

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
PAUL F. JENKINS
Tank Commander, Army, World War II.

2000

OH
146

Jenkins, Paul F., (1916-2007). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 64 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 64 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 64 min.); ½ inch, color.

Abstract:

Paul F. Jenkins, a Platteville, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service in Europe as a tank commander and platoon sergeant with the 707th Tank Battalion. Conscripted in 1942, Jenkins tells of his basic training at Camp Cook (California) and training with light tanks. He tells of his ship breaking down for a day while in a convoy to England, and he states his unit was originally attached to the 28th Division but later served with other units. Jenkins compares different tank engines and talks about commanding a five-person M4 Sherman tank. He touches on landing at Normandy in September of '44, waiting on the beach for a month, and carrying extra rations in the tank to give to infantrymen and trade with German civilians. Jenkins talks about entering combat during the Battle of Hürtgen Forest, having a mine blow the track off his tank in Vossenack, and having to wait three days under artillery fire for a mechanic. He characterizes a gung-ho West Point tank commander who was killed. Stationed for a time in Luxembourg, Jenkins tells of having an unofficial truce with the Germans, having trouble distinguishing between Luxembourgish civilians and German spies, and the chaos after the Battle of the Bulge began. He describes retreating from Diekirch (Luxembourg), spending Christmas Eve in an abandoned house, and retreating towards Paris. Jenkins details recreational leave in Paris, including selling cigarettes and Hershey bars on the black market, finding girls, being unconcerned about catching sexually transmitted diseases, and eating horse-meat steaks. After entering Germany, he talks about trading cigarettes and C-rations for food and breaking into a henhouse. After the war ended, Jenkins mentions having pneumonia and being sent home with a different unit. He portrays a soldier who avoided going to combat with the 707th Tank Battalion and who was later killed with a different unit in Normandy. Jenkins talks about attending company reunions and his activity with the American Legion and the VFW.

Biographical Sketch:

Jenkins (1916-2007) served in the 707th Tank Battalion during World War II. After an honorable discharge in 1945, he worked seven years as a carpenter, owned a tavern in Columbus (Wisconsin) from 1952 to 1978, worked four years as a mailman, and eventually settled in Montello.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000.
Transcribed by Elizabeth Hackett, 2009.
Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011.
Abstract edited by Susan Krueger, 2011.

Interview Transcript:

McIntosh: Paul Jenkins, 12 July, 2000. Born in Platteville [Wisconsin], [January 20] 1916. Now, when did you enter military service?

Jenkins: You've got that letter there? It'll tell you on that.

McIntosh: Oh, I know it. But that doesn't get into the machine. You're on—you're on big-time television.

Jenkins: Yeah, I know that. [both laughs] I think I went into service—

McIntosh: Says 1942. March 12.

Jenkins: March of 1942, I think it is.

McIntosh: Right. You were conscripted?

Jenkins: Yes, yes.

McIntosh: And where did you enter the Army?

Jenkins: I was introduced—inducted in the Army at Fort Sheridan, Illinois.

McIntosh: Right. You took basic training there?

Jenkins: No. From Fort Sheridan, Illinois, I went to Camp Cook, California, which was a new camp. In fact when we got there, we had to wait about three weeks before the barracks was built so we could get into our place where we were supposed to train. And I trained there '42—we went on the desert in August of '42. Came back off the desert in November '42. Back in basic. We left Camp Cook, California in March of 1943 and went to Tennessee for Tennessee Maneuvers[a large scale war game].

McIntosh: Did you have a specialty then? Did you have a specialty number then?

Jenkins: What do you mean, a specialty number?

McIntosh: Well, the Army assigns special tasks to different people, and everybody has an MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] number.

Jenkins: I didn't have 'em in them days.

McIntosh: Oh, okay.

Jenkins: That's before—

McIntosh: What was your assignment then?

Jenkins: I was a staff sergeant tank commander and platoon sergeant.

McIntosh: You were in a tank division?

Jenkins: Yes, a tank battalion.

McIntosh: Tank battalion?

Jenkins: Yes.

McIntosh: Did you go overseas with that battalion?

Jenkins: Yes.

McIntosh: What's the number of that battalion?

Jenkins: 707th Tank Battalion.

McIntosh: Attached to what division?

Jenkins: Well, originally it was—we started out the 28th Infantry Division. But then we went to many, many different outfits we fought with. Any place they needed tanks, we'd go to that.

McIntosh: Okay. Tell me how you got overseas.

Jenkins: By one of Kaiser's boats, on them.

McIntosh: [laughs] The whole division, or just your—

Jenkins: Nope, just our battalion.

McIntosh: And how many men in your battalion?

Jenkins: I think there's 600-plus.

McIntosh: Six hundred. That's the usual. Right.

Jenkins: That was three of every tank—three of every tank company, plus the light tank company, plus the headquarters company.

McIntosh: Four companies usually in a battalion.

Jenkins: Right, yes.

McIntosh: All right. So, you all went on one ship, right?

Jenkins: Oh, I guess, sure.

McIntosh: Sure.

Jenkins: Yeah.

McIntosh: And had a nice bumpy ride over the ocean?

Jenkins: Oh, you have a very interesting ride.

McIntosh: Did you throw up a lot?

Jenkins: Did I what?

McIntosh: Throw up?

Jenkins: No, I didn't throw up at all.

McIntosh: Oh, you weren't having those problems?

Jenkins: Well, I had a little, but I didn't let it get the best of me.

McIntosh: Okay.

