

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

DALE E. GORDON

Field Artillery, Army, World War II

2011

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Gordon, Dale E. (1922-2015). Oral History Interview, 2011.

Approximate length: 2 hours 35 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Dale Gordon discusses his service with the Army 985th Field Artillery Battalion in North Africa and Italy, his service with the National Guard, being wounded in Italy, and his life after the war. Gordon joined the National Guard 32nd Division in River Falls in 1939, and describes the six-day motor march to Camp Beauregard (Louisiana) and training for a year in Louisiana. He then discusses his unit being activated and being sent to North Africa for training as part of the 985th Field Artillery. He provides a sketch of what daily life was like for members of the 985th while in Oran (Algeria). Gordon then outlines being sent to Italy, and some of his duties while in Italy. He describes being wounded in Monte Cassino and his months of recovery from that injury. The interview ends with Gordon discussing his life after the war: going to school, getting married, and raising children.

Biographical Sketch:

Gordon (1922-2015) served with the 985th Field Artillery Battalion during World War II. After the war he was a civil engineer with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation in Eau Claire.

Interviewed by Ellen Bowers Healey, 2011.

Transcribed by Lexie Jordee, 2014.

Reviewed by Jennifer Kick, 2016.

Abstract by Jennifer Kick, 2016.

Interview Transcript

Bowers Healey: This is an interview with Dale Gordon who served in a couple of units here and I'm gonna ask you later on to clarify some of this but what I have is that you started out with the National Guard from River Falls, the 32nd division, in 1939 and you wound up with the 985th Field Artillery Battalion. You were with the 101st Field Artillery, Second Battalion. And we'll go into more of your units as we continue on with this oral history. Uh, Mr. Gordon—

Gordon: It was the 121st.

Bowers Healey: 121st, excuse me. During—and Mr. Gordon's service was during World War II. This interview is being conducted at [REDACTED] in Eau Claire, Wisconsin and we're doing this interview on November 4, 2011. The interviewer is Ellen Bowers Healey. Okay I'm gonna start out by asking you, Mr. Gordon, where were you born and raised?

Gordon: I was born in Trimbelle Township, Pierce County, Wisconsin.

Bowers Healey: How do you spell Trimbelle?

Gordon: T-R-I-M-B-E-L-L-E and that's about six miles out of Ellsworth on highway US 10.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And—and—

Bowers Healey: Were you actually born out there?

Gordon: I don't know where I was born.

Bowers Healey: All right.

Gordon: But I—that was my grand—paternal grandparent's farm, in Trimbelle. And they were in a group of Scots-Irish immigrants that had come to Wisconsin in about plus or minus 1850, and settled in that part of the state.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And the names were—Gordon is—we always called ourselves Scots-Irish. We're McLoughlin[sp??], Meacham[sp??], Floodie[sp??], which are all

the same breed I guess. And my understanding is that they came from southern Indiana at that time and moved up here.

Bowers Healey: And where were your mother and father born?

Gordon: My dad musta been born over there. My mother was born in—in St. Croix County, a rural farm over there. Her maiden name was Mable Marson[sp??] from a family of eleven.

Bowers Healey: Okay and what was the size of your family? How many siblings did you have, sir?

Gordon: Just two.

Bowers Healey: Okay. Were you the oldest or the youngest?

Gordon: I was the oldest.

Bowers Healey: Okay and where did you go to school?

Gordon: River Falls. We moved to River Falls when I was five years old from Ellsworth.

Bowers Healey: All right. And that's where you grew up, did you graduate from high school in River Falls?

Gordon: I graduated from high school in 1938.

Bowers Healey: When were you born? What was your birth date?

Gordon: I was born February 16, 1922. So I—I was—I turned sixteen then when I graduated.

Bowers Healey: And at the date today how old are you?

Gordon: I'm 89.

Bowers Healey: Okay. What'd you do after you graduated at age sixteen?

Gordon: I went to college in '39 and '40 at the teacher's college at River Falls. I was—had two years of college when I went in the service. And when I think back about it I was probably very juvenile and, you know, I ran around with a group of kids that were my age so they, they were, you know, less than the kids in my classes in schools. I was truant in high school too. I was in kindergarten for a few weeks and they put me in the first grade the rest of the year. I was in third grade a half a year and I was

in fourth grade a half a year. And they did—apparently did things like that.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Back then, so. And—

Bowers Healey: So when you went to college what was your intention? What'd you intend to do?

Gordon: I really didn't know. I took forestry [laughs], that seemed to be the popular thing. Botany and a whole bunch of subjects like that. Not—I wasn't very motivated. But I do remember that tuition was \$17.50 a semester.

Bowers Healey: And you lived at home?

Gordon: And I lived at home and that included books.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Mm-hm, so.

Bowers Healey: Did you work at all besides going to school?

Gordon: Uh, I had a—a bill route which I was happy to have.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And those two years I made seventy-five cents a week delivering these hand bills once a week.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: It was the only income I had, so.

Bowers Healey: Okay. And what got you to join the service?

Gordon: Well as I say I wasn't very motivated about school and this—you know there was a lotta excitement about us—about the National Guard being called up for one year. That was the, the topic. And so I joined in the summer of '39 and then went to summer camp down in Fort McCoy, presumably. And then in the fall we were activated and then spent, I think it was six or eight days riding in the back of GI trucks all the way to Louisiana. So that was a—

Bowers Healey: Were you down there for more training or were you—?

Gordon: No, no we went down there for this year's training.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Cause war was—I mean, aspects of war was heating up and so they called up at least our division they called up.

Bowers Healey: And what was your division at that time?

Gordon: 32nd.

Bowers Healey: All right.

Gordon: Division.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Which was basically Wisconsin National Guard. Although there was some Michigan units in there, someplace down the line.

Bowers Healey: And what type of training did you do down in Louisiana?

Gordon: Well, basic infantry and army training. Marching and learning artillery concepts and so forth.

Bowers Healey: Let me go back a little bit. Prior to your going to Louisiana you were in the Wisconsin National Guard and where did you do your training? Were you—you do that five days a week or no?

Gordon: No, once a week.

Bowers Healey: Once a week.

Gordon: At the National Guard armory.

Bowers Healey: All right and did it pay? Did you get pay for it?

Gordon: Yes, very meager. Fact, we were getting twenty-one dollars a month when I—

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Went in the service.

Bowers Healey: Oh when you were active duty you got twenty-one dollars a month?

Gordon: Yeah.

Bowers Healey: Okay. But you continued living at home while you were in the National Guard, the summer of '39?

Gordon: Yeah, yeah.

Bowers Healey: Okay, all right. Where'd you go down in Louisiana? What base or camp were you at?

Gordon: Oh we went down to a base called Camp Beauregard.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Which was literally very primitive and just hacked out of the swamps. And the camp itself was—they had wooden platforms and we had pyramidal tents which were about, I would say, sixteen or eighteen foot square and there was five men lived in each tent. And they—I think the army was so ill-prepared for this. We had Sibley stoves in these tents. Sibley was a Civil War general, quarter master general, and these were probably not even galvanized, a cone-shaped thing like this with about a three inch pipe that went up and out the tent. And that's what we had for heat in the wintertime.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And—

Bowers Healey: Well now you said you went down there in the fall of '39, was it cold down there?

Gordon: It's coldest winter I ever spent. I slept with my long johns, and my uniform, and my overcoat on all night.

Bowers Healey: Did you have cots to sleep on or not?

Gordon: Yeah, cots, yes we did.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: But those are—you know the cold comes right through a canvas cot.

Bowers Healey: Uh-huh.

Gordon: So.

Bowers Healey: So what was the temp—you say cold, now of course when you lived in Wisconsin you weren't living outside.

Gordon: Well, well, well it was probably around freezing, you know, and I don't recall any ice on anything.

Bowers Healey: Okay. Camp Beauregard was that in the northern part of—?

Gordon: No, it was Alexandria, Louisiana. It was about—oh, it was on the Red River probably a third of the way down the state. And so then during this winter they were busy building Camp Livingston which was, I don't remember how far it was, but it was a big improvement because that was a wood floor but they had sides built up about three feet. And a more rigid frame in there and a gas—modern gas propane heater in the joint so. And going back to these Sibley stoves, I bet we burnt two of those tents down a week in our company. The sparks would fly out these chimneys and landed on the tent and ignite the tent and down they'd go. So we—they had a unit of guys assigned every night that stayed up all night with a ladder and scrub brushes and would lay these ladders against the tent and go up and clean the carbon out of the spark-arrestor on the—on this pipe so that it wouldn't generate a lot of sparks up there.

Bowers Healey: Did the stove actually heat the tent well?

Gordon: Yeah, yeah it would do quite a job. But I say that was an over—that was left over from civil war, that's what they had down there.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: That was interesting.

Bowers Healey: How long were you down in Camp Beauregard?

Gordon: Well we were there through the winter and they had—they'd built mess halls for the units and they were dark, dingy things and I remember if you get assigned to KP [kitchen police] you had to get up about three o'clock in the morning to start your KP duty.

Bowers Healey: Did you get KP duty?

Gordon: Quite regular.

Bowers Healey: Okay. What was your rank at the time?

Gordon: Probably a private.

Bowers Healey: All right. Now the book that you showed me before we started the tape about the 32nd Infantry Division, World War II. You got a roster in there, when was that roster fixed? Is that when you were down at Louisiana?

Gordon: I think that's the roster of when we went down to—when we were—I call it “federalized”, when we were taken down there for this year’s training.

Bowers Healey: And what does sears stand for? You said "taken down there for the sear's training?"

Gordon: No for the year, year’s.

Bowers Healey: Oh for the year’s training, okay.

Gordon: That was a—

Bowers Healey: So you knew many of the men that you were down there with before you went down there?

Gordon: Well in the company.

Bowers Healey: Yes.

Gordon: And at River Falls, before we left they recruited around there and there was a CC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp at Ellsworth, quite a large contingent there. And it seems to me there was about fifteen or twenty guys from the CC camp that come over and joined our unit.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And they were more worldly than we were because most of 'em were out of Chicago and stuff, and knew what the world was all about.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And some, some guys come down from other towns around River Falls.

Bowers Healey: Did those fellows from the CCC camps tend to be older than, than the Wisconsin—?

Gordon: Uh, not necessarily but they—

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Yeah. And I remember that all of our cooks were from the CC camp. Including the guy they made sergeant in our unit, a guy by the name of

Robert Tann. Turns out he was a second cousin of mine. I didn't even know he existed.

Bowers Healey: Okay

Gordon: And he was from Beldenville, that's over near Ellsworth.

Bowers Healey: And his last name was Tan? T-A-N?

Gordon: T-A-N-N.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And incidentally he married a Louisiana gal down there. And I remember she had a young daughter, well she wasn't probably fourteen or fifteen. And I went to visit 'em several times after they'd—after they were married. And I still remember one thing about this gal, I don't remember her name or anything, she had a box of farmer matches in one of these big—on a stand by the chair. And she smoked cigarettes and she'd reach over and grab one of these farmer matches and scratch it down the wallpaper on the wall. And so she had all the wall paper scratched off the walls. So she wasn't too cosmopolitan, I'd say.

Bowers Healey: Before you went to train for a year in Louisiana had you ever been to the southern part of the United States?

