

# Irving Ellis Oral History Interview

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Interviewed by Sheri Kiefner

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KIEFNER: Today is February 29, 2012; I am at the Pritzker Military Library with Irving Ellis. My name is Sherri Kiefner and we are going to discuss Major Ellis's military career today. I would like to start, Major Ellis, just by getting a little background, when and where you born?

ELLIS: Chicago Illinois, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1924.

KIEFNER: And did you grow up in Chicago?

ELLIS: Partially. Chicago's always been my home, however my folks had a hotel in South Jersey and every summer we would open up around, oh I'd say end of June, early July and close up again in September or October. So I spent half of my life there and half of my life in Chicago. And then, naturally, I went away to school for a while, but Chicago's been my home, always came back to Chicago.

KIEFNER: Ok. Did you have any siblings?

ELLIS: Yes, one brother.

KIEFNER: I'll go ahead and turn it back on then (sirens heard outside). So tell me a little about your childhood.

ELLIS: Well as I said we used to travel between Chicago and Philadelphia, for a while

lived in Jersey every year. And when we went back to Chicago or went back to Philadelphia or something we never moved into the same apartment. So I used up being a transient at most of the schools, I wound up with 13 transfers for grammar schools.

KIEFNER: Oh my goodness.

ELLIS: When I got into high school I told them no more, so they used to travel and I would at least finish each semester at Marshall High School in Chicago.

KIEFNER: Ok. What did you do for recreation during your high school years?

ELLIS: Athletics.

KIEFNER: Do you want to share and of your...

ELLIS: Yes, I was part of Illinois history and national history. Our team, at that time they had two different varsities: the Juniors and the Seniors, Juniors were five-foot-seven and under, seniors were over five-seven. Our junior team won 98 straight games without a loss over a five year period.

KIEFNER: This is football?

ELLIS: No this is basketball.

KIEFNER: Ok, I missed that earlier.

ELLIS: Yeah. Jewish boys don't play good football (laughs).

KIEFNER: (Laughs) You were 16 years old when Pearl Harbor was bombed, what was your

reaction as a 16 year old to that event?

ELLIS: Well that we were going to beat the hell out of them and not to worry. It's funny, at that point in time every time every time we won the city championship somebody would throw a party for us we had some very, I would say wealthy benefactors, and at one of the parties our, I guess our leader of the gym team teachers got up and made a speech and he said, "I want to inform you all that this is my last term here, I have been recalled to active duty with my rank as a major." He said, "I'm looking out across you and I want to know how many of you are going to avoid the army before it's over," he said, "We're all too optimistic," he said, "I have a hunch that all of you will be in service before the war ends" and he was right.

KIEFNER: And at that moment did you realize he was right? What was going through your mind?

ELLIS: No, most of us thought that we were going to beat the Japanese in, I would say three, four months, that's all it's going to take.

KIEFNER: So how did you make the decision to enlist in the army?

ELLIS: Well a whole group of us enrolled at Western Illinois State Teachers College in Macomb Illinois, and they sent recruiting teams all the time trying to get us to enlist and then they came up with a program that if we enlisted in what they called the Enlisted Reserve Corps we would not be called to active duty until we graduated. So our whole group all enlisted into the Enlisted Reserve Corps and it

was called the United States Air Force Unassigned and I never passed a flying field in the entire military career. We got in, they sent us in basic training school I would say within six months at Camp Walters Texas and from there three months later we were en-route to North Africa.

KIEFNER: What was your family's reaction to your enlistment?

ELLIS: My father made this speech, he said he avoided World War One because he saw no reason for us to be fighting over there, he said, "However, you have very good reason to be fighting" and I was underage so he had to sign it, so I was very glad that he took that approach to it. But he never forgave me; he always thought I enlisted in the infantry. I kept telling him, "I didn't enlist in the infantry that was their decision, not mine".

KIEFNER: What was your mother's reaction?

ELLIS: I'm not sure she really knew what was going on. My mother was old world and as far as she knew I was in the service, you know it was like I went away to school again, a different school. Later on I'll bring her into effect.

KIEFNER: Ok. In your basic training what weapons were they teaching you to use?

ELLIS: Well basically they would teach you to use a rifle, everybody got to use a rifle or the carbine depending upon what branch of the infantry you were in. My particular training was what they call heavy weapons, it's the big heavy machine gun that sits on a tri-pod, it's water cooled. We were trained to that and we were trained into the 81mm mortar which was a little bit heavier than the 60mm that

were used by the rifle companies. So we were called in when they needed some very heavy bombardment of some kind. And they have what they call “final protective line” and that line was mapped out so that the heavy weapons and machine guns and everything would crisscross at a certain point out in front of you. And we were trained that we would be using heavy weapons, and we were told that the average life of a machine-gunner was three minutes. What they didn’t tell you was that it might take two years to fire that weapon actually for three minutes.

KIEFNER: So as you’re going through training with these weapons what were the thoughts going through your mind?

ELLIS: Well I was pretty sure I was going to be able to get out of the infantry. I thought I’d go into the Air Corps. The Air Corps was what was now the Army Air Corps, at that time it was part of the Army it was not a separate organization. And I was pretty sure I was going to go into the Air Corps.

KIEFNER: So you weren’t near as concerned with those rifles and the three minute life expectancy. So how, eventually, did you find out about your assignment, your division and your regiment, that you were staying in the army?

ELLIS: Well it goes back about the, I would say, the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> week of the 16 week training period they gave you further orders and our orders were to report to, I guess it was the south side of Newark, New Jersey, for induction into the service. I’m sorry, induction was earlier, for assignment to units, specific units. And

when we got to Newark we went to the ports there and they loaded us on ships and told us that we're all going to North Africa as infantrymen, which we had been trained for.

KIEFNER: So it wasn't until that final moment of departure that you were assigned. What was the public mood at the time of your departure?

ELLIS: By public mood?

KIEFNER: The civilians, the attitude towards the military at that time.

ELLIS: Well I'll give you an example from one extreme to the other. In Fort Worth they had a USO dance pavilion that was supported by the Jewish United Fund. In Mineral Wells which was just outside camp Fort Worth Texas they had signs in all the bars, "No Jews, Negroes, dogs or cats permitted", so it went from one extreme to the other. Most of the time we had very little contact with civilians because military posts were all inclusive, I mean we had our entertainment we had our movies we had our games and we had all the sports you wanted to engage in; I guess you could do anything you wanted on the post with fellow soldiers. So our contact with civilians was merely by mail, we didn't have all the, I'd say devices you have today for communication, so either you sent them mail or you saw them in person, that was about it.

KIEFNER: So prior to your departure that was the experience you were speaking of?

ELLIS: Right, mhm.

KIEFNER: Ok. What do you remember most about your departure to Europe?

ELLIS: We were loaded on what was formerly a luxury ship, the Aquitania. The Aquitania was a sister ship to the Mauritania which gave rise to [our entry into] World War One because the Germans sunk it with a torpedo, and the Aquitania was the sister ship, exactly identical. It was primarily known because it was most of the background for the movies, the Chinese actor, what was the name of the movie, Charlie Chan, not Charlie Chan, yeah Charlie Chan, I was thinking of Charlie Chaplain! It was built to hold something like about 1000 travelers and we had I think 5000 troops aboard, so most of us, if we could find room, slept on the deck. We didn't want to go underneath because it was like being a sardine. And as we pulled away a couple of us, you know, looking around, and then we read comic books we read newspaper reports, walked up to some of the military men who were part of the ship's crew, said, "Where's our escort?" He says, "What do you mean?" I says, "Well every time I see a ship afloat there's escorts, there's battleships, there's cruisers, there's destroyers." He says, "Well we are one of the fastest ships afloat," he says, "there are no submarines that can outrun us. So we're really not worried about it because we can see them, by the time they fire a torpedo we're not in that path anymore". And the torpedoes at that time didn't have all the sensing equipment they do now, today they can follow that boat I don't care where it goes they can follow it, in those days they used to aim it and hope to hit.

KIEFNER: How long was the trip to Europe?

ELLIS: Actually we didn't go to Europe, we disembarked at Oran North Africa, five days.

KIEFNER: Ok.

ELLIS: Which was a fast trip for that time.

KIEFNER: Right, fast because you were on a luxury liner.

ELLIS: That's it, we had the luxury liner.

KIEFNER: So what else did you do, was there any training on board on your trip, any preparation?

ELLIS: Most of the training was verbal training, going over things that you would do like how do you react to the civilians, what are you going to do when you get to Oran, what are they going to do to you and for you. You didn't have a lot of free time, most of the free time was after five or six o'clock, but during the day they found something for you to do, even if it was only working the kitchen, cleaning dishes.

KIEFNER: So when you arrived in Oran, tell me from that point what happened.

ELLIS: When we arrived in Oran they marched us off the ship, formed us in groups, and then we walked about a mile and a half in what I would call intense heat, to what they call a replacement camp and all of us were signed in and then they told you, they says, "Keep your blankets handy". A hundred and some degrees, what do I need a blanket for? Most of us just put our duffle bags under our head and fell

asleep. I don't know exactly when the temperature started to change, but we started to freeze. It was cold, we heard later that it was about 40 degrees at night because the desert cools off as fast as it heats, and everybody was out there looking for their blankets.

KIEFNER: You had been used to Chicago and New Jersey, was Oran, Africa what you expected?

ELLIS: No, I was very disappointed in it. I mean the thing that impressed me the most about it was the filth. Wherever you went there was debris, there was fecal matter. The people apparently either didn't take the time or trouble or didn't care, I'm not sure what, but it was one of the worst places I've ever been in my life. Years later when we used to go to Europe, Anne, my wife, wanted to go to Morocco and I refused to go, because I don't care how nice it was I would be picturing it the way I did in 1943.

KIEFNER: When did you learn what your first campaign would be?

ELLIS: They put us on trains in Oran and took us to, I guess it's Algeria, and then they loaded us on boats, I guess I'd call them ships they were bigger than boats, and took us to Salerno. We stopped at Sicily, but we didn't get off and we heard in route that the Sicilian Campaign had ended and we had conquered all of the island. And about a few days later the invasion of Salerno took place and that's when they started to need replacements and we were told that we would be replacements for units at Salerno, which is what took place.

KIEFNER: Ok, so you never went to Sicily?

ELLIS: Well, we stopped at Sicily, but I didn't participate in the combat at Sicily.

KIEFNER: Ok, so you were involved in the landing at Salerno?

