

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Leo Lang
Infantry Communications, Army, World War II
1999

OH
490

Lang, Leo (1915-2007). Oral History Interview, 1999.

Approximate length: 161 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Leo Lang, a native of Marathon, Wisconsin, discusses his four and a half year service in the US Army, 439th Battalion, Anti-Aircraft Artillery during World War II. A graduate of UW-Stevens Point, Lang enlisted in June 1941 simultaneously arriving for basic training at Camp Wolters in Mineral Wells, Texas, and receiving his master's degree at the university in Madison, courtesy of the services of a body-double sibling. Exhibiting an aptitude for communications, he was sent to radio school and upon graduation was selected to teach infantry communications, becoming chief instructor. Desiring change, his commanding officer directed Lang to anti-aircraft school at Camp Davis, Holly Ridge, North Carolina. Returning to Texas, the newly-married Lang learned aircraft identification for instruction purposes. He comments on the performance of the 442nd Regiment Combat Team, observed while on maneuvers at Camp Shelby in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. As a teacher imparting communication instruction for infantry, Lang observed his pupils: he decries ROTC training pre-war as not producing good officers, and found those coming out of Civilian Military Training Camps to be worse. Lang tells of the humorous way he courted "trouble": how, through his voicing concern, he was assigned in succession to mess officer, and to headquarters battery as assistant communications officer. He reflects that the civilian "liberal teacher" in him learned that book-learning can run afoul of the flexibility needed in war. Lang speaks of keeping German planes, during the North African Campaign, away from frontline action through positioning of Bofors 40 mm guns and Quads artillery tractors, contributing to the German-Italian surrender at Tunis [French Tunisia] in May 1943. He speaks of waiting in landing craft off Sicily in July 1943 and never going ashore due to inclement weather. Instead he went into Italy in August, where his outfit of 850 men, part of the 5th Army, spent the year protecting bridges and infantry. Lang remembers that the men had no winter garments and no boots, retaining clothing worn in North Africa. Lang states that, as an assistant operations officer, he could have stayed back in the tent but that he preferred to be up on the line with the troops. He feels that there is a dearth in war historiography as regards an accounting for civilian survival, and recounts a memory of civilians in the hills of San Pietro. He refers to the annihilation in January 1944 of two regiments of the 36th Division at the Rapido [Gari] River that led to the post-war inquiry into then Lieutenant General Mark Clark's actions. At Monte Cassino Lang witnessed the execution of an Indian soldier by the British Colonial division. From Cassino the 439th went through Italy and through Rome in an effort to catch the Germans who were "masters at retreating." Lang describes how misinformation given the 5th Army almost led a battalion to be sacrificed before the little town of Venice. Near Livorno, Italy, Lang's outfit was recalled for the impending invasion of southern France before orders redirected them and attached them to infantry moving on Pisa. He relates the laying of communication wire, and his experience of urban fighting: the necessity to "play it

smart” rather than to “pick a fight;” and considers the psychological toll of the noises and silences of war upon young soldiers. Lang comments about the activities at Pisa of a contingent from the all-black 92nd Division. After a leave spent in Sorrento, Lang embarked on an LST bound for France. Attached to the 7th Army, in southern and eastern France, Lang observed the consequences of local collaboration with the Germans. Near the Moselle River, in September 1944, Lang’s outfit again eluded capture. Now a second lieutenant, Lang and his men also provided reconnaissance for Gen. George Patton’s 3rd Army on the road to Germany; he recalls that the “Old Man” had a predilection for wire over radio. He adjudges the general “self-conceited,” but avers that he “shortened the war by a lot.” Lang limns a portrait of war’s civilian toll beyond the images from the battlefield: those affected by the Allied bombing; the German persecution of occupants of occupied Alsace who harbored downed French pilots; a burgermeister who refused to wear a Nazi armband; the innkeeper’s wife whose daughter narrowly escaped the Gestapo before Lang’s arrival—“those are the things you never read much about war.” Lang’s outfit entered Germany near Wurzburg. With the 7th Army he and his men proceeded to intercept German troops withdrawing into the Alps when the war in Europe ended. Upon orders from the “Old Man” to keep his men disciplined for three months awaiting occupation forces, Lang encamped them away from urban areas, and set-up a school for them that was representative of the “education spread of the guys who fought the war and won it.” Lang, now a first lieutenant, relates that, while there were fraternization bans in place for the Occupation, he engineered a subterfuge to facilitate a GI-refugee marriage. He expresses an affinity for “that damn bomb” dropped on Japan that resulted in his being shipped to the States rather than to the Pacific war. Discharged in January 1946, and with a bronze star, and a unit citation from Mark Clark, he built a thirty-nine year career in education as a teacher and school administrator. While he found the first several months back home in Wisconsin to be “testy,” he attests that he never suffered other adverse effects from his service.

Biographical Sketch:

Lang (1915-2007) served in the US Army, 439th Battalion, Anti-Aircraft Artillery during World War II as a cryptographer. His service took him to North Africa, Italy, France, and Germany. Post-war he worked for thirty-nine years in public education, teaching in several Wisconsin cities and towns; thirty-two years as superintendent of schools, Campbellsport. In retirement, he served on the Fond du Lac County Board for many years. He retired as a lieutenant colonel after twenty-four years with the Army Reserves. He was a member of local Veterans of Foreign Wars posts as well as of the American Legion.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999.

Transcribed by Joshua Patrick Gould, 2011.

Abstract by Jeff Javid, 2016.

Interview Transcript

[Beginning of OH490.Lang]

[Note 1: Tape 1 begins with approximately four minutes of conversation among Mr. Lang, Mary Sollinger, and Dr. McIntosh.]

[Note 2: The first woman to speak during the interview is Mary Sollinger, Mr. Lang's daughter. The last name of the second woman to speak, Theresa, is unknown.]

McIntosh: Leo Lang, and it's the 6th of October, 1999. Where were you born?

Lang: In Marathon, Wisconsin.

McIntosh: And that was what year?

Lang: 1915.

McIntosh: And you joined the service at what year?

Lang: That was in 19—gotta be careful here to get the right one.

McIntosh: What year was that?

Lang: 1941, in June, June of '41.

McIntosh: June of '41.

Lang: Yeah.

McIntosh: And where did you join?

Lang: Sent out of Wausau, Wausau to Camp Grant, and General Grant or Camp Grant was where I was sworn in.

McIntosh: I see. And where did they send you then?

Lang: To Camp Wolters [Mineral Wells], Texas.

McIntosh: Sign right in that space there, Leo.

Lang: Okay.

McIntosh: All right. So that was—after your basic training, what did they train you to do?

Lang: Well, my basic training was in a brand new camp. We were amongst the first groups in. Our cadre was from the 5th Division in Fort Sheldon—Fort Riley—Fort, in Michigan [inaudible]. I forget [inaudible] regulars. This was six months before Pearl Harbor.

McIntosh: I see.

Lang: And we didn't have our basic, five weeks basic. Normally it was thirteen weeks of basic, and then we became buck privates. Before that we were \$21 a month, [laughs] Selective Service or whatever they called it.

McIntosh: Right. But the war hadn't started then?

Lang: War hadn't started, six months before Pearl Harbor. And at that time you trained for a year, and if nothing happened they sent you back to the Reserves, and then you were subject to call. That was the status at that time. When I was in the university, graduated—finishing my graduate work on the master's degree, I went home on the weekend, lived in Wausau, hitchhiked home from Madison, stopped at the draft board, and I was deferred to finish my school work, but then I had to report any changes. So I stopped at Wausau and told them the examination was written, graduation is the 22nd and so and so. I had a little chat with her and hitchhiked to Marathon. It was on a Saturday. Mother had all kinds of tile. She was going to have us tile the kitchen floor. It was on the farm, a farmhouse. So, I got busy doing that on Monday. [Inaudible] said, "We'll do that Monday." The phone rang about ten o'clock, and it says, "We're from the draft board. There's a train leaving tomorrow morning, [both laugh], and you're on it. But, you don't have to go because we have to give you thirty-days notice. But we sure would like—we need to. We need one more guy. If you could possibly make it." Well, I thought, if I serve a year, getting out in June is better than getting out in July. Teachers job. So I said, "I'll take it." But now I was graduating on the 22nd. This was about the 18th or 17th. And that was on a Monday or Tuesday, and Madison was down there. And they had a rule that if you aren't there to graduate in person you won't get your degree. So I had a brother about my size [both laugh] and shape, and I says, "Heshy, you got a job." So he went down with my mother on graduation day and LaNore [Mr. Lang's wife] and shook hands with the governor and did all the things [laughs] right and graduated me. The same day I was in Texas in this brand new camp, and this was June so it was a little messy yet, the weather, but hotter than a pistol. And we were making sidewalks, you know, these new camps you had to carry stones, you know, and they built up these roads and cleaned the walls and so on. So that was my induction into this—I didn't know the difference between a captain and a corporal. I didn't know. I thought they would probably—I probably should salute the corporal as [inaudible] [laughs] or something. But then we had thirteen weeks of basic, and during that time they tested out, and we were, as I say, we were the first troops or amongst the first troops in there. So they gave you these—some aptitude tests of some sort. And I must have made it high on something because they sent me to the radio school

which was basically ‘da-da-da-dit-da-da,’ you know. If you could handle code, you could go to radio school. So I went to radio school. That filled out when our cadre—I say was from Fort Snelling [St. Paul, Minnesota], I guess is in Michigan. And it also was made up of a pretty good bunch of guys. This was the end of the year, and other college men had—were called in the draft. So we had a high percentage of a pretty good bunch of guys in there. We had our, then we had our five weeks, then we had our thirteen weeks of radio, learning the code and message center and writing code, writing messages, and this kind of stuff. If you passed through the twenty-one words a minute, I guess, you passed. And if you didn’t have that, why, you went back to boot school. So, when we finished our work, and the cadre, as I say, were a bunch of real numbskulls. They were—even we knew that they were, but nevertheless, it’s the Army, you know, and you do that. They shipped the entire cadre out and selected a new cadre from the graduates, and I happened to be lucky enough to stay as an instructor. So, I taught in the infantry communications for about a year and two or three months. And then of course, Pearl Harbor came in December, and then all this year of—was over the dam. So I stayed there as an instructor. After about the fifth class, at that time I was—I guess I was chief instructor in that. It was a radio school, a wire school, message center, and intelligence in this battalion, about 250 in each company in all [??] the schools. And when they shipped ‘em out, well, we’d get a group looking pretty good. Get ‘em on the parade, graduation, and geez, they’d look pretty good, you know. God, you felt pretty good. God, on Monday morning [laughs] from here to here. After about the fifth class I told “the old man” [commanding officer], I says, “Colonel,” I says, “next time you ship out, I’ll ship out. I said, “I don’t know if I can take this any longer. You have these kids come in here, some of the cities, “I never laid in a bed in my life. I’m not gonna start now” [both laugh], you know. So he says, “You don’t want to go in the infantry.” Well, I didn’t, outside of the fact that I had learned infantry and taught a little bit [inaudible] infantry or anything else. “I’ll find something for you.” So, he went—Camp Davis [Holly Ridge, North Carolina] came along. He called me in there one day, and he said, “Hey, there’s a school over in Camp Davis. You go there, and it’s a good school, and they’ll commission you and especially this antiaircraft.” He says, “That’s a good one.” I says, “What’s that?” “Oh, you’ll probably sit over in maybe like Chicago. They’ll have antiaircraft guns there, and you might be there, spend the whole war.” [laughs] I said, “That sounds pretty good.” So I went to Camp Davis, graduated, and that was a good school. That was absolutely the top. God, when they run it [??]—and I liked it. I thought that was the way to go. So I graduated, and on graduation day they said, “Now, you have a choice. You can go to north, south, east, or western states. You have your pick. Put ‘em in order in which you prefer.” Well, I’d been in Texas so I told ‘em Oklahoma [??] isn’t too bad, and I’d like to go east and then west, but I don’t want to go back to Texas [laughs].

McIntosh: The war hadn’t started?

Lang: Pardon?

McIntosh: The war hadn't started yet?

Lang: Ah, well, Pearl Harbor had. Oh yeah, Pearl Harbor was in December so this was already a year later. I got commissioned in January of '30—of '60—of '52.

McIntosh: '42.