Jenkins: But when we left, we left out of Boston. And we was one of the biggest convoys that ever left the United States. We went—we was way up north of Greenland, up in the cold country. One night when we went to bed went through an ice storm, and we got up the next morning about half of our lifeboats were gone. The ship was one solid coat of ice.

McIntosh: So—

Jenkins: Then we got out about the middle of the ocean and our ship broke down. We sat out there like a sitting duck for one whole day until they got us repaired. Then we joined the convoy that night, during the night sometime. I don't know when, but—

McIntosh: So where did you land in England?

Jenkins: Bristol. We went in the Bay of Bristol.

McIntosh: Okay. Then they had a camp nearby?

Jenkins: Oh, we had—went up to a little town, they call it Nuneaton. That was up toward Coventry, in that area. We trained there for—oh, we got there in March. We was there March, April, May, June, July, August. Then we was what they call a “training battalion.” They’d bring all these new tankers in, then we’d take ‘em out there and train ‘em for a week or two and—

McIntosh: In Sherman tanks?

Jenkins: Yes, the Sherman tank, yes.

McIntosh: Did you drive a Sherman tank?

Jenkins: I was a commander, but I have drove ‘em, yes.

McIntosh: As a commander, where did you ride?

Jenkins: I was stood in the—stood up, looked out the turret.

McIntosh: And pointed for everybody else to move and bear in that direction?

Jenkins: Well, I just had to—in fact, I only had one tank under my command—two tanks.

McIntosh: Oh.

Jenkins: My lieutenant had three tanks, but I only had two tanks because—when we was in basic training they always said, “You’ve always fought with two tanks—one covered while the other fired, and vice versa.” But it didn’t pan out that way when we got in combat.

McIntosh: Okay.

Jenkins: It all changed.

McIntosh: But these were Shermans?

Jenkins: Right.

McIntosh: Okay.

Jenkins: Shermans or Grants—one of the two. I don’t know. They was the ones with the 75 millimeters yet.

McIntosh: Right. Were they hard to maintain?

Jenkins: Not that much, no. The—I shouldn't say that, but when we first went in the Army we had nothin' but light tanks. They had the old Wright Whirlwind airplane engines in them yet.

McIntosh: Yeah, Stuarts. Yeah, they weren't very good.

Jenkins: In the desert they would—the clutch would fill up with sand. Then you couldn't shift them.

McIntosh: Right. This had a diesel engine, though, didn't it?

Jenkins: Yeah. The first ones had diesel, and the seconds had Ford gasoline engines.

McIntosh: Which did you like best?

Jenkins: I think the Ford was the best. Of course, it had a twin engine in it—500 horses.

McIntosh: A little more power?

Jenkins: Oh, yes. Yes.

McIntosh: Go faster. Generally how fast did that Sherman go?

Jenkins: They didn't much go over twenty-five.

McIntosh: That's all?

Jenkins: Well, it's governed for that.

McIntosh: Oh, they didn't [laughs] want any hotshot, runnin' the engine out. [laughs] That's good.

Jenkins: You could put a nickel back in the governor, get an extra five miles off it, but you'd raise Cain with the time of the motor of those things.

McIntosh: [laughs] Where'd you learn that? [laughs]

Jenkins: Well, I'd just sit around and listen to different people, and the mechanics tell you that. Of course, I remember that back in Madison when we drove cab back in '36; that's when they governed all the cabs in Madison.

McIntosh: Oh, yeah. I had forgotten that.

Jenkins: And we learned how to do that in the cabs to get an extra five miles an hour off of 'em; same way with the tanks.

McIntosh: So you had maneuvers in England and then you were transported across—

Jenkins: We landed on Omaha Beach on the first day of September, 1944.

McIntosh: You came in there in September of '44?

Jenkins: Right.

McIntosh: Okay.

Jenkins: And we stayed on the beach for one month before we went into combat. They said they had to wait until they got semi-trailers to haul us to the front.

McIntosh: Yeah. You're pretty far inland by that time, by September.

Jenkins: Oh, yes. Yeah. They's up in the—beyond that Falaise Pocket I think at that time.

McIntosh: Oh, yes. That was over on the west side.

Jenkins: Yeah.

McIntosh: That was in the 4th Division area. Were you assigned to a division at that time?

Jenkins: No, no.

McIntosh: Okay. So they've moved you as a battalion again?

Jenkins: Right.

McIntosh: Okay.

Jenkins: We moved up—

McIntosh: How many tanks? I forgot to ask. Excuse me. How many tanks in your battalion?

Jenkins: Well, let's see—

McIntosh: Roughly.

Jenkins: Well, you can figure sixteen per company. They had four companies—or five companies—

McIntosh: Sixty-four?

Jenkins: No, six companies. So we had probably sixty-four, sixty-five tanks.

McIntosh: Right.

Jenkins: Three heavy—three heavy tanks, and one light tank.

McIntosh: If that broke down, were you-- your group capable of fixing it?

Jenkins: Oh, we had mechanics for things, yes.

McIntosh: They did. But in your tank, you had—what, is that a three-man tank, or a four-man?

Jenkins: Five.

McIntosh: Five-man?

Jenkins: Five-man. You had a driver, an assistant driver, loader, gunner, and commander.

McIntosh: And you're the commander?

Jenkins: I was the commander, yes.

McIntosh: Staff sergeant?

Jenkins: Right.

McIntosh: That was a pretty important job.

Jenkins: Oh yes, yes. You had to kind of watch out for your crew. Then, of course, I had the—kind of responsible for the whole platoon.

