

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
WILLIAM J. MATTHIES
Artillery Surveyor, Army, World War II.

1996

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Matthies, William J., (1925-1998). Oral History Interview, 1996.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 90 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

William J. Matthies, a Wauwatosa, Wisconsin native, discusses his training and service with the 739th Field Artillery Battalion during World War II. Matthies talks about enlisting with the Draft Board, being excited to leave home, and basic training at Camp Hood (Texas). He describes combat training with a half track company and learning a variety of skills including radio operation, motorcycle and half track driving, and how to kill with a variety of weapons. Matthies portrays a typical day of training, working with soldiers from the Utah National Guard, feeling cared for when he was sick with stomach flu, being the tallest person in his unit, and the prevalence of smoking, though he did not smoke. Assigned to in the 739th Field Artillery Battalion, he comments on the accuracy of artillery and having several months of survey school at Fort Jackson (South Carolina). Matthies describes duty in the survey section unit, making use of his skills in mathematics to plot artillery fire, the variety of variables taken into account, and duty as a horizontal control operator, which involved tracking the location of guns, enemy units, and front lines on a map at headquarters. He speaks of circumstances that might result in friendly fire, methods to adjust the guns to hit specific targets, knowing he was responsible for enemy casualties without having to directly see the results of his work, and occasionally seeing dead bodies in the field. Matthies touches on thirteen weeks of maneuvers in Tennessee, paying a woman to fix him a southern fried chicken dinner, and getting an extra furlough to go home for his grandmother's funeral. He talks about his family relationships and his reaction to being home on furlough. Shipped to Great Britain, Matthies describes travel by troop ship, the weapons he was issued, and Army food. He portrays England as "just like an ordnance depot" and characterizes a fellow soldier named Joe Douglas, who liked to get into fights. Matthies comments on corresponding with friends and family. He mentions getting shipped from Wales to Normandy before the interview ends abruptly.

Biographical Sketch:

Matthies (1925-1998) entered the Army in 1943.

Interviewed by John Dudley as part of the Ozaukee County Veterans Book Project, 1996

Transcribed by Joshua Goldstein, 2011

Edited by Joan Bruggink, 2012

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Interview Transcript:

John: So you joined in—

Matthies: Pearl Harbor was December 7th, '41 and I joined April 5th, '43. I was eighteen in January and the following April I went in.

John: You mentioned, though, that you joined too young.

Matthies: Well, I went down to the Draft Board and volunteered to go in the next month's draft. I never told my folks this, I just wanted to get in, involved, because at my age I was Class A, just fresh out of high school, I was Class A as far as drafting was concerned. I couldn't even get a job because they knew in a couple of months I'd be gone anyway. You couldn't get a decent job as far as working was concerned; I was too eligible for the draft. So I thought I might as well get in and get involved.

John: Were you committed to be drafted or did you enlist?

Matthies: I enlisted with the Draft Board. I didn't go down to a recruiting station. I went down to the Draft Board and told them my parents had given me permission to go with the next month's draft.

John: Instead of being drafted in six or seven months?

Matthies: I might have been drafted three months later.

John: Did that give you any advantages, do you think?

Matthies: It might have to a certain degree; I volunteered for the Army. I asked to get into the Army.

John: Why?

Matthies: I was too tall to get in the Air Force.

John: Did you try?

Matthies: No, but 6'4" was the limit.

John: You knew that?

Matthies: I knew that. And the same thing was true for the Navy.

John: Too tall for Navy?

- Matthies: You didn't fit in bunk beds [John laughs] and the equipment.
- John: And you knew that?
- Matthies: Yes, I knew that, so I knew I would wind up in the Army.
- John: So you enlisted in the Army?
- Matthies: Right.
- John: Where? Where was your Draft Board?
- Matthies: Draft Board was right here locally.
- John: Where's that?
- Matthies: In Wauwatosa.
- John: Wauwatosa?
- Matthies: Uh-huh
- John: Where were you living at the time?
- Matthies: 118th & North Avenue. The house you saw where Travis' car was. We lived there from the time I was four years old. In 1929 the house was built and a month later the Depression came along.
- John: Did you feel kind of compelled to enlist? Was the feeling high that it was something you had to do for the country?
- Matthies: Not really. I had the feeling in high school that as soon as I got through high school I was going to leave home. I was going to probably go to school if I could get the necessary funds, study forestry; my objective in life was to become a forestry major and then wind up getting a job as a forest ranger and working at a dude ranch, play piano and entertain on a dude ranch. I had never been out West, but you read a lot of books in those days about people having their vacations on a dude ranch and riding horses and that sort of thing. I thought that would be just an ideal way, an exciting way to make a living.
- John: Did you like Western books?
- Matthies: Yeah, uh-huh.
- John: Who did you like to read?

Matthies: I can't think of an author but—

John: Was Louie L'Amour around then?

Matthies: I don't remember the name. But this was a way I could get to leave home without hurting my parents' feelings. I thought that would get their sympathy.

John: [laughs] Okay, you went down and enlisted for the next draft. And that day came. Did you take tests before or did you take tests after you were inducted?

Matthies: After I was inducted.

John: Where did you go to be inducted?

Matthies: Fort Sheridan.

John: Where was that?

Matthies: In Illinois.

John: And you traveled from Milwaukee?

Matthies: Milwaukee.

John: How?

Matthies: Just on a bus.

John: On a bus with other people or—

Matthies: Well, all those which were inducted that particular month left on the same day.

John: Did you know anyone else?

Matthies: Yup, next door neighbor, Dick Ryan, he had done the same thing.

John: Really. How did he fare through the war?

Matthies: He got a medical discharge about six months or so after he was in because he was deaf in one ear. When he was a couple of years old he had fallen out of a second floor window and had broken an eardrum in one ear. He

was able to hide it pretty much from the first medical, but his mother went into his outfit and pursued it, got him out of it.

John: Wow, was he happy?

Matthies: Not particularly; he still wanted to be in it. When you're eighteen years old nothing happens to you; it's only gonna happen to somebody else. Today if I were in the same situation I'd probably be scared stiff because I'd know better.

John: Right.

Matthies: But at the time—I mean, I didn't feel worried or scared or anything like this, I was just so excited to get away from home and be "on your own."

John: You caught the bus down to Fort Sheridan; what were you were thinking? Do you remember what your thoughts where? Were you scared, were you looking forward to something new or—

Matthies: I was just anxious to get going with it, and it surprised me a little bit the first night at Fort Sheridan with all these new recruits, a couple of them were crying in their bunk bed that night and I thought this was silly. But some of them, of course, left a wife behind or a girlfriend. I didn't leave anything very serious behind; I didn't feel that way towards my parents exactly.

John: What is Fort Sheridan near? What town was it close to?

Matthies: It was halfway between Rockford and Chicago.

John: Just a wartime place or had it been there for a long time?

Matthies: I think it had been there for a long time, but is since has been closed, as far as I know.

John: How long were you at Fort Sheridan?

Matthies: Oh, about three or four days, something like this. Just long enough to take your physicals and orientation and get assigned to a place for basic training.

John: There was no other testing, just your physical?

Matthies: That's all I remember.

John: A battery of written tests or anything?

