

EARL HUTCHINSON

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EARL HUTCHINSON

Today is March 8, 1994. My name is Phyllis Gordon. I am a volunteer with Midway Village & Museum Center cooperating with a statewide effort to collect oral histories from Illinois citizens who participated in the momentous events surrounding World War II. Today we are in the North Suburban District Library and we are interviewing Mr. Earl Hutchinson who served in a branch of the United States Armed Forces during World War II. We are interviewing him about his experiences in that war. Earl, would you please start by introducing yourself to us. Please give us your full name, the place and date of your birth. We'll start with that.

EARL: Okay. I was born in Winnebago County. We lived on Ralston Road up here and I've been a Rockford area resident all my life. My name is Earl Hutchinson.

PHYLLIS: Your birth date?

EARL: I was born December 4, 1921.

PHYLLIS: We'd also like to have the name of each of your parents.

EARL: My dad's name was Orson and my mother's name was Vinnie.

PHYLLIS: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

EARL: There were seven kids altogether.

PHYLLIS: Are there any details about your parents or your family that you'd like to give at this time?

EARL: My dad was in World War I and several of my brothers were in World War II along—not with me but at the same time.

PHYLLIS: What was life like for you before the war and specifically if you can think back to 1941. What were you doing before the war?

EARL: In 1941 I was a large radial drill operator for Greenlee Bros. & Co. They anticipated the war then and they were making transfer-line machines that were able to produce a lot of aircraft engines.

PHYLLIS: What thoughts did you have about the war before the United States became directly involved?

EARL: Well, my thoughts are on any war is that the people fighting the war don't want the war. It's the leaders of the different factions, or different countries that want the war. They can't seem to agree with each other so they start a war and they put all the men ___?___ even since the dawn of history.

PHYLLIS: Did you hear the December 7, 1941, radio announcement about the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese? If so, where were you and what were you doing at that time?

EARL: That is one I don't have a good memory on like most people do because we lived out here in Loves Park in what was like country then. I was doing something out in the yard. I was working on my car—or whatever I was doing and one of my brothers come out and told me that they had just bombed Pearl Harbor.

PHYLLIS: What was your reaction and the response of the others around you when you heard that news?

EARL: that I can't remember.

PHYLLIS: Do you recall reading newspaper accounts of German aggression in Europe?

EARL: Oh, yes. The first one I remember was that I was coming back from Minnesota to Rockford. I was hitch hiking all the way and on the radio of the cars that I rode in it was telling that Hitler had invaded Poland which I didn't think was the right thing to do. I thought Hitler should have stayed in Germany.

PHYLLIS: Did you have any knowledge of Hitler's speeches or ideas?

EARL: No. I never read or studied up on that. I heard what was in the newspapers or heard what was on the radio and that was as far as I got.

PHYLLIS: What events led you into military service? Were you drafted or did you volunteer?

EARL: No, I was drafted a year later. They didn't want me at first because I was working at a production facility that helped the war effort. But a year later they decided that I was a young fellow and they could use me after all.

PHYLLIS: When and where were you inducted?

EARL: I was—I guess I was sworn in Rockford, but I was then inducted in Fort Sheridan just north of Chicago.

PHYLLIS: How old were you? Do you have any special memories of being inducted?

EARL: Well, I got one that is a different one. I went in for my physical into Chicago and it took all day. They took us in by the train load and I got side tracked during the examination and I didn't get my lunch like everybody else. Finally, when I complained about it, they said, "We'll give you some lunch." They took me to a room and they had hot dogs and sauerkraut and I thought, "Oh, what a meal" because I had never had sauerkraut in my life because my mother hated it. I started to eat and the more I ate the more I liked it. I've eaten sauerkraut ever since.

PHYLLIS: That's an interesting story.

EARL: After that physical then they gave us seven day leave to go home and get our papers all straightened out. And that was right at Christmas time. And I went in between Christmas and New Year's to Fort Sheridan and we didn't do much there for a few days because of the Holidays, but then things started to move after that and I went from there to basic training.

PHYLLIS: Where did you take you basic training?

EARL: That was in Camp Hood, Texas.

PHYLLIS: What were you trained to do? And what did you think of the training?

EARL: They called the Camp Hood, Texas, a "tank destroyer unit" but that just happened to be their specialty down there but that jus like being in another branch of the infantry.

PHYLLIS: And so what were you specifically trained to do?

EARL: We didn't get any specific training there. It was just basic training there.

PHYLLIS: all right. Did anything special happen there?

EARL: Well, I know that one of the fellows in our barracks got spinal meningitis and we were quarantined for several weeks. So I got into town once the whole time I was there for thirteen weeks.

PHYLLIS: Tell us about any other training camps that you attended.

EARL: Well, from there we went over into Pennsylvania. I forget the name of the camp for a minute, but I got on KP (kitchen police) duty there and there were several of us there who had to actually peel and cut up fifty pounds of onions.

PHYLLIS: I'll bet you were crying before that job was over.

EARL: Well, we had a good bunch of fellows so we made a bunch of jokes about it. We had quite a time.

PHYLLIS: Did you have any leaves or passes during this and if so, how did you use them?

EARL: I had one evening pass while I was in Texas for the thirteen weeks and I had one evening pass in Pennsylvania for the few days that I was there. Other than that, the next thing I

knew we were on board ship heading overseas on the Atlantic.