Gordon: No.

Bowers Healey: What was your impression, coming from Wisconsin?

Gordon: Well it was very interesting. And, you know, I think I was eighteen by this time, when we went down there and had a lot to learn, I guess, about the war. I remember—one thing I remember we'd—oh once you get down, halfway down the country, pool halls and things are very popular. And we'd plow around town at night, you know, a little bit. And these guys are in there playing checkers or, or other games for recreation. Old guys from the south. And another fact of life, I remember the first night we got down as far as—okay—this air base down by Camp Douglas, like down there.

Bowers Healey: Volk Field?

Gordon: Yeah, Volk Field. We had pup-tents, of course. And then the next time we were down at Whitefish Bay, the second night. Third night we were down in—we spent two nights in Illinois going down there. But the first night we—and then we camped the second night was at, oh, where the

Mississippi River comes through there, uh, back when we had the riots and—

Bowers Healey: Down in Illinois?

Gordon: Yeah.

Bowers Healey: It's Cairo, Illinois or not?

Gordon: Cairo, Illinois.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: They practically burned the town down there, that time. Not then but—

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Rioting.

Bowers Healey: So you're talking about when you—

Gordon: We were riding down—

Bowers Healey: When you were nationalized and riding down?

Gordon: Riding down, so—

Bowers Healey: What kind of vehicles did you take down there?

Gordon: These two and a half ton GMC trucks, with a—

Bowers Healey: Were you riding in the back?

Gordon: On the back in the plank seats.

Bowers Healey: Okay. Was there a tarp over your head or something?

Gordon: Yeah there was a tarp over our head. And they'd, you know—you'd stop along the road and have a rest call[??] if you want to call it that. But what was interesting to me, I'd say oh I wasn't very worldly, I guess. I'd never gone to Cairo down there. Here come two colored gals walking through the base, we're setting up tents and everything. Each one of 'em had a roll of newspapers in their arms and I hadn't—I didn't have any idea in the world why they were there. Well here these CC guys were very knowledgeable on everything that ever happened in the world. And they were prostitutes soliciting already, coming through the camp. I don't think

any business or anything. As I recall they were getting twenty-five cents for sex.

Bowers Healey:

Okay.

Gordon:

In those days. So—

Bowers Healey:

So you just went on your way down. You went from, what, base to base along the way?

Gordon:

No.

Bowers Healey:

No?

Gordon:

They'd made arrangements and we'd be set up in football fields and—

Bowers Healey:

Okay.

Gordon:

And from Cairo, that would—that'd been the fourth night. I really can't remember just where the other ones were, down there. I remember I was impressed by how good—how good looking the girls were down in Mississippi.

Bowers Healey:

Okay.

Gordon:

'Cause they—there were really some good looking young ladies.

Bowers Healey:

So your base was close to a town, of Alexandria, or what?

Gordon:

I would say we were probably twenty miles out of town.

Bowers Healey:

Oh, okay. Well how did—how did you get rides, or maybe you didn't—what'd you do on liberty?

Gordon:

They had bus service that'd take 'em in to town.

Bowers Healey:

Okay, all right. What was your training like down there?

Gordon:

Well calisthenics if you know what that is.

Bowers Healey:

Mm-hm.

Gordon:

You know, hopping up and down and—and every day and stuff like, yeah. And then with this artillery stuff then there was a—I think I was in the radio section for a while. And you had to learn all about switchboards and these so-called radios at the time. And, well you know, we had a pretty

savvy outfit from River Falls because there was about, I'd say, sixty of us from town here. And we all—all of us, even I had some of this college training which I think in 1940 that was—made us much, much more intelligent than most of the country. But so a lot of these guys went on to OCS [Officer Candidate School] right away. And the more I saw the Army, I decided this wasn't the place for me. And let's go back and discuss our officers. Our company commander was a dapper little guy. I remember he wore leather puttees, you know they're like leggings.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And—

Bowers Healey: Was that part of the uniform?

Gordon: It was his uniform.

Bowers Healey: It was his uniform.

Gordon: Probably for an officer.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: He was a captain and—but he was a town shoe repairman. The first lieutenant was the mortician in town. And the second lieutenant was a popcorn salesman and stuff; he'd had a route that he sold these articles around. Out of the three, this captain—Webber—they shuffled him off right away. I think he went to California, some capacity. Segerstrom developed ulcers right away, so he got a discharge and a pension, come back and run his mortuary. And turns out the second lieutenant was another cousin of mine, remote cousin of mine. He stayed in the service and retired as a colonel eventually. Don't know what happened or where he went.

Bowers Healey: Do you recall his name?

Gordon: It's in this book, it's um—

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: It was Cornwall, the last name. Francis Cornwall. And the second guy, the first lieutenant was Segerstrom[?]. And I'll never forget that—you know I, I say I went to this summer camp. So they had me on KP down there and this, you know, and this mess sergeant sent me over to get a tarp or something, this Lieutenant Segerstrom he was playing poker with the guys. Everything was very informal. Well, in order to get this tarp—it was

folded up and he was sitting on it—and I told him the mess sergeant wanted it and he didn't pay any attention to me. So presumably I went back and told the mess sergeant that the lieutenant was sitting on the tarp and he wouldn't give it to me or something. So he with a lot of, probably, hot air he told me to go back and get it [laughs]. I go marching back asking once more if I could have the tarp. Didn't get any satisfaction so I grabbed the tarp and I jerked it out from under him. And I remember he went over backwards in the dirt and everything. That was something you wouldn't get by with in the professional army.

Bowers Healey: Probably not, no. So did your year down in Louisiana, did that go fast or slow or what?

Gordon: I don't know, I guess it went fast. I was gonna look up these guys' names, I don't know if I can find it. Was that in the front of the book or what?

Bowers Healey: Let's see.

Gordon: There's books in there too.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And we would, you know, there's a lot of maneuvers. And these two and a half ton trucks, they'd drive them up through the woods and they'd—do they show the officers there?

Bowers Healey: The officers that are listed here, and I don't know what from time period it's Lieutenant Colonel Kellogg Harkins.

Gordon: Well he was the Battalion Commander. Go down to company.

Bowers Healey: Okay. I'm looking at Headquarters Battery Second Battalion.

Gordon: Yep.

Bowers Healey: Captain Paul Webber.

Gordon: Yep.

Bowers Healey: Uh Lieutenant—First Lieutenant Harold A. Segerstrom.

Gordon: Yep.

Bowers Healey: Second Lieutenant Francis E. Cornwall.

Gordon: Yep, that's the third guy.

Bowers Healey: And then it's got a list of non-commissioned officers and PFCs and then it's got privates and you are listed as one of the privates, Dale E. Gordon.

Gordon: Yep, that was me.

Bowers Healey: That was you. Okay. Well how'd you get back from Louisiana? Where'd you go from there? And did you come back to Wisconsin?

Gordon: Well we'd—they'd, they shuffled us around. Like I say, part of this—that unit was sent—made into this tank-destroying outfit and went with the division when they went to Australia.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Half of those guys. And the rest of us—well, I suppose the rest of us formed a nucleus for the batch first draftees when they come.

Bowers Healey: Now you went down there in 1939 is that right?

Gordon: No it was—wasn't it '40? Fall of '40 I think.

Bowers Healey: Oh, okay. So did the war start while you were there?

Gordon: Uh, yeah. I was in Louisiana when it started.

Bowers Healey: Oh okay. So in 1941 when Pearl Harbor was bombed you were in Louisiana is that correct?

Gordon: Mm-hm.

Bowers Healey: Okay, so did your unit stay in an activated or nationalized status?

Gordon: Yeah well they locked us in, I mean, they just told us there was no getting out after.

Bowers Healey: All right.

Gordon: This year was all a pipe dream. So in talking about when the war started, I do kind of vividly remember that because we were up at this Camp Livingston and we were, oh, we were out on the—it was on the weekend, on a Sunday it occurred. I can't remember the name of the town up there. So we heard this over the radio or something. And I think there was four of us guys. You know in most of the southern states, in particular after we get up into Oklahoma, they didn't have such thing as a bar. Everything was bootlegged.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: But there was a bootlegger—several on a block. You know, very informal. But anyway we were up in this town—it was one of the bigger towns—and we were—we heard about this thing starting, it was in the middle of the morning, probably eleven o'clock. And I remember we were out on the sidewalk anyway, we all had a bottle. And here come the—I think it was the chief of police of this town. He stopped to talk to us.

Bowers Healey: You had a bottle of what?

Gordon: We drank whiskey out of the bottle.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And so we insisted he was—he had to have a drink with us, which he refused. So I remember this one buddy of mine says, "You're gonna have a drink or I'll give it to you." Words to that effect. Before they get through—this guy's name was Walt Linjer, Walt and this police chief were down on the sidewalk [laughs] Just—

Bowers Healey: And this was before or after you heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

Gordon: That was the day we heard it was—

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: The day we heard it was bombed.

Bowers Healey: So did this incident have anything to do with it or just—?

Gordon: No, no but mean I do remember this.

Bowers Healey: Okay, and was that police officer who—

Gordon: He took it pretty good.

Bowers Healey: He took it pretty good?

Gordon: Yeah.

Bowers Healey: What do you—

Gordon: Well he could have run us in, I suppose or—

Bowers Healey: Okay. It looks like the name of the person that you just mentioned who got in the scuffle was Walter E. Linjer.

Gordon: Yeah he was.

Bowers Healey: L-I-N-J-E-R

Gordon: Yep.

Bowers Healey: Okay was he from River Falls?

Gordon: Yeah, he was a—kind of a good friend of mine. Bit older than I was. And he, let's see, he left us eventually. He, He'd—after the war he got discharged. Stayed out for a couple of months and then re-enlisted and put in twenty years. And he went overseas in Vietnam and everything, as a first sergeant. And ultimately he married a gal by the name of Dean Gordon, which was the name of one of my brothers down in Oklahoma. In fact she was from there. And so she—she spent—her career was following him around, so—

Bowers Healey: After Pearl Harbor day, where'd your unit go from—

[Break in recording][End of Tape 1, Side 1][00:31:33]

Bowers Healey: —in August of '42 you were shipped into Oklahoma.

Gordon: Yep. Mm-hm.

Bowers Healey: Okay. And you were still artillery at that time?

Gordon: Yep.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And I think that's—that may have been when we were designated the 985th Field Artillery.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: I think it was—I think it was—I think I was in the 170th Artillery too at one time.

Bowers Healey: What'd you do in Oklahoma?

Gordon: Oh the same routine. Out in the boonies and trained and—but I did enjoy it up there. We were over near the Arkansas line over there. And that was

real wilderness at the time. And we used to run, on weekends a bunch of us would go to—we'd go up to Tulsa, which was about sixty miles away. We had to ride a—I guess a greyhound bus up there, spend the weekends up there.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And by that time—this—fact this Walt Linjer was—we had an anti-tank platoon that, up there and Walt was the sergeant in charge of it and he got—he and some guys got sent off someplace else and I got promoted to be in charge of this anti-tank platoon.

Bowers Healey: What was your rank at the time?

Gordon: Staff sergeant.

Bowers Healey: Okay. And staff sergeant after you'd been in the service, what, just two years?

Gordon: Probably, I know I was a corporal for a long time and a—stuff like that.