- Matthies: I.Q. test.
- John: Did you get any idea what they were going to do with you as a result of these tests? Did they say at that point, “Well, we think you’re gonna be in the artillery or we think you’re gonna be in the infantry?”
- Matthies: No. No, there were thirteen weeks of what they called basic training. They had the gruff old sergeant who gives you calisthenics in the morning and sends you out on a five-mile hike and obstacle course, climbing under barbed wire, climbing over fences, typical things you probably have seen on TV as far as basic training is concerned. And along with it, a lot of orientation, movies on, oh, for example sexual discrimination, venereal disease, things of that type, which surprised me because I apparently must have been very naïve. I hadn’t heard about most of that sort of stuff.
- John: [laughs] Now this didn’t happen at Fort Sheridan?
- Matthies: This happened in the thirteen weeks basic training.
- John: Where did you go for your basic training?
- Matthies: Camp Hood, Texas.
- John: How did you get to Camp Hood?
- Matthies: By train.
- John: By train, a whole bunch of you on the same train?
- Matthies: Yeah, everybody who was assigned to that particular—
- John: Why did they send you to Fort Hood? Fort Dix in Jersey would have been closer. How did they decide to send you to Fort Hood?
- Matthies: To Camp Hood? I think there were vacancies at the time. At Camp Hood they were just organizing the company for basic training. I just think it was just where there were openings.
- John: Did you go with anybody you knew?
- Matthies: No.
- John: Did you get to know anybody?
- Matthies: Oh sure.

John: On the way, that you got stuck with?

Matthies: Well not that I got stuck with, no. All I remember is just being on the train and getting down there and anxious to get going.

John: How many days do you remember it took you to get down there?

Matthies: A would guess about a day and a half; I'm just guessing now.

John: Did you stop at all, do you remember?

Matthies: We stopped because we were sidetracked for another train coming through or something of this type.

John: So you went to Camp Hood. What unit were you assigned to, do you remember?

Matthies: I can't think of the number of the organization, but it was for what they called combat training in the half track out in the desert.

John: Is that what you started with or did you do basic infantry training?

Matthies: It was basic training along with the half track unit, radio, just general basics of combat training, how to shoot a gun.

John: What was your job going to be? What job were you trained to do in basic training?

Matthies: Radio Operator.

John: Radio Operator; did you learn Morse code?

Matthies: No, we weren't there long enough to learn Morse code, just how to operate the radio, turn it on, turn it off, pretty basic.

John: [laughs] And you were assigned to a half track?

Matthies: Yes.

John: A half track unit. Did you do any training as a team or were you just learning to function as a—

Matthies: It was a half track company and we went out on night calls pretending we were in combat, how to read a compass. We all got a chance to drive the

half track. And a lot of it was we were taught to become adept at everything. For example, we were taught to drive a motorcycle.

John: Really. Did you learn everyone else's job or did you learn to drive?

Matthies: They wanted you to master everything possible that could save your life, what they called dirty fighting; you learn how to kill a person by jamming your thumb into their throat or things of this type. For combat training with or without a gun, with a bayonet, all that stuff. You knew you weren't gonna use bayonets, but it was there anyway.

John: Do you know what kind of rifle they gave you?

Matthies: It was an M1 I think.

John: Rifle or carbine?

Matthies: We had a rifle then for basic training. I had a carbine later on in the field artillery.

John: So Army's half tracks, they had cannons and you are supposed to learn how to destroy tanks?

Matthies: Right.

John: You think they were gearing you up for North Africa?

Matthies: At that time Rommel was in North Africa.

John: Had the invasion occurred, the American invasion?

Matthies: No, that took place later. We were still in pretty rough shape as far as the war was concerned. That was when Rommel was going through North Africa and the Germans were still bombing the British.

John: What kind of helmet did you wear? Did you wear the British[?] round helmet or did you wear the classic American helmet?

Matthies: The classic American helmet.

John: They'd gone over to that by then?

Matthies: Yeah uh-huh.

John: So you were there for thirteen weeks learning how to do that?

- Matthies: Right
- John: And then what happened? After you had learned basic combat skills and how to turn a radio on and off.
- Matthies: Theoretically how to drive vehicles and things of that type. And for the organizational purposes you were all assigned a job. People were assigned to motor pool. I was assigned to radio communications.
- John: Did you start your military piano playing career during that time?
- Matthies: Not too much in basic training. There wasn't that much time. They kept you busy.
- John: How big was the post at the time? Where there a lot of other troops training there?
- Matthies: Oh yeah, to me it looked like a young city.
- John: Did you live in a tent or did you live in—
- Matthies: In barracks.
- John: In barracks?
- Matthies: Right
- John: You were in a platoon barracks or company barracks?
- Matthies: I would guess it was probably about seventy-five or eighty people. There were two floors and there were probably about thirty-five or forty on each floor.
- John: What would a typical day have been?
- Matthies: Getting up at six o'clock and getting out to face Reveille. Going back in, making your bed and getting ready for chow, which was maybe at a certain specified time, maybe forty-five minutes later. Then about eight o'clock you'd get called out for calisthenics. And then maybe there was a short hike and after that there were classes. Classes on everything from first aid to military operations, all the things you needed to know as far as driving vehicles. A little bit on psychology on getting along and also ones, I thought, to drive you into fear.
- John: Drive you into fear?

Matthies: Submission. Well, they kind of let you know in sneaky ways that the half track was sort of a commando outfit. They let you know that the survival rate of people in half tracks was very, very low, things of this type. And you get this information from the sergeant who was in charge of you.

John: You remember his name?

Matthies: No, but one thing that was interesting about it, this whole cavalry[?] that came from Utah; they were the Utah National Guard. And one thing I thought about them, they seemed like a pretty nice bunch of people; in spite of being rough and tough they seemed fair and honest. For some strange reason, and maybe they were told not to—they were all, of course, members of the Mormon Church because it was a Utah _____[?]-they were fairly nice people but they were a little different than some of other people that I noticed and I appreciated them. In fact one time, for example, I got the stomach flu [cuckoo clock in background] or maybe it was the GI food I ate, but I became sick on some weekend. And I had thrown up my dinner and was layin' in bed like a week. The sergeant who was in charge of our barracks was there and another sergeant came in and asked him to go to town with him on a pass and he said, "No, I'd better stay here; I've got a guy sick with the flu or something. I'd better hang around." And I appreciated that because that was the only time I came close maybe to being homesick for about thirty seconds. I appreciated the fact that I had a companion, I had somebody who would take care of me and look me over and that sort of thing.

John: You'd have classes in the afternoon and the morning?

Matthies: Yeah, uh-huh.

John: And what would be next?

Matthies: Maybe a little more physical activity such as combat training. You might have rifle practice out on the range. You might have an obstacle course.

John: What kind of a shot were you? [clock chiming]

Matthies: Expert.

John: Expert?

Matthies: I got expert in rifle shooting. There was marksmen, sharp shooter and expert.

John: You had some physical activity and then there would be chow?

