

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
PHILLIP C. STARK
Machine gunner, 84th Division, WWII
1994

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Stark, Phillip C., (1925-). Oral History Interview, 1994.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 176 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Recordings: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 176 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Phillip Stark, a Madison, Wis. native, discusses his World War II service as a machine gunner with the 84th Infantry Division, and provides a vivid account of the fighting in Europe as experienced by a front line infantryman. Stark talks about joining the Enlisted Reserve Corps, basic training with the Air Corps at Shepherd's Field (Texas), transfer to the infantry, and infantry training at Camp Claiborne (Louisiana). He describes social aspects of infantry training including interaction with people from different backgrounds, visiting Alexandria (Louisiana) during the weekends, writing home, and the necessity of adopting different speech patterns and a tough attitude. Stark relates technical aspects of firing a machine gun and the logic behind who was assigned to carry a machine gun. He touches upon the voyage overseas, first experience with the British, and hiking from Omaha Beach to the Siegfried Line. Stark provides a sketch of his first experience with combat, touching upon shelling, emotions while under fire, belief in luck, and the sensation of having his company firing from behind him; he compares his combat situation to what is seen in popular movies. He details the Battle of the Bulge, including the psychological state of soldiers, treatment of prisoners of war, difficulties digging fox holes in the frozen and rocky terrain, and scavenging for supplies in fox holes formerly occupied by American troops. Stark discusses the lack of communication between officers and infantrymen during battle, seeing his friends wounded and killed, and being wounded in the left side of the face. He comments on his four and a half-month hospital stay, talking about his surgeries, wounds of other people in the eye ward, and his feelings about the loss of vision in the left eye. After being discharged from the hospital Stark was transferred to the Air Corps and talks about lack of a specific assignment, assignment to KP duty, and receiving his Silver Star. Stark mentions his return to the United States, use of the GI Bill, and attending two veteran's reunions.

Biographical Sketch

Stark (b. November 17, 1925) served with Company A, 1st Battalion, 344th Regiment, 84th Infantry Division in the European Theater of World War II. He was wounded at the Battle of the Bulge, and received a Silver Star for his actions at that battle. Stark was honorably discharged from service in 1945.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, n.d.

Transcription edited by Abigail Miller, 2002.

Interview Transcript

July 27, 1994

This is Mark Van Ells Wisconsin Veterans Museum Archivist doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Phillip C. Stark, World War II veteran, 84th Division.

Mark: Say hello to the folks Mr. Stark.

Phillip: Good Morning.

Mark: Okay. I'd like to start with some basic information here. It says you were born here in 1925 in Madison.

Phillip: Yes.

Mark: You grew up in Madison, all your life?

Phillip: I'm a life long resident of Madison.

Mark: Were you a child of the depression?

Phillip: Uh, yes, to some extent. Certainly that's true.

Mark: What part of town did you grow up in?

Phillip: Well, I must say that my parents took good care of me. I, most of my, I was born in Nakoma, uh, 734 [unintelligible] Hill in Nakoma. And uh, my father was in real estate business. He, we had a nice home. I must say that he was very adversely affected by the depression and had what I considered to be fairly upsliding through the thirties and just before WWII. In the early forties he died in December of 1945. By the way, just two week after I got out of the service. But--[unintelligible].

Mark: Okay. It says here you entered military service in 1944. So, when Pearl Harbor was bombed you must have been in high school.

Phillip: I was. I was, I graduated from high school in the spring of 1943. And uh, what I did, because at that time many of the graduates were going into the service, and of course it was uncertain as to if you would be drafted immediate or not. I joined the ERC, the Enlisted Reserve Corp, simply because I wanted to be a little more organized

about it. This allowed me--when I graduated, I assume it was May or June, I don't remember the exact date, high school, I was able to immediately start in the summer school at the University of Wisconsin. And I, they had accelerated semesters at that time, and you could get a full semester work in the summer, and a full semester from the fall till mid year, and then a full semester through spring again. So, there was a three-semester year. By enlisting in the ERC, I was able to get two of those semesters in. I went into the service then, in a orderly fashion knowing exactly what was going to happen, not really, but in terms of timing, uh, and I don't remember the exact date, it may well be on my discharge, which I carry a copy of and I'll show you later.

Mark: Okay.

Phillip: Uh, it was certainly January or around the first of the year in 1944. And of course I was still 18 years old.

Mark: Um hmm.

Phillip: In fact I was 18 years old at that time. And, interestingly, I had my 19th birthday on the eve of my induction. Our first attack, of our division, was on the 18th of November; my birthday is on the 17th of November so I spent my birthday in preparation of that experience.

Mark: Hmm. Doesn't sound like much of a birthday.

Phillip: It was not.

Mark: Of course reading here, your little manuscript here, um, doesn't sound like you had much of a Christmas either.

Phillip: No. That was, no, that was of course.

Mark: Okay, we'll come back to that.

Phillip Yes.

Mark: I'm interested in the ERC. I'm not familiar with this at all. What the activity--

Phillip: Well, to be honest with you, all of this is fifty years ago, I'm not an expert on it myself. It was a program that allowed people to enlist,

and then, and I don't remember how it worked myself, but all I know the reason, the total reason I did it was because, that allowed me to, if I was drafted I had to sit there not knowing which time I would have to go. This way I was able to know I could get a year in college before. And I wasn't trying to avoid anything at the time. I just simply, it was a better program for me.

Mark: Yeah. Yeah, was there any sort of military training involved, did you have any activities?

Phillip: Not during the period until I was actually inducted.

Mark: I see. Okay, and then you went in to active duty, I guess is what you call it.

Phillip: I, yes, I try to remember, I think it was, I reported in to--Chicago. I had to take a train down to Chicago to report. Was it, I'm pretty sure it was, I can't remember the name of the camp. Anyway, I was inducted at that time. Can I just turn that off and then I can.

Mark: As we left off, you were in Chicago.

Phillip: Now I was inducted in Chicago.

Mark: Now is where you did the physical and got sworn in and the whole business.

Phillip: Yes. Yes. The physical, sworn in, uh issued some gear and then.

Mark: Got your hair cut.

Phillip: Got the hair cut and went there. I, interestingly at that time, I had always been interested, like a lot of kids, in airplanes. So naturally, I asked for the air corps. Uh, they said, no, there's no way you'll get in the Air Corps. And as it turned out, they sent me to Shepherd's Field, Texas in the Air Corps. Which is exactly what they said they would not do. Uh, I had very little input. Um, and I had my Shepherd's Field, Texas, I had my basic training in the Air Corps.

Mark: And that consisted of what?

Phillip: Well, my recollection was that it was like a six weeks introduction to the weapons, and marching, the drill and all of the things that I'm sure you're aware of.

Mark: Um hum.

Phillip: And uh, really a good deal of physical development. You worked hard. I remember it well. I had no idea exactly where I was going to end up in the Air Corps. But, I remember it well in Texas at that time, like it is now, Shepherd's Field was out on the prairie and a lot of dust, and when it rained, it rained mud, literally. We tried to keep our barracks clean, but the dust was in everything. It was just a mess. Interesting experience.

Mark: I was at Shepherd Field too.

Phillip: Oh, were you?

Mark: Just for the record.

Phillip: Oh. Many years later. Like, it must have been fifty years.

Mark: It was 1982 is when it was.

Phillip: Okay. Well, I tell you, is it still that way?

Mark: Pretty much. The mud balls were. I remember the mud balls.

Phillip: Oh yeah.

Mark: It was spring so one day it would be 90 and the next day it would be 30.