PHYLLIS: What was your military unit?

EARL: I was in the 36th Division which was known as the Texas Division.

PHYLLIS: And what were your assigned duties:

EARL: Well, I started out as a line rifleman, but just before we got back into battle, I was sent up to Headquarters Company to be a Jeep driver and then I did all types of Jeep driving.

PHYLLIS: So then you were sent overseas. How did you get there?

EARL: Well, we're going to have to back track a little bit then. After I left Pennsylvania, we went to Norfolk, Virginia, where we all boarded ships and we headed for North Africa. We had a nice interesting stopping point on the way. We stopped at Bermuda and we all had a chance to visit the town there.

PHYLLIS: Pretty nice.

EARL: Some of them went to a couple of towns before the ships actually—well that was an assembly for the whole convoy from the United States. They all met there and took off in a convoy. When we left Bermuda we headed for North Africa and we had forty ships in the convoy. And from there we went through the Strait of Gibraltar and we could see land on both sides. The first land we had seen in thirty days and we landed at Oran which is in North Africa.

PHYLLIS: What did you think of our nation's war efforts at this point?

EARL: I thought everybody was doing a great job. People that didn't even know what a machine was were going in and operating machines.

PHYLLIS: I don't think we had ever had that kind of spirit before and determination. If you

did not immediately enter a combat zone where did you go before entering combat?

EARL: Well, I landed at North Africa. We took a little bit of training. Before the training was completely over and—well we were all called out one morning into a big field. There were hundreds of us there and our physical that day amounted to the doctor or officer coming along saying, "Well, good morning, soldier. How are you today?" And if you said fine, that was your physical. In my case, I said, "I've got a bad side ache that's really bothering me," so what's he say—you're out in this big open field with nobody around—Well, drop your pants, soldier." And he checked and I had a hernia and he said, "Well, you can't make this trip. You go back to the tent and report to first Aid and they'll send you to the hospital tomorrow." And the odd part of that was, I didn't know until after the war was completely over. A couple years later and I was on my way back home and I got my hands of all of my records. We all did that and I was going along reading them and I happened to notice one page in there and there was a big rubber stamp across it "void". So I read the page and I found out that the time I was in North Africa I was actually assigned to the First Division, which was in Sicily at the time and because I went to the hospital it was marked "void". I didn't go to the First Division. I went to the hospital and stayed in Africa all summer. Where other fellow went to Sicily and some of them never returned?

PHYLLIS: What happened then after you time in the hospital?

EARL: Well, then I went back—I had a little interesting experience—I went back to the company and by that time I was a veteran in North Africa so we were assigned to these tents. There happened to be a group of what they called non-coms. They were higher sergeants who had volunteered to go overseas. They didn't give them the same duty as the privates so they gave them some job to do and the sergeant who was in charge of our company said, "As long as you are a veteran why don't you go with the sergeants today?" So I went out with the

sergeants and when I did they had to go out and put some tents up and things like this. Fairly easy work instead of marching around and all the sergeants looked at me and said, “Well, you’re the only odd ball.” I’m not to pick up anything. “You can’t do that. You’re the leader.” (Laughter)

PHYLLIS: What happened next? When did you enter combat? Or were you in combat?

EARL: Let’s take another one on North Africa. That was in September. I was being scheduled to be shipped over to Italy and they had just made the Italy invasion just a week before that. Or they were just making the Italy invasion because when I landed in Italy it was D-Day plus 8. We went all the way across North Africa. That was kind of an interesting experience.

PHYLLIS: I can imagine?

EARL: We got on this train. Some of you may recall, they were called 40 and 8 trains from World War I.

PHYLLIS: Yes.

EARL: They didn’t have any beds in there. They had two seats facing each other, so you could sit just like on a streetcar facing each other. So then for night time, some of the fellows laid under the seats, some laid on the seats and some of the fellows took their blankets and tied them up to the coat racks and used them as hammocks. And in the middle of one night one fellow had to get up and wouldn’t you know his hammock broke loose and he came tumbling down.

PHYLLIS: doesn’t sound to cozy. That’s American ingenuity.

EARL: something that was a little different—that is we thing of as different—travelling out through the edge of the desert we could look out across the desert and here was a tribe out there and it’s just like in the Bible days. These tents were put up on poles and I suppose just taking a guess, that they were four or five foot off the ground and that’s where the

people crawled underneath these tents, probably made of goat or [game] skins or something and that was their way of life. They were Nomads.

PHYLLIS: That was interesting.

EARL: That was a little interesting point. We finally got to the shipping point where we were going to ship off to Italy from North Africa. We were at the dock there and I asked some of the sailors there about a ship by a certain number, which I can’t remember, but I went over the Atlantic on it. “Oh yeah, that ships right here. Why don’t you go over and see the fellows?” so the ships were docked side by side so instead of going down and going across the dock, I just started crawling over from one ship to the next until I got there.

PHYLLIS: I would think you would fall in.

EARL: Oh, they were close enough together, we could touch. When I got there I found that the ship I had come over on had actually helped in the Italian invasion and the captain was directing things from the unloading ramp and a shot or something went off and he was killed with shrapnel. Several of the sailors I had met on the way over—we got to exchange notes on what they had done and so on. The boat that we went over on, by the way, was the smallest troop carrying ship that they used in World War II for troops. They had smaller ships but this was the smallest one that carried troops and that was called and LST. An LST is—I forgot the initials right at the minute—but that was a flat bottomed ship and the bow of the ship opened up like doors and the ramp would come down flat and they could pull up right on the beach and the tanks could drive out of the hold of the ship and drive right up on the beach. And the reason it was quite a ride over the Atlantic was, being a flat bottomed ship without a keel, it would rock back and forth and it was so easy to get seasick.

