

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
THOMAS CLARK  
Army Communications, World War II – Pacific and Europe (1943-1946)

2011

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**Clark, Thomas.** (b. 1924). Oral History Interview, 2011.

Master Copy: 1 audio cassette (ca. 70 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

User Copy: 1 audio cassette (ca. 70 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

**Abstract:**

Thomas Clark, born in 1924, served in World War II in both the Pacific and European Theaters, and states in this interview that he served in the 69<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the 222<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, and the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division as a Communication Chief. Clark was born in Mason City, Iowa but moved to Wisconsin at age ten. Clark discusses his time in high school in Madison, Wisconsin, and the desire to join the Marines. Clark's father refused to let Clark join, and instead paid for flying lessons. Clark was also a chauffeur for the Corps of Engineer before getting drafted in 1943. Clark discusses basic training in Fort Bragg, then waiting to hear whether or not he would go to Fort Sill for an exam. Instead, he was sent to Hawaii to guard Pearl Harbor. Clark details watching for submarines and how his team accidentally shot down a small fishing boat in a restricted area. Clark was sent on furlough in March 1944, and then spent time in Keesler Field, Mississippi. Clark recounts receiving a letter stating that the closure of the air cadets; he was then transferred to ground forces and sent to Europe in late winter of 1944. Clark was in communications as a switchboard operator in the infantry and the regimental headquarters company. Clark talks about being in Remagen when the bridge collapsed, the capture of Leipzig, the Soviet/American link up on the Elbe River in 1945, and the horrors he saw when freeing a concentration camp (possibly Dachau). Clark was sent home with the 29<sup>th</sup> Division in 1946, and talks about very stormy, dangerous seas. Clark chats about being a civilian electrician, and the various jobs he has completed. He lives in Madison, Wisconsin.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Thomas Clark (b. January 5, 1924) was born in Mason City, Iowa. At age ten, his family moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin and then on to Madison, Wisconsin, where he attended high school. He was drafted in 1943, after taking some flight classes and a job as chauffeur to the Corps of Engineer. Clark took basic training in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, after which he was sent to the Pacific Theater to guard Pearl Harbor. Clark was transferred to ground forces as a switchboard operator in the infantry and the regimental headquarters company. He was sent to the European Theater in winter of 1944. Clark states he served in the 69<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Infantry Regiment, and left the European Theater with the 29<sup>th</sup> Division. Clark was in Remagen when the bridge collapsed, part of the Russian/American linkup, captured Leipzig, and part of the freeing of a concentration camp (possibly Dachau). He served as a communication chief during the war. After the war, he used his communications skills to become an electrician in Madison, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by John Weingandt, 2011.  
Transcribed by Lexie Jordee, 2014.  
Edited and Abstracted by Dana Gerber, 2014.



## **Interview Transcript:**

Weingandt: We'll get you out of here quick [laughs]. The date is January 10, 2011. We are talking with Tom Clark and Tom, tell us a little about yourself, where you're from.

Clark: Well I was born January 5, 1924, in Mason City, Iowa. My dad was an automobile salesman and he decided to give that up because the potential was a lot of work in those days 'cause people didn't know how to drive cars and to sell a car he had to think. So we moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I was ten years old, left Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Madison, Wisconsin where I went to--started in the sixth grade and went through Madison Central High School. And I was supposed to have graduated in 1941 from Central High School. I--uh--was a point--1 point short of being able to graduate so they told me I had to go back to school the next year. So I can still remember the day Pearl Harbor was attacked and I was in my--what I thought would be my last year of school. On the third of January of 1942, I got pneumonia and I wasn't able to finish out my school year. So I went to the principal and told him that, "Why couldn't I? Because I had done a full term, I had more credits than I needed." But he wouldn't give me my diploma. So I said, "Okay, that's all right with me." So I decided I wanted to join the Marines. So I went up to the recruiting office, took the papers home. My dad was in World War I and he would not sign the papers. At that time we had to be twenty-one in order to be able to enlist.

Weingandt: This was in '41?

Clark: In '42.

Weingandt: '42. So the war was already--?

Clark: The war was already on, yeah.

Weingandt: Got it.