Phillip: Right. I don't have a clear recollection of it. Nothing seemed to be outstanding about that time. I will say that the people, the kids that I was with, remember, I was 18. I was just a kid. Were to a large degree much like I was.

Mark: I was going to ask.

Phillip: In school, probably many of them would be interested in either, had some college or had by that time I had the first year of college, or

would be going to college. Definitely had aspirations for doing something with their lives.

Mark: Um hmm.

Phillip: I emphasize that because at this point then, after I finished my basic training, of course the infantry was still was building up, so they started if you'll recall, you heard the ASTP--

Mark: Um hmm.

Phillip: --people, who were in a college program, they were taking many of those and filling up divisions that had, and they were also taking people from the Air Corps. So, as I recall, through the luck of the draw, I was one of the lucky ones who was transferred at that point to the infantry. I was given a one week delay en route, I was able to get on an air, uh, you'll have to remember that at that time, air planes and air travel weren't the same, air planes existed, but air travel as we know it today didn't. Everything was by train. I got on a train and had to take all my gear, and went home for close to a week then got back on the train and reported to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. Now this is the part of my military career that frankly I guess I'm most proud of and also have the greatest recollection. Um, I will tell you that I reported all by myself; I didn't come in with a whole bunch of people, being shepherded into this thing. And I had to find my way to; I was assigned to A Company of the first battalion of the 334th infantry division. And uh, I had to find first of all, struggle if you've ever seen an infantry camp, especially all of the various barracks and rows, the fact that you can find A company headquarters was not easy, I found it and I reported to Captain, to the Captain, saluted him, and he looked at me and I was at that time 6'6" tall, probably weighed 170 pounds, I now weigh 200 pounds still not fat, but at that time I was downright skinny. But he looked at me and said, "Ah, here's our machine gunner." Just like that. That was, and of course the reason for that is the infantry always looked for larger people to carry a machine gun, cause as I recall the machine gun itself without tripods, but with a bipod on the barrel weighed in the neighborhood of 35-37 pounds. And of course this is a gun that you had to run with and to live with, it was like the rifle of a rifleman. And of course with the tripod, I'm sure you know this, that 30 caliber light machine gun is with a shoulder stock is fired much like a rifle with a tripod to hold up. So anyway, it needed a bigger person, because the larger the person, the easier, the ratio was such that you

could run and carry that gun. I also remember that during all my training all through combat my right shoulder or both shoulders to some extent, my right shoulder was constantly black and blue from that thing bouncing around on my shoulder as I ran. Anyway, I was, suddenly found myself in an instant as a machine gunner. I'm sure you also are aware that an infantry company or I should say a rifle company is made up of four platoons. The first three platoons, which are the rifle, and the fourth platoon is the weapons platoon. We have two light machine guns with, so you have two machine gunners, one for each gun. Two, second gunners and then three ammunition bearer for each one. Those were the two machine gun squads that work with the rifle, the first three platoons, the rifle companies. And they really were assigned in combat to the companies, companies operating around them; I'll get back to that. Then you had additionally in that platoon, the three mortar squads and the mortar squads were set up much the same with the ammunition bearers, gunners and [unintelligible]. So, the, I reported then to the barracks. There were four barracks, one for each platoon, and I walked in and it happened that all the guys were in there, and I walked in and looked around. Now I recall, I told you that I found many of the people in the Air Corps were much like I was, brought up in the same kind of middle class home. And as I walked in, not being discriminatory, but I had to tell you that there were five Indian kids. One did not speak English, or could barely, very rudiment.

Mark: You mean Native American, not Asian Indian.

Phillip: Yeah, no, Native American Indians.

Mark: Yes.

Phillip: There were four others who were, I will say, spirited. Very spirited! I have to tell you that all of these people that I'm going to tell you about were it seems a shock, a culture shock for me, became my best friends and the ones I remember best.

Mark: Um hmm.

Phillip: So, there was, my squad leader, he had the two machine gun squads, uh, the squad leader, the machine gun squad leader was a fellow by the name of Eddie Kuna who was a Spanish or Mexican kid who was a zoot-suiter in San Francisco prior to the service.

Mark: Oh, I know what a zoot-suiter is.

Phillip: Yeah.

Mark: But they were, Los Angeles Zoot Suit riots,

Phillip: Right and they were just kind of a gang man. But he was also a boxer and a tough little kid is what he was. And uh, there were addition you see, about three or four more Mexican kids. The other machine gunner, I was, suddenly found myself, was a fellow by the name of Edward Tinney, his nickname was Tinney Epske, a guy who really became my closest friend, one of my closest friends in that experience. Uh, very self confident, uh, strong, big kid, uh about six feet-two, broad shoulders, athletic, a take charge guy you know. I guess it was really fortunate you know because, he kind of took over, he took me over the project and introduced me around you know and kind of lead, I guess to some extent all through the experience of that relationship it remained that way. Um, my second gunner, also brand newly assigned was a fellow who was really the closest person that I was, he was killed at the time I was wounded. He was a fellow by the name of Wilbur Wibb Thurercauf T-H-U-R-E-R-C-A-U-F, I believe. He was a ASTP transplant. Then there was the second gunner under Tinney Epske was a fellow by the name of Howard Shore III. A, he was more unusual in this post then even I was because he was a, one of the elite aristocratic from Philadelphia main line, and he was semi-intellectual and so forth. Anyway, but I'm trying to convey to you is that there was just this whole array of different personalities.

Mark: Um hmm. And from various regions of the country.

Phillip: And all over the country, uh just in totally different backgrounds. And I had lived with literally a sheltered life and I found myself in a life where we were all so different. You certainly, you had to adopt a certain tough front and you had to talk the language which was to say the least, tough. It was interesting, for some reason I was able to adopt that language use it when necessary, but I never carried any of that language beyond my experience. When I got out I never felt totally comfortable with it. Never-the-less it was, if you were in as a machine gunner I really in an essence in charge of the second gunner and my three ammunition bearers. So you had to kind of respect that I was the usual skinny tall kid--it was an unusual role for me. I trained with them, it was generally in the spring or someplace in the

summer when I went to the infantry, when I trained with them until fall and this was a period of my life when I really toughened up, physically tough. We, that training was exceedingly vigorous. We did 25 mile hikes with I had carried a gun on our shoulder all the way. And I was fortunate; I really had the stamina and everything to do it. Tinny Epske who was the guy who was just the bravado. I remember we finished a 25 mile hike and we were in Claiborne, Louisiana and we would be out, anyway, we came across a stand they was selling watermelon and everybody, always had what they call a meat wagon followed us for those who couldn't, remember it was hot, very hot and steamy and terrible uncomfortable. Those who actually fainted or dropped out or couldn't walk any further or whatever, they picked up and took in the meat wagon. Well, just to show off toward the end of the march, Tinny and I, we each bought a watermelon and carried that in addition on the other shoulder. We each had a gun on the other one. That was pure attitude, dumb. But it also for some reason, I did have the ability to do it even though I was skinny tall kid. But we uh, this was an area, and I noticed one of your questions, referred to this, I think you asked the question, "Did your training prepare you for combat?"

Mark: Uh hmm.

Phillip: I'd like to just address that.

Mark: Absolutely.

Phillip: This was the period that prepared us as best could we as we could for combat. I would say that no experience; no training could really prepare you for combat. It just is not possible. There are too many psychological factors that aren't present in training that are present. But maybe what it did, it did learn physical sacrifices which you have to make in this training. We went out on biovacs, we were out for a week in the swamps in Louisiana doing maneuvers. And we did have, we had to dig our foxholes. We did have to--you know tanks come over and actually on occasion, on one occasion actually ran over our hole. This is frightening, this is very frightening. And you lived with swamps, snakes, coral snakes, rattle snakes, armadillos, huge, I'm not sure, tarantula type spiders, I always thought they were huge.