Lang: It was a January date, '42. So, where did they send me? To Texas [laughs]. So, I went down to Texas and checked in, salute the old major there at camp. And he says, he looked at me for a while, and he says, You know, I think you'll do." [inaudible]. He says, "Colonel Bowers got a battalion down here, and if you noticed the train out there, they're loaded up out there, they're almost ready to go. They need one more officer, and I think you can do it. You report down to Colonel Bowers." Well, at the commissioning or in the school, antiaircraft school, they called for volunteers to go to a special school for a week and a half, ten days, aircraft identification, you needed to know [??] the carrier groups. And they needed some officers to go back and teach in these camps for aircraft identification. And so I thought, gee, that doesn't sound too bad, so I raised my hand, and I went to that. Finally, we had the ten days, and it was good. So, we got down there, and during that week they had the Quad-50s and the Bofors [40 mm guns]. So I missed those. That's what I got assigned to [laughs]. I didn't see the Bofors [inaudible] how to fire a Quad. So, I was assigned there as a junior officer. So anyhow, that, I've been a hit and miss it seems. Something dodges me, or I always fall in [laughs] up to my neck. So anyhow, we went to [Camp] Shelby [Hattiesburg, MS] and had about three weeks, four weeks over there maneuvering with some of the regiments that were going ultimately overseas. And I ran into the Japs. I don't know if you ever noticed the Japanese outfit, the 434th [442nd?], of the all Japanese Americans?

McIntosh: Yes, I know about them.

Lang: You know about 'em. Well, I run into them there. And in the maneuvering with the regiments, it was basically an infantry type stuff. Of course, I knew infantry pretty well. I spent a lot of time in it. But anyhow, we'd set up our guns out there. Nothing to do. They needed umpires. Artillery officers come in here, and we were umpires. So I got to watch the umpiring. And that Jap outfit was the enemy and the regiments were—and they had an oversized about a—oh, fourteen, fifteen hundred as compared to a regiment with about three thousand. Well, they were the enemy, and so I don't know if you ever umpired or not, but it was new to me. They had a row of umpires from here to way out, you know. That was supposedly a line, more or less, with the whistle. And if, they would maneuver to break through, the offense would, and if they could get a ratio of about, well we said, three to four to one, firepower, and that's per rifle. So if they could get that and if they had it, we knew where their signals were. They'd give us a signal, we'd blow a whistle, everything froze. And then you'd count the number of—and each rifle

only counted one. A BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle] was four. The little antitank guns was, I guess, five or six and so on. We counted what they had—they were gonna use in their approach and then checked on the other side, and if they outnumbered ‘em three to one, we’d move our stake. And then they couldn’t move. We tried to keep the men apart, and they’d have to move back. During I think I umpired about four—or more than that, about six or seven times. Never did the Japs get caught short during all that time. They were good. Of course, they had the additional training. So anyway, I forgot about ‘em, and then they came up later on. Again I’m gonna mention ‘em, too. But then we went overseas and landed over in Oran [Algeria]. That’s when the Army had landed in Casablanca, went across to Tunis. We landed in Oran and went out and joined ‘em. Then we pulled off. The air at that time, I think the Germans actually had more air power than the Americans did at that particular time. And the British were coming from the east and the American from the west and meeting at Tunis. Then at Tunis, of course, they surrendered at Tunis. But and—the Americans had their 1st, [Major General Terry] Allen’s 1st Division was in there. We weren’t actually in line. We were back a little ways at an airfield [inaudible] together, supposedly kept the German planes out.

McIntosh: When you were doing that, tell me how you spotted your guns around that airfield.

Lang: Well, we’d stay back. We had to clear the land of flight, of course, and then we went back. And when we’d scatter ‘em, the Bofors would go in one direction, the Quads in the opposite to cover the blank spot. So they could never kill each other. So we’d spot ‘em out, and then actually they’d give ‘em firing zones so that—a

McIntosh: Were you a hundred yards apart?

Lang: Oh, they were closer than that. We’d try to get ‘em, and the attacks would normally come down the runway from the German planes. So we’d scatter ‘em out that way without getting into if a plane fell short. So we’d kinda go quarter, kinda quarter this way, and a quarter this with some protection over here. And we had so darn many of those darn things. God, I don’t know, we had thirty thirty-two Bofors in a company? So, that’s a lot of guns, a lot of firepower. And those Quads, the Quads were really a wonderful gun. So, that’s the way it went until that ended. Then we moved over to Tunis, all the way into Tunis. And then they got organized for our Sicilian operation. And Patton then had taken over, Patton was then the commander of his 5th [7th] Army. Yeah, that was the 5th Army. And Montgomery was going to be on the right side. Well, we all moved over. We were supposed to go over there, but if you followed Patton, he was a pretty good field runner once he broke loose, and he wanted to—he landed and took off. And God, we sat over there with our landing crafts and the weather was not good. But we sat there and sat there, and they didn’t call. We were keeping up with what was happening. The actual, long story short, they hit their deck, and they took right off moving, and there was no way we could catch up, and do ‘em any good. Besides,

they didn't need it because it changed so fast, and the Germans were kind of—so we never got into Sicily. We just sat there until they landed in Italy. And then we went to, oh, I have to tell you one little thing because it's one of the things that gets me into trouble all the way, all the way up through this thing. I got into Battery B, a junior officer of course. And then we had little maneuvers of our own, and the first one we went out on, the guys were all going to the PX and buyin' candy and all kinds—what's this all about? “If you don't get candy and stuff, you don't eat.” But we had a kitchen. Oh, you haven't been with us. [laughs] So, I thought, well, that's all right. So I went out there, and I watched that little bit [??]. Sure enough, they opened the kitchen from 12:00 to 1:00. If you didn't show up to eat, he closed it up. They said, “Nobody's not serving anymore.” That was a hell of a way to run an army [laughs], you know. So, I had a critique. Well, I got up and I told 'em what I thought about our kitchen and what purpose it would serve and how they're gonna feed the troops the next time [laughs], and I know it didn't go over too well with the other guys. But I said, that kind of thing got me in trouble all the time. And then I noticed that our communications, our guys were having trouble with their wires, and I followed them around out there. So I was out in the field, and they were having some problems. “What's the problem?” “The lines are shorted out.” “What's the problem?” “Well, somebody's going around putting pins in.” “Pins in? Why—you're out in the Army? Who'd be doing that?” Checked farther and farther—it turned out the finger was pointed at the staff officers, the battalion staff, the operations officers. I thought, for Christ's sake, here you're tryin' to teach these guys [laughs] to lay a wire to get communications, before they get it down, they short it out, and that's the hardest short to find, you know, that kind of a short.

McIntosh: How did they short that out?

Lang: Put a pin through it.

McIntosh: Through what?

Lang: Through the wire. You know, it's twisted wire.

McIntosh: Oh, by mistake.

Lang: No, no. Staff would go out there and short it out, see what these guys, watch 'em look for a short. And these guys hadn't graduated to that level yet. They were just trying to get the damn wires down so that they had the transportation, so they had communications. So, I took that, and I checked into it, and then the word got back I was satisfied that it was the case. So, we had our critique and I [laughs] opened my big mouth and told 'em what I thought about the kitchen, our kitchen. And next time then I was made mess officer. That's how I got to be mess officer right away [both laugh]. Then I mentioned this thing about—and I went up to the staff and I said, “Now, what the hell is going on here with this? We're tryin' to teach these kids how to lay a wire, and before they get it down, they already have a flat

tire, you know.” That’s a hell of a—“Who’s doing that?” And so I made the statement too that I had told the men, and when we get in a war and somebody tampers with your wire, you shoot him, I don’t care what kind of a uniform he wears [both laugh] And so, the next day the orders come out. “Lang transferred to Headquarters [inaudible] communications officer assistant S3 [Operations Section]” [both laugh]. So I got into this kind of crap. And this was kind of my history as I went through the thing. We had a West Point commander. He taught in West Point, graduated and taught for seven years. So he was a West Pointer book from here to here. Practical army, almost so much. But terrific disciplinarian. So being a liberal teacher, I had my troubles with him, but, I always had to respect him because, by God, if he said to do something, you did it. And he was right by the book. And at that point, I personally did not see why the book wouldn’t be right all the time. But the book is right all of the time. But there are times when you deviate. You know, hell, if you’re supposed to run down this landing, there’s a church over here, you might go around it. You deviate, so I learned that. So then I was assigned to Headquarters Battery as assistant exec [executive officer] I guess, and then of course, at the kitchen and supply and headquarters and the communications and [inaudible]. But, it was the kind of thing I enjoyed to do. So I went through the war that way. And the other thing that I mention once in a while, I never realized how bad our leadership before the war actually was. The ROTC [Reserved Officers Training Corps] training, I don’t know if you were ROTC or not, but they took those courses and who took it, they kinda had fun and got paid a little bit, paid their tuition. And when they got in there they absolutely were not good officers.

McIntosh: They weren’t prepared.

Lang: Then the CMTC came in, Civilian Military Training. They were worse, and when I was down in that teaching that communications in infantry, they were coming in. And every time they had about forty or so they would have ‘em down there, and then they’d send them down to communications. Language people would refresh your memories on infantry communications. So I’d be down there [laughs] in the rec [recreation] hall trying to teach these guys. Well, a lot of ‘em were sincere. A lot of ‘em were pretty good guys, but I could tell they weren’t focusing. But you know, you wouldn’t believe it. But in this rec hall, there’d be magazines, stuff, funny books. Some guys while I was talking to those birds over there, and I was a staff sergeant then, reading these funny books [laughs], you know. So in addition to talking to “the old man” I with these kids, and I said, “I’ll tell you something else. These officers are [inaudible] [laughs]. He said, “I know it, but I’ll tell you something. That’s all I’ve got.” So, it was kind of tragic. But that was the case and so, one thing about “the old man” after a while, I guess, when he took me up there, and I never knew that until the end of the war. I was the only officer that he wanted to stay.

McIntosh: Sure. That was nice.

Lang: [laughs] As contrary as I was with military regulations.

McIntosh: Well, they valued your service, too, you see.

Lang: Yeah, apparently so or something. I don't know. Anyhow—

McIntosh: About how big was your outfit now?

Lang: About 850 men.

McIntosh: Eight hundred and fifty.

Lang: Yeah, and then our mission was the same. We went over to Italy.

McIntosh: Which was around [inaudible] airfields?

Lang: Yeah, and aircraft—no, we worked with the infantry. I think we were always with the infantry then and the artillery. We were ahead of the artillery, behind the infantry, because the Germans still had quite a few planes. And they would sweep down and hit the infantry. So, we were in that sector. And the other thing was our primary mission, any roads going up, and in Italy, there's a hill or a road, a little village, and a little bridge, another hill. There's a bridge down there, a little village, and so if they put a bridge down there they want to keep the planes out of there. And so we'd be down there in this kind of [inaudible]. I think we spent most of our time on little bridges then and then infantry. I think that was—when it got fluid, and later on as the war went down the German, air force went down and down. I think there were times where we were superfluous, but then we got other missions. So we went through Italy. The weather was abominable. All winter long we crossed the Mediterranean. I never knew that a lake could get that rough on the LCIs [Landing Craft Infantry], and then those little devils would bounce. And we could see the others of our ships that were [inaudible] “God, look at that guy over there.” We forgot ours [laughs] was doing the same thing. Everybody was sick. I never got sick.

McIntosh: This was crossing from the—

Lang: The Mediterranean into Italy.

McIntosh: Where did you go in Italy?

Lang: All in all, we spent about a year in Italy. My gripes basically were that we wore— all we had were shoes. We had no boots. We wore the same uniform in Africa as we wore in Italy. There was no [winter] clothing, no combat clothing. And you slept wherever you could sleep with the tanks and the trucks and what have you. I had a little film, I showed it. [inaudible] “Where did you sleep?” I said, “Pick your spot” [laughs], you know.

McIntosh: Did you sleep in a tent?

Lang: Yeah, well, the tanks and the artillery were always pretty close to us, and they were usually behind us, but artillery was always behind, but the tanks, you know, they were going in and out.

McIntosh: You slept in a tent?

Lang: Yeah. So, we had a, oh, there were a couple of incidents, and with my being Assistant 3 [Assistant Operations Officer or Assistant S-3], I was up with the troops and “the old man” lost it a couple of times. And so he kind of developed a communication between me and him. “I want you to go up and do this and that,” type thing. And being the Assistant 3, the 3 was back in the tent someplace, and I was here with the troops, and this kind of—was our relationship basically, and I liked being up there with the troops. And so, he’d follow that pretty much as a pattern so I was out here with the troops. So all of my observations from the service are most unusual, I guess. When I came back as I thought about what the service was about, and I guess the humanitarian was probably more important than the damn war [laughs], you know. How do civilians go from that side to this side when there is no place to go [End of Tape 1, side A], and it’s mud and fire and every goddamn thing? How do they survive? I never hear anybody talking about that. I mentioned in this thing here a couple of incidents.