Bowers Healey: Okay, and so you got promoted to being in charge of what did you say?

Gordon: So-called anti-tank platoon.

Bowers Healey: Okay

Gordon: With six of these. Actually at that time they were thirty-seven millimeters, that was about an inch and a quarter around, probably wouldn't even dent a tank. And I can't remember what—where Walt and those guys went but—

Bowers Healey: How many men did you have in your platoon, your anti-tank platoon?

Gordon: Well, I think the platoon was about—there was six of these guns and I think there was four guys on a gun and then a corporal on each end.

Bowers Healey: Where did your men come from? I know you started out with people from River Falls, Wisconsin, Wisconsin, and Michigan, but after you'd been in the service for a year or two where did the replacements come from?

Gordon: Well they were draftees, so-called draftees.

Bowers Healey: Okay, were they draftees from Wisconsin or from somewhere?

Gordon: No, from all over.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Yeah, they came from all over. And I think, you know, basically we got filled up with that first draft and maybe periodically we'd get a few more come in.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: So you asked me how many men. I think there was a corporal and three men on a gun, that was four, times six is twenty-four. Three sergeants is twenty-seven. Me was twenty-eight and I had a weapons carrier, the driver, thirty. And then after we went overseas, I had a—when we got over to Africa they—we got a whole bunch of guys. And there was about eight or ten Mexicans that didn't speak English.

Bowers Healey: From the United States or—?

Gordon: Yeah.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And I remember we tried to teach them some basic English.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: Which was—

Bowers Healey: When did you go over to Africa? How long were you in Oklahoma before you went to Africa?

Gordon: Well I'd say I can't really remember the dates.

Bowers Healey: All right.

Gordon: But it's all in here if you, if you—

Bowers Healey: We can look at that later but if you wanna just give me a guesstimate or tell me how you got to Africa?

Gordon: Well we went to—let's see. Well, June and July brought us some Long Toms that we had 50—100—or 155 Howitzers, they had a short barrel at first, then they replaced those with these so-called Long Toms, they had a long barrel, longer range. I think that was up in Louisi—up in Oklahoma. I have trouble reading because I shut one eye and then the other one starts to water.

Bowers Healey: Okay. When you went to Africa what was your unit designation at that time? Were you still with the 32nd?

Gordon: No, no, no.

Bowers Healey: No.

Gordon: I think when we went to Oklahoma we were shipped out there by ourselves.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And the—this division went to Africa, fact maybe even in '42.

Bowers Healey: When you got to Africa do you know where you were in Africa? What part of Africa?

Gordon: We landed at Oran.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And this is, I was reading, you know, this is pretty good.

Bowers Healey: Did you get there by—did you fly in a plane or you took a—?

Gordon: No, in a convoy.

Bowers Healey: A convoy, okay.

Gordon: And we—well first of all we were up in, you know, we were in Oklahoma and then we were shipped back down to Louisiana to kinda do whatever we did. And from there we went to Fort Dix New Jersey, which was right along the coast there. And from there we loaded onto ships and went overseas.

Bowers Healey: Was that your first time on a ship?

Gordon: Yeah, I think so.

Bowers Healey: Do you recall anything about the voyage overseas?

Gordon: Yeah I can recall several things. First of all I lost every last cent I had playing cards before I ever got on that ship. They'd given us, I think two months' pay, and I lost it all playing black jack. So I got on the boat absolutely broke. The ship—I think the trip was eight days over there. And so we got out—at that time the—I remember there was a couple of

dirigibles followed us for two days. Cause as I recall the Germans had submarines along the coast there. So they, they went out two days with us and they turned around and went back.

Bowers Healey: Did you say dirigible?

Gordon: Well, dirigibles or balloons.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And so then we were on our own. But another thing I remember is USS *Texas* was right alongside of us. Must have been our first trip overseas, that was one of the big battle ships. She was a comfort to have with us. And, you know, you couldn't see the front end of the convoy and you couldn't see the end of it. There must have been 100 ships or more in that. They needed to be spaced out pretty well. Destroyers running around back and forth and blah, blah, blah. We'd go three, three ships abreast, all spread out. We were on one side and the *Texas* was in the middle. So the *Texas* was over there then for the duration of war. They were, I think they were in Sicily and up through Italy and stuff like that. And anyway, I remember now I was just skimming over this article, this ship we were on was the US *Monterrey* and that was a luxury liner, some kind of conversion. So I don't know if we slept up on deck deliberately or we went up there but what they didn't know was that every night after dark, they'd blow the stacks out—I don't know why they did that—all the soot would come out and were out on the open on the deck up there so we got a dose of this soot.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: So my hair was full of it. Another thing I did on this ship I—maybe that's when I went down and took a shower—and what I didn't realize is this the showers were sea water. And the soap didn't take that off so I tried to soap up and everything. So I had all this mixture in my hair, soot and soap and everything else and I had it there like, I don't know, for a couple of weeks I guess. It was unpleasant. So anyway the *Monterrey*, I don't know how many troops they had on there but it must have been, you know, several thousand. So then I remember going through the entry into the Mediterranean, might be three quarters of a mile wide, Gibraltar and stuff. So part of the convoy went into Gibraltar and their ships come out and joined us. We just kept on sailing and—

Bowers Healey: Did you know where you were gonna be going?

Gordon: I don't think so. [inaudible] Africa, so I guess there was no place else to go. So I don't remember—we got—I know we were out of sight of

Gibraltar we were going down there and we could hear bombing going on. Part of this group that had left Gibraltar with us had split off from us and they probably went on to, oh I don't remember in the—Algiers that was the last port down there. And we turned and went into Oran. And anyway they were getting bombed. I don't know if it was the next morning or the next day sometime here come two or three smaller ships back from that had hit. I suppose they were going back to Gibraltar, trying to get back there or something. So we turned and went in to—I don't remember how many ships went into Oran.

Bowers Healey: Is it Iran or was it—?

Gordon: Oran, O-R-A-N.

Bowers Healey: Oh, okay.

Gordon: And then I think that was a big, probably—I don't know how big it was, it was a pretty big city. Right on the coast. Some of it was up on the cliff and some of it was down there and stuff. But I don't know if you remember reading about this or, you know, before we landed in North Africa, the French—there was a free French and some of the French were kinda, you know, collaborating with the Germans. And so the free French were concerned that the naval forces that were available to the Germans would turn around and attack them. So they—they had a big deal on where they bombed their own ships and all the French ports and African ports and everything. So the, I don't know if—how much bombing we did in Oran but the harbor was—still had lots of sunken vessels. So by the time we got there they had—I don't remember how we got ashore but I think they had some walkways built from ship to ship and stuff and we had to walk on there, walk to get to shore.

Bowers Healey: Once you got to shore, where did you go?

Gordon: Well we—I remember we went marching up through the town.

Bowers Healey: Did you have your weapons with you?

Gordon: Yeah, we had our weapons.

Bowers Healey: What kind of weapons did you take ashore?

Gordon: Well, what we had. We had carbines.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Mm-hm.

Bowers Healey: You didn't take artillery with you?

Gordon: No, they had to be on—it took pretty heavy equipment to unload them, I don't know. Musta had winches and stuff that would swing those on.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: So I can't remember—the only is I remember is this one incident, we're marching up the street going up the street and here was this Arab woman sittin' there. And this is a dirty story. So as we come marching up the street she opened up her robes like this, and here, I bet you she had a hundred flies on her crotch.

Bowers Healey: Okay [both laugh].

Gordon: And the guys like, "What's that? What's that? What's that?" North Africa, I'll never forget it because of the flies. The flies, you know, if you—if the flies landed on your forehead, you couldn't go like this, it wouldn't move. You had to actually physically pick it off. Anyplace you went, the flies were just so persistent and they were just nasty. But she had a lot of 'em on her butt.

Bowers Healey: Okay [both laugh].

Gordon: I don't know what she was doing, if she was propositioning the guys or showing 'em off or what. I'll never forget that. And then, um, you know I really can't remember how—where we spent that first night even. But we were—we were on—eventually wound up out of town about twenty miles. And to the west of Oran and they had a tent city set up.

Bowers Healey: Was it already set up or did you set it up?

Gordon: Uh—I think it was—I don't know if it was set up or if we set it up. I remember our battalion was there and there was another unit along there too. You know my dad was in the infantry in World War I. So, he said if you wanna see any action get in the infantry. Well, really, I had two brothers and a half-brother. And my one brother was in—my one brother—I had tried to join the air force—no, the navy with him. Went up to the Twin Cities, this was before, and he got in and I didn't. That's the first time I realized I was color blind.

Bowers Healey: Oh, okay.

Gordon: And they wouldn't take you if you were color blind at that time.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: So he went in the Navy and was killed shortly in the first part of the war.

Bowers Healey: Mm. How old were you when you tried to enlist in the navy?

Gordon: I was probably seventeen or eighteen.

Bowers Healey: Okay. All right.

Gordon: And later on—

Bowers Healey: And where was your brother killed?

Gordon: He was killed in the Philippines. He was a pilot. And this half-brother, he was killed in the navy. He was on a submarine. Submarine to—

Bowers Healey: Both of them were serving during the war when they got killed?

Gordon: Yeah. I had a younger brother that was—oh he was sixteen, I think when I got out of the service. And he'd lost an eye when he was a kid, real young.

Bowers Healey: Okay well at this time were—you're in or near Oran.

Gordon: Yeah so were out there—

Bowers Healey: What country is Oran in?

Gordon: It's in Algeria.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: So we—well it was so hot there that they'd make us train during the day or do whatever we did—during the morning. Then we'd—in the afternoon they'd take the afternoon off so we'd formed a baseball club and we'd play baseball all afternoon.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Go around and find other units, we'd play for 100 bucks and that's what—

Bowers Healey: Those are pretty high stakes.

Gordon: Yeah, you know, most I ever made in the service was ninety-six bucks a month that was for staff sergeant overseas.

Bowers Healey: How'd you gather up the hundred bucks?

Gordon: Well, we'd always have a few bucks around.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Although I didn't have too much because one night—after we were there and outside of Oran, I and another guy went into town one day, into Oran, and bummed a ride in there, I don't know why they gave us time off. And we're—and as I say Oran was a pretty big city, had a lot of blacks and they were all MP's. And there was a lot of stories going around that the Muslims would stick a knife in these guys once in a while. And they had a favorite job: they'd castrate 'em and stick the testicles in their mouth. To let 'em know that, I guess, let the U.S. know and one thing or another that that was objectionable.

Bowers Healey: Is that a true story?

Gordon: Yeah, that's a true story, yeah.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And during World War II the blacks weren't allowed to—I never seen any of 'em carrying. Well they carried arms in the MP's, they made MP's out of 'em.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: I understand later on they put a few of 'em in some of the combat units. And General Patton, the story was, he didn't think—his favorite story was that you couldn't teach a black guy to handle a tank, they couldn't learn to drive one or anything else. That probably was not true, of course. But that's the way it was in those days. I remember this guy's name was Claude Seabald[sp??] he was one of 'em. And well I remember one place where there was music coming out of the building and with a curtain in the door. We walked in there and there was a bunch of girls in there playing the phonograph. And we horsed around with them for a while. As usual we had a bottle. By the way, in Africa they told us not to buy liquor from these Arabs or anybody else. For two reasons, water was in very short supply and they claimed that these Arabs would dilute the wine with urine. You'd get sick off it. So we weren't supposed to buy it or drink it, which we did anyway.