PHYLLIS: Were you seasick?

EARL: I was seasick a good way over, but I finally got used to it. But going over, I had another little experience. All the soldiers and

sailors had to pull—we had rotary guard stations. They were called battle stations, but you pulled guard for four hours and my tour happened to be from twelve midnight to four in the morning and while I was on guard—I was way up on what they call the bridge—that's the high point of the ship—and I looked over the side and here was another little ship going beside us which I thought was what we called one of our sub chasers. You have to keep in mind we didn't have lights with the war on there and it was dark out that night. I just see this small ship going by. I didn't think much of it. Four o'clock I went down and got in my bunk. I had no more got in my bunk and the sound came on the lour horns and everything. "Go to you battle stations." I just got in my bunk, so I went up there as it turned out then we had to post guard then there until a certain length of time went by. And it turned out the ship that went by there going through the middle of our convoy got way up to the head—it was a German sub.

PHYLLIS: Oh, no. Oh, **EARL.** That was quite an experience.

EARL: We laugh abut it now, but ...

PHYLLIS: It was a pretty dangerous thing.

EARL: When the convoy was going over, you could see pretty much all forty ships. Oh, they were 2, 3, 4 miles apart from one end to the other probably. The next morning when daylight finally came after we were relieved from our guard duty and we discovered that somebody had told the convoy to change direction. Instead of going east, we started going straight north and in doing that the ships spread so far apart, it was all you could do to see the nearest ship which was 15 miles away. The reason being if he started shooting he's not gong to get very many ships. He's only going to get one or two instead of a lot of them.

PHYLLIS: So it was a wise move. Back to Africa. Were you then sent to Italy?

EARL: From there I went to Italy. I can't remember what kind of a ship. They just loaded

us up there, just like you'd take a ferry across Lake Michigan. They just loaded us all up—it might have been over a day. We landed down on the beaches when they where they had actually made the invasion.

PHYLLIS: Where was that?

EARL: That was, I think it was the town of Paestum which is just a little bit of a village. Everybody is going to remember it as Salerno. That's where the invasion was made. We were just south of Salerno at the town of Paestum and we didn't have any real leadership. They just had—we were what they called "replacements." We weren't organized and they even had officers as replacements so as long as they were officers, they put them in charge and they led us up to a pasture where we staid over night. Had another little interesting experience there. We were told we could go up to the creek and wash. The officer told us to be sure to wash ourselves, take your bath downstream because you are going to get your drinking water from upstream. While we were there getting washed, there was this guy taking a bath upstream and I climbed all over him, said "You didn't follow instructions very well." He said, "You're not going to be allowed to drink this water anyhow. There's dead cows in the creek up stream here a ways. You better just leave the water alone." And afterward we visited a little bit and hew was getting his clothes on and it turns out here I was chewing out an officer. I was just scared stiff. Without his clothes on you couldn't tell what his rank was.

PHYLLIS: But weren't disciplined for that?

EARL: Not for that.

PHYLLIS: Well, then did you immediately enter combat?

EARL: Well, let's see. I'll have to scratch my memory. No, we went from there up to a little town just north of Naples. Here again, I forget the name of the town. A few years ago I could remember all these names and we stayed there. Had a few interesting experiences there. There was a small mountain between our little town

and Naples and we lived in the middle of an orchard and that ground was so rich and firm from being an orchard all those centuries, I suppose, that we could dig fox holes with no trouble whatsoever. You just dug down like digging into black dirt and the first night there we had an air raid over Naples. The Germans came down and we all jumped into our foxholes. We didn't feel real secure about that because we didn't have them very deep. The next day then everybody was digging fox- holes six feet deep so that we could get down in them for protection. We'd be down in the fox holes and we'd be cheering our anti-aircraft fire from Naples, shooting at the planes, trying to get them knocked down. Of course, nobody got hit because the planes were too high and the guns didn't go that high. But there weren't any casualties or anything from that. The planes must have just been going over to spot what we had. We stayed there for probably week or so. It seemed like a long time, but a week is a long time when you are over there.

PHYLLIS: In a foxhole.

EARL: We didn't live in the foxholes all the time. Come to think of it, I even got a tour to go into Naples and I got a chance to tour Naples a little bit. I saw the palace of Naples and we got to buy a few things and could eat whatever we could scrounge up in town instead of eating regular rations we had at camp.

PHYLLIS: Did you proceed into actual combat after this?

EARL: No. From there we moved up further yet. Maybe we did go into combat, but being a jeep driver the captain picked me then to lead the convoy of our company—not our division, but our company—going up. He knew where we were going. We went up the highway. It was scary. It was the first time I had ever driven in black out. In black out you drive with no lights whatsoever. You just have to go by what ever you can see and follow the jeep ahead of you. Well, I was the lead jeep up there then. It was a kind of a rainy night. We pulled up and he said, "Go ahead and rest up for awhile—you're tired out from your drive. Where he went, I don't

know, but he came back and I was kind of shivering. He had a coat; somebody threw a coat over me. And that was my first night in combat. Now, in combat—it wasn't actually like you think of shooting guns at each other. I was back in what we might call the rear part of the front and they could have thrown artillery shells in there, but none came in at that particular spot. They were a couple miles down the road where they were coming again.