ELLIS: No, we came in I'd say, probably five days after the landing, but they were still on the beachhead fighting and the Germans had, not control of the skies, but they had access to it, so there was bombings and everything, airplanes coming over both sides, dogfights and stuff like that. But I'd say we were not really assigned to a unit for five days. And then, one of the funny things is, they gave us shovels and told us to dig foxholes. So there was an officer alongside of me and he had been on the ship too and I said to him, "Why do we have to dig a foxhole?" He said, "Well I don't know about you," he says, "but I'm going to dig one for myself". I said, "Well why?" he said, "You'll find out." And sure enough that evening the airplanes came over dropping bombs and everybody got into the foxholes (chuckles).

KIEFNER: So they really had not prepared you for what was going to happen?

ELLIS: We had no idea what combat was like, absolutely none, and I don't think it's anything to be prepared for. You have to see it and live it to understand it.

KIEFNER: Was your first combat experience with the Italians or the Germans?

ELLIS: I don't think we ever encountered the Italians. For one thing they never stayed to fight. They tell a little story, that the Italians were very bad soldiers, as soon as

they saw the enemy they would run. The French were a little bit better, they would wait until the Germans got within firing range and then run, the British were pretty good soldiers, they would stay there and they would fight until it was hopeless and then they would run. The Germans were outstanding soldiers, they would fight until death. The Americans would stay in their foxholes until they found a better foxhole, which was true, we always felt superior to the foreign armies, even though the Germans had better records and everything like that, but we were Americans, nobody could beat America.

KIEFNER: So on Salerno, where were you staying these five days before you were organized?

ELLIS: Well they had a piece of equipment called a pup tent, and we pitched our pup tents and during the day we were out working unloading ships or we were carrying water or something like that, back up. Or we would play cards or something.

KIEFNER: What was the role of the aircraft, you mentioned an aircraft, was it German aircraft, US aircraft?

ELLIS: By the time we got to Salerno the Us Air Corps, or Air Force, had taken command of the skies, the Germans only came over at night because they came over in the daytime they were dead ducks. We didn't see them too much, but they'd come over and they would drop bombs on the beachhead and that's where we were, just off the beachhead into the lower hills and they'd come over and

drop bombs there, drop bombs on the bay there against our ships. So we would stay out of trouble, that's all you could do, we'd crawl in the foxhole which was usually underneath your pup tent and hope you didn't get a direct hit, that's all.

KIEFNER: How many troops were near this beachhead in Salerno?

ELLIS: Well you've got to remember that the actual fighting units were already maybe a mile or two inland. I'd say we probably had 1000 troops, most of us put to work during the day taking supplies off ships and loading them onto trucks and things like that. 1000 would be a good estimate, how many of them were permanent party, which were assigned to the units there, the engineers and the quarter master, and how many were like me, transients who were waiting to join a unit? I couldn't tell you that difference.

KIEFNER: So tell me about when you were ordered to join your unit.

ELLIS: Well somebody stood up there and started calling off names, and the names called off were to go over here, we went over there, they said, "Find your duffle bags", we found our duffle bags and they brought trucks over, loaded us on trucks, took us up about a mile or two and unloaded. Then somebody over there that unloaded us started calling names too. Some names here, your name's over here, your name's over here, and my name came, I went over here, I was told that I was now a member of Company H, 179<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. That's exactly the way you got assigned, when you got there you were told where you were.

KIEFNER: Ok. So you were loaded on trucks and you were going to move it and going to join the rest of...

ELLIS: Out to the units.

KIEFNER: Of the units. And how long of a trip was that?

ELLIS: Oh maybe a mile or two, not far at all.

KIEFNER: What did you find when you arrived, what was your unit involved in?

ELLIS: At that point in time the unit was moving towards Naples. They were between Salerno and Naples; I would say maybe a mile or two off the beach at Salerno itself. And at that point in time, I'd say, eight or ten miles from Naples, Italy.

KIEFNER: So at this point in time the largest danger was coming from the skies up until this point, you were talking about the night, there was no combat up until that point?

ELLIS: Right.

KIEFNER: Ok, so tell me about your first combat experience, when you first encountered the enemy.

ELLIS: Well, we, I guess the morning after we arrived, and it was pretty close to that it may have been one day where we ate and stuff like that, they formed us into our units and issued us our ammunition, or told us to grab our ammunition, and moved on. At that point in time I was assigned to a heavy weapons unit which was a machinegun unit and I was assigned as an ammo bearer, we carried two boxes of ammunition, each one of the ammo bearers. A squad consisted of a

gunner, assistant gunner, ammo bearers and a squad leader. We started to move out with the ammo baskets and the enemy started lobbing shells into us, the first shell I heard landed about 20/30 feet behind me. One of the men who had been assigned with me, he was sitting there and it just about amputated his leg, so I grabbed the serge and I said, "Look, you've got to do something, I mean the kid's going to die!" He said, "Number one he's not going to die, number two there's nothing I can do." I said, "Well you don't care what happens to him do you?" He says, "I'm very concerned about what happens to him" he says "Do you realize I have six men carrying 12 cans of ammunition, now I only have five men and I still have 12 cans of ammunition." He says, "I am really concerned about that". That was my first introduction to combat. And we hadn't moved through that barrage, by the time we got through it we were in this lower mountain area already and we were engaged in frontal assignments.

KIEFNER: It was the Germans that you were in combat with in that area?

ELLIS: Yes, German units.

KIEFNER: Were you involved in taking any POWs in that area, during that campaign?

ELLIS: Well by involved in taking them, when a unit attacks if they can get behind the enemy unit and they can reverse their departure the enemy has no place to go so in most cases they would surrender. So can you say, were you involved, everybody in the attacking unit was involved in it, they may assign two men to take the prisoners back, that's about it.

KIEFNER: Ok so it really was, they would march them back and then it would be handled more...

ELLIS: Yeah, first of all they would have intelligence interview them and try and find out what units they are, what their strength is and things like that, but once we had them surrender just move them back that's all.

KIEFNER: Ok, and continue on your mission.

ELLIS: And keep going.

KIEFNER: What was the terrain like?

ELLIS: In Italy?

KIEFNER: Mhm (yes)

ELLIS: Very warm in the valleys and very cold in the mountains. We were heavy weapons, we had the heavy water cooled machine guns and we get at lengths there, number one we had light field jackets and number two the water in the machine guns would freeze because it was below freezing temperature. You'd go back down the other side it would be in the 80s and 70s, you'd go back up top you'd be in the 20s and 30s and it was like that.

KIEFNER: So that was just one more challenge that you faced...

ELLIS: Well the government recognized that very quickly, because they issued us different boots which were padded, they issued us different jackets, combat jackets which were a lot warmer than the ones we had had in the past.

KIEFNER: Did you encounter any mines while you were in Salerno going towards Naples, in that campaign?

ELLIS: You always encountered mines. Whenever the Germans left they would mine, they would mine anything, they would have a loaf of bread with a mine underneath it and things like that. What you did once you encountered them, you encountered them the hard way somebody would step on one and you knew it was a minefield there, so then you'd have people go through with their mine detectors, most of the time they were engineers and a lot of the time the infantry themselves would do it and they would clear paths for you to walk through. You walk through single file through the path that was cleared and you wouldn't step off that path because you might be in the middle of a mine field, we didn't know.

KIEFNER: So tell me about first encountering combat, well you told me about that, but beyond that first experience and going to Naples, was it house to house fighting, was it...

ELLIS: Most of the fighting in Italy was land fighting between the valleys and the hills, they'd go through towns but most of the times the towns were not defended. I would say very rarely did we fight in a town in Italy. Most of the time was in the open fields or the open fields and stuff like that, and when you say encountered you would move through, and you saw the pictures in here, and then when they started firing on you, you would drop down and start deploying. Somebody in charge would say, "Do this, do that, move over here, put your guns up over here, do that" and then they'd give the order, "Open fire as soon as you're ready" or,

“Hold your fire until we tell you” or something like that. And then you would, what we call, engage the enemy and eventually either we would run out of ammunition and still not make any headway, or we would reach the point where they had to get out of there because they weren’t doing us any harm and they were getting killed themselves. The attacking team never has the advantage, it’s always the defending team because they pick what they want to do and where they want to do it, you have to respond to it, but your tactics are that, how do you best get from here to there and why do we want to go there. General Omar Bradley made the statement, I think I’m attributing it to the right person, and he said, “Every objective has a cost” he said, “Minor objectives may cost you one man” he said, “more heavily guarded and utilized objectives may cost you an entire platoon.” He said, “Many objectives can cost you a battalion or a company.” He said, “And it has to be a very, very heavy objective for you to commit an entire regiment”. So they had to decide where you’re going and what would it take to get there. And I recall that we went to Italy many years later, and took a ferry to Bari, from Bari we motored to Salerno, from Salerno up through Naples, and as I’m riding along the road I’m driving and I see these little town names, I said, “Anne this is what we used to call US Highway 1! It didn’t look like this but this was the highway that was our border”. That was our measuring stick, we would move up there, and wherever that went we would go, unless we had to get around some sort of obstacle or thing like that.

KIEFNER: You mention until you were out of ammunition, how well supplied were you?

ELLIS: Most of the time adequately supplied, you never tried to waste ammunition, but I would say adequate. There were times when we would run out of it and we would have to pull back, or just stay there and hope that they could get more up to us. We were told later that a lot of the ammunition was being diverted to England in preparation for the Normandy invasion, so we weren't getting everything that was going over, although we were the only combat units in Europe, we weren't getting a lot of the supplies that should have gone to us, but that's a decision they make.

KIEFNER: What about as far as food, etc. What was the food like as you were trudging forward?

ELLIS: There were, I would say, a minimum of three types of rations and one was a C Ration which was a little can and then, they could have fish, they could have meat, they could have cheese, they could have eggs and stuff like that. Another was the K Ration which, a little bit more, used to what you would eat at home, and that you could put on a fire and warm up and stuff like that, and you see pictures of soldiers boiling water in their helmets and stuff like that, well that was normally what we used the K Ration for. And then they had Company Rations where if you were in a position, fairly static, they would actually have the kitchen trucks come up and deliver meals to you, they were hot when they started out (chuckles).

KIEFNER: So your opinion of the food was?

ELLIS: Adequate.

KIEFNER: Ok, ok. What was your opinion of Major General Middleton?

ELLIS: The war is fought by three different segments: the enemy in front of you, your troops on your left, your troops on your right, you get beyond that, who was Troy Middleton? He was commanding general of our division, but we don't get to see him. I mean you read stories where he came up to the front, I don't doubt that, but he never stopped to talk to me, at least at that point in time I didn't have contact, later on I did have contact with higher officers, but initially you never got to see anybody above your company commander.

KIEFNER: You would be responding to their decisions, but not directly involved.