McIntosh: Wherever you went, there were civilians in your way.

Lang: They were never bothersome because we wouldn’t tolerate any service, any civilians around our equipment. But they had to come through. I could see how they could get through from the German side, but how did they get into the American side? In Italy, they must have gotten into those high hills and got way up in there. Well, an example, we had an Italian kid that talked pretty well. He was—at San Pietro was a—it was a treacherous, a terrible war right through there. And, one day Franchetti, he says, “You care if I take a little food up in the hills here?” “What’s up there?” [laughs] A couple with seven little children. It was raining. They could always get there in winter. Their house was a door leaning against a tree. That was it. And food, they were digging up grass and cooking it in a #2 can. So, we hauled food out there [laughs].

McIntosh: Good, very good.

Lang: So, that type of thing, we were in the—at Cassino. I don’t know if you just—ever hear about “Monte Cassino.”

McIntosh: Oh, yes. I know all about it.

Lang: At that monastery—

McIntosh: I know all about it.

Lang: Yeah, they were on either end.

McIntosh: You were in the 5th Army then?

Lang: Yeah, it was all 5th Army, yeah, yeah, yeah all Fifth Army. And then 8th British were on the other side. [General Harold] Alexander was over there. And the Monte Cassino sits over here, and Cassino's a little village down here in the bottom. And we had the 34th [Infantry] and 36th in there and they got shot up pretty badly. So, we were over here with, don't know, with some other outfit. The others over here and joined the British. The British had two division there, too, the 3rd and the 1st, 5th, I guess. And so we were over there and so, here comes another British division from India. I think they were from some of the mountain tribes up in there. They looked like pretty good soldiers. The British had pretty good soldiers compared to the French. The British were not too bad. But these were colonials. So we spent some time with them. They were getting oriented and getting ready. We were over there, and it was snowing. And we went in and were committed. Our infantry pulled out, and we had been in there. You can only go about so far. I think it was kind of foolhardy anyway, but they still wanted us in there case of some—none of their planes showed up. They committed that Indian troop. And before they were committed, we were commingling with them down here in this little hollow [inaudible]. Anyhow, one morning they tooted some horns or some bugles. Some of them fell out and formed the formation. Somebody up there read a bunch of stuff in Swazidal or whatever their language was, and then pretty soon they marched the guy out, set him up here. Pretty soon the firing squad came out here. One, two, three, bang [laughs], shot him. I never knew why they had shot him. I don't know what he had done. You hear rumors, you know. But I watched an execution and very methodical. The rest of them all went back to their business. Everything was normal. Somebody dragged him off. I don't know what they did with him. I thought that was kind of unusual. But they committed 'em. They were only in there eleven days, and they just got kicked out [??]. We never saw 'em again. They pulled 'em out, and I don't know where they went to. They disappeared. So that was often—a lot of our history was of that nature. And going through Italy to Rome, we finally got through Rome, we never stopped. We went right on through Rome, and that was celebration like you can't imagine. And went right out to the other side and tried to get the Germans before they dig in, but they were masters at retreating. They had this dug in, and they'd pull back, and they would dig in back here, and so every hill was a fortification. And then they had the 88's [German anti-tank/artillery/aircraft weapon] set up so that on the other side if a tank would come around the nose they had that thing zeroed up with a stationary gun. And that thing would stick his nose out there, and they'd pick him on the first or second shot, you know. So when we were up in the little town of Venice [Chioggia] we were with the 3rd Armor up there, and, geez, they weren't moving; and talking to the guys they said, "Well, that's infantry's

job to take these guns out. We can't go around those corners." [inaudible] says, "The tanks [laughs] can get 'em out there. We're not there." So, they didn't move. Anyhow, we sat there and visited, and that's—I spent my time, and I spent it with the troops so I knew what was going on down there [laughs], you know, but it's hard to say what they sent back compared to what was going on.

McIntosh: How did you move, in six-bys, trucks?

Lang: Yeah, we were completely mobile, completely by 6x6s [cargo trucks] and then smaller stuff. We had our own ambulance—

McIntosh: It So it took you long to set up then?

Lang: No. We could set up if we had a—well, in taking off, never more than a half hour. We had 'em completely on the road ready to go. We moved, I don't know how often. And then going in, going in was slower because we had to find, had to get the layout, and we usually had an advance company—battery commanders [inaudible] that type of thing. We followed them. After they were in we knew where the lines. I had a good section chief and a good [inaudible] crew. So, but picking up and going—so we were over here with the 1st, and the 36th was over here. They called up, and they says, "Well, you're not going anyplace here. Pull out, the 36th needs cover." Only this time, we pulled out, and the operations back here sat down. I was always at the head of the column from when we got to Africa all [laughs] the way home. And Captain Grover was our motor officer. He was on the tail end, the finest officer you ever want to meet. And between the two, we never lost any trucks, and we never got into any trouble, but, I was always in the lead. Anyhow, we took them over there, and he says, "Now"— and I also almost on a—whenever I had a ten o'clock in the morning, if I had a half an hour or an hour and I nothing much going on, I'd run back to the war room and see what's going on. So I had a pretty good picture of who was where and what was going on. And the official word is that our troops have taken Venice. Now, that's a little town of Venice—

McIntosh: That's not the big Venice?

Lang: No, it's on the east side, that little town, one of those valley towns. "They've got Venice. So you come over here, don't go beyond Venice. We'll stop you before you get there." That was the statement that they had to eat. So we pulled out, went over there, and saw them came over the hill, and I could see Venice down there. Geez, I went along, it didn't look right. Here, Pack Howitzers [inaudible] Hell, you don't fire mortars across the hill over there [laughs], you know. So I stopped the outfit, and I walked up there, and there was some infantry hiding behind a building. Talked to them, MP [military police]. I said, "What's going on?" "Oh, nothing." I says, "I was told by Army that you had taken Venice." "Oh, hell we have, aren't even close to it. [laughs] Who told you that?" I said, "That's what you guys told 5th Army 'cause that's what they told me." Well anyhow, I went

back, there wasn't a shot fired at us. And I turned 'em around, got back. Here's my advance party, and I'm talking about ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] boys now. They catered to "the old man." They partied all the time. We had this 180 vehicles about, went by 'em. Didn't notice us. So I went back there [laughs] with my best vernacular. Anyhow, we got back without getting hurt. So, but I just mentioned that as an incident of war where nobody got killed, could have lost the whole battalion. Then from Venice—

McIntosh: Those infantry boys would have been surprised if they saw your trucks go sailing [Lang laughs] right past 'em, right into the teeth of the enemy.

Lang: [laughs] Yeah. So then we went from there on, we went back of course, and the 36th was badly shot up at [inaudible]

McIntosh: Across that river, Rapido.

Lang: Yeah, the Rapido River. And they were going to court martial [General Mark] Clark on that.

McIntosh: They should have.

Lang: Yeah, it was a fouled up mess, but the fact of the case is that they had crossed the river. They had taken the high ground. If they had just held it. All of a sudden they broke ranks. That was never published. You can't blame 'em, but they were slow in getting reinforcements up there, maybe, but they were across, and then all of the sudden they broke ranks, and then of course—

McIntosh: I interviewed Mark Clark's chauffeur. He's up in northern Wisconsin.

Lang: Oh.

McIntosh: Eau Claire.

Lang: Well, we went to—from Venice then we went, we kept going the same way, went up to, I forget the name of the towns now. There's a big town up there where they had the [inaudible] dug in, you know. We got up there pretty close to Livorno [Italy], Leghorn [English name for Livorno]. And then the word came we're getting a task force to invade southern France. Ah, you're gonna be on it. We have nine days to pull out, get your equipment cleaned up, and get ready for invasion. Okay, we pulled out and back. And I told "the old man," I said, "Look," I says, "we got nine days to go back here to Naples." Hell, I had loaded that outfit coming in here in nine days. I said, "We can take a couple of days and have these guys see Rome." "Good idea." [laughs]. So we stopped, sent an advance party down to find a place [inaudible] pulled in with all of our stuff. I said, pitch up little, you know, tents so they could rest in peace. About five o'clock we were putting these tents up. "Hold everything." So, well now what? "Oh, we don't

know.” Pretty soon they says, “Orders are that the invasion has been set back because the infantry weren’t ready to go. They need more fillers. They need a little more training.” And, I think we were supposed to land ahead of the channel. But, now we’re behind, so we’re gonna have quite a bit of time here. “We want you to come back up front.” So, we go back [laughs] up front. So, we go got up there, and I got up there and pulled ‘em off a field and waited. So, the advance party came on, and the colonel says, “There’s a meeting at three o’clock.” This was night. Yeah, this was late at night. “Three o’clock we have a meeting. I want you to be there.” So, when you gonna go and where and when to be there. I says, “I’ll ride with you.” So, whatever. Got over here and here was the 5th Army staff. “We have to pull the infantry out, and we don’t have any troops to replace them. We want you to park your guns and teach your men how to be infantry and do it in forty-eight hours ‘cause in forty-eight hours at ten o’clock day after tomorrow you will take the position. They’ll leave their guns, their communications. You can put your switchboards on, your telephones [laughs], but you’ll be infantry.” Well, having had a little infantry, I became pretty popular. So, I went down with—and then they loaned us four captains, one with each battery and one with me to set up, first of all, where their stuff is. Got in there, put our stuff on, and bring the troops in. So they would—at ten o’clock at night. So I was pretty well prepared, but our guys, Jesus, they’d be walkin’ around in the dark [inaudible] enemy. They had been around us all the time, but now there’s nobody. Believe me, in the front before this we had infantry [laughs]out there. And we, at the meeting, there were four battalions. We were the second one. Four battalions of artillery at the same order. And I heard him say, “Now, Bowers, you’ve got the best outfit. I want you to take the city of Pisa.” They were up on, they were almost at the Arno River, and that’s the river that goes up to Florence, you know.

McIntosh: Sure, in Pisa.

Lang: Yeah, in Pisa. “You get the City of Pisa from here to here. You’re the best outfit.” Now, city fighting is difficult for anybody [laughs]. These guys are yokels, you know.

McIntosh: Zero experience.

Lang: But the order was—and so I took off right away with the guys. Went down there, found their places, set switchboards, even got telephones in the right places. Each battery commander took one or two men and took ‘em down with the other outfits so they knew where it was, and so we had men there when we put our telephones on and got the stuff all laid out. Ten o’clock at night we were down there, and we took over. Got quite a bit of shelling and mortar and so on fire, but I don’t think we lost a single man. At least we didn’t kill any of our own. But the captain that was with me was a pretty good officer. I believe they stayed for another four, five days. And he says, “You know,” he says, “I want to commend you. We did not lose a single man shot by one of our men.” So that was a—

McIntosh: That's nice.

Lang: But anyhow.

McIntosh: How about the street fighting? How did that go?

Lang: Well, I'll tell you how we did. I had my switchboard—I was about three blocks from the front behind the building, not as big as that but that thick of walls. The 88s [88 mm German artillery] couldn't penetrate, I was sure. And behind it was a little building, and I put the switchboard in another little building here. But the only thing that could hit us with was mortar, and the 88s were dead. So, and I had to keep it close because, hell, I only had about—I think I had about thirteen, fourteen men in a section. But for wire, when you didn't have 'em out I don't think I had more than eight or nine guys down there with me. And they had to operate that switchboard. And we had two eights sitting side by side and a six on top here yet. That was full of wires.

McIntosh: Eights?

Lang: Eights. Eight drops. Eight lines. Then we hooked 'em together. That's sixteen and sixes. Yeah, six to sixteen is thirty-two. They were almost full with wires. We had mortars going through it. We had artillery going through it. Tanks were tied onto it, lateral and lateral, you know? An observation post and I had a listening post out up here plus back—

McIntosh: All connected.

Lang: All connected in.

McIntosh: How long did those wires go out? How far away?