Bowers Healey: When you say there were girls there were they French or Arabs?

Gordon: French and Italians.

Bowers Healey: French and Italians, okay.

Gordon: They were running everything.

Bowers Healey: All right.

Gordon: All those bigger cities had big French and Italian populations.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: You know looked just like American girls.

Bowers Healey: They speak English or French or what?

Gordon: Some of 'em I guess, I can remember. And I remember another day I and a guy, we went the other way down the coast. Jeez, I don't think we wound up going about thirty miles to some town. The war was pretty well cooling down, it was over in the next, even the next country. But anyway about all you could get to eat was potatoes. Go to a restaurant and they'd fry potatoes for you, or I wanna say grapefruit, what do you call 'em, this fruit we raised around here too. Kinda a bush—it's usually dark colored. We used to fry that with a—can't think of it. We'd buy it—we'd pick that up at one thing or another, slice it up and fry it.

Bowers Healey: Eggplant?

Gordon: Eggplant.

Bowers Healey: All right.

Gordon: Well we'd—

Bowers Healey: Did you spend the duration of the war in Algeria?

Gordon: No, no, no. We eventually buttoned up and went to Italy as soon as there was an invasion there.

Bowers Healey: All right.

Gordon: And I remember we went to this town and tried to get something to eat and I don't know what they gave us but they were either French or Italians, and we bought a bottle from an Arab kid, a bottle of wine, and had something to eat in this place, it was still daylight. So now we're thirty miles away from this tent camp we gotta get back to. So we started walking and we'd walk a ways and then we'd stop and have a little snort

out of this bottle. And on and on. Finally two MPs come by on motorcycles and stop, picked us up, said they'd give us a ride. I can remember this one MP telling us how lucky we were, to make it back without getting knifed or something 'cause these Arabs weren't very pleasant people. So we made it back anyway. But that was, well that wine was, it was wine, I suppose it was polluted, some of it anyway.

Bowers Healey: So from—on a day to day basis what was your mission or what were your duties while you were in Algeria?

Gordon: Well, we were training.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And we weren't in this camp too long before the—they invaded in Italy there and we were up there.

Bowers Healey: So your unit then went to Italy?

Gordon: Yeah. And again the harbor there, Naples, was full of wrecked naval vessels. And for a long time after we were up there, well the Germans would bomb that harbor every night. So the whole air raid signals would go off. 'Cause when we first went into Naples there, we were in some buildings that—in a kind of suburb in the north side of Naples there. I still remember the name of it, it was Bagnoli. And we were in this empty building of two or three stories. And so they'd come over and bomb the harbor, we'd all have to get up and run outside and there was an air raid shelter down there that we could run in. And first time I did that I run in there and I come out and this Colonel Harkins slapped me on the shoulder, wanted to know who it was, I told him, and he says, "Make that private, Gordon" I'd stopped and urinated when I come out of this air raid shelter. And he'd issued orders that you couldn't do that, which I hadn't received and didn't know. So in talking to the company commander later on I said, "Well I got broke again." He must have fixed it up because they give me my stripes back.

Bowers Healey: Did you actually lose your stripes for a while?

Gordon: Well he told me I was broke and he had the authority to do that

Bowers Healey: Yeah.

Gordon: And by the way, feather in my cap, I—I had a thing about that service by this time. I had an IQ of a hundred and forty-something. Which was way higher than most of the guys.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: Well, going back to the states the ASTP that musta come up on your travels or someplace along the way. Along in the war they started this ASTP—army—AS—Army special train—training thing—they had this at all the universities around the country and in our battalion, they picked me and another guy, and I said, "I don't wanna go to the damn thing." They said "You gotta go, you're the only guy that's qualified" Cause I had this couple years of college and I was—had this higher IQ than most of the officers. So I got sent off on this expedition to go to this ASTP, which was at Stillwater, Minnesota [laughs]—Stillwater, Oklahoma, There was a college there.

Bowers Healey: Oh and this was after you left Italy?

Gordon: No, no. This is before I went overseas.

Bowers Healey: Oh okay, all right.

Gordon: So I got over there with this other kid and uh there was, oh there was—musta been hundreds, if not a couple thousand kids from all branches of service. And we were in—this was one of the bigger schools in Oklahoma. And uh I can't remember, I think we were sleeping in—in a lot of—these places they put cots in, I think they were in like dormitories or something or other. And when I find out what this is all about I told 'em I didn't want any part of it. So it took me several weeks for me to get shipped back to my unit. And what the deal was, they'd ship you off and you'd go to college. And this other kid, who I ran into a couple of times—now where did he go to school? I think—

[Break in recording][End of Tape 1, Side 2][01:03:16]

Bowers Healey: So you had well-formed your idea that you didn't wanna stay in the service?

Gordon: No, I'd already had about three years in by this time.

Bowers Healey: Okay, uh-huh.

Gordon: And I was so disgusted of the people that were officers. Some of those guys should have been digging ditches, when some of 'em would come through. I mean I was—you know school teachers were commissioned.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: And—but you know there's a lotta guys—I don't know what—there was a lot of school teachers actually. And the other guy. So they did—they were somewhat educated but I gotta tell you an incident when I come home. Started back to college at River Falls. I decided I should take—well they decided I should take a science course—that's how I wound up in engineering—'cause of my aptitude [laughs]. So I decided, “Well jeez, I gotta—better take some of this math and stuff over again.” And for a while after the, the latter part of the service—they, you know, they usually had a summer school at these colleges, it was six weeks. At River Falls they were teaching teachers there basically. But to accelerate this thing they'd give you a double dose in summer. So I went to school twelve months a year for about—for three years. And this first year I was taking this math over and there was—and god bless you, there was mostly girls in this, not girls they were middle-aged teachers, female teachers, back taking courses, they had—some of 'em probably had two degrees or three year degrees.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: And I'm taking this—all this math, like probably two or three courses along with these other—these women. And I said before and I'll say it again, they were the dumbest bunch of people I ever been exposed to in my life. They didn't know a sigum[?]. The professor in charge of the math department, her name was Mrs. Ide[sp?], so she ask me to help. I'd write all these equations on the board and try to explain 'em and everything. And I thought, "Oh my god, these people are teaching our kids?" So anyway I got through that and I went to River Falls then for, probably a year, maybe a year and plus. Then I transferred down to Madison, into engineering.

Bowers Healey: Okay, Well let me take you back. You didn't tell me much about what you did in Italy?

Gordon: Italy. Okay well so we were, you know, when we were in this building in Bagnoli there, we had guys coming and going even in the—at the company level. We were all sitting in this building in there, and all we had was one, one half a shell to canvas, it—you know for, you could take and put it with another guy. Had that rolled up and sitting on it. I don't know where I was but I got separated from the rest of 'em at someplace and caught up with 'em there. And this guy—I'm sitting, oh this room isn't right, this tech sergeant was with us and a bunch of guys were sitting along the wall over there. And we were all—we all had issue forty-fives, but you didn't wanna lug 'em. All of a sudden, bang! This guy had that thing on and went off, he shot underneath me, through this bedroom, and I think it scared him more than it—I didn't really get scared but I, I was about thirty feet from it.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: And this one other kid by the name of Kay, he says, "What are you gonna do about it Gordon?" He says, "If i was you I'd kick his head off" And I thought well, I dont wanna get in any more trouble, I've been in it a couple times.

Bowers Healey: You mentioned Kay and I was just looking at your book, that's Eugene L. Kay.

Gordon: Yeah he was the biggest guy in our outfit, he was quite an athlete, he was about six foot two or three.

Bowers Healey: So what if anything happened to the guy who had—I take it accidental fire

Gordon: I don't know, yeah he had that thing out and he, you know and accidentally let it fire.

Bowers Healey: Was he cleaning it or what was he doing?

Gordon: I don't know what he was doing but these, these forty-five's, you know, are big, big bullet. Woulda done—really wrecked me if it woulda hit me. Tore through my bedroom wall.

Bowers Healey: Okay

Gordon: I shuttled him, got up and kicked him in the head or something but—I didn't know him too good either. When we get to Italy, other than this place and I say when we get there they were bombing the harbor there, we moved north a town then right away. You dig a slit trench to sleep in, you didn't wanna sleep out in the open. I'd sleep, I'm sure everybody else would, you'd sleep with a steel helmet on. They weren't too much help but they were—'cause you could shoot right through those things. And then—but the ricochet would probably—so we kept going up and along with this anti-tank platoon, I and two or three guys would go out and we'd do OP duty, we'd ride up with wherever we could, I mean with, pretty much with the infantry and spot for our battalion or something. I suppose there weren't too many guys that were too sharp on that even. That was kinda interesting because, you know, these shells would weigh probably well over a hundred pounds. They'd bring 'em up a whole truck load at a time, usually they'd throw 'em off the truck on the ground [laughs]—bang, bang, bang. But they had to have a fuse on those to explode 'em, that was part of it. And the firing batteries—we were so diversified and widely separated we wouldn't hardly see them. We were kinda separate down with the headquarters.

Bowers Healey: When you say you were OP duty and you were spotting for the battalion, can you describe what spotting is?

Gordon: Well we'd be up there close to where the Germans were, we could look into the German occupied area. And we had some crude maps, there was always planes flying over us, trying to photograph some of the stuff. And there was a lot of isolated houses, farm houses and things. Back at the so-called OP, the operating center, they had the same things and they could—by scaling and everything—they'd come pretty close to—we were on telephone or radio communications back there. And so to adjust these things, particularly after you moved, you'd wanna get on a target or something so you'd know where you're shooting. So you'd pick something that was visible to both of us, on both ends and they got pretty excited if I shot more than two or three or four of these rounds off [laughs]. Follow 'em all the way to the United States and trucked 'em up there. But you'd fire one of these at 'em at these, just by calculation. And then try to adjust the next shot, either over or under or—a few—we use to use the term "clicks" that was—and if you got right on, you know, on—you could hit this house or come close to it by. Then you were on the range. So all these—all the—you could fire the whole, the whole battalion at once if you had to. And actually, see there was three artillery batteries. And each had four of these guns and over there they had—they were 155 long rifles. And they had a range of something like eighteen miles. You could shoot that far with 'em. And then each battery had one 203—that was an eight inch caliber gun. You know, so they had five guns in each one. And the crew on—these artillery crews were fifteen men I think that took to man one of these things. And that was—hustle shells up to 'em and do whatever, set 'em up and—and after each round you had to clean that gun. Cause did you ever see those things? They had a—it was an artillery shell about this long and you'd push that in the breech.

Bowers Healey: You're indicating a shell about two feet long?

