

Jack Herman Oral History Interview

May 9, 2012

Interviewed by Nick Marrapode
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MARRAPODE: My name is Nick Marrapode. I'm here with Jack Herman. It's May 9th 2012. We're at the Pritzker Military Library. Just to get started, can you tell me when and where you were born?

HERMAN: March 10th, 1926, Gary, Indiana.

MARRAPODE: Did you grow up in Gary?

HERMAN: Yes.

MARRAPODE: Can you tell a little bit about growing up in Gary? What that was like?

HERMAN: I went all the way through high school, and of course there were two major things: the Depression and the War. The Depression, no one had any money including my family. When I was kid I worked for 20 cents an hour; when the war started I was 15, but on my 16th birthday I was eligible to work. It was 1942 and the steel mills were going very strong in Gary. There was a huge labor shortage because of maximum production and they took anyone to go work in the steel mills starting at 80 cents an hour, but on nights and weekends and holidays it was a dollar an hour. I worked while I was attending high school from my 16th birthday in the steel mills usually at a dollar an hour, which was a fabulous amount of money in those days. I was financially independent from that day on and all the way through the rest of my life. During high school I worked at the steel mills, weekends, holidays and vacations, as a basic laborer. I was a very little guy. I couldn't do much, but they didn't care. They took anyone, it was labor work. We were digging ditches and carrying bricks. The war took over our lives. Previously it was the shortage of money that took over our lives because everybody was poor. No one had anything, but the war took over; everything depended on the war. They speeded up my high school education to a great extent; I started taking college courses during my senior year of high school. When I got out of high school in 1943 I was

17, barely 17, and of course I wanted to get into the service as fast as I could. They were recruiting high school 17-year-olds actively because you couldn't be drafted until you were 18, and the Navy and the Army recruiters came around. I signed up to be a Navy pilot, what they call the V-12 program and that program took 17-years-old and they said they were going to train you in college for at least a year and half to two years and then they'd train you to fly an airplane. By the time you were 19 or 20 you could be a fighter pilot, and I thought that was great, but they cancelled the program. I signed up for the next program, which is Army Specialized Training Program. They said they would send you to college, train you to be an engineer, and I signed up and they took me and I went to school at the University of Kentucky and Purdue during the summer and the winter of '43. When I reached my 18th birthday in March of 1944 they decided that they needed infantrymen more than engineers, so they took us all out of the engineering program out of college and put us in the infantry. So that's my background, and of course I've gone beyond Gary, Indiana. But I think I answered your question about Gary, Indiana.

MARRAPODE: Can you tell me a little about the V-12 program?

HERMAN: The Navy V-12 program?

MARRAPODE: Yes and what kind of classes you were taking.

HERMAN: I didn't get into the V-12. The Navy V-12 program was cancelled. That was a program to make you a fighter pilot, which I thought would be great.

MARRAPODE: You didn't get into it? It got cancelled before you could?

HERMAN: It got cancelled so I didn't get into it. I was greatly disappointed.

MARRAPODE: You went to the Army?

HERMAN: Yes, the engineers. The Army engineers did not seem as nearly as glamorous but it's the only thing that was available at the moment so I could get right into the service. See at that time all the males in the country were in the service. It wasn't like any of these subsequent wars. Everybody was in the service. If you were a man walking on the street and you were in civilian clothes you could be stopped and asked, "Why aren't you in the service?" That permeated everything. I wanted to get in uniform, so I signed up for the Army to be an Army engineer, and they

took me. They sent me immediately over to Lexington, Kentucky and I started taking classes.

MARRAPODE: What kind of classes did they have you taking?

HERMAN: Very intensive programs in math, physics, chemistry, some history and English. The math just shot you right through algebra, geometry, trigonometry, calculus and integral calculus. Also physics, chemistry and we learned a lot about the periodic table, about the various elements which even mentioned uranium. We didn't have any idea they were working on an atomic bomb, but I heard later that some of the graduates of this program were sent to Oak Ridge or to Hanford, Washington to work on the bomb, or New Mexico, but I didn't get that far because they needed infantry.

MARRAPODE: How do you think they decided who was going to go to the infantry and who was going to stay in that program?

HERMAN: I thought all of us were sent into the infantry as far as our group was concerned.

MARRAPODE: There was no real evaluation? They just...

HERMAN: We were 17-years-olds, we were technically reservists, and I thought that everybody who went as far as we did, which was three semesters in one year, everybody in our group was sent into the infantry, I'm sure it was everybody. I heard later about what happened to various people. They were all in the infantry. One guy in my group was in my company with me; he was killed immediately in the war and others. Sometimes you'd run into one of these guys, infantry all of them. Maybe there were groups that were further advanced that were not sent into the infantry that stayed in the program, but I don't know about any. Of course they also taught languages. They had a group that was learning Japanese. The engineering was a basic program, but they had other programs.

MARRAPODE: There was a pretty wide variety of classes and programs and a lot of people in it?

HERMAN: Right.

MARRAPODE: It was a good?

HERMAN: Actually I'm not sure. I can't say for sure, but I have a feeling that they wanted to have a replacement pool and the best thing they could do with

these people was put them in colleges on college campuses because they were in the Army. They were subject to orders, and they could be taken out of there and put in where they're needed, and I have a feeling that was a deliberate plan.

MARRAPODE: Plus that's a great way to get young people to enlist at the time right? So you want to fight right way, we'll educate you, then whenever they need you...

HERMAN: It worked out very well. I've heard that it turned out that we were very good infantry replacements even though a little overeducated, but we were very valuable, and certainly the Germans did not have a high quality replacement when they needed them.

MARRAPODE: Yes, by later in the war they were having some troubles.

HERMAN: I had personal experience with the quality of the German replacements, and they were not very good there were 15-year-olds and 50-year-olds; uneducated.

MARRAPODE: Let's take it back a little bit to the outbreak of the war. As the war was unfolding in Europe and in Asia how much did you know about what was going on over there? How much were you aware of the events even before the US entered?

HERMAN: Yes, I was pretty aware. I read a lot and kept up with the news. It was very discouraging at first, very discouraging, but we were aware. I spoke at my high school graduation and the whole topic of my speech was on the subject of the war.

MARRAPODE: Really?

HERMAN: Yes, everything was involved in the war. They were rationing everything. Every non-military industry was shut down. The construction industry was completely shut down. Everything was devoted to military purposes. Food and clothing were rationed; gasoline and tires, you couldn't buy tires at all. You couldn't buy any appliances or cars, there were no cars. The whole thing was the war, and I don't how you could not be aware of the war, and since I was a reader, I read Time Magazine and all the newspapers. I knew what was going on.

MARRAPODE: How did you hear about Pearl Harbor?

HERMAN: I was in Chicago at the Sinai Hospital. My father was getting surgery that day on his stomach. It was a dark, gray Sunday and we were just sitting around the hospital waiting while my father was getting his surgery. I overheard people talking about it. That's how I heard about it.

MARRAPODE: Did a lot change after Pearl Harbor or was the US already gearing up enough to war that it seemed like...

HERMAN: They were gearing up, but of course the economy had improved for a year or two before Pearl Harbor because of all the production, helping the British but it certainly was a 100 percent war effort after Pearl Harbor. It affected my high school classes. People would say, "Well you don't have to take any more Latin. What good is Latin going to do for you? Take electric shop that sort of thing, and start taking college courses," which I did. I had a lot of college credits by the time I went into the Army, and I was only 17 years old.

MARRAPODE: What courses were you taking while you were still in high school?

HERMAN: Economics. I can remember basic economics. I remember college English classes, History that sort of thing while I was in high school. Of course then in the ASTP I got all the credits I could ever need in Math, Physics, Chemistry, and so forth, and a lot of English and History, too. So they were rather intensive courses.

MARRAPODE: The ASTP was the Army Service Training Program?

HERMAN: Yes, Army Specialized Training Program.

MARRAPODE: You were in this training program and after nine months you were transferred to the infantry?

HERMAN: Right.

MARRAPODE: Was that when you were assigned to your unit?

HERMAN: No, I was sent to basic training. I had to go down to Fort Robinson, Arkansas for basic training, and I think we started in May and ran through September right through the summer.

MARRAPODE: What did basic training at that time consist of?

HERMAN: Marching around and learning how to use a rifle and various other weapons, a lot of calisthenics, a lot of KP (Kitchen Police), you've heard about basic training in the Army?

MARRAPODE: Yes, a little bit.

HERMAN: Infantry basic training that was it. We were all 18 by that time because they wouldn't take you until you were 18, that's one of the reasons they kept us in the ASTP until we were 18. As soon as we were 18, we went into basic training, and the obstacle courses and all kinds of stuff like that, using bayonets, marching around in the heat, was my memory. Arkansas is very hot in the summer, and we were put into very good physical condition. I think basically we didn't learn a hell of a lot just the conditioning program. I was in great shape physically but I was small. I was 108 pounds when I went into the ASTP. By the time I was in the infantry I was 118 when I was discharged I was 128, but I was a small guy, we had to carry 50-75 pound packs and march in the sun. I was in great shape. I didn't realize at the time that I was in such good shape.

MARRAPODE: What kind of weapons did you train with?

HERMAN: The M1 rifle mostly, but they taught us how to use machineguns and mortars and carbines, the automatic rifles; all the infantry weapons.

MARRAPODE: When were you assigned to your unit?

HERMAN: After basic training they sent me to Fort Leonard Wood to the 70th Division. The 70th Division had been there for about 6 months, and there was no program going on. We were just waiting to be reassigned overseas, and I was there maybe two months and tried to get integrated into the platoons.

MARRAPODE: You said there were no programs or there wasn't an intensive training program for the unit going over.

HERMAN: No, it was mostly just marching around, doing calisthenics. We went on maneuvers for two weeks, which I couldn't understand. We were just marching around the woods and pitching tents. When you're living in the woods like that with tents and sleeping bags and stuff you spend most of your time in housekeeping, that's what we did. It wasn't like combat at all, no digging foxholes and stuff like that, but a lot of marching around back and forth like we did in basic training, but it was very pleasant. The weather was pleasant in October and November in the Ozarks. We were just trying to guess where we were going to be sent to Europe or to the Pacific, and then they gave us winter clothing, so obviously we were going to be Europe.

MARRAPODE: What kinds of rumors were going around? What kind of things were the men in your unit talking about?