ELLIS: Not only that, when you would bivouac or something like that they would come around and talk to you and they would play card with themselves and you'd walk over and watch them and things like that.

KIEFNER: Was there any free time, any down time along these campaigns?

ELLIS: Yes. Our division, I've heard I've never seen it officially, had more combat days than any other division in the United States Army, both Pacific and European. But you're not in combat all the time, they try to limit you at first maybe to 45-50-60 days of combat and then pull you off a week. Later on it became 60-70-80 days of combat and off for a week, then it became 90-100 days of combat and they would decide if they could pull you off or they would put you in a reserve position where you were not fighting yet, but you really weren't off the line. So

we did get breaks in the middle there.

KIEFNER: Did you have opportunities for letter writing?

ELLIS: Yes. The letter writing, if you'll recall, was on the film, you couldn't read it after you wrote it, but that's beside the point. My father used to send me these emails, they were like emails, and I couldn't read it.

KIEFNER: Now you say on film, share with me, what does that look like?

ELLIS: You would get, they would write it on a certain form, the form would be mailed, somewhere the United States Army Post Office would get it, they would take a picture of it, reduce all the pictures and put them on a main background, they would deliver the background which would have maybe 20, 30, 40 mails on it to different people and then they would be re-photographed when they got to the destination and then disseminated to the troops.

KIEFNER: That was your incoming mail?

ELLIS: That was the incoming, and the outgoing, we could write that way too, or you could write on paper, don't forget we didn't need postage in those days, and you could write on the paper and they would censor it to the extent that they thought that it gave away information and I recall my father making this statement he says, "You never tell me where you are" so I wrote back I says, "I'm not permitted to tell you where I'm at". He [wrote], "I don't understand, the newspapers tell us exactly where you're at every single day!"

KIEFNER: Who were most of your letters to?

ELLIS: Most of the letters were to my folks, I had a couple of friends that I communicated with, and I had one girl that I wrote to, I would say, quite a few times. That's about it.

KIEFNER: How much information did you share?

ELLIS: Just the fact that, the fact that I'm writing to you means I'm still here. That was basically what we wrote. Now and then you'd write about the weather which was always a topic of conversation, the weather in Italy was terrible.

KIEFNER: Tell me a little about the weather in Italy.

ELLIS: I would say that that we had more rain days in Italy than we had the rest of the war put together. More important than that, you stayed off the roads, when I said you followed the road you didn't go down the road you went down either side of it and you're walking through mud constantly. And your big job was to keep your weapons clean and free of mud, that was your primary concern.

KIEFNER: So the weather certainly complicated your task at hand.

ELLIS: Oh it was terrible. And when you got up on top the cold weather, the rain became snow and it became very cold, you look down it would stay rain and it would be very warm.

KIEFNER: Would you say you were appropriately outfitted for that type of weather?

ELLIS: Well you didn't have two sets of clothing, one for hot weather and one for cold

weather, we settled for the ones for cold weather and in hot weather you would open it up and walk around with it, you never took it off because if you put it down somebody would steal it.

KIEFNER: Did you have any contact with the civilians in Naples?

ELLIS: Constantly, constantly.

KIEFNER: What was the opinion of the Italian civilians?

ELLIS: The Italians, they loved seeing us, they would come out and bring us vino, they'd bring us cheese, the Italians did not suffer for food, not too much. And they not only shared they would try and get you drunk and everything like that. There were many, many Italian-American soldiers in our units and initially they would talk to them in Italian and everything and then the Italians would beg so much that these Italian soldiers would stop speaking to them in Italian, they didn't want to be bothered all the time with requests for coffee, requests for bread and stuff like that, yet they had food there because they would give us food. They weren't getting the kind of food they wanted to get, that was the difference.

KIEFNER: How were your supplies and troops transported then, from village to village, was it all walking?

ELLIS: The troops were all walking, I don't think we, the only time we would use motor transportation is when you were off the line, the line moved up maybe two, three, four, five miles before you went back up, and then they would truck you to maybe within 1000 yards of where you were going to deploy. Other than that,

you walked.

KIEFNER: How aware were you, during your campaign, of what was going on elsewhere in the war?

ELLIS: We used to get local, I guess you'd call it a newspaper, and it stayed pretty well up to date, you've got to remember we were the only ones in actual combat at that point in time. The only other ones were in the Asian campaigns you know, with the islands and so on. But the war was us, they would tell us, they would play it up you know, "This is fallen, it was like this", you know, everything is wonderful. And the biggest thing was we would wait for the papers because one of our former men became the head cartoonist for the United States Army, a guy named Bill Malden, he was from our unit.

KIEFNER: Oh!

ELLIS: And we used to wait for his next cartoon because that was the joke of the day, half the time he was attacking officers and we used to laugh like hell.

KIEFNER: To what was the extent of, through the end of Naples, what was the extent of the combat, how severe was the combat and the casualties that your unit...

ELLIS: It depended upon the objective. If you were trying to take high ground and the Germans chose to defend that high ground because it covered a lot of territory you would have a hell of a time, you would lose a lot of men going up there and hope that you took it with a great loss to the Germans. We not only wanted the high ground we wanted to reduce their strength, and if you overran them they

would also be losing weapons because they'd have to leave them behind or they chose to leave them behind or they'd surrender and leave their weapons there. So as a result of that your combat units... can you repeat your question?

KIEFNER: I hope so! What was the, basically, what was the extent of Naples, before we kind of move on to what came next I want to make sure we're not missing anything, around Naples you know as far as...

ELLIS: Combat is funny. You took an objective and they try to retake it from you. The extent, as I said, the importance of the objective, let's say we wanted Naples because we needed the harbor there, to us the mountains surrounding Naples were very important, so it was attacked with great vigor, with lots of strength, heavy ammunition, heavy bombardment, heavy air support and everything like that. Once you got past Naples the Germans would not stop right there they would retreat back to a defensible position which also commanded an objective that they didn't want us to have. So you would go from heavy fighting to light fighting to no fighting, and most of the time it was walking, very rarely did you use a vehicle. As a heavy weapons unit you had a vehicle for each squad and on the vehicle was ammunition for our particular weapon that we were using. The mortars had their own jeep; the machine gunners had their own jeep and everything like that. To try and stereotype combat it's almost impossible. As a matter of fact you know up until recently I never even discussed it, except I had one friend who was with me all the way through, from Milwaukee, and every time we got together we would talk about some incident, but that's very recent

that we've been discussing it openly with other people. How do you describe it? You can't. Having objectives that they chose not to defend because it didn't mean anything to them, but to us it meant something. And whenever they retreated, the enemy retreated, they would retreat to a point where they chose to defend, not only they thought it was easier to defend that, it was harder for us to attack it and that's the way it went, up and down, up and down.

KIEFNER: You discussed the Germans having the high ground, would you say that was a disadvantage to you or to them?

ELLIS: High ground was always the advantage because it gave you observation and it's a lot easier to sit there looking down than it is to try and crawl up. If you saw pictures of some of the Italian landscape they have tiers, each tier would have plants on it, different types of plants, and when we attacked we'd have to go up those tiers, and they would be hidden up on top looking at us trying to make our way up.

KIEFNER: As you went up these tiers, were these actual roads or paths, how improved were they?

ELLIS: Most of the time you were attacking up landscape, you would try and find low, depressed areas where they would have limited site of you, because if they could see you they could hit you. So you tried to take paths that were hidden from the objective to the extent you can. For instance if you wanted to get here, you may go this way... get behind them up here or get right in front of them where you

could throw grenades or something at them.

KIEFNER: Now, were you still with this heavy artillery, was there any variation in the weaponry that you were using?

ELLIS: Well we didn't use artillery, I was a machine gunner. Yes we had various types of artillery. We had what's most common was the 155mm howitzer. Now a howitzer is something that shoots a shell up and then down, that's good for mountain warfare because you can come over the top of a mountain and hit what's behind it like roads or trucks or stuff like that. Then they had the 155 rifle, which is straight shooting. Then we had the 75mm anti-tank guns, and then we had the 37mm anti-tank guns which that was probably like a firecracker, it had no purpose at all except to take up space and we abandoned that way early in the war, went to 75. The 75mm was supposed to penetrate German armor but it couldn't do it because they came out with the Tiger Tank, which was much heavier than our tanks. And there's a lot of discussion as to the superiority of the German tank. Our tankers didn't think they were superior for many reasons. Number one, our tanks weighed about half of what the Tiger Tank weighed, if the Germans tried to maneuver in muddy ground the tank would sink into it, it wouldn't move, our tanks could move through that type of ground at least to the extent it would support them which was much better than the Germans. And more important than that they had a 120mm canon on their tanks, we had a 75mm on ours until later on in the war when they expanded it to a 90 and then from a 90 to a 120. But the most important thing about it is their tanks did not

have a gyroscopic turret, we did. Our tanks could move and rotate their gun and fire on the move, the Germans had to stop to fire their gun, they could not fire their gun on the move, which gave us a tremendous advantage which was partially offset because their heavy armor would deflect our rounds, but at least if we were to hit them in the grooves there could stop them.

KIEFNER: So your objective when firing at these tanks was simply to stop them.

ELLIS: Well if we could penetrate them yes, but very rarely, there are parts on the tank that were not heavily armored, there were other parts that were heavily armored, you would try and hit them in the parts that weren't.

KIEFNER: So the most vulnerable parts of these tanks were?

ELLIS: Underneath. And the reason I state that, a tank moving in heavy ground would go like this, the front end of the tank would be up because it's climbing over a hill, you wanted to hit them then, at that point in time. Our job as the infantry, the tankers have to have spotters, they have somebody, usually the tank commander, who looks through slits to guide the tank and we tried, firing at it, tried to aim at those slits.

KIEFNER: So you really haven't been gone from Chicago all this long when you find yourself in Naples, how long did it take you to figure out all these strategies?

ELLIS: You never get to figure it out, you're told what to do. And if you're sitting in a foxhole and they're coming at you with tanks you have two choices, fire at the tank or get out of there, one of the two and we've done both.

KIEFNER: What weapons did the Germans have that we didn't have, you know we've discussed these tanks and the difference between the US tanks and the German tanks, but outside of that was there any other weaponry that the Germans possessed that we did not?

ELLIS: Yes. They had a 120mm gun, which was an artillery piece which was far superior to anything we had. It took us until the end of the war to come out with something comparable to that. Our engineers didn't believe it was an effective weapon, the Germans built it and used it against us. It had a funny sound, you could always tell what it was, because it came screaming at you. The other weapon which we feared the most which was probably the least destructive is what we called the "Screaming Mimis", it was a six barrel mortar that fired like a rocket shell and it came at you and made this screaming noise as it came at you. It wasn't that effective as a fighting weapon but as a morale weapon it sure as hell was effective.

