad.

KK: Where did you go next, after you headed back to St. Lo?

RS: Oh, we didn't head back to St. Lo. We went ... towards Orleans, I think it was, Orleans, yes. We headed there and we kept going until July, August, September, October, I guess it was in October, when we ran out of fuel and we ran out of ammunition. They couldn't keep up with us and we had to stop, and then, we found out that they were shipping all the gas and all the supplies up to the English Army. That was where Montgomery wanted to do something from up [there] and they stopped the Third Army advance, so [that] they could give the supplies to the British. Our tanks were in a city called Metz, a big city, and we had to pull out, because we had no ammunition or we didn't have no gas to go any farther. We pulled out, and then, I understand it took two infantry divisions to take that town, to take it back.

SI: I have interviewed a few people who were in the Battle of Metz and they said it was a huge fortress city.

RS: Oh, yes, yes. It was, really, and we were in it. That's the part that really made us mad. We were in it and we had to get the hell out.

SI: The Germans did not have it then. The Germans moved in after you moved out.

RS: Well, we chased them out, but, then, when we couldn't hold it, we had to get back out. They moved back in again, and then, they had a hell of a job getting them out of there. Yes, we lost a lot of guys doing that.

SI: There was not much resistance the first time.

RS: Oh, no, we were going, you know. When you've got them on the run, you've got them on the run and that's what we were doing, but, when you ran out of, well, the biggest thing was the gasoline, we ran out of gasoline. We had ammunition, but not that much. So, then, we pulled back. That was the first time we pulled back, an armored division works with Combat Command A, Combat Command B and Combat Command C. They break the division up into three parts. You use your Combat Command A and you use your B and you keep your C in reserve. So, when you're going along, A was on one road, B was on another road, and then, C would just come up behind if they were needed. You just used to do that. Every third day, you'd get into C, so, that third day, you didn't have it that bad, you know, and we never had a kitchen set up.

We took care of our own food all the time. We had what they called ten-in-one rations and they were very good, ten-in-one rations were very good, but you had to have your own stove, too. We used to have these little stoves. We used to heat the stuff up, but the ten-in-one rations were good rations.

SI: In general, before you had to pull back from Metz, did you feel that you were well supplied with everything you needed?

RS: It seemed that way, yes. Yes, we were doing all right. Sometimes, we were going so fast and the guys who got wounded, they didn't want to go back, because [we were] between the frontlines and the infantry is in the back of us. You'd miss Germans here and there, you know, and they were knocking off the ambulances, once in a while, because the ambulances are going back and there was nobody there to protect them, you know. In other words, we were going so far. That's one thing I remember about that.

SI: How often would you get casualties in your unit during this period?

RS: That's hard to say. I mean, yes, you didn't know.

SI: Was it frequent or rare?

RS: No, I wouldn't say it was very frequent, but, like I say, the biggest thing was the artillery and the mortars and stuff they used to throw at us, yes.

SI: Many of the people that we have spoken to have said that the German .88s were very terrifying.

RS: The screaming mimis were more psychological than anything. They make so much noise, they scare you, but the .88, they could shoot that like a rifle. They could shoot an .88 at one guy running across a field if they wanted to, yes. That was some weapon, that .88.

SI: You were assigned to the half-track. I have spoken to some people who were in tanks or half-tracks and they said they thought the tank was always a target that drew fire.

RS: The tanks did, yes. Well, the half-tracks did, too, but not as bad as tanks. ... First, our tanks had a .75-mm, which was a peashooter. I mean, that damned thing, it wouldn't even penetrate some of the [targets] and they had that .88. See, the .88 was a rifle, the .75 was a cannon and the cannon, you shot it, and then, you waited for it to get there and, you know, where the .88 was bang, boom, right there. When they got rid of that .75 and they put .90-mms on them, well, that made a big difference in the medium tanks, but that was a lot later, a lot later. Because of how many we lost, they used to call them "rolling coffins." Yes, they were bad. Our tanks were bad.

SI: When your unit got into an engagement, were they tank-to-tank battles?