McIntosh: Oh?

Jenkins: Making sure that their tanks were clean, and when we was in garrison you had to, make sure the barracks were clean.

McIntosh: Did you take K-rations aboard?

Jenkins: Oh, yeah, we carried all kinds of rations. In fact, sometimes we'd have maybe twenty-five cases of C-rations on the back of our tank.

McIntosh: On the outside?

Jenkins: Yes. And the only reason we carried them, because you'd always run into some infantrymen that hadn't eaten for a couple days, and—

McIntosh: You'd feed them.

Jenkins: Feed them, too, see -- so--

McIntosh: That's pretty nice.

Jenkins: Then we'd go through the rations and pick out the hash [McIntosh laughs]. If they got meat in it then we could trade it to the Germans for fresh potatoes, tomatoes, anything, see.

McIntosh: You mean the German civilians?

Jenkins: Yes.

McIntosh: Huh! Well, now, this is—no one ever told me that before.

Jenkins: Oh, yes.

McIntosh: That's very good. We'll get -- this is a little ahead in our story, so—

Jenkins: Yeah.

McIntosh: Don't rush us here, now.

Jenkins: Okay.

McIntosh: So, you just got ashore, and did they put you in a tank area, an assembly area, and then move on from there?

Jenkins: Well, we've moved up to the Huertgen Forest. Some outfit moved out of there just ahead of us, so we moved in where they were, and we stayed there three or four days before we went to combat.

McIntosh: Okay.

Jenkins: The first city we went through was the little town of Vossenack. It had been--been through several times before this, so it was pretty well shot up. We went through it the first time, and then we turned back. We come

through it a second time, and my lieutenant run over a mine and blew the track off his tank. He told me, "Go down one block and go up that way." So I went down there one block, went up that way, and blew the tank off—track off *my* tank.

McIntosh: Anybody get hurt?

Jenkins: No, nobody got hurt.

McIntosh: So what do we do? Is the tank finished then, or—?

Jenkins: No, no. Then they—back in them days you stayed with the tank until the mechanics come out and repaired it.

McIntosh: You had a telephone?

Jenkins: No, no.

McIntosh: How did you contact folks?

Jenkins: Well, then they're -- the other people, see. The other set of tanks had to go back and tell 'em, see.

McIntosh: Oh, but you didn't have any radio contact?

Jenkins: Oh, no. No.

McIntosh: Okay. So you were on—you had to sort of sit there and wait 'til help arrived?

Jenkins: We sat there for three days. And it got quite hairy.

McIntosh: How was that?

Jenkins: Well, we'd—they were trying to hit us with their 88s [German antiaircraft and antitank gun].

McIntosh: Oh, you were too close to the front, because that's—

Jenkins: Well, we was right on the front!

McIntosh: Well, that's a bad time to have your tread blow out. Was your tank hit with the German 88s?

Jenkins: One—one—one round. I sat there one morning making coffee, and got that little gas stove, you know what they were.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Jenkins: Had the canteen cup on just about ready to make my coffee and that 88 -- 88 hit the back of my tank, and another went up in the air and come down on me, and I didn't want any more coffee that morning.

McIntosh: Must have scared the shit out of you.

Jenkins: More than that.

McIntosh: More than that? [laughs] But nobody was hurt?

Jenkins: Nobody was hurt, but it opened up the side of the tank about, oh, about a foot. Blew a 50 caliber machine gun all to pieces.

McIntosh: *Now* the tank was done.

Jenkins: No, no, no. I used it after that.

McIntosh: [laughs] You could repair that?

Jenkins: Well, didn't have to repair that. See it's just—

McIntosh: Oh.

Jenkins: Just on the side so it didn't—

McIntosh: You just let the side stay open, you mean?

Jenkins: Well, it wasn't—it wasn't open that much, see.

McIntosh: Oh. What did that do for your stove, though?

Jenkins: Oh, it didn't hurt the stove after you got—

McIntosh: Oh, it didn't?

Jenkins: Oh, no. It didn't. It didn't—it didn't hurt anything inside the tank, just—

McIntosh: Oh, okay.

Jenkins: But the dust flew.

McIntosh: And everybody jumped.

Jenkins: Couldn't jump very far. We was locked in.

McIntosh: Right.

Jenkins: You didn't dare show your head outside too much because they would start shelling again, see.

McIntosh: Oh. In other words, as long as nobody moved outside, they assumed that the tank was done, and then they—

Jenkins: Yeah.

McIntosh: Left you alone. Okay. Were you worried at this moment about being overrun by those guys?

Jenkins: That's something that never bothered me.

McIntosh: Because they must not—couldn't have been more than a mile away.

Jenkins: Oh, I don't think they was that far.

McIntosh: Yeah. So if they decided to move in you were more or less stuck.

Jenkins: Well, we—we got surrounded by 'em one night. We didn't know it 'til the next morning. We got out of that all right. But we had a company commander with us; he was a West Pointer. He tried to make a real good name for himself. When we went for the first push through the town, they got out, and a lot of the tanks got stuck in the mud—water holes and things. That was a difference from our B Company and A Company. And he would take a tank out there, and these other officers told him, they told him, "You shouldn't go out there. That's Germans calling you out there. They're trying to hit you." But he wouldn't listen to them, so—boy, but them officers [were] really scared. He definitely went out once too often. He got his head blown off.

McIntosh: With an 88?

Jenkins: Yeah, an 88 hit the tank on top of the door—on top of the turret.