Clark: So then I says to my dad, "Well I want to go into the Air Force." So I said, "I'm gonna enlist." He says, "You're not going to enlist." He would not allow me to--he would not sign the papers. So he says, "I'll tell you, I'll make a deal with you." He says, "If you stay home, I'll sign for you to learn how to fly." So that was my cup of cake. So I started a couple lessons. And at that time they were \$5.00 for instructions. [laughs] Which is far more today than it was then.

Weingandt: Sure.

Clark: So anyway I went to the Four Lakes Airport and I took a few instructions. Well then, he got me a job. He was third in command at Badger Ordinance when they were opening. So he says, "I'll get you a good job." So he got me a job as chauffeur for the Corps of Engineer--which the Corps of Engineers didn't want a

chauffeur but there was room for him, so I got the job. Well, then I got drafted. This was in February of 1943.

Weingandt: Oh, wow.

Clark: So I went from Madison at five o'clock on a Tuesday afternoon to Camp Grant, Illinois, which is now a suburb of Rockford. And the railroad station is still there. I went from Camp Grant to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where at that time, it was the largest field artillery placement center in the world. And I was a cannoneer on 155 rifles. There was the--field artillery had rifles and howitzers. The firing was the distance of the--a rifle could fire twenty-two miles, a howitzer can only fire fifteen miles. So I took my basic training there, with the intention still of getting into the Air Force. So I went down to the company commander and asked him if I could sign up. And he says, "You can't until you get to your line company, then you sign up." Well we had six weeks of training and we all--a group of us got called down to the office. And we marched off to a conference room where we had to take an exam to become officers. We were supposed to go to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Well, it ended up, we went through the thirteen weeks of basic training and never heard another word from it, whether we were going to Fort Sill or not. So we ended up getting on a train. We were forty miles from the Atlantic Coast. We went to forty miles to the Pacific Coast to the port of embarkation. My dad was so upset about this that he wrote to President Roosevelt [both laugh] and said, "Why can't he have a furlough to come home and see his family before he goes into combat?"

Weingandt: Well, that's reasonable.

Clark: Which undoubtedly must have helped because then I went to--over to Hawaii.

Weingandt: So did you get the furlough?

Clark: I got to--we were guarding Pearl Harbor. We were set up in the city of Honolulu. We had canvas houses on tracks and we rolled them off and then we'd fire into Pearl Harbor. But we were supposed to be looking for submarines. Our forward observation post was Waikiki Beach Hotel. And it was--that was strictly officers [interviewer laughs] so I had a special pass that I could go up into the roof, that was our forward observation post. And the first experience I had there was, we had binoculars and we were watching out. The Navy had put out targets for us to fire at. And I'm looking through the binoculars and they also had put out red buoys to keep fisherman away from where we were going to fire. And I was looking through my binoculars with an officer that I was with. And all of a sudden we see this little fisherman and little boat popping along. And we said, "Fire one." And it was too late. And it landed right in the boat, the fire one, and they never did find the two occupants that was in it. That's--that was war, you know?

Weingandt: Yes.

Clark: And they were told not to go into these areas.

Weingandt: They probably figured that they're not shooting now, maybe the best fishing is right there.

Clark: Right there, yeah. [both laugh] We can pick them out of the water. But then I took an exam for air cadets and I passed it. And my officer--we had to get to the table of organization. We had one too many men in the table of organization and the officer called me in, the captain of my--the company commander. And he said, "If this guy that's in the hospital comes home--comes to--back to the barracks." He is going to release him and keep me. I won't be able to come home for air cadets. Well then I sweated. Will I get to come for cadets or won't I get home for cadets? So, the days went by--to this day I can still hear this guy--I was a switchboard operator and I had been on the night shift and I got ready to go to bed, to sleep during the day. Tied my towel at the end of my bed so they knew that I was authorized to take the day off. And I had just got into a twilight zone sleeping and I heard this voice, "Clark, Clark, wake up Clark." I opened my eyes and here, this company clerk was standing about two inches away from me and he says, "You're going home." [laughs] Well, course I hadn't been home in over a year. Well I was very happy about that. So I got up, went up to Schofield Barracks, and then to Hickam Field, which had been bombed and got the chance to see Hickam Field and I hadn't been there before. It was a great honor for me to be there, to just--to see that. Well then I came home, got the cadets, they took me to--well they gave me a furlough. And I came home on furlough, that's the first I'd been home. One of the things my mother says, "Oh, I got something for you." At that time, of course, food was all rations, you know, it was hard. She says, "Something that you really love, I'll give you this." So for supper.