RS: They were that, yes, and we got into it, too. ... We'd be riding the tanks, sometimes, and you'd get into it, but, [for] most of ours, ... we would be against infantry, yes.

SI: During an engagement, did you have to stay with the half-track or did you get out and get into a foxhole?

RS: Oh, no, you had to get out; ... you wouldn't stay with the half-track. Even the half-track driver didn't stay with it. He got the hell out of the way, too, because they used to pick them off.

SI: What was life in the field like at night? When you would stop and sleep, did you sleep in a foxhole?

RS: It all depended. It all depended. If you were going to stay someplace more than overnight, you would dig a slit trench and we never dug deep enough to dig a foxhole, unless you were really going to stay. If you're going to stay someplace two or three days, then, you dig a foxhole, but, if it's just overnight, you dig a slit trench, just someplace that you could get in that was below, you know, just about that deep. That's all you needed, just so you [could] get down, and so, the shrapnel will go over you. Foxholes, we didn't dig too many of them. Like I say, if you're going to stay someplace for a couple of days or something like that, which didn't happen that often, and, sometimes, you'd just get your slit trench dug and you thought you were ready, right, and then, all of sudden, "Load up, let's get the hell out of here," you know, and move again. We used to do a lot of moving, moving all the time.

JK: You spoke about how good the .88 artillery piece was. Did you feel the same way about the German tanks?

RS: Oh, yes. They were good vehicles, too. They claim they used to leak a lot and all that kind of stuff, but I didn't worry about that. You [did not] give a goddamn whether they leaked or not, but, oh, yes, you didn't like to tangle with them. I was on duty all the time with the radio, yes.

SI: After you were pulled back from Metz, what happened next?

RS: I think that's one of the 26th Infantry outfits that met up with us. I think they'd come in brand-new and I know they took our positions. We had pulled back, they took our positions, and then, we pulled back farther, but we didn't go back too far and it paid off, because the 26th had trouble, you know, being brand-new, and then, we had to go back up and help them out. Then, we stayed back there until November the 9th, I think it was, when we took off, November the 9th, yes. That's when I got blown out of the half-track, when our half-track got hit, because we were lead vehicle of our combat unit. It was our turn to be the lead vehicle and we come to a crossroad, like a V, and Frenchie says, "Somebody get out and check for mines." It was cold, it was real cold and everybody was holed up in their blankets, so, nobody wanted to move. So, I handed the radio to the guy next to me and I got out and I checked the whole road and everything. I was climbing back in and, as I climbed up, right in front of me was an .88 pointing at us and I said to Frenchie, "Over to the left," and, when he turned around, bang, we got hit twice and I went off. I wasn't inside. I was still standing on the mine racks on the side and I got

blown off. ... The driver had the half-track in front-wheel drive, so, it knocked the tracks off the back, but ... he got it off the road. He kept going and he got off the road.

KK: Is that what you received your Purple Heart for?

RS: Oh, that's where it happened, but I didn't get my Purple Heart until March, because, when it happened, I was only in the hospital for a couple of days, not even a hospital. It was like the frontline aid station. Then, they shipped me back up, because I didn't have what you would call broken bones or anything like that, you know. I was just shook the hell up, you know, but my back was screwed up, I guess, and then, later on, it started happening again. So, I really didn't get shipped back until March, when I got the Purple Heart, but it happened in November, November the 9th, yes.

JK: Were you temporarily immobilized?

RS: Oh, yes, yes. I was in the ditch on the side of the road when the medics found me, yes. When I was laying there, right behind us was a light tank. It wasn't a medium tank, it was a light tank, with a .37-mm, and there was a guy up on the turret and they were swinging the turret around for the .88 and he got hit. The light tank got hit and the guy in the turret come out and he was lying next to me. He had lost both his legs and, yes, so, the medics, they tourniquet his legs and they put him on [a stretcher]. ... So, I went the same time as he did.

JK: Was the ground snow covered at this time?

RS: No.

JK: It was just cold.

RS: It was goddamn cold. Yes, it was cold.

JK: Were you being attacked from anywhere else, besides from this .88?

RS: That's all I saw.

SI: Was that unusual, for you to see somebody firing at you?