HERMAN: There was a lot of interpersonal stuff among the men in the unit. There were a few older guys and most of us were younger 18 or 19. We were all speculating about whether we're going to Europe. We knew that the invasion had been successful, D-Day was successful, and Americans were advancing towards Germany and whether they would even need us, whether the war would be over by the time we could get there. We were speculating about that and training. It was there that I was selected to be a messenger, a platoon messenger, and as I say in my book I survived the war because the Lieutenant picked out this other guy who was a very good friend of mine, Don Sundstrom to be his personal messenger, and made me Captain's messenger, and of course Don got killed, but I didn't, from my standpoint only, that was a good decision by the Lieutenant. We knew that we were going to go into combat where ever we went.

MARRAPODE: As long as the war lasted that long.

HERMAN: Yes, well if the war wouldn't last that long they would turn around and send us to the Pacific. The news was very good from Germany as they were moving through France at about that time.

MARRAPODE: How did you feel about being assigned to be a messenger, and was there any kind of preparation for that or just "You're a messenger now?"

HERMAN: That was it, and then they taught me how to be a messenger, which was rudimentary. How to use a walkie-talkie and how to use the telephones and that sort of thing, but I think that everything depended on your IQ score. As part of your record they had an IQ score for you, and jobs like messenger were given to guys with higher IQs, and they looked at your records and said, "Well, this guy," and they looked at you physically to determine whether you're appointed to be whatever they wanted you to be, whatever they had a need for. We got to know each other and we got to know the sergeants. See, there were two groups. There were a lot of the sergeants in their 30's with wives and children at home, they had been drafted late in the war because they had been deferred because they were married, until the Army ran out of people and then they started drafting them. Then there were all these 17- and 18-year-olds who were right out of high school. The sergeants were pretty nice guys most of them.

MARRAPODE: How did you feel about the officers, the higher up in your unit?

HERMAN: We didn't have any contact with anybody higher than the platoon commander, 2nd Lieutenants. No contact, practically none at all, and I didn't have any contact with them until combat because they were too high above us to be concerned about us. Our lieutenant was a very nice guy. He was a Cajun from Louisiana, and we had no problem with him at all, and some of the guys were unpleasant guys and some of the guys were okay.

MARRAPODE: You said you spent two months at Fort Leonard Wood?

HERMAN: Yes, about that.

MARRAPODE: About two months. Didn't really do any combat or tactical training while you were there?

HERMAN: No, a lot of lectures about how to behave if you were captured. Give your name, rank, and serial number; nothing else. There were lectures about combat tactics that sort of thing, which went in one ear and out the other. We didn't learn a damn thing about combat until we were in combat because there's no way of teaching it. They taught you how to dig fox holes and so forth. You could not do that, they didn't have you dig them actually because they didn't want to dig up the whole countryside. In basic training if they had everybody dig a foxhole there wouldn't be anything left to dig. They couldn't really do much about combat, but the generals, captains, and the colonels could point out where their units were on their maps.

MARRAPODE: They taught foxhole digging theory?

HERMAN: Right.

MARRAPODE: When did you learn that your unit was going to be deployed?

HERMAN: We knew we were going to be deployed the minute we went to Fort Leonard Wood, so one day the captain called us all out (the only contact I had with the captain was at these assemblies). All four platoons, the captain stands up and gives a speech, and he said, "This is our last weekend." He didn't say what it portended but, "This is the last weekend we have available if you any of you want a pass to go home and visit your wives come up to the orderly room." I thought, "Well I don't have a wife," and I said, "Can I get a pass to go back to Gary?" Then some guy asked the question and he said, "Yeah, come on in." So I got a pass, and got a Saturday morning bus. I took the bus to St. Louis then took a train to

Chicago and then took a train to Gary. I got there about Sunday morning sometime and had to go back on Monday, so I turned around at 5 o'clock or something and got back on the train and the train to a bus and got back, and that was my final leave. He didn't say where we were going, but we knew we were going to Europe because we had warm clothing. It was November.

MARRAPODE: You only got to spend a couple of hours really at home.

HERMAN: Right.

MARRAPODE: How did you spend those couple of hours?

HERMAN: I just spent it with my parents and I think my sister was there. I didn't talk to anybody else.

MARRAPODE: What was their reaction?

HERMAN: They didn't say anything. See, we had a neighbor, a boy that I went to high school with who was dead by that time, and I know what they were thinking. I'd graduated high school in '43 and this was November '44, so by that time some of my classmates had already been in combat and some of them were dead already, so we were thinking the same thing but nobody mentioned it. I didn't think I would get killed. There was no way I could get killed at that time. Something would happen to keep me out of it.

MARRAPODE: After you got back to your unit, then you shipped out for the East Coast?

HERMAN: Right.

MARRAPODE: Then overseas?

HERMAN: Right.

MARRAPODE: Can you tell me a little about that? That journey to get over to France?

HERMAN: They never told us where we were going. The lectures on secrecy all pounded it into us. We had to guess and we had to listen to rumors, so we got on a train and we didn't know where we were going. We passed through Gary (I could smell the steel mills) and ended up in Camp Myles Standish in Taunton, Massachusetts which was South of Boston. We were there Thanksgiving until December 7th and then we got a ship and went to Boston. It was a cruise ship, an American cruise ship called the *West Point*, the previous name was the *SS America*, and we had the three infantry regiments that were it on the ship, the 275th, the 276th, the 274th

but none of the rest of the 70th Division. They were going to come on other ships, and we went across alone on the Atlantic. It was rough, there were storms and we landed in Marseille on December 15th. Am I getting ahead?

MARRAPODE: No. Can you tell me about those eight days at sea?

HERMAN: I was seasick. I'd never been on a ship before. I was seasick the whole time. It was a very crowded ship, very segregated. We were limited to certain decks and the room we were in was the ballroom, a couple of hundred of us on bunks that were three or four or five levels high and packed in there. If there was three regiments, and that's almost 10,000 people on the ship. The officers were somewhere else. We the enlisted men were all together.

MARRAPODE: How did you spend the time?

HERMAN: Reading pocketbooks, writing letters, V-mail, and a lot of people were gambling; I never got into the gambling. I didn't have enough money. They seemed to have a lot of money. I don't know where they got it. They were shooting dice and playing poker. We did a lot of reading while were in the Army. They always had these pocketbooks, 25 cent pocketbooks circulating around. That's how I spent the time and looking out at the ocean. When we went through Gibraltar we saw Gibraltar on one side and Atlas Mountains in Africa on the other side. From then on we had a destroyer guiding us through the Mediterranean for some reason and we ended up in the middle of Marseilles Harbor. We just dropped anchor in the middle of the harbor and they brought dozens of landing ships to take us off. We climbed over the side to get into the landing ships, and then the landing ships went up on shore and trucks waiting for us there and that's how we got introduced to Europe.

MARRAPODE: Just right up on the beach at Marseilles?

HERMAN: Right. Not in Marseilles, but outside of Marseilles.

MARRAPODE: Did you get to see the city at all?

HERMAN: Yes, we went into the city. They put us in a big field outside Marseille on a plateau, a flat landscape where we had to pitch four man tents and it was dark, it was raining most of the time, cold, and we pitched our tents, and we stayed there with nothing to do. We read our books and wrote letters, and one day I went into Marseille with a group. You had to go in groups

with your rifles and helmets. They said Marseilles was a very dangerous town. People were always trying kill Americans there, so you couldn't go in any groups of less than five or six and you had to stay together the whole time, so we walked around Marseilles, and then came back. It was a very grim, poor port town at the time, ports all kinds of different languages spoken, but we spent a couple of hours walking around the streets of Marseilles then back to the camp. It was on the 15th that we landed, and then of course almost immediately we started hearing rumors of the German attack, which began on the 16th. The rumors kept getting worse and worse. They didn't officially tell us anything the whole time. All during this period there was an obsession with secrecy. Of course there was censorship, we were strictly censored on what we could tell people, and the only thing we could read was *Time Magazine* and *Newsweek*, army versions of them, no ads and probably censored and the *Stars and Stripes*. But there was nothing in the newspapers, it was rumors telling us that the Germans had attacked and the next day that the attack was bad and the next day a whole American Division was destroyed and Germans had moved on, and then the next day it was worse, and the rumors were true. A lot of time rumors were false, but we were not surprised when they told us that we were going to be moving out. I learned it, as I said in my memoir, when they called us out into a formation one time there was a general inspecting us, one star general, and he came up to me and asked me questions, "Who is the commander of the 7th Army?" He could've asked me a hundred questions I would've answered them all because I knew the situation and the geography. I'd been reading the magazines.

MARRAPODE: You had plenty of time to read by then.

HERMAN: He said, "Who is the commander of the 7th Army?" I knew we were going to the 7th Army, and "Where is Strasbourg?" I knew we were going near Strasbourg. So he knew what was going to happen. By the questions I knew what was going to happen to us, but I don't know if anyone else knew, but I knew that we were going to move up to the 7th Army and then the order came in, "Pack up. We're going to get on the trains." We got on these trains, *Forty and Eight* cars, actually the same *Forty and Eight* cars used in World War I, little cars, one platoon to a car, forty men, eight horses. A platoon had forty men, and that was really packing them in, but they packed us in there, and we moved on up to the Rhone River to Alsace.

MARRAPODE: How long were you in the train for?

HERMAN: Three or four days, maybe five days. We officially entered the combat zone on December 25th, so we had been, maybe three or four days.

MARRAPODE: Were you able to get out of the train and stretch out?

HERMAN: Well only when it stopped. It stopped frequently. There was no heat in the train. There were no toilet facilities, but we got out of the train, and I think all they did was start passing out K-rations and C-rations. There was no cooking on the train, and you sort of slept in shifts. You slept sitting up mostly because it was packed in there. I don't know if they still have those *Forty and Eight* cars but those were World War I vintage. They were small boxcars.

MARRAPODE: No amenities just a box on wheels?

HERMAN: Yes, it's not much bigger than this room. It's a little bigger than this room. It's about the width of this room I think, and there were three, now I didn't know any of this at the time, but there were the three infantry regiments without their artillery, without their tanks, without their communications gear, without any support. They had, because of the emergency of the Battle of the Bulge, they had put them under the command the assistant Division Commander his name was Herron, and they called it Task Force Herron. What's in an infantry regiment? It is 12 Companies of at most 2,500 men and we were Task Force Herron. And we had our rifles and we had our walkie-talkies and we had our B.A.R.s, our light-machine guns, but we didn't have any heavy stuff, and they sent us up to Alsace. We were stopped at Christmas night in a small town in a railroad yard. We're stopped for some reason, and some German planes came over, that was our first taste of combat, and I saw them. The people in my car got out of the car because we figured it was dangerous to be in there. Maybe they'll drop a bomb on the car, so we got out of the car and ran and found a place to get down and look at the planes coming over. We saw them coming over two or three times just looking at us, tiny little planes that was just a buzzing, that's all it was.