Lang: We were down so low that one time we had one wire in [laughs], and everything hit us with a barrage, you know, and they'd catch wires, but I only lost one man. But we were in there for five weeks, and it was quite an experience. I'll tell you of a little bit because the Japs come in again. I taught the guys, "We can't outfight 'em." Well, that's just what I told all of 'em, but I'll tell you what I told this listening post of mine. They were up here about two blocks because that road went right across the Arno and had about never more than two feet of water, and there were stones down there. They could run across there with a tank. So, I had 'em lay mines. The engineers came up and laid mines across the sides so if a tank had to come across they'd have a tough time moving down. That's the only thing we had. And so I told my guys "Now, you don't fire at anybody without me telling that you can. But", I says, "I want you to listen for me every night." We never rang a telephone, but we had these [sounds of tapping], you know, SOS. And then you'd whisper back. And this went on, see, for five weeks. But a highlight, a couple—I was back at the switchboard. This was at night. And

[makes tapping sound], I whisper back. And he says—[Approx. 10 sec. pause recording] And he says, “There’s some Germans coming down the road.” And I whisper. I says, “Are they in combat formation?” “What’s that?” “Well, he says, “are they walking each side of the road in the ditch?” “Yeah.” “Far apart?” “Yeah.” “How many?” First of all, I says, “Negative.” “You don’t fire.” “Well,” he says, “let me see, there’s two, three, four—” And he was counting ‘em. He had eleven. He came up with eleven, see. “Can I shoot at ‘em?” I says, “Negative [laughs].” Got official. So, I tried to call back, and I delivered ‘em. I said, “Look, there’s a squad of eleven Germans coming down the road. And when they come past ‘em, let ‘em go.” I says, “I’m not going to tackle with ‘em.” These guys had never fired their M1s [rifles]. We were issued those overseas.

McIntosh: They got that far, and they’d never fired ‘em?

Lang: We got them issued overseas, over in Africa. And from then on the only time they did was to walk guard which was an empty—never fired. And I have a lot to say about equipment. But, nevertheless, he was ready to shoot at ‘em or the two guys, but I said, “No.” I said, “Watch what they do.” So I called back and told ‘em to set a trap for them for ‘em. We had enough artillery men back there and a few other guys. “If they come in I’ll call you back, but if they go past me, I’m not gonna tackle ‘em. You have got to be crazy.” So anyhow, all of the sudden, hey, they turned. Which way? They’re were going east so they turned to our right. Over there were the Japs. Had a wire to ‘em, so I called over there. “So and so is happening.” I could just [laughs]—we’re going to get a fight out of this. So I says, “Now, you be quiet and just listen.” So all of us—literally hell broke loose over there. And so everything quieted down after a while, and so pretty soon he says, “I hear one coming back. Another one coming back. Now can I shoot at ‘em?” I says “Hell no, you still got [laughs] [inaudible].” I says, “If they win the war because of those two guys we’ll have to lose[laughs], but I need you two guys.” So, just an incident. So I tried to teach the guys not to shirk their duty, but let’s play it smart. Let’s be a good soldier. We won’t pick a fight unless we can win. And this kind of stuff, and this I tried to, and it worked. The guys that got killed were guys that violated, not in all cases, but darn near. You never walk off a path that somebody else hasn’t walked on of late. You never step off. Saw a mine, you know. I lost one guy, one of my best soldiers. Before we left Pisa he wanted a picture of Pisa. He wasn’t getting a very good [inaudible]. He stepped off to the side a little bit.

McIntosh: Bang.

Lang: So, I think that did a lot to get the guys through. Anyway, we were called out. And then I got, oh, I have to tell you [laughs]—something nobody understands, and you never see it on the film. And at the listening post out there for—I think you had to keep ‘em in for three hours. Two was normal, but I had ‘em in for three at night and daytime two. Daytime wasn’t so important, but at night. And then, let’s see, at eleven o’clock tonight these guys were replacing, you know.

And so at eleven o'clock at night those two guys would be over there and replace 'em, and they would come back. And the thing about it is, they'd sit there for an hour, and then they'd look at their watch, and it hadn't moved [laughs] ten minutes. You'd never hear that. That's what kills more soldiers than anything.

McIntosh: They get careless when their—

Lang: They got absolutely scared, and they're—they can't stand it, and it just kills 'em. There were more guys, new guys came in as replacements, you'd find 'em sitting back on the road someplace, crying. Talked to some of the old infantry sergeants. They said, "Well, every time we get replacements, those who weren't there for a while, take 'em up to the battery headquarters wherever that is." Usually in a bush someplace with a telephone or two and maybe one or two guys around. And I'd tell 'em, "Look, if you hang around these guys, learn to rest here and relax. Learn to sleep. You gotta do what they do, but, you have nothing else to do. Just kind of stay here and listen to them and watch what—visit with 'em they and so on." If they last for five days, they might make it. Maybe they'll make it. Otherwise—

McIntosh: Would they crackup or not?

Lang: Just cracked up. They'd just crackup. Well, just imagine you're going into a war zone. There are no lights, even in the daytime. At night it's even worse, but say it's morning or evening. Pretty soon you hear the howitzers going, and jeepers cripes, they must be getting close. Maybe a shot coming in from time to time. And then they go further, maybe send in tanks in there, and then pretty soon you get to where the mortars are. Then you keep—jeepers, cripes, it's quiet, you don't hear anything but just that. And pretty soon they stop, and then they walk through the woods and then way over in here and then geez, up here. God, they're shooting 'em over there, that must be pretty close. Just imagine a nineteen, twenty, twenty-two year old kid. And so, they lose it.

McIntosh: They make a mistake.

Lang: Well, the hardest thing in the world—I don't know how many psychics we had go out, that I saw going out. I didn't blame 'em, but it was just hard. Not a friend, when we went over there these guys knew each other. This guy's alone, coming up here a replacement.

McIntosh: They were exhausted probably.

Lang: The rest of 'em were all quiet. Nobody says a word. And Jesus, you'd like to have somebody tell 'em something. [laughs] Why don't you shut up? You don't talk up here.

McIntosh: Yeah, that's hard I 'pose not talking up there [inaudible].

Lang: Yeah.

McIntosh: Tougher on [inaudible].

Lang: If you just put yourself in that picture. And as you go into that front and then you keep going, and you keep going, you keep going. Anyhow it gets you. So from Pisa then we pulled out and got back and “the old man” say’s, “You and Doc Bailey [??] can have two days off R&R [Rest and Relaxation] [laughs]. That was my total R& R.

McIntosh: So where’d you go?

Lang: Sorrento [laughs], Sorento in Italy. Army quarters there.

McIntosh: That’s a pretty place.

Lang: Yeah. Nice place. Dinner was good. The meals were good, and the bed was soft. I laid on the bed, couldn’t sleep [both laugh].

McIntosh: Wasn’t hard enough.

Lang: Wasn’t tired enough. So, then we went back—the meals were good though. We had good meals. We went back up and loaded up and came back and unloaded [inaudible]. And then we went in southern France. Oh, there is something else I’m gonna tell you about Pisa. Did you ever hear of the 92nd Division? American 92nd Division? That was an experiment with black troops.

McIntosh: Yes, I know that.

Lang: I’d sooner not put that on tape. If you can you shut the tape off while I tell you after awhile.

McIntosh: Why? What’s—why we can’t—be put on tape?

Lang: Okay.

McIntosh: We have no secrets.

Lang: It’s what happened because I wrote a letter to *Newsweek* here. Anyhow, they put the 92nd in there, solid black. Noncoms [noncommissioned officers] were all black. The officers were mostly white, but the chaplain was black, I guess. I think that was the set up. And that was up on the Arno River, right to our right. I don’t know how long they were in there. But they replaced one of the divisions. I don’t know how many were in there. They were pulled out, broken up, and they made ‘em engineer. First of all, they could volunteer, those who wanted to volunteer to stay in a mixed group if they wanted to, but they didn’t have to. And they made—

I ran into one bunch who were made an engineering battalion which was a road patrol with graders in France. Other than that, they were the only ones I ran into that I was aware of. Of course, I wasn't in every place, but I was aware of that was in that thing. Ah, let's assume they were in there twelve days, fifteen. They'd come up there in the morning, and you'd find a whole section. Now, a section in the Army is about two squads, and squad is from nine to eleven men, would be gone. Their weapons lying—and not a soul around, all AWOL [absent without leave]

McIntosh: Where'd they go?

Lang: Back AWOL [absent without leave].

McIntosh: AWOL?

Lang: AWOL. I know that the 34th got involved, and I can only say what one of the 34th officers told me. He says, "We had just pulled out. We went just back here and relaxed. We were called up to form a line behind 'em and stop 'em." So, they broke up that division and made these separate units. Then later on—and that's all I knew about it. But in France I had—when we went up France, up the Rhone River, we stopped in beyond Dijon just a little ways. And these road patrols were coming, and there was some white officers there, and I stopped to visit with one of 'em. In fact he was a "light [lieutenant] colonel," and he was commanding this outfit. And I visited him about his [inaudible] and work he's doing and so on. But he was quite upset. Eleanor Roosevelt had just been over there, and she had left. And they got orders that a black outfit could not have more court martials than a white outfit. And these are his quotes. I can't tell you who he was, but they could look up the outfit if you quote him. This was the seventh of the month. He says, "I've run out of my court martial allotment. There'll be no roads built for the rest of the month."

McIntosh: That's pretty sad.

Lang: It's a sad commentary for the black people, too, because that isn't—the ones that volunteered, from all of the reports I had, we met 'em you know, terrific soldiers. But they needed somebody to lean on. Somebody to be with.

McIntosh: When you mixed them with the white troops they did well. They did okay.

Lang: When one of their own brothers leaves them, it fell apart. So, every so often I'd see an article in the paper, why didn't the 92nd Division get any medals? Well, I suppose a lot of people wonder, but nobody ever tells 'em what really happened.

McIntosh: Yeah, they were just not prepared for what they were asked to do.

Lang: Yeah, but I've met a lot of fine blacks, and I think very highly of 'em, but that's what happened to a solid, the 92nd Division, which was a solid black division. And it was in the newspapers because *Newsweek*, I read an article in *Newsweek* because they sent those old papers over there. And it said, it said something, and that's where this thing appeared about this leaving a whole section. A black officer, a major from the Pentagon, went up and investigated according to this article. His name was in there. I wish I'd kept it. And he said that his conclusions were—but then he said he verified all this stuff, what happened. And he says that, the fact is it's so, but he concludes that these boys were psychologically unprepared. And I think that's probably the real problem.

McIntosh: As I said, in Vietnam when they mixed with the white troops they were perfectly fine.

Lang: Yeah, but when they got in with a group that they could **[End of Tape 1, Side B]** depend on, and not that you couldn't get four blacks that you could depend on, but for some reason or other, it didn't work. So, I just throw that in.

McIntosh: How did they move you over to France?

Lang: France, we went on an LST [Landing Ship Tank ship].

McIntosh: That's out of Pisa?

Lang: Out of Naples.

McIntosh: Naples.

Lang: Went back to Naples, loaded up there. That was about the only port that had, I think you had Rome. I say da Vinci could have—I don't know if da Vinci could have handled it or not, but down there was the one place we could move so I put 'em all on one LST, all our equipment and everything. And went over, and on the way over my driver got a stomachache. Pretty soon they checked it. We had a dentist on our boat, and it looked like it was getting pretty hot, and so they put some—they slowed the convoy. It was nice and smooth like the lake was just glass. And [inaudible] pretty soon a small dingy pulled up beside, and another guy come up, a couple of more guys, one doctor, a baby doctor, a psychologist, and a dentist. That was professionals [laughs]. Put him on the captain's table which was five feet, about like this. Somebody held his head. Somebody held his feet up here, locally took out his appendix. And so we left him on the boat when we got over there and sent him back home. I don't know if later he caught up.

McIntosh: Tell me about your two days of R&R. You passed over that.

Lang: Oh.

McIntosh: Was that worthwhile, or was that pretty bad?

Lang: Well, the food was good. And I slept twice on the floor, and that was [laughs] good.

McIntosh: That was about the best part?

Lang: Yeah, we took a boat over to Isle of Capri [Campania region of Italy], and I saw the—

McIntosh: Blue grotto.

Lang: Yeah, the grotto of Saint Angelus, Verano [?] [Grotta Azzurra, Blue Grotto]. I saw that, beautiful thing.

McIntosh: I've seen it.

Lang: Have you been there since?

McIntosh: I've been there in the 1970s.