KIEFNER: That's very interesting, just the fact that it wasn't as effective but morally that does make a lot of sense. How did the soldiers deal with emotions during this? Was there time to really reflect?

ELLIS: By reflect, to try and figure out what was going on?

KIEFNER: Exactly.

ELLIS: No.

KIEFNER: Or to predict what was going tomorrow, to anticipate.

ELLIS: The dog face, you just followed orders. The war belonged to the corporal or sergeant who was giving you orders, the war of the sergeant belonged to the lieutenant who was giving him orders, and the lieutenant was following the orders of the company commander, company commander was given his orders by the battalion commander and you didn't think about it, you did it. If you stopped to think you wouldn't do it.

KIEFNER: That's true. So from Naples how did you learn what your next objective would be?

ELLIS: Well we went way past Naples, I would say probably maybe close to 100 miles past Naples, and then we were pulled off the line let's say after 50, 60, 70 days we came off the line and were taken back to Salerno. And then we were told we were going to be practicing beach landings, but they didn't tell us what beaches. It wasn't until we got off the landing craft at San Tropez that we found out where we were and I didn't know exactly where we hit until fairly recently. Anne and I took a trip to Provence and we went to San Tropez and I keep telling everybody that I bathed in the waters of San Tropez before most people ever heard about it. When we got there we had to wade through chest high water to get to the ground, but we did it. But anyhow in San Tropez I was told that the French National Maritime Museum was up on the hill there in the castle. So we went up on the hill, we went into the castle, we found two rooms devoted to the allied landing on the beachhead by unit, by date, by time and by movement and I could see exactly where I came in and where we wound up and I had to go out there to find

it.

KIEFNER: So was this a bit of, would you consider it a break, just a break from combat, a training?

ELLIS: What, the landing?

KIEFNER: No, before the landing, when you...

ELLIS: Oh when we were, yeah. I say we would probably practice maybe five or six landings a day and we were off in the evening, go into Naples you can go into Salerno or something like that. It was more like a rest area, yeah.

KIEFNER: Ok. And then from there what was your next assignment?

ELLIS: They took us north of Naples to a little town, I think was Civitavecchia, but I'm not sure, and they kept us in groups there and then they brought in landing craft, LCIs, and loaded us on and told us we were going to France.

KIEFNER: Now this would be your first beach landing, was this to be a beach landing?

ELLIS: No, Anzio came in between, I've left Anzio out.

KIEFNER: We missed Anzio, lets, Anzio was the first beach landing

ELLIS: My first beach landing, unless you want to call Salerno because we had to come in the beaches just like they did except nobody was shooting at us.

KIEFNER: It was no D-Day.

ELLIS: No D-Day.

KIEFNER: Well let's go back to Anzio and tell me about the amphibious landing at Anzio.

ELLIS: When we were loaded on the landing craft, we also had a lot of what they called landing ships, they put the tanks and the heavy equipment and the trucks and stuff on those

KIEFNER: The LSTs?

ELLIS: LSTs, yeah. It stands for Landing Ship Tanks, LCI is Landing Craft Infantry and things like that, I don't know what they mean but they gave them all names. We were on the smallest of the ships, and it would hold, I think roughly, about 200 people, that's it. Most of them on deck, very few underneath, underneath was the crew, the Naval or Coast Guard crew that were manning the vessel, and we took off and we took off in very bad weather. A lot of us got sick, those that didn't get sick they put us in the kitchen to work so we could make food for the others. I think we were probably at sea three days to get to Anzio, and then our unit was the second unit to hit the beach, the first I think was the Third Division, ours was the second but we hit in a different area than they did. Initially we ran into no opposition, it was a rest camp and the rest home for the German units in Italy and they were all resting. So getting into Anzio was a snap, there was no problem at all. We had prepared the beaches properly for it, I mean the machine gunners, the aircraft came over and bombed it and everything and we went right through Anzio itself and we landed near Nettuno which is a twin city to Anzio. Moved in probably the first day or two, I would say two to three miles. And then we moved in about, maybe five miles. And then the Germans started, we thought that when

we hit Anzio we had outflanked them, anything south of Anzio they would have to pull out of. They didn't, they moved three divisions out of Yugoslavia through Italy, down to Anzio. We had three divisions, but only two were committed, one was in reserve. Then the next day they hit us with everything in the world. They brought something like seven or eight divisions in from everywhere they could and they went through us like a sieve. They completely drove us almost off the beachhead, if they had realized how bad we were they could have retaken Anzio, but somewhere along the line they stopped, and they took, well in my unit only four of us got out of there and I got out by accident. They captured our whole unit because they came in behind us with tanks and everything and they started marching us back toward their lines. And I recalled that I had a dog-tag that said "Hebrew" on it. So I bent down to bury it and my buddy I told you about, he stopped, "What are you doing?" I said, "Go ahead" he said, "No!" he stayed with me. And we watched them move the tanks behind the troops, keep moving, keep moving, they were past us, 100-200 yards away they're still going and we're here, nobody around us. So we saw a house down the road, we ran to the house and they spotted us and they started shooting at the house but we were behind it and they kept going the other direction, so I needed a new set of dog tags (chuckles).

KIEFNER: So you simply got separated and basically saved because you stopped to bury those dog tags?

ELLIS: Right.

KIEFNER: Wow. So how did you rejoin, after that did the rest of your unit get captured?

ELLIS: Not everyone, two platoons had it very bad and two platoons didn't have it too bad. H Company didn't have it as bad, a part of the H Company with the mortar units were way behind the initial lines that broke through so they could get back. What happened was, we retreated to a line that our intelligence had decided that if we got outmaneuvered we have to fall back to this area, so they started collecting everybody at that area and then reformed the units. My unit had one complete platoon, parts of two platoons and one platoon which was almost nothing, which was mine, there was only four of us. Later on I found out what happened to them, but that was a long time afterwards. And they started re-outfitting the units, sending in replacements to the units, just as I had been a replacement maybe a month or so before, new ones. They came up and we had to train, we took about two weeks and training and discipline the newcomers, and that was about, I would say maybe a half a mile from the beach.

KIEFNER: Going back I found it interesting with you, burying the dog tags, was there anything official that they warned you or was it from talking to other soldiers that you knew to get rid of those dog tags that said "Hebrew"? Was that just your own common sense telling you that was in your best interest?

ELLIS: We had heard about the atrocities, not to the extent that they had actually occurred, but we knew that Jews had been killed. And the only thing I knew, that I was identified as a Jew, I had no idea what would happen to me or how and I just didn't want to take that chance.

KIEFNER: Ok so I was just curious if there was actually some sort of formal instructions, because it's interesting.

ELLIS: No.

KIEFNER: So casualties were high in Anzio with your unit?

ELLIS: Very high, very high. I mean most, we had battalions in place, you know a division has three regiments, a regiment has three battalions, each battalions has three rifle companies and one heavy weapons company, we had been reduced down to I'd say about 190 we were reduced down to maybe about 40, 30 or 40 people. What had occurred was the Germans found out how we were defending, who was what, they threw division size units against our battalion sized units, and it didn't take them much to break through. The night before they broke through they had sent patrols along and these patrols were under orders to count the number of foxholes and stuff, they wanted to find out how many people we had there, and our orders were, we found out about it, our orders were anything standing outside your foxhole, shoot, so we stayed in the foxhole and fired at anything that was coming out at us. In the morning just as daylight had dawned is when their tank battalions started moving forward with all their infantry around it. I'd say my battalion had under 1000 people, I'd say they hit us with roughly 3-4,000 troops plus tanks.

KIEFNER: What do you owe your survival, just simply at that battle of Anzio?

ELLIS: Luck. I had a very good friend who's since passed away that, when they started

firing at us, he was using his machinegun and a mortar round hit right in front of him and both of his eyes went blank. He got up and ran. I think he was the last guy that got out of there, and if he hadn't been hit by that mortar round he would never have gotten out of there.

KIEFNER: After you left from, did you have a retreat after or did you have a rest after Anzio?

ELLIS: After Rome fell we were placed, I guess it's called, now I really don't remember the name of it, anyway we were given three weeks additional training. First of all we were given more men to replace those that had been lost and then they started awarding ranks, I mean we had four men so of the four men one became platoon sergeant, two became squad sergeants and the third one became, I guess administrative, I don't know. But the point is we had to refill everybody else, I was lucky I got selected as a section sergeant. I was told I wouldn't get the stripes until it went through, so every month I got a promotion. I went from PFC to corporal, the next one from corporal to sergeant, the next one from sergeant to staff sergeant and then a little later after that from sergeant to technical sergeant which was platoon sergeant.

KIEFNER: Had you been injured to this point?

ELLIS: At that point no.

KIEFNER: Ok. So tell me a little bit about your time of rest just outside of Rome then.

ELLIS: We would go into town and we would drink, normally, and go to shows and stuff

like that. I had one guy in my unit he would go to the opera, that's about it. We'd get back that night and the morning you'd get up and have breakfast and then you'd start training again for whatever they wanted you to do. And I remember we used to practice landings and stuff like that in the field that grew water melons, so we'd sit there with a bayonet and eat water melons.

KIEFNER: And you were preparing for, what was coming next?

ELLIS: Southern France.

KIEFNER: And you knew you were heading to southern France next?

ELLIS: Not until we were aboard the ship.

KIEFNER: So tell me now, we'll go back to, back on the ship to go to southern France.

ELLIS: On the ship, I'm trying to recollect back about 67 to 68 years, aboard the ship they called in everybody who had any kind of authority and at that point in time I was a platoon sergeant, a tech sergeant, so they called us in and they had maps spread out in front and they laid the whole thing out, they even had the walls that were used on the beaches facing the sea, the Mediterranean. And they gave us our objectives, that was it. They said, "We expect to be inland maybe five to ten miles the first day". We, I think, went in 17 miles the first day, we met almost no resistance at all. They may have had some patrol guards walking the beach, about it. The Third Division met no resistance whatsoever, they could move at will. The 36<sup>th</sup> division, which was the Texas National Guard, hit a strong point and it took them three days to fight themselves off the beach. It's luck, we had

nothing and they were facing divisions.

KIEFNER: So what was the fighting in France like?