Gordon: Yeah it wasn't probably that long—but it was—yeah, I'm sure it was probably was close to two feet.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And about 155 millimeter, that's about six inches, in diameter. And push that up in there. And course you didn't want any fire up in there because behind that the powder would come in silk sacks, probably, oh gosh, five or six feet long, and there was a series of these sewed together. So depending on off what range you wanted you could cut off some of 'em. And then you'd jam them in and then, of course, the fuse on this shell too, you had to put a fuse on it. And but anyway during this process they'd fire

and then they'd open the breach. And take a—they had a big swab, it was wet and they'd run that thing through to—cause this fabric from the silk casing around the powder was fragments that was in there, it was impossible, so you wanted to put them all out. And it so happened, there was another 155 outfit from—that come to Africa from the 32nd. And they, they had a muzzle blast. I can't remember the number. And that was—you'd fire and the shell would explode right at the—as it exited the gun. And I think that killed a whole crew over there in Africa. And we had—one of the guns was getting a direct hit when we were at a casino there, in front of the Germans and I thought it killed all fifteen guys.

Bowers Healey: So you were at Monte Cassino?

Gordon: Yeah, that's where I got wounded.

Bowers Healey: Okay. What were you wounded by?

Gordon: I was wounded by shell fire.

Bowers Healey: Okay. Had you just fired out?

Gordon: Well, actually I was back at our CP 'cause I—I don't know where I'd been, but I noticed that we'd been there, jeez I don't know, six, eight weeks. And we were about, say a mile, from the line, from the—as I remember Cassino was about forty or fifty thousand people, when they started out, that thing was leveled when you got through. This Cassino was up on the hillside about five hundred feet higher, on the outside of the mountain up there. And that was kind of a political football because they didn't want the story of this holy Catholic institution up there, for some reason, which was all right. But they finally bombed it from the air. And then—

Bowers Healey: Before they bombed it from the air had you seen Monte Cassino?

Gordon: Yeah I could see it every day.

Bowers Healey: Okay. And was there fire—could you observe—were they firing from Monte Cassino?

Gordon: I couldn't see that. In fact I didn't wanna be out there—they could see me if I could see them.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: But they said that—well once they started firing on it they said the German's occupied it, it was rubble. And then they had a heck of a time getting them out of there.

Bowers Healey: Now you said they fired on Monte Cassino from the air?

Gordon: Well they bombed it among other things and were firing artillery on it.

Bowers Healey: Had you fired artillery before they bombed it from the air?

Gordon: Well, you know they bombed it after I was wounded and left. And that was kinda fiasco too, the Air Force couldn't hit the side of a barn with this bombing. And some of the guys that were there, I talked to later, and they said they see the bombs come out of the planes and they were probably bombing at a thousand foot elevation or something and he said they could see that they weren't gonna hit the Cassino.

Bowers Healey: When you got wounded what happened to you? Were you alert when you got wounded?

Gordon: Well, you know, I say I don't know where I'd been, it was in the morning. And I think I'd been up on one of these OP's.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And I come down and, you know, we had these GI cans do you know what they are? Five gallon cans?

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: We'd have about, oh water—a lot of water sittin' around in 'em. And we'd also had a lotta wine sitting in 'em. And we'd tap these—every farm house had big casks of wine, in wooden casks. They'd generally have a dirt floor in 'em. These things were no bigger than the height of these counters. So what we'd do is shoot—stand in the doorway and shoot holes—shoot a hole in the bottom of each one, to see if they had wine in 'em, to squirt out then we'd take the next plunge and get in there and fill these cans. Cause the Germans—there was a rumor going around they were putting box mines in these little sheds where they were storing wine.

Bowers Healey: What were box wines—box mines?

Gordon: Well, they were little mine about this big, anti-personnel mine, but they had a wooden exterior so they couldn't pick 'em up with mine detectors. And they'd explode and wreck a guy.

Bowers Healey: I'll note as you're talking you're—you're making hands probably about four inches square.

Gordon: Well they weren't square, they were about like a box of fire matches.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: You'd find those all over. They stick in the ground. So, in fact—

Bowers Healey: So that's what you were doing the day you were wounded?

Gordon: No I'd—I was up on an OP, I think, we come down and you didn't dare to be—we had to come down in the dark. Cause we were exposed to all these guys on the German side. And anyway we were back, I'm gonna say we were about a mile from the village at Cassino, although we had to drive through that town to get up to where we went up this one place on the OP. Now I gotta gather my thoughts. Anyway we were back to where we were and I—this—oh I think this guy's name is in here. I said I had a driver, his name was Edwards, Corporal Edwards. He got killed after. He'd built this—we had—we were on a—they had a vineyard and they'd step these hillsides, you know, to plant vines.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: And so these guys would dig—we'd dig into this thing and then so Edwards had made a bunk for he and I to sleep. And he'd found some planks and stuff and he put them over the excavation and piled dirt on there then he had sand bags filled out in front. And I come back and I'd stopped and filled my canteen with wine, probably one with wine and one with water, back at our kitchen area. And that's—we were scattered over probably a city block area. And there was—seems to be there was a half a dozen guys dug in alongside of us. And I was wondering why nobody was around. Occasionally they'd shell—throw some shells in there. So these guys were all in this—sleeping in these bunkers they made. And so I sat down on the entrance to it on the sandbags and still had this canteen and stuff on and, you know, there was—you could probably ask anybody in the Army or particularly the artillery if they can recognize an incoming shell, with how close it's gonna hit to you. Cause there was a popular saying, if you don't hear the one hit you and you'd know it. I just heard a buzz. Where if they hit a hundred feet away or more they'd have a plane do it. Germans had a device that made 'em whistle when they—before they hit. So I was sitting there and this shell hit about thirty feet out in front of me. I was lookin' right at it and seeing the dirt erupt. I thought, "My god, I must be hit." And I had this canteen of wine on this side and one fragment had gone through there. So I could feel it running down my leg. I thought, "Oh my god, it hit me through the side over here for one thing" I thought it was the wine coming out.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: But I had a half a dozen other holes on this side, so.

Bowers Healey: Meaning your legs? Or no?

Gordon: Yeah, most all of the leg.

Bowers Healey: Okay, all right.

Gordon: Well I got one piece on my rear end. It's still in there.

Bowers Healey: Cause that was from the shell or from the canteen?

Gordon: No from the shell.

Bowers Healey: From the shell.

Gordon: From the shell.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Then those shells are about—these are eighty-eights, so they're probably a quarter inch thick. This piece is about that long that I've got in my butt. So they musta decided they didn't take it out. And then over here, the one that got me I was kinda—I was sitting kinda crouched. And this one hit me underneath my leg and ripped me clear in and ripped the nerve. Open for about eight inches. On this side I think—

Bowers Healey: On the right side.

Gordon: Yeah on this little—cut through there. I had two that went through my penis.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And that [laughs] went in and out with a—I don't know how. I think I got a scar over here on this side too, I think I got—so.

Bowers Healey: Did you lose consciousness or no?

Gordon: No.

Bowers Healey: No, okay.

Gordon: But I—by the way this Kay was in the next hole.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And he—so I yelled at him and said, "I got hit." He come over and he got the medics. And the medics were about, probably five, six hundred feet away in the house. Anyway we'd getting back to this thing and—well anyway somebody run and get the medics and the first they do they give you a shot of morphine. Which was very relaxing, I guess. And then put me on a stretcher, then four guys had to carry me down to the—we had one ambulance of the battalion and that was, well back down where the aid station was. We had to park behind the house 'cause I'm sure the Germans could see the house. And—so we get started in—I think they cut my pants off when we were in there. But we get down there and there was three more casualties they had to drive down.

Bowers Healey: From the same shell or not?

Gordon: No, I think just from that air raid.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: On the way down there, before we ever got there, they used to fire air bursts, the proximity fuse is what they called it. But they could set those so they explode twenty-five feet off the ground. Shell would come in and right at twenty-five feet above the ground it would explode.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: So this—I don't think they could see us or what they started shooting and this trail was rocky and everything, you know, all four of these guys just dropped me, period. I bounced off the trail. And I give 'em hell 'cause I said, "You weren't much help." I don't know where they went but they probably just took to the ground. Got down then and eventually loaded up in this ambulance and took off. And oh they used to keep smoke pots going all up and down in the valley there, 'cause they could—the Germans could see us. And this was very unusual for an outfit like ours to be as close to the line as we were. That's why we were catching all this fire.

Bowers Healey: And the smoke pots were for disguise? Cover?

Gordon: Yeah, they'd hang, you know, maybe ten feet high or twenty feet of smoke. So they couldn't see vehicles or anybody else in the road. So we got down the road a ways and this ambulance driver stopped the ambulance and the damn ambulance was burning.

Bowers Healey: It was burning?

Gordon: Yeah. So he had to stop along the road and pull us out. And I don't know if there was a driver with him or not, I don't remember. But there was a fire in the roof of the thing. Cause these shell fragments would be red hot when they'd come from the explosion and that would happen. So anyway we had to reload and he flagged another guy coming down and put us in a new one. And—

Bowers Healey: Were you on a stretcher all this time or were you ambulatory?

Gordon: No, I was on a stretcher. So were the other two.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Yeah. I do remember that this one guy was screaming and hollering and I knew these medics because, most of 'em, cause you gotta be a hustler in the army to get along. And they had a hundred and sixty proof alcohol, come in five gallon cans. It was drinkable [laughs].

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Might scorch off an inch of skin but. So I was the guy that—there was a staff sergeant and then a doctor at this place. And I remember this guy's name was Gray, Sergeant Gray, I think. I'd trade fruit juice to him for this hundred and forty or hundred and sixty proof alcohol.

Bowers Healey: After you were wounded or before?

Gordon: No, no, before.

Bowers Healey: Do you remember what day it was that you were wounded?

Gordon: It was—I think it was February third.

Bowers Healey: Of 19-what?

Gordon: '44.

Bowers Healey: 1944, okay. What—when they finally got you back and you said you got loaded and then off loaded because it was burning and then loaded again, where'd they take you and what kind of treatment?

Gordon: Well then, then down the road about, probably two miles there was a small hospital facility and I—they had a small tent they operated in. I can't remember if there was one tent or two. Kind of a war tent, it was probably twenty guys in there, or maybe thirty, I don't know. And this was the most forward tent—I got a story to tell you about this thing. I—well even before

this I had, oh what the heck they call it, real severe sore throats. There was a name for that.

Bowers Healey: Strep throat?

Gordon: No.

Bowers Healey: No.

Gordon: More than that, it was.

Bowers Healey: More than that, okay.

Gordon: And I—that flared up on me over there, about a month before that. They hauled me back to this facility and they lanced this thing, kept me overnight. And this was just plum full of puss, you know what I mean, you'd cough up like a couple of tablespoons of pure puss. And I was in there—but I do remember that deal too because there was a big push on that night and hundreds of casualties that night—

[Break in recording][End of Tape 2, Side 1][01:34:57]

Bowers Healey: —in the medic tent

Gordon: Yeah, okay I got off subject. Okay so I knew I'd been back in this tent before and then back to my unit. This guy was—I said this one patient in the ambulance he was screaming and hollering about how bad he's hurting or something and this driver told him to shut up. And he made some remark about me being very much worse. Then when he told him to shut up. So then they pulled up to this small unit, they dropped me off there and take the rest of 'em and go further. I thought, "My, that's not good news." They operated on me right there at that tent. I was in there for a week. And another thing that was interesting about that, you know what dog tags are?