- Matthies: Yeah.
- John: There'd be training after that?
- Matthies: Sometimes there was a night hike or going on a bivouac where you had to camp out overnight and you were not allowed to use any light of any sort. In other words, you had to do everything in a blackout like you would if you were in combat. They'd try to simulate combat situations.
- John: What'd you think of Army food?
- Matthies: Not bad, I ate it all. The only thing I didn't like as much but I ate it was powdered eggs and powdered milk and things like this, but I was a growing boy and I ate my food. [laughs]
- John: Where you the tallest in your company?
- Matthies: I think I was.
- John: Do you think that gave you any benefits?
- Matthies: Well, people got to know me as Big Bill or Slim, High Pocket. In other places some of them started to call me Long Ass. [laughter] I was always given a name which differentiated me from the other Bills. [phone rings]
- John: Did you ever experience or see other people experience unusual punishment?
- Matthies: No; that I didn't see. Especially with this group of _____[?] from Utah; they were pretty fair, pretty honest, pretty nice.
- John: One other thing I remember when I was in basic training, you get to qualify with a hand grenade. Did they give you a rating with that?
- Matthies: Yeah, I always had pretty good ratings. I was always kind of athletic. I don't remember what the ratings were, but I was always right up in there. In fact, when we went on a five-mile hike they always put the tall guys in the front.
- John: Why?
- Matthies: Because they could take the biggest strides; the little ones were always running to catch up. [John laughs] We would have to take our five-mile hike with all of our full packs and the captain who led us on the hike, he would just be in tennis shoes. And I used to give him a hard time because I could keep up with him.

John: What was his name, you remember?

Matthies: I don't remember the captain's name.

John: Did he seem young or old to you at the time?

Matthies: He seemed old to me, but he was probably about twenty-eight or thirty.

John: Were they regular Army, or were they just—

Matthies: There were a couple later on when I was in the field artillery that were regular Army, but this was basically—

John: Duration?

Matthies: Uh-huh, right.

John: When you enlisted and they said you enlist for the duration, is that what it was, or was it a set period of time?

Matthies: You enlisted 'til the war was over.

John: 'Til the war was over?

Matthies: Right.

John: So you went through thirteen weeks of basic training, not much piano playing?

Matthies: No. We really didn't have time for that there. They kept you busy and I didn't—

John: Did you ever get a pass to go off base?

Matthies: Not during the basic training.

John: Not during basic training. What was the closest city?

Matthies: Waco was around thirty miles or so from Camp Hood and I think Dallas was around sixty or eighty miles away.

John: It was pretty close to the Mexican border.

Matthies: Uh-huh. Strictly hot desert, especially at that time when you got drafted in April; by the time you got to it was May, June, July.

- John: Very hot, very hot. Would you say you enjoyed basic training? Was it hard for you? Was it physically hard? Was it mentally hard?
- Matthies: For me, because I was eighteen years old, fresh out of high school, I was sort of competitive. Whether I was on the obstacle course or on a five-mile hike or no matter what I was doing, it was more like gym class in high school. I kind of enjoyed it. I didn't find it upsetting.
- John: Not a real challenge?
- Matthies: Well, it was just a challenge to be at the front of all the—especially the athletic-type thing, the exercises, the obstacle course and so forth.
- John: What would you say was the most distasteful thing about basic training? The thing you liked least.
- Matthies: The thing I liked the least was the language that the people used, profanity and the smoking and that sort of thing.
- John: Was there lots of smoking?
- Matthies: A lot of the G.I.s smoked at that time; there were no restrictions. In fact, if you were having a ten-minute break between classes, once in a while the sergeant would come up and say, "Hey fella, you're not smoking anyway; would you run an errand for me?" You know, that kind of thing. I don't mean it as bragging, but I was sort of a squeaky-clean kid who didn't appreciate that sort of thing.
- John: Did you write home?
- Matthies: Yeah, uh-huh. I never complained in the letter about that sort of thing. I just wasn't brought up that way.
- John: Did you meet anybody there that you went through the war with during your basic training?
- Matthies: No. A lot of were in the same outfit but not what I'd call buddy-type of a situation there at that particular time.
- John: Did that unit stay together as tank destroyers?
- Matthies: No. After the basic training was over there was very little need for half tracks.
- John: Why?

- Matthies: They weren't doing a good enough job against the German tank. They were supposed to be faster with less armor and they just weren't as good and as effective in the desert sand. It still had the wheels in the front, you know, the tires in the front, and just the half track in the rear. And they weren't doing the job. We were winning the war more with tanks than with half tracks. In fact, I think it was a some time after that that they abandoned the vehicles altogether as far as use.
- John: At that point, having had your introduction into the Army, did you have any idea what you wanted to do in the Army? What you were prepared to do?
- Matthies: No, I didn't. I can't say that I really did. All I knew is that I wanted to do something in the Service where I had my both feet on the ground.
- John: You didn't want to be a paratrooper?
- Matthies: A paratrooper or a pilot or anything in the Navy. I've always had the feeling that as long as I kept both feet on the ground I could take care of myself.
- John: [laughs] Was there any inducement to go anywhere else? Did they ever talk about joining the paratroopers or going to any other branch of Service?
- Matthies: I don't remember there being any inducement. I guess you could request it, but they didn't encourage you to.
- John: Did you sleep on the top bunk or the bottom bunk?
- Matthies: I slept on the bottom bunk.
- John: Did you do your own ironing and washing of your clothes?
- Matthies: I did my own washing, I remember that.
- John: Did you ever press your clothes?
- Matthies: I didn't really press them very much. I just sort of rolled them so the basic wrinkles would come out.
- John: [laughs] How many pair of pants did they give you? How many shirts?

- Matthies: Usually there were, I think, two pair of khakis and then two pair of what they called the olive drabs, which was the dress clothes. In other words, you had four sets of clothes, two for field wear and two for dress wear.
- John: Did you use your dress uniform very much?
- Matthies: You had to when you went out for Taps.
- John: If you weren't doing any field work at the night time, what would you do for entertainment?
- Matthies: I would usually read a book.
- John: What did you like to read?
- Matthies: Oh, you always had these—[**End of Tape 1, Side A**]—novels.
- John: Did you have those sent to you by your parents or were they available at the Post?
- Matthies: Available at the Post, and then you'd buy one and then you'd sort of trade them. You'd read it and trade them around.
- John: Do you remember what you read, any of them?
- Matthies: I read a lot of western ones and I also read the life of George Gershwin, the life of Oscar Levant, the life of musicians, biographies of people. I always had a mental picture that one day I was going to be a professional musician.
- John: A composer or a musician?
- Matthies: Yeah, uh-huh.
- John: Do you remember any of the westerns that you read, any of the books? Any Zane Grey?
- Matthies: Well, I read Zane Grey, many of the pocket ones. I don't particularly remember the names of 'em now.
- John: Was there somewhere where you could go to buy chewing gum?
- Matthies: The PX.
- John: The PX?

- Matthies: Post Exchange.
- John: Did you spend much money there? Was there much to buy?
- Matthies: Well, there wasn't that much to buy. Being a dentist's son, I didn't believe in chewing gum and I didn't drink beer. It was what they called near beer, lower volume of alcohol, and it was only available there at the PX. Yeah, there was candy bars and things like this, but I didn't buy too much. After all, I think your private's pay was fifty dollars a month, something like that.
- John: What did you do with your money then?
- Matthies: Some of it I sent home. I had my folks open a bank account. And I think out of the fifty I probably sent twenty home; which came out automatically. It was deducted in a payroll deduction.
- John: And the rest you had in cash?
- Matthies: Uh-huh.
- John: Did you feel comfortable having that in the barracks? There was no theft problem?
- Matthies: No, I never thought about it.
- John: What happened when you finished basic training?
- Matthies: The group was transferred. Most of our group, including the captain, the officers who trained us, were transferred to South Carolina, where they were forming the 739th Field Artillery Battalion.
- John: Battalion?
- Matthies: Yes. In fact, they were forming three of them then, the 739th, the 740th, and 741st, three battalions of heavy field artillery.
- John: Now heavy field artillery, what caliber of gun is that?
- Matthies: It was what they called an eight-inch Howitzer, eight inches in diameter. The biggest gun was the 240 millimeter. I don't know what eight inches comes out to in millimeters. I think it's a little over two hundred.
- John: What fort was it that you went to?
- Matthies: It was Fort Sheridan.