Lang: In the 70s. Okay. Was it all pretty well commercialized up there? Did you find it? Well, I went up there, and I knew it was there. And I talked to a guy, I said, "I want Saint Angelus Chapel." "Huh?" Talked to [inaudible] "Huh?" And I said, "Up here somewhere is Saint Angelus Chapel with a big mural on the floor. And pretty soon there was an old Italian. "I know where that is. Come follow me." So we went with another couple. Went over there and here it was sitting in back of some [laughs]—"Wisconsin Dells" [both laugh]. So, but outside of that, I enjoyed it, but I had lost quite a bit of weight in that fracas up there, but I got it all back.

McIntosh: So anyway they got you to France anyway.

Lang: Yeah, we got to France. We landed, unloaded there. The infantry had taken over and had gone inland when we got dumped off, and we were—we pulled out. We were supposed to go down to, oh, where the French fleet was sunk.

McIntosh: Toulon?

Lang: Yeah, Toulon. And down as far as Marseille and turn, but don't go beyond. That was more or less the orders. So went down there and got there [inaudible]. There they caught us, the advance party. They had a place we could pull in so we pulled in there and got ourselves straightened out. Got everything cleaned up, and the company commander says, "Gee, you know, we'll be taking off again. We have never been any place. Why don't we go into Marseille?" And I says, "Well, sure. Let's go to Marseille." It was just next door. So we drove in there, and everything was dark, dark. I told the guy there, we stopped, I says, "Is there any—besides

what's?" "Nothin'." He says, "You go down that street. When you see a door and a light on the bottom, you go in. Somethin' going on in there." I go down there, park the jeep. The driver stayed in the jeep. Went up, yeah, there was a band playing, and not many people there. But went in there and sat down and ordered a glass of wine. And we visited a bit. And pretty soon a gal came out, she did her shaking and all this kind of stuff, and she come over and sat down with us. She said, "How did you like the show?" "Oh, good." I could talk French pretty well. I had a year in college [inaudible]. I thought it was very nice [inaudible]. Anyhow, it went by pretty—eleven o'clock, everything shut down. So I looked around for the "can" and saw the door over there, and I asked a guy for the latrine. He says, "In there." So I went in the door. Sure enough there was a urinal, and that was the men's head. Around the corner there was a wash basin, and then there was a hole in the ground, you know, over here where the French have these holes in the ground. I got in there and did my duty here amongst two French women. Never looked at me. It looked like one went over there and powdered her nose, and so I kind of leaned over a little bit, you know, and pretty soon the other one got around on this side [laughs]. So, I kind of finished up quickly, and then she hit me in the arm. She wanted to leech. She wanted a match [laughs]. Gave her a match. My first introduction to French society.

McIntosh: The French have no shame.

Lang: No, and it was kind of interesting, but that's the only thing we ever had. Then there were two Navy officers there, and they were on a landing craft tank, LCT I guess. They could carry two tanks, kind of low slung. Anyhow, they said, why don't you come out on the—

McIntosh: On the ship?

Lang: Yeah, go down there, and they stopped at the harbor. Parked our jeep, went in there, and sure enough they had a kitchen there and a little stove, and they fried up some steak. The only steak I had [both laugh] in all the years I was over there.

McIntosh: Courtesy of the Navy.

Lang: Yeah, in the Navy. They feed well, I says, but I got ground under me, and you don't [both laugh]. So, we had a steak. I had a nice visit there the fellas, I don't even remember where they were from. Anyhow, they went back, and they went up the Rhone River. Gosh, we went beyond Lyon.

McIntosh: What Army were you with this time?

Lang: Then we were traveling alone, more or less. There was actually not much going on. We moved, oh, we moved up through Rhone. Oh gosh—

McIntosh: You're along the Rhone River?

Lang: Yeah, we stopped, God, I don't know where we stopped. We pulled off sideways and parked. And then we met there with whoever was supposed to be giving us assignments, I guess or whatever else. Nothing much happened. We got to Dijon, we were with—I couldn't even tell you what divisions. We were in 77th, 44th, they were new—then we were in the 7th Army. And, we got beyond Dijon. Dijon had a great deal of fighting in it. And then we were more or less then on duty with troops. I think it was—there were others in there too, but I didn't get that close to them. In Italy we lived with these guys. But in France it moved too fast. We went into, supposed to go into a river crossing, and then we went pretty far north. I must of had some other stuff in there, but it couldn't have been—oh God, where? I wish I could tell you the name of this little town because it had some meaning. It wasn't Dijon. We stopped in the town.

McIntosh: A bigger town?

Lang: Yeah. It was a pretty good sized little town, yeah. It had a park in it.

McIntosh: It wasn't Lyon?

Lang: No, it wasn't Lyon. Anyhow, we were there for—I think when things were settling down or something because, you get “army wise” after a while. If you don't go to the wrong place you get a couple of days extra, you know. So, anyway, we were there at that place, and we stopped at, yeah, that was the last stop, because [inaudible] park. We put our motor pool down in the park, and they had an arch across the top, and we had—there was an empty house there too because once I think that I slept in a house, and that was it. Right there on a bunk. I threw my bunk up there and slept in it. Other than that it was open space or something. Anyhow, we left there, and we'd forgotten something. So I says, “There's a little ways to go.” I said, “I'll go back and get it.” So I went back to get it. When I got back they had—there was a mob out yelling and screaming and everything. They already had two of them hanging here that they considered two French collaborators.

McIntosh: Collaborators?

Lang: Apparently so. And the other thing we saw in France was an awful lot of shaved women. I don't know if you ever got that—

McIntosh: From collaborating with the Germans.

Lang: Yeah, but these were hung—hanging there, and I had to go on through that thing to get what I wanted [McIntosh laughs]. So they moved aside, and let me through [laughs], and they waved some more and clapped, you know. There were these little things happened along France which was quite normal, I guess.

McIntosh: Did you go back on the line?

Lang: Yeah, oh yeah, we got back. Then from there, we moved just a little ways, and then the Moselle River had to be crossed. Saint-Dié is at the end of the Moselle River, pretty close to Switzerland. We were missing in there, too, but there wasn't much in there. But Saint-Dié, we had one river crossing. And that included an infantry, and the division was, I think—I knew it was either the 91st or the 90th. The one of 'em was in Italy, but this was a new one from the States. And they had—I don't know why they would send brand new troops into a river crossing section, why they don't put 'em on the ground and let 'em get used to something. Anyhow, we were supposed to go down there and be sure they don't get bombed out. So we pulled right down along the river, and the tanks were down there, and then the engineers. There were some tanks there and the engineers—oh, I guess just engineers 'cause they'd have tanks and half-tracks and stuff, and they were going to throw in two pontoon bridges. They got 'em both in, but the Germans were shelling 'em, and they knocked them both out. I don't think we had anybody across. Or at least if it was, they got 'em back. So that was a kind of a futile thing, but we sat there till morning, and then they called up and says, "Pull the units out, come back, and go up front." Yeah, that was when we pulled out there, and they got word to come up, and they'd stop us along the highway. Again a night movement, so we moved up, and you go with those little "twinkie eyes," you know and the lights. If you see two lights you're too close. If you see one light you're—no other trucks.

McIntosh: That's the way the trucks followed each other?

Lang: Yeah. If you see two lights you're okay, but if you—now, two lights you're too close. If you see one light, then you're okay.

McIntosh: Where were those lights?

Lang: On the back of every vehicle.

McIntosh: There were two lights?

Lang: Two little lights, about a slit light.

McIntosh: White lights?

Lang: We called them "cat's eyes." Just little lights back there, and they were little—

McIntosh: When you got close you could see two of 'em.

Lang: Yeah. If you got close you could see two of 'em, but when you got farther away it was one. So that was the way they drove their trucks in convoy so they wouldn't pile up. And you wouldn't drive over twenty miles an hour, probably. Yeah, that

was a standard procedure. Anyhow, we went up and kept going and kept going and kept going. And gol-darned, if you know, nobody asked to stop, and I just kept moving. Pretty soon there was a flashlight up here [??]. So I pulled up and stopped. “Where are you going?” “Well,” I says, “I’m going until I have an advanced party up here someplace, and they’re gonna stop me.” “Well, I don’t know where you want to go, but don’t go over this hill. The German tanks are over there [laughs].” Second time I almost went through the lines. So, I turned around again and went back, and as you do this—

McIntosh: You had the whole unit there?

Lang: The whole unit, yeah, the whole outfit, all 185 vehicles [laughs]. Turned ‘em all around and went back. You always watch for an open space after a while, one of the things you learn just in case.

McIntosh: What was your rank at this time?

Lang: Ah, second lieutenant.

McIntosh: That’s all?

Lang: Yeah.

McIntosh: Boy, that’s a lot of responsibility.

Lang: I was the junior officer [laughs], remember.

McIntosh: I was going to say, for a second lieutenant that’s a lot of responsibility.

Lang: Well, I enjoyed it.

McIntosh: That would have called for a major I would think, at least.

Lang: Well, there would be a major somewhere. The CO [commanding officer] was never with us, but his exec [executive officer or second in command] would be somewhere around.

McIntosh: I see.

Lang: But I never had him around me. Later on one of them got—because they didn’t know as much as I did about this thing, so they would get lost in the convoy. But I had this understanding—we had no communications between us either. Our radios, I mean, we couldn’t run radios because it just—

McIntosh: When you put out these landlines, how far out could you go? Were they a hundred yards, two hundred yards, five hundred yards?

Lang: They what, put out what?

McIntosh: Landlines. Communication lines.

Lang: Oh, the communication lines. Ok, from where they had to go to, we had as high as sixty-five miles of wire out.

McIntosh: One line?

Lang: No, total. But you take the OP, the observation post, that'd be up on a hill someplace. We'd have radio, but at night, especially in Africa, radio signals are dead. You got a chatter like you—a ground center like you can't imagine. And so you have to have a wire up there, so we laid these lines out. I think on an average, we'd probably—oh gosh, it's hard to say, but we would try to keep a line to headquarters. That would be the least. We'd carry one line way back to our next headquarters.

McIntosh: This was a landline, not radio?

Lang: These are lines. The “old man” believed in wire. Whenever we were down, the wires went down, and the radios got off the air. The radios were then used for emergency. Like in Pisa, we had every line broken but one out of twenty six. The radios went on.

McIntosh: But your landlines would go out for many miles?

Lang: Oh, yeah, they could go—

McIntosh: They had enough power to try and [inaudible].

Lang: Oh yeah, yeah. Oh, we'd have—we'd cross frontage, gee, mileage wise, God I don't know, it varied so much. In Africa the airport up to our next headquarters would be one long stretch, and we'd get a wire—I would say we'd go as much as twenty miles, twenty-five miles. Try to hook on to somebody else.

McIntosh: How was the power for that signal?

Lang: Just battery.

McIntosh: Just battery?

Lang: Just battery.

McIntosh: No generator?

Lang: No, these were just battery, and then the crank, of course, developed the ring. But the speaking was just batteries. In fact, our—what do they call those little Dunn batteries, sound powered? We had some of those. They worked pretty good. Well, where was I here?

McIntosh: You were up there, you're almost up to the tanks.

Lang: Oh yeah, I turned around and went back and parked the cars. Parked in this field maybe four or five miles back. We had our kitchens mounted on a truck. We had 'em mobile. So they cooked all the meals, they could stop, pull her off, and they could cut the gases and cook something hot. And the cooks were good. The "old man" insisted and that to feed one hot meal a day if you can possibly make it. So, maybe this was the hot meal. And they were right there, the cooks were—yeah. So we stopped back there, pretty soon here they came, "Gee, we didn't expect you so soon." I said, So and so happened." "Well, just jump in. We're going to a meeting." At two o'clock in the morning we were called to some—I just rode along, some woods. Here was the 7th Army staff, and they announced that the 44th Division, the 44th and the 79th were in line. The infantry had gotten through the Siegfried Line. That was the German line, and we have no recon. The Army had a recon unit which was a battalion or battalion strength probably. It was a reduced number, light tanks, armored cars, a heavy firepower unit. When they had a breakthrough like this, they'd run this through in there and just "shoo," wreak havoc in the back. Just mess everything up and then pull on out, see. They said that they'd just broken through. "We haven't got a recon outfit, but you guys can do it [laughs]." So here we go again. So all right, we're in back, and the mission was to go through the line, and we were right on the line. This is north, and this is south. And this is Patton [General George S. Patton] over here, and this is 7th Army. He came up here and met. See, like this, we were going this way over to Germany. Right on this corner there was a road that went down. And they said, "Now, I want you to go down that road, and as you get beyond so and so far, drop a gun about every quarter of a mile. Your mission is to secure that road for us. And when you get up to Hochfelden [in the Alsace-Lorraine area of France], take Hochfelden, put some troops around that a little bit so you can hold that a little bit, and then go over to Haguenau [France], and there's an airfield. Put two batteries on the airfield." Well that's a simple enough order. So, then I told them, I says, "Hey, last night there were tanks over across the road." "Oh yeah, they're there at night, but they tend to pull back [laughs]." A bunch of horse manure [both laugh]. Anyhow, it worked out that way. So we went up in the lead again and got up to Hochfelden, and I decided I was going to put my radio in the first town. So, I pulled 'em off to the side and got the radio in. They just had radio. And then the other two batteries went over to Haguenau and did their thing, and they shot down a couple of planes on the way. But then it really quieted down. We saw a few German soldiers, and our GIs would disarm 'em, and what do we do with them? So kick 'em in the butt [both laugh], and let 'em go. So—and they were surprised. As you went up going to this front, we went through our infantry which had gone to the other side. You can come up here and sit down.