RS: Oh, no, but not when they're pointing right at you, no, but you could see artillery pieces in the woods and stuff like that, yes. No, you'd see that, yes.

SI: Was this a typical operation, sweeping for mines?

RS: Oh, yes, because, in a retreat, they would just scatter these [things], you know, put these mines on the road, you know, but you could also tell if the ground was freshly dug or something. I know it's hard ground. I knew goddamn well they weren't digging nothing, because they'd have to have picks to do it. They couldn't do it just with shovels. So, there was nothing there. In other words, it was clear.

SI: How often would you run into mines, either anti-tank or personnel?

RS: Not very often, not too much. They used the mines if they were set up someplace, in the perimeter. They put mines out, but, if they were running like we had them running, they weren't bothering putting mines down, no.

SI: After November 9th, you were sent back for a little bit, and then, sent back up?

RS: Then, I went back to the outfit, yes, and they were all replacements, except the tank driver, staff sergeant and a lieutenant. They were in the front, you know, and then, behind them, in the half-track, where the rack was for the .50-caliber, we had all our extra equipment hanging on there, like our knapsacks and all that kind of stuff. So, when the shells hit, the mat acted as a barrier for the shrapnel. It didn't get the three guys in the front. So, they were still with the outfit when I went back, but it was all new replacements. So, there's a whole new bunch of guys again, you know, and then, ... our captain for the company, he got rotated. He had enough points, so, he got rotated back to the States for a furlough or some damned thing. Frenchie got moved up to company commander and, while he was company commander, he got killed. He was in a jeep and they knocked the jeep off and Frenchie got killed.

SI: What was your opinion of the junior officers that you had contact with, like Lieutenant French?

RS: It was great, yes. It took him a while to learn. He was green, you know. What the hell? He was just out of OCS, I guess, in Fort Benning, Georgia, but he learned quick, yes.

SI: Did you have confidence in your officers?

RS: Oh, yes, yes, and your sergeants are the ones that really [mattered]. If you had an old sergeant, you were better off than anybody. One bunch of repple-depples, replacements, we got, they broke up an airborne outfit in England and they weren't going to use them anymore, so, they sent them out as replacements. Christ, they were all staff sergeants and buck sergeants and tech sergeants. So, when they come to our outfit, they held their rank. It didn't give us a chance to advance anyplace, because they already had too many sergeants and too many of that. Oh, Christ, that was a mess, yes, but that was towards the end when they broke that up.

SI: Did these former paratroopers resent being in the Armored Force?

RS: No. They had a job to do, so, I guess they did it, but they were doing private and PFC work with staff sergeants and tech sergeants, you know. The old time privates were telling them what the hell to do, but they couldn't say anything.

SI: In general terms, of the men you served with, how many were draftees and enlistees and how many were old Army?

RS: Well, I don't think there was any old Army at all. I think they were all draftees. I think the whole Fourth Armored Division was made up of draftees, when they originated in Pine Camp, New York. No, I can't swear to that. There might have been some, you know, enlistment guys, I guess. I really didn't know. I didn't know any enlistment men in the Armored Force.

SI: After you rejoined the outfit, where did you go next?

RS: We got as far as the Rhine River and we were waiting on the Rhine River and the Coast Guard comes up with landing boats for us to go across [on]. While we were [there], this is when the Ninth Armored captured the bridge. So, that saved our ass from going across the river. So, they sent the Coast Guard back, and then, we turned south and we went along the Rhine River and we formed a big pocket. ... They had a name for it; I can't remember the name. This big pocket, the infantry went in and cleaned it all out, and then, we went across the river and somebody had already made it across. They had a pontoon bridge across and we went over the bridge and the other side was cleaned out. In other words, we didn't have to fight when we got over there. It was cleaned out, and then, we went into Germany, Koblenz or something like that, I don't remember the name of the town, but it was a pontoon bridge, like this, and that river was wide, boy, I tell you, the Rhine. That was a ride. We were in Luxemburg, too, before we went over there.

KK: I am assuming you had not traveled much in the United States, except when you were moving around the East Coast in training. Traveling all around Europe, what did you think of it?