Weingandt: What was it?

Clark: Pineapple. [laughs] I said, "Mother, I just come from the pineapple--" I said, "That's no treat." I said, "I've had so much pineapple."

Weingandt: You're sick of it.

Clark: Yeah. [laughs] So anyway, I went to Keesler Field, Mississippi and nothing was said. There wasn't a word. We couldn't figure out what was going on. All of a sudden one morning we got up and they said everybody was meeting in this great big hangar. And as we went in, they gave us an envelope with a letter in it. And it was a "Dear John" letter: we are closing air cadets and there will be no more. "You will have been sent back to the ground forces." "Well, where--what ground forces are we going--are we going to get sent back to Hawaii or what?" "No, the infantry is just up the road here 40 miles at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. That's where you're going." Well fortunate enough, I was--had been in communications long enough that I got to be a switchboard operator in the infantry and the regimental headquarters company. Well, then that took me to Europe. So I was--when I came here to inquire about a thing that I was looking for, this woman that was here says, "You served in both the Pacific and Europe?"

Weingandt: That's unusual.

Clark: I'm very unusual. And she says, "I'm sure they'd like to hear about this." And I said, "Well, it wasn't too exciting--other than guarding Pearl Harbor, to me was just a thrill of a lifetime."

Weingandt: And blowing up some guy that went and fished in the wrong place.

Clark: Yeah, right, yeah. [laughs] Well we killed over there--we killed a whole heard of cattle too one night.

Weingandt: How'd you do that?

Clark: They had free grazing. And their cattle just roamed around. So we fired one for effect. And then during the night we got up and fired--I was in the forward observer. And got up the next morning, there's cattle laying all over. They had strayed into our thing, which we didn't know, you know?

Weingandt: Of course not.

Clark: And I guess the government really got sued.

Weingandt: Oh, I'll bet the phones rang.

Clark: So anyway then we went to--I was there five months at Camp Shelby and then we moved out and we went to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey and then we shipped out of there. And my only fear that I ever had was this convoy of ships. It was a big convoy. And submarines scared the life out of me.

Weingandt: What--give me a time, April, or May, June?

Clark: It was in the winter, it was in December of 1944.

Weingandt: '44? Okay. Well, submarine activity was a lot less—

Clark: They were starting to--because we had an air craft carrier, it was right in front of us. And we could see the--when it went over a wave it would go up like this and we could see the airplanes on the deck, you know?

Weingandt: Sure, well that's your protection.

Clark: That was our protection, yeah. Yeah so we landed in England and we were alerted in late December, it was just after Christmas, that we were to prepare, to pack up and get ready to go over into combat. Well the Battle of the Bulge had started. So they took all our riflemen. Being on the switchboard, I got into a lot of information the other guys never knew about. And I was listening into this conference call and our colonel says, "I will not let any of my technicians go. This is the backbone of my outfit. You can have all my riflemen but you can't have my technicians." Well I happened to be a technician so it was just--worked out just perfect. But the guys--there was an airfield just below us and there was guys in



this--our outfit which gone down to the airplanes, flown over to the Battle of the Bulge, and came back on the exact same airplane, wounded. It was just--it was unbelievable the things that happened within that short period of time. So we replaced the 106th Infantry Division, which was two-thirds wiped out. The 99th was one-third wiped out. So that took care of about fifteen thousand guys we figured. So we replaced them in the Ardennes woods, which was in Belgium. And the first guy I saw was dead. It's an experience you never forget because of the fact that it was an SS trooper and we were eating lunch--or supper, in the dark and we could smell something terrible. We said, "What is the odor, there's something that stinks around here." And it turned out to be--we found out the next morning when we were eating breakfast. This guy was laying on a log just right where we were setting, but we couldn't see him because it was dark. It was an experience. Well then the next guy I saw was an American soldier and he had been decapitated. His head was underneath the tank and his body was laying alongside the tank. And of course when you look at that and you see a guy with a uniform on like you got, you know, you start thinking, "That could be me," you know. And it--uh--it affected me. Well then we went across the Rhine River and that was probably the worst experience I ever had because they were--the Germans were on the other side of the river, shooting ack-ack up into the air. And I was standing by a Jeep, talking to this guy to find out if we were supposed to move forward or we were going to settle down for the night. And they were shooting this anti-aircraft stuff into the air and shrapnel was coming down. And this piece of shrapnel missed me by about six to nine inches. Just in front of me it came down and landed in the Jeep. And setting there, this guy had just received a package from home, and it was a can of grapefruit juice. And the shrapnel went right through the top of the grapefruit juice [laughs]. 'Cause we were discussing how we were going to open it. [laughs] [inaudible] We didn't have to.