MARRAPODE: They didn't strafe?

HERMAN: They didn't do anything. They just reported that a train full of troops had arrived and that was on December 25th. Then they put us in defensive positions on the Rhine River north of Strasbourg. Am I going ahead?

MARRAPODE: No, you're doing great.

HERMAN: They were prepared defensive positions. We didn't have to dig anything. There were already foxholes and there were bunkers overlooking the Rhine, with Germany on the other side, and we stayed there a couple of days. Nothing happened there. One of the messengers took a shot at a German on a bunker across the river and supposedly hit him. That was the only thing that happened there. Then we were taken out of there, put on trucks, and we were driven to this the area of Wingen up in the mountains, maybe 20 miles west of the Rhine River.

MARRAPODE: The Vosges Mountains?

HERMAN: Vosges Mountains, and we didn't know where we were. We knew we had been on the Rhine River. We didn't know what the military situation was. We just had kept our eyes out for patrols and stuff, and we also didn't know what the military situation was in Wingen when we got there.

MARRAPODE: There was no real intelligence on it?

HERMAN: I don't know what intelligence knew, but we didn't know what intelligence knew. I could tell you what happened because I've been reading all the histories, but I didn't know anything at the time. We didn't know. I had a general idea that we were in Alsace, which I knew was part of France, but turned out to be all German at that the time and everybody was German there. They won't admit it now. Then we were taken to the area of Wingen, but we didn't know what the military situation was. How Patton's Third Army had been stationed along that northern end of Alsace.

MARRAPODE: Then they drove north?

HERMAN: Actually when the American Army was coming across France in September and October they knew they couldn't keep that up because they were running out of gas. They had to stop and stabilize a line. Eisenhower wanted (this is all I learned later) to stabilize this line through the Vosges Mountains, which were defensible. There was only one pass through the Vosges Mountains but the French would not do it. They wanted to liberate Strasbourg for the glory of France, so they went ahead and they liberated Strasbourg. Well that changed the whole picture. Strasbourg, which was 50 miles east of the Vosges Mountains, was in a level area. That was hard to defend. The Vosges Mountains would have been easy to defend, but Eisenhower had to go in there and occupy northern Alsace because Strasbourg had been liberated. They had this big celebration, and all the people in Strasbourg were dancing in the streets, and if we evacuated Strasbourg to go back to the Vosges Mountains the Germans would just

come in and just kill everybody, so they had to defend the whole of Alsace, which was very difficult to defend. The 7th Army was facing the Germans on the East, and in Alsace, the French border goes west from the Rhine River, and the 3rd Army was defending that northern part of Alsace. There was a point there that was vulnerable and then all the troops in that point were vulnerable. Anyway, before Christmas, the 3rd Army had to reinforce Bastogne. Patton took his troops out of there and they went up to reinforce Bastogne. They left it undefended, and the 7th Army spread out to try to defend it. They only had a couple of divisions to do it, and they sent these task forces in there to help. Not just Task Force Herron, but other task forces which were inadequately trained and inadequately armed. We didn't have our artillery, we didn't have anything, and we just had our rifles. They sent us in and attached us to those divisions, the 45th Division and the 79th Division, and we were to defend the northern border of Alsace against attacks by the Germans. They didn't expect anything, but the Germans did plan when the Battle of the Bulge slowed down around Christmas time, what they called Operation Nordwind. To come in from the north and retake Strasbourg and cut off that portion of France that was exposed. That's what happened on the ground, but had no idea this was going on. They came in and attacked on a large scale and it was a large battle. The battle ended, Operation Nordwind ended with I think 20,000 American casualties and 30,000 German casualties. It was a big battle, but it was dwarfed by the Battle of the Bulge. Nobody's really heard of it even military people, people who claim they're historians. You ask them, "You ever hear of Operation Nordwind?" They came in from the North and they went through the American lines. The 6th SS Division, which was a good division, well trained and experienced in mountain warfare, came through, infiltrated through the American lines went 10 miles behind American lines in the mountains and took Wingen. Well we were there in that area defending Wingen. In fact we were right on the outskirts of Wingen. I was in C Company. B Company was north of Wingen, and they were right in the path of the Germans. Two battalions from the 6th SS came right through there and destroyed B Company, and came in and took Wingen.

MARRAPODE: Did they even know that there were Germans in the area?

HERMAN: I guess they didn't. I think they were told to look for a German attack on the night that it occurred and that was a last minute thing, but I don't think they expected this to happen because the frontlines were 10 miles north. The Germans had first attacked on January 1st, and were being slowed down. In fact there was another regiment from Task Force Herron up there

on the front lines, the 275th Regiment, and they were badly battered. There were a lot of people killed and captured by the Germans when they attacked on January 1st, but they did slow them down, and I guess the Germans decided that they had to do something to make some progress, so they sent two battalions from the 6th SS Division infiltrating through the American lines about 10 miles down, through the mountains, and they took Wingen on the night of December 3rd, and we were right outside of Wingen when that happened. We were not in the town thank God, but they did destroy the B Company. We in C Company and A Company were left in our battalion, and we were just marching around back and forth north of Wingen, East of Wingen, and south of Wingen. All I know is that it was Wingen because the signs on the road said Wingen. Signs on the road could've said Women. We didn't know what we're doing, but on the afternoon of January 4th they marched us up to a hill south of town, overlooking the town and we had to dig in. We dug our foxholes, and we're hit by a mortar barrage and that night we were called out of our foxholes, and we were told to attack and we attacked into the southern part of town. We ran into some resistance, and then pulled off, and I was involved in that battle because I was behind the captain, and all I know was we were being shot at, and there were tracer bullets going over our heads, and tracer bullets from us coming going towards them, but the battle just stopped. There were two people in our Company wounded and that was it. Apparently the captain, later that night, had gone back to the regimental headquarters tent and they told him what to do the next day, what the plan was. I didn't know what we were going to do, but we got some ammunition and some rations, we were told we're going on a long march and attack, that's all. We march around the town counterclockwise through the viaduct and through up into the hills, and both I and the Communication Sergeant were told to lay down a telephone wire. We followed behind the Company and we laid this telephone wire around the whole town; telephone wires connect us with Battalion Headquarters. We attacked and that was the disastrous attack. It took a whole day. Sergeant McCord and I weren't in on the first attack. There were several German machineguns on top of the hill, and we were going to take the hill, that was the hill overlooking Wingen, and they beat back the first attack. Sergeant McCord and I arrived there at that point; we saw the wounded and we heard what was happening. We hooked up the telephone line, and were told we're going to attack them again, and I asked McCord what I am supposed to do. He said, "Well stay with me behind the captain behind wait for orders." We went in on the second attack, and that was the time

we had 11 or 12 men killed on and they beat the hell out of us. I know now the Germans had called for reinforcements. They had machine guns and riflemen, and we were just attacking up the hill. We would never do anything like that again. I think it was partly because we were green, but we did use what mortars we had. We didn't have any heavy mortars. Anyway, it's all described in that memoir of mine, and of course it's hard to describe it without having access to the maps, but in this recording you're not going to have maps anyway. Actually, as I was saying, there were four of us who were always together because the way this set up was. There were forty men on a platoon, so they had four men groupings per tent. Each guy carried a fourth of a tent in his pack, and you hook them all together and they were fairly large, a tent to accommodate four men and you're always together at the mess, you lined up in formation and you marched together, but the four of us all were always together. There was the other messenger, who was my best friend in the company, Don Sundstrom from Chicago, from the North Side. We four were always together because we were not in a squad. There were the Platoon Sergeant, the Platoon Guide and the two messengers. The Platoon Sergeant was named Russel Cavitt, an elderly guy from downstate Illinois, and the Platoon Guide was Art McBride who was from California, a very talented dog robber. A dog robber is a guy who could go out and get stuff that you needed. Like when we were in our tent in Marseilles he would go out in an afternoon (it was uncomfortable and cold) and he would come back with a handful of candles and bottles of red wine and extra blankets. He knew how to do that.

MARRAPODE: Did you ever figure out where he was getting it from?

HERMAN: I didn't ask him any questions, but one thing he said was, "You need to trade for this wine." He said, "If I had some soap, if I could give them some good soap, I could get all the wine I wanted." I wrote home and said, "Send me a box of soap." That comes in later in the story, and anyway he was a talented guy. He was a good storyteller. He was like the life of a party, and the four of us were always together. Within two weeks of combat, Sundstrom was killed on the hill in Wingen, McBride, on that hill in Wingen, took a bullet through his eyes and was blind for life, and Cavitt was killed two weeks later. Of the four guys who were together all the time, I'm the only one who made it through. You figure why that happened, there's just no way of knowing why it happened. There was no reason it happened. It's just luck, and there was no logical reason that anybody would say that this guy Jack Herman is the only one who deserve

to live, which is stupid, so it was just luck; but the luck was there. Anyway, McBride was blinded, Sundstrom was killed, Dick Finley, who was a friend of mine from Purdue (he was the only guy who ended up in the same Company from the ASTP in Purdue) he was killed on that hill and it was a disaster, and we didn't accomplish anything. We just got the hell out of there because we didn't want the Germans to come and kill the rest of us. By that time I had figured that these Germans are fantastic fighters. We haven't got a chance against them. I was so pessimistic you wouldn't believe how pessimistic, it was as a result of that first experience.

MARRAPODE: Did you know that you were fighting soldiers from SS?

HERMAN: No, we didn't know anything. We just thought these Germans are unbelievable. They took this town and we can't touch them. We can't lay a finger on them that was my reaction.

MARRAPODE: When they first took the town you had dug in on a hill to the South of it and then you were hit by mortar fire and your unit was ordered to attack..

HERMAN: It was the next day when after we took the town that we dug in opposite to the Germans.

MARRAPODE: Then you were ordered to attack the town?

HERMAN: Right.

MARRAPODE: That initial attack was pretty quickly repulsed?

HERMAN: Yes, it was at night. Yes, it was repulsed.

MARRAPODE: You didn't have any real idea of the strength of the German unit that was there?

HERMAN: No.

MARRAPODE: You just knew that they were there?