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: Okay the—my—the nurse that was at this tent, I don't know, she was probably looking at my dog tags and so she was from Stanley, Wisconsin over here. And I was in there for a week and I was right inside the door. In those days they used ether rather than something else to—for an anesthetic. And so I woke up puking and I puked all over and over her linens, I think they were piled on the little cabinet alongside of me there. And this vomit when you had from ether was just coal black. So I don't know what they did, probably had to throw all this linen out. But she—anyway she was from Stanley, Wisconsin. Later on after I was discharged

and home I made a point to stop in Stanley one time, that was kind of a long ways from River Falls, and right after the war, to find out about her and she'd been killed. I still don't know—I knew her name when, you know, when she was in the tent with her. But then I've asked over there and these dummies in Stanley, nobody seems to know who it would be. But later on, in fact, not within the last year I was reading an article in a magazine, I thought they said there were only six army nurses that'd been killed in the whole war all over the world, in World War II. So she musta been one of them. And I got a gut feeling that probably they moved up to this Anzio beach head up there where they were sitting ducks too [blows nose]. I don't know why my nose runs all the time but—

Bowers Healey: You indicated that you were in the hospital for a week. Were you—?

Gordon: I was in there for a week and then they moved me out of there, I think up to Caserta. Caserta was where the king's palace was in Italy. C-A-S-E—E-R-T-A. And this was a big old masonry hospital. And the king's palace was there. And if you have access to—by the way I give—oh, I'm getting off subject. I give the museum down there—I had put 'near all the Yank Magazines were published. Did you ever hear of them?

Bowers Healey: I think I've seen that.

Gordon: Well I give 'em to the gal. And they've got 'em down there I guess. And they were like a biography of the war.

Bowers Healey: You collect those in Italy or where?

Gordon: My mother took 'em. She took—they were—they were—I know they were two dollars a year. They were bigger than this but they were about no more than eighth-inch thick.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: But they published those about a year and a half. And it was really good stuff. I used to take those out—find me on—they laid there and I probably hadn't looked at those twice in fifty years and I got to taking 'em out to McDonald's out here. I'd take six, eight copies. And these guys were all GI's, ex-GI's from World War. And finally I noticed some guy was cutting the cartoons out of 'em. [laughs] God, I coulda killed him if I—I think I know which one it was, it was—so I thought, “My god these things are priceless and this dummy's cuttin' pictures out of him.” He's dead, thank God.

Bowers Healey: Um—all right, you were takin'—we diverted from Caserta Palace.

Gordon: Yeah well anyway that was right along there too. This is a great big monstrosity. I can't remember if it was two stories or three. And it was in multi-wards, thick walls, and I don't know how old this building was. And the Army had taken it over. And I don't know if that was the second one I was in or the third one after I got sent back from this early one. But I was in there for a long time because this wound in here, it ripped the sheath, it was what they call the sheath around your nerve, the main nerve that goes around your leg, it ripped that open all the way down. So I laid there and I couldn't feel my leg or move it or anything else, for about six weeks. And finally some feeling started coming back. In the meantime I laid in the fetal position—here I'm showing my hospital pictures—which meant my leg was bent. So when I got out of bed and tried to use crutches, I couldn't reach the floor with this leg. Finally I got a—I think a size twelve shoe, I only wear a seven or eight myself, and I put that on and I could just touch the floor with that thing and by walking around and stretching the thing I finally got down to where I could walk. With crutches that took quite a series. But I was in that hospital for, oh gosh, two, three months. I think I was in the hospital four to five months for this thing. And it was this wound here that was holding me up. And they never, they never bandaged that thing, it hung open pretty much. They'd put a couple of, I think they called 'em ace bandages, they'd just hold the thing shut, not kinda shut. And they wanted it to heal from the inside out. Cause the guys—a few of the guys in the outfit would come in once in a while just to visit me and I'd take my pajamas off and show 'em this wound. So that was quite an experience in there. Then they used my bunk for a poker table [laughs]. We couldn't hardly move, they'd wake me up in the morning and we'd play poker all day on that thing.

Bowers Healey: Oh, other patients?

Gordon: Yeah, come down, ambulatory pers—people. So I'll tell you an incident about that—

Bowers Healey: So you stayed in Europe? They didn't send you back to the United States?

Gordon: They didn't send you back at that time. I mean the real bad guys were shipped back on—they had these big ocean-going vessels, you know, that's the way took 'em back to the states, if they were real serious. I got in and got more ambulatory. You know, you'd just wander around the hospital on crutches and everything. And I remember there was two of these guys. One guy's name was Culbertson[??] and I can relate to that because of Culbertson bridge. He claimed his uncle was that famous bridge player.

Bowers Healey: Oh okay.

Gordon: I remember he was from Virginia or West Virginia or something. So they stole a—I guess they stole all these uniforms for me and put 'em under the mattress on my bed. So I'd put the uniform on and these guys'd help me and we'd go into Naples and tear around. We'd escape. Had to fight to get on the truck and they'd push me over the tailgate and we'd race around and come back. And I remember they had guards on the gates of this place. And these two guys, these weren't very intelligent or they couldn't write very well 'cause I had to write out the passes. I remember they stole some passes too. I'd write out a pass for all of us. And then—

Bowers Healey: Were these guys from Wisconsin or not?

Gordon: No they were from—they were in the 1st Armored Division, I remember that. And they were from out east someplace. And I can remember the one guy had a wound in his thigh there a couple inches. Every couple of weeks he'd pull that thing open so it'd bleed. He didn't want it to heal up 'cause he didn't wanna go back to where they were shooting at him. They were really a couple of characters, I tell you. I won't tell you some of the worst things we did when we went to Naples. That was quite a place. So anyway then—boy another guy that I got acquainted with along the line, I used to call him Junior. He was from Ranger Battalion. The Rangers were like the Marines and the super heroes of present day wars right now. And there was only, I think, the first, third and fourth ranger battalions were in Italy. And then there was a—there was only five of those battalions in the world. The fifth one was sent to Asia, I think. Oh, and the second, the second ranger battalion got a lot of publicity, they were the ones that climbed—on D-Day the ones that climbed the cliff. Remember that? On D-Day—but the first, third, and fourth were all there in Italy. I don't know what they thought they were gonna do there.

Bowers Healey: How'd you run into this ranger?

Gordon: He was in the hospital there too.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And so I lent him—in a poker game before I got through he owed me two hundred dollars. The next thing I know he's gone, he's back to his unit. So I thought well, live and learn, you know, other guys owed me money too. And I'm gonna digress a little bit. Later on, I'm back in the states, I'm home on a furlough, I get sent down to Hot Springs, Arkansas. They'd taken that whole city over. I don't know if you've ever been there but there's—

Bowers Healey: Hot Springs? No.

Gordon: Hot Springs has got a lot of natural springs. And a lot of hotels they'd build around that. So they use 'em for health kick. And they'd booted everybody out and they were using it for a rest camp for us guys comin' back from overseas. I'm walking down the street in Hot Springs, here comes Junior, the other way down the street. He says, "Hey I've been thinking about you," he says, "owe you two hundred bucks." I said, "Boy I thought I'd never see that." So he give me that two hundred. We went out and spent it in one day. Along with—we got hooked up with two other GI's and four girls in a rental convertible. And away we went. And I remember it was late at night 'cause we had—I kept paying the guy in the bar to stay open, out in the country some place. Oh and then coming back—and by the way I'm well acquainted in Hot Springs, Arkansas 'cause my brother retired down there. One of my—my youngest brother. And he's dead now but my sister lives down there yet. And well anyway coming back into town that night we side swiped at truss bridge, tore the running board and the fenders off this convertible and everything else. Just lucky nobody got hurt, you know. I was glad I hadn't rented that car. So then I don't know who these guys were or what but—

Bowers Healey: So you got your two hundred dollars back to spend.

Gordon: I spent the two hundred bucks. That went a long ways.

Bowers Healey: Okay. Now you mentioned that this ranger left the hospital before you did and—

Gordon: Probably went back to his unit.

Bowers Healey: Okay and did you go back to your unit?

Gordon: No. What happened to me—after I got out of this massive hospital there at Caserta, and I say I can't remember if that was the second or the third one, I was to a couple other hospitals out and one of 'em was—by the way up at Cassino they were right next to British 8th Army. And there was an—British 8th Army, they had what they called twenty-five pounders, I don't know why they used that term. Well they were shell—the shells only weighed twenty-five pounds and those guys'd come over and fire the artillery at our outfit and our guys would go over and shoot—fire the British stuff out there, down. And the British had an air base along there, down there in Naples. Those were quite the days. Anyway from—went out—a bunch of us were sent out to this, this one hospital, just a tent hospital and the British had been using it and of course they had all colonial troops most of 'em. So they booted a whole bunch of these native troops out of the tents to another part of this hospital and put us in it. And I'd never even heard of crabs. Do you know what crabs are?

Bowers Healey: Uh-huh.

Gordon: That people get. The guy in the bed that I got had crabs apparently and then I got 'em. I was a crawling mess of—so I got a lot of advice from the GI's you know, they'd moved. So I went down to the kitchen of this hospital and they told me to get vinegar and put it on your privates and everything because that dissolves these eggs and everything that these crabs lay right away. But I didn't know that I got a bottle of stuff that was come in a bottle about like this but about this much vinegar in it. That was so concentrated it wouldn't—the bottle was smokin' even. I go back up to this tent, slosh in the palm of my hand and slosh it on my crotch and my god, two minutes I was tearing down to try to find a shower. I burned myself real seriously. That was a tough lesson. So wouldn't buy that but these were—oh, there were some troops in North Africa called “gooms” [Moroccan Goumiers], I think there's—they were not Arabs but I don't know they were wild people, Berbers or something. And we'd all stand around out there and try to understand each other and everything.

Bowers Healey: Were they fighting the Germans too?

Gordon: Oh yeah, yeah. Well, I said, British wouldn't have wanted anything with it, they haven't fought their own war for 200 years. They had—yeah—in Italy there you never knew who you were gonna run in to. They had these so-called—oh, were they the “gooms” or were the “gooms” from North Africa? They had a lot of Indian troops. And some of 'em were big tall guys and they had a big tall headdress on. And meet those guys in the dark and my god they looked like they were about seven feet tall. Oh let's see, there was a lot of these—I've met an Indian and talked to, you know, talked to guys about this and they said this name the English used, that was one, kinda like a county. And the English called all of 'em the same name all over. It was—what's that next country north of India?

Bowers Healey: Pakistan?

Gordon: No, no no.

Bowers Healey: Um, I'm trying to think.

Gordon: Little, little countries.

Bowers Healey: Tibet?

Gordon: No.

Bowers Healey: Bangladesh, is that?

Gordon: No, no, no, no, no that's India—India—

Bowers Healey: Yeah it's north of India.

Gordon: Um—Nepal.

Bowers Healey: Oh, okay.

Gordon: These people are from Nepal.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Little short stocky guys, real tough guys.

Bowers Healey: I can't think of their name either, I know what you're talking about.

Gordon: Well they're Nepal—Nepalese but yeah they had their name they called 'em

Bowers Healey: Starts with a K, I think, K or a C.

Gordon: Okay.

Bowers Healey: Well, okay.

