

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
Ernest Johannes  
U. S. Army, World War II

2004

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**Johannes, Ernest**, (1917- ), Oral History Interview, 2004

User copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 80 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 80 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

### **ABSTRACT**

Johannes, a Horicon Marsh, Wis. native, discusses his World War II service with the Headquarters Company, 379<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 95<sup>th</sup> Division, and his return to Wisconsin after the war. He describes basic training at Camp Swift (Texas), Leon Springs Military Reservation (Texas), and supply sergeant training at Fort Sam Houston (Texas). Johannes tells about his involvement in the Louisiana maneuvers at Camp Polk, his desert training at Coxcomb (California), maneuver training at Fort Indiantown Gap (Pennsylvania), mountain maneuver training at 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain (West Virginia), and embarkation and debarkation training at Camp Miles Standish (Massachusetts). He mentions that when he was in Leon Springs Military Reservation, the 379<sup>th</sup> Regiment, the Regimental Supply Officer at that time was Oliver North, the father of Marine Col. Oliver North. Johannes reports their training ended on June 6, 1944 and they were prepared to go to Europe; coincidentally this was also D-Day. He mentions that they were transported to Liverpool (England) on the West Point which was the largest ship in the American fleet, and they did not have an escort. He reports that he was assigned to the 20<sup>th</sup> Corps of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army in September of 1944, and they moved to the vicinity of the Metz. He characterizes the foxhole as muddy and horrible with the constant fear of being hit by artillery or mortar shells. Johannes states they crossed the Moselle River and replaced the 5<sup>th</sup> Division that had originally assaulted the Metz. He describes when he volunteered to go out and recover a wounded man and bring him back to the Aid Station while under fire from German artillery. Johannes tells about fighting their way into Saarlaurten as part of the Battle of the Bulge, which was part of the Alsace campaign. He states they took and crossed the bridge over the Saar River. Johannes reports that when the war was over in Europe they were shipped back to the United States. He expresses his surprise at arriving home on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1945. He tells that when he was discharged in 1945 he went to work for The Treasury Department on tax fraud and other violations.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Johannes (b. 1917) served in the European theater of World War II. He was honorably discharged from service in June of 1945 after serving 10 months overseas and achieving the rank of staff sergeant.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2004.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2004.

## Interview Transcript

John: This is John Driscoll, and today is March 5, 2004. And this is an oral history interview with Ernest Johannes, a veteran of the United States Army in World War II. And we are at Laurel Oaks, in Milwaukee, and good morning, and thanks an awful lot for agreeing to the interview.

Ernest: Yes.

John: Could we start at the beginning, Ernest, and where and when were you born and a little bit about your early life?

Ernest: I was born on the Horicon Marsh. My dad was doing some truck farming. Apparently he was homesteading. I was probably the only one that was ever born on that marsh. I was born in the township of Chester, July 12, 1917.

John: Okay.

Ernest: Did you want me to continue?

John: Oh, sure. Just keep going.

Ernest: Well, my father was a Spanish-American War veteran, a veteran also of the Philippine Insurrection. He served from age fifteen to age twenty-one. He was in the Navy for about five years. He was a florist by trade, and he was a partner right in this area where we are now with another man, who was a drinker. And he engaged in the greenhouse business. And it broke up because the partner was a drinker. So Dad was out here in the Horicon Marsh doing some homesteading. That did not work out so this was during 1916-17 through about 1918. At that time he found an opening to go to work at the Navy yard in Bremerton, Washington. So I was a tot at that time. They moved out there and we resided on an island in Puget Sound. He, while we were there, my mother's family had a farm in Ozaukee County, in what was known as Julio. And at that time the flu epidemic took two of my aunts who I never knew. I was probably two years old. They passed away. My dad moved back from Bremerton Navy Yard. He left because there wasn't any more work. He came here and he worked for International Harvester, and at that time he accumulated a thousand dollars. And with the thousand dollars, he bought a greenhouse and store on 17th and Hoskins, for which he paid a thousand dollars down. And the total price was about twelve thousand five hundred dollars. He saved enough money in the future days to pay off the loan. I was in college in later years. I did the floral, dad was kind of a combination grower of flowers and making funeral arrangements. Grew a lot of

geraniums and bedding stock. The place was located across from the cemetery and there were two other competitors. My father had three small green houses. My brother, one brother, Daniel, assisted dad. He worked with dad. And there was another man, this Harry Knueppel, who I mentioned. Harry and this brother and the minister's two sons took up an interest in riding horses when they had free time. A friend of theirs told them that they were foolish to pay for riding horses. He said, "Why don't you come over to the armory? You can have free riding at the armory, there on Richard Street." So he did that and these brothers did that. And eventually the war was pending and he and his brothers and the two ministers sons joined the 105th Cavalry, and eventually the threat of war came, and there was the draft. But the 32nd Division was monopolized, and I was drafted into the Army. And went down to Louisiana and [buzzing sound in background]. Do you want me to repeat this?

