

**CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**INTERVIEW WITH: HOMER HOOKS
INTERVIEWER: JAMES M. DENHAM
PLACE: LAKELAND, FLORIDA
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**M= James M. Denham (Mike)
H=Homer Hooks**

M: Today is June 21, 2005 and I am in the home of Homer Hooks in Lakeland, Florida. We are here to discuss his World War II experiences. Homer, good morning.

H: Good morning, Mike.

M: Homer, we have your biographical information from the other tapes that we did. Could you tell us, before we actually get into your World War II experiences, a little bit about your knowledge and awareness, I guess, of the growing threat of fascism in Europe and also in the Far East, and what you thought as a college student and maybe even a high school student in the late 1930's, 1936, 37, 38, I think you entered University of Florida when?

H: 1939. I was there from 1939 to 1943 and, of course, that was right at the beginning of the war in Europe and as a student, well, I guess the first impact was that our student body suddenly dwindled down to less than 5000 students at the University of Florida. I believe it's maybe over 25,000 today, just to give you a comparison, and the reason of course was that at that time it was a boys' school and the draft into the service, in the Army and Navy and Marine Corp and others certainly decimated our student body. So my service actually in military began in ROTC at the University of Florida. I went through two years of intensive ROTC training. Because of my enlistment in ROTC, I was permitted to stay on the campus and graduate with my class in 1943. I went from there to Fort Benning.

M: Did you get a sense in 1939-40 that there was the likelihood that there would be a world war? September 1939 was the outbreak of World War II. Did you get a sense that, even though the United States was not in the war yet, in 1939, September, that there was a likelihood that this may happen, that things could degenerate to that point?

H: Yes, Mike, I think all of us, even though we were green freshmen in September of 1939, every newspaper we picked up was war oriented and we were not excluded. We saw many of our friends at school leave and go into the service, volunteer service. Many of us, as I said, stayed in ROTC in the Reserve Officers Training Corp of the Army and thereby were able to get our degree before we entered active service. But yes, to answer your question, there was a cloud over the campus for four years.

M: Also, you worked for *The Alligator*, correct?

H: I was editor of *The Alligator*.

M: Well, you would have editorialized on some of these events.

H: We did, of course we were consumed by “what’s going to happen to us” here at the campus and I remember very well that *The Alligator* was full of information about the reserve status and what you could do if you volunteered, and how you could come back to your position in education, etc., so we were surrounded by the war element even though the United States had not yet been attacked, of course, at Pearl Harbor in 1941, which was, I think, my sophomore year. So while not involved directly, we were certainly involved indirectly because each of us had a personal decision to make.

M: Can you reflect briefly on the state of public opinion as far as you could tell at the University of Florida, and in the State itself? Were there people who were isolationists in their views? Were there people who were interventionists, or was that not discernible?

H: I don’t remember any isolationists. I think it was more a feeling of inevitability, that we could see where we were headed as a nation. I believe all of us felt, and the reason I went into ROTC was to prepare myself, even as a 19 or 20-year-old for the inevitability of our becoming involved in the war.

M: Who were some of the people that you remember, schoolmates, close friends of yours, contemporaries of yours that you may have gone into ROTC with that you also saw later on as time progressed?

H: There is one very significant young man of my acquaintance in memory. We entered the Army together from the University of Florida. We went to Fort Benning together for training. At that point of course everybody was assigned all over the map. Al Cone, then of Jacksonville, was a contemporary of mine. We were both assigned to the 102nd Infantry Division, the 406 Infantry Regiment, the First Battalion, C-Company. I had the 1st platoon in C-Company and he had the 2nd platoon in C-Company. We went all the way through the war together. There was an incident that Al Cone won the Silver Star for an act of absolute incredible bravery in carrying a platoon behind the enemy lines and capturing Germans and raising hell generally in southern Holland. That’s a long roundabout way of saying, , that Albertus J. Cone, who is a distinguished attorney now in Ocala, fought with me side-by-side and I have never known a braver or more resilient patriot than Al Cone. If I have nothing else to say in this interview, I want to pay the highest tribute I can to my friend, Al Cone, who walked with me side-by-side through Germany.

M: So he would also have been with you at Fort Benning.

H: Yes, he was with me at Fort Benning. He was with me at Gainesville, side-by-side when we were youngsters together in the same class.

M: Were the units organized together, or was that just as far as the same geographical area, or was that just dumb luck that it ended up like that?

H: Dumb luck, I guess. Because when we graduated from Officers Candidate School at Fort Benning, we were assigned all over the map, wherever the Army needed a Second Lieutenant.

M: So it would have been likely that you would have been with him at Fort Benning but not anywhere farther.

H: It’s an incredible coincidence that Al Cone and I wound up side-by-side all the way through the war.

M: So, walk me through your progression in school. You began in 1939.

H: I was a resident of Clermont in Lake County. I had no money. I borrowed \$100 from my aunt and got to Gainesville a week late as a green freshman and went on from there. I was very fortunate to be able to finish the four years and graduate with high honors and Phi Beta Kappa, and the editor of *The Alligator*, and the Campus Hall of Fame, and other honors that I'm too modest to relate. I was very lucky to have that opportunity to graduate from that school.

M: What was the extent of your duties in ROTC? What were the kinds of things that you did those four years?

H: We met, I believe, maybe twice a week. My memory is a little vague on that now, but I rose to the rank of Major in the Infantry. We drilled and had exercises and went to summer camps in Georgia or somewhere and practiced the arts of infantry.

M: December 7, 1941. Do you remember that day?

H: I remember it vividly. I was studying in my dormitory room in Fletcher Hall when the word came down that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. I leaned out the window and shouted to the first acquaintance I saw go by, who happened to be Raymond Ehrlich, a law student from Jacksonville, who later served on the Florida Supreme Court with great distinction. I hollered to Ray that we had been attacked by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor, and of course the news spread over the campus like wildfire because we were all vulnerable. We didn't know that maybe the university would close down and we'd all be sent into the service. We had no assurances of anything. But I do remember that Sunday.

M: What was the next day like?

H: The next day was looking out for yourself; "what does this mean to me personally." I'd like to say that we sat back and studied the strategies of Omar Bradley and General Eisenhower, but I was worried more about the strategy of Homer Hooks and was I going to be able to finish school, was I going to be jerked out of the Army, was my ROTC any kind of a shield or protection for me. It turned out it was and a very fine one, but I had no assurances of that the next day.

M: That would have been around Christmas break, I would imagine. Did you go through the rest of the spring semester?

H: Yes. Of course, the university stayed open and continued to hold classes as normal. Of course, many classes were decimated because students were leaving to volunteer. As I said at the outset, this was probably the lowest enrollment point in the history of the University of Florida. I think we were down to something like 3800 students, 3794 men and six women. This was before coeducation.

M: What was that summer like? What were the things that you did that summer as far as your ROTC? That would have been the summer of 1942.

H: I had a job in the dormitory system. I was a building monitor, so I stayed on the campus and worked as monitor of one of the halls. Incidentally, it was the women's dormitory. That's part of the story that we won't talk too much about!

M: You were the most trustworthy person on campus I guess; the straightest arrow of the bunch.

H: Absolutely. I had many of the young women come to me later on and say “thanks for letting me come in late”. But that summer was uneasy because in the first days of the war, you know, it didn’t go very well. The Japanese were in full attack and we were losing in the Pacific and we had not yet mounted a strategy in Europe. I think in Africa we were fighting but not on the continent certainly. So things were kind of tense that summer. We were all wondering about our own future, selfishly speaking.