Mark: They were big enough.

Phillip: They were big enough. You always had to check your sleeping bag and be sure that there weren't spiders in there. But anyway, it was a good training in that respect because although the conditions were totally different in Europe, certainly, you basically lived outside on the front for a week and then you went back for 24 hours of rest and you were out there again for a week. So you had to sleep in a hole, you had to, in one case its hot and then it turned out in the winter its cold, but both of them were wet. And uh, so it was very uncomfortable, and it did prepare us in that respect. And of course, under those circumstances you become very very close to the people who you're with.

Mark: So, all these people from all across the country somehow gelled together.

Phillip: We really gelled together. You know, not totally but now, there were two of the Indian kids before we left the states who were transferred to the parachute, paratrooper, they became a paratrooper. I remember when we were in this training, a few times that we would, well, if we were in camp in the evening and then in the evening you know, we would go over and have some beers at the canteen is what we called it fifty years ago actually. But um, they had some dances and parties and what not. I'll have to tell you that these two kids, our paten feature, once they got a couple beers in, they'd get wild and they were just unbelievable. They were tough kids. I remember one night one of them was trying to persuade me to go in one of the vans. Well, I turned away from, walked away and before I knew it he backed off, I don't know where he came from but he simply tackled me and pushed me out on the floor, and we both went out right on our face and slid across the floor. What he was trying to do I have no idea, but you know, they were unpredictable and you learn to live with it. But they left us and I didn't get to know them as well. The ones that became very close friends were the other machine gunner, Epske, my second gunner was Thurercauf, Howard Shore III, and then Eddie Kuna, my squad leader and we did, there was a fellow by the name of Albenez who actually was, we were all in the same barracks, well, we weren't either, sorry, he was in the other. There were two barracks in the fort, but he was a Spanish decent, and he was, I remember him he was always carried the words of popular songs. Whenever we'd stop, he'd pull these out and start singing to himself all these songs. He was an unusual character. There were just a lot of people who I became very very fond of. So anyway, I didn't mean to go on.

Mark: No, that's just fine. One more thing about your training. Did you have any sort of equipment shortages or problems? How would you characterize the equipment that you had?

Phillip: Uh, no shortages. You know, I remember absolutely no time that we didn't have what we needed. We worked with what we had. I guess that's part of the training. You don't wish for something, you wish your boots don't get wet and all that sort of stuff. But you didn't get them. You didn't expect to get them. You knew what you had and you worked with it. Uh, but no, our equipment was good and of course we learned our weapons very well. We spent a lot of time firing them and we spent a lot of time cleaning them and my machine gun I would say I could take apart and put together with a blindfold. Literally, that was important because your weapon was, the conditions in combat were terrible and you have to be able to know everything about it. I wish I could remember, I wonder today if I got a hold of a good [unintelligible] machine gun if I could remember because my mind tells me I have no idea where to start but it may be if I had it before me I could still.

Mark: While you were training did you get off the base much? You mentioned --

Phillip: Oh boy, that was something.

Mark: I'm wondering about the northern guy, and Louisiana.

Phillip: Oh yeah. Camp Claiborne, one of five army installations and Air Corp, I think there were four infantries, camps, Beauregard--I'm not going to try and name them all. And then there was an Air Corps field, we were near Alexandria, Louisiana, right in the heart of Louisiana. And uh, so there were five, this little town was surrounded by five army camps. On a Saturday night, they all drained into Alexandria and I, if I had been a citizen of Alexandria I would have left town because it was just a zoo of service men. All having worked, you know, and really letting it go. I went in a total of all that time, I think I went into Alexandria twice and not only was it, you know, you wanted to get away, what you'd really like to do is get away from the infantry and other soldiers and that wasn't the place to go. Not only that, but it was a drunken brawl. Frankly, I then the trip back to the base, there were busses running back and forth was so awful, a bunch of drunken soldiers riding back. Half of

them sleep, half of them sick. It was just a nightmare and it was not something that I liked. So I only went in twice. I did spend a fair amount of time, I'd go to the it is the canteen, I'm trying to think, it funny, it's a total block on that what we called the recreation center on base, because there was a place that you could sit at the desk. I'd always write my letters home. They had a certain number of activities and there were a certain number of people. So a lot, most of the time on the weekend I just stayed at camp and they had dances every now and then. Bring in a bunch of gals and it was all very, it was pretty tame, but it was, what I was.

Mark: If that's what you wanted. Okay. So, you finish your training and you got orders to go.

Phillip: Yeah. The division went to Europe and I don't remember the exact dates but it was the fall of 1944. We shipped out, we took, we trained to Camp Kilbourn in New Jersey. We shipped out from there. We got on a boat. I, this is, well I won't go into that. It was kind of a fun thing. We got there and we were in Camp Kilbourn for a couple of days, two or three days before we got on the ship. I got to go in, I'd never been in New York, and I went into New York and got my first time of ooh and ah's of the Empire State Building and all that sort of stuff. That was a memorable little experience. So I have to, well I won't get into all that. But anyway, we shipped out on the sister ship of the Royal Castle, the Royal Castle being a kind of a I think it was pretty big. I think that, my recollection with that was that ship had a disaster, burned and had many people killed and what not. So a lot of people know Royal Castle. This was, I don't remember the name of our ship, anyway. It took us, we went in a convoy, large convoy, I had no idea how many ships but there were a lot of them, escorted, we had everything we had, I don't even know the ships that well but were surrounded by ships. We zigzagged all the way to Europe and it took us as I recall somewhere around eleven days. You can imagine how slow that was. We did have some, some submarine--U-Boat contacts and what not. And there was we heard some bombs and that sort of thing. By now its non of our convoy has ever sunk. That was a tough experience. They just strip these boats and of course sleeping not annex but you sleep about five high and its just packed in. And of course people get sick and the food is not great and you spent a lot of time out deck. Anybody with claustrophobia would die. So that was an experience.

Mark: So where did you land?

Phillip: We landed in South Hampton, England. And uh, we went to, we got off the boats and went up to Winchester, England and stayed for I would guess five to seven days in the Professional Army Barracks at Winchester. Our first experience with the British, of course at that time [unintelligible] in Europe and overseas anyplace was part of that. And that was an interesting kind of a nice week. These were brick barracks. We slept on bed with straw mattresses. They were different. They weren't beds, they were cots. And uh, but we, the food was good, the weather while we were there was pretty good. It was crisp and clear this would have been in early November and that was a and were were able to spend a little time. Winchester is a very interesting city I haven't visited since. Its a walled old city. So, that was a good experience. Then, we again got on a boat and traveled over to Omaha Beach and we landed at Omaha Beach and got off the boat and hiked down off to where the trucks were and we trucked our way to the Front which was at that time was in Germany in the Siegfried Line off Holland and near Gillinkerken which was the largest city. I have some maps--

Mark: Okay. I think I know where Gillenkerken,

Phillip: Gillinkerken. I'm not very good at maps. But not far from Roughr. Hell and we actually got off Helenberge was this little town where we first left that was the town where we arrived and prepared for our first combat to go up to the lines. It was also the town that after being on the line for a week we would come back to get our 24 hour rest and some hot food. And then so back and forth into town. It was a town that was pretty much leveled it was very badly ruined.