McIntosh: Flipped over and—

Jenkins: Oh, no. Blew it right off. Blew the top of his head right off.

McIntosh: What was he trying to do out there? I didn't understand.

Jenkins: Well, he was trying to win the war, and make a name for himself!

McIntosh: In one tank? [laughs] Well, I'm sure you're glad they didn't insist that you come along.

Jenkins: Well, I probably would have if I had a tank, but, see, I didn't have a tank at that time because mine was laid up, see.

McIntosh: Right.

Jenkins: But—so we—

McIntosh: So—yeah—

Jenkins: Go ahead.

McIntosh: Did you get your tank repaired, or did they—?

Jenkins: Oh, yes. Yes.

McIntosh: Then you were off and running again?

Jenkins: Well, not very long, because we only stayed there about four days and then we moved down into Luxembourg for a—to recuperate.

McIntosh: Now, what time of the year was this? Do you recall?

Jenkins: This is November '44.

McIntosh: Luxembourg—when you talk about Luxembourg, you start thinking of the Battle of the Bulge.

Jenkins: Well, that's—that's where it was.

McIntosh: But that was the next month.

Jenkins: After—well, we was down there about—we was down there a little over a month.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Jenkins: We was talking about—we had our Thanksgiving dinner. Then we was talking about, afterwards, talking about our Christmas dinner, what turkey we was going to have and all the trimmings, stuff like that—

McIntosh: Well, you assumed you were going to go home. The war was going to be over then, wasn't it?

Jenkins: Oh, not then, no. No.

McIntosh: Well, that's what a lot of the talk was. They assumed that this war they were gonna be able to defeat the Germans by the first of the year. But that—we know that didn't happen, but—

Jenkins: But see, where we was in Luxembourg, we was right on the front line.

McIntosh: Right.

Jenkins: Germans on the other side of the river, and we was on this side of it. And it was kind of a gentleman's agreement: they wouldn't fire at us, and we wouldn't fire at them.

McIntosh: That was because of Thanksgiving?

Jenkins: No, that's just because both sides was recuperating, or—

McIntosh: Okay.

Jenkins: And—but the trouble was, we couldn't tell a German from a Luxembourger.

McIntosh: Yeah, but Luxembourgers weren't in tanks.

Jenkins: The German spies wasn't either.

McIntosh: Ah, okay.

Jenkins: And they would come in at night, and for all we knew we was talking to them. We didn't know who we was talking to, see. That was—that wasn't only a week or so before the Bulge started.

McIntosh: Right. That's how they got information where the line was weakest.

Jenkins: Oh, yeah. See, we—

McIntosh: How far were you from the Ardennes Forest?

Jenkins: Oh, I was always on the southern flank, to start with.

McIntosh: Right.

Jenkins: See, I was down-- well, I doubt—see, when we first started out we got with Patton.

McIntosh: Yeah, well, he was south of the Ardennes.

Jenkins: Yes, right.

McIntosh: So when the drive came through the Ardennes and the American line it was north of you.

Jenkins: See, it was like this here.

McIntosh: Right.

Jenkins: We was on this—

McIntosh: Got it. You were south.

Jenkins: But—

McIntosh: So you were—when did you first hear about that something bad was going on up north?

Jenkins: Well, we got hit the first day, the 16th of December, going south.

McIntosh: You were on the edge of that?

Jenkins: Well, yeah, but see--the push started, we was on what they call the southern flank.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Jenkins: And we got called out the first day. They wanted a—they wanted two tanks. They said there's a patrol of eighty men coming, and they wanted two tanks to go down and check it out. That grew to 800, and I think before the day is over, there's over 8,000. And there was just utter chaos. You didn't know nothin' about nothin'.

McIntosh: What did you do, personally? What did you and your two tanks do?

Jenkins: Well, I went with my platoon leader, and we went up through another town up on the hill, and we could hear the gunfire to our right. We didn't know where we was at, so we went back and got near the company, and we bivouacked for the night. The next morning we found out we slept with the Germans that night.

McIntosh: [laughs] They didn't discover you?

Jenkins: No, no. Maybe they wasn't looking for us. I don't know.

McIntosh: Okay.

Jenkins: But then we got out of that. But when the Bulge first started the second reason we was with the 28th Infantry in the city of Diekirch; that's where their headquarters were. First building to hit was where they had the headquarters. The next place was hit was where the motorpool was. And we found afterwards that the shoemaker in Diekirch was a spy for the Germans, and he'd give 'em all this information. And, uh, they had us right dead to rights there, see? So it got quite hot, and we lost a couple tanks. So then we pulled back across the river and then we blew the bridge. And this was Christmas Eve of '44. We pulled a little down, and we was in a house there making something to eat.

McIntosh: In a house?

Jenkins: Yeah.

McIntosh: In a Luxembourger's house?

Jenkins: Oh, yeah. There was nobody in it so we just—

McIntosh: Oh, they evacuated. They were getting' the hell out of the way.

Jenkins: And—

McIntosh: Okay.

Jenkins: We was there, and my buddy and I went upstairs to bed.

McIntosh: [laughs]

Jenkins: The first thing you know, the house got hit, so the company commander said, "You better go in the basement." So we went in the basement. We done that twice. After that, I told my buddy, I said, "I'm going up to bed. If, they get me out of this bed any more tonight they're going to have to shoot me out because I ain't going to get out by myself."

McIntosh: [laughs]

Jenkins: 'Cause it's the first bed I'd seen in a couple weeks.