M: Okay, into the fall of 1942, can you remember chronologically how things developed?

H: My memory is not too clear on that except that this was getting into the serious phase of ROTC because we could read the headlines and we knew that’s where we were headed, either the Pacific or the Atlantic, or somewhere else. We knew that our service at that point was not doubtful, it was certain. I think all of us began to grow up rapidly.

M: Then you graduated in 1943.

H: I did, and after a couple of months of leave, I reported to Fort Benning, Georgia, I think it was November of 1943, and then proceeded with the 13-week course there. I was commissioned Second Lieutenant on graduation.

M: Roughly how many folks were at Fort Benning when you were there?

H: I don’t think I know that figure. It was pretty crowded because they were grinding out second lieutents

M: Five thousand?

H: Probably less than that. I’m thinking of the Officer Candidate School, which I was in. I’d say between three and five thousand.

M: And that was you!

H: That was me, Second Lieutenant Infantry.

M: Were you assigned right after the 13 weeks?

H: I was assigned to the 102nd Infantry Division which at that time was located in Camp Swift, Texas. Three or four of us who were similarly assigned to the division got in a car and motored across, me from Clermont, others from other parts of the State.

M: Besides Al, did you know anybody else?

H: Oscar Herman Lewis lives here in Lakeland and is the head of the Mutual Wholesale Company. Of course in the army he was Oscar H. Lewis. He was assigned to the same division. I came to know later others who were from this general area. But at that time of course my hometown was Clermont, not Lakeland.

M: How many people were there at Camp Swift, Texas? And what were some of the different kinds of things you did from Fort Benning?

H: Camp Swift, which was located not far from San Antonio, was a traditional Army base with training facilities primarily. There were probably two or three regiments.

M: Did you have any idea at that time if you would be deployed to the Pacific or the European theatre? Did you have any hunch at all?

H: No, we had no indications where we might be sent.

M: It was all a matter of where the 102nd was sent. And 102nd didn't even know.

H: Exactly. It was a matter of war planning and the contingencies of war. If you remember, at that time we were losing. Europe had been overrun, the Pacific was under assault, Manila had fallen, and things didn't look good.

M: How long was the Camp Swift experience?

H: I was in Swift through the rest of 1943 and then in 1944 they moved us to New Jersey, to Fort Dix. At that time of course we were headed for Europe. That was clearly understood.

M: At Camp Swift were you all put into platoons at that time?

H: Yes. That's where the 102nd Division was organized. I was assigned as I said earlier to the 406 Regiment of the 102nd Division to the 1st Battalion to C-Company and I had the 1st Platoon in C-Company and Al Cone had the 2nd Platoon.

M: How many people were in your platoon at that time?

H: I think there were 40, something like that.

M: Who was over you, as Second Lieutenant?

H: A first lieutenant or Captain was the Company Commander. The platoons were part of the Company.

M: How many platoons were in the Company?

H: Four; three Rifle Platoons and one Weapons Platoon, mortars and machine guns.

M: And you were in a Weapons Platoon?

H: I was in a Rifle Platoon. That's the lowest common denominator in the Army.

M: Okay. So platoons are approximately 40.

H: Something like that, yes.

M: Would that hold together throughout the rest of the war, the number 40, roughly speaking?

H: That was the goal, but the contingencies of war could reduce a platoon to three overnight. Then it would be re-manned as soon as recruits came down the next few days. But it's the nature of war and nature of infantry combat that we never were at our ideal goal.

M: I guess you rode the train to Fort Dix.

H: Absolutely, across country. That was no great thrill. It wasn't Pullman service but we got there and Fort Dix was a big camp in New Jersey as you probably know. We continued our infantry training regularly. I want to go back if I may because the infantry training reminded me of the 13 weeks at Camp Benning. It included two tests that had to be passed before you could graduate no matter what else happened. One was a mental test, a kind of an intelligence test I guess would be a stretch, that involved a solution of problems and "how many men if a train leaves point A and travels X miles an hour when does it", you know the kind of test. But you had to pass that to graduate as an infantry officer. The other was a strenuous physical test which involved a horrendous obstacle course where you climbed walls with only a rope to pull you up and over the other side and you crawled under live fire on the ground to teach you to stay low as you moved forward because there was live ammunition 18 inches over your head. If you stood up, you got hit. I well remember that one. We went through that test. You had to pass both of those obviously to graduate as a Second Lieutenant Infantry. Now, back to your original question, yes, we were at Fort Dix and then we prepared to sail overseas. I believe we sailed to Cherbourg in September of 1944.

M: How many days would that have been roughly as far as getting over there?

H: It took us about 10 days or two weeks. Very slow going.

M: In your platoon, what were the geographical origins of these fellows?

H: That's a good question, Mike.

M: Everywhere?

H: Everywhere. We had kids from the Bronx. We had a scholar.

M: So it is kind of like the movies, then.

H: Yes, it's very much like the movies. It's the ultimate Democracy, an infantry platoon, or the squad even more so, which is 10 or 12 men. It was fascinating because for the most part none of us had ever been exposed to that diverse a personality pool, and here we were thrust in with people that we could barely understand. Of course they couldn't understand us either.

M: So you had been to college, which is an experience similar to that perhaps.

H: This was the great leveler, as I often call it, because Phi Beta Kappa meant absolutely nothing to the guy bunking above. All you hoped was that he could shoot well, and he hoped the same for you. I guess the point there is that I had never experienced a more democratic in real life institution than the U.S. Army.

M: I would imagine that the expectations that you had of certain people as you would meet them, both positive and negative, were not always realized.

H: I have a specific example. A West Point officer was in charge of one of our units. When he went into combat the first time, he completely collapsed. He sat in the bottom of his foxhole with his hands over his face. He could not go forward.

M: He was an officer, I guess?

H: He was a First lieutenant and a graduate of West Point. The point I want to make here is that nobody condemned him. Nobody blamed him for this because this is just another illustration of how much the human body and mind can take in the horror of war. So we lifted him out and got him back to the rear area and took care of him because it could happen to any of us. In his case, he just wasn't prepared mentally for the shock of combat.

M: And then perhaps on the other side of the fence, some of the ones that you didn't expect much out of perhaps –

H: My friend, Al Cone, whose story I just recited for you, in college was just a hard-working Joe studying Business Administration and my God, he got to Europe and he was a killer, a very shrewd and smart guy. He operated that raid in back of enemy lines like a professional soldier. And for that, he got the Silver Star. We were all very proud of him. But your point is well taken. I don't know of any institution in life that offers a broader range and scope of human emotions, abilities, sensitivity, than infantry combat. You see all kinds.

M: One of the things I want to ask you, and we can pick up on this as we go along while we're going across, is about African-American service in World War II. Obviously at this point in your service, they were very much marginalized. When you went to Camp Swift and when you went to Fort Benning, did you ever see any African-Americans and what kinds of roles they played, maybe as domestics or whatever?

H: No. I don't recall seeing any in the active platoons. I recall seeing a few doing barracks duty, kitchen duty, things like that.

M: But at this point in your service, you hadn't seen any evidence of that.

H: No.

M: Okay, so you arrive at Cherbourg. That must have been a real frightful experience because you didn't know what to expect.

H: Well, it was well under control by that time, but just barely. I mean, the advanced parties had already been there and set up a semblance of order. We arrived in Normandy; Cherbourg is in Normandy, in the fall of 1944 and set up our tent operation there.

M: I have September 22, 1944. Does that sound right?

H: That sounds about right, yeah.

M: September 23?

H: That's right.

M: What went through your mind the minute you stepped on shore, the minute your group deployed? And by the way, how many people were on the ship with you?