John: Yea.

Ernest: Well, my dad was in the business and I was going to college. And I graduated from college in business administration, and law school, in 1942. Of course, we were a patriotic family. And my brother Daniel had volunteered beforehand. He didn't even tell me about it. So, he was already in the Army. And I was drafted on July 18, 1942, although I remember Pearl Harbor.

John: What do you remember about that?

Ernest: December 7, 1941? We were listening to a Packer football game and it was announced by an announcer – the original announcer for the Packers was a man by the name of Russ Winning – and during that the notice came through about the attack on Pearl Harbor. We realized, my brother and I and two other friends, realized at that time that we were going to have something to do with it. Well, my brother was already out. He was in the Army, in the anti-aircraft. He was in the 90 millimeter anti-aircraft battery, or the 101st. And I was subject. I went into the Army on July 18th, 1942. And, of course, the draft, we were sworn in at the Richard Street armory. And it took us forever to get us processed and to get us down to Fort Sheridan. As a matter of fact, it still smelled after the horses my friends were riding. So we got there about between three and four o'clock in the morning.

John: That sounds like the Army.

Ernest: And immediately we took all the pads. And the next day or two we were given uniforms. There were some men that were too heavy to get uniforms. Somewhere around two-fifty, two-sixty, maybe three hundred pounds. So we left them there at Fort Sheridan because they couldn't get clothes. So it wasn't very long and we

departed by train to go to Texas. As a matter of fact, the destination was a spanking new camp called Swift.

John: Camp Swift.

Ernest: Outside of Austin. Bastrop. It was really closer to Bastrop, Texas. It was the 95th Infantry Division.

John: Okay.

Ernest: We were in new uniforms, and we had our basic training there. I can remember we had a lot of heat. We slept without, we had beds with sheets, believe it or not. So, as we were there, we would exercise. We would start at five o'clock in the morning and in the evening we would run, hike and run maybe five miles or so. That was every day. And we had to build up the camp. In other words, there was construction needed. And when we got into the camp, the order was given to clean the windows. No equipment, nothing. Second thing, we were instructed to hang our clothes up. No hangers. I don't remember how that, what happened, how that worked out. But, going on, there was a terrible thing that happened there, at Camp Swift. Shortly after we had been there and completed basic training, and while we were completing it. And we got troops from all over. Matter of fact, we must have had all the states represented, with the exception probably of Florida. We had a man or two from Honolulu. We had men from Alaska, there were two from Alaska.

John: Wow.

Ernest: And, see, the division must have had a thousand or more men from Wisconsin, maybe even more. It was even larger than the contingent that ultimately was in the 32nd Division. I think it was. And we had them from Illinois, the Midwest, Minnesota, and that is what I was going to get to, the terrible thing that happened. One day we were alerted to check the area for the body of a little girl. And eventually the little girl's body was found. It turned out that a draftee from Minnesota had raped and murdered.

John: Oh, that is terrible.

Ernest: And rather quickly they found the person who had done it. He was, apparently, in civilian life he was already mentally ill.

John: I see.

Ernest: And the draft board, instead of sending a qualified person, had sent this person. In

other words, honoring the requirements of the draft.

John: Yea. That's terrible.

Ernest: He was court-martialed, and sentenced to death. All this information didn't come out right away, but when we made the next move, to San Antonio, to Fort Sam Houston, and for our training, Fort Sam Houston wasn't much more than a mailing address. There was the Leon Springs Military Reservation, where we did our training. I think they call it division problems, I think that is what it was called. And there, while we were there, this man had been convicted. The engineers had built a scaffold, and they brought in an executioner, and this man was hung. He had been sentenced to death.

John: Oh, wow. That's tragic.

Ernest: And then we were there, we participated in what was called D problems, division problems. And this was on the Leon Springs Military Reservation. We built a camp. Each one of the infantry regiments built a camp, a tent city. And I remember, each regiment had a camp which they built and a name was assigned to it. Our division was assigned the name Camp Civilo. First time we went out there, we went by truck, but there was another camp on the grounds. This was a huge place. There was another camp called Bullus. So we trained there and we would hike from Camp Civilo to Bullus, and Bullus back to San Antonio. It was probably twenty miles. And we would hike, oh, we'd hike that once ever two weeks, to and from. And we had a man who was acting as battalion commander. At the moment I can't remember his name, but he would get out on these long hikes, he'd drive the Jeep and then he'd get within maybe five miles out of Fort Sam Houston, and then he'd get out in front and he'd speed up the cadence of the men. This came to the notice of the regimental commander, a World War I veteran, a tough West Pointer, his name was Marlin C. Martin. He learned about it but he said nothing. So one day, we had built this tent city that I referred to, and had a company street that stretched way out. A regiment is composed of a lot of people. And he would take reveille in the morning. He had such a voice, I don't know how many hundred feet he could project that voice. First thing, he would call the service company to report. Then he went on to each regiment. And I was in the 379th Regiment. 379th, he called it. And someone responded, "Sir, all present and accounted for." And this colonel bellowed out, "Who is reporting for the second battalion?" And the fellow said, "Captain So-and-so." I don't remember the name of the major who was in charge of the battalion. And he said, "Where is this major?" "He's in bed, in the sack, sir." Colonel Martin shouted out, "You tell him he is hereby relieved of his command!"