RS: The part I saw, I didn't think very much of it. The little villages, the ditches on the side of the road going through the town was all the crap from the cows and everything that they had in town, because ... they used to keep the livestock in the houses for the heat, I guess, from the animals, you know. If somebody started shooting at you, that's where you dove. You dove into the ditch, you know, and I didn't think too much of the French at all. You think just the Dutch wore wooden shoes; all the French farmers had wooden shoes, too. Anything they did outside, they had wooden shoes. When they went inside, they took the shoes off, yes. They had awful beer. Their beer was rotten. Their wine was good, drank a lot of their wine.

SI: Did you have any opportunity to interact with the civilians?

RS: No, because, usually, when we went through a town, you didn't see nobody. They were gone, you know. Then, I understand, after we went through, then, they started coming back, and then, the rear echelon guys [would] see them and all that, but we didn't see them, very few civilians, yes.

KK: What about soldiers from other nations, such as the British?

RS: No, never met up with them, no. The only ones we saw, we come across a camp, a labor camp. They were all captured Africans, I guess they were, or something like that. They were all blacks and they were in this labor camp. All they wanted to do was get knives and go after them, but they were sent back again, you know, and then, you met what they called the FFI or

something, the Free French. You'd see them floating around with an armband on, that little bit, you know, but not too much of them, either.

JK: What was your interaction like with the men in your troop that you were in combat with?

RS: Always all right.

JK: You got along.

RS: Yes.

SI: Were they from all over the country?

RS: Oh, yes, yes, some were from Utah. We had guys from there and from all over. You didn't know where the hell they were from, yes.

SI: The bonds between men in combat has been a big topic in movies and TV shows recently. Did you have that experience?

RS: No, no. You didn't get to know anyone that long, no.

SI: Was there a feeling that you should not get to know people, because they might not be there tomorrow?

RS: Well, you're not really with anybody. When you stopped, you usually had a buddy, but, because I was the radio operator, I had to stay by the half-track. The rest of the guys had to spread out. They didn't stay by the half-track. So, you really didn't [get to know them]. I was more with the half-track driver than anybody, you know, and then, he got to be ... an alcoholic. A couple of times, I thought they were going to take him away, you know, just because he was inebriated all the time. He was still there when I left. So, yes, they didn't have that. I didn't, anyway, and, like I say, with replacements, you didn't really get to know anybody, you know.

KK: Do you remember any of the more important or vital messages that you received on the radio?

RS: We were on a roadblock. We come into this town. We set up a roadblock for the night and you could hear the armor in front of you. So, Frenchie got on the radio and he called headquarters and told them that there's armor moving up in the front. They told him to be on the alert and I had the radio. A couple of hours later, I guess, it was dark, pitch dark, you couldn't see anything and battalion comes on. They called our number and I answered and they said, "Tell Frenchie to haul ass." I said, "Frenchie, haul ass." Boy, we rode out, off we went, back, but we were in Chateau Salins or something like that. They needed tanks and I can remember, because I was listening to this on the radio, I heard all this stuff and the tank battalion or the tank company commander, whoever it was, I don't know, he says, "We can't get across this brook," or whatever the hell it was, and [the] lieutenant colonel, I guess, who was in charge, they needed

him. He says, "You'd better get them across or I'll get somebody that can," and the next thing I heard was, we got across, yes.

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

SI: This continues an interview with Mr. Raymond A. Shipley on November 5, 2004, in Totowa, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth ...

JK: Jason Kulak ...

KK: Ken Karnas.

SI: We were just talking about some of the radio messages you received.

RS: Yes. When we were in reserve for a day, the division communications office would have a meeting with the radio operators and he had all the transmissions for the whole [outfit]. Somebody should have got that and wrote it as a book, all these different [messages], what you're not supposed to do, what you're supposed to do and these radio transmissions. Oh, boy, I'll tell you, swearing, oh, unbelievable, but, you know, they get excited and they don't worry about who the hell [is listening] or whether they were using phonetic alphabet or nothing. "You get your ass up here. We need help," you know, and stuff like that. He used to say, "You can't do that. You've got to stick to your routine and what you're supposed to do." We all used to laugh like hell out of it, but he tried to keep us all in line, but it didn't work.