Mark: Was it in Holland or Germany?

Phillip:I It's uh, Pellemborg, you know I've never quite, let me explain to you here that when you're in the infantry, especially if your not an officer and nobody gives you maps of anything, that your never quite sure where you are or what's happening. You follow orders and that's why it becomes so, it literally impossible for anybody other than the officers who sit down with maps and see all the overall layout. You got to follow orders because you don't know where you're going, you don't know where you are, you don't know where you've been and during this whole experience, I never saw a map and therefore, and certainly the guys I was with didn't have a clue as to where we were. So, as you look back on it you think when you get out you need to

get out some maps and figure out exactly all that but I never have. I think Pellemburg was in Germany but I'm not sure. See here's, yeah, yeah, here's Pellemburg. And there's Pellemburg right there and you see, actually its all Belgium, no wait a minute.

Mark: I assume it's the little finger of Holland.

Phillip: Oh, I guess that I never realized that. Yeah, see that's exactly right. We were right in that, I believe, I'm not sure which, it's right on the border actually. But the Siegfried Line ran all the way through that area. So, where were we?

Mark: I was about to ask you about your first exposure to combat.

Phillip: Okay. In Pellemburg, they put us somehow in a what was a had to be a bomb shelter. And it was just like a big tube underground. And I remember that was where I spent a good deal of my birthday. My nineteenth birthday. And we sat in this thing and just waited. We left that shelter. Pellemburg was not subject to any shelling at that moment. However, we could hear the shelling which in the Siegfried Line and generally between all my experience in combat shelling was pretty much a 24 hour a day phenomena. You didn't just endure, you did endure heavier barrages but you had a certain amount, you could expect a certain amount of incoming fire most of the day. So we could hear combat. We could hear shells. This is an experience that I don't think I could ever convey to anybody else. How that effects you and knowing that you are going to go enter into that. We, it was the middle of the night, it was early morning I guess actually when we got out of there and marched on up to the front. And I remember the very first shelling that I experienced, we were marching along and it was dark and it was, I think it was raining to some extent. Suddenly incoming shells, just right into where we were. That was my very first and I threw myself in a ditch which you always, obviously try to get as close to the ground as possible. Then I had an absolute uncontrollable need to take a crap. [Laugh] And, but I'll never forget there I was in the dark in this ditch with my pants down and just had to do it. Anyway, I survived that. And we marched up and what you basically do, we were relieving another company, another battalion. They were going to head back. We took over their holes, there fox holes and what not. Actually that's not quite true. That's what we often did, I guess that time, we actually went through them and had an attack of our own. We actually attacked. It's fuzzy to me they all run together now, which is

good so I can't give you details of that particular attack but it was in full, we were, we went from no experience to in 24 hours you felt like a veteran with 24 years of combat because you just about experienced everything. You've seen friends wounded, you saw the very first attack, or one of the first or second attack my squad leader was killed. You know, we saw all of this, and experienced a tremendous emotions of, you hear every shell and every mortar coming. They say that the one that hits you you don't hear so if you hear it you're still okay. But you hear them, there is a scream and shell and scream and the mortar is a lob but it still makes a very-- here it comes. So that was our baptism, literally that. It was just indescribable. And then when you, whenever you attack you get where you're going to go and the first Lieutenant and our platoon leader it was as though we were always on the take. They would tell us to dig in. The machine gunner is always the focal point. There are two machine gunners for each company. You set up your machine guns and then you set your rifle company surrounding that. It's getting support fire but the machine gun is set up to take the brunt of any counter attack. That is exactly the situation when I was wounded later at the Battle of the Bulge. But, so that's what we would do. During that, we were in Siegfried Line, there were all kinds of different attacks. The first attack was right across the fields. You don't know what you're doing, you're running, you can't see anybody, it's often dark. You see tracers, you see, the ones you see are okay, the one that aren't tracers, the bullets, machine guns that are firing are the ones you have to worry about. You run, and you its always amazing to me, it isn't like they show in the movies. I think you overwhelm more than you actually. The enemy fires at you as long as they can and when they see that they are going to be overrun and your going to get into some end-to-end or very close combat or whatever. So they usually pull out. It's a strange having experienced it for a month and a half I guess, about forty or forty-five days. I never did quite understand the phenomena of battle. Sometimes it took the forms of a movie but many times you just suddenly, the order was to get out of your hole and charge forward and you just charge forward.

Mark: And go where? That's what I was going --

Phillip: You just go and go and go until they tell you to stop.

Mark: As far as you can?

Phillip: And all the time under fire to some extent firing, certainly when it gets to bad and we have to take cover and then the machine guns set up, I can tell you, I'll tell you one little incident that was kind of interesting. We were near the town of Lefar, and we were making it into town and there were some farm buildings on the far side of a railroad that was, the railroad was raised, so you needed kind of a natural **[END TAPE 1 SIDE A]** like a fortification. We got to that point and we went over the railroad and we were experiencing heavy fire from these set of farm buildings. Also I should tell you the German's were fond of taking a haystack and they'd build a hole underneath the haystack and they would bring the haystack down over them and they would fire right out of the base of that. Well anyway, when we went over that railroad track bed my lieutenant called for machine gun and I went up and he directed me to bring fire on these buildings and I had a mixture of I can't remember it was with tracers you had one tracer for every four or five shells, but that allows you to know exactly where you are firing. There are five bullets going for every one you see. Well anyway the 30 caliber light machine gun has I always operated, not with a tripod which would keep it too high, but like a rifle with a bi-pod off the barrel in front and you could either have the legs down which would put you about a foot off the ground or you had some skids right on there, you could really get close to the ground. Well, I set up [unintelligible] fire I was about two feet behind the actual track and I was laying and all the troops were behind this track and I, so I set up and I commenced to fire, well I had the thing too low. It was really funny. I hit the steel track two feet in front of the gun with my first bullets and they went careening straight up in the air, which pretty well shook up everybody.[Laughter]. Especially the Lieutenant next to me. Well of course I corrected that real quickly and anyway I brought the fire to all those buildings, but also there was a haystack, because, so I really put a lot of fire into the base of the haystack. Well some of those tracers set the haystack on fire. And it turned out as we went back then he had to get account go back and dug in. That haystack burned all night long. I kept saying "I did that", that was my contribution. But actually it was an effective thing and it was interesting because that little experience kind of bonded the relationship between the Lieutenant and myself. So, the machine gunner is, the problem with tracers of course, is that it also shows the enemy exactly where all the fire is coming from. The problem with the machine gun is it draws fire. So you're always in a position to log your fire, especially if you see tracers. Anyway that was just a

little experience. I'm not sure, it was effective, I think I was. It was also I think the basis of another experience which I'll tell you about.

Mark: Okay. In this memoir you wrote here, it's interesting that you wrote that the world of the combat soldiers, a hundred yards in front of them and that's about it. Not really much--

Phillip: Really, you just don't know where you are and as far as you can see, but you hear a lot of things happening around you but your never quite sure, never oriented very well. And that's why I think it's important that you have leaders, squad leaders as well as the platoon leaders that are briefed cause they know what its all about. There is no way, if you make an attack every single day, so you change your local every single day, we never did stay still, we were always on the move forward, so it's always changing. That added confusion. There was no time for them to educate us and show us on a map what we should do. They just had to simply direct us.

Mark: You mentioned the kind of Psychic urge to dodge.

Phillip: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Mark: Do you think that's common or was that just you?