PHYLLIS: Did your mental attitude change as being near combat continued?

EARL: Well, it sure got scary. Especially, well they had a comment—that's the wrong word for it—but they would mention if you lived the first few days in combat you're pretty good at going all the way through. Those that got killed usually got killed when they're brand new in combat.

PHYLLIS: I hadn't heard that. Did you write many letters home?

EARL: I wrote a lot of letters home. I like to write and I still do ... let's back track to Africa for just a few minutes.

PHYLLIS: Sure.

EARL: I had that operation and then I went to what they called a convalescent hospital, which was just a group of tents and along the Mediterranean. I had a couple of experiences there. One was that after that operation you're not allowed to do anything except walk around. You can't do any work. I got bored. I sat down one day and I decided to write a letter home. I wrote a nine page letter, keeping in mind that it had to be censored and I the whole letter was just on what we do from the time we got up to what we do when we go to bed at night.

PHYLLIS: I hope someone kept that.

EARL: I'm curious as if I've still got it home in my garage. I'm going to have to look it up this summer to see if I can find that.

PHYLLIS: That would be a good letter to include with this interview. Did you receive many letters or packages? And what kinds of things did you like to get if you got any packets?

EARL: Well, that's another story. When I was in Texas, my mother sent me a package of donuts. They went to Texas. I had already left for Pennsylvania. She didn't know that, of course. They didn't catch up with me in Pennsylvania because we were only there a couple days and we took off for Africa. Then we went over to Africa and the package still followed me.

PHYLLIS: What were the donuts like by that time? (Laughter).

EARL: They were home made donuts and they were greasy and stale so we had to throw them out.

PHYLLIS: Oh, dear. Did you receive many letters?

EARL: I got quite a few letters. Another little experience I had then because of going to hospital and moving around like this, was, my records couldn't keep up with me very well. I was going all this time without getting any pay check. They didn't have pay checks. You got paid in actual money but I didn't get any pay all that summer and I wanted to buy candy like the other guys were buying and I couldn't do it and then I discovered you get a certificate or ticket whatever you want to call it where you could buy so much candy, so much cigarettes, so much toothpaste and all this and so I would trade all my cigarettes coupons with somebody else. (Laughter).

PHYLLIS: Give you the candy.

EARL: Then I was able to get the candy.

PHYLLIS: What kind of candy? Do you remember? What was popular or what was available?

EARL: They didn't have chocolate candy, naturally. But they had one that I still like today.

PHYLLIS: What was that?

EARL: You know they're jelly candies that are sugar covered and they come four to a package?

PHYLLIS: I don't know.

EARL: You can still buy them today.

PHYLLIS: Wow.

EARL: They were different fruit flavors. I am not in love with them but I still like them today.

PHYLLIS: That's interesting. Did most of the other men write and receive letters?

EARL: That was the big issue with soldiers overseas. They all wanted letters. Some of them weren't great at writing, but they really wanted to receive letters.

PHYLLIS: did you forge any close bonds of friendship with some of you companions?

EARL: Well, back to Africa again. I went to the hospital and at that time—it's not like today—but back at that time when you had a hernia operation you had to stay in bed for ten days. You couldn't get out. And there was a fellow laying right next to me—he was from the swamps of Louisiana. We got to be pretty good friends. We compared a lot of notes. He was the intellectual type, not the crude type and he said he was writing articles for the newspaper back home. He sent an article home every week telling about some of the things that happened. Articles that would clear the censor that are. He couldn't tell where he was at in this town or we were here or how many fellows we had or anything like that. He could just tell generalities after we left. He was from a whole different outfit then I was. No connection because I was a replacement and I don't know what he was, but we some how kept in touch with each other. We corresponded all through the war and after the war. So then after the war, I went down to Louisiana, New Orleans, and I thought I would do down to see him, another 85 miles down to this town where he was from and it's way down

in a swamp. I mean way down. I got down in there and I had written him a letter telling him I was coming, so I went to the bank to get directions and they said he was there, but he's in a meeting right now—meeting with the insurance people out of New York. While you're here, we'll tell him you're here. So he came out and he was glad to see me and said, "I didn't know you were coming." And I said, "I wrote you a letter." "Oh my cousin probably got it and he's on vacation." His cousin's got the same name. So he says, "You wait a little bit." So he went back to the meeting and cancelled his part. He gave us a tour then. It turned out he's the banker. He owned the bank building, he owned an auto agency, he owned two oil wells.

PHYLLIS: Wow.

EARL: And by some coincidence, that was the night that the Rotary Club was having ladies night so he said, "You're going to be our guests tonight."

PHYLLIS: You came at the right time. That was interesting.

EARL: The name of the town he was from was called Golden Meadow. It's a fair sized little town but down in the swamps there, you have a town and if you go two or three blocks off the main road, that's it. If you go any further, you're into the swamp. There all narrow towns right along the highway.

PHYLLIS: Back to Italy. Were you aware there were civilian concentration camps? Were you aware of their existence?

EARL: I don't know if I ever thought about that in Italy. I can't remember.

(End of side 1 of tape).