SI: Were you instructed not to say certain things on the radio, in case the enemy was listening?

RS: No, we never worried about that, no. We never did, because they knew who the hell we were anyway. I mean, I don't recall any instructions. There might have been, but I never [knew].

JK: When you got that message over the radio that told Lieutenant French to haul ass and get out of there, were you at risk of being overwhelmed by a large German force?

RS: Oh, yes, that armor we heard out in front of us was coming. It was moving in and the half-track, with a .50-caliber machine gun, isn't going to stop nothing, you know. Yes, we were told to get the hell out. We had it good out there. We had a tank destroyer out with us. They weren't part of the Fourth Armored Division. They were just attached to us and they were great. I'm trying to think, I'll go get the number. 704th Tank Destroyers, that was the outfit, yes, they were great and they had a .90-mm gun on their outfits. They didn't have any goddamn .75s. Yes, they were a good outfit. So, I imagine they were called up when we got out.

SI: What do you remember about the period leading up to the Battle of the Bulge?

RS: I was in the hospital at that time. I'd gone back, yes. I was in the hospital and I remember them cleaning everybody out. The orderlies and everybody was cleaned out and they took them

up to the Bulge and we had to take care of ourselves. In the hospital, they only left a few nurses around like that, you know. Yes, I didn't get into the Bulge.

SI: Why were you sent back to the hospital?

RS: For my back, yes. It was screwing up something awful, so, they sent me back and I went back up again.

SI: When did you go back up?

RS: It was after the Bulge. I can't remember where the hell I was. I can't remember the name, but I know I went back, and then, it hit me again ... when we were in Frankfurt, Germany. Then, they shipped me right back to Paris and, from Paris, they shipped me to England. I was in England when the war ended.

SI: You always seem to go back to your own unit.

RS: Yes.

SI: From what I understand, that was kind of rare. If you were sent back, they often sent you to another unit.

RS: I never had that problem. I get shipped back to my own outfit every time. The trouble with the repple-depple was, you had to come back up through those repple-depples the same as when we went out as replacements. When you come up from the hospital, you're supposed to be shipped back to your own outfit, but some guys didn't. Some guys got mixed up. No, I went back to my outfit every time. Three times, I went back up.

SI: Overall, how would you rate the care you received in the hospitals?

RS: Oh, great, yes. I have no complaints about that at all.

SI: You mentioned that there was one sergeant who became an alcoholic.

RS: He was a driver, a half-track driver, yes, and, to tell you why, ... we had five-gallon cans, we called them Jerry cans, but they were water cans, five gallons, and there was no water in them. There was wine in them and, [if] anybody wanted to drink, you drank wine. There's no water and he got pretty good doused up all the time. I remember, once, we were dug in. We were in foxholes this time. We were dug in for quite a while and they came past with a three-quarter-ton truck and they give us, oh, Christ, it looked like to be about five or ten pounds of chop meat and two loaves of bread. I was by the half-track in my hole and, (Kerr?), his name was, he's the half-track driver and he's smashed. He was feeling pretty good and we're getting a hell of a lot of the artillery. Any movements at all, you got artillery. So, he says, "What the hell are we going to do with this?" I said, "Let's make hamburgers and slice them nice and get the guys some hamburgers," you know. "Hey, that's a good idea." So, the two of us, we made up all these goddamn hamburgers and sliced the bread and made sandwiches. I said, "Now, how the

hell are we going to get these out to the guys?" He said, "I'll take them," and he picked that whole goddamn stack up and he walked down the line to each foxhole and gave the guys two hamburgers. That's in the goddamn hole and he never got hit. He never got touched. He walked all the way down, holy Christ, but he was drunk, he didn't care, (Burl Kerr?).

SI: Do you think that that was his way of coping with the stress of combat?

RS: It could be, who the hell knows? "What are we going to do with these hamburgers?" He said, "Take them down."

SI: Were there any men who psychologically could not take being in combat? Did anybody have to go back because of mental problems?