John: You know what they say, what goes around, comes around.

Ernest: And there were other things that happened at San Antonio, but it was rough going, and there were ticks and poison oak and mosquitoes. And the ticks were so, there were so many they would just ring your body, go around your chest. The men that didn't have the problem, like I had, would get sick apparently, they eventually called it Bullus fever. While we were there, President Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, made a trip to Monterrey, Mexico. And we were ordered to protect the railroad areas from San Antonio to Corpus Christi. It was the only time that we were issued live ammunition with the exception of the rifle range. And while we were there we went through the infiltration course, infamous, you know it?

John: Oh, yea.

Ernest: And the ground was at that place it was all rough surfaced. We were required to dig foxholes, and it was impossible to dig into this ground. So when we stayed, we stayed in a park between San Antonio and Corpus Christi, there we had no problems with any insects. The reason was, in this area cattle had been kept and, you see, they were all sprayed, and they laid on the ground.

John: Oh, okay.

Ernest: And of course, in San Antonio, at Fort Sam Houston, we didn't get very much time off. We'd go into San Antonio and drink too much.

John: Yea.

Ernest: That was the place. I didn't tell you, I became the supply sergeant and I think it was at Fort Sam Houston, and I had no knowledge of the job at all. All of a sudden I am the supply sergeant. And I checked the, we had rifle racks. So I would take the company book and check the contents of the rifle racks. The rifles didn't belong to us. And I notified the regimental supply officer. And it's a name you know, Oliver North.

John: Oh, yea?

Ernest: That's the father of the present Oliver North.

John: Oh, okay.

Ernest: And he didn't want them. And eventually a notice came down. And, to this day, I have no idea of what happened to those rifles, how they ever got there. These were short rifles. Well, it was pretty rough training in Texas. And we would occasionally get into San Antonio, and the usual things happened. There were

fighters. And, incidentally, at Leon Springs Military Reservation, we would go a portion of the way back to San Antonio on these long hikes. And they had a beer garden there. It was in a building. And the men would, they would give them bottles, and the men would get in there, and it would be steaming hot, and they'd get outside, and before you know it, they'd be holding a beer bottle and someone would come along with another bottle, and bang it out of your hand, and a fight would start. And I have to go back to the compliment of men we had. We had men that came from, as I said, Wisconsin, Illinois, and originally from the middle west. And I dare say we had more men than the 32nd Division had from Wisconsin.

John: Yea, that's interesting.

Ernest: Who knows, though?

John: Yea.

Ernest: But we had many of them from right here.

John: Now, you were a college grad and out of law school by then?

Ernest: Yea.

John: That didn't work toward a commission?

Ernest: Well, I'm not handy. I was no good at handling a weapon, and I always felt that I should not attempt to lead men if I couldn't do the same thing myself.

John: Oh, that's good. That's a good point. Yea.

Ernest: So, it's going to take a little while to get to Europe. Well, while we were there, there were some other things that happened. Well, I drew Jeeps, Jeeps with snap locks, three or four of them. I went to the motor pool and signed out for three. This was on a Saturday. And I got back, I got the motor officer. I wanted him to sign up for the Jeeps. Came back, there was a Jeep missing. Well, the guards, they had the responsibility. The regimental headquarters company had the responsibility, the service company had the responsibility to protect them, but I was concerned about it. It took a week before they found the Jeep in San Antonio. How they got out of there, out of the motor pool and off the post.

John: Sure.

Ernest: Incidentally, we had one of those long hikes one day, and I developed a blister.



And as we were going in, I had a friend from Alaska. Not a native but he was a newspaper reporter. He was up there writing about Matiska [?] A story, if you remember what that was, there were people from northern Wisconsin, some from other states, they were doing farming and were not successful, and they were settled in Alaska, in the Anchorage area. Yea, he was a graduate of the University of Kansas, School of Journalism. And he hopped along. One leg was a little shorter than the other and we had to tote field packs and rifles on our shoulder, and as he hiked along, he looked like he was suffering. So, I looked at him and I said, I asked, “Hoppy, give me your rifle. I’ll carry it for you.” So he did. It was only eight, ten miles. We get back to Fort Sam Houston, and I was tired. I was in good physical condition, and I look up, here’s walking out to the shower to go to town in Hoppy. And then another story, in San Anton, of course, we did go into beer gardens. It was a time they didn’t serve liquor in beer gardens. And one day, one of my buddies was in there. He’d had too much. I think he had booze. They’d go into these beer gardens and get a taster, and he, there were women fooling around with him. So I had to try. I drove them away, “Leave him alone.” And then he was so drunk, I had a heck of a time getting him onto the bus to go back to Fort Sam, and I got out in the middle of this field. I had taken him maybe a hundred yards. I couldn’t carry him any more. So, I let him lay, and I took his wallet for safekeeping. I got back to the barracks, and the next morning he had slept it off. And I asked him, “Corky, are you missing anything this morning?” “No, I’m not missing anything.” “Are you sure?” “No.” “Do you recognize this?” I showed him his wallet. And this man was from Superior.