EARL: And I could pick a half a dozen things because to me war isn't all fighting. You aren't always shooting at somebody or coming out of a foxhole or going out of a trench. These will just be at random. I was up near Mount Casino and we never did really take Mount Casino, but our planes were bombing it and I was up near the

front then and I went over to the edge of the cliff. I could sit right on the cliff, just a balcony and I could sit and watch the planes all coming over. You could see them without binoculars. They were coming over dropping bombs on Mount Casino. So I had a front row seat for that. Right in that very same area there, we had a shortage of tires. For some one reason or another they'd be damaged and we couldn't get them fast enough. They were making them in Naples but they were still short. My jeep was up to the front. They took all the wheels off my jeep and just let it set there at the front, so I had to stay there with the jeep while they took my tires back for somebody else and a couple days later they came up with tires and put them back on my jeep and I was able to get out of there.

PHYLLIS: It's hard to imagine what you had to do.

EARL: That was near a town called San Pietro which was another valley. We lost a lot of men there and there was another one right up in that area which was interesting. This was at Christmas time. In 1943 would that be, I had met a fellow from Rockford there. He was in H Company and I was in Headquarters Company and we would visit once in a while. Had a couple little experiences there. One—I was trying to write a letter home one night. I was using a candle inside the tent to write by. Just a hundred yards back away from the front, behind our tent was our big guns shooting over the mountains into the German lines. And every time that gun would go off, the muzzle blast would cause a rush of air and blow my candle out.

PHYLLIS: So that was a difficult letter to write.

EARL: So then right at the top of the mountain from where I was which wasn't very far, we were near the top, it was foggy up there one day and it was soldiers—I suppose soldiers from both sides. I know some American soldiers that were injured up there. Our medics wanted to get them so the medics went up with a Red Cross flag thinking that would protect them so they could bring our wounded soldiers off the top of the hill. But both sides saw—the American

Infantry and the German infantry both saw the flap go up there and being foggy, they thought it was a surrender flag from the other side. So the two sides went up there and started arguing—"You're going to be prisoners—no you're going to be prisoners." They couldn't decide who was going to be prisoners so they all went back to their own sides and started fighting again.

PHYLLIS: Unbelievable. (Laughter). That is an occurrence to remember.

EARL: I wasn't in on that. I just heard about it.

PHYLLIS: Can you tell us what you and the other men did to celebrate some of our traditional family holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas?

EARL: That was at Christmas in '43. We were up at the front. We didn't do much then. We always had a special treat and a special meal for that day. What we had, I don't remember. But they made it a point some how to get the good food over for that one day. Speaking of food, there was another one down there in that same general area. I had a lot of experiences in that general area. I was a driver now for the kitchen and we took hot food right up near the front with this trailer and we had large thermos containers that would keep the food hot and the fellows right up in front would get hot pancakes. To get there, we didn't use the highways. The Americans, with all of their big powerful bulldozers, went in where there use to be a railroad. The railroad was ripped up by the Germans, but we were able to make a highway out of it just by leveling it off, but when you came to the valleys, the bridges were knocked out so our big bulldozers had steep slopes—you go down one side, up the hill on the other side and you were back on level ground again.

PHYLLIS: Did you have to do that with your jeep or truck?

EARL: I had to do that with my jeep and the trailer with the food behind it. What I am leading up to is we had to go through three of these. After I got by the third one, it was a little

dark and foggy in the morning and we saw fellows standing along side but we kept going looking for the next dip. We were supposed to—I didn't know where I was going exactly—the sergeant knew. All of a sudden I slammed on the brakes because I was going to step on the gas and zip down the next dip and come to find out there wasn't any dip there that was where the bridge was knocked out. And we stopped with the front of the jeep just almost hanging over the edge where the bridge should be. So he told me to back it up. I said, "I'm not taking my foot off that brake. You get out and push this jeep back." So the sergeant got out and he pushed and I put it in gear then, backed up and we got turned around and we got up to where we were supposed to where these fellows were standing along side. They should have stopped us. So we drove off there and went down through the farm-yard and down around the trees. I didn't know it at the time, but down toward the Rapido River, we went down around the trees and pulled up in another little farm-yard down there. I sort of wondered at the time the sergeant and I were serving the food, I don't know if anyone else was helping us or not, but all the front line soldiers came up one at a time to get their food. They didn't come up in a line as hungry as they were. Only one came up and when he left another one came up. When I got back to the kitchen again, back in the rear again, I found out why. As it turned out, when I was going around that end of the trees, the sergeant and I and the jeep and the trailer, we were just a hundred yards from where the Germans were. They had been watching us at the Rapido River where we lost hundreds and hundreds of soldiers.

PHYLLIS: Well, that's an experience. When and how did you return to the States after the war? Or when did you come back to the United States?

EARL: Okay. By being over there as long as I was, by making this southern France invasion, we got so many battle stars and all this sort of thing, so many ribbons, whatever, we got points for each one and I ended up in Germany and I staid there all summer. In September I headed for home. I had to leave my girlfriend behind. It

was a girl I went with for five weeks. She wanted me to stay there but I said if I wanted her I would come back and get her. I never did. Then coming home in September, we went over near Rheims which you staid in these certain camps until you got new assignments. Then we went down to Marseilles and from Marseilles we sailed out through the Rock of Gibraltar and back home again.

PHYLLIS So you covered a lot of territory.

EARL: I always say I covered Africa, Italy, France, Germany and Austria.