McIntosh: Was that—that was an artillery shell that hit your—that hit the ground—

Jenkins: Oh, yeah. Yeah, hit inside the house a couple times. Blew all the windows out.

McIntosh: So you didn't go to the basement ?

Jenkins: No, no. And then from there we just kept going toward Bastogne.

McIntosh: You were a pretty stubborn guy.

Jenkins: I still am.

McIntosh: Oh. [laughs] That third shot could have come in and taken you out.

Jenkins: I never worried about that.

McIntosh: No kidding?

Jenkins: No.

McIntosh: Seriously?

Jenkins: Never worried about getting killed. It never bothered me.

McIntosh: You didn't assume, like a lot of the guys, that you were going to be killed and not worry about it?

Jenkins: No. Never worried about it at all.

McIntosh: Oh, okay. Okay, so, here we are. You got up in the next morning, and then you kept moving back, or—

Jenkins: Well, we had—we moved back toward Paris. We said, "We'll go back as far as we can go. We'll find somebody back there to help us out." So—in a couple days it got kinda organized again.

McIntosh: Yeah, you didn't have to go back *that* far.

Jenkins: Oh, no, no, no.

McIntosh: [laughs]

Jenkins: Well, see, we didn't see our mess truck for three or four days. Like I always said about the government, they made sure we got cigarettes, but they didn't worry about the food. And they made sure everybody got cigarettes, [unintelligible]. I don't know what the reason was, but—I think they're the greatest—

McIntosh: When you smoke cigarettes, then you're not hungry.

Jenkins: What? [laughs]

McIntosh: How's that?

Jenkins: That could be, too.

McIntosh: [laughs] Okay.

Jenkins: Well, I said they pushed cigarettes on everybody.

McIntosh: Yes.

Jenkins: So we got what they called the K-ration. You remember them?

McIntosh: Sure. They had four cigarettes in them.

Jenkins: No, the tanks, they had ten in them.

McIntosh: Oh, really? Oh, all depends?. All right. Okay.

Jenkins: But then every week you could get a carton through your PX, so you had all kinds of cigarettes. But see with the [Unintelligible], we all thought about going to Paris. And we had about a thousand cartons of cigarettes saved up to sell 'em Paris.

McIntosh: You were going to sell them?

Jenkins: Yeah. Well, they're good money!

McIntosh: No kidding.

Jenkins: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: I know that.

Jenkins: Did you sell any?

McIntosh: No, I couldn't. No, I didn't. When I was overseas, they weren't selling them.

Jenkins: See, I didn't get down the first time. When we went through Paris the first time cigarettes was \$40 a carton.

McIntosh: Was that what you'd get on the black market?

Jenkins: You'd get it from anybody, it didn't have to be in the—yeah. But they would buy 'em—

McIntosh: \$40.

Jenkins: \$40 a carton, they'd get for 'em.

McIntosh: In American money?

Jenkins: Right.

McIntosh: But what kind of American money? They didn't have the American scrip, did they?

Jenkins: Well, they had [unintelligible]. That got all over down there. See, the French money was good, too.

McIntosh: Yeah, in *France*.

Jenkins: Yeah. But see, when I went—I went to Paris, and when we went through Paris on the way to the front we bivouacked up at the Orly Air Force Base, just outside of Paris. But we didn't have nothin' to sell them that day. But then I went back to Paris *after* the Battle of the Bulge, and I sold I don't know how many Hershey candy bars.

McIntosh: What did you get for a Hershey candy bar?

Jenkins: A buck a bar.

McIntosh: [laughs]

Jenkins: We did. We spent it all, so that's [??]

McIntosh: You never left France, anyway. Did you find a lot of girls there in Paris?

Jenkins: [laughs] Do I have to answer that?

McIntosh: Certainly. It makes an interesting story.

Jenkins: We was walking—there was five of us walking down the street. This was about, oh, 3 o'clock in the afternoon. We talked about where to find the girls. Somebody backed up by me, said, "Don't worry about that, fellers." He said, "After dark," he said, "you'll have to fight 'em off." There was a Frenchman who could talk real good English. He just said, "Don't worry

about girls.” He says, “There’ll be all kinds of ‘em after dark,” and he didn’t lie about it. They was there by the hundreds, all over.

McIntosh: Professionals?

Jenkins: Some of ‘em were professionals, some amateurs. But most of ‘em—

McIntosh: Hey, you could trade those candy bars in for, instead of money, couldn’t you?

Jenkins: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

McIntosh: That work?

Jenkins: Oh, sure. Sure.

McIntosh: Or a carton of cigarettes, or—

Jenkins: Yeah.

McIntosh: I don’t know; what was the running price?

Jenkins: I don’t remember anymore, either.

McIntosh: Oh. Well, you stayed out—you didn’t catch anything bad, did you?

Jenkins: No, it’s funny how they talk about AIDS today, it’s a wonder we didn’t catch all kinds of stuff in them days.

McIntosh: Hadn’t invented AIDS then. [laughs]

Jenkins: Well—

McIntosh: Just the clap; that was the only thing.

Jenkins: They had it in Africa, you know.

McIntosh: Oh, yeah.

Jenkins: I don’t know whether you knew this or not, but I had a brother, went through Africa in the Air Corps. And some of the guys there got the clap, but they had to leave them there because they didn’t have a cure for it.

McIntosh: What do you mean, they didn’t have a cure for it?

Jenkins: It was so bad in Africa they didn't have—they had no medicine to cure it, see.