John: Oh, Wisconsin?

Ernest: That is what happened there. Well, we eventually went on to Louisiana maneuvers. We had quite a bit of equipment drawn by that time. We were, our artillery had its guns. Everybody had the equipment. We were fully equipped. So we went on Louisiana maneuvers. I should go back to the first bivouac. We didn’t get fed until after midnight. It was pitch dark. So the trucks were parked around the kitchens, so we started running. They called chow. And we had our mess kits, and we ran down this hill.

**[End of Side A of Tape 1.]**

And all of a sudden my feet are out from under me. I had ran into the kitchen sump hole.

John: Oh, wow.

Ernest: There are probably other things that I don’t remember.

John: Let's get to moving overseas. This was about what, now? Late '42?

Ernest: Late '42 to early 43. Okay. Well then we moved to Louisiana maneuvers. I'll short cut that. Louisiana maneuvers where they had what they call, well, they were real maneuvers against other infantry divisions. And from there we were stationed at Camp Polk for a while, and from there we were moved to California, in the desert. We were in a camp there called, I should remember the name of that Coxcomb. We got there in October or early November. We weren't there in the warm, hot season. And we got some, we had training in the desert. We also trained for the Southwest Pacific. And while we were there, we had a chance occasionally to go into Los Angeles. I had an aunt living out there. Incidentally, her son was a movie cameraman and he photographed the landings in North Africa. I think he also took the pictures of the Normandy invasion, and there was one other. But I never met the man except in the '20s when he visited. I don't remember. He passed away, or something. After World War II, shortly. I never knew him. Well, we completed the Louisiana maneuvers and we completed the desert training and then we were loaded on trains to go to Pennsylvania. Forever, it seemed to go from California to Indiantown Gap. There we got training, again, and we moved to West Virginia. We took mountain maneuvers. We trained with the 10th Mountain. Now, that division still exists. Yea. And we did some mountain climbing. I wasn't much good at that. I got up all right, but getting down was something else. I wasn't able to rappel. But there we had a big party before we moved from there. We had a lot to drink. I remember getting there. I was in the advanced, in charge of the advance party. I got there. I said, "Oh, I don't think I'll put up a tent tonight." There was an experienced man who said, "Joe, you better. It will rain." I looked at the sky. Beautifully clear.

John: Yea. I think I know what is coming.

Ernest: And it did rain. And I had a hangover. So, finally, after that, we went through all the maneuvers. There maneuvers there ended. In fact, they ended on June 6, 1944.

John: That was D-Day.

Ernest: And we were sitting around a fire, which was very unusual for us, just before we returned to Indiantown Gap. From Indiantown Gap, we were alerted for overseas. So we moved, I don't remember too much about that anymore, but I do remember one thing that happened. I must have been up thirty hours or longer, and I got back to the barracks. The men were all packed up. They saw my condition, they packed my bag for me. They did everything for me. And the next day we left for Camp Miles Standish, in Massachusetts. And there we had an area where they had, they had constructed something that looks like a ship, in the middle of a pond, and we did climbing up and down to replicate what would happen if we were on a ship

and had to get off of it. So that was what, well, eventually we did get chances to go to Providence and to Boston. One time I went with another soldier into Boston and we went into a good restaurant. The restaurant was full. We were sitting at a table which had four chairs. And I noticed a man, an officer, a naval officer, coming down the aisle, and he was looking all over for a place to sit. And I called out, "Sir, are you looking for a place to sit? If you don't mind, you can sit with us." He had been on duty out of Boston on the ocean, and he said, then, after we visited, he asked what we were going to do. And we said we probably would go back to camp. And he said, "Why don't you come home with me?" So we went, we got on a train, we went out, it was a palatial estate.

John: Wow.

Ernest: They had rest rooms on, it was the servants' quarters. So we stayed there overnight, and they fed us, and put us back on the train so we could go back to camp. So, a little kindness...

John: That's something to remember.

Ernest: Well, after that, we eventually got on the transport, which we were taking to Liverpool, on the *West Point*. I don't know, do you have any acquaintance, do you know about the *West Point*?

John: In England?

Ernest: From Boston. It was the largest ship in the American fleet.

John: Oh, the ship?