PHYLLIS: Could you tell us about your military rank or your decorations or your campaign decorations?

EARL: Well, I got the Good Conduct ribbon; I got the Southern France Invasion ribbon; I got the—I forget the name of it right now—but the European Theater ribbon and I got so many stripes for the amount of time I was over there. They called those gold stripes or gold bars on your sleeve and I got some shooting award whatever that was. Anybody who could shoot half way good at all got an award of some kind.

PHYLLIS: How many campaigns were you in?

EARL: Well, I missed the African campaign. That ended a few days before I got there. I missed the Italian invasion because I hadn't been assigned to a unit yet, but I was there right afterward. I didn't get credit for the invasion but I go credit for being there in that theater. I was there and I went up in Anzio which was quite a place to have an experience with and then I was in Southern France that's another one, and the European theater that was another award you might say.

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PHYLLIS: How did you get along with the men with whom you had the greatest contact?

EARL: Well, I got along good enough. I am still writing to several of them.

PHYLLIS: That's good. Were there things you'd do differently if you could do them once again?

EARL: That's the game of life. Hindsight is always better than foresight.

PHYLLIS: What was the most difficult thing you had to do during you period of military service?

EARL: Let's back track there for that hindsight. I've often wondered what would have happened when I was in Chicago at Fort Sheridan—in high school I was not a good typist. I took typing for two years. I could type fifty words a minute but I wasn't a good typist. I wasn't going to tell them I knew how to type. I found out later that they had so many people from the other end of the scale that couldn't do anything like that. If I'd told them I could type, I would probably have stayed right in Chicago for the whole tour of duty.

PHYLLIS: For heaven's sake. That's interesting. What was the most difficult thing you had to do during your period of military service?

EARL: Well, it's all how you want to interpret "difficult" so I'll interpret it one way. One experience, being a jeep driver, I kept track of my miles on something or other, so I knew that I drove about 25,000 miles in Europe. Out of the 25,000 miles, I estimated from the experience I had that I drove 5,000 miles in what they call "blackout" driving. That is driving with no headlights whatsoever. No lights—you couldn't see where you were going. Now in Italy that's

not too difficult because a lot of the country roads in Italy have rows of trees down both sides of the road so all you got to do is be like a tunnel at night time and stay between those trees. Then you have to watch out for is a jeep coming at you with have a head-on collision or you might catch up with one that's going away from you. So you had to keep watching closely for those jeeps. I had a few accidents but nothing real serious.

PHYLLIS: So probably that difficult driving would be one of your most successful achievements. Are there any others? Things you look back on as an achievement in this service?

EARL: Well, I could look back and think of all kinds of things. I was offered to be a sergeant after the war was over. I was so close to going home, I turned it down. Telling me I would be head of a message center. I can think of another one for combat. I had one over in France that was somewhat different. There was a little town that had maybe a population of 100 to 200 people in it, but at that time we didn't see anybody. We had our telephone lines going right through the town. At that time, I was the driver for the telephone wire—I forget the name of it for the minute—for laying telephone wires and we got word then that our telephone might have been knocked out in the middle of town some place. I took three fellows with me who were wire men and I was just the driver. Got to the edge of town and we checked our line and sure enough there was a break, so we fixed it. Boy, we got it made. We tried to check going forward to reach the forward battalion and we couldn't reach them. We just reached the rear. So we drove on through town, to the other side and picked up another wire which they usually send the fellows out that laid the wires because you remember where you put them. So we picked up the wire now we got forward to the battalion but we couldn't get to the rear. So now we knew there was another break some place, so we went into the middle of town. This town only had two roads in it, like a cross. We got in the middle of the town and sure enough there was some wires broken there. We thought maybe some of the trucks or tanks knocked out the wires, so I went up the pole on one side to fasten the wire up and

run it across the top of the road instead of on the road. I got down from the pole and went over to a garage where the sergeant was going to check the lines to see if we could reach front and rear. We heard this shell coming in so we all grabbed the phone and ran inside the building, of garage or barn of something right there. He set the telephone down between his legs, just to have a place to put it and it was still attached to the wires. We all waited until the shell hit out on the corner and stones and shrapnel were flying every which way. So then after it got all quiet he reached down to pick up the telephone and found a hunk of shrapnel had come right between his legs and smashed the telephone.

PHYLLIS: That was a close call, Unbelievable.

EARL: So this is how your get your experiences over there. You don't actually sit there and shoot at each other. You've got a lot of this artillery, bombs coming in and all these shells coming in and that's what does the damage.

PHYLLIS: How did you learn about VE Day and what was your reaction to it?

EARL: Got to stop and think. Where was I on VE Day? That was over—I had been doing a lot. We were really moving back then. This was down in Bavaria. I got to see a beautiful part of Germany. People pay good money to go there today. I had some interesting experiences there, too.

PHYLLIS: Do you want to tell us about those?

EARL: Well, there were two or three that were kind of interesting. You've all heard of the book Mein Kampf. Hitler wrote that when he was in prison. Well, the prison is in Landsberg and I lived across the street from that prison for seven days. The strange thing about it was that every morning and only in the morning, every morning I went out and my jeep had a flat tire on it. One time it was a horse-shoe nail, next time it was a bullet clip, next time it was something else and I got so I could change tires in a hurry.

PHYLLIS: Did you ever find out what was happening?