John: Oh, Fort Sheridan, which was in South Carolina?

Matthies: Which was in South Carolina; right.

John: Fort Sheridan was in Illinois, then you went to—

Matthies: Oh, pardon me.

John: Fort Hood, Camp Hood, then that was at Fort Jackson?

Matthies: Fort Jackson. right.

John: And that was for artillery school?

Matthies: Yeah.

John: Did you have any input into being in the artillery? Did they say what would you want to do?

Matthies: They divided us. First I was put in the 739th and the officer in charge took a day to interview everybody to find out who should do what. For example, some went into the motor pool, some went into the kitchen, some went on a gunnery crew. And the captain took a look at my records and he said, “You just graduated from school in January and you majored in math, you had algebra, geometry and so forth. We need people like you in the survey section.” So I was assigned to an eight battery survey section.

John: How many guns in a battery?

Matthies: Four.

John: How many batteries in a battalion?

Matthies: Three.

John: So there were twelve guns in a battalion?

Matthies: Twelve guns, right.

John: How many men?

Matthies: I think about two hundred.

John: He said to you, “How does that sound to you?”

- Matthies: I remember telling him, I said that in basic training I was assigned as a radio operator. He said, "Radio operators are a dime a dozen." He said, "I need somebody who has a little mathematics." This is exactly what he said.
- John: [laughs] Did he ask you to do some calculations so you could show him or did he just assume because you were right out of high school, or he looked at test results?
- Matthies: Well, he saw that my major I had had algebra and geometry and solid geometry and trigonometry. All that math that was available, I had had. He just said, "What was your best subject at school?" I said, "Math," and it was.
- John: And they were forming the 739th?
- Matthies: Right.
- John: Field artillery, was it?
- Matthies: Right.
- John: When you say field artillery, how far can an eight-inch gun shoot?
- Matthies: Ten and a half miles, a two-hundred pound shell. It was just like a small bomb actually. The difference between it and a bomb dropped from an airplane is that an artillery shell is more accurate; you can shoot close into your front lines. And it was something that the infantry could call on when they had opposition, if anything's in their way they could call on the artillery to knock it out. If it was a pillbox or something of this type, a two-hundred pound shell would destroy it.
- John: You could be that accurate?
- Matthies: Yes.
- John: What city were you closest to in South Carolina?
- Matthies: Columbia.
- John: Columbia, South Carolina?
- Matthies: Yeah. Uh-huh.
- John: Is that post still there?

- Matthies: As far as I know it is.
- John: How long were you there altogether?
- Matthies: We were there for about—let's see, we got through basic training in July, we got there probably in August and we were there until the following March, when we went on maneuvers in Tennessee.
- John: And you were training that whole time?
- Matthies: Yes.
- John: In surveying? What does a surveyor do for a gun?
- Matthies: Well, you have to know exactly where the gun was located on your map.
- John: Okay, I'll back that up. You weren't with the gun, you were with the headquarters unit, the headquarters part of the battery?
- Matthies: When I was in the survey crew I was with—yeah, I would have been the headquarters part of the battery, not the battalion. Later on I was in the battalion headquarters, but now I was in the battery headquarters.
- John: How far from the battery would you be?
- Matthies: Oh, you might be a mile, might be a half a mile from the actual gun position. [Break in Tape] In actual combat there was probably a slight advantage being in the survey crew because the enemy could spot the guns when they were fired, but they never knew where the headquarters people were. You could be anywhere, dug in underground or in some facility of that type.
- John: Did you find this period from like July or August through March to be as physically demanding as basic training would be or was it different?
- Matthies: It was a little more advanced. You see, if you consider that a gun shot ten miles, you had to know where the gun was on a map and where the target was on a map and compute difference in altitude between the gun and the target, the wind direction, the density of the air and a lot of factors that were taken in so you could hit the target.
- John: And that was your job?
- Matthies: That was my job. So much of that time was spent in school learning to do this mathematically.

- John: Were you assigned to a gun or were you just assigned a mission?
- Matthies: A battery of guns. I never pulled a lanyard; I never actually shot the guns.
- John: I don't know how guns are numbered in a battery; say gun "a", "b", "c" and "d." When there was a fire mission, did you plot for gun "b" all the time or you just plotted for the whole battery?
- Matthies: For the whole battery.
- John: How many surveyors were there in your battery?
- Matthies: There was just one survey team per battery.
- John: What would the other jobs be in your immediate area? For example, you were away from the guns, the guns were half a mile to a mile away, and you were sitting at a table, and I'll ask some questions about that, but there was a radio operator?
- Matthies: Yes.
- John: There would have been a battery commander?
- Matthies: Yes.
- John: What other jobs?
- Matthies: The cook, the kitchen crew.
- John: But they weren't doing anything while you were on a fire mission. When you were firing the guns, when the guns were firing, what other people were there doing the plot, plotting the fire mission for the guns? There was you, there was a wireless operator, there was a battery commander, and what other jobs? A messenger, I would imagine.
- Matthies: We said radio operator?
- John: Right, radio operator.
- Matthies: That's about it.
- John: Really that's a very small group of people.
- Matthies: Right.

- John: Tell me what your job would be, how you would get the information you would need to do your job and how you did your job.
- Matthies: As survey team, we are given a map of the area where we were located, where the enemy was and so forth. And the first thing we had to do was from some reference point establish the gun position so we could actually put a pin in the map saying here is gun number one and so forth. When these were accurately surveyed in, then it was the fire controller's job to determine the powder charge, the direction of the gun and so forth, actually aiming the gun. Initially I was in a survey team, then I was transferred from the survey team in A Battery to the headquarters, where I became what they called the horizontal control operator; that's the one who took care of the map. Keeping the map up-to-date, where the enemy was, getting messages from the radio operator or the telephone, where the enemy was and where the frontline was so we would know where to shoot and where not to shoot.
- John: How long were you in the battery? How long did you train as a surveyor in the battery before you moved on?
- Matthies: Probably about three months.
- John: Three months, okay. For example, you would be at this desk and you would know where you were, or where the guns were. A fire mission would come in, which is what they call it now; I don't know what they called it then.
- Matthies: That's what they called it then.
- John: The radio operator says that there is a forward observer who says that there is an enemy column at point X and you're at point Y, the guns are at point Y and they need a fire mission. He gives that information to the battery commander; what do you do?
- Matthies: I plot it and at the same time I'm plotting where the fire mission is I'm having someone check to verify that we still have accurate results as to where our G.I.s are. In other words, make sure that the line hasn't moved; we don't want to be shooting at our own people. So we had somebody in what you would call "Intelligence," usually an intelligence officer, who at the same time I'm figuring out the fire mission is verifying that the method that we have for firing is accurate. And then we would usually fire at points like a railroad crossing—[blank tape]—or some highway or a building, or actually a reference point to where they had seen artillery firing at them.