Weingandt: Question, did you eat it then?

Clark: Pardon?

Weingandt: Did you eat the grapefruit?

Clark: He did, I didn't.

Weingandt: Okay, but he ate it.

Clark: He ate it, oh yeah. He didn't care whether it was shrapnel or not, he ate it--he drank the grapefruit juice. But we had a discussion how we were going to get that can open, you know? And he got it open.

Weingandt: Krauts did it for you.

Clark: [laughs] Yeah. That was the closest, really, that I ever came to getting hit. But I know there was bullets around me but it was never a case of where I thought I was really in bad danger, you know. Course you'd never know if the guy at the other end of the thing was a bad shot, he'd probably missed me anyways so.

Weingandt: Well tell me about crossing the river, you said the Germans are on one side. They're going to be shooting at you?

Clark: Oh very definitely, yeah, yeah.

Weingandt: But you're going to cross in boats or what?

Clark: Well--the Remagen bridgehead is what we called it. Remagen.

Weingandt: Oh, you got across on the bridge?

Clark: No, no. Our engineers were repairing the bridge when it clean collapsed. 267 of them got killed.

Weingandt: I didn't know that.

Clark: Yes.

Weingandt: Well, I knew it collapsed but I didn't know that. That's a lot of people.

Clark: They were out there trying to get it so that we could use it. But we never got--we went across on pontoons.

Weingandt: Didn't they build a--

Clark: It was a pontoon bridge.

Weingandt: Yeah, next to it.

Clark: It was the biggest, longest bridge built of pontoons up to that time. Across that river. That's what we went across on.

Weingandt: Okay but the Remagen bridgehead itself was a major event.

Clark: Yes, yes.

Weingandt: And a lot of troops did get across before it collapsed.

Clark: Oh yes, right right. It was our division. That was right in front of us. And that's the--Patton had crossed over in front of us. He had been sent--see we were at the edge of the 1st Army and then the 3rd Army, which was Patton's army, was on the other side. Well he cut in front of us.

Weingandt: Sounds like him.

Clark: Yeah, yeah, it sounds like Patton, yeah. And he, yeah, he crossed the--well I'll tell you a story about that. My commanding officer, my communications officer--at the time I was the chief switchboard operator then I got promoted. And he says to me, "Go up and find out if you can see if they are taking anybody across the bridge." He says, "And come back and report, would you?" I said, "Okay." So I took off and I went up this--in this town, I can't remember the name of the town, I

think it was Remagen if I'm not mistaken. But anyway I went up, and I was looking down, I could look down this street and I could see this pontoon bridge down this--from way up--I was way up in the air looking down on it, on this hill. And all of a sudden these shells started hitting around me. And there was a stairway going down into a basement of a building. And I was just walking past this when this shell hit across the street, at a big building across the street. Knocked the corner of the building down. The floor from the second floor came down and out came a dresser, on little tiny casters, the smallest little casters I ever saw in my--and it came down and it hit the street and came across the street and came toward me. Well I ran down this stairway, and the thing came down this stairway. [laughs] And it followed me right down the stairway. And of course there was a brick wall there, and it hit the wall, and the drawer opened, and here's a camera inside with two rolls of film. [laughs] The only thing in it. Somebody must have taken everything out of it, whoever it was that lived in that apartment. And so I got that, so it came in handy later on. So anyway I got out of there and I found out what the officer wanted to know, told him about it. So he said, well we've got about another hour's wait for--he had been communicating with the engineers when they were going to send us across. Because oh, we had MP's about every ten feet apart, directing us across this bridge. Well guys were trying to get across and they were trying to get in in front of--you know. Well it turned into kind of a--

Weingandt: Traffic jam.