H: I don't remember.

M: It was a gigantic huge ship.

H: Well it was not a huge ship, it was a converted passenger ship, and I'm going to guess maybe a thousand.

M: How many ships did it take to bring the whole division over?

H: I don't know that number, but a lot. I was in the advance party by the way. I came over to Europe with, I don't know, maybe two to three hundred.

M: Were you concerned and informed, as you were crossing over, of submarine attacks and that kind of thing?

H: Oh yes. We didn't have any fortunately.

M: You don't remember any incidents?

H: I don't recall any incidents of that nature because there was good intelligence about where the submarines were, and of course we traveled in a convoy of many ships and we had battleship protection with our crossing, but we didn't have any incidents.

M: What went through your mind the first time you stepped onto European soil in hostile territory?

H: I would like to say that I made some wonderful quotable statement like "Lafayette, we're here", but I was probably looking for a restroom. No, I don't recall anything memorable about it except that we all had a lot to do.

M: Can you go through the first week?

H: Well the first week was involved in first getting ourselves settled down and then making preparations for the main body of our division to come over, a lot of planning, a lot of surveying outlying areas, "where are we going to put this battalion, this regimental headquarters" and so on. So I guess the answer is we were just tremendously busy making plans for the main body of the division to arrive. But we were not without amusing incidents. I recall one day we were leaving a certain area and we had used slit trenches of course, we had no bathroom facilities, we used slit trenches, and one of our jobs after we left the area was to cover them up and mound them over. Well we got up to leave one morning and we saw three French nuns out putting flowers on the slit trench. They thought they were graves. They were kneeling in prayer over these slit trenches. It's hilarious but in a way it's very touching because they had no way of knowing otherwise and they were paying what they thought was honor and tribute to these fallen soldiers. But that was an aside. Another aspect of the time in Cherbourg was the difficulty the tanks had in overcoming what the French called the hedge rows, that is, and you perhaps are familiar with it, they had their units with a rather steep row of embankment at the end and our tanks had a terrible time getting over those. It would put them up and make them

vulnerable. Their bellies were vulnerable to enemy fire, so we literally had to dig passages for tanks to get through there.

M: As you arrived in Cherbourg, how far would it have been, how many miles would it have been before there would have been a strong likelihood of combat? Let's say, you're in Cherbourg, how far would the, I guess the lines of Germans –

H: I think the enemy at that time was maybe 75 miles away. The Army prudently didn't run any great risks. Having established the beachhead, Omaha Beach, and the others and pushing inward, they consolidated the positions and defended them well so that the enemy was by that time not in panic retreat but in an orderly retreat toward Belgium and Southern Holland and back on into Germany. But I don't remember actually, Mike, whether Paris was liberated. I don't believe it was.

M: Well actually I have August 26th liberation of Paris.

H: Well then that was before we arrived.

M: But just barely. How many troops were in the full division, do you remember, roughly speaking?

H: Oh gosh, I can't remember that. That's in the standard table of organization somewhere. My impression is that a regiment was about a thousand troops and we had three regiments plus supporting Tank Battalions and engineers and other troops. A full-strength division must have been upwards of five thousand soldiers.

M: So as you consolidated your position and you prepared for the landing of the other troops, how long was it before you actually were mobilized to the point of moving forward?

H: We began to leave Normandy, where we were camped and move toward Germany in trucks because our forward troops had already cleared the way. Our first combat, 102nd Division, was in Southern Holland. If you remember your geography, there is a little neck of Holland that comes down between France and Germany, and that's where we were.

M: Now there was a major British battle, Market Garden. Were you involved in that at all?

H: No.

M: That was an unsuccessful attack. So you first penetrated, I guess, Holland. Would that be the case?

H: Yeah. Our first combat experience was in Southern Holland and that's where Al Cone's raid took place when he captured some German soldiers and exposed himself to great, great risk. Can I interrupt? I see by my notes that I've skipped over a couple of things that I wanted to mention. Camp Swift, Texas, was our main assembly point for the division. I may have said that, but then we went to Fort Dix, New Jersey, before we started overseas, and in Fort Dix concurrently, there was a transit strike by the bus and subway system in Philadelphia and our division was called to help keep the trucks and transit running. It happened that I was on leave at the time and I didn't personally experience it, but my friends and colleagues over there said it was a strange experience for infantry soldiers to be standing guard in streetcars, but that was one of our missions. It was kind of interesting. We embarked from Camp Kilmer, New Jersey,

on September 3, 1944, and then, as I said before, we went into Normandy, landing September 25, and then there were the hedge rows, the nuns at the slit trenches. The Red Ball Express was organized to move supplies to the front lines and the 102nd Division was assigned the duty of running that. I was not personally involved in it but a lot of my friends were who learned quickly how to drive trucks and deliver supplies to the front. We went across France and Belgium into Holland and our first major engagement with the enemy, and now I'm up to the same schedule you were on before, was on the Roer River, where we met the Germans head on. I have many, many memories about that.

M: Can you describe some of your first experiences or feelings about combat, what it was like?

H: Yes, it was strange. It ran all the way from absolute terror to lulls that were almost peaceful, and then suddenly it would pick up again. There was not a continuous burst unless you were in attack mode. It was in that first engagement when I was run over by a tank. I was deep down in my foxhole. The tanks had just advanced our lines and were firing on the enemy and when dusk came down, the tanks would customarily come back into the village behind us. Well the tank commander waved and I waved back, but it turned out he wasn't waving at me, he was waving at somebody else. He did not see me in my foxhole with my Sergeant so the next thing I knew was a hell of a rumble and the tank tread ran right over our foxhole and packed both my Sergeant and me under six feet of Dutch soil. Some of my friends on either side in their foxholes had seen this happen so they jumped up to come dig us out. Well when they jumped up, the Germans saw that action and laid down some heavy machine gun fire at ground level. So my friends who came to dig us out had to lie on their backs and dig with one hand with shovels. I remember vividly that they finally got a semi-loose dirt opening, so they jammed the handle of the shovel down to create an air hole. Well the handle of the shovel hit me right on the back of the head. They thought they had hit a rock, so they just jammed harder. Finally maybe they heard me holler and scream or whatever and they finally dug us out and the firing ceased from the enemy because they couldn't see in the dark. I never saw the Sergeant again. He was evacuated with a badly sprained back from carrying that load of dirt on his back. I had the good sense, I guess, involuntarily to go into a hunched position and spread the load. He was on his side and took all of that pressure on his ribs.

M: So the tank just continued on, I guess.

H: They continued on. They didn't know that they had run over us. Only my friends on either side saw that suddenly our foxhole had disappeared and they dug us out.

M: Was that the first day of your combat?

H: It was probably the second or third. It was not the first. But it was very vivid.

M: If I understand this correctly, your battalion was trying to take the bridges. Were the bridges that you were trying to get control of over the Roer River at that point?

H: Yes, they were over the Roer, and they were heavily defended. But before we even got to the bridge, we had to eliminate the resistance in the little towns before the river. Some of the heaviest combat that we ran into was on the banks of the Roer River and just before the banks, little towns like Apweiler and Geronsweiler, Geilenkirchen. I wrote an incident for which later the *Saturday Evening Post* paid me a hundred dollars in which my Sergeant had lost his rifle for some reason and the only thing he had with him was his radio with the antenna sticking out, so we came upon a German foxhole or embankment and we yelled in German for them to come

out. There was my Sergeant sticking his radio antenna into the chests of the Germans, and they had never seen this thing before and they were scared to death.