- John: Say, “Okay, we’re going to fire at point Y” and someone is verifying that to you. You mentioned before you had verify altitudes, air density and different things like that; how would you do that? Would you just rely on your map for altitude?
- Matthies: We’d rely on the map for the altitude.
- John: Why does that make a difference?
- Matthies: If you were, say, in a valley that’s a thousand feet above sea level and all of a sudden the target is up at the top of a hill, at say five hundred feet higher, you’re gonna have to make a different calculation than if it were reversed.
- John: But air density, how did you calculate air density?
- Matthies: Well there was a factor that we put in, I don’t remember—we had slide rules which we used to make all the calculations and a certain formula that we used [conversation between John & woman about slide rules] and that’s what we did. While I was figuring out the direction to set the guns, the intelligence officer was verifying that it was a legitimate mission.
- John: So it would be your calculations—what would you finally hand over to the gun crew? What would you tell them? What would be the figures or the statistics? Was that your responsibility? Was that the information you gave?
- Matthies: Yes.
- John: What kind of signal would you give them?
- Matthies: You’d give them a direction in degrees.
- John: Like a compass?
- Matthies: Yes, like a compass direction, and then the elevation of the gun, the powder charge you were to use behind it.
- John: You calculated that?
- Matthies: Yes. And that’s about it. By the time you gave them the elevation, the direction and the powder charge, that’s what they needed.
- Woman: Did you find out if you were accurate? [unintelligible]

- Matthies: Usually the mission would come in past the forward observer and he was waiting for the—and then he would let you know if you hit the target or not.
- Woman: So were you pretty accurate?
- Matthies: Oh sure.
- John: How long between the time the guy on the radio receiving information from the forward observer—how long would it take you to calculate the information to pass on to the battery?
- Matthies: Maybe a minute and a half.
- John: How many calculations were involved in that?
- Matthies: It was really—direction, first you'd have to get the direction in degrees from true north, and the elevation of the target, then you'd get the weather report to give you the direction of the wind and the density, and those were all factors you put in. And you had a formula, and I don't remember the formula, but you would put one thing in first, the direction of the wind, you added that, density, and then you'd determine how much you had to compensate for that. You'd put that in the slide rule and you'd come up with a number.
- John: Did you keep any of that equipment, the slide rule or anything?
- Matthies: Oh no, that belonged to the government.
- John: Did you ever have competitions? I heard there were competitions between batteries for accuracy and for time.
- Matthies: There was, especially in training.
- John: Did you have competitions like that?
- Matthies: Yeah.
- John: How did your battery fare when you were compared with the rest of the battalions?
- Matthies: We were always right in there.
- Woman: There was only one surveyor per battery?

- Matthies: It was a surveying crew. It's just like one you see out on the road when they're making the road, you have a guy looking through a transit.
- John: But you were the one, the surveyor, there was a crew, but the crew consisted of, as we said before, the radio operator, the surveyor, the battery commander, who was maybe the intelligence officer or someone else, but you are the one who actually did the calculations to tell them where to shoot? The battery commander didn't make that decision, you made that decision and you relayed that?
- Matthies: Right. Uh-huh.
- John: And so it was your information that determined the accuracy of the battery?
- Matthies: Right.
- John: You and the forward observer, it was your calculations that put it on target?
- Matthies: Right.
- Woman: You hear in the Gulf War and other things about people killed by friendly fire. Was someone surveying incorrectly or were people given wrong targets?
- Matthies: Well, if people gave the wrong information, for example, say that—
- Woman: They said it was an enemy but it wasn't and you calculated—.
- Matthies: They said our front line was here and it turned out that the front line was there. If somebody gave you wrong information then you could—
- John: But if your map was inaccurate too, if the elevation, for example, was incorrect and you calculated based on the elevation on the map, you could fall short, too.
- Matthies: Well, many times what you would do is fire a round at the target and they would tell you that you were two hundred yards to the right, then you'd make a correction and fire a second round.
- John: You would have to recalculate based on that information, or would that be the battery's job?
- Matthies: I would make the adjustment.

- John: And you would feed that to the battery?
- Matthies: Right.
- John: And the battery would shoot on your information?
- Matthies: Right. But the forward observer would tell you how far off you were. And of course a lot of that was dependent on his guesses, whether it was actually two hundred yards or three hundred yards.
- John: Was that achieving what you wanted to, was that satisfying, what you wanted to contribute to the war? It seems a little remote, and you are an eighteen-year-old boy and you weren't directly in combat. Did that satisfy you? Were you happy with what you were doing?
- Matthies: Yup, uh-huh. In fact, I would not have been one to point a gun at somebody and pull the trigger. And by shooting a gun which shot up to ten miles distance, I never saw the results first hand, in a sense. Well, for example—
- John: Did you ever see them firsthand? Did you ever go forward and see the damage caused by—
- Matthies: Oh yes, we went forwards sometimes when there were dead bodies still lying on the ground.
- John: How'd that make you feel?
- Matthies: Not very nice; not very comfortable. The most eerie one I saw was in a river when I was—in fact, I think it was the Elbe; I'm not sure, either the Elbe or the Rhine. But there was half a body; it was just cut off completely right about here. The trousers and everything were still on but the other half probably was down in the water somewhere. It made me a little sick, anyway, not sick to my stomach, but just sick to see it. And it kept you well aware that you were in the war for keeps.
- John: And you weren't invincible?
- Matthies: Right, uh-huh.
- Woman: Where you ever in fire?
- Matthies: Well, we had artillery fire come in at us once in a while where we would have to take cover, but I was never—the closest happened was when I was carrying a door, we were going to make a little hut for ourselves, I was carrying a door which I had ripped off a barn when shrapnel hit the door.

Speaking about hearing the results, many times when you got into an area and your guns were set up, you would fire a shot or two to orientate them to make sure you're in the ballpark. For example, we would fire at a certain railroad crossing or a highway crossing so we had a reference point and we knew what that was. So when we plotted a target we had to go so far left or so far, ya know, and we'd always go back to that target again and leave the gun oriented right there because it was in the middle of the area where we were gonna be working. And I can remember one time they said there was a wagon coming down this highway where we were focused on a certain intersection and the forward observer told us just exactly when to shoot and we hit this wagon right dead on. So you know you did damage and you had results, even though you didn't have to look at your personal results.

John: So the three months, was it on-the-job training to learn to be a surveyor?

Matthies: Yeah, that's a good word for it.

John: It wasn't as structured as some of your other training had been? You were learning to do it.

Matthies: We still had calisthenics in the morning and things of that type, but it was mostly classroom training.

John: And that went on for about three months?

Matthies: Well, that went on from—after we got there I think it started September 1st and it went on closer to six months.

John: And you said you moved on to battalion headquarters?

Matthies: It was the same general area, it didn't change.

John: But your job changed?

Matthies: It was just my assignment. My job changed from surveyor to what they called horizontal control officer.

John: How did that happen? You excelled and you think you got recognition for it? Someone couldn't play the piano?

Matthies: Actually, I don't really know.

John: Was it a promotion?