HERMAN: I know now that the whole situation was: The first intelligence that came out of there was that 30 Germans took the town, and then later it was revised that were 50 Germans in the town, so here we were, two battalions. Of course, they wiped out B Company, but A Company and C Company were south of the town and the 3rd Battalion was west of the town, and they said, "Go in and clean them out, there are only 50 Germans in the town." It turns out there were about between 700 and 800 Germans,

and they were all armed with new, modern automatic weapons. They were experienced in mountain warfare and they were not the bums that we saw later. They were in their 20s and they were really top-soldiers. We didn't know that. After we got bloodied, I thought that all the Germans were like that. I didn't know they were two SS Battalions. I didn't know any of this until after 1990.

MARRAPODE: You said you didn't even know who the commanding officers of your unit were at that point when you were deployed to the area.

HERMAN: I had nothing to do with commanding officers. I had a lot of connection with the captain because I was his messenger, but most of the men in the platoons didn't have any connection with the captain. The only officer they knew was a lieutenant, and that was true of us all privates. I was a messenger so I could at least relate to the captain, the company commander, but until I became a messenger I had no connection with him. He turned out to be a wonderful friend of mine after the war.

MARRAPODE: That was Captain Greenwalt?

HERMAN: Greenwalt, yes, but not during the war. We were not friends at all really. I was strictly subordinate, but I admired him, and one thing I admired him was after that defeat when I was so desperately despondent his attitude was, "Okay, boys, we're going to go on." I mean he just pulled the company together, and I even realized it at that time, that he was really showing some leadership. That was the greatest thing he did the whole war, despite the Silver Star and all that bullshit. I mean by pulling the company together. We could've fallen apart after that defeat. I was despondent. I was ready to say, "I'm not going make it." But he did bring us back. Of course you heard the story about our battalion commander, what happened to him. You saw that?

MARRAPODE: Yes.

HERMAN: He fell apart.

MARRAPODE: You could tell it.

HERMAN: After B Company was destroyed the Germans took Wingen. He had the same reaction that I did. "We can't beat these Germans. Let's head for the hills and towns." They had to lead him away; take his pistol away from him and lead him away. The guys who took over the battalion turned out to be very good officers. We were lucky, and they got along very well

with Greenwalt, but apparently our regimental commander was no genius, and as far as our Task Force Commander Herron, I guess he was competent, but he was not as highly as respected as our battalion commander and our company commander, but we knew nothing about that. I knew the company commander but the other men didn't even know him.

MARRAPODE: All you really knew at the time were what your orders were, and you didn't have a very good picture of what was going on in the area?

HERMAN: No, I knew that we were that these Germans were tremendous fighters, that they were very effective. That was my impression at first. It didn't turn out to be later.

MARRAPODE: Can you walk me through the events of this attack on the hill that the Germans were defending? What time of the day it started and from your point of view kind of how it unfolded?

HERMAN: That was January 5th. Wingen was dominated by this big hill along the North that was overlooking the town, and the railroad track ran alongside the hill.

MARRAPODE: Was it a wooded hill?

HERMAN: Yes, very heavily wooded, and very steep, arising from the railroad track. We came around the other side of the hill because they told us to, "There's 50 Germans in the town. Let's take the hill so we can pick them off one by one and it'd be simple." Then they sent 3rd Battalion into the town from the West and they also got creamed. Fifty Germans, there were 800 Germans with machine guns and everything. A Company was left to guard the Southern part, and we were to move around behind this hill, go up the hill from behind, and take over the hill. Our first attack was beaten back in the morning. I was not involved in that because I was laying the wire. I got there in time for the second attack, and I was involved in the second attack and it was dominated by the sound of the machine guns. It sounded like they had dozens of machine guns all over the place, and they were just tearing up the woods and everything, and we were all in the middle of that. We couldn't get them out. We lost 12 men. I mean dead, but a number of others wounded, and then the next thing is the word came in to pull back. We went down into the gully between the hills and up the other hill. We never got to the top. Some of them got to the top. Those were the ones who were killed, and the rest of us couldn't get to the top because we would just have been killed. It's like World War I movies of coming out

of the trenches. This German who wrote a book about this battle criticized us for being cannon fodder and I have that book at home, which is a very good book. A German who was an officer in one of the two battalions wrote this very well researched book about the Battle of Wingen. We should not have done it that way. We would never do it again, go up there and use our bodies. We would've found other ways to get them out of there.

MARRAPODE: You didn't really have the training to make that kind of attack

HERMAN: We didn't have the training, we didn't have the equipment, and we didn't have the correct intelligence. If there were 50 men in Wingen, the whole town of Wingen, how many defenders could they have up on that hill?

MARRAPODE: Maybe a couple.

HERMAN: There were between 700 and 800 according to this German Officer. That was that battle, and the aftermath was just terrible. Here this, whole gang of our men, were wounded and they were sent in one direction. We went in another direction and we ran like hell. I thought we were running away, and I thought, "Thank God we're running away. This is an intelligent thing to do." But the Captain would never agree that we were running away from the Germans, and we weren't. He was ordered to go somewhere else, but I thought for 40 years that we were running away. I didn't lose any respect for him because of the way he pulled us together after that battle. From that point on I was convinced that I would never make it through the war. You'd see the guys who were wounded were coming back again and again. You were not going to get out of this war unless you've had an amputation or you were dead. I was convinced that we were all going to die. But that was depression.

MARRAPODE: What ended up happening with the German units that were in Wingen?

HERMAN: Well, we kept attacking them. We came around the very next day and attacked from the other end of that hill, Task Force Herron brought in another battalion from the 274th Regiment which was in that area, and they attacked them from the West. It was the same way that they'd been attacked by the 3rd Battalion of the 276th on the 4th and 5th. On the 6th, the 274th attacked from the West, and the Germans were running out of equipment and ammunition by this time. They took this town 10 miles behind the frontlines, in the middle of winter in the cold and the roads were frozen. They had sneaked through the woods to get there. They didn't use the roads, and they were supposed to be reinforced on the roads,

and the Germans attempted to reinforce them, but they couldn't get through because the roads were bad and covered in ice. The roads were very primitive, narrow and unbanked because I saw them later, and Americans were in that whole area 10 miles deep. They couldn't get through, and our 3rd Battalion got close enough and just demolished them. The Germans were isolated in the town, and they could not be reinforced. They tried, they were running out of ammunition, they were getting casualties and the German commander had no communications because in those mountains the radios didn't work. We had the same problem with communications. So the German commander sent a messenger through the lines who got there on the morning of the 6th, and got to the Germans and told them, "Get out. Leave. We're can't reinforce you. You just pull out and save your men." So of the 700 to 800 men, 200 got out. The rest of them were either killed or captured. The Germans, these two battalions were pretty well chewed up because we kept attacking them. On the day after our disaster on that hill we came up and we attacked from a different direction, those of us who were left... I couldn't understand how we had the strength to do it, but we did it, and there was a fresh American battalion attacking from the West, and the Germans decided they couldn't reinforce it, so they sacrificed these two battalions.

MARRAPODE: You wore them down.

HERMAN: We wore them down and this guy Zoepf who wrote the book *Seven Days in January*, a very good book, describes the whole thing. He tries to sugarcoat the German aspect, but it was a worse disaster for them than it was for us because they didn't have many of these elite troops left in the war at that time, and these were elite troops who could have really done something for them, and who escaped Wingen got chewed up in the woods.

MARRAPODE: By this time Operation Nordwind had been pretty much stopped or it was?

HERMAN: No, it went on to almost to the end of January. They had this failure at Wingen in just that one sector. Then they started attacking from the east out of the mountains right into the Alsatian Plain, and they sent us up to that frontline after were through with Wingen for another ten days. It was brutally cold in the mountains. People were getting sick. We fought there in the mountains until about the 15th of January or the 16th. By that time we'd been reduced to 28 enlisted men. The four rifle platoons had 40 enlisted men each; we were down from 160 to 28 men by the time we were through. By that time the Generals decided that we were no longer a

fighting force. We had to be replaced by somebody else. They found somebody to replace us.

MARRAPODE: Where in the mountains were you fighting?

HERMAN: Just in the little towns, insignificant little towns in the mountains, that's it. I could give you some names, but they're on the maps.

MARRAPODE: What did that combat consist of? Was it rifles? Small arms skirmishes?

HERMAN: Yes, it was. We didn't know the objective or the purpose. We just kept advancing and we'd run into opposition, and they were not SS elite troops. They would give some opposition and you'd attack a flank. We had very few casualties and they would surrender. They were not fighting hard. They didn't have any morale by that time, those were just ordinary troops. They weren't elite troops, but that fighting kept chewing us up, mostly physically, sicknesses and hospitalizations, not wounds so much and they used artillery on us very effectively.

MARRAPODE: After Wingen you weren't taking as many combat related casualties, it was more of just the conditions and the terrain that you were in?

HERMAN: Right, exactly.

MARRAPODE: So that was in January in the mountains, so I could imagine it was quite cold.

HERMAN: Very cold.

MARRAPODE: When did you have your first experience with POWs and with surrendering troops?

HERMAN: In the mountains, on January 6th that story of the pillbox. I don't know if you remember.

MARRAPODE: Yes.