RS: No, I don't recall ever seeing anybody, no. The only ones I ever saw run were; ... we were setup, it was funny, we'd pulled back and we were setup. I think it was when the 26th relieved us and in comes the Red Cross with this doughnut wagon, right. I said, "Holy Christ, we're going to get doughnuts." So, they come in and they set up. They opened up and there were two women, Red Cross women, and they had a driver, I think, was with them. "Oh, Christ, we're going to go up there," we've got our canteen cups, you know, "We're going to get coffee." Then goddamnit, they started throwing mortars in. Well, they slammed up that goddamn thing and, boy, they were gone. We never did get the damn coffee or doughnuts. Yes, it was funny. The only thing I ever got anything off of was the Salvation Army. We're going from Glasgow, Scotland, down to Southampton and we stopped at a train station. There was no mess car on the train at all. They were out on the platform and they had mutton pies and hot tea and, boy, was that good. That was the Salvation Army.

SI: Did you ever see a USO troupe or anything like that?

RS: Yes, we had Marlene Dietrich. We were outside of Metz, no, not Metz, Nancy, France, it was. We had taken that town and, well, it was in our hands, anyway, and the USO came up. It was Marlene Dietrich and we were way the hell out someplace; I don't know where the hell we were. They brought these two-and-a-half ton trucks and they're going to take us into the USO show and it was raining like a bastard. It was miserable. So, we went in and we're sitting on our helmets, you know, waiting and waiting and waiting. This guy comes out with an accordion and he says to us, ... "Marlene Dietrich is not feeling well. She's not going to show up," Jesus Christ, and he starts playing his accordion, right. That poor bastard didn't stand a chance. I mean, they just blew them out of all that. So, that was the end of the USO. They loaded us all up and took us away, but, then, after the war was over, they were doing shows, yes. I think the only guy I saw was Mickey Rooney. They put on some kind of a show in Frankfurt, Germany.

JK: Was that during your occupational tour?

RS: Yes. When I left the hospital in England, I went on limited service and they put me with headquarters, SHAEF, I was with SHAEF and I caught up with them outside of Paris. I wasn't there a week, I guess, and they moved to Frankfurt, Germany, the SHAEF did, too. So, we went to Frankfurt, Germany. Then, I drove a truck, ... believe it or not, for the officers' dry cleaning

outfit. I'd take their dirty outfits to the German factory and they'd clean them, and then, I'd pick them up and bring them back. I did that until I got sent home. I was in Frankfurt, Germany.

SI: Did you see any of the big name generals while you were at the headquarters?

RS: No, no, I didn't get to see anybody. The highest ranking officer I saw was a one-star general, when we were on-line. ... I can't remember his name. He had a light tank and we're in this village. We called the main road in the village, "bowling alley," because no matter [what], if anything moved on it, they threw artillery in. We were outside of town. We weren't in town, but Frenchie wanted something from headquarters. So, I said, "Oh, French, I'll go down, just get somebody to watch the radio and I'll walk down." So, I'm walking down this Bowling Alley and, all of a sudden here, comes this light tank up the road towards me, you know. I said, "Oh, boy, we're going to get artillery in on this bastard." So, there was a cellar. So, I went down in the cellar and, sure enough, this tank is coming up, you know, and here comes the goddamn artillery. Well, all of a sudden, this guy comes down these damned steps, next to me, you know, and I had a few words. ... "Who's that crazy son of a bitch bringing that tank in there?" He says, "It's my tank," and, Jesus Christ, he's a one-star general. I didn't know. How the hell did I know who the hell he was, right? He says, "What's the matter?" I say, "We call that the Bowling Alley. They throw that shit in on us like that." He says, "Yes, I guess they do." So, it quieted down and he got up and out he went. That was the end of that. I went to the company. I said, "Who the hell is that general?" but he was from the division. They didn't hit the tank; he was lucky. Little things like that happen.

SI: What did you think of Patton and others in the higher ranks?

RS: There was quite a few things said about Patton, none very good, but he was a good general, no doubt about it. He kept you moving and he wanted to keep moving and he was really teed off when they sent the stuff to Montgomery and they stopped his outfit. He couldn't do anything about it. What the hell can you do?