McIntosh: [laughs] I'll offer you a chair.

Lang: Yeah. That's all right, I'll give her mine. Anyhow—

McIntosh: You have to stay put. I can move. You can't. Here, sit here. I've sat long enough. [laughs].

Lang: Anyhow, we went through the line, and the infantry was walking, like they do, you know. They're walking maybe two miles—half a mile an hour, and then they watched, and they kept this line going. So it looked pretty good. So if they walked in a couple of three or four days they'd be up to where we were. No big problem. A week went by and they weren't there. So finally I decided I better go back and see what's going on.

McIntosh: You hadn't lost communications though?

Lang: No, but I went back. I had communications back to our outfit, but this was the infantry division. We weren't with 'em then. We were just out there holding this as kind of a separate—so anyhow, I went back, and pretty soon I came across—they're not very far from where they were when I went up. Standing there, you know. I says, "What gives here with you guys? We're supposed to be up here." "I don't know, they told us to stop here." "What's the matter?" "We don't know." "Where's your CO?" "Oh, you go back there. There's a road in there, and in the bushes you'll find him." Okay, I went back there in the bushes to find him. And so I got over there, and I says, "Hey," I says, "what's the problem?" "Well," he says, "I could tell you, but here's the *Stars and Stripes* [American newspaper reporting on issues for US service members]." Headlines, "I won't clean up the flank for any son of a bitch." [laughs] Patton. Because he wouldn't move his troops, these outfits coming up here had to peel off—

McIntosh: Right, to the middle—

Lang: Yeah, you don't leave a vacancy here. And he ran out of troops.

McIntosh: He's a real asshole. He really was. Oh, I'm not surprised.

Lang: Anyhow, you can put that on tape and underline it [laughs]. So, I'll add one more thing to it. Later on, you know how he was killed? A manure spreader broke loose from a German, loaded with manure, and it broke loose from the oxen or the horse or whatever they had, ran over his jeep, and killed him. So I say, when he was killed by a German manure spreader running over him, I didn't smile, but I didn't feel bad [laughs]. That's my opinion. But I will say this for the guy, an open field runner, nobody like he could command troops. He could get the best of 'em. But an independent self-seeking, self-conceited, cuss like I've never—

McIntosh: He was an ROTC guy?

Lang: Pardon?

McIntosh: Was he an ROTC or a Reserve “trade school” [slang for graduates of US military academies]?

Lang: No, no, he was West Pointer.

McIntosh: Oh, “trade school.”

Lang: Oh yeah, he was West Pointer. Eisenhower, you know, he took him off Sicily. He was in Sicily. They pulled him off. He slapped the GI in the hospital.

McIntosh: Oh yes, I know.

Lang: And then he took him to England with his staff [laughs], and they left him until they could use him because that’s the one thing he could do. When he took that 3rd Army over he drove those guys all the way up here and across. He shortened the war by a lot.

McIntosh: If he had enough gas, he might have shortened it even more.

Lang: I’ll tell you how he got the gas. We couldn’t pull out because they stole our trucks [laughs]. He sent his men out there. If they saw a truck, they said, “General Patton says we’re supposed to take your truck.” What does a GI say on that vehicle? He gets off and he stands there. They took our trucks hauling gasoline for his tanks. That was afterwards. So, these are Army stories that don’t appear in history books [laughs].

McIntosh: Well, that one does.

Lang: So anyhow, “Well,” I said, “I can’t argue with Patton,” I said, “but I got my own thoughts.” “Well,” he says, “I can’t help you,” he says, “but we have to wait.” Well anyhow, I went back, and it was raining. It rains almost constantly there in winter. This was in December. And the ice was like this, and I was going back. Pretty soon there came up here, there was a woman standing there, and she’s waving her hand, a little old lady with a babushka on. And we had to come slow down and cross the tracks, and I says, “Stop.” So, I stopped and called her over. I says, “What’s going on?” Oh, she was just all beside herself, all shook. So, I said, “Where do you want to go?” It appeared that she doesn’t belong here, you know [laughs]. She mentioned a little town up there, you know. She may have had it in Hochfelden, but she mentioned a little town. “Well,” I says, “get in the jeep. I’ll take you along and go up there.” So, she got in the jeep, and she was still pattering back here, you know, and she was really out of it. So, I got up there and dropped her off and went about my business. Pretty soon, one of the guys came over.

“Hey,” he says, “That women you bought in here has created quite a fuss. The people are meeting. They’re crying and all of this kind of stuff.” He says, “Maybe you—you talk German. Maybe you can find out what’s all going on here.” So I went over and talked to ‘em. What the outcome was that she lived in the next little town. This woman, that was the innkeeper’s wife, was her daughter. And she lived in another town. But her attic in her house was used as an underground for pilots that were shot down. And they would bring a pilot in the morning or late night, put him up in this attic. She’d have food up there and some clothing or something. And then in the evening they would come and get him, and they’d take him on.

McIntosh: I mean these are—this is a German?

Lang: This is France.

McIntosh: Oh.

Lang: Well, this is Alsace. They were German now. They went back and forth [between French and German jurisdiction]. Alsace-Lorraine, you know, they were bounced back and forth. They didn’t want to be in either one, but they were never alone. So then, that night, there were two French pilots. They were called pilots. I suppose they were, whatever. And they left. After the day went on a German officer came over and told ‘em that they had captured these French officers, and they said they stayed in your house. They killed—they had two children at home, older teens and in the twenties in there. The youngest one who was sixteen got away. They killed these two young kids, threw them in the moat behind her house, and then the young guy got away, and then he say’s to her, “Now, I’ll be back at such and such a time. If you don’t hear, you’ll go to prison.” Well, he came back, and she obviously didn’t have the kid there so he put her in prison. So, she was in an Alsatian prison. There was a large prison, I don’t remember the name of it. The name was real common when we were over there. But this big Alsatian prison, they put her in this prison, and on the day that this happened, on the day when I picked her up, she says daily they would march them out into the potato fields, and we’d pick weeds and pick grain, and they’d work all day, and then they’d come in. She says, on this morning, the day that I picked her up, she was—they were out, and the trucks came in, and they loaded people, and the comment was, “Get on the truck because those who won’t fit are going to be killed, and we’re gonna take off.” And she says, pretty soon, there was—heard American—the ground fire, rifle fire. She [inaudible] “putt, putt” outside. And so they took off with the trucks and went out. She says, “And I was standing there.” So she started [laughs] to walk. Then she went out, and then she ran into these American soldiers who were then walking, and that was farther into—and they says, “Get lost.” So, but she says, “I didn’t know what that means, but get lost [laughs].” So she walked, and I was the first guy that listened to her.

McIntosh: Oh good, you rescued her.

Sollinger: You know German.

Lang: Yeah, I could talk German. And you know, it brings you back to this one thing, what happens to the civilians, and our people have no idea. They said, “Send out the troops and shoot up the works, bomb the cities and do this kind of thing. But there are a lot of people in there.” And these people are—it’s unbelievable. Well anyhow, that was the story of that one. A couple more things about that little place. We were there, I don’t know, I have no idea. I didn’t keep track, but it was Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, twenty-fourth. Anyhow, cut when we went back. Anyhow, a couple of days before that a burgermeister invited us to stop there, invited us over there for a dinner on a Sunday. So Chuck Shott and I went over there, and he served the meal. And he was a rugged old character. And then he brought out a little bottle of wine, about that big. He put it in when the Germans took over, in his well.

McIntosh: Oh, my goodness.

Lang: Now [laughs] it’s time to break it out. He thought this was a proper occasion.

McIntosh: Sure, right.

Lang: So, then he also, oh, he brought his swastika armband, that has never been worn [laughs]. They had to wear it for parades; he wouldn’t wear it. I guess they must have gave him, given him fits. But he never wore it. He was a bullhead from way back. So there was interesting things about it anyhow. Here’s another thing about that little town. This woman when we first got there, the husband and wife, had this little inn. We took the—went into the barn. They have these barns attached. We were in the back there. Once in a while she’d out and say, “Are you going to stay?” “Well,” I said, “the longer we stay, the better it gets, you know. If troops ever show up, we’ll probably stay.” And later she’d say the same thing. So one day she wants us to come in the tavern. Her husband was there. She was with her husband. We tried to play it real lost in there. Had a little girl with her, fourteen years old, her daughter. “I want you to meet my daughter so and so.” She says, “A half an hour before you came, the Gestapo was here.” She was supposed to be on that truck, and her mother had hid her. So she [**End of Tape 2, Side A**]
—they left, and they said, “We’ll be back in an hour, no, two hours. We’ll be back in two hours. If she isn’t here, we’ll take you.” Then we came [laughs]. That of course changed the picture.

McIntosh: Yeah, saved her life.

Lang: Yeah. Well, those are the things you never read much about war, you know. You see the gun slaying and the body slaying and the tanks shooting. So on Christmas, the 24th, got a radiogram. They were building up, behind you there’s evidence that they’re building up. It looks like they’re going to hit us from your side. Not

immediately, we pulled out. Went into France, we ended up with going through about two feet of snow and got back into France, and the advance party had found a spot there, a school, parochial school, and we pulled in, and the roof didn't leak [laughs]. The ground was dry. So when we had Christmas, had turkey for Christmas dinner, and we stayed there I think about two weeks.

McIntosh: They brought that in by truck?

Lang: Yeah. Well, the quartermaster always had these warehouses that you could pick. In fact, because we were Army troops, because we were with Combat 2, we would—they had good food, especially now, the later part. They'd go to Army Corps, you couldn't get it. You were supposed to draw from Corps, but we're Army troops. Then they send that truck home and then go over to Corps and draw some rations [laughs].

McIntosh: Get some more.

Lang: You know these GIs. You can't beat a GI.

McIntosh: I know.

Lang: Gol, they won the war for you, all their cleverness. So, anyhow, then we went into Germany.

McIntosh: Hold it just a second. Would it be possible to get another chair, Theresa, do you suppose?

Theresa: Sure.

McIntosh: I need another chair.

Lang: Anyhow, then we went into—got back and joined the troops, went into Germany, headed towards Wurzburg.

McIntosh: Is that where you crossed into Wurzburg?

Lang: Yeah, over towards Wurzburg. And there wasn't much fighting, just moving slowly and carefully, 'cause it seems that the army had pretty well knuckled under, the German army, at least in our sector. But they had these crazy goons that would be stuck in the woods someplace with a machine gun. They'd try to knock somebody off, you know, so it was—

McIntosh: Well, some of the SS troops stayed in there.

Lang: Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah, they stayed. They were a real problem.

Lang: Yeah. Anyhow, that went slowly, but we went through, but something about Wurzburg. Wurzburg—all the cities were bombed except Heidelberg. Heidelberg was not bombed, and Wurzburg was hit pretty hard, and we stopped in there and talked to a guy. And I says, “Gee whiz, it’s pretty well beat up.” “Yeah,” he says, and he was still nervous, and I says, “Tell me about it.” I visited with him, what he did, he was a carpenter. And he said, “Well, the Americans would announce that they would hit three cities, one of ‘em—but they announced three.” And so, then the planes would come, and of course all three cities were alerted then. They’d all go to the shelters. And so, Americans planes came that one day, and they went right over Wurzburg and didn’t drop any bombs. So they sent an “All Clear” signal. We all came out, started to work, the planes turned around and got them on the way back.

McIntosh: Oh my.

Lang: And he says, “They must have caught all of the people out of the shelter.”