HERMAN: That was our first experience with POWs; that was a disaster. I was deeply involved in that because there was a pillbox on the other end of this mountain dominating Wingen facing in a westerly direction. Somebody had put in a pillbox and there were Germans in this pillbox with a machine gun holding up our advance up the hill. I was with the Captain, as it was, and the platoon that was attacking called in and said, "We need a translator." "What do you need translator for?" "That's Germans in the pill box. They're yelling something. We can't understand them. We need a

translator.” We got on the walkie-talkies and called all of the platoons asking, “Anybody speak German?” Nobody could speak German, so I said to the captain, “Well, I can speak a little Yiddish. Maybe they can understand me.” I didn’t have any confidence that it would work, but he sent me there. I went over there and I saw the pillbox. There was a guy with a flamethrower under the pillbox shooting flames at the hole, and there are people taking shots at the pillbox, and the lieutenant said, “Go over there next to him, and tell the Germans to come out with their hands up.” I went over next to the guy and I heard the Germans yelling and I couldn’t understand because I didn’t know any German. I knew a little Yiddish I had learned in my mother’s kitchen and it wasn’t real German, and it was mixed with English. But I heard them say, “Nicht schiessen!” I could understand that, “Don’t shoot!” I yell out, "Kum aroise mit hant aroof! (Come out with your hands up!)." They came out, three young Germans in very dirty uniforms, very frightened, waving a white rag, and by the time I could get around to where they were I could see how they came out of the back of the pillbox. A bunch of GIs emerged from their cover, and they were surrounding them and pointing rifles at them and yelling at them. We had never seen a live German before, and here these Germans had been killing us, so it was a very confused situation, and we were all yelling different orders in English and I was yelling in Yiddish, and the Germans started running away. They didn’t have their hands up anymore. They ran for some reason. I don’t know why. They started running, so everybody opened fire and shot them down. Those were the first three Germans we captured. They were all dead. We shot them all. That was our first experience with POWs. After that the company commander said, “No more of that. When you get Germans don’t give them orders just bring them to Herman. He’ll question them. He’ll disarm them and he’ll question them." I became the company translator. Although nobody knew how badly my German was because they didn’t understand it but I could make myself understood. From then on when we captured prisoners most of the time they would bring them to me. They would just gesture them, “Put your hands up,” and gesture them and bring them to me, and then I would search them. I would take their pistols, if they had them. Usually their officers had pistols, which were very prized souvenirs, and I’d ask the prisoners questions and they would answer them. I mean these were not SS elite troops, so they were afraid of us, they were helpless. They didn’t have their guns anymore, but we had our guns and so forth. They would answer most of my questions. That was the way we treated prisoners.

MARRAPODE: What would you ask them?

HERMAN: I'd ask them questions like, "How many men are there? How many men do you have in that area? Where is the machine gun?" We needed information, and a lot of them would answer, and some of them would say, "Ich weiß nicht," But some of them would answer. They would tell us.

MARRAPODE: Were they usually telling the truth or did you ever find they were lying?

HERMAN: Sometimes they were lying. Sometimes they're telling the truth, they gave us information. I'd tell the captain what they told me, and he would decide accordingly. A lot of that, a lot of our war was attacking and Germans defending under orders to hold us up so that they could get their men out of there. A lot of these defending troops that we captured were told not to surrender but they all wanted to surrender. They wanted to save their lives, and they knew what their situation was. After Wingen a lot of our combat was of that nature. Advancing against troops that were ordered to hold us up, hold us back.

MARRAPODE: By that time you were more experienced?

HERMAN: We were learned fast. When you'd maneuver behind them or flank them and show your firepower they would, very often they'd surrender so we had a lot of experience capturing, and we treated them much better than the first three because we weren't green.

MARRAPODE: How long were you in the mountains before your unit came out?

HERMAN: About 10 days after Wingen. About January 16th or 17th we came out of there and went into reserve, but in a different area, out of the mountains up in the area south of Saarbrücken and Forbach, which was rolling farm country.

MARRAPODE: That was still under German control at that time? Saarbrücken?

HERMAN: Yes, we were facing north against the Saarland. We're still in northern Alsace right near the border.

MARRAPODE: Can you tell me a little about what being in reserve was like?

HERMAN: Yes, it was like heaven. It was much better. We had a little farmhouse that was our Company CP with a wood-burning stove and the men had little shelters of some kind. The platoons were not really in combat, we were behind the lines. The lines were probably five or six miles north of us, so

we were not really in the foxhole situation, and we got some rest and we got replacements. We got new equipment. We got hot food. We got our mail. The whole time we were in Wingen we didn't get anything like that. It was strictly K-rations and C-rations and no mail, no nothing, but in reserve we got all that stuff back. We got showers; little tents were put up and we went in the tent and you threw all your clothes in a pile and took a shower under improvised plumbing, and then picked out cleaner clothes from another pile.

MARRAPODE: What did you personally enjoy the most in reserve? What was the amenity that?

HERMAN: Warm sleep, and then they kept feeding us turkey with stuffing and peas and potatoes because those were the Christmas dinners and New Year's dinners that we had missed. We got hot food, and then we got warm sleep. We could sleep indoors. There was always guard duty, but on a reduced scale. Because when we landed there, when we ended up there, there were 28 men in the combat platoons left. There were probably 40 men in the whole company and we got anything we wanted: cigarettes, cigars, whatever, liquor if we wanted it, because they had all sent down stuff for a whole company and we were only a few guys there. Then all these guys started coming back from hospitals and lots of new replacements, and so we built up our strength again.

MARRAPODE: You know you'd been through so much stress that happened so quickly in the previous couple of weeks, now that you had time in reserve to sit down, and think about it, did some that stress kind of come back into your mind?

HERMAN: Yes, I had a breakdown one night. I just got emotional and started yelling at Greenwalt and he was just calm about it, got over it, and went on. Combat was never like it was the first day, but I had the feeling that we were going to come back to that situation and we never did. I got through it alright.

MARRAPODE: With all these new men coming into the unit, did you make an effort to have them be more prepared for what was coming than you were?

HERMAN: Yes, some of them had no infantry training at all. Some of them were sent in from Quartermaster Corps or whatever. They didn't know what to do, and we tried to guide them along because after the Battle of the Bulge, there was a shortage of people, and a lot of them were killed, those replacements.

MARRAPODE: What kind of information did you give them or tips did you share?

HERMAN: Keep your head down; don't expose yourself; that sort of thing.

MARRAPODE: What was the relationship like between the now I guess you'd call yourself veteran soldiers and the replacements?

HERMAN: We tried not to get too close to them because I don't want another Don Sundstrom experience. I think that it was guarded generally. You didn't want to get too close to anybody, and some of them just didn't seem to give a damn. They didn't seem want to listen to your advice, but others did.

MARRAPODE: Did you develop any friendships with the replacement soldiers even though you were being more cautious?

HERMAN: Yes. Ernie LaPresti was another messenger. He was a replacement. I got to be quite a good friend of his. He just died a couple of years ago. At age 97 - he was 33 at the time - and some of these other replacements we also got to be friendly with.

MARRAPODE: Since you were still so young did you have troubles at times? The older guys who were new to the unit not wanting to listen to you because of your age?

HERMAN: I didn't notice anything like that. LaPresti was 33. We were 18, and we called him Pops, but he was the sweetest guy you could imagine. I'm sure he didn't show any resentment, and, no, I don't remember any experiences like that.

MARRAPODE: Even so at that time you were getting along pretty well with most of the men in your unit and even after the stress of all that combat and the new guys...

HERMAN: It's more than not getting along, it's like a bond was there and as soon as the replacements got a little combat experience you had the bond with them too. I mean there was a bond there. It's sort of a thing that you, what keeps you going in combat. A lot of it is regard for your peers, so it's more than just that, and some of these guys kept their bond their whole lives because we'd go to reunions and you could see they were still bonded. I mean these guys would do anything for each other.

MARRAPODE: When did you move back to the front after reserve?

HERMAN: I had to go on a patrol that I described in my memoir, a 32-man patrol behind the German lines, and take over a little town. I had some experiences there with combat. After that we went into an attack on, I think February the 17th; the entire division had been unified at that point. We had our own artillery, our own tanks, and our own communications, and our own engineers, and we were a real unit for the first time. We weren't just improvising anymore, and we went into an attack. It was a large attack. I think several divisions, north out of Alsace toward the Saarland, and this was just preliminary to the attack assault which was supposed to go over the Rhine, and I suppose it was scheduled for March. We went in to attack February 17th. It was a muddy situation; the front had been stable for months, so there were trenches, barbed wire, mines and small fortifications built up on both sides. It was like a World War I sort of thing and that was February 17th.

MARRAPODE: Before we go into that can you tell me a little bit about the 32-man patrol, and your experiences there?

HERMAN: It's all in my memoir, but we there was a front there but it was fluid and there was an attack from another battalion in our regiment several miles west of us one night. I was called in and told that we're going to send a patrol out that same night and to take a town and that they would need a translator because I opened my mouth and volunteered to be a translator. I was sent to go on this patrol. It wasn't my platoon. It was a different platoon, and I didn't know the guys. It was commanded by a guy named Schram, who was another Chicagoan who died about five years ago, and I was sent along in case they need a translator or messenger; so we went. We started at midnight. We blackened our faces and taped down our equipment so it wouldn't rattle, and we went on this silent patrol through the German lines and took over a house in a town. It took us about two or three hours to do it. We started exploring the town and Schramm told me to dig in outside this house that we took over, and I started digging and then I heard some rifle firing coming from the town. One of our patrols had run into Germans and they started shooting at each other. I was trying to dig a hole, and I couldn't because the ground was hard. A German 88 fired and I heard it come over and I dodged for some cover and I landed on the bottom of a manure pile and I looked at the manure pile and it would be very easy to dig a hole in that manure pile and stand guard, so I dug a hole in the manure pile, got up on top of it and stood guard, so I didn't smell so good afterwards.

MARRAPODE: It kept you safe.

HERMAN: I was able to keep an eye on them because you don't want anybody sneaking up on you. The next day we went single file into the town into the main square. As we entered the main square, the first scout went around the corner of the building, and a machine gun opened up and he started yelling for help. Apparently he'd been hit, so the commander wouldn't let anybody else go over to help him. He said, "No, stay here because what's the use turning around the building?" It's not going to help the guy, if he loses more men. The guy finally died. Then there were some prisoners, some kids that somebody brought in, and I questioned them and they were terrified, but they apparently didn't know anything. Schram sent some men over to take care of the machine gun that killed this guy. His name was Nuzzo, a replacement who had volunteered to be a First Scout. Then we got out of the town. Went back to our lines, so it was an exciting experience for me, and those were the high points. But when you tell these stories it just didn't get the flavor of it.

MARRAPODE: You were pretty familiar with sound of an 88 by then, you could tell?

HERMAN: Yes, the 88 was the most terrifying weapon they had.

MARRAPODE: Just because of its power?

HERMAN: All of sudden you'd hear this scream, like 100 ambulances coming down on you, and then these powerful explosions. They were very accurate, and we had a lot of experience with 88's, especially in our subsequent attack.

MARRAPODE: After this patrol the whole 70th Division at this point is together?

HERMAN: Right.

MARRAPODE: What did that mean to you and the guys in your unit? Was that a pretty big deal to you?