ELLIS: Initially there was none. We saw, the only Germans we saw were surrendering. We got to Grenoble, and this was a story Anne wanted me to tell you, we took the evening off and went into town and went to the bar and we're sitting there drinking and the French was on our left and they came in too and they were drinking and singing and we were drinking and singing and we were laughing and they were laughing and one of the Frenchmen gets up and jumps on the table and says, in German, "Kann immer du deutsch sprechen?" means "Can anybody here speak German?" So I looked up and I said, "Ja, ich kann deutsch sprechen". So he says something to me and I responded to him and he turned around and in French he tells his men, then he told me what he said, he said, "Here you have two Jews in France trying to talk German to each other!" From then on we were all drinking together and I don't know how we got back to camp, but they were a lot of fun to be with. These were what they call FFT, the French Forces of the Interior.

KIEFNER: Eventually where did you go, from there you moved on it wasn't...

ELLIS: We moved on closer to Milan and Dijon. And then we started to run into heavy resistance, very heavy resistance. Just outside of Dijon the French called for help, they were being attacked by some heavy German units, so they sent my battalion in to try and relieve them. We got there and as we got there the

Germans moved in an entire tank division and they drove right through the middle of us and separated us. Part of us were on this side and part on the other side, they turned their tanks around and faced these people, we saw that our guys surrendered. Most of us started running, some of them just gave up, and then they saw us, they turned their tanks around and started shooting. Three of us got out, my platoon leader, a squad leader, and me, we just kept running and nothing hit us. Then we found out that a lieutenant had been hit, not very badly but he'd been hit, so we got into this little town, a suburb of I guess Dijon, and we talked to the people there and they told us the Germans are not far away. Pretty soon we saw German trucks moving so we went up into, I guess you'd call it the hayloft of a farm, and we left the lieutenant down below, they came, they picked up the lieutenant and took him away and never searched the house.

KIEFNER: The Germans picked up the lieutenant?

ELLIS: Yeah. And we were there, I guess two or three days and the, the Italians kept bringing us food and stuff like that, the French, kept bringing us food at that time. Unbeknownst to me the military advised my parents that I was missing in action. Now that took roughly, I would say, maybe a month and a half, two months, for me to maintain contact with my parents, send a letter, have somebody else write to them and stuff like that. As I understand it they had a chaplain, a soldier and a messenger boy knock on my folks door while in New Jersey, read them the telegram, and my mother attacked the messenger.

KIEFNER: Oh my goodness.

ELLIS: She wouldn't believe it. Then the word got back to Chicago, my friends in Chicago, and one of them who was a soldier stationed at Percy Jones General Hospital here, he asked for the dates in which I was missing in action. So somehow he found out the dates, and then he wrote my parents and he said, "I have a letter from Irv dated after the day he was reported missing in action". Then my folks finally got the letter from me stating that I was alright.

KIEFNER: So they reported you missing in action after you were separated from your unit, how did you, what happened to the rest of your unit when you were separated?

ELLIS: Those on my side either gave up, were wounded, or captured. Those on the other side were taken almost intact, they couldn't shoot, I mean they were facing, you had maybe 3,4,500 troops facing a whole line of tanks with their guns leveled at them and a guy hollering at them, "Give up!" you know what I mean? And they gave up.

KIEFNER: So they were taken prisoner by the Germans?

ELLIS: They were taken prisoner by the Germans, one of whom was a 39 year old Jewish man from Chicago. And I found out after the war, ran into him on the west side, and he told me they were treated like any other prisoner, they were never separated, never anything like that.

KIEFNER: So how did you get back? How did you find your way back? Your unit was now gone, taken prisoner...

ELLIS: Stupidity.

KIEFNER: Ok!

ELLIS: Unbeknownst to me and my other fellow friend who's also from Chicago, happened to be, we were three miles from Switzerland; if we were gone to Switzerland we would have been interred there in a hotel and treated like kings. But no, we turned around and went west and finally rejoined an American unit and sent back into combat. There's as much fun in what happened as there was bad stuff.

KIEFNER: What unit did they put you together with then, your unit was...

ELLIS: My unit was still intact, I mean not everybody in the unit was captured, some of them ran away the other direction, but not many.

KIEFNER: So your unit was definitely reduced in size.

ELLIS: Then they sent in more replacements. Replacements, the only replacement pool that was covered by higher authority was the 442<sup>nd</sup>, you know who they are, that was the Japanese unit. And the reason they were segregated for replacement was they were never committed until they had amassed a pool of replacements so that as many as could be hurt could be replaced because they didn't want them disseminated, first from a propaganda period, second they were good soldiers they were real good soldiers.

KIEFNER: You rejoined your unit, I lost my train of thought here...

ELLIS: And we were moving, at that point in time, we were moving northeast. And then

we got into the Vosges Mountains and the Hürtgen Forests, that's where we really ran into some heavy resistance. That was almost as heavy as Anzio was, when the counterattacks came. This was near Epinal and not far from Strasbourg, right in there, the Germans moved in a lot of troops a lot of heavy stuff, and they bogged us down for interminable periods.

KIEFNER: Were you still France or had you crossed into Germany?

ELLIS: Well we were in Alsace-Lorraine that part considered themselves fully French, as you went further north they were French but they spoke German.

KIEFNER: Did you notice a difference in fighting when you went from France to German soil?

ELLIS: The thing we noticed was the type of German soldier we were facing. We would take prisoners or look at wounded and dead, there was a lot of younger people there and a lot of real older people. They were recruiting and putting in uniform anybody they could. So we knew that they were in trouble, the question was how do we really profit from it? In many instances we would move maybe 1000 yards that day, they would knock us back 800 yards. Then we would move 1000 yards and they would knock us back 200 yards, we'd move 1000 yards and they'd knock us back 2000 yards. I mean they were really heavily reinforced at that area, and that's when I got the Silver Star which I brought a copy of here today.

KIEFNER: (Clears Throat) Tell me about the events that led to receiving the Silver Star.

ELLIS: You asked me how I thought people survived and I said luck. When we were

holed up in the Vosges Mountains and the Hürtgen Forests it was really static. The Germans were up ahead of us and we could look down into town and see them walking around and stuff like that, we were half way up the hills and our troops were disseminated here and this went on for maybe a week or two weeks so they started bringing up the kitchens. They would bring the kitchens to the foot of the hills here, our troops were across the other side and the Germans were down in the valley over here. Now what the Germans were waiting for I don't know, but they started serving hot food and you'd go one third of the troops at a time and the officers were supposed to go one third of the officers, we had four officers on line. That particular time all four officers went down to eat. Next thing we know this tank with about maybe close to 100 infantrymen are moving through the forest toward us, tank started opening fire and the men started retreating, we don't even have an officer here. So I looked around I said, "Get those guns over there! Get those guns over there!" I said, "Ok, when they open fire, move, go that way." When they moved that way the tank went that way, we were between the tank and his troops, so the tank took off through the woods and the troops, the German troops, did not have the tank support so they turned around and ran away. So they say, you know luck has a lot to do with it, if you read the, I don't know if you read the order, it sounds like I won the war by myself. Each unit had what they called an awards officer, he would write them up, somebody would recommend you and he would write you up. Now I was recommended by one of the officers who should have been up front, but he wasn't there.

KIEFNER: Right. So basically it was a surprise that the Germans were there or they certainly would have had an officer.

ELLIS: We knew they were there, we'd been there maybe a week or two, we were in a static position. They were there and we were here and...

KIEFNER: They just decided to move.

ELLIS: They decided to move. I don't know whether they, I think they figured out exactly what time the food trucks came and exactly when our men went down to eat and they knew when we would be at our weakest point and that's when they hit.

KIEFNER: There certainly were other men there, the fact that you took charge of that situation with no other officer present...

ELLIS: I think I was the senior person there at that time.

KIEFNER: And do you remember exactly how old you were at that time?

ELLIS: Yeah, I was 20.

KIEFNER: That brings me to the question I was going to ask earlier when you spoke of the replacements. What was the situation when the replacements came in, how long did it take them to get up to speed and catch up with the other troops? Were they usually coming from another area of battle or were they fresh troops?

ELLIS: Most of the time they were fresh troops right from the states coming from what they call replacement centers. Replacement centers where they would

administer them, they would feed them, and they would house them and give them entertainment until they were assigned. Once in a while they would have somebody who had been hurt or captured and got away, came back, and was in condition to fight again and he may or may not have been assigned to his original unit he could have been assigned to another unit, but I would say 90% were replacement units who had never been in combat before and we'd put them through training that was it.

KIEFNER: Do you recall crossing the Rhine; was that before or after this?

ELLIS: Crossing the Rhine was easier than crossing the Volturno River in Italy. The Volturno River was a river immediately below Venefro which was the entranceway to Monte Casino. At the Volturno River we had intense competition at the other side. They were shooting at us all the time, we could only get a few men across at a time like that, it was very bad. Crossing the Rhine we were a couple days behind Remagen where the American troops had crossed just north of us, so we had some resistance but they had moved most of their heavier troops north of us in order to combat the bridge people coming across. So we came across in boats, the engineers, I think the boats would hold about 20 each so they would load us 20, take us across, go back for more 20 and load them, take them across and those who came across would dig in along the far shore, make sure that no counterattack existed and we did not get counterattacked there. As a matter of fact I don't think we hit any really heavy German resistance until we hit Aschaffenburg, which probably was 40 or 50 miles from the Rhine. The

problem with the Rhine was that we concentrated so much on it that we almost ignored the easiest part which was where we went through. They had very light resistance there and we had very light resistance most of the time. Until we got, I would say 40 miles from the River Rhine.

KIEFNER: What was the role of the Engineers throughout this whole time? Did you experience much of the engineer's work?

ELLIS: No. Some, yes, but not a lot. Incidentally at that period of time when we cross the Rhine is about the time I got my field commission.

KIEFNER: Ok. Tell me how that happened.

ELLIS: I had a wonderful company commander, I was a platoon sergeant... and he recommended me for a commission I told him no. He says, "Why not?" I said, "I have a lot of superior time here now," I said, "somebody goes on rest and somebody goes home." I said, "I'm going to be up there pretty soon," I said, "that's where I'm staying". He said, "Ok!" And a couple of weeks later, tried again. I said, "Tell you what, you send me to West Point, I'll accept your commission". He said, "Well I can't send you to west point", "Alright". We got assigned a new officer, who took over my platoon, I was his platoon sergeant and he decided I have too much influence with our platoon and he was out to get me. I don't know what stories he made up, but he kept telling the company commanders a lot of things, well I got called in by the company commander and battalion commander, "Irv, we're going to reassign you." "What do you mean

reassign me?" He said, "I have a sergeant and an officer who don't get together right," he says, "you know who's winning". I said, "Yeah" he said, "E Company has agreed to take you on and I've made arrangements for it" he said, "We're going to Paris for a week, when we come back we'll work out the transfer order" "It's ok". He leaves. I went up to the assistant battalion commander, I says, "You know, I was offered a commission?" he says, "Yeah" I said, "You know what? I'll take it" He says, "Ok!" he says, "Well Captain Goldoni is not here, he should know about it." I said, "Well he's the one that recommended me" "Oh yeah you're right!" So five days later I was sworn in as a second lieutenant and a couple of days later the company commander and battalion commander come back, the company commander gets out of the jeep, walks over and I'm standing in the doorway of his command tent and looks at me, I... he says, "How did you work that out?" I said, "You forgot to tell the assistant battalion commander that I was being transferred" I said, "all he remembered was that you had recommended me for a field commission." I get called in again by the battalion commander, he said, "A week ago I had a sergeant and a lieutenant who didn't get along" he said, "now I've got two lieutenants who don't get along!" He says, "Either you get along or I'm going to get rid of both you" or words to that effect. So we became friends, we never really liked each other, but oh I took the commission under one clause; that I be reassigned to the platoon that I originally was platoon sergeant, and the agreed to that one.