EARL: Well, we left town and that was the end of it. No more trouble., Then we went from there to a place called Tegernsee which is Teg-ern-see in English and Tegernsee is like the Hollywood of United States and all these wealthy homes down in there. In fact, one home where Himmler had his home, we set up our kitchen there.

PHYLLIS: Was it pretty nice?

EARL: Oh, that was a big—just like you see in pictures—big chalet, big balcony on the front. It was situated across the road from the lake so you could look out over the lake. It was a pretty place in there.

PHYLLIS: How did you learn about VJ Day? Do you remember that?

EARL: I suppose it might have come up over the radio because I was in Germany at the time. Or it might have—I know we got it by the Stars and Stripes, which was the weekly newspaper that we always got. But I am sure the radio picked it up from some place.

PHYLLIS: What was your opinion of the use of the atomic bomb when it was used against the Japanese in August of 1945?

EARL: Well, I still have mixed emotions on that. It was nice that it ended the war but I hated to see all those civilians that were slaughtered.

PHYLLIS: When and where were you officially discharged from the service?

EARL: I was discharged from the same place I went in, Fort Sheridan. We spent just two or three days there and then we were given all our belongings, whatever we had. And we had a final physical.

PHYLLIS: What year was that? Do you remember?

EARL: That was in November, 1945.

PHYLLIS: Do you have a disability rating or a pension?

EARL: No, I have nothing like that. I was one of the fortunate ones. I came back the same way I went over. In fact, I might be little better off.

PHYLLIS: Do you have any opinions or feelings about our nation's military status or its policies?

EARL: I would still like to see a lot of these differences settled by arbitration and not by shooting at each other but if we listen to the Bible, the Bible says there will be wars and rumors of wars, so I have mixed emotions on the part of it.

PHYLLIS: Do you have any contact with the Veterans' Administration?

EARL: None whatsoever.

PHYLLIS: What is your opinion of the Veteran's Administration?

EARL: I think it's good for what they are doing but I haven't had any real use for it.

PHYLLIS: Have you ever gone to a VA Hospital for medical services?

EARL: No, I haven't.

PHYLLIS: Would you like to tell us how your family supported you during your military life with letters and encouragement.

EARL: Well, I don't know how my mother did it but she managed to write to us. There was three of us boys that was in the service. One was in the navy over in the Pacific, the other brother was over in Brittany He went over to the Netherlands, I guess it was. He was one of the ground crews of the Air Force. She managed to keep writing us letters. Somehow she managed to get film, which was real hard to get and she did send us film and it came all the way through. I had to laugh one time getting the mail. It was in Africa, too. I was helping to sort the mail out one time. They had big sacks of mail just like you're familiar with sacks of mail here. And as one fellow threw the bag off the truck, "clank"

the thing went on the pavement and it turned out somebody from over here in the States had sent a bottle of shampoo over there but the shampoo happened to have whiskey in it instead of shampoo. That was a way of sending whiskey. But the fellow didn't get his whiskey.

PHYLLIS: Did it break?

EARL: It broke.

PHYLLIS: That was before we had plastic bottles isn't it?

EARL: Oh, yes.

PHYLLIS: Is there anything else you would like to recall before we end the interview?

EARL: I should have brought some thoughts with me. I should have had them written down. But we did have a certain amount of religion over there. We went to church in Germany in a beautiful house over there. It was three stories high and that's where I met my German girlfriend.

PHYLLIS: Was there a chaplain for these churches?

EARL: Well every outfit always had a chaplain and I remember even down in Italy. Not at the front, but back off the front and Sunday came and the Chaplain would have Sunday services. Anybody was welcome to come. It was non-denominational.

PHYLLIS: Were they well attended?

EARL: I thought they were well attended—not heavily attended. No, but they were well attended.

PHYLLIS: In your experiences, did you ever have any entertainers come over?

EARL: I can't remember their names now, but yes, we did have some. We didn't have any big entertainers that I would remember but they had some that were still name entertainers back then that came over. We say them a few times.

PHYLLIS: Did that help the morale?

EARL: Oh, I think that was a big help. Because it gave the fellow a little closer touch to home and after he got to see, what you might say, civilian women instead of women that were in uniform of some kind, such as the Salvation Army, or the Red Cross I meant to say. The Red Cross girls were in their uniform as such and we had nurses and that.

PHYLLIS: What did you do after you were discharged at Fort Sheridan?

EARL: I didn't go straight home as I had a great aunt in Chicago and she said, "You've got to stop here before you go home or you'll never get back here again." At that time Chicago was a long ways from Rockford. So I said, "Okay, I'll stay overnight and go home the next day then." And that was an interesting experience. I left camp. Why they didn't let us go in the daytime, I don't know. By the time I got to the middle of Chicago it was dark and I went to what was then the old Union Station and I asked directions on how to get down to her home, which wasn't too hard. It was all new to me. He told me what train to get on, so I went out and got on the train and sat down and I thought, I'll have to watch real close so I'll know where to get off at. I turned around and looked and right across from me was a fellow sitting there and this fellow happened to be in our outfit over in Germany.

PHYLLIS: Oh, no.

EARL: He was discharged three months before.

PHYLLIS: What a coincidence.

EARL: But the thing about it is—how small the world is.

PHYLLIS: Yes.

EARL: Not only was it in Chicago, which is a big place, but we happened to be on the same train, the same car, the same end of the car.