Clark: Yeah, yeah. So then they said there will be no more--they sent the MP's down and they said, "They will regulate this, send you across the bridge."

Weingandt: Good idea.

Clark: Now that was the largest pontoon bridge. But yeah, we lost--we had 267 guys were killed in that. It was--well the whole thing collapsed. I suppose they were still there because it was a lot of steel work. It was cold.

Weingandt: How long did we have control over the bridge before it collapsed? It was quite some time wasn't it? A couple of weeks?

Clark: No, it was about, oh I'd say probably a week. Because they were supposed to have blown that and they didn't. The guys found the explosives. They were there--alls they had to do was touch them together and bang. A lot of guys had--they must have known we were coming [inaudible]. Well you know, it was a strange thing. The number of kids we captured. And these poor kids, fourteen, fifteen years old, crying.

Weingandt: Germans?

Clark: Yes. They were just--you know they--they must have been dragged out of their homes and put on uniforms and said, "you go up there and you fight." And they didn't--they weren't interested. And they cried like, you know, little infants, it was

pathetic to see some of them. Well then we went on from there, Remagen--oh something else probably you didn't know, that Fort Ehrenbreitstein was on the Rhine River. It was a major fort.

Weingandt: Dating back to what?

Clark: Way back.

Weingandt: Okay, from medieval times?

Clark: Probably Napoleon and further you know? And anyway at the end of World War I, that's where a garrison of American troops stayed. Raised an American flag up over the thing and when they called a treaty and they had all the troops leave, they took the flag down and sent it to the Smithsonian Institute. Well we captured Fort Ehrenbreitstein and they sent the same flag back and put it up.

Weingandt: Oh my. That's neat.

Clark: Yeah, yeah. It was, you know, hysteric--well my uncle happened to be a General of the 32nd Division at one time and they named a street after him in Germany. But it was after Hitler died then all that stuff was changed. If you didn't have a *Straße* after your name you were a nobody. But then we moved off out of there and we went to Leipzig, the Battle of Leipzig, which turned out to a big--one of the very last large battles.

Weingandt: Give me a date, roughly.

Clark: Well, it would be--well the war came so close to the end, it was May it ended, so it was probably April of '45.

Weingandt: '45, okay.

Weingandt: Battle of Bulge is long over.

Clark: Oh yes, yeah.

Weingandt: Were you at Remagen after the Battle of the Bulge?

Clark: Yeah, yeah.

Weingandt: Okay, want to get a chronology here.

Clark: Yeah, right, yeah. Yeah I was at the--after the Battle of the Bulge it was Remagen.

Weingandt: Your unit link up with the Russians after Leipzig?

Clark: We were the first one after we captured Leipzig.

Weingandt: Well tell us about that.

Clark: Okay, we went into Leipzig. I was on a tour that we went twenty miles into German territory and came into Leipzig from the east to capture--to close it out. And--[coughs]--excuse me--And another guy and I were waiting to set up our switchboard and they were fighting at Napoleon's tomb. And it was a--they were going to hole up in there 'cause they thought nobody would ever be able to take it. And they were lucky--the artillery were shooting shells in through these big windows and they finally came out just in droves. But they thought that they could do it. Well it turned out to be that just outside of Leipzig there was a concentration camp which we freed and that was--that is one--

Weingandt: Do you know which one?

Clark: You know, I can't think of the name of the thing, and it's--

Weingandt: I have a note here about Dachau.

Clark: It could have been Dachau, yeah. It wasn't the one that you hear so much about. I have a picture in here that I'll show you. And I think my mother wrote it on the back of it and she didn't get the right name. They probably talk a lot about Dachau and she just put it down because I sent it home.

Weingandt: Ah, okay. That's right you got a camera now.

Clark: Huh?

Weingandt: You have a camera now.

Clark: There, see! I said the camera would come in--I took pictures. I had twenty-five pictures and I have one left.

Weingandt: What happened?

Clark: When I sent them home, somebody must have taken a bunch of them out. Then when I got home, I had a couple--my daughters were going to Lodi High School and the teacher asked if there was anybody who knew anybody that was in the Battle of the Bulge. And, of course, I was there so they asked me to come in and give a speech. I took them in, I had probably at that time about six pictures left, somebody had been taken. I ended up with one picture.

Weingandt: Oh nuts.