McIntosh: That’s a shame.

Lang: And he says—I said, “Well gee, how many people were killed?” He says, “I don’t know,” he say, “but they hauled people, hauled people, there were people all over, they were dead and wounded.” He says, “I think at least half the people were killed.” So, I just mention that as a side issue that the average person doesn’t know either. And then the other thing that—from then on of course it was—well there was—we weren’t quite through yet. The French were to our right. They stopped at Stuttgart, and then word came out that we should, that the 7th Army should send a force to the west, to the east—a report that the German troops are withdrawing into the Alps, we’re going to cut them off.

McIntosh: Were you at Metz then?

Lang: Yeah. Well we were we were at—Wurzburg went down to Stuttgart and then part of the ways we could go for, on the autobahn but most [inaudible]. And so went back in there a ways, and little towns on the way, but that never really materialized. All of a sudden the war ended, and then we got orders to, that, “the war will end soon and you’ll be relieved by occupation forces from the States. You’ll have nothing to do, absolutely nothing, no responsibilities, but keep your men out of trouble. Plan for about three months.” [laughs]

McIntosh: That’s easier said than done, isn’t it? The war is over.

Lang: Keep ‘em out of trouble.

McIntosh: Right

Lang: So the Old Man says, look, you heard what the order is, I want you to set a plan for what we're going to do with these guys to keep them out of trouble. Take anybody you want [laughs] to help you. So, I get two other guys that were pretty good and decided that, well, these guys have been in war a long time, and they're going to go back as civilians, you gotta do something with 'em to keep 'em out of trouble. First thing to keep 'em out of trouble is to keep 'em away from the cities.

McIntosh: Oh, I know. You gotta keep 'em away from the booze. That's the thing you wanted to keep 'em away from.

Lang: Well, if you keep 'em away from the cities, then you got the booze whipped.

McIntosh: Yeah, I understand.

Lang: And anyhow, they went back, and they found Heidelberg and then south towards the Schwarzvald [Black Forest]. A little town of Neckargemund on the Necka River. And each city has their little woods, you know. We had lived outside. We were going to keep on living outside, so we're gonna live in that woods. So, that's gonna keep 'em away from the city. They can't walk twelve miles, and we aren't going to take 'em [both laugh] so they'll never be able to get to Heidelberg, get in any trouble.

McIntosh: [inaudible] some protection.

Lang: Yeah.

McIntosh: Was there a lot of shooting when they announced the war was over?

Lang: No.

McIntosh: They didn't do that?

Lang: No.

McIntosh: You know they did that in some places. A couple of people got killed in Okinawa. They lost twelve soldiers.

Lang: Oh, yeah. No, we didn't have anybody.

Sollinger: That was crazy.

McIntosh: They'd shoot their guns around, and pretty soon twelve guys get shot.

Lang: I think that everybody was so sick of the war, the German people took a hell of a beating, you know, in that war, and there's nothing they could do about it either.

So we moved into that woods and got a school down there, and I set up a school before noon for four hours. You wouldn't believe this, but out of the 850 men, about half of them, about 450, didn't have anything to do. The cooks worked, the clerks worked, the drivers, communications, you know, and this kind, they had work to do. But about 450, had nothing to do so they were going to be in school. So I used sergeants, and I had lawyers as officers, you know, businessmen. So we had business courses, psychology courses, medical, and a doctor were in a class, I guess. The motor pool was the busiest. Diesel was becoming very popular, and everybody wants to be an auto mechanic, you know, pick something or other. And then diesels were popular. So we took the school over, and we got equipment. There was a Daimler-Benz [German automotive] factory not too far. They had beautiful equipment [laughs] in their factories. And we hauled those diesel engines, you know, so for some diesels were first time and all this kind of stuff, testing equipment and so on, and then Ronnie Goldberg, who was my motor sergeant, one of the finest people in the world. He had a bunch of guys working on this stuff. And his sergeants, of course, were all good mechanics and stuff, but the problem that I brought back, about forty, well, I'll say fifty, forty-five to fifty—had another guy help me talk to the people, and we had their records. "What do you want to do when you get back? What did you do when you left, you know, and what are your problems?" Just a few questions. We had their records too. About forty-five of these guys could not read the primer, first grade primer, could not read. Only fifteen of the guys who I had in classes had ever entered high school.

McIntosh: Really?

Lang: This was the education spread of the guys who fought the war and won it. So, anyhow, that school lasted then for two weeks, for two months about, and then of course, then they were sending guys home.

McIntosh: I was gonna say, you must have been ready to go home.

Lang: High point.

McIntosh: You must have had enough points to come.

Lang: I think I had the highest points in the—

McIntosh: Except they needed you, huh?

Lang: You got twelve points for having a child. I had a child. I was in longer than anybody was so every month was a point, I guess. I had a Bronze Star here, so that gave me, I don't know, how many points. I think I was right close to the top. But enlisted men had to have fewer points than the officers. Officers had to have more. So that was the way it should be. But, an order would come out, and so many guys would ship out. Order would come out and so many guys would ship

out, you know. This went on for, oh gosh, to a point where we didn't have enough left doin' much school.

McIntosh: Were you still a second lieutenant?

Lang: No, then I was a first lieutenant. Yeah, I got promoted [both laugh] somewhere along the line in France I guess.

McIntosh: About time.

Lang: Yeah, and anyhow, another thing we had to do—there was no fraternization with the Germans. All the other countries, we'd get our laundry done by women who were washing in the streams, you know, whatever they did to wash our clothes. Couldn't do that in Germany, so we had to set up a laundry. So we used the schoolhouse down there. They had a school master's house. We used that schoolmaster's house for the laundry. And then we requisitioned, I think, fourteen women from one of these displaced peoples camps, you know. All these—see, wherever Germany went they brought all of these people in, and they did all of the work here. When the war ended, here they were. So they had these camps set up for 'em. So we requisitioned twelve, all Poles, all Polish. They came in, and then they got washer boards and tubs and whatever. And they said, "There's laundry up in here." Did the laundry. Well anyhow, I ran the school down here, and the laundry was up here, and the rest of us up here in the woods. One day, a couple of girls came in from the laundry. Two Polish little girls and, with the chaplain's driver, they wanted to get married. Well the Army frowned on it.

McIntosh: I know.

Lang: They says, "Don't get 'em married. Women are waiting at home for 'em and we don't condone that." So, I told 'em, "Gee, the Army can't do that." "We're really in love," you know, all this kind of stuff. So I said, "Have you seen the chaplain?" I talked to the chaplain. He says, "Aw," he says, "we'll all be gone here in another month or two." Anyhow, this went on and on and on, and they'd come in again. By golly, after a while I thought, "Cripes little [inaudible]," you know. I thought they were like fourteen, fifteen or fifteen, sixteen years old. That's what I thought they looked like about. "God," he says, and they talked about their homes. They hadn't heard from their homes for so many years. "If we can get, if you can get us across out of Germany, we can make it."

McIntosh: Which way? You mean to France?

Lang: Into France, yeah. The roadblocks were up on all the roads, out and in. But we had combat vehicles. We had combat markers on our vehicles. They never fooled with the combat. I knew they didn't.

McIntosh: What was "combat marker"?

Lang: That was that flexible painting on tanks rather than have the one painting. You've seen ships where they waves? Looks like waves. Well, this is brown—

McIntosh: Reflective?

Lang: Protective painting—

McIntosh: Reflective paint?

Lang: Yeah, protective painting. All the trucks were. And I finally thought, nothing had been going very right with me either so I thought, well maybe—so I says, “Can you sew?” “Yeah.” “You know what a WAC [Women’s Army Corps] looks like?” “Yeah.” “You think you can look like a WAC?” “Yep” [both laugh]. “Okay,” I said, “but don’t tell a soul.” “Nope.” Gee, it wasn’t long here they come, walked in, and God, you should have seen those two little girls.

McIntosh: Looked like two GIs.

Lang: I didn’t believe it. So I thought, “Goldarn,” and here’s this chaplain’s driver was with them. I said, “Well, you kept your word.” I said, “Wait a minute.” So I went down and typed out some passes for ‘em, called down to the motor pool. I says—Henderson was a pretty good driver, and I knew him pretty good, closed mouth kid. I said, “Bring a weapons carrier up here [inaudible].” Came up here.

McIntosh: Special mission.

Lang: Yeah, a special mission. And I said, “Drive over to France. You gotta get past this roadblock over here.” I gave these girls these passes and, I told the girls “You sit in the back of the truck. You say nothing. Don’t talk to anyone.” They could [inaudible] English a little bit, but I said, “You say nothing. You just smile nice.” And, I says, “You take ‘em over to that town, drop ‘em off, and come back. Good luck.” So at least he came back. Forty-four years later, I guess, we were at a reunion, first reunion.

McIntosh: Where?

Lang: In Minnesota. And we were in there having a good time, and all of the sudden here comes this girl up here, “Do you remember me?” “Are you a WAC?” “Did you marry a WAC? Did you marry a lieutenant?” There was one of our officers who married a WAC. “Oh, no, don’t you remember us?” “No,” from me.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Lang: Yeah, she was still one of us there. Finally, I says, “Did you have a sister?” So anyhow, they made it. They got married, they live in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania,

and their sister was with 'em. They both came back. I don't know how they got her back, but they got her back. And as far as I know, they are still going.

McIntosh: Great story. So when did they—

Lang: So, I cheated a little bit.

McIntosh: Yeah, that's all right.

Lang: That'll get you a court-martial [inaudible] [laughs].

McIntosh: You went home shortly thereafter?

Lang: Yeah, then from there, no, that's another doggone thing. Troops kept getting home. Max, our adjutant says, "Well, there's something wrong here then. You'll be coming." Pretty soon, there's a big order coming, cleaning us out. He says, "Get everything packed and ready to go." I says, "Fine." So, I got down there and waited, checked the order out. I wasn't on it. I was the only guy that wasn't on it. So, then he, we had to call in Northern Germany someplace. Finally, he got a message through. "You're essential." I says, "What makes me essential?" He said, "I don't know. But, you are supposed to report to such and such a place at such and such a time, and that's all we know." So, I had about four or five days. The "old man" says, "take a jeep and get lost." Well [laughs], so I went down to Oberammergau and drove around awhile, you know. Not a lot of things happened there—I won't mention that because it's another one of those—I will too mention it. Went over to Oberammergau, went up to the hills there and came back. I knew there was an Army field kitchen out there somewhere so we found out where it was. I think it was in Oberammergau. So, we slept under the trees, but we're gonna eat at that field kitchen. Went over to that field kitchen and good meal. And a bunch of nurses had just come over, and they were sitting around there, spritz up little gals. God, could they talk, holy cow. They'd left Chicago. And I tried to talk 'em, and I discovered that, Jesus, I don't think I knew these people [laughs]. So, after it was all over with, then no matter what I said, they looked at me with a kind of crazy look. And I discovered that I knew a lot of stuff about something you know nothing about, and vice versa. That was the first inkling that I had that [Approx. 2 sec. pause. Tape returns to count 221 and resumes with "slept under" from sentence above] it's not going to be that easy just to go home and fit in. Another thing that happened—

McIntosh: Why didn't they understand you?

Lang: Pardon?

McIntosh: Why didn't they seem to understand what you're saying?

Lang: Oh, why didn't they understand? Well, I don't know. What would I talk about, I guess, but I couldn't talk much about Chicago because I'd been gone there for four years, and their music, and their lifestyle, and everything, I was out of it.

McIntosh: Oh, okay.

Lang: That long, and that's what they talked about, the chitchat.

McIntosh: Well, that's the way it is now around here all the time.

Lang: And how great it is, how beautiful, the trees up—and the animals and the fields and the hills, you know.

Sollinger: All the—hills were in German forests.

Lang: Damn it, you know, I didn't think that was so—this was in Oberammergau.

Sollinger: Oh, this was in Oberammergau. So they—

Lang: Yeah, in Germany.

Sollinger: They were—this was after the war, and—

Lang: The war was over, yeah. The war was ended, and that's what I was—the last one going home, and I wasn't home yet. Another gang came in, guys suited up in suits. I snuck over there. I say, "Where you guys from?" Oh, we're from the Congress. "Which congress?" The United States Congress. "What are you doing over here?" "Well, we're taking a tour over here to see the need of milk or foreign milk for German babies." [McIntosh laughs] And we didn't have transportation to go home, and these clowns were flying around sightseeing. I told 'em so. So, they avoided me [laughs] after that.