M: They thought it was a secret weapon of some sort.

H: Exactly! That's what the name of the article that *Post* printed, "*A Secret Weapon*".

M: These were civilians?

H: No, these were German soldiers.

M: These were captured soldiers?

H: Yeah. We captured soldiers with a radio antenna. I didn't. My Sergeant did. That was kind of a funny story.

M: I suppose you were seeing civilians everywhere you went.

H: Not as many as you would think.

M: That goes back to even Holland I guess perhaps.

H: Well in France of course we saw a lot of civilians but as we got closer to the combat areas, Mike, they weren't there. They had the good sense to get away.

M: You mentioned that you wrote a little bit. Did you use any of your journalism while you were in the field?

H: No, I just remembered it. I don't think I wrote that story about the radio antenna until I got back home. But I remembered those incidents because those were the kinds of things that stick in your memory. One other incident that I thought was touching in a way was on Christmas day, I guess it had to be 1944, we were near the banks of the Roer River and, I don't know whether it was by common consent or what, but the Germans floated a Christmas tree down the river. The Germans celebrate Christmas as we do, as you know, and I think the same day. So there we were, bitterly fighting and hurling everything we had at each other, but for a few hours on Christmas day and at night, the little raft with the Christmas tree made by the Germans floated down the river and nobody fired a shot. I will always remember that incident because it told me that, even in the midst of the horrors of war, there remains some spark of humanity left in all of us.

M: Now would it be true to say that they were on one side of the river and you were on the other side pretty much?

H: Yep.

M: So the civilians were pretty much flushed out of there as you approached.

H: Yeah. The civilians were long gone. I don't think we saw any civilians until we crossed the Roer and ultimately crossed the Rhine and then got into the heart of Germany and into some of the larger cities.

M: Would it be correct to say that the Roer area was the heaviest combat that you had fought so far?

H: Yeah.

M: Did you have combat in Holland and in –

H: Well to the extent that Al Cone's raid was in Holland. There was some resistance there, but by far the bitterest fighting was between the Roer and the Rhine.

M: How many miles would that have been roughly?

H: Oh, 10 or 12 miles I guess. Interestingly enough, I had occasion after the war, I guess in 1947 or 1948, to go back to Germany on business. I was in the citrus business then, and one day I rented a car and I drove to the exact spot where I had dug a foxhole and found it. It was just –

M: Where you were run over in the foxhole?

H: Not the one where I was run over.

M: But right where you remembered there was one? What went through your mind when you went there?

H: It was an indescribable memory. What went through my mind first were the faces, the faces of the soldiers who aren't with us anymore. I remember so well some of the incidents where they were hit. I remember one time I was crossing a field with one of my colleagues. A shot rang out and he dropped dead from a sniper crossing the wood line on the other side of the field. Now if that sniper had moved his barrel four inches to the right, I would have dropped dead. That's the kind of memory that sticks.

M: Do you have any memories of civilians, before we get over to across the river, either the French or the Dutch or the Germans up to this point chronologically I guess?

H: Yeah I did. In one combat scene, I distinctly remember running into a Catholic priest, I guess he was a Catholic, he had the collar, and he was carrying a pistol which I relieved him of. He was prepared to shoot me despite his collar.

M: Was he a German?

H: He was. He may have been a pretender. They were not above disguising themselves as old women or priests or whatever, very clever people, but not that one.

M: What about women? Did you see women civilians around? I know you wouldn't have noticed them, but maybe you did, I'm not sure.

H: No, that's a good question, Mike, because in thinking back, I don't remember until we were well into Central Germany seeing any women at all, children too. These areas, Apweiler, Geronsweiler, Roer River, Rhine River area, just seemed to be clear of civilians.

M: You probably have some vivid memories of the crossing part of the river.

H: Yeah. I mentioned the Christmas tree thing. I have another short story. I'm not even going to swear that this is accurate or truthful but it's so funny that I have to put it in. We were called on almost daily to take raids behind enemy lines and capture prisoners. Of course this is a terribly hazardous thing because nobody wants to be captured, so we ran into a lot of resistance to this.

M: As far as participating in these operations. Nobody wanted to do it.

H: Oh no, but you had to do it. I mean this is part of your job. But it was something that was very hazardous and dangerous. So one Lieutenant, or maybe it was a Sergeant, came up with a beautiful idea. He took a team across the German lines and captured 25 or 30 Germans at one swoop but instead of sending them all back to headquarters for interrogation, he sent three or four of them back, and he kept the others in a basement. He kept them fed and took care of them, but when the word came down that we needed to make another raid, he'd take another three or four prisoners out of his pool. Now I want to emphasize up close that I do not stand ready to swear under oath that this happened.

M: And you're not ready to swear under oath who it was either, I'm sure.

H: I'm not ready to swear anything on that story.

M: It's a good story and probably did happen. It was a pretty enterprising guy.

H: A good postscript to it would be that this Sergeant was so enterprising that he briefed himself on what was happening so that he could tell the Germans what to say. Now again, this may be pure fiction, but it's such a good story I couldn't help but relate it to you.

M: Well, go through with us a little bit of the logistics of crossing. For example, help me understand how you were able to push the Germans far enough back from the other side of the river to actually execute the crossing.

H: Well, there were assigned assault troops of course who with all engineer built boats would cross the river in raids and gradually push the Germans out of position. When they got them far enough back, then the engineers would build a pontoon bridge and a main body of say a battalion could cross over and push the Germans further back.

M: At this stage of the war, were paratroopers still being used?

H: Not in our section but I think up north of us, north Holland, there were paratroop operations, but we didn't have them.

M: I also want to ask about air cover and air combat. At this stage in the war, were there still German Luftwaffe coming over all the time, or was that pretty much knocked out by then?

H: We didn't see any significant air combat on either side. One reason was we were so close together.

M: Even if you go back to when you first landed for example. Was there significant air combat or air strafing or anything like that?

H: I'm sure there was, and we could see the red light flashing in the cities back in France, but we were not ourselves involved in air strikes. In some combat situations I recall as we moved into Germany, we called down air support but that was rare. And again part of the reason was, Mike, we were so close to the German lines and they were close to us that it would have been difficult for an air strike not to hit our own troops.

M: We were talking about the Christmas tree and we were talking about Christmas. We know what went on south of you around that time, and that is the big Ardennes offensive, the Bulge.

H: Battle of the Bulge.

M: What kind of effect or impact did that have on you, if only just to scare you a little bit?

H: It had a very direct impact in that our lines were thinned out so that more troops could be sent south to the Ardennes. We were perhaps 15 or 20 miles north of the Bulge.

M: Is that all? That's not far.

H: Yes, that's not far. Had the Germans known that our lines were being thinned to go down to the Bulge area, they could have walked through between our lines, but their intelligence didn't show that so the net effect was that they were confronted at the Bulge by Patton and his people and destroyed. But German intelligence was not the best. To us it meant that our lines were thin. We actually had communication by telephone between foxholes because we couldn't yell that far.

M: So when you first learned of the offensive, was there a lot of chaos, a lot of concern?

H: No, I think our defensive posture was pretty well established that we had to get reinforcements in there, which we did. As I said, some of it was the thinning of our own lines. But that was handled superbly by our higher command in their getting General Anthony McAuliffe and his people, (and his saying "nuts" to German surrender orders), and they got things taken care of. But to us who were north of it, the only effect we saw was some lowering of our troop levels.

M: Okay, walk us through from your own personal perspective what crossing the Roer was like.

H: Well the crossing of the Roer, which is a very narrow stream, was not a significant problem. Crossing the Rhine was a big event. You remember the Bridge at Remagan?