HERMAN: We felt better about it because we had really good artillery. We'd been fighting without artillery. Sometimes they'd use artillery in Wingen, but it wasn't coordinated, artillery is what really creamed the Germans; that saved us many casualties. At that hilltop at Wingen, if we'd had our artillery they could've killed every one of those Germans on that hill with 105's and 155's and even bigger guns than that. After we got our division together, when there was a problem we'd call in the artillery, and they were terrific. They were accurate, and they would demolish the Germans. If a couple of shells were fired the Germans would surrender because they didn't want to be killed. That made a big difference. Then we had

engineers to clear out minefields and stuff. We didn't have any intelligence screw-ups like we did in Wingen. We were just improvising in Wingen. We were untrained, improvising troops green as could be, unequipped for warfare. The fact that we had our division together helped a lot. I hadn't really trained with the division, but the division had trained for several years in Oregon and in Fort Leonard Wood. I was just a replacement, so they were a good division. That made a big difference.

MARRAPODE: Having access to all those resources that you didn't have before?

HERMAN: Yes, right.

MARRAPODE: Can you tell me about the division-level offensive and how that unfolded?

HERMAN: We just kept advancing. The first night we had some bad opposition, but mostly it was the minefields. The Germans had fortified that area with trenches and minefields and they had machineguns. They had 88s. They had a lot of 88s, but they were no match for our stuff. The 88s would open up. Our 155s would open up on those 88s and they'd finish the 88s. The 88s would kill a few of us, but as soon as we knew where they were our artillery silenced them. We had engineers. One area we went through we were stopped at a minefield. Two guys had their feet blown off by shoe-mines, and so the men were ordered not to go near that area, and we'd get the engineers to clear those minefields for us. The next day they did clear the minefields for us, and that happened when we're crossing the Saar River, same thing. The fact that we had the division together made all the difference, and that what happened to us in Wingen was an aberration. It wasn't the American army. It was just a bunch of units thrown together.

MARRAPODE: Not supported and not good intelligence, and not...

HERMAN: Not cohesive. We pushed into and through Forbach, which was a different kind of fighting. It was a city, pretty good-sized, industrial city and the Germans were defending, but what their reasoning was I don't know. They would defend a building then they would pull out or surrender, and then defend another building. It was a grind; we had to go through every building in the whole city.

MARRAPODE: It was quite different then?

HERMAN: Quite different and you couldn't really demolish them with artillery the way you could out in the woods.

MARRAPODE: Was there anything about the fighting at Forbach that stood out in your memory or anything particularly unique about that time?

HERMAN: It was just running up and down the streets, and climbing through buildings from the top to the bottom and breaking in doors and looking for Germans. Sometimes you'd find dead Germans in there. Why they defended some buildings and not others I don't know, but it was a grind.

MARRAPODE: It didn't seem like their defense was very well coordinated?

HERMAN: It seemed to me that most of the time we were fighting against holding actions, people who were ordered to hold us up as long as they could.

MARRAPODE: The same kind of situation that you had been facing earlier in the mountains where they were just trying to move back and you were moving forward.

HERMAN: Yes, we were mostly always on the offense. They were mostly on the defense.

MARRAPODE: Was there ever a time where you were on the defense where it switched?

HERMAN: No, you'd dig if you were in a position where you had to stay awhile. You'd dig in and set up your defenses. The only reason you did that was because you were ordered to hold up because our other troops were behind you, so then you'd dig in, and hold up. The Germans would dig in opposite you, but then when you had to attack you'd concentrate your forces one place and you'd attack and the Germans would pull back. They seemed to be interested in preserving their forces, otherwise you'd surround them and you take over a whole division at a time. This way they'd leave a few squads behind and pull out so that they had their division left that seemed to be what was going on.

MARRAPODE: They were trying to prevent a breakthrough.

HERMAN: Yes, but during all this time I wasn't thinking in those terms; not at all. I was just thinking about how I am going to get this or that done without getting killed.

MARRAPODE: Did you come up against any Germans that were particularly well-armed?

HERMAN: We never met any really good German soldiers other than at Wingen. As the war went on they got worse and worse. They knew the war was over. They knew they were going to lose. They didn't want to die. They'd been

ordered to hold and to fight against us, but they were ready to surrender. We took hundreds of prisoners.

MARRAPODE: You were pretty busy translating?

HERMAN: Right. As the men got more sophisticated they didn't need me anymore to question the prisoners. Some of the men were just as good as I was at making themselves understood, so it wasn't that rigid any more.

MARRAPODE: Other people were starting to pick it up?

HERMAN: Yes, and they could tell the Germans. The Germans understood. They understood me because I knew a few words, but with gestures and inflections and even English, they know what we wanted. "Put your hands up and spread out so that we could search you!" The rest of the men were able to handle it pretty well. When we were green, frightened, young and immature, that episode happened with the three prisoners.

MARRAPODE: Did you ever encounter or did you ever work with armored units from your Division?

HERMAN: Sure. They were no help to us at all. They would send in tanks to help us and the tanks would turn around and leave.

MARRAPODE: Why?

HERMAN: They didn't want to get burned up. I don't blame them. We saw some German tanks on the road to Wingen from the north.

MARRAPODE: In Wingen?

HERMAN: In Wingen, they had tried to get through to relieve the two German battalions that were in town. We saw what our Americans had done to those tanks. They were on this road. They were exposed, and the Americans had just destroyed them. There was one tank when we were marching by, was still burning and smoldering, and one German was still hanging over the hatch with his arms and head down and it was obvious what had happened. You could smell the bodies and the burning. We saw it the next day after this happened. The German had worked his way down that road through the lines and came within four or five miles of Wingen, and or three miles, and he'd been destroyed by American gunners; the tank was burning and he tried to get out and of course they shot him as he was trying to get out, so what happened to the other guys who were still in the tank? That's what happens to a tank when it gets hit. In a town where

you have enemies all around in different directions shooting bazookas at you and rockets and mortars and artillery. Sometimes they would send American tanks out to support the troops and we would get behind the tanks and the Germans would start firing at the tank and the tank would turn around and leave, leaving the troops. It had happened in Wingen the first night of the attack, the first attack. There were some tanks there. They weren't our division's tanks, but they were American tanks, and it happened in Forbach the same.

MARRAPODE: Did your tanks ever directly engage German tanks?

HERMAN: Sure. They would fire at the Germans and the Germans would fire back at them and then they turn around and leave. They would get disabled and the guys would have to crawl out of the tanks and runaway. The tanks were no good for city fighting, at least in our experience. They were less than an asset because they didn't want a fire to burn their bodies to death. You could understand it, if you were in a tank.

MARRAPODE: What about the Germans, were they more willing to use their tanks or were they also just falling back?

HERMAN: The Germans didn't have many tanks. They had a Tiger tank in Forbach.

MARRAPODE: A Tiger tank?

HERMAN: A Tiger tank that we fired at and I told about this in my memoir. We were on the last phase of the Forbach conquest. Forbach took us about two weeks to finally clear out because they were resisting. In the last phase our forward CP was on the second floor of a building overlooking a railroad yard, and down the street there was a viaduct. It was a German defensible position because there was a railroad yard bisecting the city, and we were attacking across the railroad yard. One of my good friends got really badly wounded there at the railroad station. The street went below the yard into a viaduct, and the first platoon was attacking on the right and I did some artillery spotting because our men were being held up by a machine gun in a building there. We couldn't get an artillery spotter so the captain told me to contact the artillery people. I talked to a battery commander and told him what we needed and he demolished the building for us.

MARRAPODE: You were able to communicate with artillery and direct their fire?

HERMAN: Right, exactly. The captain told me to do it. Lieutenant Villars called me and said, "We need some help here because if we have to attack that

building we're going to get some men killed. They've got machineguns and riflemen in that building. Can you get an artillery spotter?" I told the captain the problem and he said, "Well, call battalion. They'll help you." I called Battalion. They put me through to the artillery battery commander. We found the building on our maps, we called the guy. "Send over some 155 shells and demolish the building." The Germans surrendered; no American casualties, a few German casualties. To our left, there was a railroad station where this friend of mine got really badly wounded. In the street under the viaduct there appeared a German Tiger tank.

MARRAPODE: Hiding from the artillery, right?

HERMAN: Hiding from the artillery because it was under the viaduct. We kept shooting at it. When the tank commander would stick his head out to look around we'd fire at him, but we couldn't hit him. We were too far away, and finally it loosed an 88 shell that hit our building right in the next room, and it was a terrifying experience because I could see the cannon coming in our direction and we yelled, "Hit the floor!" The next second there was an explosion in the next room. Anyway that was a nice experience with an 88 on the tank.

MARRAPODE: Shells went right by your ears.

HERMAN: The tank was exposed because our men could get behind him, we could fire on him, and he got the hell out of there, too. Those tankers were terrified of city-fighting. They didn't want to get toasted.

MARRAPODE: How did your unit finally persuade that Tiger to leave? Did you get some of your own tanks?

HERMAN: He finally left. He was there for an hour or two. Of course, we were sending patrols around, bazookas around firing at him, and we were firing rifles at him, and he couldn't stick his head up above the hatch because he'd get shot at, couldn't see very well obviously. So he wasn't going to stay there and let us set him afire. We had antitank guns; we had everything.

MARRAPODE: He decided he had enough and he moved on?

HERMAN: Yes.

MARRAPODE: You said one of your friends had been pretty badly wounded in the railroad yard. Can you tell me about that?

HERMAN: He was the 2nd Platoon Tech Sergeant, Paul Kennedy, and he was attacking on the left. The railroad station was above the railroad yard, and they just got to a point where he took the building and he went around the corner to see what was behind the corner and he got a bullet in his guts. He was in a hospital for 18 months afterwards, but he's fine. He was fine. He died a few years ago but he was an older guy. All the older guys have died by now, I think even Greenwalt. The only ones that are left are the ones who were 18 years-old at the time, a few of them.

MARRAPODE: Two weeks of fighting in Forbach?

HERMAN: About two weeks, yes.

MARRAPODE: What was after Forbach?

HERMAN: We went up into the woods above Forbach towards the German border and there were coal mines and woods and some scenic stuff. It was much more comfortable than city fighting. We didn't like city fighting at all, and we just kept chasing the Germans. We reached a certain point where we had to stop in order to let the other units catch up, and so we dug in. We dug ourselves very elaborate foxholes and stuff. We stayed there about a week.

MARRAPODE: You had time to, or you said it was pretty scenic. There were times even when you were fighting when you noticed the scenery and the area around you?

HERMAN: Yes, a very woodsy area. I visited that area again in '94, now they have bike paths through there, like the woods around here. I couldn't find any sign of any of the foxholes or any of that combat.

MARRAPODE: Were they big enough that you thought you would maybe find them? You said they were pretty elaborate foxholes.