Ernest: We got loaded on the ship in Boston. We went directly from Camp Miles Standish to Boston. At Boston, of course, it was a rather quick trip. We didn't have an escort, and the ship had thousands of men on it. We were told the ship was too quick for...but nothing happened.

John: How long did it take, do you remember, to go across?

Ernest: Eight to nine days, I think, is what it took. And when we got there we sat in Liverpool Harbor for a long time. We were loaded with duffel bags and double full field packs. And we got off around midnight, and we hiked, I don't know how long that hike was. We were not carrying weapons, we just had our clothing. And we hiked to this spot which was almost a mile away. We got on the train and went to southern England, to a place that was in the vicinity of Winchester. And the camp was marked, Stacy. Near a town called Basingstoke. Did you ever hear of it?

John: No.

Ernest: Well, this was an English camp, and they had these double-bunkers, and the double-bunkers were all wooden. There were no springs. So then we took on supplies. We took on trucks and I believe that the artillery, and others who needed weapons, I think the big stuff was picked up there, in England. Eventually, I always remember two things that happened. I had got to London for a few days, but returned, and what happened there, I was, we moved to Southampton. For some reason, I ended up, I wound up directing, I was in the hold of this Liberty ship. And I had to direct the dropping of the ammunition truck. And it was loaded with ammunition, a ton and a half. And I had no experience with this. But eventually, it got loaded.

John: You got it down?

Ernest: Well, eventually, we left. It was in September of '44. We took the Liberty ship. We had C-rations, exclusively. And the sailors would taunt us. They were frying their own eggs and everything. That was dirty.

John: Yea.

Ernest: So we landed, ultimately, by barge from the Liberty ship into Normandy. Close to Avranches. But at that time, when we landed, battalion headquarters company, and all the companies of both regiments, got on the Red Ball Express, and we had been assigned to the 3rd Army. Although we individually did not know that. So they pushed, moved up all the supplies, fuel, etc., and then we were assigned to the XX Corps, 3rd Army.

John: Okay.

Ernest: We went into the vicinity of Metz. There we were, first, I remember being in a foxhole. I was so wet. And we stood guard, and nothing happened. It was all mud. One blessing of the mud is that, except for artillery or mortar shells, you don't have any problems. Being the company supply sergeant, we moved into two positions. The first position was in preparation to go into position to attack. And I remember we were in a barn yard there, and there was just mud all over the place. Like World War I. And when I was there, the shoe problem. We started off wearing leggings and shoes. The first thing that happened, well, this is mud. You are going to have to wear overshoes. So, here I am in this outfit with the armor, trying to make a requisition. And I did it, and we got the galoshes. And, of course, we pulled out and took up positions across the Moselle River. Positions that had been formerly occupied by the 5th Division, which had made the original assault

on Fort Brionde [?] and several of the forts outside of Metz. And I can remember one of the roads, I remember on this trip passing Verdun. I looked at that place. Nothing has grown. It was still barren.

John: Twenty-some years. Twenty-five years.

Ernest: Yea. It was a horrible place. Well, then, of course, I don't know the exact dates we jumped off but we weren't the only. We replaced the 5th Division. There was the 90th, and I think it was the 11th Armored. We had quite a compliment of men. We lost men. It was muddy, it was miserable. We even used the artillery spotting planes to drop food and supplies to isolated units. So we went into the attack. And one thing I was involved in, the supply sergeant for one of our companies was banged up in a Jeep accident. He didn't know what to do. But, being with the battalion headquarters company, I had most of the men right around me. I went along. I said, "I'll do it for you." So we went up, I had a load of ammunition. We went up to Company G and got there. They had pulled their heads in. They had been in the offensive. The company commander had been wounded and evacuated. And I got there and while I was there, first the Jeep jockey was supposed to take the ammunition which we had in the trailer, and put it in the command post. But these men were all frightened. And nobody moved. And then, I got a call in, a man was wounded. There were four litter bearers there. Well, but one man refused to go. So I did one thing that a soldier is never supposed to do, and that is volunteer.

John: Yea.

Ernest: I didn't have a Red Cross to wear on my arm, so I strapped on the rifle. That is something my armor assistant did, the same thing. And we went out. There were no incidents. We got the man out and got him back to the company CP [command post] and they got him to the medics. Then, I returned. Now, this area had been occupied, still, by the 5th Division. And as we went back, and the Germans knew we were on that road. And they started shooting with the artillery. Somehow, we avoided it. We got back. We had a lot of casualties there. So eventually, that battle, Metz fell, and we were given the credit, our division. We were given the credit for capturing Metz. That really isn't fair. We had the 5th and the 90th Infantry. We had the 11th Armored. We had a medical, mortars. You know, they had a big mortar they were going to use. As a matter of fact, I have to go back to the story of what happened in England. We were assembled to go to Southampton, and just before the regimental supply officer comes out with a supply of condoms. I got a big box of them What am I going to do with them? I went to the first sergeant and said, "Assemble the company." And so I handed every man in the company a package of condoms, and there was a preventative in them. But we also were issued chemical impregnated clothing. It was, you know, the material

was imbedded in fatigues, green fatigues. Now we wore woolens in Europe. We got that, and it was all issued, and these men had enough in their barracks bag without adding this, but we got it. So, as things went on, we got into Metz on Thanksgiving Day, 1944. And while we were there, well, the Germans had been badly defeated. They had their horses and wagons. The horses were loose, and the wagons stood there. And my friend, Hoppy, who was the gas corporal. I don't know if you knew we had such a thing.