- Matthies: Yeah, then I became a sergeant, Fourth Technical Sergeant.
- John: What rank had you been up until?
- Matthies: A Corporal.
- John: And you got that after basic training?
- Matthies: After basic training I became a Private First Class and then Corporal was a classification for a survey team member.
- John: I see. Do you remember your service number?
- Matthies: No.
- John: So for three months you were learning how to be a surveyor; what would be a routine day during the period you were at the battery?
- Matthies: We'd get up and fall out for [unintelligible] and you'd come in and make your bed and things like you usually do. And maybe there was calisthenics for the first hour and then there was classroom training. And then sometimes they would change it to field training.
- John: When there was classroom training, was it just all of the surveyors being trained?
- Matthies: Right.
- John: How many were being trained at the same time you were?
- Matthies: In three battalions there would have been three sets of surveyors. You weren't in surveyor school the whole entire day, you were there for maybe a couple of hours and then everyone say from ten to twelve went to their own specialty that they were being trained for. A radio operator would know how to take a radio apart and put it back together and things like that. But then you still got training in shooting the gun.
- John: So you'd go out in the afternoon maybe and practice what you'd learned in the classroom?
- Matthies: Right. Maybe in the afternoon a surveyor team might have to go surveying a gun position. And of course there were days you actually went out and you practiced firing.
- John: It would make no difference to you as a surveyor whether it was day or night doing your job?

- Matthies: No, you had to do what you could. Some of the night surveying jobs you couldn't do because you couldn't see where you're trying to sight to.
- John: But as far as a surveyor was concerned, whether it was night or day, you just fed off of the information that was given to you, calculated based on what the forward observer said, they're at point X, and you calculated based on that information?
- Matthies: Yeah. There were two horizontal control operators that operated off this map.
- John: At the battalion or the company level?
- Matthies: At the battalion level. So that we could give round-the-clock service, you might say. There was somebody always awake by that fire control station, and the radio operator was always awake.
- John: So you got your technical sergeant when you went to battalion, and that was about when?
- Matthies: Probably January or February.
- John: How was Christmas spent in 1943?—**[End of Tape 1, Side B]**
- Matthies: You were just plain off and you had a big Christmas dinner, it was like a holiday.
- John: Did you call home? Was it possible to call home?—**[Break in Tape]**—You went after that on thirteen weeks of maneuvers in Tennessee; what area of Tennessee?
- Matthies: The Smoky Mountains
- John: Smoky Mountains. You ranged all over?
- Matthies: I do remember one particular town called McMinnville, which is right in the middle of the Smoky Mountains. I looked it up on the map; you can see the general area.
- John: Where all of the other battalions there, the 379th, the 340th, and the 341st?
- Matthies: Yeah. And maneuvers was just like a mock war.
- John: Where there other units there, infantry units?

- Matthies: Yeah, infantry units, artillery units, ordnance units.
- Woman: But you didn't really use artillery shells or anything?
- Matthies: There were certain areas where we did.
- John: After you finished this, did you get any promotion at the end of your training before you went overseas?
- Matthies: No. Basically speaking, [cuckoo clock and chimes] the promotions were almost like job promotions. In other words, a head of a unit was a captain and a lieutenant would be a fire officer. In other words, it was a certain classification and it let you change classifications, and if you changed jobs you would stay in the same level of pay and the same level of job classification or promotion classification, however you want to word it.
- John: And so then you were ready to ship out?
- Matthies: Yeah, uh-huh. From there we went up to—and I don't remember the name of the place; it was up near Orange, New Jersey. And we were there for a couple of weeks while we were waiting to get on board ship.
- John: Did you talk to your parents?
- Matthies: I called them, sure, before we went overseas. In fact, I got an extra furlough, a second furlough, because my grandmother died and I got a couple of days to go home for that.
- Woman: Did you go home by train?
- Matthies: Yeah.
- John: Must have taken a few days.
- Matthies: I was only there for the funeral and then I came right back again.
- John: But you'd had another furlough before that?
- Matthies: Before that, right.
- John: For embarkation leave? And how long was that?
- Matthies: Probably ten days.
- John: Was that your first leave basically?

- Matthies: It was a leave after basic training.
- John: How long was that?
- Matthies: About the same thing, about ten days.
- John: Did you go home?
- Matthies: Yeah, uh-huh.
- John: Did the Army pay that for you or was that out of your pocket?
- Matthies: The trip home came out of my pocket, I remember.
- John: Was everyone happy to see you?
- Matthies: Oh yes, uh-huh.
- John: They thought you'd lost weight and grown?
- Matthies: That sort of thing, right. But you know it's funny; it's good to be home but you felt like you belonged somewhere else. You wanted to get back in the unit and get on with it. I didn't like the Army as a career as far that was concerned but I felt like I belonged in the Service and the trip home was just sort of a slowing down of having progress take place as far as getting it over with.
- Woman: Did Grandma [his mother] cry when you left?
- Matthies: No, she was very gaunt, very careful—
- Woman: Probably waited until after you left.
- Matthies: Perhaps. I remember even when my dad died she said, "Well there, I got it done." She was talking about so many people who weep all over the place, you know. She was very ruggedly constructed.
- John: Did you ever have a man-to-man talk with your father?
- Matthies: No.
- John: He never pulled you aside and said, "Son, I'm proud of you for what you're doing?"
- Matthies: No.

- John: Did you have that kind of a relationship with your dad?
- Matthies: No. I'll tell ya, there was a funny thing. My brother, who was seven years older, could do no wrong. He was the high scorer in the suburban conference basketball team, he was the starting end on the football team, he was vice-president of the class and all that sort of thing. And all I got from my dad was, "If you would only be half as good as Karl," that kind of comment when the report cards came out or whatever happened. So I got in the habit of doing everything that Karl didn't do. When I went to high school I wouldn't play on the basketball team because I might not get to be the captain of the team. I went out for the chorus and I sang in the chorus. I even took some of the subjects that my brother didn't take. I always had the feeling that my dad didn't understand me. I felt he loved me but he didn't understand me. We didn't have a close relationship in that respect. And the other thing was every generation has its own kind of music. And so just like rock maybe drives us buggy today, boogie-woogie drove him buggy. And that's all I was interested in playing at the time was boogie-woogie and jazz and razzamatazz piano, and he thought—I think he had the feeling I would probably go to hell playing in these dens of iniquity. [John & woman laugh] And he never could quite see the value of the beauty—I think I thought it was a generation gap.
- Woman: Is that why you picked the Army, because Karl picked the Navy?
- Matthies: I was in the Service before he was. Because he by that time was married and had a defense job.
- Woman: Why did you pick the Army? You volunteered?
- Matthies: I volunteered to be inducted. I went to the Draft Board and asked to be drafted with the next month's quota.
- John: Rather than wait for his number to come up.
- Matthies: I was anxious to get into Service and get away from home. And you couldn't even get a decent job because you were classified and expected to go in.
- Woman: But you were old enough?
- Matthies: Yes, I was eighteen.
- Woman: I thought you were younger.
- Matthies: I was eighteen in January and in April I was in Service.