HERMAN: I didn't even look, but, no, they were not that elaborate.

MARRAPODE: When did your unit cross the Saar River? Were you with them then?

HERMAN: I was gone. I was on leave at the time, so I missed it, but that was I think March the 16th or 17th.

MARRAPODE: How did you get a pass for leave?

HERMAN: I didn't know what was going on through all this, but apparently there was a system for the combat people to go on leave, and I had been with the

company without a day off through the whole thing since we left Boston. There weren't many of us who could say that they did that, so one day they told me, the day after my 19th birthday on March 10th. I spent my 19th birthday in my comfortable foxhole. When we say it was comfortable, we built it big enough so that you could lie down on it or sit up and put a roof over it. We had all this time. We had all these tools. The day after they said, "Your turn has come up to go on leave, a five-day pass." I said, "Great!" That's how it happened. Apparently there was a system where three men at a time could go on pass.

MARRAPODE: From a company?

HERMAN: Three men from a company could go on a pass, at least that's the way it happened with me because I didn't know. I think most of the time it was the officers who were going on pass. They or the people in the rear CP. Although Greenwalt never took one day off because he was responsible for us. We wouldn't let him take a day off. We didn't want him to because we trusted him, and trust is the whole thing. It was my turn to go on leave so I went back to the rear CP. You read the story in my memoir. I was told there were three passes, one trip to Paris and two trips to a rest-camp, and we would draw slips of paper out of a helmet for the trip to Paris. There was a rumor going around at the time that we were supposed to get pulled off the front lines and were going to lead the 7th Army across the Rhine River. I figured, well if I'm in a rubber boat in the middle of the Rhine River, there's nothing I can do about it. I wanted to see Paris before I die. I didn't win the big trip. I went to the guy who won the trip and I showed him my pistol. Pistol souvenirs were the big thing, and I had the best pistol in the whole company because I was the guy, who would disarm the Germans, and I offered him the pistol for a trip to Paris and he agreed.

MARRAPODE: What kind of pistol was it?

HERMAN: It was Luger with a carved-ivory handle, a shiny Luger with a carved-leather holster with notches for shiny silver bullets. It was just a pristine thing. I had fired it a few times, but I gave it to him, and I got the trip to Paris. I got to go to Paris. By the time I came back everyone had already crossed the Rhine River and combat was over. I never got another pistol.

MARRAPODE: Can you tell me about your trip to Paris?

HERMAN: I was convinced that I wasn't going to survive the war. Even if I survived this war there'd be Japan. I wouldn't survive it, so I wanted to go to Paris. I met a guy on the train who was sort of an intellectual. He had spent a

couple of years at one of the Eastern colleges and he was reading a pocketbook and I was reading a pocketbook. We talked about Paris. Before I left for Paris, Lieutenant Boyle took me aside and took me into the supply room and handed me a pack filled with 10 cartons of Lucky Strike cigarettes and said, "Here take this. When you get to Paris there'll be a bunch of guys at the station buying stuff for the black-market. Sell these for 1000 Francs a carton, that's 20 dollars apiece. You can have a good time in Paris with 200 dollars." He gave me some addresses. He says, "One's a nightclub and one's a dancehall. You'll see the most beautiful women in the world there. Have a good time." I went there and got teamed up with this guy from the train and we had to check-in at the service club, and they had everything set up. Free passes to all the museums and free tickets to the opera, to plays, to concerts, free trips to around the, bus trips around all the landmarks, so we signed up for everything. There was a sign on the bulletin board that said, "There'll be a visit to the studio of Pablo Picasso on Thursday morning, for the first six men to sign-up." We signed up. Then that night we went to a concert. It was a Glenn Miller concert in a great big auditorium. I think it was the one opposite to the Eiffel Tower. There were at least a thousand servicemen, generals, colonels, all kinds of military. They saved some seats for infantry riflemen so we got good seats, and it was the greatest thing at the time, mellow music. I sat through the first half of the concert, and I'm listening to the music and then I decided, "Well what the hell am I doing here? I'm going to be dead in two weeks." I left during intermission and went down into the subway and I went up to the station was and went to these nightclubs and dancehalls and had a goodtime for five days. I spent all my money, and then when I was done I had to report back to the service club for transportation back to the front, and I ran into this guy from the train, and he said, "Well what happened to you?" I said, "Well I ran into somebody at the concert and then stayed with them." He said, "Look I have something to show you." He pulled out a parchment, unrolled it, and there was a portrait of himself. You could recognize him immediately and it was signed by Picasso. I said, "How did you get this?" He said, "Only four guys showed up, the lieutenant who took us brought Picasso a big pile of this paper. Picasso said it was the best paper he'd seen since before the war, and he sat down and he made a sketch like this of everyone, for all of us." That's how I missed out.

MARRAPODE: Was it a pretty coherent image?

HERMAN: Yes, it was terrific. You could recognize the guy. He caught some quality in the guy's face, but it wasn't very elaborate. It was just; I think it was in black ink, only a few lines.

MARRAPODE: That's incredible.

HERMAN: That's how I missed out on the Picasso, but then when I got back I found that the rumor was completely false, that we were not going to cross the Rhine. We were not going to get two weeks of amphibious training .We were going to get two hours of amphibious training, and then we were going to lead our Regiment across the Saar River, which was about 20 feet wide. So the whole rumor was incorrect. Then they went across the Saar River, but the other side of the Saar River there was the Siegfried line, pillboxes with machineguns, artillery. The Germans had abandoned it when C Company went through, so there was no problem.

MARRAPODE: When your unit got to the Siegfried line it was now by that point...

HERMAN: It was all over.

MARRAPODE: The Siegfried Line was a pretty famous defensive installation.

HERMAN: It was very elaborate according to the guys that saw it, it was very elaborate.

MARRAPODE: Did you know why the Germans had pulled back from the Siegfried?

HERMAN: Sure, because Patton had started his offensive and was coming from the west towards the east. We were facing north, and he started northwest of us and was coming east in a clockwise motion. He was behind the Siegfried Line, and he was going to close that gap and take out many Germans, maybe a whole army. They pulled out. They didn't even leave a holding force behind to kill Americans. The whole purpose of these holding forces was to kill Americans, and that was unpleasant, and that's what we had to contend with, and a lot of our combat was that.

MARRAPODE: Just trying to cause casualties?

HERMAN: Right, exactly, and our whole purpose was to get them to surrender without killing them. They wanted to surrender. They knew that they were going to be treated well because all of the prisoners of war in America had written letters back saying they were being treated well. That's why they surrendered, and that's what saved us a lot of casualties, their eagerness to surrender.

MARRAPODE: When you got back to your unit, combat had effectively ended?

HERMAN: Yes.

MARRAPODE: What was your unit doing when you met back up with them?

HERMAN: Just moving from one town to another. I don't know why but that's what they did.

MARRAPODE: Just checking for German resistance?

HERMAN: They kept warning us that the Germans are going to have guerilla warfare, they're going to sabotage us, and none of that happened. We looked for German stragglers and didn't find any, it was all effectively over. They were convinced that they lost. There was none of this stuff that they have in these other countries. We were warned, "You never go out by yourself, and always wear your helmet and carry your rifle." But after about two weeks it was obvious that there wasn't going to be any of that, so we didn't need to take our rifles with us or anything.

MARRAPODE: In all of your combat experiences what kind of sticks out the most in your memory? What kind of thing do you remember noticing at the time about combat like the noise or something like that?

HERMAN: Smells were important. You never hear about that, but I don't know why but noise of course and smells. The people smelled bad, the Germans smelled bad, the rooms you went into smelled bad, the residue of gunpowder, like when a shell hit you heard the noise, you felt the impact, and then you got the smell, so that's another thing I thought about that it's never mentioned but the camps smelled. I imagined that the concentration camps were awful but we went by a labor camp which looked just like the concentration camps with the barbed wire, the guard towers smelled awful, so that's another thing.

MARRAPODE: Did you go into the camp?

HERMAN: We didn't go into it. Another Company in our Battalion did go into it, but we went by because we were chasing Germans. We went by the back of it, the fence. It was next to a coal mine. It was a labor camp. I don't know whether they killed people but the place smelled awful. They could've been killing people in there too. I don't know, but it was empty. It was virtually empty when we went through.

MARRAPODE: Virtually were there some people that had been left behind?

HERMAN: A guy who went in there wrote a memoir on the subject, a guy in Company A of our Battalion. They found a couple of people in there. They even said the soup was still warm. They found a couple of emaciated sick people who apparently couldn't be moved, but I guess it was a labor camp because it was right across the street from the entrance to a coal mine. They just sent the guys down there working the coalmines, but that's the only camp I saw.

MARRAPODE: Were you aware of the concentration camps?

HERMAN: No. Well nobody was really. We knew that the Germans were persecuting people and killing people, but we didn't know there were these death camps until we saw the news.

MARRAPODE: What do you remember thinking when you heard the news or found about them?

HERMAN: I was shocked, but I wasn't surprised. We'd been involved with death, killing, and our people killed Germans. There were a lot of dead Germans around. There were dead civilians around in Wingen, places like that. In Forbach, you'd see dead civilians lying in the street. Everybody was dying in 1945. Roosevelt died, my father died, Hitler died, friends were dead, not all of them but a lot of them. The death camps are just another statistic. It's hard to figure millions, but it was bad news. It was awful news. The thing is we were frustrated that there's nothing we could do to the Germans because these people were beaten, they were obsequious, they were very obedient, they did not give you any trouble, they were scared of you, you had the guns, they were lost, and they had lost the war. Were they involved with the concentration camps; some of them maybe, some of them not. When you deal with all these people, you get all these prisoners, and you talk to the prisoners and ask did they know about politics. They're illiterate farmers most of them at least the ones we captured. They can't talk intelligently they don't know. In dealing with Germans we, you can't equate that the people who were administrating those death camps to the people you were talking to. You had no reason to say that they were involved in it. They went along, they supported Hitler. There's no question about that, but did they know about it? We didn't really know how to deal with that question.

MARRAPODE: Did that end up affecting the way you dealt with the civilians?