M: Sure.

H: I'll have to say, Mike, that by the time we got to the Rhine, our regiment had been in a reserve posture, we crossed without any difficulty.

M: The Rhine?

H: Yeah. The engineers had laid the bridge down. Of course there was some sporadic enemy fire but nothing concentrated and we got into the main body of Western Germany without major difficulty. Our main fighting was around the Roer River, which the Germans would call, I guess their first line of defense before the Rhine. We didn't see any resistance to speak of at the Rhine because that had all been cleared out by other troops.

M: What about right after you crossed the Roer? Were there still Germans in that grid?

H: Yeah, but they were taking off. They could see what was coming and we didn't have a lot of problems between the Roer and the Rhine.

M: Are there any memorable incidents that you'd like to talk about, either before the crossing of the Roer or after, between that and the Rhine?

H: Well, let's see. I remember mentioning floating the Christmas tree down the river and the pause in the fighting between the Germans and our troops. I took a leave in Paris about that time.

M: Let's talk about that a little bit if you want to. You can tell us certain things. You might have a little selectivity there.

H: Well I have a few memories about it that are kind of amusing.

M: How long did you have?

H: Four or five days. We went back in a big truck, all of us huddled together with our bags with us, and one in our group had treasured a bottle of Scotch whiskey for a big party in Paris when we got there. As we got off the truck, he dropped it on the cobblestones and I have never seen a soldier more distraught in my life! Here he had survived weeks of combat and the first time he tried to get off and celebrate his leave, he dropped his whiskey. Anyway that was kind of funny.

M: I guess the remarkable thing is that it lasted that long.

H: Yeah! That's right! Oh I could see he was guarding it carefully on that truck. I got my Purple Heart in that battle around Apweiler and the Roer River when I got caught between a tank battle between the Americans and the Germans. I got out in front of our tank and the German tank was firing toward the American tank of course. Unfortunately, he was firing short. He was firing at less distance than he should have and a shell hit near me and got me in the ear. I was not evacuated. It wasn't that serious, but it was very bloody. I don't remember much about it because I guess I was knocked out and they took care of me from there. That was where I got my Purple Heart for combat. I don't want anymore. There were some guys that got, well I think, who ran for President last year, the Democrat, Kerry. I think he got three or four Purple Hearts according to the record. I have great respect for that medal. It was founded by George Washington I think in 1776. Incidentally, if you don't mind a little personal note that I think is of some interest, I belong to the two oldest organized societies in American, Phi Beta Kappa and the Order of the Purple Heart. Phi Beta Kappa was organized at William and Mary College in the 1700's, I don't remember the date, and the Purple Heart similarly. So that's a mark of some pride and distinction I think.

M: Yes. Now you were going to tell us some more about Paris I think.

H: Oh, was I? I thought you'd forgotten. I don't have many memories of Paris except of Moulin Rouge. I remember going there and well, soldiers on leave do what soldiers on leave do.

M: Did you hang out with your platoon primarily?

H: I tried to lose them.

M: Were you all on leave at the same time?

H: No, it was a group of officers, each with a different unit, so some of us barely knew each other. Oh yeah there were accommodations for us. Two or three of us would go out together but we weren't considered a unit or anything like that. But we went to the nightclubs and we went to the bistros and we had a great time.

M: What was the population like? I bet the civilians had been battered pretty hard.

H: In Paris? I wouldn't know that, but oh yeah, they'd just come out from under German occupation. But they made a brave front. I'll never forget the Moulin Rouge opened, a famous nightclub, and they had some tottering old ladies who had been in the original Moulin Rouge but they came back to entertain, and it was very touching and wonderful to see that all brighten up again.

M: Was that after you had crossed the Roer or before that you had that time in Paris?

H: I think it was before, Mike. I think that was before, I had that leave in Paris when all that happened.

M: Okay, so now, as you're heading up to the Rhine, you were able to cross on a bridge made by the engineers.

H: Yeah, we crossed the Roer on an engineer bridge, crossed the Rhine on a better engineer bridge because they'd had more time to work on it. But we were not out of danger either time. There were always pockets of German snipers that they left behind to pick off officers if they could. Incidentally, this is where I took dispute with some of those war movies. Officers never, never wore their insignia on the front of the helmets, but in the movies they always did. And that was a sniper's target, to pick off a Major's crest or First lieutenant's silver bar. Yeah, we crossed the Rhine without great difficulty but we ran into considerable combat after we crossed the Rhine when the Germans were making their last stands so to speak, and the Bulge, and all of that. We headed north to cross into Northern Germany.

M: As you were moving, did you stay pretty much in the countryside?

H: Pretty much the countryside. They had what is called the North German Plain. It's mostly level country with some wooded areas. We were, I think at that time, attached to the British who had responsibility for that whole northern sector, and we crossed Northern Germany with some fighting but nothing like the fighting at the Roer and the Rhine Rivers.

M: Did you have any significant interaction with British officers or British soldiers?

H: No I really didn't, until we got to the Elbe River and before we met the Russians, and that's another story we'll get into.

M: So like the D-Day boys, you didn't have any time in Britain beforehand or anything like that.

H: I had no leave in Paris other than one and no leave in London at all. But we did run into some allies as we got to the Elbe River.

M: What was the first major German city that you approached after the Rhine?

H: A city named Krefeld. Is that on your map?

M: It sure is, right here. That actually looks as if it is on the west side of the Rhine on this map, though.

H: Oh really? Well, maps are accurate so it must have been. My thought was that we had crossed the Rhine, but maybe not. Anyway, that was the first major city we ran into.

M: Can you tell us a little bit about that battle? I suppose there was a battle for the city, would that be correct?

H: I believe that either one of our sister divisions was involved in the leading thrust but the 102nd was definitely in it and the account in the book will relate some of that. I have an amusing story about that. Fast-forward to the Korean War. When I went to the Pentagon in Army Intelligence G2, I reported in to the General in charge and it turned out to be the commander of the 84th Division in Europe. He took a look at my Ozark patch and said, "Who captured Krefeld, Captain?" I was standing at attention and I said, "General, for the purposes of this interview and my duration under your command here at the Pentagon, you did, sir". He laughed uproariously and we had a couple of drinks later on about Krefeld. There was a little bit of tension between the 84th and the 102nd on who captured Krefeld. That was big prize in Western Germany and the 84th Division claims they did and of course we claimed we did.

M: Can you help us understand how that process worked? Obviously cities were a whole issue unto themselves. They would have been defended by the Germans. The city leaders would have been involved perhaps. How did that process work as far as the actual process?

H: There may not ever be an answer to that.

M: Was it all different based on each individual situation?

H: Yeah, and each Unit had a different assignment. Take New York City for instance. Here's an army coming in and captures Long Island and the Bronx. Here's another army coming in from Pennsylvania that captures the western side of New York City. Suppose they, by prior agreement, meet at City Hall just to exchange swords. Who captured the city? And that's what happened at Krefeld. We each had a different assignment, we carried it out, and I don't think it's a very important question as to who captured the city.

M: Okay, so we're up to the Rhine. We're getting over the Rhine. What were the first objectives after the crossing of the Rhine?

H: After the crossing of the Rhine, Mike, the objective was to head east as expeditiously as possible. The first objective was the Elbe River which flows just about 50 miles west of Berlin, and to hold up on the bank of the Elbe River for further instructions.

M: How far would that have been from the Rhine?

H: From the Rhine? I'm going to guess a couple hundred miles.

M: So that's a good way to go.