Gordon: Yeah, there was a lot of them around. You know I said I used to go out on these, these OPs we had. And well anyway this one time, was up on—I was up on this thing and the British 8th Army was right in the next valley and it was all these foreign troops down there. And here come four—I remember it was four trucks grinding up the valley down below once and it seemed like it was a long ways down, probably fifteen hundred to two thousand feet 'cause we were above the clouds are. And this was—you think I'm BS'ing ya—one truck had a load of goats on it and they butchered these things and ate 'em themselves. One truck had women, a load of women standing back there.

Bowers Healey: And you're talking about when, did this?

Gordon: This was during the war over in Italy.

Bowers Healey: In Italy, okay.

Gordon: They were bringing these women up to the troops.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: So, you know, lots of strange things went on.

Bowers Healey: Italian women?

Gordon: No, no.

Bowers Healey: No?

Gordon: Native women for the—these Nepalese. I'm gonna look up to try to find what they would call those guys. They were—and they had a reputation for cutting throats and loved it. They could crawl into German mines and they said they'd feel the buttons on the uniforms. The Germans had one design on 'em, they could tell by the feeling of the buttons whether they were Germans or allied troops. And they'd just cut their throat and they were tough babies.

Bowers Healey: So you had some contact with them?

Gordon: Well I—not over there particularly. These guys were down in the next valley where we could see 'em down there. Moving up there to the line with these commodities. Goats and women, I guess that's all they needed. Them and then the India—there was Indian troops too around, a lot of 'em too. Of course I guess these guys, British would probably consider these people Indians but they were from Nepal. I've been to Nepal too. What else do I wanna tell you.

Bowers Healey: Well you said you were in Hot Springs, Arkansas after you were sent back.

Gordon: Well anyway from—when I finally got out—well then from finally got out of the hospital they sent me back to Naples. You know during the war supposedly the World's Fair was gonna be in Naples, in the early '40s. Didn't happen but they'd built all of this facility. A lot of guys referred to it as the race track. They had a big race track there and big other facilities and you know many, many acres there. And this was all fenced in. And they said there'd be as many as twenty thousand GI troops there, American troops in that place at any one time. And the Air Force would route through all their people coming and going through there too. And there was—so I come limpin' back there, don't know if i had a cane or was beyond that stage and all I had was an empty barracks bag and I had to throw that in a tent and take a rest getting back there. So here I am down at this repo depot and they put me on guard duty cause I didn't really even have a uniform, I was still a staff sergeant but I didn't have any stripes on this thing. And so I thought, “Well, I'll take my turn on this—” I think there was a—I think there was thirty-five guard posts, no it couldn't be, was it that maybe? Was it thirty-five or twenty-five? Thirty-five, I think it

was thirty-five. Around the outside of this place. And so you got three shifts so that means you got to have three times that many guards to handle the shifts, the guard for the day. So the first day I went down and I just, well put me out on the guard. Walked the post for the thing until the beat was over and the next time I had guard duty, well there wasn't any sergeant of the guard showed up. So somebody says, "Well Gordon's a staff sergeant." So they—I got promoted to sergeant of the guard. And the, you know, the guard duties you've got that in every Army base and everything. Usually you had a corporal of the guard and then the guards guard our guards and so forth, the sergeant of the guards probably. Well the sergeant—or the corporals of the guards were all buck sergeants in the infantry, usually. And I'm in charge of this thing. And I remember this one guy was a red-haired guy from the 34th Division. I don't remember if I'd go with him or not but we'd have to walk all the way around the post of these guards and pick up the other ones and bring 'em back. So when we got back I—he and I had taken—go outside and walk out someplace and drink wine and some—everybody in the country was selling wine, the locals. So got through—got that done.

Bowers Healey: What time—what date was this that you were guard duty? Was the war—had the war ended?

Gordon: Oh no. The war was still goin'.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: 'Cause I remember that one night—one morning there was a big—well, I'd say a pretty good size culvert it went under the racetrack and under this fence and into the—this area where all these tents were and everything, you know twenty thousand troops in there. And all of the sudden there's a tremendous commotion. It must have been thirty kids had snuck in this pipe and fortunately they went over in the air force area. These rich air force guys they'd always had it easier. Better clothes and better going than the rest of it.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: The kids are in there looting that and somebody saw 'em and started yelling, you know, here come these kids all running, dragging clothes and everything else. I thought about taking and shooting—not shooting at 'em but just shooting in the air a couple times, I thought "Oh, my god, I'll have a riot around here if i get everybody scared." So I let 'em go and I guess most of 'em run back through the pipe and that was exciting for a while.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: So they got a lot of clothes stolen from 'em.

Bowers Healey: How much longer did you stay in Europe after that?

Gordon: Well I was there—not too much longer. I was there for—at this—doing guard duty at this repo depot. In fact you walked through there to go shipped either way. And then they shipped me back to states. And I went back to—I guess I was shipped directly to Wisconsin on furlough.

Bowers Healey: Okay. Were you able to get back to your hometown, River Falls?

Gordon: Yeah, on furlough.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: So I was at—back there for, I don't remember, two, three weeks and then they had me—had this thing down at Hot Springs Village, Arkansas. So from my furlough I was told to report down to Hot Springs Village. And down there, you know. No, I'm getting—I'm getting this—no, no I did. For my furlough I had to go down there and I think was there for, probably three, four weeks. Just nobody bothered—they didn't know where I was or anything. We all had rooms in the hotels. Food, food was available. In this main hotel which is still down there, they had an orchestra played there for meals and everything so it was very nice.

Bowers Healey: And after Hot Springs Arkansas? Did somebody figure out where you were—?

Gordon: Well from Hot Springs, Arkansas, I had the—I was a ranking NCO then so they gave me forty guys, told me to report down to Camp Bor—Camp—what was the name of it? At New Orleans, where I'd been before. The—all this time that I'd been gone they built a new, a new Army base right at New Orleans. And what they—what this base was, they were training Army troops to operate these sea-going ocean vessels. And it was a complete mess. But they had eight hundred PWs [POWs]. And I took these forty guys down there to the PW camp. It was a stockade within the camp. And it got foggier than heck down there, you know, at night sometimes so we'd have to follow all these guards out and we'd have to stand literally shoulder to shoulder around this PW area so nobody escaped, I don't think they wanted to but there was 800 of them.

Bowers Healey: 800 PWs?

Gordon: Yeah 800 PWs in there. They had their own kitchens in there and.

Bowers Healey: Where were the PWs from?

Gordon: From Germany [phone rings] Oh.

[Break in recording][02:06:39]

Gordon: So anyway from the Hot Springs Village there was a depot there. We had to go in to Hot—in to Little Rock and transfer trains. So here I got forty guys that were probably all of 'em could clean my clock. I filled the first train and lined 'em up and give 'em a pep talk and we had to wait a couple hours for this other train. I said, "I'm not gonna chase you around looking for you in town. You better get your asses back here in two hours or I'm gonna come lookin' for you. I'm gonna do bad things to you." [laughs] Which was probably all a bluff. They all showed up. So from there on we had a sleeper car loaded down to New Orleans. And I remember one incident. Another pet peeve of mine are railroad conductors, particularly. So this crabby old guy was in charge on this train. The guys wanted to, you know, lay down on their bunks and rest. He didn't want us to mess 'em up. So I finally told him, I said, "You know. We're all here from, you know, overseas and everything." I said, "You keep crapping off like this and I'm gonna have one of 'em throw you off the train, then we wouldn't have to put up with you." Boy, that guy shut up. So we got down there and reported. And, you know, I don't know what nationality you are—this was another thing. There was three officers in charge of this PW Camp. A captain, a first lieutenant, and a second lieutenant. All of 'em Jewish guys from out east. I thought, "You bastards, you found a soft place for the war." But that's beside the point. And then the guy—the captain had the nerve enough to try to recruit me. He says, "Boy you've got quite a record." He's like, "Don't you think you wanna stick in the service and this and that? And I said. "Not one more day than I have to."

Bowers Healey: I take it you were in for the duration?

Gordon: Well, yeah well we all get stuck once you get drafted, I suppose or whatever.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: But he wanted me to make a career out of the service.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: Now you see these guys walking around with artificial legs and arms and everything else.

Bowers Healey: How long did you spend down in New Orleans?

Gordon: Well I was—I made up my mind that I was gonna get the hell outta the army. So then I—I wasn't getting along very good anyway. And you know this, this—what do you call that thing right on the back of your heel? This tendon back there? Achilles tendon.

Bowers Healey: Achilles.

Gordon: That was about the size of a wood match. It atrophied so if I wasn't careful, you know, when I would step up on the sidewalk my, you know, my foot wouldn't support me and I'd fall down. Stuff like that.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: So I said, "Well, I've had enough of this crap." And wasn't doing anybody any good. So I started going sick leave every day. Which is—and well they were starting to discharge guys. There was six of us—one guy had a car so we drove to Fort Sheridan and he got paid to drive his car out there and. And I got discharged in December of '44. I don't remember the exact date. Well and an incident happened there. This company commander I had in the—this artillery outfit in Italy, he got wounded a week or two after I did. And I'd looked him up—he was in this army hospital, he and another—one of the other company commanders. And so I'm in—at Fort Sheridan down and he was delivering farewell speeches down there to the guys, several hundred guys. And I could see him looking, you know, individually down each row and I could see when he hit me he—his eyes opened up and he recognized me, so. He was a nice guy.

Bowers Healey: He was from your unit?

Gordon: Well he was the captain of this headquarters battery in Italy.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Well let's see I've meandered all over now, where else do we wanna go?

Bowers Healey: Well, um, December '44 you're discharged, where'd you go from there? Did you come back to River Falls?

Gordon: Yeah, I come back to River Falls and my uncle got me a job tending bar.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: This gal's [phone rings] this gal's—

[Break in recording]

Bowers Healey: —bartender.

Gordon: Yeah, I was a bartender.

Bowers Healey: Okay

Gordon: And this gal was a widow and so my uncle says she's looking for a bartender. So she was about, probably fifty, I don't know. So then—I split the shift—the day's shift with another guy. And back then they had punch boards and stuff like that in the bars.

Bowers Healey: What's a punch bar?

Gordon: Punch boards.

Bowers Healey: Punch board.

Gordon: Don't you remember those? You're too young. You know, probably five hundred holes on here, you punch out these sleeves, they got a price on 'em. You either win something or you don't.

Bowers Healey: Oh, okay.

Gordon: And there was fourteen bars in the town. And she—she didn't have punch boards. So after I worked for her for a while, I asked her if I could put 'em up. So she was paying me sixty dollars a week, which was pretty good money in nineteen four—what year would that be?

Bowers Healey: Was it '45? If you were discharged in December of '44?

Gordon: Yeah it was probably in '45 for a while. I couldn't get into college over there, you know, because the semester. I had to wait 'til the next.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And I was—well I lived tying hog but I never saw—really never saw the sun. Cause I'd—one day I'd open it up. Had to wash all the glasses and you know clean the place up and then I'd go on the other side of the bar or what and hoop it up the rest of the night someplace else. Next day I'd just have to reverse the process.

Bowers Healey: Were you still living at home?

Gordon: Yeah.

Bowers Healey: Okay. And your mom and dad there?

Gordon: Yeah, yeah and then my kid brother was there yet. So and my mother took in—we had a two story house, I think she had three or four kids there. College kids that stayed there, about that time. 'Cause—oh maybe that's a little bit later 'cause then Chuck went down and got a degree at the college, at Madison too.