McIntosh: You mean it was resistant to penicillin?

Jenkins: Resistant to everything. And that's where some of these missing boys in action come in from, see, so because they couldn't bring it with them because there's no cure for it. So they just left them there.

McIntosh: Well, they weren't there permanently.

Jenkins: I don't know where they went afterwards. They never come home with the troops.

McIntosh: Yeah, well. Okay. All right, so after—how many days were you in Paris getting in trouble?

Jenkins: Three.

McIntosh: Was that enough?

Jenkins: Yeah, we run out of money.

McIntosh: [laughs] You find something to drink there?

Jenkins: Oh, yeah. If you use your head, you can find plenty to drink.

McIntosh: Generally you drank wine?

Jenkins: Oh, yeah. I think they had a little liquor, a little beer. But if you'd bribe the bartender, you could get all kinds of—I give a bartender two packs of cigarettes one night. I says, "Where can I get a good steak?" He says, "Let me check." So we went back in the kitchen; they had steaks stacked up that high see. It was all from horse, but they was steaks.

McIntosh: [laughs]

Jenkins: They were *good*.

McIntosh: Oh, sure.

Jenkins: But for that two cartons of—I mean, for two packs of cigarettes, and afterwards, I gave him some more—but I got a nice T-bone steak.

McIntosh: Taste good?

Jenkins: Real good. The only thing was, the meat was a little bit coarser than what beef was, but it was good. Anything would be good after C-rations.

McIntosh: I was going to say, after field rations [laughs] Oh, my. So nobody—nobody caught the clap in your tank?

Jenkins: I had—one new officer caught it. He went to Paris with us. He got a dose of that.

McIntosh: He did?

Jenkins: Yeah.

McIntosh: He didn't go to the "pro station" [prophylaxis station] afterward like he was supposed to?

Jenkins: I suppose. I don't know. I didn't know him that good anyways.

McIntosh: They Army was instructed to squirt some Argyrol into the urethra after you had contact, which would generally kill the gonorrhea before it got established. But nobody liked to do that because it was uncomfortable.

Jenkins: Well, you done it anyways, so—

McIntosh: Okay. [laughs]

Jenkins: A lot of things is uncomfortable, but you went through them. Well, look—when I first went into the service I made up my mind, I'm going to do what they tell me to do. If I didn't like a guy, I'd do what they told me to do, too, and I got along real good.

McIntosh: So when you got back, did you push up into the Ardennes again?

Jenkins: No.

McIntosh: Okay, then you went east towards Germany?

Jenkins: We went into Germany then.

McIntosh: Okay. You crossed the Rhine River. Tell me about that.

Jenkins: I'm trying to think where we crossed the Rhine River.

McIntosh: It was north of Remagen, then, if you were up there—

Jenkins: Oh, no. We was way south of—

McIntosh: Oh, you were?

Jenkins: Way down toward Frankfurt.

McIntosh: Oh!

Jenkins: That's where we crossed at.

McIntosh: Okay.

Jenkins: And we didn't—we didn't—see, we went—we went back to recuperate, and we didn't leave for the front then until the first day of April, 1945. I'll always remember that because that was Easter Sunday.

McIntosh: When you crossed?

Jenkins: No, when we left France.

McIntosh: Oh.

Jenkins: [unintelligible]

McIntosh: Okay.

Jenkins: And we went into Germany, and that—that we didn't have too much—too much fightin' after that. You could go into a town, and somebody's firing at you, then you'd shell 'em, but if they didn't fire you'd just go through the town and *leave* 'em. And I've seen where we'd go through some towns and you wouldn't see nothing, but afterwards back, of you there'd be—there might be six or seven hundred people walk out of the woods, walk back toward the—

McIntosh: Toward the town?

Jenkins: Well, no, not toward town. They'd walk back where they knew it was safe.

McIntosh: So where did you trade these K-rations for German food?

Jenkins: Anyplace we could.

McIntosh: In farmhouses?

Jenkins: Oh, yeah. Yeah. In the cities. In fact, we had a boy in my tank speak real good German, and there's a burgomaster [English for burgermeister, chief

magistrate] there. That's a policeman, and I told him, "You go up, tell burgomaster, get us some fresh meat and have it here within an hour, or he won't last the night." He had it for us.

McIntosh: [laughs] That was a threat. Jeez. [laughs]

Jenkins: Yeah.

McIntosh: And what did you give him, after threatening to kill him?
[Approx. 2 sec. pause in recording. Resumes back at point Mr. Jenkins says "an hour"]

Jenkins: Give him some cigarettes.

McIntosh: Oh. Was he happy with that?

Jenkins: Oh, yes. Yes.

McIntosh: Or what—

Jenkins: The we stopped one time—we was gonna trade some C-rations for some fresh eggs. This lady had a lot of chickens. Then she run out and locked the henhouse door. That made us mad, so we took the cable off the tank, unhooked the chicken house door, and we pulled a chicken out, right out of the chicken house. Got our eggs. She didn't get nothing, then. But if she'd a give us the eggs, we'd a give her some meat, some—a lot of C-rations. We had all kinds of C-rations.
[End of Tape 1, Side A]

McIntosh: Okay, hold it for a moment, here.

Jenkins: Did you ever see a roadmap of Europe?

McIntosh: Huh?

Jenkins: Have you ever seen a roadmap of Europe?

McIntosh: Yeah. [Approx. 25 sec. pause] So tell me about a roadmap in Europe.