KIEFNER: And that was the platoon, the H platoon, or...

ELLIS: Company H.

KIEFNER: Company H, ok. So this was taking place, where were you when this...

ELLIS: This was in the Vosges Mountain area, just north of it, just before we crossed the Rhine.

KIEFNER: Ok, and into Germany?

ELLIS: Yeah.

KIEFNER: What was the fighting like in Germany? What was the terrain, the situation?

ELLIS: The terrain was usually very level there was not too much advantage. The advantage we had was that as long as the weather held out we had the Air Corps going for us and they were good. They would blast an entire area in front of you, maybe for a half a mile, and then you'd move forward. We used to get maps that covered maybe a mile at most, we didn't know what was going on up here, we only knew what was going on over here and they took care of that over there pretty good. I've got to give my colonel credit for one thing. We ran into a mountain range and the Germans were very heavily encased there, they had dug in well, they had some good weapons and they were bothering us pretty good, wouldn't let us go forward. Colonel went back for help and he passed an anti-aircraft company that had 12 guns, four of the what they call Quad-40s that are used for airplanes, he looked he says, "How far can you lower that thing?" said, "Oh, pretty good" he says, "Follow me" he says, "We're guarding this base" and he says, "I said follow me" Follow him, he says, "See those woods out there?" he

said, "I want you lined up and I want you to let go with everything you have". Well they opened up and you could see trees, 50 yards back falling over. A 40mm is pretty big, it's much bigger than a rifle, I'll put it that way. And we must have taken 100 prisoners from there because they couldn't get out of there, the forest and everything was around them pinning them and stuff like that, but he was the first one I know who ever used that 40mm against infantry, and it worked.

KIEFNER: Were you fighting in any villages in Germany?

ELLIS: In Germany we had quite a bit of, in France we had some, in Germany almost every single village in the road that we were taking would give you resistance, they fought like hell in the villages and you see pictures in here you seen what we did to some of those villages and cities, Nuremburg and Munich it was like, like the atom bomb had hit there.

KIEFNER: So you were fighting not only the German military, but were you also fighting civilians, guerillas or no?

ELLIS: To my knowledge I don't know of any civilians, they could have been shooting at us, but I don't know of any personally, but the soldiers were all over the place they were in buildings they were in churches. The snipers were probably the worst because as soon as you came into sight they would start shooting from here and somebody would start shooting from here and from here, and you had to stop until you got rid of them, by the time you got rid of them it might have been a

half a day.

KIEFNER: So what sort of a strategy would you have to take to...

ELLIS: Kill them. If you've got to take, somebody decided that we have to go through that village and capture it. The idea was, go through there, they stop and they start fighting you just fight back, that's all. You see a lot of pictures of troops advancing, that's in between defense of the positions that the Germans have taken, you've seen that in here where they're moving along with their rifles on their shoulders.

KIEFNER: Right, right. Tell me a little about the destruction in Nuremburg.

ELLIS: We hit Nuremburg there was some intense fighting on our side, they were defending it very, very heavily. And our poor Air Force, our Air Corps, whatever you want to call it, they came in with bombing levels, our tanks crossed the way and everything opened up, they must have hit it with thousands of rounds of ammunition, just about every single building in the city was hit. Now that has two effects, number one it gives you more vision, but number two it gives them better hiding places because they can get behind rubble and stuff like that, which is what they did at Monte Cassino in Italy. So you have a rough battle trying to get rid of them there ,but, remember what I said, that the importance of the objective determines what kind of risk you're willing to take, or have to take. That was one of very high risk, we had to get Nuremburg. And from Nuremburg we had to get München, Munich, same thing in Munich.

KIEFNER: And at this time when you were in Germany, how aware were you of what else was going on in the rest of the war, in the Pacific, were you still getting...

ELLIS: We used to get newspapers, I mean they were a little bit older, and we had the 45<sup>th</sup> Division News and everything which would give us a summary of what was going on, no problem there. I was starting to say something, I hope it comes back to me... alright, I don't think I remember.

KIEFNER: Ok. Did you have any experience with medics, throughout this whole...

ELLIS: Good and bad.

KIEFNER: Tell me a little.

ELLIS: In Italy, southern part of Italy, I started throwing up, I don't care what I ate I would throw it up. I went down to the medical tent, guy looked at me and gave me a pill or something and said, "You'll be alright". Couple of days later I couldn't stand it and I went back down, he looked at me and he says, "I told you there's nothing wrong with you. How old are you?" I said, "19" he said, "You miss your mother's cooking, that's your problem". I went back, next day we get the order to move out and we have our pup tents, I'm rolling my pup tent towards my tent mate, he looks at me he says, "Your eyes are a funny yellow" I said, "Wait a minute, don't go away". I went back down to the medical tent, I says, "Doctor how's your vision?" he says, "What do you mean?" I said, "Take a look" he says, "Well there was no way I could tell" I said, "Bullshit, you knew damn well what I had." He said, "Well we weren't allowed to evacuate anybody

who could fight”. I said, “That’s a nice doctor”. Well anyhow this doctor pulled a lot of junk, had a couple of men with frostbite and he would tell them, “Come back when you’re black and blue”. And yeah somebody waited for him to leave his tent and when he left his tent they threw a hand grenade in his tent to explode it, they didn’t want to kill him, but they did what they wanted. They scared him so much he transferred out of the unit.

KIEFNER: What do you suppose would lead a person to be that way? I mean he had to see...

ELLIS: Following orders, who knows? All I know is that he knew I had yellow jaundice, but, hepatitis B if you want to call it that, but...

KIEFNER: So how were you treated, after?

ELLIS: I was evacuated to a general hospital in Naples and I was there, I’d say two weeks and they kept giving me candy for food, I mean I was getting these orange slices and stuff, this is what they would feed you. That was the prescribed treatment at that time, I understand now that that would kill you, because that’s not what you should be taking, that was number one. Number two was we had a bombing run that went the wrong way. Instead of going this way it went this way, so the last bombs dropped, dropped on our position and it blew out my eardrums, it didn’t break them it just ruptured them and I was oozing fluid from both ears so I was evacuated, about ten days or so in the hospital. It recovered mostly, to this day I have problems with my ears, but it could have been worse.

KIEFNER: Did you receive the purple hard for that?

ELLIS: No, I received the purple hard in France for a tree burst that threw shrapnel all over me while we were moving. You know what a tree burst is?

KIEFNER: No, that was my next question.

ELLIS: Artillery pieces have a detonator and they have a propellant. The propellant is usually bags of powder behind them that shoves them through the barrel, in the front of it they have an accelerator which, when the bomb hits or rather the shell hits, the part of that goes back and it ignites the powder inside the shell which expands and usually a shell is filled with, well now they call it rusty nails and stuff like that, but that point in time wouldn't know what they were using, I think rocks and things like that. The shell is supposed to hit the ground and explode, this one hid the tree over my head and exploded and I got the stuff to my shoulder and my knee.

KIEFNER: So, you were treated at a hospital?

ELLIS: Not initially, initially they just bandaged it and then it started to swell and I got blood poisoning so they evacuated me to the hospital.

KIEFNER: Was it one of the US Army hospitals?

ELLIS: Yeah, it was a general hospital in Dijon.

KIEFNER: And how long did you spend there before rejoining your unit?

ELLIS: Oh I'd say I was there about, maybe a two weeks, a week.

KIEFNER: So going back to Nuremburg, we were discussing the bombing and strafing that was taking place. How much fear of friendly fire was there during that bombing, were you well out of harm's way?

ELLIS: Very rare, I don't recall any of our artillery other than this bombing from the airplanes that fell on our positions. We were lucky if they got out to their positions, let alone hit us, I don't think they could. We had a funny situation, just before we crossed the Rhine we hit some very, very major resistance and they were throwing artillery shells at us like crazy. So our intelligence unit, called division intelligence unit, told them we're under heavy fire, we're getting roughly 3-400 rounds fired at us per hour. So a guy at the other end says, "You don't know what you're talking about, they don't have that many weapons and they can't be doing that much damage to you, go back, forget about it". Next day the Germans attack behind the artillery and retook most of the ground we had taken the whole week and we had to go back and get it again.

KIEFNER: Oh my goodness.

ELLIS: Now we had some screw ups and stuff like that, but not too often.

KIEFNER: So tell me about heading to Munich.

ELLIS: Probably every single crossroad we went to, every single village we had to fight through, the Germans fought like hell every morning. And at that point I don't know if they brought out civilians, but there were a lot of women, a lot of children and a lot of older men firing weapons at us and most of them were in

uniform. They were trying to defend every shingle of what they could of Germany, but by that time we had numerical superiority, we had weapons superiority, we had everything going for us at that point in time. And also we had determination, by that point in time we knew what had happened on the bulge because we had been moved from our point on the Siegfried Line, we had been moved up to block on the southern end of the German bulge to keep them from going south. And on the north the second army did the same thing, so they kept the Germans moving in a straight line instead of spreading out, so we knew what had gone on, we knew that they had created the bulge, that they had massacred some of our American soldiers and things like that, which gave us determination.

KIEFNER: What about Russian prisoners did you have any contact with, not Russian prisoners, Russian soldiers?

ELLIS: No, not in our area, the only contact we had, our troops captured one or two prisoner of war camps which had Russian soldiers in them, and also our troops captured Dachau. That was something.

KIEFNER: Tell me about that, how that happened, where you were in route to and...

ELLIS: Well we had no idea there was a Dachau or anything like that, we had heard about atrocities, but we were attacking down our lines, heading from Nuremburg to Munich and when we got about 40, 50 miles from Munich we ran into this camp. We attacked it, it was defended by the SS troops, but we overcame them and the prisoners helped, they were attacking the troops from behind while we

were attacking them from the front, and then our guys got into Dachau and there was a lot of throwing up. Our commander, Division Commander Robert D. Fredrick's ordered all of the units to march past Dachau and take a look at what we were fighting for. And Munich, Munich was token resistance, they did resist at the beginning, but then they ran away in the middle because we, at that point we were so far superior to them that they didn't stand a chance.