Clark: They were taking them and I never, you know. But it's--so then we captured Leipzig. Then our next turn was to move on.

Weingandt: Tell me about the concentration camp.

Clark: That's hard. [voice breaks] [long pause]

Weingandt: Okay, I understand.

Clark: There was a pregnant woman who had been thrown into the pit. And when I was there, there was a medical officer standing next to me and he says, "You see that young girl there?" He says, "That baby was alive when she was thrown in there." I mean--this is what hurts most. It's--people don't--it's unbelievable, it's unbelievable.

Weingandt: What another human being can do to a human being.

Clark: This trench was about a half a block long, the width of a scoop on an in-loader. And it was ten to twelve feet deep. And it was about half full of bodies. It just--unbelievable, unbelievable. I used to have nightmares when I first came home.

Weingandt: I can understand.

Clark: Yeah. Because you don't just--I saw a lot of soldiers get killed and for me it was like playing football with a group of guys, you know? [laughs] And they had the same uniform on and I felt sorry for them. But it was war, I realized that. But not to see this kind of stuff that--the way they treated people was just--unbelievable. These people had made American flags out of canvas. Some--it was--rough.

Weingandt: The prisoners had made the flags?

Clark: Prisoners. And they hid them until they would--they knew we were coming because they had radios that they could--and when we were there they were waving them and oh it was just, you know, it was just spectacular.

Weingandt: What kind of condition were they in?

Clark: Very poor, very poor. And one of our instructions were--this was a special order sent down from army headquarters. That we do not feed them. Because we could kill them. We freed a lot of guys--in the Battle of the Bulge that were in hospitals and we had freed hospitals. And we were told not to feed them either because their stomachs were all shrunken up, you know.

Weingandt: You don't remember the name of that prison huh?

Clark: Gee I wish I could--I'll look and see if it's--

Weingandt: Maybe we can add that too. This is going to snap off here.

Clark: Okay.

[long pause][31:07]

[sound of tape stopping and starting][31:21]

Clark: I really can't talk intelligently enough about it because it hurts—

Weingandt: Well, it was an awful experience though.

Clark: Yeah. It's something you never forget, never forget. I mean human beings, you know? And treating people like that, it's not, it's not at all possible that people could do things like that. But they did it. Well then, we moved on after Leipzig. And it turned out to be that Lieutenant Robinson, who was the first American to meet the Russians, was in our division. He was with the 273rd, I was with the 222nd. Lieutenant Robinson was with us on our fiftieth return to Europe.

Weingandt: Oh okay.

Clark: To take care of--they had a reception for us at Elbe River. And I was going to donate this to the--there's a flag--three flags, Russian, American, and German flag at the Elbe River dedicating this spot where they met. And I was going to look for it and I can't find that flag, I don't know what happened to it. I had it and I was going to give it to the museum here. It's just a little one but it means the same as what was over there. And this Lieutenant Robinson was--we were over there and I was sitting in a hotel room in Paris and Lieutenant Robinson came in and I recognized him. I had never known him but from pictures I saw I recognized him right away. He came over and I was sitting in this lobby, it was about midnight. And he came over and he looks and he says, "Lodi, Wisconsin?" and I said, "Yeah, Lodi, Wisconsin." He says, "You know that's where I was raised." I said, "You were?" and he said, "Yeah." So he was telling me about this house that his folks had built and he says, "That's where--". "Well yeah, I know that house," I said, "that's two blocks away from my house."

Weingandt: For Pete's sake.

Clark: And he couldn't believe it. And he says, "Here I am for years looking for somebody from Lodi, Wisconsin, I come all the way to Paris to find him. [laughs]. Yeah, his parents--well I don't know what you remember--Robinson's, they had a van line.

Weingandt: Vaguely.

Clark: Movers. It was a big red truck with white letters, "Robinson." That was his uncle, that was his uncle. So it was quite interesting to find out. So I asked a few people in Lodi, a lot of them didn't even know it. They said, "Oh really? I've heard of Robinson but I never knew--" But he was a brain surgeon. He said that there's one thing I'll always say about the Veteran's administration, they gave me a chance to go to school to learn to be--He said, "My folks had never been able to afford to send me to school but," he says, "it turned out to be very good."

Weingandt: Many many stories about that. That's one of the good things that came out of that war.