- John: Who wrote to you? When you wrote, who wrote back? Did your dad write to you?
- Matthies: My dad wrote occasionally. My mother wrote real regularly. My twin sister Charlotte wrote and Margaret wrote. Fred Krieger wrote. He was trying to convert me to Lutheranism, really long, long letters about the gospel mostly.
- John: You were LDS at the time?
- Matthies: No.
- John: Did you go to religious services on Sunday?
- Matthies: We went to the Evangelical United Brethren Church, which later on became the United Methodist.
- John: Where you more religious than the average trooper?
- Matthies: I wasn't that religious as far as my belief in Christ was concerned, but I somehow or other felt inclined to live a clean life. Most people were carousing around getting drunk and picking up some woman and having an illicit affair or things of this type, and that was not ever my inclination. I was very squeaky clean.
- John: You left for war on what ship? Where were you when D-Day happened?
- Matthies: In New York; we didn't go overseas.
- John: Do you remember what you were doing at the time you heard the news?
- Matthies: Not specifically.
- John: What was your feeling? What was the feeling amongst your—
- Matthies: That made me tense because you knew that—it made me tenser because you knew that I was going to become part of it. We got to realize that we were on the edge of the ocean waiting to get on the next ship going over there to join the war.
- Woman: And you heard about all of the losses and the casualties?
- Matthies: Yeah.
- Woman: Did that scare you?

Matthies: Well not really, because I knew I was going to be from six to ten miles behind the front line. It helped a little bit. And we also knew that the Nazi army was on the run.

John: When did you leave New York? Do you remember the date?

Matthies: I don't remember the date.

John: Remember the month?

Matthies: It was in June.

John: In June of 1944?

Matthies: Yeah.

John: How long after D-Day?

Matthies: Maybe a week.

John: Oh, that was really soon.

Woman: And you rode past the Statue of Liberty?

Matthies: Yup.

John: Did you see it? Were you up on deck?

Matthies: Just very, very briefly. I saw it going out and I saw it coming in.

John: And what ship were you on?

Matthies: Queen Elizabeth going out and Queen Mary coming in.

John: It wasn't its normal luxury trip?

Matthies: Oh no, it was built as a troop carrier. All the luxury had been stripped.

Woman: Tell about how you really basically had to stay under the water level the most of the time, tell us about that; we missed that.

Matthies: Well, because of all the levels of the ship, there was a big dining area and the officers got to be above water level and the enlisted men got to be below water level. And the only time you got up anywhere near it was when you had breakfast or your meals, which you were assigned a certain specific time, and then you were given maybe fifteen minutes on the deck

for calisthenics. The rest of the time about the only place to go was on your bunk.

Woman: And you weren't in a convoy?

Matthies: We weren't in the convoy, no. Because the Queen Elizabeth could travel faster by itself than having to wait for cruise ships and destroyers and so forth and it was less noticeable.

Woman: How long did it take?

Matthies: Six days. Every day at a certain time we changed the clocks one hour.

Woman: So did you have any jobs at all to do while you were crossing or you were just kind of on your own?

Matthies: Nothing. They gave you the fifteen minutes on deck doing calisthenics to try to keep you in some semblance of limber.

Woman: You didn't even necessarily have bedtime and rising time because the clocks kept changing.

Matthies: Just eating time.

John: What did you do; how did you spend your time?

Matthies: Probably reading a book or talking.

John: For six days?

Matthies: Uh-huh. It seemed like a long time because there was nothing to do.

John: Did they give you any classes? Any orientation as to Europe? Did they give you anything to read about Europe or about England?

Matthies: No, all there was, there was a few announcements like a weather forecast and progress of the war and things like this and bulletins over the loudspeaker system.

Woman: Were you given any rules about how to treat the Europeans?

Matthies: Not how to treat them, no.

John: For example, did they say you will be received well by the English, they are a friendly people?

- Matthies: That sort of thing, yeah. And there was a lot of instruction about how to treat them with respect to morals.
- John: Did they give you a handbook or anything?
- Matthies: Not really, no. In other words, they didn't want the G.I.s that go over to England to take advantage of all the young girls.
- John: You arrived where in England?
- Matthies: Glasgow, Scotland.
- John: And there was no escort with your ship?
- Matthies: No.
- John: From Glasgow where did you go?
- Matthies: Down someplace into Wales.
- John: Do you remember a town that was near?
- Matthies: I don't recall a town at the moment, but we were not too far from London. I didn't get a pass to London because we weren't there long enough, but a few of them did.
- John: How long were you in Wales?
- Matthies: Probably two or three weeks.
- John: Oh, not very long at all.
- Matthies: No, because as soon as the beachhead was established sufficiently then we went over and landed on the continent.
- John: Do you remember what units were on the ship with you?
- Matthies: The three batteries, the 739th—
- John: The 740th, the 741st?
- Matthies: Right. And a lot of infantry.
- John: Cannon fodder.
- Matthies: I don't know how many were on the ship, but there were several thousand.

John: How did you travel down to Wales?

Matthies: Train.

John: Did you have your guns with you?

Matthies: Oh yeah, we were issued guns at that time. We had our guns with us.

John: Your personal gun, where were you issued that?

Matthies: That was issued in the States.

John: And you carried that with you?

Matthies: Yes.

Woman: What kind of weapon did you have?

Matthies: A .38 caliber carbine. That's a small rifle.

John: Did you qualify with that?

Matthies: Yeah.

John: How'd you qualify?

Matthies: Expert shot. The only one I didn't qualify as expert on was the handgun, the .45.

John: Were you issued a .45?

Matthies: No, that was in basic training, in target practice.

John: Between the two rifles that you had, which was your preference?

Matthies: I like the carbine.

John: Why?

Matthies: It was lighter in weight and it shot very fast.

John: Was it automatic or semi-automatic?

Matthies: Semi-automatic.

- John: And you carried that one weapon throughout the whole war?
- Matthies: Right.
- John: The same one, you never lost one?
- Matthies: No.
- John: How much spare ammunition would you carry at any given time?
- Matthies: Gosh, I don't remember the numbers, but we had an ammunition belt.
- John: What would you carry on your ammunition belt aside from ammunition? What other things?
- Matthies: Nothing.
- John: Canteen?
- Matthies: Oh, yeah, that could hang from it. I never carried a canteen because we always were pretty close to the kitchen. [both laugh]
- Woman: Was the Army food any good?
- Matthies: I enjoyed it. I was 6'4-1/2" when I went into Service and 6'6" when I came out.
- John: What about C-rations? When you were out in the field for thirteen weeks, you ate C-rations I assume?
- Matthies: Yeah.
- John: How did you fare with those?
- Matthies: I ate 'em, sure. I can backtrack and tell ya the one time we decided we wanted something other than C-rations. And so on the weekend when we had a break from the maneuvers, we went to a little one-room cabin. And there was a little Afro-American woman in it, middle-aged probably. And we asked her if she could cook us a southern fried chicken dinner. And she went out and she run after a couple of chickens and fixed up the dinner and we had the nicest fried chicken dinner you can imagine, ten of us guys in this little old one-room shack.
- Woman: Did you pay her?
- Matthies: Oh yeah, ten bucks a piece.