Jenkins: I said, "You ever seen a roadmap of Europe?"

McIntosh: Yes.

Jenkins: They're quite interesting.

McIntosh: Yeah, I've driven in Europe.

Jenkins: I've got a couple here, below my—I can get right there and show where I was at in combat, where I was at when the war ended. But we was almost at the Elbe River when the war was over with. And all the land we took the last, oh say, last couple weeks, that all had to go back to the Russians. For this agreement—this Malta agreement. They had there back when Roosevelt and Churchill and Stalin met there at Malta.

McIntosh: Mm hmm.

Jenkins: This was the agreement they had, see. And the more you read about that, you can understand it more now, that I think the United States done a lot better there in the war than they thought they was going to do. I mean, it wasn't as hard on us as they thought it was going to be so we got a lot of land that we didn't think we'd have. So when the war was over with we were up in the little town of Épernay. We was in bivouac there, and that's when I got pneumonia. I got pneumonia in June, July; I didn't get back to my outfit until August. And when I got back there was no outfit because they had already split 'em up, and a lot of 'em already went home. But then I finally found some of the guys, and they attached me to the 602nd Tank Battalion. That's the outfit I come home with.

McIntosh: So you didn't get injured?

Jenkins: *Never* got a scratch. There were—I had one brother in Africa, in the Air Corps, and one brother in the Philippines, in that area, in the Air Corps, and then I had another brother in Europe later, but out of all of us, it was not a one got a scratch.

McIntosh: That was very lucky.

Jenkins: Well, I've always said, and I still say it today, if you come out of that war without a scratch you had to be real lucky. If you can—if you come out of it alive you was much more lucky. Can I tell you a little story?

McIntosh: Tell me a story.

Jenkins: Well, we was—we stayed in Camp McCoy in 1944, went up in December of '44. Everybody there that hadn't had a furlough, got a furlough.

McIntosh: Before you went overseas?

Jenkins: Before we went overseas. We didn't know we was going overseas at that time, but we kind of had a hunch. But we went—I got on the Hiawatha up at Camp McCoy and went to Portage on it. I said to the conductor, I says, "How far is it to Portage?" He says, "Two drinks, you'll be there." But we

had this little guy from Kentucky on there. He's a little bit of an outlaw. We got to Portage and he come up—"Sarge," he says, "I won't see you any more." He says, "I'm not going overseas with a chickenshit outfit like this one." I said, "That's up to you." I said, "I don't have anything to say about that." He went through Chicago and got himself a dose of clap. And he never come back to the outfit. We was overseas, oh, it must have been about April or May, who comes through the repo depot but this little guy who left us in Portage, see. And we talked to him and kiddin' him, and, "Well", he says, "I still don't care about going with ya." So they put him in the 2nd Armored Division. And they went in on D-Day. And when we got over on the coast there, we had a month there with nothin' to do, nothin' [unintelligible] us. Walked up, looked everything over, and we went to this big cemetery. I don't think I'd been in that cemetery twenty minutes and who did I run into but this little German's name; he had lasted in combat two days. If he'd stayed with us he'd have probably went through the war without a scratch.

McIntosh: Right.

Jenkins: But that's always—that's always going to stay with me. Because, uh, I think an outfit's what you make it.

McIntosh: Right.

Jenkins: The outfit.

McIntosh: Did you keep in contact with any of these guys?

Jenkins: Oh, I kept contact for years. In fact, this is just a company—we had company reunions for--

McIntosh: *Company* reunions?

Jenkins: Yeah, just the company.

McIntosh: That's very good.

Jenkins: And we had it down in Burlington, Iowa, at a private home. This guy had a private home, and he had a great big front lawn. He had a fireplace. We started them reunions in '49, I think it was. When we first went there, we done all of our own cookin' on this fireplace. And when it first started we went every year, the first weekend of August. And the wife and I—my kids was little then. In fact, my daughter she'll be 49 now, I think, it's her 49th--yeah, next month--and the first one I took her to she was in a bassinet. And we went down to—on the Mississippi River there, and it was so hot in them days, no air conditioning. But we'd have a good time

down there. We kept them up 'til, I think about five years ago was the last one we had, but there are so many of them dead now that—they're talking about havin' another one, a get-together this year, down at the same place. But I haven't heard anything now for about a month so I don't know whether they are or not.

McIntosh: Did you join veterans groups?

Jenkins: Oh, I belong to the Legion and the VFW. Yeah, very active in both of them.

McIntosh: You're very active in both?

Jenkins: Yeah.

McIntosh: The Legion is not as powerful as it once was. It's less—

Jenkins: Well—

McIntosh: Popular.

Jenkins: Well, don't you think they're both getting the same? You know, in order for these service organizations to survive they got to have wars. You don't have wars, you don't have veterans.

McIntosh: Well, that's sort of—

Jenkins: We got a pretty active Legion post here in town. 'Course, we got—we got members all over the United States, but we've got over about 250 members.

McIntosh: In your local?

Jenkins: Yeah, but I said they're scattered all over the United States.

McIntosh: Oh, I see.

Jenkins: And when we have a meeting, if we get twenty-five there we're lucky.

McIntosh: Right. VFW, too?

Jenkins: VFW, they don't have a post, but—they have a post here, but they don't have a clubhouse.

McIntosh: I see.

Jenkins: We meet at the bank, and we most generally have enough members there to have a meeting. That's about it.

McIntosh: You meet on a monthly basis?

Jenkins: We meet every fourth Wednesday. The Legion meets every third Thursday.