Clark: You bet. So that pretty much ended my combat experience. Other than going down to see the link up of the Russians and seeing General Omar Bradley in person for the first time in my life. And I didn't get to shake hands with him but I saw--I got to see him.

Weingandt: You could have. He's--He was very approachable.

Clark: Very approachable from what I understand, yeah yeah.

Weingandt: Tell me about your trip home.

Clark: Well, we had quite an experience. We went in to army of occupation. I got transferred. They took the 69th because of the first link up.

Weingandt: You were with the 69th division?

Clark: I was with the 69th, right. And because of the publicity they got from being the first to link up, they took all the high point men and put them in to the 69th and transferred us to the 29th. I've got nothing against the 29th division but I didn't serve in combat with them.

Weingandt: Okay, 69th is yours.

Clark: Is my division. But the 29th landed on D-day which made them that much more famous. But we stayed in army of occupation in Bremen, Germany. And the Europa was there. Now the Europa was a German ship, the largest luxury liner in Europe. It was docked in Bremen, Germany.

Weingandt: I didn't know that.

Clark: And we were--we thought, "There's this ship we're going home on." [laughs] They made a deal that the British could have the ship if the British would give the Americans the right to Bremen, Germany for a port to bring in supplies through. 'Cause then we had to drive through the British zone to the American zone which was south.

Weingandt: Oh, okay, sure.

Clark: Yeah. So anyway, we got to Bremen, Germany. So in--my birthday is January fifth. So on the second of January--

Weingandt: Happy Birthday.

Clark: Thank you. We shipped out. We started to head for home. We went through waves--now they claim--I couldn't prove this 'cause I have no way of telling it but they said the waves were eighty-five feet high. We went up and through and up--we lost five guys overboard. Never stopped to even try to pick them up.

Weingandt: You can't.

Clark: Couldn't. It was impossible. You couldn't turn the ship around in water like that, you know. But the guys, they disobeyed orders. They were told to stay off--we slept--now I had six different trips. One to Hawaii. Then in the inter-island boats over to Maui which I spent most time on. And then back to Oahu and then back



home again. And then to Europe and then we came across the English Channel. And then back again to home.

Weingandt: You went from Bremen to what, New York?

Clark: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Weingandt: But you ran into this huge storm and you lost five guys overboard.

Clark: Five guys overboard. And we slept with our ponchos on. Because we were bunked at the front of the ship and they had like plywood to block--from the railing, it was tied to the railing up to the top of the, whatever-you-call-it, ship. And it was about six inches. Well when the water would hit, it would go up the bulk head and come through that opening. We'd be just drenched. And it was--it was one of the worst experiences--well the boat that was south of us, it was 200 miles south of us, lost their rudder.

Weingandt: Oh god.

Clark: So they had to steer the ship with the twin screws. So it was lucky they had twin screws so they could stop one to turn the ship one way.

Weingandt: Still, that's--

Clark: That was one of the worst things I have ever experienced.

Weingandt: It's a good thing it was on the way home, not on the way over.

Clark: Yeah, right, right, yeah. Well, you know that was my biggest fear was submarines. I just couldn't picture--well you were telling about the guy who spent the--

Weingandt: 8 hours in the water, yeah.

Clark: I just couldn't figure what I would do.

Weingandt: You probably wouldn't survive in the--he was in the tropics.

Clark: Yeah.

Weingandt: You're in the North Atlantic, that water's very very cold.

Clark: Well it was January, you know, or December. And boy that would have been cold going--Well we came home on the fifth of January was the day that we lost the five guys overboard. On my birthday. And it was--I couldn't--well I'll tell you what happened. They had a piano in the lounge but when we got to New York, the only thing that was left was the harp. [laughs] It had smashed against the--It was five of us used to play cards, Euchre. And we were the only five guys that were moving around because I never got sea sick. But everybody else was just seasick. They were just--oh it was. But that was quite an experience. Well then we landed

back at Camp Kilmer and they divided us up, the south train and the north train. And I was on the north train heading for Chicago. And we went to Fort Sheridan. And the south train had an accident. I understand there was guys killed, I don' know how many. But the train derailed somewhere.

Weingandt: Ouch.

Clark: Can you imagine going through a whole war and then getting killed in a train accident.