Phillip: I don't know. I'm not sure. Certainly, intellectually you do but it was a matter of luck whether you were going to get hit or not. But, you did a lot of getting up and throwing yourself on the ground, there was never an intelligent decision made as to how to avoid the bullet or shell or anything else. One of the things that is a very strong and difficult part of being on the front is, you dig a hole and during the week you're there for, you know, maybe twenty hours in one spot. It's all inside a hole in the ground, just a fox hole. And because we were this was at the Siegfried Line we were being shelled pretty much all the time. You didn't get up and wander around. Occasionally you could get up out of the hole but usually you were right in the hole. Then the shells start coming in and the ability intellectually to accept the fact that chances of that shell hitting you right on that hole, which would kill you, you knew that those chances were not real good, intellectually. But as you hear mortar people, I don't remember the term that they used, but anyway they started at a spot and they keep moving their mortar by degrees so it moves right across, you can hear it start fifty yards from you--40 yards from you-- 30 yards. It gets closer and closer and then its on

the other side of you. That creates a psychological, just a terrible terrible feeling. You know exactly what they're doing, you don't know if their distance is right or it's going to hit right in your hole. As long as you're below the all shell, the largest shells of anything, 88's all of the German's artillery shells as well as the mortars, if you were below the surface and it didn't hit on top of you, they make craters and then go up. All the shrapnel goes up. So you're not in danger, yes you will get an occasional piece of shrapnel that has spent its force and it will hit you or go into your clothes or next to you, you'll have that happen but the killing force of those will not get you as long as you're below the surface and it doesn't hit you directly on top. Now that happened. Had a number of people killed where, but the chances were not that great. So it was important, my experience was the better educated and more innately intelligent people were able to handle that psychologically. Many of the people who were, did not have those abilities, just couldn't cope. And they were the ones who, that we called the section 8's that just went to pieces.

Mark: Was that very frequent?

Phillip: Fairly frequent. Fairly frequent. We had one of our non-commissioned Sergeants go to pieces, professional army guy, been all his life, simply could not handle it. I don't know if he was but all we knew that he didn't handle it well and went to pieces and he was gone. There were some people who shot themselves in the foot. One person who ran a bayonet through his foot which was kind of stupid because it's pretty hard to do. [Laughter]. It's a lot easier to shoot yourself. But you know, inflict some self-inflicted wounds to get off. That was your only way of getting out was to ----- and that's unfortunate. But that's that, or get transferred. So it was a difficult psychological problem. You knew that the longer you were the better chance you had of getting killed and the only way you could get out of there was to be wounded.

Mark: So, there's no getting used to combat. Does it get worse as you go on or--

Phillip: Hard question. I don't recall well enough. I don't know, you do get accustomed to it to some extent, no question about that. A friendly wound would be welcomed by anybody. I never did find anybody that was intentionally heroic where they were going to go out and win the war. You know, you see it in the movies where they're going

to go out and save all, everybody else by being this heroic. They were assigned to do a job and their self esteem, their need to be honest with themselves made them a little bit a macho, would make them do the job they're assigned to do. My own view is that's a Hollywood creation, the idea that someone would be really heroic. I think, I eventually received the Silver Star of the Troops Award. The second highest medal you could get. Congressional Medal of Honor for an infantry member. So, you could, I could say to myself, "Oh, you were some sort of hero." If I was a hero it was because circumstances dictated and I did not go out there. I kept my self esteem by doing what was expected of me, you know. But it sure didn't have any idea getting out there and being a some kind of fool.

Mark: One more thing before I move on to the Bulge I was reading Paul Brussel's book and he was, he's and English professor now, he was a combat infantry officer in Europe in WWII. And he, he was mentioned Paul Brussel say's that in his experience people were more fatalistic than religious, they didn't just go into combat with their crosses or whatever but they had lucky shoes or three dirty cigarettes on the match was bad luck or something like that. Could you comment on that?

Phillip: I had no I harbored no feelings that I had lucky this or lucky that. Fate certainly seemed to be whether you, nobody, it was not a fixed fate of anybody, it was just luck. I, you just simply, people I saw--see, when I finally was wounded there was only 25 of the original over 200 people who were in the company, in my company that were still there. So, I did pretty well, I lasted about 40 days. I lasted longer, everybody used to kid me because I was so tall that I'd be one of the first ones to go, but I proved to them that that's not necessarily the case. Even as a machine gunner, which draws a lot of the fire when you're in that situation. Another thing, this is a little irrelevant, but before I forget it, this whole matter of firing, you've read a lot about it, there was always a problem of getting riflemen to fire.

Mark: Um hmm.

Phillip: Um, to some extent there is some truth in that. It isn't true so much of a machine gunner because you have certain things you gotta do as machine gunner and that's why you're there and a good deal of the firepower of a infantry company comes from machine gunner. But a rifleman has to in order to shoot, you gotta have something to shoot at. And because a lot of the combat is not, there is some of it that's

very close, but a lot of it is from quite a distance. And you don't see the enemy. They're in fox holes or whatever. So, they're firing, I think there are a lot of infantrymen that didn't do a lot of firing, riflemen, I should say. Riflemen. So--

Mark: Yeah, cause I've read those statistics. Let's say only 1 in 4 would shoot their weapons and then--.

Phillip: Part of that is they don't, it isn't like the movies, you don't see that well. Yeah, it's not, you don't need binoculars but you get 200 yards or more away from somebody it's a long shot, and it's very easy not to be able to see them.

Mark: Yeah.

Phillip: You can see fire coming, you know a fire is coming from someplace but you're just not sure where. Things move pretty fast.

Mark: Okay. So, on to the Bulge, I guess.

Phillip: Yeah, let me just think of a, there was one other thing, well, I don't guess it's that important, uh yeah it is important. Much of our experience in the Siegfried Line was, Siegfried Line is a bunch of trenches and a bunch of pill boxes. And uh, so its just all, where as we would come in and we would have to dig fox holes, they had their entrenched positions they were all pre-prepared. But some of our combat was in clearing those trenches and then of course blowing up of fox holes, specialist blew them up, but riflemen, we had to go through the trenches and clear out the, without question I with my machine gun, I don't say this proudly, but the fact is that I killed many men with that machine gun. I know I killed, I saw some of them go down [unintelligible]. The first one I saw on the front was very, I, we were clearing trenches and the trench would go along and there'd be an offshoot going off this way, maybe into a underground room or whatever. I was going along, and of course I had my machine gun on my shoulder and I always had my sidearm was a 45 Colt pistol. And I, as I went through the trench, I came around the corner and I was face to face with a German, and without thinking I shot him and that was the only person I ever shot with my pistol. That was a traumatic experience. Whatever would have happened if I had waited . It was an unusual situation. He must have come out of that little offshoot, holes you know. But anyway, there were those experiences. There were all kinds of something. I

started smoking. You spend most of 24 hours in a hole just sitting there and you get a "C" ration. As far as cigarettes you going to do everything that's [unintelligible] so you start smoking. So anyway, now you want to go on to the Bulge?

Mark: Well, it's pretty well covered in your manuscript.