PHYLLIS: That is amazing. Then what did you do after you came home?

EARL: I went with my Dad and we were setting up a general repair business in the middle of Loves Park and he had, had a part of it set up while I was gone and I helped get it organized when I first came back.

PHYLLIS: Did you have any difficulty in your adjustment back to civilian life?

EARL: Well, there were a couple of little things. One was—at least in our outfit—I don't know if it was in all of Europe or not—but at least in our division, or our company or our battalion whatever it was—we had an expression that we used without thinking of it and that was the words “Just some” and all of us over there knew what it meant. If I went up to the front and I would come back, they would say, “How were things up at the cross roads up there?” And I would say “just some hot up there” meaning that it was really hot and “Just some” meant an awful lot or very much. If you came in from outside into an enclosure some place and they would say, “How's the weather out there?” “Just some raining out there.” and they all go the message that it was really raining.

PHYLLIS: That's interesting.

EARL: Another one I came home with—by the time you go through all these countries your everyday language—one sentence may have three different languages in it. One that took a while to drop was “beaucoup” which means “a whole lot”. And two or three others that we used all the time while we were over there and when you came back home you had to drop those.

PHYLLIS: No one was into these special expressions.

EARL: No. You had to explain them, but they still weren't going to use them or remember them.

PHYLLIS: Didn't have the same effect. Is there anything else that you remember that you want to share with us today?

EARL: Give me a second here. Why don't you shut it off for a second. Hold it—shut it off for a minute. . . . Now we are going again.

PHYLLIS: Earl is remembering an incident with the jeep.

EARL: This was in—north of Rome in Italy. Stop to think for a minute that in Italy a lot of those small towns are built up on a hillside or up on top of a little hill. The reason being that they saved the low lands then for farming. And we drove up to the one town, [Rapadiappa], and it had a wall around it so people wouldn't fall off the hill you might say. We were eating our meal along the wall. It was evening time and we could look across the valley. There was another town over there about two miles away, maybe three mile and we were stopping to think. “Here we are standing here and watching all this and to think that yesterday the Germans were here”. Nobody knew anything ahead of time so after we finished eating they said, “Get your things all packed up. We're pulling out”. We pulled out in a convoy. We couldn't use the highway because the highway bridge had been blown up. There was a river there. They routed us down across the farmland, up the bank to the railroad track which had all been torn out and used that for a road way. The bridge was still in for that, but bombs had been dropped all over that and there were craters all along there and it was just so dark at night you just couldn't see the jeep ahead of you. They had white tape along the sides for you to follow and they had army engineers at every chuck hole or every bomb crater, I should say, to tell you to stay to the right or the left a little bit. When he said a little bit, he didn't mean a long ways. He meant just a little bit, so we managed to get over that and got back on the highway again. We went just a half a mile and pulled off on a country lane. I hadn't gone very far, maybe a city block, when all of a sudden my jeep went off in the ditch to the right and put it in low gear, low range, and pulled back on the road. No problem. There were six of us on that jeep heading for the top of the hill near the front.

Like I said before, it was so dark, it was one of those during the new moon when it is dark out and it was cloudy out and you couldn't see the jeep ahead of you. You might see a dark blob it you were lucky and I had a big truck behind me with maybe fifteen fellows on it. So I'm going along here and my left wheels go off into the ditch. Just as they went off in to the ditch, I put it in low range again and as soon as I did, that wasn't a ditch. That was a bank. The jeep rolled down the bank. Arms and legs went flying every which way. Well as the jeep stopped, I was the only one left underneath it. I was hanging on to the steering wheel. I had what they called a wire catcher on the front, which was a safety device. I had a wire reel on top because I was in the wire section. The two of them kept the jeep off of me. The big truck behind me—he saw that the dark blob disappeared and he didn't know if I went off into the valley or where I went so he stopped and everybody jumped off and came to find me and they found me under the jeep. There were enough fellows there, they rolled the jeep back on its wheels again. My sergeant then drove the jeep up the bank because you could feel around when you were on your feet. He got it back on the road again. "Why don't you drive it the rest of the way?" "Oh no. He's not driving that thing." They all trusted me to drive and it was probably another half mile to the top of the hill and we pulled into the town. And no one got seriously hurt.

PHYLLIS: That's just what I was going to ask. That's quite an experience. (**EARL** was also remembering about his operation when he was in Africa.)

EARL: This is just something on the personal—it has nothing to do with the war really, but it is just something I never forgot. They sent me into the hospital, nice hospital right down in Oran. We had taken it over for the Army. The fellows there by the way, were doing eight and ten hernia operations a day. So the doctors had a lot of experience, but at the operation, I was given a spinal injection instead of—which freezes you from the waist down—putting you to sleep. They took me into the operating room and put a hoop over my

waist line and put a sheet over that so I wouldn't see down or anything. Then they put a little metal shield over my eyes so I couldn't see that way. But I started to wiggle my eyes and the nurse said, "Hey, you can't do that, you'll get sick." And I said "No, that's alright." So she took it off then and I got just a little bit sick and that didn't bother her much. I looked up at the reflectors where the lights were and as it turned out, the reflectors over there in Africa were all mirrors. They didn't have chrome and all that. I was able to watch in that mirror and see the whole rest of the whole operation. It was interesting. Each nurse had some little special job to do.

PHYLLIS: Did you feel that the medical people did a good job?

EARL: Oh, they did a good job.