Weingandt: Doesn't make sense but--

Clark: Yeah, yeah but that's--I mean there's so many things that happened that people don't know about that, you know, it's a wonder were all still alive.

Weingandt: Well you've got a great memory.

Clark: Well I--I just loved--

Weingandt: It's your card playing.

Clark: Huh?

Weingandt: It's your card playing

Clark: Yeah that's right. Well my doctor told me that. He says, "Playing cards, that helps your memory--" Well I do also the crossword puzzle and that helps too I think.

Weingandt: My mother did crossword puzzles til the day she died and she was sharp as a tack.

Clark: Yeah, yeah. Must be something about the crossword puzzle.

Weingandt: Your mind's working.

Clark: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I suppose.

Weingandt: Well then you're--I have a note here that your electrical training was useful in your civilian life after--

Clark: Well I was in communications.

Weingandt: Right, tell me a little about that.

Clark: It was--we relayed wire, we hooked up--something, another thing people don't know is, if you're a lineman and you go out on a line that's broken and there's a general talking on the telephone, he has to get off the line. Lineman had number one preference.

Weingandt: Wow.

Clark: Well communications is the backbone of any armed forces. It's the key people playing the game in tune, you know. And so it's--but that's how I got my basic electricity in. And so when I got my apprenticeship, they gave me a year's credit for my army service.

Weingandt: What'd you do specifically in civilian life when you got out?

Clark: I was an electrician. I worked on an atomic plant down in Byron, Illinois. I worked on the Portage power plant here, on both faces of it. I worked at the University Hospital when they rebuilt that. And many other smaller things. My prime interest is--one thing I liked about this was that I can say, "I worked on that building." You know? It's --it's like a monument. [laughs]

Weingandt: It's neat, yeah.

Clark: 'Cause you go by the thing--and they--when we worked on the University Hospital we had all kinds of problems, though, because you'd get lost. You wouldn't know where you were. And as long as the siding wasn't on, we could tell, that's the university, this is Shorewood, that's Lake Monona, and this is the Veteran's Hospital. So that's how we went. I'd send guys on my crew out. I'd say go over to such and such and do such and such and [laughs] I'd go up and they wouldn't be there. They'd be lost, they'd be walking around. And I'd say, "You're supposed to be doing--". So I'd have to take them and show them where to go and what to do. And it was a problem because everything was exactly alike. But when they put siding on it, oh, that was horrible.

Weingandt: Now you're reference points are all gone.

Clark: All gone, we didn't have a thing anymore. You couldn't say, "We're going to the university side and doing such and such," you know? I was there when the guys fell, you know they fell six stories there?

Weingandt: Mhmm, I remember that. The fellow involved and he was I think supervisor building the thing. A fellow named Davis, last name of Davis, was a former neighbor of mine. And he filled me in on a lot of the stories about--it's just a huge place. People still get lost there.

Clark: Well yeah. I had a friend of mine that was in the armed forces with me and he worked for Coca-Cola and he was sent here to be the manager of the Coca-Cola plant. And he had the first heart surgery done at the University Hospital. His wife, they called her from the visitor's room and said, "He will be at room blah blah blah blah." And [laughs] they got lost and she was sitting in the room and said "Where have you been, you said an hour and a half ago." They were wheeling him around the--

Weingandt: They're doing a little better now.

Clark: I'll tell you a story. They suggested why don't we figure out some way to name the different modules there. So guys put in different suggestions and one suggestion, we'll name them after presidents of the United States. We can't do that because a Republican may get into a Democratic--would be unhappy. [laughs] Our country is civilized? If I had an appendix operation I wouldn't care whose name was on the --

Weingandt: Just get me to the room, good enough. So anything else you want to add here?

Clark: No I think it's pretty--well I think I gave you as much as I could remember. I mean I know that guys had a lot worse experiences than I had. And those guys, I think, are great. But as I've always told people--I have a friend of mine who is very upset--gets very upset because I'll make a comment about, "I'm going to do this" or "I'm going to do that." Well he was wounded and he says that, "You guys shouldn't have any right to do this, only us guys that got wound--" I said, "Bob, they shot at me like they shot at you but I was fortunate enough not to get hit," and that's all I can say. [laughs]

Weingandt: That's pretty self-serving. [laughs] All right Tom.

**[END OF INTERVIEW]**