Phillip: Well, that yeah, What happened was, yeah you know the history of the Bulge of our division. Interestingly, I was, because we had been on the line for almost a month, about a month, they started giving a couple days leave to just, they would pick throughout for reasons, I was one of the first in the company to get the combat infantry level and I think that related to it. But uh, you see we got the expert infantry in the United States and then as officer felt you were warranted you'd get it. It would be awarded and we would get these awards when you come back for 24 hour rest. By the way, even those rests were a little bit traumatic because having eaten C-rations for a week and come back and get hot food usually did something a little drastic to your whole system and you just weren't ready for it. But anyway--because I did receive the combat infantry thing and I think it related to I was picked along with another fellow for two days off and we, believe it or not, went to Paris. And, spent two days in Paris and then came back and it was during these two days that the Battle of the Bulge occurred. It actually the, breakthrough occurred right at that time. So when we got back to our company, they were just preparing to pull out and they were going to go down there and hold the breakthrough. And uh so, when we arrived by truck the, I always remember that the line itself, there was no defined front line because they had broken through and they were all over the place, So the trucks let us off and we were supposedly going to go up to the line but the fact is after the trucks let us off, they were all captured by troops behind us, so you were in that bulge you had a whole new situation. Where we were before, there was a fairly distinct line and there was not a lot of infiltration behind us and the Battle of the Bulge or the Battle of the Ardennes or breakthrough, whatever you want to call it, they were literally troops were behind you, in front of you, and that created a whole new set of emotional problems.

Mark: Um, that was interesting. I'm interested in this the shooting of prisoners. I've never heard this before. Was that a fairly prominent occurrence on both sides?

Phillip: Unfortunately, yes.

Mark: On both sides?

Phillip: Well, what could you do. Here we were, and I tried intellectually to deal with this. I was never in a position to make a decision to do this nor was I ever in a position to have to do it because as a machine gunner I wasn't so assigned. But, if you have, if your on the enemy is all over, behind you in front of you, all over, and you take a prisoner, what are you going to do? Are you going to sit down and just guard him? You can't do that. There is simply nothing to do with the prisoner and I am totally aware of the fact that some of our officers ordered our men to take them back on what we called [unintelligible] and I'm sure that the Americans did it, we won the war, and therefore we weren't tried for it. They lost the war and were tried for it. I guess that's one of those terrible things in life. Nobody is ever going to believe, but it happened.

Mark: Hmm. I had never heard that before. Interesting.

Phillip: It's awful. Especially today. War is so absolutely ridiculous. It's so incomprehensible that people can sit there and try to shoot each other and take land by killing the other. That under those circumstances these things would become thinkable, and actually happened. Its hard in the context of peace to understand what that, oh and in that day, I think we're a more civilized world, but I'm not so sure we were more civilized.

Mark: So, after about two days of, no, it was the day after Christmas then, you were wounded.

Phillip: Yeah. We, I don't know how that you can get if you want it, my experience there is all laid out. Yeah, it was Christmas day, we attacked, and took some ground. Well, let me ask you, this is off the record, do you want me to get it on the tame? That, my written record is a more accurate statement because it was written in 1948. That was many years ago. Today I'm dealing with fifty years of--

Mark: Of time going by.

Phillip: But anyway, basically we took this position and on Christmas Eve, I remember Christmas Eve so well because first of all it was a relatively, we had fox holes just on the edge of a woods and ahead of us we had a big open space and we had been told that up ahead at the

bottom of the hill ahead a company of another different company of our regimen had occupied that hill. I assume it was ours, and I'm not even sure if it was our company or not, but anyway somebody, our Americans had occupied the hill and they had been overrun and there were, we were going to have to the next day, Christmas day, we were going to have to attack and take that hill back. That there would be holes there so that we could use the foxholes and so forth. On Christmas Eve itself prior to our attack, it was fairly quiet you could actually hear some Christmas music, there was a little town off to the west and we could actually hear some celebration. We also heard some fighting going on. So, anyway, we attacked and when we again went forward in darkness we could see tracers coming at us. One of the things they like to do is have tracers high and other bullets low. It kind of gave you how well they were shooting. There was not much to shoot at you couldn't see a doggone thing. We got up to the position where the other company had occupied and we did find holes but what they didn't tell us that they were one or two dead Americans in every hole. And we chose not to deal with that, it was not an easy thing to live with. All the ground in that area was shale rock. You would have really worked hard.

Mark: Was it snow covered at the time?

Phillip: No. There was no, at that moment there was no snow on the ground. We had snow prior to that a little bit, but not for a couple of weeks, there was not frozen ground but it was awful rocky. We worked, I remember when we got up there we worked the rest of the night. And we were no more than maybe a foot or a foot and a half down in the foxhole waiting for a counter attack. But, somehow and I never know how these things happen, there was somebody in one of the other, one of the riflemen in one of the other holes had an ax, a pick ax, and we got a hold of that and made some real headway on that hole, just for even a short while, we were going to do some things. But anyway, we finally, and that was Christmas Eve, and Christmas morning, so we were in this new position, it was bright and clear and it was just a beautiful day. And because it was Christmas we persuaded ourselves that this was going to be a day of peace. Which didn't happen to be the case. There was this town to our left and I have since been able to read some of the history and what not, the general layout of this, but there was a town on the left where there was obviously a lot of fighting going on, and as the Germans were driven out of that town, we couldn't see the town, we were on top of this bridge, the town was down, the German armored vehicles would

break out across the field in front of us and our anti-tank people would shoot at them as they were going and disable them and then the Germans would get out of them and run and I remember I took my machine gun and finished off some of those people as they ran. That was the nature of war and I can somehow, its ridiculous why there was a battle of attrition. The whole idea that why you were there, they were trying to kill you and you were trying to kill them.

Anyway, the day went like that and of course the most startling thing that happened that day was that we got up out of the hole and I wandered down to these holes in front of us and I was purposely not looking in them because they were occupied by a previous company. I was looking down in the hole, but what you do is pick up some of the gear, you pick up a blanket or a hat, pick up a first aid packet, or some K rations, always laid those out around the hole. But I suddenly saw movement and here was one of these, this one guy in a hole who was not dead. And suddenly he got up and he looked at me and I tell you if you ever had your hair stand up like that on your head, that was the most scary experience I ever had. Come to find out he had been, he had to have been as I understand it, lying there for at least two days underneath this dead man. And he looked up at me and said something about where is I-Company, he was a member of I-Company. Anyway, his speech was such that I could tell he was mentally wasn't with it, was totally coherent or even knowledgeable about what happened. They had been overrun, the Germans had killed the people in the hole and he was not killed. He had a hole in his leg and I could see the where it went in and came out, but obviously hadn't. He pulled himself out from under the body and got up and actually, and I called for an aid man to come, and at, just then Howard Shore III who was in, who was my machine gun person, Howard Shore was the second gunner along with Tinny Epske the first gunner and the other machine gunner, Howard Shore III came down and started toward me. Just then one of these armored vehicles came out of this town and they opened fire on us and Howard got hit and he literally flew in the air. He took a bullet in his leg and it turned out I found out later and I wish, he had a serious chunk of bone in his leg away. But anyway, aid men were coming and there was a lot of firing and we had to get back in our hole. It turns out this guy, I had forgot about this guy who was in the hole that I discovered came back and I sent him back with the aidmen who took care of Howard Shore III. And they also felt the guy had flipped and never knew anymore about it. All through that day then,

this is the kind of thing that went on and in many respects it wasn't all that eventful [Unintelligible]