SI: After you returned from the hospital the second time, the war was kind of winding down. Could you tell that where you were? Did you notice anything about the Germans?

RS: Well, they seemed to be younger. The ones that you were running against were younger, you know, but the resistance was pretty good. They didn't have nothing left. I mean, what the hell? Most of it was hand grenades and stuff like that, you know.

SI: I have been told that they were very good at using natural barriers to their advantage, rivers and such.

RS: Oh, yes, yes. The damn towns, ... the streets were so narrow. I've seen where a tank has to go through and, to make a turn, you'd have to back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, before you can make the turn, you know. Everything was so damn small and tight, yes, but that was in the little villages. You get in the big cities, you know, cobblestones, and that was good.

SI: Did you ever have to fight in a city or were you usually outside of the cities?

RS: I'm going to tell you something. If we went into a lot of resistance, we would bypass it and leave it for the infantry. We would bypass it and just keep going, which was the main thing, to get behind them and cut off everything they had. So, we did run into resistance, but, like I say, if it got real hot or it was going to take us quite a while, we'd pull out and go around it, you know. I know we left a lot of shit for the infantry, yes, and they didn't like it too much, either, by the way. I've heard from guys that were in some of those outfits that had to go and clean up what we left, yes.

SI: Did you ever have to call in an air strike or anything like that?

RS: Oh, yes, we always had the Air Force with us. Oh, they were great, they were great, yes. They'd catch them out on the roads, oh, they'd just cut them to hell, and then, towards the end, they started using horses, you know, for transportation and pulling stuff. They just cut them poor animals to hell, because, if they got attacked, the soldiers [would] just run off. They'd get the hell out of there, but they left the animals there, you know. ... Christ, it's lying all over the place.

SI: Did you start taking large numbers of prisoners towards the end of the war or did you leave that for others?

RS: Well, there, again, we really didn't take that many prisoners. What the hell were we going to do with them, you know? There were a few taken. We took them back to headquarters. We didn't know what they did after [that]. I wasn't with them when they relieved those camps and that; I had left by that time, you know, when they got into [the] concentration camps. I didn't get into that. I was gone by then; I wasn't in the final clean up stuff.

SI: Were you surprised when you learned about that?

RS: Not really. You heard that we came across these, like I say, labor camps. So, if they did it with labor camps; ... I mean, you know, you'd heard what they'd done to the, you know, ... Jews and stuff like that, so, you figure, "I guess it could have happened," yes.

KK: You said you were in England at the end of the war.

RS: Yes, at the end of the war, I was in England, that's right.

KK: What did you see or feel, either among the GIs or the English, on V-E Day?

RS: Well, I was in the hospital on V-E Day and they come in, the townspeople come in, with the beer and everything, you know, yes. They were great, great time, yes, and I hadn't been paid from the time I left the United States. I didn't get paid at all and, when I come out of the hospital, they gave me a good hunk of money. Oh, Christ, for my seven-day furlough over there, if you had the money, you could buy whiskey and everything. I had a good time on the seven-day, besides seeing all my relations there.

SI: Did you correspond with anybody during the war?

RS: Only my wife. My wife, I wrote to.

SI: What did you think of the Germans as an enemy?

RS: They're very good. I mean, they were trained and they were good soldiers. One guy told me, he says, "The only trouble with you people," he said, "is you knockout ten tanks and you turn around and there's twelve in its place." It was just numbers that beat them I think, anyway. ... Yes, the same way they couldn't understand how you could knock [down] all those airplanes and everything and they still kept coming and coming. When they lost planes, that was it. They lost planes, the same way with their tanks, and had no replacements. They were just, you know, [gone] and he said it and I believed him. It was just numbers, yes. Anything else?

JK: What did you think of the whole experience?

RS: Well, it's like, you know, I guess everybody said it, you know, they don't want to do it again, but it was an experience that you could never get any place else.

JK: When you left, were you happy to be back in New Jersey?

RS: Oh, yes. Oh, sure, I got discharged in Fort Monmouth, yes. The guy says to me, he says, "You sign up for Reserves and you can maintain your rank." I said, "Buddy, I can come in anytime I want and still be a private. I've got no rank to maintain," yes. You know, I won't sign up for nothing.