KIEFNER: What could have been going through your mind, you knew there were atrocities going on in Germany, but to be faced with that...

ELLIS: What kind of atrocities, what were they doing? We didn't know, we knew they were killing Jews, that's about it. We didn't know they were also killing 5-6 Million Russians, Frenchmen, Yugoslavians and stuff that we never heard.

KIEFNER: Things were winding down in the war at this time...

ELLIS: Well I don't know you'd call it winding down, but I think the Germans, at that time, they were hoping to succeed on the Battle of the Bulge, which could have changed the entire European conflict, but our being able to stop the bulge moved our troops back down to where they should have been in the first place. And I don't care what kind of resistance they put in they couldn't overcome our superiority, and eventually they recognized it.

KIEFNER: So after Dachau what was it like to then go from seeing that and knowing a lot of what you were fighting for to moving forward to fight beyond that?

ELLIS: Well we were told, my division was told, that Munich was ours, we're stopping

here. Now the hierarchy knew that the days were numbered, so somebody was given Nuremberg to stop, we were given Munich to stop which was maybe 100 miles away from it. Then we each had assignments, we had three regiments, my regiment was in charge of local security, we were like MPs we patrolled the town. The 157<sup>th</sup> was in charge of German government buildings, to get all the paperwork they could get out of there, and the 180<sup>th</sup> I forget what their job was, but each of us had different assignments and we used to patrol the streets. The Germans, first of all we had what they call “No fraternization” rule, so we avoided them to the extent we possibly could. We didn’t hire them to do any work, we took people out of Dachau and put them to work, fed them, put them to work and then opened kitchens for them and things like that, those who were left, which was substantial.

KIEFNER: How long did you stay at Dachau, or your unit, until they were liberated and evacuated?

ELLIS: I didn’t stay, we were just moved through it. 157<sup>th</sup> I think stayed at Dachau probably about two or three months, then it was turned over to the UNESCO or whatever you call that unit that took care of them.

KIEFNER: So tell me about the assault on Munich.

ELLIS: Pardon?

KIEFNER: The assault on Munich.

ELLIS: The assault on Munich was house to house initially, and what you do you clear a

house and move across the street and clear the one, then you spread out, we try not to spread out too much because that means you're vulnerable on both ends. My unit was charged with patrolling streets and after the concerted effort to defend was gone the Germans realized they were through too, so either they stayed in their houses or they ran away, they went back south, and a lot of them went into Switzerland, went into Austria and stuff like that. And some of them gave up, we had one area where I think we took something like 1,200 prisoners in one location, they all gave up, threw down their weapons and gave up. And every day we'd get up, have breakfast, go out and patrol and we'd designate given areas, given times and stuff, I think most of the time we were one day on, two days off, one day on and two days off, what would we do on our days off? We'd go out and play baseball, we opened a brewery, we opened a camera developing place, you know we'd find them and then put people in charge of them and it was almost like a vacation afterwards because there was nobody fighting us anymore.

KIEFNER: How did things change for you after that battlefield commission?

ELLIS: Actually, except for the fact that I could now eat in the officers mess and I took a cut in pay, it was almost the same because the only difference was I would tell a platoon sergeant what to do, before I was a platoon sergeant and somebody told me what to do, but it would be the same type of information it would come from the same sources and it was more or less filling a space in an active unit.

KIEFNER: What was the bravest combat action that you witnessed during the war? Was

there anything in particular, either by you or someone else?

ELLIS: I think breaking out of Anzio, to me that would be the height of the combat situations that I was in, it was rough. They defended every single foot, they created a lot of casualties on our part, and up until the time that Rome fell we had a battle on our hands and we lost a lot of soldiers there. And I think at that time I was a section sergeant, yeah I wasn't platoon sergeant at that time.

KIEFNER: Was there any individual that you can recall a specific instance of, you know, bravery? It's like, it's all a mass of everyone, but is there anything that stands out in your mind, something that you witnessed?

ELLIS: No, I think you're too busy doing things and looking at the end result as what did we do, in my opinion every one of them would stand out as individuals, put them all together they're one.

KIEFNER: So tell me about the end of the war then, Munich was pretty much the end for your unit?

ELLIS: Yes, for our unit it ended in Munich. And we were there, I would say, maybe two months maximum, maybe less and then we were told we were going home. So we prepared to go home, packed up and everything and we went to what they called Camp St. Louis in France, it's just below Normandy. Then they told us we weren't going home, we were going to the Pacific. That was quite a blow.

KIEFNER: How did you react to that?

ELLIS: Disgust (chuckles). We had heard rumors that they had determined that we would lose roughly 50,000 men attacking Japan proper, that was their estimate, and we were wondering what part of that 50,000 would come from our unit. Now we were very proud of our unit, we had a good officers, we had a couple of jerks who didn't deserve to be officers, most of them were found out very fast and relieved of their duties, but overall we had a good unit, worked under good people worked with good people. I was told that I was too stubborn, I wasn't told personally, one of my very good friends was at Percy Jones General Hospital, I told you that before, and he had a patient walk in, come in with the 45<sup>th</sup> division patch. So he asked him what unit he's in and he says he's with the 179<sup>th</sup> infantry he says, "Oh I have a very good friend of mine was in the Company H" he says, "Yeah? Who was it?" "Irv Ellis." "That son of a bitch!" (Chuckles) So apparently some people thought I was a little too hard on them.

KIEFNER: That's funny. Tell me about the end of the war, you did not go to the Pacific, how did that turn around?

ELLIS: They started assigning the points based upon number of months in combat, number of times that soldiers, it took 100 points to come home early, at that point in time I had something like 98 points and I had something like 40 some points in the banks waiting to be classified. My very good friend in the Adjutant General's office came in to me, he said, "Irv I've got a proposition for you", "What?" he said, "If I put through the additional points," he says, "you will be going home early" he said, "however, you probably will be going to the Pacific."

He said, "If I hold those points, you stay with the division, you'll do whatever happens," he says, "Eventually when we get to the states I will put through the other 40 some points and you'll get out". I said, "Fine, do it that way". The point system was very, I think it was fair, with one exception. Those who were designated to go home were sent from camp to camp to camp waiting for quotas to take them home, those who was remaining with the division were shipped immediately. Now they went through the states and I think that most of them were given time off, but then they had to regroup and go over to the Pacific, if it had taken place.

KIEFNER: So where were you when the atomic bomb was dropped on Japan?

ELLIS: I think I was in Munich. I would think so, yeah.

KIEFNER: So do you remember your reaction to that news?

ELLIS: Good. More of them. You want a little anecdote to that?

KIEFNER: Absolutely, it's what I'm here for.

ELLIS: When I came out of service I went to Albion College, Michigan, and I think prior to, during the war their enrollment number around 700 to 900, when the war ended with all the GI Bills and everything it went up to 17-1,800. We had chapel every Tuesday or something like that and the president of the university used to invite speakers, he invited a very good friend of his, a clergyman from another school. Clergymen met us and started the diatribe about the attitudes of the American people for permitting the dropping of a bomb on defenseless civilians,

on taking steps that only god could do and stuff like that and as he's talking people got up and walked out and walked out and walked out. The next day the president of the university called in all of the presidents of sororities, the fraternities, the clubs and he said, "I have never been so insulted in my life. I demand an immediate apology from all of you on the treatment afforded my friend that earnest pastor". So they turned around and walked away and one of the presidents, I don't know which one it was now I think it was a local Chicago boy, asked for a meeting with the president and he got it and he says, "Uh, we have a kind proposal, unless you apologize for bringing that imbecile over hear all of the soldiers who are now enrolled here are going to leave this institution because he does not know what he's talking about. He doesn't realize that they saved 50,000 lives by dropping that bomb, American lives at the expense of Japanese who treated us like we were animals." He said, "We demand an apology" he turned around and walked out. The president called another chapel the next morning and apologized, he said he didn't realize the extent of the feelings of his constituents.

KIEFNER: Wow that is amazing. So, when did you find out you were going home the second time, for real, when were you going home?

ELLIS: Well I knew when the division was going home, and when we hit the states my friend put through the other 40 some points and I was now scheduled for, I don't know how to put it, for termination of service. So they shipped me off to Camp Grant, Illinois, to be separated and then somebody greeted us there, a very sharp

individual, and he said, “All those who have signed up for the reserves, we have three trains a day going from here to Chicago, you can board any one of them all you have to do is sign your papers over here. Those of you who choose to get out, we have a train leaving tomorrow morning for Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, where you’ll be processed for separation. It will probably only take about three weeks”. So most of use lined up for the reserve, that’s how I stayed in the reserves.

KIEFNER: That is what you based your decision on to stay in the reserves?

ELLIS: Well yeah, to go home!

KIEFNER: To go home faster! What was it like getting home and adjusting to civilian life again?

ELLIS: Well buying clothes was probably the primary task at that point in time. As I understand it they would only give one or two shirts to any purchaser, one or two suits, one coat, things like that, they were rationing everything. Fortunately my father had a restaurant on the west side of Chicago and we had a clothier right down the street, I went in and I picked out what I wanted and the woman said, “I’m sorry I can’t give you all of that, it’s only one of these, one...” So the owner walked over and says, “You don’t know who you’re talking to,” he says, “he’s the reason that we still are making shirts and stuff.” He says, “Give him what he wants!” So I was able to buy clothes. And, you know, every night was a party, every place we went. Met different people and said hello to people that we

had gone to school with who were coming home as well, a lot of them who had not been in service you know, were still there, others that had been in service a short period of time, never went overseas, they were scheduled to go overseas, so we had a lot of parties.

KIEFNER: Were there any challenges adjusting to being back in the states, to being back home?

ELLIS: Yeah, I had to decide what I was going to do with my life. I had had two quarters of college at Western Illinois State Teachers College, but I didn't want to be a teacher anymore. So I had to look for a college and ran into a friend of mine who had an athletic scholarship to Albion College, he said, "It's a lovely community, you'll like it." So I enrolled at Albion College. Then I started going with Anne, first via the mail and stuff like that, and I decided to go to school in Chicago so I transferred to DePaul, got my degree in accounting and took the job as an accountant and the Korean conflict broke out and I got recalled.

KIEFNER: Going back to coming out of school, how would you say being in the military and your involvement in World War Two, how did that influence you decision of what you were going to do when you returned?