John: Yea. Okay.

Ernest: He was a farmer boy. So we decided that instead of riding in the truck, we were going to take these horses. And get into the column. And we did. Our regimental commander was replaced and we got a real tough guy. His name was Bacon. Yea. He says, "Get those men out of line, they're holding up the advance." And we get that, and we took the two horses. And I had a man got up on a horse. One horse was saddled. He wants to bust you. So, we got into this Duke and Duchess of Metz's palace. So we took the horses, and there is a big horse barn, so we took the two horses, three horses, and put them in the stalls. We got back in the truck and went on. Then, I don't know if it was at that time or not. I have to tell you about this. And we got to Saar Laurten. We fought our way in there. And as we were going into position, as a matter of fact, into the battalion rear. Being the battalion supply sergeant. And all the supply sergeants and the kitchens were located together, and then we'd go up to the companies. And battalion headquarters company was just a short way ahead of me. And while we were there, it was very bloody. It was during what they called the Battle of the Bulge, but that was part of the Ardennes Alsace campaign. And while we were there, some of our enterprising soldiers noticed an open bridge. This was the very famous bridge, there, because the first battalion commander saw the bridge and he personally crossed the river with a rifle and a bayonet, and he bayoneted the two guards. That was one of the important events of the war, taking that bridge.

John: Over what river?

Ernest: The Saar.

John: Okay, you said that. That's right.

Ernest: And of course, that was contemporaneous with the German attack on, I think it was the 106th Division, simultaneous with the Battle of the Bulge.

John: Okay.

Ernest: Let me get the story here. Let me go back, to Metz. Our division captured Von

Pappen.

John: Oh.

Ernest: Yea. And his son.

John: I saw films of that. Newsreel films. Okay. Okay.

Ernest: I don't want to forget one thing. I will get going on with this. We had on Medal of Honor winner. His name was Andrew Miller, and he is from Manitowoc. I thought you should be sure you had that in here. In the record.

John: Sure.

Ernest: I don't have the citation. I have the history of the division. This shows his name but that is so distinctive of the division. They had one. They said, personally, there were two Congressional Medal of Honor winners but this man, I'll get to that a little later. But while the battle of Saar-Lautern was under way, we were in threes, you know. Two on the line and one in reserve. We were in reserve, and we got men from all over. Most of them from the Repple Depot [replacement depot]. And we were preparing to go to defend Saar-Lautern. We were there and as we were there, the battalion commander came to me and said, "Joe, I've got a man that doesn't have a trigger finger. He is an armor artificer". And he says, "I am going to assign him to you. You'll have two armorers." Since we were in reserve, I had used my camera and I took his picture. Name was George Rader and he was from Orange, Texas. And he was a very nice, capable person. He was married and had a daughter I took his picture and some pictures of the other men. Developed in Paris. So I sent it in. Later the battalion commander said, "I have to take that man and assign him to a rifle company, we are so short."

John: Wow.

Ernest: Pictures took about a week and a half to return. And I had a picture of this man. And I started checking around to find out what had happened to him. And the supply sergeant of G Company, which was, the sergeant major said, "Well, he was assigned to G Company," and the supply sergeant of G Company was my friend. And he said, "Ernie, I don't have any such man in my outfit." So, eventually, I got back and I checked again, and I found out that he had been killed in action. And I had his picture. And I talked to the men, and I asked, "What do you think about this?" And he said, "I wouldn't sent the picture. I wouldn't have any contact with his wife." And I said, "You know, this is too important." So I mailed it and the negative, and I sent them to his wife, and I told her he was only with me a short period of time, and that I knew nothing about, I couldn't help her. And she wrote

to me back, and said, "I won't bother you. Thank you."

John: That's great. That's really great.

Ernest: But then we went on. Another incident that happened to me.

**[End of Side B of Tape 1.]**

John: Okay. Go ahead

Ernest: We were, during the Battle of the Bulge, being on the right flank, we held and at that time the *Stars and Stripes*. One thing about the *Stars and Stripes*, first thing, we didn't get it all the time. We got it one time and the headline, "Have you killed your German today?" This is the headline on the *Stars and Stripes*. And the second time which was related when we got a copy, we didn't get the paper very often. The second time there was a statement that the city of Saar-Lautern has withstood the heaviest German artillery attack of World War II.

John: Wow. What did you think of that headline, "Have you killed your German today?"