H: Because that's all the way across the North German plain. And I have a fascinating story, which I've told many times, tried to sell it, about my role in the ending of World War II. Tell me when you're ready.

M: We'll certainly get there. How would you describe the German resistance at that point? That would have been, I guess, February or March of 1945.

H: That's a very, very good question. I would describe it as intense and sporadic. It was not well organized. Mike, we ran into kids of 12 and 13 years old. We ran into old men all bent over but holding up a rifle. We ran into very little highly organized resistance, but we ran into a lot of pockets of absolute dedicated committed resistance.

M: Did you run into any SS Divisions or any SS troops at this point?

H: I personally never did. We were told that they were out there, but by that time they had turned most of the heavy fighting over to the Citizen's Armies they called it, the Wehrmacht.

M: You also mentioned that after you crossed the Rhine you began to see a lot of civilians that really had nowhere else to go I would assume.

H: Exactly. They knew the Russians were coming from the East, they knew we were coming from the West, and I can say right now that we got most of the surrenders because they were just dreading the Russian army, and with good reason.

M: Was there any evidence nearer the Elbe that there were massive numbers of refugees coming across the Elbe and then over into –

H: Yes, yes. Many, many, many hundreds, if not thousands, were fleeing from the Russian army and attempting to surrender to the West. This was a real problem because logistically these people had to be taken care of one way or another. At my level, we didn't have the problem except in the case of the concentration camp at Gardelegen, which we liberated and which will always stand in my memory. All the pictures you've ever seen of emaciated bodies, they're all true.

M: How many days was it before you reached that spot from the Rhine?

H: Oh, it must have been two weeks.

M: So you moved forward. Did you have any sense that this camp was there or did you just kind of stumble onto it? How did that happen?

H: No, I think our intelligence had shown us where it was and we went into the camp. The German army had just left and the creatures were just in pitiful shape. Of course our medics took over and tried to salvage as many as they could. But it was a horrible example. I laugh at these revisionists who try to say it never happened, you know. It did happen. I saw it.

M: As I tell my students, there is no other documented incident in World history that is more documented and is more documented by pictures, by documents. You name it.

H: Pictures in this book! Survivors.....

M: There is no other incident in history that is more documented.

H: Did you ever know a guy named Landwirth, here in Lakeland?

M: No.

H: He ran and owned the Holiday Inn on Memorial. He was a survivor; he and his sister were survivors of a concentration camp. He still had the numbers on his arm, and to hear Henry talk about his experiences, you just couldn't believe it, that a human being could do those things.

M: Yes.

H: But anyway, that was my experience with it. It was the camp called Gardelegen in April 1945 and then we went on to the Elbe River. We went right up to the Czech border and then pulled back into Bavaria where we occupied Bavaria. I was still a First lieutenant at that time, but I was given heavy responsibility along the border of Czechoslovakia. One of my Company Commanders raised the question, he was a Captain, and he said, "Why should I take the orders of a fucking First lieutenant?" So I said, "Well, sir, I'm just carrying out the General's orders". So I went to the General whose name was Biddle, a Philadelphia Biddle, and I recounted that and I said, "Sir, I've had a problem with Captain so-and-so down there who says he's not going to take orders from any SOB First lieutenant". The General picked up the phone and he said, "Get me Captain so-and-so". He said, "Captain! This is the voice of Biddle". I'll never forget his phrasing it. "This is the voice of Biddle. From this day forward, you will obey without question any order given to you by Lieutenant Hooks. Am I clear?" That was a funny incident. It's true.

M: Now this occurred after you had gotten to the Elbe, and after you were in the occupation.

H: We were in occupation at that point.

M: Well I want to go into that too actually, that occupation. So, as you move toward the Elbe, resistance is sporadic, there are extreme dangers still. Did you ever see, at this point, any German aircraft at all by that time?

H: No. In fact, I can only recall two or three incidents I could see them, as I told you before, when we were getting into France. I could see them off in the distance, but strafing our troops? No. We never had that. And I didn't see much enemy air activity at all.

M: Chesterfield Smith has that great story, you know, the jets flying over for the first time, and as Burke Kibler says, "You have to take a lot of what Chesterfield used to say as revisionist".

H: That much salt!

M: But you never saw any jets or anything like that?

H: No.

M: Okay. When you were on the way, of course, you're trying to survive and just make it through the day, but did you have a sense that there would be political fallout from the Russians

occupying Berlin and then incorporating all the territory up to the Elbe? Did you think at all about any of that stuff as you were going through the day?

H: Let me remind you, Mike, I was a First lieutenant.

M: Yes, exactly.

H: Company Commander, Platoon Commander.

M: It's almost a ridiculous question.

H: I wasn't thinking at – well it's a good question, it's a legitimate question. But as one soldier said, "That is above my pay level". In retrospect, certainly we were concerned, but at that time, we welcomed them because they were fighting the same guys we were and for every German they shot, we didn't have to worry about. So to put it as plainly as I know how, I would say that we loved the Russians at that point.

M: Now we all hear all these wonderful stories of vodka being exchanged between the Russian soldiers and the American soldiers. Do you remember any of those kinds of incidents or interactions with Russian soldiers when you got to the Elbe?

H: I remember a couple parties on the banks of the Elbe, one side or the other. I often tell the story, we drank vodka toasts to each other and I fell out at Krefeld. We were toasting all the cities we'd captured from France –

M: Oh, okay.

H: And I said I fell out at Krefeld, that's where I got off the train. They could drink vodka like water. I never saw anything like that. And the Russians we met with, you know, they were at our level, lieutenants, captains, majors, and they were fighting hard for their country and their cause, so we had great respect for them.

M: Now what was your sense of the morale or the thinking, I know you've probably thought about this, of the German civilians that you confronted as you moved towards the Elbe, and even after?

H: It was different in different places. Some of them fought to the bitter end.

M: Even the civilians?

H: Yes.

M: They'd pick up a gun and go after you?

H: They'd go after you with a pitchfork or a gun or whatever they could. For the most part, they seemed resigned to the inevitability of their defeat.

M: Are there any incidents with civilians that you can think of at any point in the war?

H: Only that German priest that I mentioned before that I took the weapon from. For the most part, the Germans were sullen and cooperative. They weren't happy to see us, but they were

happier to see us than the Russians. This was the big demarcation at the end of the war. They were horrified by the Russians and the stories that they had heard, so by contrast, they considered us much more desirable people. But there were pockets of resistance, just unyielding.

M: What was the last day, the last shot that you heard fired in combat? That might be hard for you to remember, but what was the last day that you ever experienced any combat moving up to the Elbe?

H: Gee, that's a tough one. I don't know if there was a specific incident because after we crossed the Rhine and got into the North German plain, it was more a matter of continuous movement. We were in trucks for the most part so whatever shots were fired were from last ditch snipers and, you know, malcontents. To put it another way, a better way, there was no organized resistance to us for the most part in the North German plain as we went to the Elbe River.

M: Can you remember your feelings or your thinking on VE Day, when you found out about the surrender?

H: Yes, and I remember quite vividly, they were not entirely joyful because we were getting a lot of information that troops were being moved from Europe to Asia, that some troops would be redeployed from a combat area in Europe to staging areas in the Pacific and everybody wondered 'is it us'?

M: You were already thinking about that?

H: Yeah. So we were apprehensive about that and every time orders came down for a troop movement, you wondered 'does this mean us, are we going to San Francisco?'

M: So you had experiences or knowledge of people on a personal level that that was going on with?