ELLIS: It didn't influence my decision as to what I was going to do when I returned, but what it did to it installed the sense of leadership in me. I may be bragging, but prior to that I was one of the boys, but they send me to leadership school, I had command of up to 200 troops, later on I became a plans and training officer for a

major reserve division, gave me confidence in my ability to work outside of the military and it was very good training and I appreciated all of that. I guess better than all of that was the GI Bill let me go to four years of college at no cost to me.

KIEFNER: Excellent. So how did you feel when you got notice that you were being recalled for Korea?

ELLIS: I knew it was going to happen. We were taking a vacation in Atlantic City and walking on the boardwalks, somebody was walking around with newspapers, "Read all about it, North Koreans attack! Read all about it, North Koreans attack!" So I bought a paper and looked at it, Anne said, "What is that?" I said, "That's my ticket back into service, I'm going to be recalled" and that was the last week or so in August. By September second or third I received notice to report for physical examination.

KIEFNER: What was your role in the Korean Conflict?

ELLIS: I was a training officer, for most training divisions, there were three of them there that I worked with, enjoyed very much we'd get all new people. We would put them through 13 weeks of basic training and then reassign them to wherever we thought they should go. I enjoyed it very much, Anne had a good life as an officers wife, and incidentally that was the first time I had ever really felt like an officer because prior to that I was the same as I was when you asked me the question, what was the difference, there was none up until I got recalled, then I saw the difference.

KIEFNER: What were some of your feelings towards some of these recruits coming through and then going over to Korea? What was going through your mind, was it, were you recalling your time back in World War Two?

ELLIS: Not really. The reason is, I think we were, should have been much more prepared for the Korean Conflict than we were. I know when I got recalled I had to report to Fort Leonard Wood Missouri, and they had a sergeant, not even an officer, a sergeant saying, we were all officers, sergeant standing there, "Ellis, over here, Jones, over here, Tom, over here. Take your bags". Went through the whole list, all of us, and said, "Alright, those of you follow the other sergeant he's going to take you to your quarters. You will be here, we're going to look for quarters for you we don't have room yet, you over here keep your bags we're going over to the bus station". That group over there within 30 days was in combat. They left the United States without even uniforms, they gave it to them over there. That was the most poorly organized thing I've ever seen in my life. The Tribune on October 2<sup>nd</sup> listed the casualties to the first month of the war, I think something like nine names from that group were on it. I was very upset with that, first of all it wasn't handled properly on who gets recalled, secondly I don't think it was handled properly to send them into combat without giving them extensive training. He's got, hadn't seen a gun, most of them, in five years! But the government's supposed to know what they're doing. See my experiences after, I recall were mostly good, I enjoyed what I was doing. I was teaching, not only teaching enlisted men, I was teaching officers who were recalled and I was at a good post, I was at Fort Leonard Wood Missouri, I was at Camp Atterburry

Indiana, I was at Pennsylvania...

Anne Ellis: Indian, Indiantown Gap

ELLIS: Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, which I have relatives not too far from there, and we enjoyed it. Anne became pregnant; we were waiting for our first child.

Anne Ellis: Inaudible. (chuckles)

KIEFNER: So, um... I lost my train of thought there for a second. Oh, Anne, go ahead.

Anne Ellis: I was going to say, when you were at Indiantown, when you were at Fort Leonard you were training some of the neighborhood boys.

KIEFNER: Oh tell me a little about that, tell me about some of your trainees when you were at Fort Leonard Wood.

ELLIS: When we got to Fort Leonard Wood the first thing they did was send us to school, navy ship school, weapons school and stuff like that. And they perfected our skills pretty good, those who stayed, the ones who were gone, were gone. Then they opened up the companies for training, and the first group came, they were I'd say maybe in November of '50, and they dropped them off on trucks and lined them all up outside the barracks and made my four officers walk out, we started walking up and down looking at who we had. All the sudden I heard, "Hey, that's Irv! Ain't that Irv? From March? That's Irv, yeah from Grenshaw Street!" Look around, I think 17 of that group of 190 were kids that I watched grow up in my neighborhood.

KIEFNER: And, was that simply a coincidence, you're not even close to home.

ELLIS: Coincidence. They were drafting and these kids got drafted and they happened to be put in the bus going to my camp, we had four units starting training I was one of the four. And those kids, there were 17 of them.

KIEFNER: After the Korean Conflict, or was it during the Korean Conflict that you were at the G3 training division, or that came later?

ELLIS: That came, that was the last assignment I had, and then I don't remember the MOS on that one, I put my infantry unit leader on there, but I don't remember the other one. But I was transferred to Camp Atterbury, Indiana, and they took down my history then they sent me up to the interviews, the guy says, "I'm looking for an officer who's seen combat and also who has had, I would say teaching experience". I said, "Where would you find him?" He says, "Alright, we're getting you secret clearance and we want you as assistant G3". G3 is plans and training, and I enjoyed it very much. I used to look over the lesson plans that the officers were making up for their classes, if they selected sites I wasn't aware of for certain training I would go out and take a look, I had a helicopter that would take me around and show me what I wanted to see.

KIEFNER: This was part of active duty?

ELLIS: Active duty when I was recalled. I was first recalled to Fort Leonard Wood, from Fort Leonard Wood I went to Indiantown Gap and from Indiantown Gap I went to Indiantown Gap to be separated, so I was in Indiantown Gap for quite a while.

KIEFNER: Anne wanted to offer something.

Anne Ellis: Where you put in for regular army.

ELLIS: We liked it, so I applied for regular army. There are three ways of becoming a regular army officer, one is West Point, two is R-O-T-C from a major approved university, and three is what they call competitive tour. Competitive tour you must have a minimum of three assignments, not over six months in each, but not longer than two years. You must also have an oral interview and you must take a written exam, so I did all that and when I got to my oral interview Colonel walks up to me and I go like this and he goes like this, then he goes like this and so it's one of these. It was very fun, we both started laughing and everybody did, and he looked over and he said, "Don't worry about it!" he said, "Everything is ok!" And I got accepted for regular army. I got a letter from the secretary of the army accepting me and about a month later I got a letter stating that the secretary of the army is sorry to inform me that I cannot be accepted for regular army commission. So I showed it to my G3 training officer, the G3 himself, he said, "I have a very good friend in Washington, I want you to go see him". So he sent me to what is called career management, I went to career management I'm sitting with a full Colonel and he says, "Yeah I knew you were coming" he says, "your colonel called me." He said, "You have a problem don't you?" I said, "Yeah!" I said, "Not that I'm disappointed" I said, "I'd like to have a reason why, and what can I do about it?" So he sits around, hands me my files, he says, "Take a look at this." And he hands me a 2-14 military history there and I go (Knocking sound) a

little later. And he says, "Read it". I read it, "Irving Ellis", at that time I was a captain, "Captain. Did this, did this, this, that. Education, this and that. Parents names, parents date of birth, parents place of birth, nothing." He says, "Start over". I read it again, "Parents date of birth", "Start over". I says, "What' that got to do?" He says, "Your parents are Russian born, they have relatives in Russia" he said, "We're not here to blame you for anything, we're here to protect your family." He said, "Have you ever heard of the Russians applying pressure on any military?" I said, "Yeah I've read a couple of articles." He said, "For every one you've read we've stifled hundreds", he said, "We don't want to put you in that position." He said, "We can't afford to put you in that position". So he says, "Well you can always have G3, category three, which is three years more." I said, "No thank you, I'm going home". He says, "Why?" I said, "Well does it have my application for language school, in Presidio California?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "I didn't get to go." He said "Yeah it's not there" I said, "You know why I didn't get to go?" he said, "No." I said, "Because I'm not a regular army officer." I says, "Anything I try to do" I said, "there will be somebody who's ahead of me." I said, "That's not the way I want to live my army career".

KIEFNER: So what did you decide to do after that, did you return to Chicago?

ELLIS: Yeah. Returned to Chicago, and I took a job with a public accounting firm, I had finished my, yeah I had finished my college degree at that point in time. Took a job at an accounting firm, worked my way up to partner, firm merged with an international accounting firm and stripped me out. Anne took a lot of trips, she

was able to come on a lot of them with me.

Anne Ellis: But you remained in the reserves...

ELLIS: Hmm?

Anne Ellis: You remained in the reserves.

KIEFNER: You were still in the reserves.

ELLIS: By that time I had four years active duty during the war, I had five years between wars, I had four more years, then 13, 14, so I figured I might as well stay in to get my 20 years, I've already got 14 years invested.

Anne Ellis: We went to Camp McCoy.

ELLIS: And I got assigned to a nice unit here in Chicago, the 335<sup>th</sup>, enjoyed it.

KIEFNER: Tell me about, you had mentioned earlier returning to Europe after your military career, after the war, tell me a little of what that was like to return to some of those same areas.

ELLIS: We didn't go to visit those areas, but when they were adjacent to us or right near we went. The only two I recall visiting really is the one at San Tropez and the one near Paestum and Salerno and... I'm trying to think... Pompeii.

KIEFNER: Ah yes!

ELLIS: Those were areas that I went to because they were there, not because we made the trip, there are trips that go visit those areas, but most of the trips I looked at

do not cover the areas that I went through, so.

KIEFNER: Ok. Do you stay in contact with, have you stayed in contact with any of your fellow soldiers?

ELLIS: The only one that I did die last year, he was my friend from Milwaukee who was in service with me. We trained in the same battalion at Camp Walters, we were assigned to the same unit at Salerno, stayed in the same unit all the way through the war and stayed friends after that and he passed away last year. But we were in contact with him throughout the time, yeah.

KIEFNER: Are there any questions that you expected me to ask that maybe I didn't, or is there anything else that you would like to share you can think of?

ELLIS: You know when I walk out of here I'll probably think of a dozen of them, but right now I don't think there was anything more that we haven't covered. Except that, I came home, have a nice family, have five granddaughters, two daughters, used to have a female dog, but we don't anymore.

Anne Ellis: We've got grandpuppies.

ELLIS: We've got grandpuppies, yeah.

Toni Wolf : Yes you do.

KIEFNER: Well thank you Major Ellis for sharing your experiences with me today and thank you for your service to our country, it's been a pleasure.

ELLIS: Have you ever heard of the honors flight?

KIEFNER: I have, I have.

ELLIS: I went on it, a few months ago.

Anne Ellis: That was last summer, wasn't it?

John Driscoll: Yeah, it was.

ELLIS: You mention it to people who come before you, if they're from World War Two, it's quite an exposure.

KIEFNER: Excellent, thank you!

ELLIS: Thank you!

*Note: Toni Wolf is Mr. Ellis's daughter, Anne Ellis is his wife, and John Driscoll is his neighbor.*