Ernest: Well, we were completely upset about it. And, of course, the story of the marching fire. Have you heard that one before?

John: No.

Ernest: Oh, my gosh. Patton came to the battalion, right down to, when we first got into position in front of Metz, he addressed the officers and the enlisted NCO's [non-commissioned officers], and he described marching fire. Marching fire, he said, normally what has been done and has been taught, is to hit the deck, or hit the ground, if you are being shot at. "I don't approve of that," he said. "I am ordering you and your men to keep on going. Hold the rifle at your waistline and shoot ahead when you receive any artillery. We find there are more lives saved by marching fire."

John: I've heard that.

Ernest: Well, you know what the men thought of Patton. He repeated that on some other occasions. On one instance, I had an experience. He visited our regiment, and as I was going down the road, I had a Jeep jockey. He was right in the road with his Jeep. I never expected that. And we drove in the center of the road because of the artillery shells laying on the what you call the shoulders of the road. And here he comes. We could have hit him head on. Or shot him. Scowled, car was, his Jeep



was all shined up, which was a no-no. He had luster olive drab. That is unheard of in the army. But I guess there are so many stories about Patton. Well, I will go on now. Inside Lautern, we saw a plane flying and one of the men said, "We better get out of here. They are attacking us." And I said, "Oh, no, that is one of our planes." And I looked over to my left and here I could see the plane was out of, didn't know where the target was. You could see the ground being dug up by the machine gun fire. Just lucky that the, and the fog was...

John: We've got about ten minutes, so let's...

Ernest: We popped...

John: This is a fantastic story. I never heard that thing about Patton and the marching fire. I never heard that story before.

Ernest: It was repeated. In the book I have, it was repeated. I tell you, we went on and captured, we participated in capturing Saar-Lautern. We had a lull during the Battle of the Bulge. And then we went on to Belgium and into Holland. We had gone up to [?] and Bastogne, and we went into Holland. There is a little story there. We were attached to the British Army, and they had an officer that was liaison to our battalion headquarters company, and he had a Jeep jockey, and he had a trailer loaded with scotch.

John: He must have been a popular guy.

Ernest: And his Jeep jockey was stupid. And apparently this Major Chamberlain, now that is the "peace in our time Chamberlain."

John: Yea.

Ernest: Well, there was a hell of a lot of American soldiers, and so some of the boys were, they went over and asked to borrow the trailer. And they said, we got to put the liquor somewhere. And this one man said, "We'll bring that all back."

John: Sure.

Ernest: That's what they said. So they wound up with some scotch, a trailer load of scotch. Then we went to Saar-Lautern, which was a bloody fiasco, then we went to central Europe. No, it was the Rhineland campaign. And the Rhine, we got to a city called Trefeld [?] and while we were there, we were at the base of the Adolph Hitler bridge. And my battalion had been ordered to cross the bridge, into Germany. And the battalion commander sent a patrol onto the bridge to check it, to see if it was mined or not. And while this patrol had just approached the bridge,

it dropped into the Rhine. So we went on, eventually we crossed at Essen. We didn't cross at Trefeld. We didn't take part in the battle at the Ruhr pocket. And that is where we got all the prisoners. And it was the worst scare then. You didn't know if these guys were soldiers, whether they were taking their clothes off or not. And eventually we were sent back to Normandy, and to Le Havre. Camp Old Gold. We came back to the States.

John: The camps were named after cigarettes. Right?

Ernest: Yea. Camel. Old Gold. Lucky Strikes. I don't know what the other ones were. We were at Old Gold. Then we crossed the Atlantic, and we got back to Boston and from Boston we went back to Miles Standish. And we were fed everything. We were allowed to eat everything. And we also were given an opportunity to call the family.

John: You were in Europe in the winter of '44-'45. That was the coldest winter on record. Do you remember that being that bad?

Ernest: Well, I know the men got a lot of trench feet. And we'd change shoes. We started off with our regular shoes and leggings. From that we went to the overshoes, then from that we went to shoe packs. And then from the shoe packs we went to combat boots. And it was cold. We stayed in buildings. I slept on the ground, or on the floor, or on divans. I never slept in a bed over there. My assistant, Herman Bates, got into a home of a German archbishop. And he got in, and there was a bed in there. And he decided he could go to sleep in it. I found, he gets into that bed, it was all full of bed bugs.

John: Oh. Wow.

Ernest: And then, of course, we came back to the States, and we got uniforms. Maybe not, we still kept our old woolen uniforms. And our group went to Rockford, Camp Grant. And there we got new uniforms, we got our insignia, they sewed that all on for us. We came home. I came home of the 4th of July, 1945. Big surprise.

John: Now, were you planning on going to the Pacific?

Ernest: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We were scheduled to be in the first assault landing, November 1, 1945, on Honshu, twelve miles north of Tokyo.

John: That would have been bloody

Ernest: Bloody.