But then, of course, with an eye, what you did in there at night, was you always had one person on watch and one person sleeping you'd go an hour at a round and so you would sit down, one of you would sit down in the corner of the hole and try to sleep, you had a blanket and you just kind of tried to sleep. The other one would then stand guard. Well, I was on guard and it was just breaking morning, you know it was just, at one second it was dark and suddenly you could see things. And I saw the Germans coming right square at us. I immediately, I think I was one of the first ones to see, and they weren't very far from us at all, they were from here to there away from us. So, I opened fire and pretty well stopped them and then that of course that got everyone up and I never did get, I never was able to talk to anybody else who was there and at the moment about what happened in those very few minutes. I know what happened to me. We had, there was an exchange of fire both ways. I drew fire of course, so I was kind of up, fire, down, up, fire and down. But anyway, it had stopped pretty well, we had never talked, that's one thing, we never talked, and communications tended to come under those circumstances to absolute zero. So, and I had no idea what happened with the rest of the people, but they did definitely get out of the holes and they retreated, the rest of the company fortunately I never got the word, this is how I became the "hero". I just never got the word. And I had no option. What they did, they brought three tanks, Germans brought three tanks, so I had to pretty well come down, I was firing, and with my second gunner, who in many respects had no reason to be out looking around, so, and one bullet got him and got him right in the eye and right in the forehead he was instantly killed, and I remember he was, these holes are never very deep, I'm six feet six and he was six feet one, with the two of us in there, we were pretty close. And when he was killed, all the blood in his body, it just started coming out through his nose and I don't know medically how that happens. It was pretty traumatic. Well, I should say, before he was killed, the first time a bullet went through his helmet, through his wool knit cap and out the back end, he took the helmet off and his hair pulled out of the wool knit cap sticking up like this and it never touched him. The next one of course got him. So, he was dead, I was alone. We were on our second ammunition box, that's why you have a second gunner. You have to quickly switch ammunition boxes, [Unintelligible]. So, and it takes a little time to make that change. Before he was killed, he had changed to

the second box. And I continued to fire but by now I had tanks in front of me and I'm pretty sure it was a tank that got me [Unintelligible] yes [Unintelligible]. Um, what happened was that these tanks, a lot of people think that a tanks only weapon is the cannon that sticks out. Well, the cannon is used but in terms of point blank, real weapon on a tank, is a machine gun in place, so they were using machine guns--and you can see [Unintelligible] this was close. And so, it was a hopeless situation and I try--and I try to put some extra thought into it. So I, but what happened in retrospect, was that the rest of my company had withdrawn, I was alone at that time and our artillery was coming in on these ammo tanks. So they were coming in and so I am not sure to this day whether they were shelling that hit the tank that was directly in front of me or if it could have been a smoker shell, I mean all I know is that a lot of smoke, and oh well, I guess I'm getting ahead of myself. This went on a little bit I was up when I should have been down. What happened was a bullet, I was firing and a bullet ricochet off the side of my machine gun and then across my face, but it broke the shell up so they just they just covered the whole left side of my face with small shrapnel, holes or at least the bullet, we know that at least this is the terminology [Unintelligible] of course this blinded my left eye as well it caused a fair amount of damage and was a bloody mess. So, I was not disabled, I probably was conscious for a very short time, I don't know, all I know is when I was at the bottom of the hole, and my hands, I wore gloves on them and the gloves were soaked with my blood from my face, I know that, so it probably didn't happen, I may have been unconscious for some time, it couldn't have been long cause I got up and knew I had to keep firing, the enemy was going to keep coming. I actually opened my [Unintelligible]. So I kept firing. But then this shell hit, and when it hit, I almost just got out of the hole and started running. I ran no more than, first thing, immediately when I got out, I tried to determine their position behind me, which I should never do it again, it was burning, this tank was burning, how this ever had happened behind me, I was totally focused in front of me. The tank and artillery [Unintelligible] you don't want to be close to a tank that's burning. I'm sure you've seen one, but these are very spectacular because all the ammunition and M-16's were pouring out all over, tanks burn very quickly they start to explode, so I ran out past, and I got up to the top of the hill and by this time, I met two other guys and one had, I was a bloody mess because of my face, one of the took a good look at me and said it was a wide open space, I don't in retrospect recalling, but then we're still on top of this hill we had to jog down and then there was this

long open space and then there was this woods we'd come out of that on Christmas Eve, that's where we were before. So, the three of us started going along and by this time the Germans had made it to the top of the hill and started firing on us, so we separated as far as we could and one of the guys went down, and I have no idea what ever happened to him, he went down and we could not stop and I made it.

I think to some extent, that here I am running across this field with a bloody face I hurt for more than--everybody said half my face was blown off, I don't think it was that bad, but I didn't really look at it. And then of course out of the whole series of these stations [Unintelligible] when they were operating on me, I, the combination of the operation and the sedatives that had, I'm told that I slept 24 hours. When I woke up I was being operated on, the initial operation and that was--I lost everything and by that time, I always said I would keep my pistol, side arm and that was gone and at that point I didn't care. I just cared that I wasn't dead, I was alive. So, the series of going back to the hospital, in Paris and then I went back by hospital train to England and believe it or not I was in a hospital there for all told I was in the hospital for over 4 1/2 months. In those days, I honestly don't think that you would spend near that amount of time, they didn't have near the technology, and they had to first of all take care of some stuff on the left side of my face and then they, after that they worked on my eye itself was eventually operated on, I still have shrapnel all over this side of my face, or my head I should say. But they spent a lot of time on it I was two and a half months, I got out and eventually I was discharged. That was 1945.

Mark: I see. So, do you spend, all these operations took place in England then.

Phillip: Well, they weren't really big operations, they never did that much. They did an awful lot of exploratory and so many people, you know, in the hospital there that you were healing, they never at that time, I know they took X-rays of my head to locate every piece of metal which turned out they didn't operate, they did operate on my eye so, I had stitches in the eyeball, and stuff all, you know. But, in terms of restorative, they didn't do any plastic surgery, you see the main part of the hole here like this and a lot of big skin all over and they brought that together some, just cosmetically and they eventually pulled out the eye and the doctor told me at that time that it was about a 50/50 chance that the eye would survive and if it didn't they would take it out and give me a glass eye, but they never did. I can't see anything still light [Unintelligible].

Mark: So these hospitals were probably filled up I imagine.

Phillip: Yeah.

Mark: Because of all the casualties.

Phillip: Oh yeah. I was in the Eye-Wards. I remember, you always felt very lucky and you never felt sorry for yourself. First of all you felt so lucky to survive that you knew you were lucky. Secondly, you felt there was always somebody worse than you. The guy right across from me had two pieces of shrapnel hit him, one in each eye and they took each eye out totally. **[END TAPE 1 SIDE B]** There was no hope for this guy for ever seeing anything because both eyes were gone. And yet he didn't have a scratch on the rest of his body. I'll tell you, It's been a long time but that guy--. It' hard to accept that. I could still see, yet I never felt that the loss of an eye, I don't have depth perception, you use two eyes, that's where you get it, but other than that I never felt terrible. I have had vision problems, my vision is limited about as far as my nose, but when I can see that I can't see my hand. I can see it when I put it there, now I can see it.

Mark: So, you get back to the United States on a hospital ship or something?

Phillip: No. It was with flying.

Mark: So, you were pretty ambulatory.