McIntosh: You have dinner and that sort of thing?

Jenkins: We have, at the VF—no, at the Legion, we do. Yeah. We have potlucks, we have early-bird dinners. We have quite a few different banquets there. And then we have pancake breakfasts. The ladies --

McIntosh: Did you ever go back to Europe?

Jenkins: I had no desire to go back.

McIntosh: Did you use your GI Bill?

Jenkins: Not from the government, no.

McIntosh: Right. You didn't go to school, or use it to get a housing loan at five percent?

Jenkins: No, I didn't—I didn't do that. The only thing—I got a loan from the state, '52 or '53, one of those thousand dollar loans.

McIntosh: Oh, uhuh.

Jenkins: Have you heard of them?

McIntosh: Yeah.

Jenkins: Yeah. But I went up—this big lieutenantcolonel or colonel was settin' back in his chair there, and he—that time I was, oh, about thirty—thirty-two or thirty-three. I told him I needed the thousand dollars. I had about \$800 in bills; I wanted to get them all in one. He looked at me, and he says, "You know," he says, "You're kind of old for a loan like this." I looked at him, I says, "I wasn't too goddamn old to fight the war for ya!"

McIntosh: [laughs]

Jenkins: In five minutes, I had the loan. [laughs]

McIntosh: Right. He didn't want any part of you!

Jenkins: [laughs] He made me mad!

McIntosh: Of course.

Jenkins: That's the only—I didn't even take advantage of that "52-20" [a benefit in the first GI Bill: \$20 a week up to 52 weeks] , they called it.

McIntosh: Oh, you didn't?

Jenkins: No, uh-uh.

McIntosh: Even though you didn't have a job?

Jenkins: Oh, I had a job, yeah.

McIntosh: Oh, well then, you didn't qualify for the "52-20".

Jenkins: Well, these guys, they qualified, and they didn't—they could work, but they didn't. They sat around for fifty-two weeks and drank beer.

McIntosh: For \$20.

Jenkins: \$20 a week, yeah. They'd live at home.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Jenkins: But I didn't ever done that. I—I was—I'm that way yet today. I don't think the government owes us everything for the little time we spent in service.

McIntosh: So what did you do after you got out?

Jenkins: I done carpenter work for about seven years. Then I came to Madison, and I bought a tavern. I went in the tavern in '52, and I stayed in the tavern business until '78.

McIntosh: Where was that?

Jenkins: Columbus. And then—

McIntosh: Then you sold it?

Jenkins: Sold it to my son.

McIntosh: Ah.

Jenkins: But, in the meantime, I got hooked up with the Postal Department as a sub on the mail, on the rural route. In them days, you worked about thirty, thirty-five days a year is all, see. Well, I worked there for about twenty years, then the man I was subbing for retired. And this postmaster was a wonderful man. He says, "One thing I'm gonna do before I retire," he says, "I'm going to appoint you a regular mailman." That was in '78, I think. So I was a regular man for a little less than four years; then I could retire. I was there long enough to get a pretty nice little pension from the Postal Department.

McIntosh: Yeah, sounds that way.

Jenkins: Yeah.

McIntosh: So you got a pension from—

Jenkins: Oh, I still get a pension.

McIntosh: From the Post Office?

Jenkins: Yeah.

McIntosh: Well, that was a government service then.

Jenkins: Yes.

McIntosh: Now it's private, the postal business.

Jenkins: That I don't know.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Jenkins: I still get my check the first of every month.

McIntosh: Well, that's all that counts, right? Is it signed by the resident of the United States? [laughs] Right. So, tell me what awards you got for your experience in Europe?

Jenkins: Well, I got four combat ribbons. I got the Good Conduct Medal. And I that's my --

McIntosh: I can't believe that, after telling me all these stories. [both laugh]

Jenkins: I could show you the Conduct—the ribbons. I got one for France, one for—

McIntosh: Right.

Jenkins: The Ardennes.

McIntosh: Unit citations?

Jenkins: I don't know.

McIntosh: Probably. Theater stars, all that?

Jenkins: Well, that—they four—the four battle stars, or whatever.

McIntosh: Battle stars, yes.

Jenkins: Yeah. But I didn't get any—I didn't get any Purple Hearts.

McIntosh: That's all right. That's not an award everybody really wants.

Jenkins: And I wasn't a sharpshooter; didn't have them. But—

McIntosh: That's very good. It sounds like you had a good experience.

Jenkins: I—I enjoyed it. I've—like I said earlier, that I went in there with my mind up that I was going to do what they told me to. And you get along good that way, don't you? If you fight the system, you're in trouble. I think it's that way yet today. But it's altogether different than it was in them days, though, too.

McIntosh: Everything changes. Okay. Any stories you forgot to tell me?

Jenkins: Well, when we was come out of Paris we was flat broke.

McIntosh: [laughs] I'm sure.

Jenkins: And my buddy, he had the shakes, and he needed a drink. So he says, "You get the bartender, pretend you're another bartender and talk to him," he says. "I'll steal a fifth of wine." We done that; he got the fifth of wine.

McIntosh: From where?

Jenkins: From the bar!

McIntosh: Okay. So off you marched with your stolen wine?

Jenkins: No, we had trucks.

McIntosh: You had your truck, then. Okay, all right. I guess that's it.

Jenkins: Well, does that sound good to you?

McIntosh: Sounds good. Yep. You did a good job.

Jenkins: Thank you.

McIntosh: Okay, we'll close her down here.

[End of Interview]