- Woman: And she was happy to do it.
- Matthies: She was happy to do it. I think she was happy to do it for the money, and also happy to do it for the G.I.s.
- Woman: For the war effort?
- Matthies: Uh-huh. But over there, in June of '44, England was like an arsenal, one great big arsenal of soldiers and tanks and trucks and guns and food and ammunition and gasoline and bombs and what all. It was just like an ordnance depot.
- Woman: Did you feel pretty much well received?
- Matthies: Yeah. There were always some G.I.s that would take advantage of situations or get where they shouldn't and would always get in a fight or things like this, so you always had problems when lots of people are in a congested area.
- John: Was Joe Douglas one of those people?
- Matthies: Joe Douglas was one of those who used to like to get into trouble. In fact, one time we were sitting in the PX and some guy came up behind him and brushed him on his shoulder accidentally and he was going to get very severe and he took offense and started calling him names and he wanted to make something of it and this sort of thing. And I thought, "Oh you dumb guy if you want to get into fights," and I thought, "I'm just going to get out of the way," and I got up like this and the guys all sat down. [laughs] And I suddenly realized that they sat down because they saw me and it ended the whole fight. [all laugh]
- Woman: They thought you were getting up to fight and you were getting up to leave.
- John: How tall was Joe Douglas?
- Matthies: Average height. I would say 5'9" or 5'10", I really don't know, but he wasn't a big guy at all.
- John: You hung around a lot with him?
- Matthies: He liked to fight. We hung around together. One time when we went on maneuvers we went to McMinnville together and the next day we were going to church. It was at the Protestant church, so we went to church and they were giving communion and I took the communion and he didn't.

And I said, “How come you didn’t take communion? You tell me you’re so religious,” and so forth. He said, “Well, I know I wasn’t going to live the religion and I didn’t want to be a hypocrite.” So he decided not to take it; when you take a sacrament it’s asking for forgiveness of your sins and that you intend to lead a new and righteous life and he had no intention of living that kind of new and righteous life. He was the kind that went out every weekend and found someone to share his moments of happiness with.

Woman: Did you ever know what happened to him? Did you ever contact him when the war was over and you all came back?

Matthies: Yes. That’s why we went to Toledo in the first place. We knew he was there and he was going to give me a job as a surveyor. His dad owned a fence company, only he didn’t have enough work to do to keep me busy. But we went back about five years ago with Carol Ann to Toledo because they had the pandas on loan from China and we decided we wanted to see a live panda. We went down there and I looked him up and I didn’t find Joe Douglas in there, but I found Neil Douglas, who I knew was his brother, and the fence company is still down there and I called up Neil. I asked him where Joe was. It was very peculiar because he didn’t give me an answer. He said, “Who wants to know?” and so forth. I told him who I was and I was in basic with him. Finally he said, “Well, Joe isn’t living any more; he died over twenty years ago.” He must have been in his forties when he died.

Woman: What did he die of?

Matthies: I asked him what he died of and he said his wife is also dead. I said, “What was the cause of death?” And he said, “I’d rather not get into it, but let’s just say he got into the wrong kind of stuff.” So I think he might have got on drugs of some sort. He had two boys and the boys he hadn’t seen in years; they were living down in Florida somewhere. They would be Neil’s nephews. So that was that.

Woman: Did you know Mom when you were over there? Did you write to her ever?

Matthies: A couple of times.

Woman: You weren’t really sweethearts when you left?

Matthies: We had dated in high school on a double date and we left—I wrote to her; it was patriotic to write to the G.I.s.

Woman: Did she write to you?

- Matthies: She wrote to me, I wrote to her and I wrote to her girlfriend, Joan Kurshner. A lot of people were writing and I always answered the letters.
- John: Did anyone knit you socks? Did you get packages from home?
- Matthies: Yeah, cookies, not socks, but cookies and goodies mostly.
- Woman: From your mom mostly?
- Matthies: My mother, Winnie, Charlotte, Margaret. I had a sister—and then Uncle Fred, Margaret's husband, he used to write me and try to convert me to Lutheranism.
- Woman: I didn't realize you weren't Lutheran. I thought you were Lutheran.
- John: What was your religion on your dog tags?
- Matthies: Protestant. It was Protestant, Catholic or Jewish.
- John: Do you still have your dog tags?
- Matthies: Yeah, somewhere, and I have a box of old souvenirs tucked up.
- John: I'd like to photocopy your dog tags.
- Matthies: I think I can find 'em.
- John: Be nice to have a couple of photocopies and any other mementos. I don't want to take them, I just want to copy them.
- Matthies: I have a Bronze Star. I don't really recall; I'll have to look and see what's there. I don't have an awful lot.
- John: We were up in Wales. You were in Wales two or three weeks; what were you doing during that time? Basically stretching your legs?
- Matthies: Basically stretching legs, because the whole coast of England was loaded with—it was like an ordnance depot. It was filled with soldiers and equipment and food and gasoline and everything you can imagine.
- John: Where you still with the other units? You were all together still?
- Matthies: Oh yeah, we stayed together as a unit.
- John: The three battalions?

Matthies: Right, uh-huh, the three batteries.

John: Three batteries, I'm sorry. Three battalions, wasn't it?

Matthies: There was the 739th, 740th and 741st.

John: But did the three battalions stay together?

Matthies: Basically, yeah. It was what was called a core, core artillery.

John: Those three were a core?

Matthies: Uh-huh, right.

John: So you stayed there and you didn't get outside the camps very much?

Matthies: No, it was very limited to get passes. You could apply for a pass, but I didn't particularly care if I went.

John: Surely a piano player could have gotten around wherever he wanted?

Matthies: Oh yeah, uh-huh, but there was always a place locally that I could play around on the piano.

John: Did you meet many Welsh people?

Matthies: No, it was—the whole place was, like I said, like a warehouse. And the civilians sort of stayed away because it was filled with G.I.s. It wasn't too much different than when you were on an Army camp.

John: After your three weeks there and you stretched your legs, then you head on off to Europe?

Matthies: Right.

John: How'd you get from Wales to Europe and where did you land in Europe?

Matthies: We went over on landing crafts. You've probably seen pictures of it, the front comes down.

John: Where did you leave England? What port?

Matthies: I'm not even sure.

John: Was it on the Welsh part of the country or—

- Matthies: It was on the Welsh side. I should have this book which Mike has got.
- John: I'd love to read that. I'd be happy to get it and I'd mail it back to you as soon as I've read it, but I'd love to read it. I love history.
- Matthies: There it's got the whole map and everything and all the different battles and has pictures of all the troops.
- John: Are you in any of the pictures?
- Matthies: Yes. It was built just exactly like a high school yearbook; after the war they came out with that. In fact, I had it up there and Mike wanted to borrow it.
- John: Do you mind if I ask Mike if I could borrow it?
- Matthies: No, I don't mind.
- John: I may even get a copy while I'm here.
- Matthies: Yeah, he should. He's had it about a year or so.
- John: Yeah, I remember last year when we were here and you'd mentioned that he's had it. So you went by big landing craft, little landing craft? Were you on a big ship then deployed to a smaller ship to actually land?
- Matthies: We were on a bigger ship crossing the Channel.
- John: Do you remember the name of the ship?
- Matthies: No.
- John: Was it American?
- Matthies: It was not American; it was British, if I remember right. And then when we got there we went out to one of those landing crafts because there weren't any harbors open. We landed on I think was part of the Omaha Beach.
- John: How long after D-Day was this?
- Matthies: Probably the last weekend in June.
- John: So it was only a matter of three weeks after the landing. And you landed at Normandy?

Matthies: Yeah, uh-huh. And it was an island. I think, if I remember, it was called Cézembre, the island of Cézembre, and it was in a harbor and you couldn't use the harbor—[tape ends abruptly]

[End of Interview]