SI: How do you think your service in the war influenced your life later? We talked a little bit about Public Law 16 and its effect.

RS: Well, it certainly makes you grow up quick. I mean, it takes you out of your home that you never left and there's quite a difference. You've got to grow up quick, yes, and I don't think it hurt. I don't think it hurt at all.

SI: Was it difficult to readjust to civilian life?

RS: No, I didn't find it difficult to readjust, at least I didn't think I did, anyway. Maybe somebody else might have, but I didn't think I did.

SI: Did you ever make use of the GI Bill at all? Was Public Law 16 part of it?

RS: Yes, that was part of it, and then, we had the 52/20 Club. I put a saddle on that son of a bitch and I rode that for six months, I think it was, yes, and then, my wife got pregnant, so, I had to go to work. Yes, in fact, it's my son's birthday tomorrow. He'll be fifty-nine. He's out in Indiana. All my grandkids and all my great-grandkids are in Florida.

JK: Do you have any other children?

RS: No, I just have the one, yes.

JK: Was he ever called up for military service?

RS: He did. He got called up for Vietnam and he got rejected, physical rejection. What the hell was it? Would you believe it? It was acne. His body was covered. I didn't know it as a kid, his body was covered in acne and they didn't want to [take him], I guess for fear of infection or something, I don't know, but he never did go, but he was going to be drafted, yes.

JK: Were you pleased that he did not have to go?

RS: It didn't bother me that he didn't go. No, it didn't bother me at all. It wouldn't have bothered me if he had gone, you know what I mean, but it didn't, no. I won't send him to Canada or stuff like that, that I know somebody did. So, that didn't sit too well with me.

JK: You have been a member of the American Legion for quite a few years.

RS: Yes, fifty-six years, yes, commander twice, adjutant for twenty, thirty, I don't know. I've been adjutant so long, I don't remember.

SI: How did you become so involved in the Legion?

RS: Well, at the time, in 1949, we had a friend, a kid I hung around with and everything before the war. He went in the Navy and I went [in the Army] and he came out and he joined the legion. He was after me, "Come on, Ray, join the Legion." "I don't want to join the goddamn Legion." So, he finally pestered me so much that I said, "All right." So, I went down and I joined the Legion in 1949. He quit. He's never been back to a meeting since. Then, he got on the police force and he finally ended up as chief, Chief (Gator?). He isn't there now, he's retired, but, yes, I met a bunch of guys that were terrific. I mean, one of my best friends down there was a Seabee in the South Pacific and all these other guys. I got my brother to join two weeks after me. He joined and he made state commander. He went as high as state commander, yes. I never did, but he did. ... Well, I met [Jason's] grandfather there. It was before television and you had to have someplace to go and do something, you know, and you were with a bunch of guys from the service. You just fit in, you know. As long as you were willing to work and do a little bit, you can get along. I've been active ever since, fifty-six years.

KK: Have you been active with the nationwide effort for veteran's rights and veteran's benefits?

RS: Oh, yes, yes. We've got a good outfit for doing that. They're on the ball about that.

SI: Is there anything you would like to add for the record?

RS: Except I'm glad to see you guys. [You are] the first ones that ever asked me anything about [the war], no, truthfully, you know what I mean. In fact, [Jason's] grandfather asked me, he

says, "Would you be willing to meet with my grandson?" I said, "Sure, why the hell not?" you know. I mean, I didn't mind, no, not many of us left.

SI: Unfortunately.

RS: Yes, and I was one of the young ones, I guess, and I'm eighty now. My brother is eighty-two, he's still alive. Down at the post, there's not many left. The commander, he's eighty this year. He's a commander and he's eighty now. We just had a guy die, he was ninety, yes. He was ninety, Pete the Greek, but he went in on D-Day with an infantry outfit.

SI: I want to say thank you very much for doing this.

RS: I'm glad you guys are interested. You don't hear [about] too many people even worrying about it anymore. They're trying to do away with Veteran's Day and all that kind of stuff, yes.

SI: This now concludes our interview.

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