McIntosh: I'm sure that made you very popular.

Lang: Yeah. So, anyhow, I got back, took my bags, and went up, took me up to this little place. There were these bags sitting around, maybe twenty or thirty guys, I don't know. All sitting on their bags, nobody saying a word. All felt like I did, I guess. Nobody knew why they were there. They knew why they we're there. They thought, for some reason, we got a job to do or something. And then pretty soon the major came out. He had just come from the States with his first sergeant and a clerk. And, he had orders to take this group to the Pacific through the Suez Canal. Well, the rest of that, I don't know anything about it, but that's what I'm doing, and that's what it is. So I still don't know why I was picked out of 850 men to go up there and go to the Pacific. And then, as we were sitting there, before we left, we were leaving there in a couple of days, the atomic bomb dropped.

McIntosh: What?

Lang: The atomic bomb [laughs].

Sollinger: Bomb—Hiroshima.

Lang: And all of the orders were frozen, so I have a little affinity for that damn bomb.

McIntosh: You bet. It saved probably a hundred thousand lives and a million casualties.

Lang: Yeah, you know, it killed a lot of people and it's bad.

McIntosh: So?

Lang: But, I don't think it killed as many as would have died on the shores of Japan.

McIntosh: Well, it was proved [??], not at all. They killed that many people just by bombing Tokyo. On the 18th of March they killed a hundred and eighty thousand civilians, so I don't see the atomic bomb as much different than that other than the lasting effect on the people who survived, of course, and they died over a twenty year period.

Lang: Yeah. Anyhow, we got priority to go home. No responsibilities and got down and they—we went right over the top of everybody else, but [inaudible] to the boat, USS *West Point* [a troop transport ship, 1941-1946]. Got on there and got up there and went home. So on the way home, I still had my pistol. I was busy, and you turn in this stuff. I was going to turn it in to the guys up there. He says, "Our records are clear. Don't mess us up." You know how that was in the supplies.

McIntosh: Yes. I know, I brought—

Lang: "Bury it someplace," but, I wasn't going to bury that thing, but if it says US Army, I wasn't going to take it home either. So, I had that darn thing on the boat, and I didn't know—I didn't want to throw it overboard. I was talking to a dentist who was sitting there visiting some guy who was playing poker or visiting. He says, "Well," he says, "you know, I was over here so and so long, and I collected a lot of guns. God, I'd like to have a Colt." I says, "Gee, I know a guy that's got one." I says, "You go up to that bunk." They had 'em stacked, you know. "Number so and so and so and so, look under the pillow. The holster is on it. The belt is on it. I know the guy well." I says, "If you don't tell anybody where you got it, he'll never care. He'll never know, and he won't worry."

McIntosh: You didn't sell it to him?

Lang: No. So he went up, and he—and I got up there, and it was gone. But under it was a box of cigars [laughs]. So, I had quit smoking. I never did smoke, but over there

one of the officers, a Jewish guy, his uncle, a cigar maker from Cuba, Havana. And every week he got a box of Havana Havanas or Berings. These were Havana Havanas. The best cigars you ever wanted to see, and I didn't smoke. You couldn't light too much anyhow because in the daytime you could smoke, but—so he says, "You, you just take some of these." He was at headquarters too. I take one or two, pretty soon, three or four, pretty soon a whole pocketful in morning or the evening or sometime. I always had a cigar or two then. Didn't light it very much, but I chewed the darned fool thing. And this went on until we were at this school, at, you know, the last—we went home. One day we had a switchboard down at the bottom that tied this whole stuff together, and one of the guys called at me, and I looked back, and then he went back to this little tent they had over the switchboard. And he says—I looked back and I says, "Were you calling me before?" He says, "Was that you?" I says, "Yeah." "Gosh," he says, "I thought it talked and walked like you, but when you turned around and didn't have a cigar in your mouth, I didn't think it was you." [laughs]. I decided that was the end of cigars. No more cigars. Threw 'em away, and that was it. Well, then when I got [inaudible] box of cigars, I thought, well, it's a long ride home here, and so I thought I'd take one out and go outside, back there and lit it. Got a mouthful of dust, dirt, it must have been World War I, I guess [laughs]. I went up and got the box and pitched it. That was the incident of my pistol.

McIntosh: I brought a burp gun [Soviet submachine gun] home from Korea.

Lang: You did?

McIntosh: I took it apart and hid it in my d-4 bag.

Lang: Since that time I wished I'd taken it home, but then again, every time I see that US Army on there I thought, nuts, I'm glad it's gone.

McIntosh: A lot of 'em came home. We've got tons of those downstairs [at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum]. A lot of German and Japanese weapons here and British weapons. Got a whole room full of them down there, downstairs.

Lang: So I came home and was discharged, January the 7th, the 11th, or the 9th in there of '46. Four years and almost a half. Interesting.

McIntosh: You got the Bronze Star?

Lang: Yeah.

McIntosh: And you must have had a unit citation? You must have had that.

Lang: Yeah, I don't know.

Sollinger: It's probably in that green folder there.

McIntosh: It's right here. Probably listed in there.

Lang: Yeah, I didn't know, I have one in here. I made this up for the kids. I was in, I think, five campaigns.

McIntosh: Yeah. You've got a campaign star I'm sure, but you must have a unit citation from there?

Lang: This was the school. Yeah, this came from Clark [General Mark W. Clark]. That's the unit citation from Clark.

McIntosh: Yeah, that's your unit.

Lang: And then this one over here, this was the school. This was a battalion citation of the school.

McIntosh: Well, that's nice. 439th, triple A. Well, when you got back, did you use your GI Bill?

Lang: No, I don't think I did. I had all of my schooling.

McIntosh: You had your schooling, but you couldn't get a loan to buy a house.

Lang: Yeah, no—

McIntosh: Five [??] percent.

Lang: I didn't do that.

McIntosh: That's why that was nice. I bought a house with that, or a part of a house. That ninety percent loan—

Lang: This is the Bronze Star.

McIntosh: That was really neat. That's your Bronze Star.

Lang: Yeah. But other than that—

McIntosh: Well, that's a lot.

Lang: I didn't—see, I had all my schooling, and that's about the only thing you could use because I had some loans, and we bought a house. By that time I'd earned some money.

McIntosh: So what did you do then?

Lang: Well, I came back and taught in a vocational school in Wausau for a little while. Taught GIs, a lot of them came back in apprenticeship jobs, and I taught those guys.

McIntosh: What did you teach?

Lang: Carpenters or carpentry. I had a bunch of those, and I had, oh, other classes, too. And then from there I went to Brooklyn, Wisconsin and ran the school in there for two years, public school as the administrator. Then from there to Campbellsport for thirty-six years. Ran the schools as the administrator, taught classes, and living there yet.

McIntosh: Sounds great.

Lang: Yeah.

McIntosh: You have wonderful children.

Lang: Yeah, you're the middle one, right? [McIntosh laughs]

Sollinger: Well, the second oldest [laughs].

Lang: Yeah, you're the second oldest. Marilyn, Mary—

McIntosh: Well, if they're all like Mary, they're wonderful.

Lang: Well, they're all around. They're doing their thing, and yeah, we're proud of all of them.

McIntosh: You should be. They're wonderful. Well, I'm glad we got this down.

Lang: I did find that for about six or eight months coming back it was testy. I think the biggest thing was that—well, we're out of it for so long. That common chatter, we were away from that for all those years. But the biggest thing was walking around the street and never steppin' off the sidewalk [laughs]. And if you did cross the street someplace, you looked through the hole over there, a brick building, and it would hit you just like that [thumping sound]. And I think for six months I thought that thing.

McIntosh: Did you have nightmares?

Lang: Pardon?

McIntosh: Did you have any nightmares?

Lang: No, never had nightmares. No, it didn't affect me that way. I was never afraid. I never took that position. I was always figuring out a way to—and it worked. And no matter what was going on, what the shelling was or so forth.

McIntosh: Turned it off at night.

Lang: Yeah, and it worked. It worked real well. One of my guys just mentioned here not too long ago, he says, "I'll have to tell you." We were in infantry in Pisa, and I would always look out for him because I tried to be help to him. But, we were going through a—we were back here about seven blocks up here with six or seven blocks up here, and there was a field in here of olive trees, and we had lines going through. Then the line broke in here, and we were always—I took my chief of section, who was a little bit edgy under pressure [inaudible]. Went out there and his line broke as we were out there. We're fixing the line when they start shelling us. And they were dropping it like this [thumping sound] and like this, see..

McIntosh: Mortars?

Lang: No, these were artillery.

McIntosh: Artillery?

Lang: Yeah, and then the middle one was right about in our range, and it hit us. We were like not over more than that. We were in a little bit of a hole. You always look for a hole, you know, or a swale [a low-lying stretch of land]. And it missed us, and then it went down. I said, "They're gonna shift." I says, "You see that hole up there? As soon as this one drops, take off and dive into that hole." So they dove into that hole, and then you kept repeating it. They shifted a little bit, and then they'd drop, and then they'd shift back, and they dropped, and they just—

McIntosh: A plan, right?

Lang: Yeah, just planned to kind of cover the territory. So I had a lot of luck with this kind of approach. When I talked to these guys, "Don't you fire at them. You can't win anyhow." So you don't—you don't [inaudible] [laughs].

McIntosh: I know a lot of GIs [inaudible].

Lang: And you don't do stupid things. And that's about what the book says. You just don't do stupid things.

McIntosh: They all jump in a hole that was bombed, a bomb hole because they assumed they would never hit the same spot again.

Lang: Yeah. Well, you're down, and, you know, that mortar clips, the guy that I said got killed because he stepped off the line, we had a hard time getting him to hit the

ground. With those mortars you hear them, you know. They whistle, and they hit. They'd hit the ground, you're on the ground. And Jim had trouble—

McIntosh: You were safe when you were flat.

Lang: Flat, yeah, just dive on the floor. If there's a hole, hit it. And if you're walking you always see that you have a spot. You kind of walk that way. It's like walkin' when you watch cars on the streets nowadays. And so, he [**End of Tape 2, Side B**] was with—Dave was with the line crew, and Jim—Dave was always telling him, you gotta hit the dirt. And one day he came up and his pants were torn [laughs], a little blood coming out. "What happened?" Dave says, "We finally got him on his belly [both laugh]. And then later on, like I say, he was a guy—a real fighter from Texas. Got killed, again because he violated a very simple little rule. Don't step where somebody else hasn't stepped. It's mined out there. And you just don't do that. You walk where you think somebody else has walked. This Bronze Star here, we were in Moorgrund [Germany], that building with that machine gun, and they were over there periodically. They'd go up there, and they'd spray the area, and this was i-n a little bit of railyard in Pisa. And Bill Wallace was with me, and so, we could see the line was broken. Well, it was broken over here. He was down in there, and when they started to shoot, you're always looking for a spot, and I had this railroad car here with a wheel. I dove over there, and these things just bounced off this whole area.

McIntosh: [inaudible] the wheel, good protection.

Lang: If I wouldn't have done that, I'd never be around here. And Wallace was down there [laughs]. I looked to see how he was doing. He had squeezed himself down under the railroads and was fixing the wire [laughs].

McIntosh: Just went right over the top of him.

Lang: You know, these—yeah, these little things just leave memories of guys that you just never get in civilian life. Terrific bunch of people. And they're average Americans.

McIntosh: Well, they're civilians, but they're doin' somethin' that they're not—really want to do. That was the most amazing thing about the GIs. They're involved in a war they had no interest in. They had to go fight. They didn't want to do it in the first place. They had no interest in Japan. They didn't really care about what the problems were in Europe. But, they had to do it—

Lang: Yeah.

McIntosh: And they did it.

Lang: I knew I had to do it and do it right. I felt sorry for these young kids, you know, and here this younger generation thinks they just can put on the uniform, take thirteen weeks, go over there and kick somebody around. It doesn't work that way. It just—

McIntosh: That's ignorance.

Lang: Yeah, well, I'm sorry I took too much of your time.

McIntosh: Couldn't spend a nicer afternoon [both laugh].

Lang: Good luck to you.

McIntosh: Well, thanks a bunch.

Lang: Yeah.

McIntosh: I'll show you the way out.

Lang: But that's about the way it was.

McIntosh: It's perfect. Let me get that stuff copied.

[End of OH490.Lang][End of Interview]

[Note: The tape continues with a brief exchange between Ms. Sollinger and Dr. McIntosh regarding leaving the interview site]