H: I really didn't. I think it was more in the realm of rumor, but *Stars and Stripes* and other communications were full of news about the war in the Pacific so it didn't take a genius to figure out that if they're going to have one, here we are! We're well trained, combat ready, move us over. So we had to be concerned, and we were concerned about that.

M: Well walk us through, unless there are some other things that you'd like to talk about, up to the VE Day surrender. Is there anything more that you'd like to say about your combat experience up to that point?

H: Well I mentioned the 'Voice of Biddle' incident which is interesting to me.

M: But that was after VE Day, correct?

H: You're right. That was after VE Day. That was in the Army of Occupation. But before that, when we got to the banks of the Elbe, I was acting as a liaison officer between my outfit, which was the 406th Infantry, and division and Corp headquarters to the rear. We were poised to cross the Elbe and capture Berlin, and we were all ready to go; everything was set up. And I had an urgent call to report back to division headquarters, somewhere 25 miles behind the line. So I went back and I got a sealed envelope. I wasn't allowed to read it, in case of capture I

couldn't say what it was, so I took it back to my regimental headquarters and waited while the Colonel read it and the message was 'you will stand on the West bank of the Elbe River and not cross the Elbe River to capture Berlin'. I'm paraphrasing it. I'm sure it was put in more elegant military language.

M: And this was a Colonel who had received that.

H: Exactly.

M: And this had come from HQ?

H: From SHAEF, (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force). Maybe I'm over-glamorizing but to me, that message stopped the American war on the West bank of the Elbe River. Had I been shot or captured or otherwise detained, my unit conceivably could have crossed the Elbe the next morning and captured Berlin and the course of history might be entirely different! If the Americans had gotten to Berlin before the Russians got to Berlin, or maybe even at the same time, we would have had a lot more stature to say, you know, there's no longer a four party army of occupation.

M: What was the reaction of your Colonel when he read that? Were you in the room when he read it?

H: I can't remember what the reaction was.

M: But you obviously at that moment learned of the contents, correct?

H: Yes. I knew the contents. I knew that we were not going to cross the Elbe; that we were not going to capture Berlin. We ultimately did of course move in after the Russians.

M: So a hundred other colonels were getting the same message.

H: Getting the same message 'stand on the West bank of the Elbe River, do not cross the Elbe River until further notice', which gave the Russians clearance to move in and capture Berlin and become the conquerors of the German army.

M: Now we all know that was a tremendously historically important event, but at that point, you probably didn't appreciate the full measure of it and, like I suggested, you were just trying to get through the day and you were glad probably at that moment, 'oh gosh I'm glad we're not crossing that Elbe'. But within a month let's say after you're occupation begins, how long was it before that really began to sink in, in terms of 'hey this is really an important thing'.

H: It might have been more than a month, Mike. You have to remember, a captain is a pretty low level, or first lieutenant then and I didn't have an appreciation for the global aspects of the war as I did perhaps six months later.

M: Well, let's take it a year in advance. Did you, as a member of the Occupation Army and also later on, hear in your ranks disgruntlement, anger, frustration, those kinds of things that we oftentimes hear from the military people, like Patton for example? That the Russians had gotten it first and 'damn it, the politicians', you know.

H: This answer may surprise you, but no. I did not hear that much, keep in mind that we were getting killed right and left. Here was an army of allies on the other side who were taking far worse hits than we ever did. I would say that we had more respect for the Russians at that point than we had up until a year or two years later. Because we felt, as infantrymen, 'these guys have been through what we have and they took their licks! By God they're entitled to what they're –'

M: They're country was occupied for 3-1/2 years.

H: Brutalized!

M: Yeah, brutalized.

H: And if they captured Berlin, so what? Later on of course things developed and you began to realize that the Russians were not the white knights of the Western world and –

M: And of course that idea and that anger fuses into politics and the political conflict, Democrats vs. Republicans, and who lost the Eastern Europe, and the Democrats lost the Eastern Europe, all that kind of stuff. They sold us out at Yalta, and all, you know that story.

H: I sure do! Many years later I went to Berlin as a tourist; I hadn't been there before. I got a pass and I went into the Russian zone; they were still occupying it. Then I got ready to leave and it took forever. Everybody else on the bus was cleared, and you can imagine what was going through my head, 'my God these guys have gotten my military record all the way back to the Rhine River and they're going to let me rot right here in Eastern Germany!' But they ultimately let me through and I'm sure it was just unfounded dismay. But it did go through my mind.

M: What year was that?

H: This must have been 1947.

M: So it was only a few years. Are there some other things that I've missed here that you'd like to put in between the VE Day and also occupation?

H: Did I tell you about the time that I went back to Germany as a civilian and retraced my steps to Aachen and Geronsweiler and Apweiler and all those places? Peace was at hand. This was two or three years after the war but it was a bittersweet kind of memory because I could walk up to the spot where I had dug a foxhole and I could look at this corner of a building where I'd hid behind. It brought back a lot of mixed feelings. This was in 1947 or 1948. I remember going to a hotel in Ragensburg, Germany, and I had a Purple Heart which I wore the little thing and still have the medal, but this was to wear on your suit, and I got up the next morning and it was gone. Some German had stolen my little Purple Heart emblem. I don't know what that means; it may mean nothing, but it happened. I remember going to the semiannual Oktoberfest in Munich, a giant blast of beer, pretzels, singing, and conviviality. I was there alone and I got my big stein of beer and a couple of pretzels and sat down at a table. The guy who sat across from me looked about my age and spoke a little English; I spoke a little German then. We got to conversing, fast forward, he was on the opposite side from me in Geronsweiler or one of the towns in Germany that we'd fought through. He was just yards away. We shook hands, parted, and never saw each other again. I have one other story that's not directly related to the war. It goes back to when I was growing up in Clermont. My Sunday school class at the Methodist

Church, at which my grandfather was the pastor, organized a communications and letter exchange with foreign students our same age. It wound up that I was put in touch with a young man named Rudolf Donner of Leipzig, Germany; exactly my age, say 16 or 17 years ago. So Rudolf and I corresponded back and forth for years and years, all the way through college. Then when the war came, suddenly he joined the brown troopers and he was so happy and proud about that. Of course I was in ROTC. And our correspondence just kind of petered out because we lost our common interests. Then, when I was in Germany in Occupation, in Bavaria, I took a jeep one day and went driving and we went to Leipzig, and I went to Rudolf's apartment.

M: You knew his address!

H: Yeah, I knew his address. And there was his name on the door, Rudolf Donner, but he was gone. Of course I had no way to communicate by telephone or whatever, so I just left a note on the door that Homer Hooks of Clermont, Florida, came by to say hello; never heard from him. But that's kind of an interesting story, melding the old with the new.

M: Yes, yes. That's probably a good segue into Occupation. Can you go into your Occupation duty and how long that lasted, and some of the memorable –

H: Yes, it was the story of "Captain, this is the voice of Biddle". Homer Hooks speaks with the Voice of Biddle, I think was the way he put it. That was in the Army of Occupation. We had responsibility for the entire Czech border with Bavaria and I lived in a town called Wieden and I lived in Passau, where the rivers converge and flow into Austria. That was rather pleasant duty because there were no shots fired. We had a thing called the Horse Platoon. All the people in the platoon had their own horse, and we had very light duty.

M: What was the chronology of your service there? Or what was the timeframe, I guess?

H: Let me see. It was after - I don't have any dates on that.

M: Was it a year? Six months?

H: I didn't have enough points to come home immediately. Al came back sooner than I did, and that was based on when you set sail for home. It seems to me I was in Bavaria about 10 months or a year after the cessation of hostilities, technically in the Army of Occupation. And then we took many side trips. We had time. We went to the Alps in Switzerland. If you weren't anxious to go back home it was a pretty good duty.