Phillip: Well, like I, this was the not so glorious part of my service. They put me originally, I got out of the hospital and I got again a week off. They sent me up when I was discharged from the hospital and my brother who is an Air Corps in France came to visit me, he got a little visit. The two of us had a week together or five days, something like that. And we had a good time. And it was during this week when we were there that Franklin D. Roosevelt died, I remember one morning, heading out on the street, and the shop owner was draping a picture, they really idolized Roosevelt. He draped a black cloth over Roosevelt, that's how I learned that Roosevelt had died, so that gives you a time frame. After that, they sent me on, they put me on what they called limited duty, believe it or not, I was put back into the Air Corps. I started in the Air Corps and ended in the Air Corps in limited duty. The only problem was this government, they weren't well organized, they could have did

this to us, and there were a number of us at this point, I didn't know the other kids, but we did arrive together and we were all in infantry and had been wounded, we were perfectly fine except that we had a disability, and we could do a lot of things. So a limited group of us, the problem was we didn't have a job. So we were at this Air Force base, and nice brick barracks, and this other infantry guy and I had two cots in this nice room with a pot belly stove, and nothing to do. So, oh I occasionally had the job of sweeping up the hanger or something stupid like that. I remember I made a ring in the workshop because I had nothing else to do, stuff like that. Anyway, we would sit and read in our bunks, and having started, in the Army I started cigarette smoking we would smoke cigarettes and flip the butt toward the stove but we would never hit it. And anyway, months we were in this kind of condition in the barrack when we had an inspection. Here were all these butts around the pot belly stove and it was a bad, we were not properly--

Mark: You weren't DI.

Phillip: That's right. So the two of us were called into the Master Sergeant and of the group, and whatever I never did learn all the Air Corps terminology exactly structured. And he just ate our butts out, unmerciful. He was absolutely, I think there was a feeling that as ex-infantry people, we didn't know anything, there were all kinds of things at work there, but the relationship wasn't all that great. And he didn't know what to do with us, we were more of a problem in the first place, so he said do you think we could or if he could straighten us out and we said yeah that would probably do it. And we got the worst jobs. I remember I was, the moment I'm going to tell you about I was cleaning frozen chicken. Now if you ever had a chicken which was, we had hundreds of chickens which were half the feather were half out and frozen and it was hard and it had little icicles all over them and you got to sit there and pull the rest of them out and get them clean and ready to eat. That is an awful job. You cut your hands and it was just a terrible job. I'm doing this when suddenly, and by the way I should tell you I went over seas as a PFC, no I went over seas as a private and I don't remember why I got PFC title or class. When our squad leader, well, first, Tinny Epske took over our squad and he was a squad leader and when he got transferred, I took over, anyway I was the active squad. So, I was promoted, battle field promotion to Staff Sergeant but it never arrived and then I was going so I'm still PFC. Over the loud speaker system I'm on KP, "PFC Stark report to the orderly room". I thought oh boy, now what have I

done. So I left KP and saw the same Master Sergeant and he informs me that I had been awarded the Silver Star. And he explained what that was, I had never heard of it before. And he said the problem is that we cannot present it to you because you have to have a General, he is the only person that can present that, and there's no General in the field so we will let you know so I go back to KP and finish these chickens. Well, a day or two later, I'm still on KP, and suddenly over the loud speaker comes this, the whole group, everybody involved in this deal has to fall out. Now remember at this time the war is really coming down, much slower than when we pulled out, I don't remember the exact date. We all have to fall out in Class A uniforms. What that means in the air field is that everybody's got to go get into their dress uniforms. This is the grease monkey's, everybody's got to shower and it was just massive. And we all got to follow and get out. The apron of this big hanger were lined up it seemed like forever. They were all at attention, and I had a bad feeling about this because we were just not sure because nobody said a word to me, I fell out with everybody else. I'm in the middle of the crowd standing there. And suddenly an airplane comes out of the sky, saw it land right in front of us. Out steps the General. They have a microphone set up and PFC Stark front and center. I couldn't believe it this is the most ridiculous situation. And I go marching up and he reads the citation and he salutes me and I salute him and he makes the thing, a couple of remarks, he gets back on his airplane, flies off in the sky, I come back in, and I'm standing there with this thing around my neck and we were excused, I go back to KP, and everybody has to go back to work, and I am not exactly a big kidder and I was, it was alright. But I was known as High Ho Silver Stark. Everybody, and I took an unmerciful beating. But that's how I got presented the Silver Star. Which was typical.

Mark: Well that I think can't be typical.

Phillip: [Laugh].

Mark: So, when did you get back to the US then and how did you get back?

Phillip: I got back in November, I think I arrived home eventually, somewhere in October or November, October probably, no November, in Madison. I should say this, I came back that summer with the Air Corps, got a 30 day leave, spent it in Madison. Then I had to report back to Stoughton Air Base, and I go down to Tampa Florida, and again, I still don't have a job. So I get down there and at

this point the war is over so I applied for a discharge. So, you had to go before the board and I said look, I had my time, I've got before these officers and I said look, I've been in the Air Force since, you know a few months, never had a job, not doing you any good and certainly you're not doing me any good and I'd like to get out. That was my whole argument. And the officer looked at me and said well, you give a darn good argument [Laughter]. And they gave me a medical discharge. I don't know why, well of course the medical discharge was because of my wound but that's what I got. So then, that was down in Florida, and then I came home and was able to get back in school with [Unintelligible] which was in the fall.

Mark: You were in the fall semester.

Phillip: Yeah. But it was, the semester started at different dates then. I think they were still on that three semester a year setup, so I was able to neatly go in. I was very efficient at the time. Unfortunately, then about two weeks after I got home, within a month, my father died, so that's another story.

Mark: Okay. Did you use GI bill to pay for college?

Phillip: Oh yes! I went to all of the accountants, which was great. You know, several things, I was totally financed, school didn't cost as much, and I got my degree and I lived at home, but I lived on that and I also of course got ever since my wounds, I got pension. So, I had that money. And then I actually did some practice teaching during, I was teaching professionally was I was a sophomore. But, remember I was in more than two years.

Mark: What did you, what did you get your degree in?

Phillip: Bachelor of Business Administration, Advanced Business Administration and Real Estate Major.

Mark: You finished fairly quickly.

Phillip: Yep. Yeah. I was graduated in 1940--. June of '40. Afterwards again, I went right to work. Of course back then, my father having died, my mother owned the business now--the grass grew, through the ranks I could be a manager.

Mark: So, you probably didn't need to use the GI bill housing benefits, but in the real estate business, did you see much of this?

Phillip: Yeah, yeah we did. I'm sure we did but I have very little recollection of that. I don't remember the programs that's just a blank in my mind.

Mark: I had one last area I wanted to talk about. Did you join any Veteran's organizations or did you attend any reunions? You know on campus for example, there were a lot of different groups and as people get older they tend to join fraternal organizations.

Phillip: I don't want what I say to sound like I am critical of those groups. I have never been a professional veteran. I have never felt any, that they owed me, that the government owed me anything. I was lucky, I do get a pension which to me has been very helpful, not great but over the years it's really amounted. I feel that that's more than enough and I tend to be conservative on my politics and think people that don't need the help certainly get it and people that do need the help should get it and we can't subsidize to everybody and give to everybody to help subsidize everybody. I think that's something that we need to tax everybody and give to those who need it. But anyway, I have never therefore, totally agreed with some of the politics of some of those organizations.

I did not spend a lot of time reminiscing about my experience. This is more talking about it other than with my family itself, than I've ever done regarding my experience. So, I never really been interested so I never joined any of them. I did go, there is a natural attraction to the--I went to two reunions of our unit and did meet there, we arranged to meet some of the people that I knew in the service. Here again, I found the general conventions to be rather boring since they were later in life I know that. See, I was 18 and 19 years old when all this happened. Many of the guys who were there were 25-35 years old. And those people today are really old. And I never, I always categorized myself as myself, I never wanted to act like an old man, therefore some of that didn't really change how I felt. I could get together with some of the people separately just as well and I did do that to some extent.

Mark: Is there anything that you would like to add? That's all I had.

Phillip: Oh, I talked enough.

Mark: Well, thanks for stopping in.

Phillip: Yeah, thank you.

[End of Interview]