John: They would have had little girls and old women fighting.

Ernest: First, we had discharged quite a few men and took on new men. I can remember. While we were on the train, the troop train, we were derailed in Chicago. When we left, we went to Rockford, to go back, and we were in Chicago on a siding in the rail yards of Chicago and we learned that the atomic bomb had been dropped. The men went crazy.

John: Oh, I can imagine.

Ernest: They just got off the train. Some of them lived in the general area. They bought beer and booze.

John: That would have been a blood bath. Then when did you get out?

Ernest: Not right away, because there is another thing I want to talk, to be sure to tell you about. I never, being in the battalion headquarters company, I never had a supply room, an actual supply room. Now this is at Hattiesburg, outside of Camp Shelby. I never had a supply room. There I had one. When I walk into the room, I look on the wall and there is a blackboard. And some man who was really an artist drew a picture of sodomy, accurate. And as I looked at it, I told my assistant, I said, "Take that off that board." A major comes in, he looks at it, and he countermands my order. But the cap line, the real story line, is, never in all my time in the army did a general come in to inspect a supply room. He comes in, not with one general, there were three generals. Commander of the 2nd Army, his assistant, and my own general, who I didn't even see. But we were high ranked. We were like all other divisions. There must have been twenty-five, thirty that were trained just like we were. And that you have to give credit to General Marshal. Probably the greatest soldier in the history of World War II.

John: What did you do right after the war?

Ernest: I was in uniform. I walked down Wisconsin Avenue and there was a man who was a customer of my dad's. He looked up and asked, "Ernie, what are you going to do?" I said, "I don't have the least idea." He said, "We're hiring. Internal revenue service." And this was in December. I was interviewed a few days later and I was offered a job as a special agent with the internal revenue service. I became a treasury agent. And I worked on tax fraud. I worked on organized crime. And then the last seven years I worked in Chicago as what they call a reviewer conferee. They had a review process where cases were passed through for prosecution. Eventually that job has been done away with. And I became what was called an analyst. What I was doing was checking the work. We had about nine districts and I was assigned about three or four of them, where I would check

what they were doing. In other words, decide if what they were doing was unnecessary or unproductive work. That was the job of an analyst.

John: That's great. That's a remarkable story. I have a very good friend who just passed away, Steven Ambrose, the writer. And he was talking to a bunch of vets from World War II at a meeting, and most of the guys were saying, more or less, "I didn't do anything, really." And Ambrose, of course, I don't know if you ever met him.

Ernest: No, I thought he ignored our division.

John: That might be.

Ernest: I'll tell you why.

John: Yea, go ahead.

Ernest: We have a history, but whoever printed the history did not have page numbers and an index.

John: Oh, no kidding. That's awful.

Ernest: I still have the book.

John: That's terrible.

Ernest: See, there was no reference for Ambrose, who must have been a corporation to produce he did.

John: Oh, yea, he had a lot of people working for him.

Ernest: Although this man, a man named Kent that published a book on that. Kent. And I have the second edition, which has pictures of the division. And I don't want to give that up. I have the division history. And we've had an organization which in a way is sloppily run. I have to tell you about that, too. 1951-'52, we had a reunion here in Milwaukee. I helped organize the outfit, and we worked. My wife and I were newly married. I was walking down Michigan, and here I saw two fellows from the engineer battalion. And they asked me what I was doing. And would I help them. And I said, sure. And I thought immediately of the idea of getting the general on television.

John: Oh, okay.

Ernest: So the general was there with his wife. I had hardly seen him in the service. And I had written him, and he had written me because I was the last man to leave the division at deactivation. And I wrote him--first I talked to Bob Heiss, and sure we will have the general, a question and answer session. He was the emcee of a program called *The Man Next Door*. And I got a question and answer format from the general. So--nothing is said, but the program is scheduled. So, lo and behold, the day it was scheduled he was there with his wife, whom I had never met, either. And so the station sent a Cadillac--spanking new Cadillac to take us to the television station, so when I get there, what with the general, and there were two other men. And the wife, his wife said to me, "I don't want to go there. I want to see my husband on television." So my wife, and we were only married a few months, had to entertain the commanding general's wife. So the part of the story is this. When we got there, Bob Heiss came. I had never seen him before. I had arranged this. He asked me, "Do you want to talk to him? The advertisers have given up all their time. He will have one hour, the whole hour. But the general was heart-broken about a river crossing which the corps commander opposed. And our general couldn't say anything. He was only a two-star. And he, this man was the corps commander. We were in the famous "Ghost Corps." The commander was Walton Walker. Walker succeeded MacArthur and was killed in the jeep accident. I never saw any general but Patton. I never saw a Red Cross so I--

John: Okay. We're going to have to, this is great. This is, again I repeat about Ambrose, he said, "You guys were giants. You went out and you saved the world." And you really did. These stories are really precious. I'm so grateful that you are taking the time to do this.

**[End of Interview.]**