M: Were you in with your same platoon, or how did that work? Were you reorganized into another

H: Yeah, it was different outfit. Different people had different go-home times and so units were reorganized. I was in something called actually the 11th Constabulary Regiment. And that was people who were just biding their time waiting for

M: Now on the other side of the Czech border, the Russians would have been there. Did you have any instances of crossing over or trouble the Russians?

H: No, I didn't have any problems. They had their duty on their side and we were on the German side and those problems were being addressed at our headquarters.

M: What was it like, let's see you'd been overseas now about a 1-1/2 years, correct?

H: Nearly two years counting Occupation.

M: What was it like getting your gear together and getting ready to go back home? What was going through your mind?

H: Well, I was excited about it. Number one, I had a girlfriend I wanted to marry, not the one I'm married to now; that ended in divorce, but she was studying for her Master's Degree at Columbia University so it was very convenient.

M: Did you meet her at Florida?

H: I met her in Texas.

M: Oh while you were in Texas.

H: She was a Texan. She was at the University of Texas in Austin when I met her.

M: Did you maintain contact while you were over there?

H: Yeah. We wrote each other. Then when I got back, we got together again and subsequently got married. But I guess it was more a matter of just waiting. I was glad to get home. I wanted to embark on my career in Journalism for which I was trained at the University of Florida. I went to Tampa and looked up a dear friend, Jimmy Clendenin, who was State Editor of *The Tribune*, and he hired me, and I went to work writing for *The Tribune*. Then we can fast forward. I stayed in the Army Reserve and was recalled to duty in the Korean War. I think I told you that.

M: Yes. We can certainly get into some of that if you'd like.

H: Well, it'll be rather brief. I went into the Pentagon in Army Intelligence. I was promoted to captain by that time and I was assigned to give regular daily briefings and that's when that incident occurred where the G2 of the Army was the former commanding general of the 84th Infantry Division. I told you that story, I won't repeat it. He said, "Who took Krefeld", and I said, "For the purposes of this interview, you did". My job every morning was to go in and get a telecom message from Tokyo on what happened in Korea the day before. I would plot that on a Top Secret portable map which I carried under my arm and then go to the office of the Chief of Staff or the general who had troops in Korea, the Allies, to the State Department. It was a pretty high level duty. That would take all of the morning and then I'd come back in the afternoon and plot maps again about the situation in Korea. The thrust of the duty was that I was in charge of informing the ambassadors of the countries who had troops in Korea fighting alongside ours and our own command structure in the Pentagon, Chief of Staff, Chief of Staff of the Army, Secretary of Defense, and so forth, on an up-to-date accurate maybe 10-15 minute description of what happened the day before at Korea. It was interesting. And I met a lot of very fine officers, General Mark Clark and General George Marshall, of course, and others were there.

M: What were your impressions of General Marshall?

H: Consummate gentleman. He could have held any office he wanted I think. He was very quiet spoken, unassuming. In civilian clothes you would not guess that he was a commanding general, but he had tremendous intellect and a certain gravity about him that commanded instant respect and admiration. I was very much taken with him. I also recall one time when one of my colleagues was appearing before all of these generals to give his report on the situation in Korea and he suddenly forgot everything. He forgot his notes. He forgot where he was. And he was an Irish boy and he said, and I'll never forget it, he said, "Gentleman, for the moment I seem to have forgotten the things I was supposed to cover with you, so if you have no objection, I would like to sing a few old Irish ballads for you".

M: Now and this was General Marshall?

H: Well, I don't think it was Marshall, it was probably some lower level people, but it was such candor and consummate humor that it just broke up the crowd and he went into, I don't know, "Danny Boy" or something until his memory came back. I don't know whether he had some ailment or what, but I'll never forget that moment when in all seriousness in the briefing room, suddenly here's this lieutenant singing.

M: Now, DuMont. Tell us about the DuMont –

H: That was a network –

M: Was that a television network?

H: Yeah. It's an old network and I guess they merged with, I think NBC bought them out.

M: So you actually were on that television program.

H: Yeah.

M: Were you the spokesman or were you the writer for that?

H: Yeah, I was the Army Briefing Officer.

M: And that would come on –

H: I think it was a Sunday night broadcast for about a half hour.

M: And the purpose was to show the people.

H: Yeah. And I was the spokesman for the Army. It was quite a nice assignment. I enjoyed it. But DuMont Network disappeared.

M: Did you actually also write the script as well?

H: Yeah, I wrote the script. Of course it was supervised by somebody in higher command, but since I was the one who got all the information from Tokyo, I was really the expert on it. It was an interesting assignment, but I couldn't wait to get back to civilian life. I really wanted to get back. I was with Lakeland Highlands Canning Company.

M: So when you were called back you were working for the Tampa newspaper?

H: I was working for the Lakeland Highlands Canning Company here in Lakeland, citrus canner. I had left *The Tribune* and a couple of other jobs in the citrus industry. But I was with the canning company and what got me back into duty, I was at the same time in the Strategic Reserve exploring strategic intelligence assignments. I remember our assignment. We had a team of six or eight officers and we'd meet at the Bartow Air Base once a week, and our job was to evaluate and assess the military capabilities of the Swedish Air Force. It sounds like some grand operation, but I'm sure we were number 18b in somebody's roll. Anyway, we worked hard at that and then we had assurances, Mike, that if we were ever recalled to duty, this was the Army, that we would be recalled as a unit; we would be together, we would operate probably in the Pentagon, carry on these high-level assignments like the –

M: Now who else was involved in this?

H: I don't remember now. A guy that was on the staff of the Lakeland Regional –

M: This was the Reserve –

H: Yeah, all Reserve officers.

M: Burke wasn't involved in this was he?

H: No, but he was in something similar to that.

M: And also, Chesterfield, right?

H: Right.

M: Was Chesterfield in that?

H: Not in my unit.

M: I thought Burke and Chesterfield maybe had been in the same Reserve unit.

H: I think they were, but not in the one I was with.

M: And Lawton too, I think, right?

H: Strategic Intelligence Team. But the bottom line is, the Army welched on its commitment and we were recalled separately, me first. That's when I reported to the Pentagon as a Briefing Officer. I remember when time came for me to leave, well let me back up to another little story here, when the general who was Chief of Staff G2 said, "Captain Hooks, who captured Krefeld", and I said, "For the purposes of this exercise, General, you did", and that got a big laugh from him. There was a funny story about the Pentagon. Have you ever been in the Pentagon, Mike?

M: No, but I've seen it. I've been on the outside.

H: It's a wonder and a maze at the same time. It seems that a very pregnant young lady who was obviously in the last moments of distress came up and asked an officer how in the world she could get out of there and he said, "Miss, you really shouldn't have come here in your condition". And she said, "I didn't". Anyway, that's a funny little story. Oh, and I went in to see

the general when my 18 months was about to come up, that was my tour, and I said, "General, it's almost time for me to leave now", and he said, "You can't go". I said, "Sir, what do you mean, with all respect?" He said, "Well our policy is that you can't leave an assignment like this until you get a replacement for yourself". And I said, "With the deepest respect, Sir, how do I get a replacement for myself?" And he laughed and said, "I'm kidding you, Hooks", he says, "We'll see that you get your dismissal on time". That was 1952 and then I went from here to Lake Wales to become Director of Sales for Donald Duck, and the rest is history. And I severed my connection with the Army.

M: We've covered that history, of course, on another tape.

H: Yeah, I remember that now.

M: This dovetailed with that will be wonderful.