Bowers Healey: And then you went down to—next semester you went down to Madison or not?

Gordon: No I went one year at River Falls.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: I took all—started in March.

Bowers Healey: That's right.

Gordon: Started it in March I think then went all the way through and in—and the whole next year too there. Yeah I had really good pickin's around there, there was only 400 girls in the student body at that year. I was the seventeenth male in the student body. Out of the seventeen of us, three of us were veterans and the other fourteen were cripples, so you know, handicapped so couldn't be in the service.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: And I used to see the one guy, he—in Eau Claire here he wound up teaching drivers ed here in Eau Claire. Don't know what's happened to him since. [inaudible]

Bowers Healey: Did you end up using the GI Bill at all for college?

Gordon: Yes I did, yeah i did.

Bowers Healey: Were you able to use that for all the rest of your college?

Gordon: Uh, yeah. See I was in the service about, I think fifty months. And the guys I went in with, these other guys, they all got in five years plus, before they got out.

Bowers Healey: Wow. And after you graduated from UW Madison, what'd you end up doing?

Gordon: Well I—I said I come up here.

Bowers Healey: Oh, okay.

Gordon: You know, to work for the Department of Transportation

Bowers Healey: All right.

Gordon: And there was thirty-three of us that graduated when I did in June of '48 was all. There was, you know, tens of thousands of kids goin' to school down there by that time. And—but I say there was only thirty-three in that class that graduated when I did in civil engineering. And three of us come up, went to work.

Bowers Healey: Up here to Eau Claire?

Gordon: Yeah.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: 'Cause they—they were, oh they were—they were kind of a horse and buggy outfit at—prior to that. And I don't know how many engineers they really had on the staff, most of 'em were kinda homemade guys, you know, learn on the job and. So one kid was from—he's still in town here, was from Stanley and the other one was a local kid and he's married a contractor's daughter and away they went, I don't know where he wound up.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: By the name of Stan.

Bowers Healey: So you've been living here in Eau Claire for fifty or sixty years?

Gordon: Well we, um, uh, yeah.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Well I was married in Madison too. Got married when I went down there.

Bowers Healey: Um where's your—where was your wife?

Gordon: Let me show you my—that's my wife over there in the—

Bowers Healey: That's okay I'll take a look later.

Gordon: [walks away from recorder] No it's down—facing away from me. I—my—the reason I'm especially bad on the walking—I just—I'll bring a couple pictures over here.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Just wearing that for kicks.

Bowers Healey: Where was your wife from?

Gordon: She's from Minneapolis when I married her. And she's—she was a nurse. But—oh here's a picture of her and my daughter, sittin' in there.

Bowers Healey: How many children did you and your wife have?

Gordon: Three.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Then she revolted and she had all three of 'em caesarian so.

Bowers Healey: And was she going—was she a student in Madison when you married her or how'd you meet her?

Gordon: No she—she graduated in Minneapolis from nursing school.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And she was living with me. She'd lived all—quite a few places there. She's from Minnesota originally. And her dad was a revenuer so they'd lived in Washington D.C. quite a while and they lived in New York. And then he come back to Minneapolis again.

Bowers Healey: And where do your children live now?

Gordon: Well they all—two of 'em live in—two of 'em live in Colorado and one in Montana, so, hard to—and, well the kid with the uniform on he's, oh he must be, I'd say he's sixty-three probably. So he owns an engineering company out in—are you familiar with Aspen out there? Aspen, that's where the big ski resorts are?

Bowers Healey: I've heard of it but yes, I've not been there.

Gordon: He maintains an office up there but he—with some guys but he's down in Glenwood Springs. It's down the valley fifty miles.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: He's got ninety employees out there. And then my daughter and her husband went out there fifteen years ago I guess. He was building houses in Minneapolis, my son-in-law, and they got caught up in financing and foreclosures and a bunch of stuff and so they just walked away from the Twin Cities and went out—went out there 'cause they're were familiar with. Sold out and so they're—

Bowers Healey: And now you spend some of your winters out in Colorado?

Gordon: Uh—no I don't. I was there this summer for a month.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: So. And Dean is—well he's been out there, oh, over thirty years I guess. And he went out there to go in business with a guy and then the, the guy—partnership in an engineering company and the guy got a chance to sell out the company and he sold it out and left Dean hanging, for the—so, you know, they were in on—oh a guy—a building that was owned by a guy from Alaska originally, from out there, and he was a big—see what did he do out there, he had a—well he was a developer or some kind of a thing and they were in his—one of his buildings and he was in there. And he'd been a city manager up in Alaska at Fairbanks and everything. So he told Dean, he said, “Well before you make any other decisions I, I wanna talk to you.” So he set him up in business originally and then had Dean buy him out and left. So it's quite the country out there.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm

Gordon: Kids all skiing. Race skiing. Fact they get to a point where they don't—skiing isn't even a challenge anymore, so. But they could all ski pretty good when they're six, seven, eight years old, so.

Bowers Healey: After you got out of the service how much have you kept in contact with people from your unit?

Gordon: Well for—back in about the mid-fifties—and see we started out as a National Guard unit over here so there was a few of those around. I don't know if there's any of 'em left over in River Falls anymore. But we started havin' reunions, they wanted to do that. And there was, oh, quite a few of 'em around that area. Prescott had two or three. River Falls, probably, maybe six or eight left over there. Bunch of 'em in Milwaukee and around there. So we started havin' those reunions. We'd have 'em one year down in Milwaukee and then the next year we'd have 'em up there. Fact it got to a point where I'd have it here every other year. And oh we'd have about

thirty, thirty-five show up. Mostly guys that were originated in River Falls. And a lot of the guys over there grew up and moved away and so it was kind of fun. Made a lot of work for my wife, so. But they're all pretty good bunch of guys. And, oh, a lot of—some of—

Bowers Healey: You know, one thing I didn't ask you about, I was just thinking, your parents lost two sons in the war. How much correspondence did you have with your parents when you were in the war? And how did you hear about your brothers being killed?

Gordon: Well Erman [sp??], Erman who was my half-brother. He and I—he was two years older than I was. And my dad had remarried I guess or and I—actually he and I were graduating high school together.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And his, his family was—they were farmers over—down in Ellsworth. And he and I were both kind of buddies then—I say then he went in the Navy and I went with him then I found out that I was—they wouldn't take me. And so that—that was—he was killed in, oh gosh, maybe February, maybe February of after the war started. And I don't know if—you know I don't know if they ever did find—it was on the sub. The *US Shark*. I know they named another—commissioned another sub with that name, since then. He was killed someplace in the China area someplace there. And then my youngest brother that's two years younger than I am, he was flying in the Philippines and he flew into a mountain with—lost the radio and stuff like that and he had—I think he had eight or nine guys on board with him. So they didn't find it—they finally found the plane on several weeks later, it was up in the mountains someplace. You know there's a couple things I've thought about. He supposedly had won about \$4,000 playing poker a day or so before that and that disappeared. Somebody got that. But, anyways, so he's—he's buried out at, oh what's the name of that place now, I'm getting senile myself. It's ten miles this side of North Platte, Nebraska. He and the pilot and one other guy were—we got out to the funeral and those were the only bodies that were there. You know, goofy service, sometimes I think they do things right and sometimes wrong. But they never notified us of it—well they pretty much identified these bodies by—just by bone fragments and stuff like that, so. And my youngest brother he's—he got his eye poked out when he was about five or six years old playing—sliding on the sled. The kid had jammed his sled back and sleds didn't have any—you know now they roll the runner back up and tie it onto the sled body. Before that they used to cut 'em all sharp down here. So he caught this thing on his eye.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: So that take his eye ball out and.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm. Anything else that you—that I didn't ask you or that you didn't mention? That you'd like to add to your oral history?

Gordon: No I can't think of anything. I, you know, when I—I've only had three physicals since I got discharged. And one of 'em was in Madison. And one was up in Fort Snelling. Maybe two of 'em in Madison, I can't remember.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: But so they—they awarded me 30 percent disability. Which I—didn't amount to too much money I don't think. So after I was goin' to school down in Madison, probably a year later. I got this register letter from the VA and they said they'd reviewed my medical records and increased me to 70 percent, which was a nice—and paid that right directly from the time I'd had started up havin' exams.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: So.

Bowers Healey: So 70 percent disability since your college days?

Gordon: Ever since I got out of the service, yeah.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: And you know it's unfortunate but it's—and then if you're—I don't know if you know this, if you're 50 percent disabled or more they put some kind of a bonus on that. Which I—which—let's see how'd that work. Oh no, no. I'm thinking—I got that for my wife. I think I got a hundred bucks or something like that, while she was alive, so. Well this doesn't seem very comprehensive, what'd we—what'd we miss?

Bowers Healey: Got a lot of stories and lot of stories, good stories and information. You had quite an experience when you served.

Gordon: Yeah I did some things not—well nothing that I'm not really too—unproud of's probably the wrong word to use but. I remember over there when we were at this—bivouacked with all these—in North Africa getting—before we went shipped over to Italy. They brought in ten 100 pound sacks of potatoes, the kitchen. And for seven or eight hundred men. And they were lined up in tents down there. So we couldn't let that go so we went up and stole one sack, hauled it down to our tent. We ate potatoes 'til they stuck out of our ears.

Bowers Healey: [laughs]

Gordon: We ate a hundred pounds and the rest of the 800 guys got the other rest of 'em.

Bowers Healey: Better food than you normally got?

Gordon: Well yeah, probably.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: So we ate potatoes of all sorts, just to take care of ourselves.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: Cause I took a—my dad told me—he'd been in the infantry in WWI, he says, "If you can make it, take a frying pan with you."

Bowers Healey: Did you?

Gordon: I kept a frying pan around, it was in the barracks bag most of the time, I didn't always have access to it. But I had that and what else? Oh I had rubber boots, knee boots. I dragged those around.

Bowers Healey: Did those come in handy?

Gordon: I don't remember ever really havin' much occasion to use those.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: But I was way ahead of the game. So yeah, well, lots of good times and. The only guy the comp—was Edwards. And he was kind of a nice guy and I hate to see him killed. Especially because he was killed after I was gone—cause he had a couple of little kids. I think they were about three or four years old.

Bowers Healey: And he was from River Falls?

Gordon: No he was from—I think he was from down around Milwaukee.

Bowers Healey: Okay. All right, well, I thank you for sharing this oral history with the Wisconsin Veterans Department.

Gordon: Yeah, well, I've been thinking that I should go to the VA and apply for 100 percent disability since I got to a point I can't even move around very

much anymore. But I've gotten around pretty good for most of these years.

Bowers Healey: Okay.

Gordon: But on the other hand I think, oh there's gotta be a lotta guys that are worse shape than I am, so. Think I've gotta get out of this place. Kids want me to come out to—out West and live probably some place and I don't know if I wanna go out there or not. But they all got a lotta stairs in their houses out there.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: And the—kind of the mountains. And my oldest son is a real sharp. I've had the university out there tell me that he's probably one of the smartest kids that ever graduated in the engineering school down there. So that's something to be proud of I guess.

Bowers Healey: Mm-hm.

Gordon: And never—I don't think he ever had anything but an A all the way through his lifetime. [laughs]

Bowers Healey: Okay well thank you. I appreciate it.

[End of interview]