HERMAN: One of my jobs, as reflected in my memoir, was, since I was the company translator, as we moved from town to town they gave me the job of

acquiring housing for the troops, and they told me what to do, the officers told me what to do. "You go in, you knock on the door, and you tell them: 'You must be out of this house in one hour. You can take with you only personal items and food. Leave everything else, all the furniture, all the towels, sheets, everything else, and you're to be out in one hour.'" That's what they told me, that was my orders, and I did it town after town. I would go ahead of the company. We would get up early in the morning, the jeep driver and I only. I said, "Give me some more people to go with." They said, "No, you don't need anybody. Don't worry about it. You can do it." Apparently I don't know where they received those orders, but that was my job; to go an hour ahead of the company and go into a town, find the best looking houses, vacate enough houses to house the Company. A Company was 150-160 men, so that was 10 houses or more. I would go knock on doors, and tell them they have to be out in one hour and remove only your personal items and food. Everything else remains here, and they would do it, most of them. Almost all of them would do it. They'd say, "Nicht Nazi." I'd say, "Das macht nicht. I don't care whether you were Nazi or not, out!" I felt that they had it coming to them or maybe that's what I told myself. Can you imagine doing that? How old are you?

MARRAPODE: Twenty-three.

HERMAN: Twenty-three, alright, you're old. I was 18-19. Imagine an armed soldier going in your house in Naperville. He knocks on your door and says, "The German Army is coming in one hour. Be out of here. Take only your personal stuff. We're going to stay here." That's what we did, and we did it successfully. They would do it. If they'd really resist, I'd say, "Ich glaube dir nicht. *I don't believe you.* I'm Jewish. I know better, and my company commander is Jewish, and most of them men are Jewish." That would cause them guilt. They knew they were getting their punishment, and that's what Hitler had told them, "If you lose this war you know who's going to rule you? The Jews." They were obedient generally. My dealings with the Germans were not that friendly. A lot of guys got very friendly with them and I did too. Some of the women were gorgeous and they were available. There were no men around. It's remarkable. Of course, the big cities were all destroyed, but the smaller cities were beautiful. All that foreign charm and everything, and they had food in the smaller cities they didn't have in the big city, and the women were very attractive women and there were no men between the age of 15 and 50 at all except a few amputees you saw in the street. There was no competition for the women.

A lot of the guys got very cozy with the women. They didn't care about the war crimes.

MARRAPODE: What were your Unit's orders up until the end of the war, and did they change? Did what you were doing personally change when the Germans surrender?

HERMAN: We just occupied these small towns and we stood guard at various road intersections, and we didn't have much to do. They would start giving us lectures and training and calisthenics, the old stuff that we got back before combat, and of course we were waiting. We knew we would all be sent to the Pacific to go on the invasion of Japan, and we would try not to think about that because that was another big war, but we were just happy. I mean the weather was beautiful. The countryside was beautiful. The women were beautiful. The people were obedient. People would do anything you told them to do. It was not an unpleasant situation. We were tired of combat and tired of not getting any sleep and tired of not having any decent food. We were getting all of that plus I was from Gary, Indiana and I never saw beautiful country towns like this in my life, a charming countryside and all that. It was very pleasant in some ways. We started playing baseball and touch-football and organized leagues, something for us to do. They organized discussion groups. Everybody wanted to go home, but we knew we were going to invade Japan, so we tried to enjoy this for a while. And then my job of course was requisitioning housing until I got fired from that job. One time I went into a town. These towns had maybe three or four thousand people in them, and this town was completely untouched by the war, and had a big hospital. As I started knocking on doors there were hospital patients in these houses because the hospitals in the big cities had been destroyed and they moved them all to this town. They were living in the houses and the doctors and the nurses were telling me, "We can't vacate these houses these people are sick." I didn't know what the hell to do. My orders were to vacate 10 or 12 houses, so I did a lousy job. I'd say, "Alright, these people can stay here, and we'll just sleep in the living room." When the company got there the trucks unloaded all of these men. I said, "Now listen you can't move into these houses. You have to just sleep in the living room or some place because the bedrooms are occupied by sick people." The company commander was furious at me. He wasn't Greenwalt anymore, he'd been transferred. He fired me and then emptied out the houses and they got somebody else to do my job because I didn't clear out the houses. They cleared them out.

MARRAPODE: What'd they do with all the patients?

HERMAN: They moved them into other houses or somewhere else, but that was it for me. I was no long the translator.

MARRAPODE: Greenwalt had been replaced?

HERMAN: Right.

MARRAPODE: Did the relationship between the kind of the average soldiers, the enlisted men and the officer's change after combat?

HERMAN: Yes, definitely. The guy who took over for Greenwalt was highly disliked. He was the Executive Officer. Nobody trusted him. Nobody liked him. He was not competent. He was just an arrogant guy who didn't have any ability. He was a lieutenant. That's why Greenwalt never left the company during combat. Not for one day did he ever leave because he knew that we didn't trust this guy, Boyle was his name, and he took over for Greenwalt but Greenwalt didn't leave till after combat was over. He left about the end of May. I had been dispossessed of; my job as a messenger. They didn't need the messengers anymore because it wasn't combat, so I had been sent back to my squad in the 1st Platoon. It didn't matter anymore who was company commander. The only thing that mattered was who your sergeant was, and the sergeants were all friends of mine because they had gone through combat. I didn't care that Boyle was the company commander but by that time it didn't matter.

MARRAPODE: Were things more formalized after the war?

HERMAN: Yes. Saluting and standing at attention and all that stuff. We didn't have that during combat; it was nothing like that.

MARRAPODE: Actually I forgot to ask you, where were you for V-E Day? When did you hear about that and?

HERMAN: I was in my squad and we were guarding a crossroads in a little tiny village, maybe four or five houses at a crossroads, two dirt roads, and an unimportant place. There was nothing for us to do but go to those places and stand guard, and see if there were any Nazis coming by. They were never any, so I was at one of those stations at V-E Day, and maybe four or five us living in a German house on a dusty crossroads.

MARRAPODE: No big celebration or anything? You're just standing out...

HERMAN: No celebration at all.

MARRAPODE: Did you write home a lot? Did you send a lot of letters home?

HERMAN: Yes.

MARRAPODE: Who did you write to the most?

HERMAN: My mother, my sisters, my brothers, some friends who were in the Army in different places. They would get the letters because we had nothing to do most of the time. Even in combat there was a lot of time that you had to kill.

MARRAPODE: What did you write about?

HERMAN: I didn't describe combat too much. I never understood it very well; never understood what was really going on. What would I write about? What I was doing and what they would tell me they were doing. We got mail all the time except in the middle of combat.

MARRAPODE: How long was your unit stationed for occupation duty before people started being sent home?

HERMAN: We were in occupation duty in the summer of '45, and we knew that we were going to be sent to the Pacific. At one point about the middle of July orders came down; this time there was no secrecy. We saw the orders that said that the entire 70th Division was going to be sent to the Pacific, and that we were going to travel through Marseilles, Suez, and Singapore, that's as far as they went. That we should get ready and within several weeks we would all ship out and those were the orders. I don't know what my job would have been in combat, whether I'd go back to being a messenger. I was just a guy in a platoon. I was a rifleman and some of these guys, my friends, were squad leaders and stuff. Even the 18-19 years-old guys, and very; it was very pleasant to have them as squad leaders. They were your friends. I don't know what my role would have been, and I didn't get a promotion because messengers were PFCs, although I did all these other things besides being a messenger. We were going to go in the Pacific and I was going to just be a guy in a platoon and we would be landing on a beach in Japan. We knew that the next thing would be the invasion of Japan and we knew that it'd been very, very tough in Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Then of course we got the news of the atom bomb and a week after the news of the atom bomb the order came down cancelling our trip to the Pacific, and I knew it was all over. I knew I was going to go home alive, so that was my reaction. "Wow, I really got lucky just in time." I didn't know when the invasion of Japan was coming.

I thought it was going to be in October of 1945. When that news came down everybody wanted to go home immediately and there weren't enough ships, so they set up a point system. You got a point for each month in service, you got an extra point for each month overseas, you got a point for every wound, every a point for every medal, and the guys with the most points went home first. We'd only been overseas for eight months and a lot of guys had been overseas for three or four years, so they were all going to go home first. We were stationed in Germany in Hesse. North of us was the 3rd Division, that's historic, you're a historian, that's the Division that got all the medals that had fought all the way from North Africa through everywhere else and they wanted to keep the 3rd Division in Germany because of its prestige. They transferred all the men from the 70th Division into the 3rd Division, and they transferred all the men from the 3rd into the 70th Division, and they sent the 70th Division home with all the 3rd Division people, and dissolved it and discharged the people, and we were left to man the 3rd Division in the Army of Occupation in Germany, and I had so few points that my turn to come home didn't come for more than a year. I didn't go home until May of 1946.

MARRAPODE: How many points did you have?

HERMAN: I don't remember. It was not enough points. I'd only been overseas for eight months when they set up the point system, and so I stayed there for another year. They made me a clerk typist in the 3rd Division, and that was because I had taken a course in typing in high school so I stayed there for another year.

MARRAPODE: Where were you stationed during that year?

HERMAN: Around Kassel mostly and I don't know if you know about this, they set up a university. They had millions of men with nothing to do. All kinds of men; a lot of young guys like me, 18 to 20 years old, and they had a lot of guys who were college professors who were in the army, so they set up a university in Biarritz, France. Did you know about this?

MARRAPODE: No.

HERMAN: Biarritz is on the Bay of Biscay. It's right near the Spanish border. It's a resort, a very fancy resort where they have a lot of these great big old hotels from the '20s on the beach. The army took it over and set up what they called Biarritz American University and they took the guys in the Army who were PhDs and a lot of them were college teachers and they made up a faculty. They even brought over some old guys from the United

States to teach in that faculty; these old guys who missed the whole war and wanted to get in on something so they brought some of them over to teach. They set up this university in all these hotels and there were thousands of us that went. I went there for three months from January to March of 1946.

MARRAPODE: What kind of classes did you take?

HERMAN: I took Masterpieces of World Literature. You could take anything. I took English Composition. I took some Philosophy courses. At that time I wanted to be a sports announcer. I took a course in sports announcing. It was terrific.

MARRAPODE: That's a pretty specific course.

HERMAN: Yes. I thought, "What did I want to be?" I wanted to be like every other kid, a sports announcer. So I took that and they told me I had no talent whatsoever. A sports announcer from California, the teacher, told me I had no talent. I had to look for something else. Anyway I took those courses. It was terrific. We read Goethe's *Faust* and Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. We didn't read it all because it was too much to read, but at least we took the class, and we had the books, we looked at them. It was great. I don't know how long it lasted, but I got college credit for all of that. And so we lasted through a year of this kind of stuff going through the motions when we were in Germany.

MARRAPODE: When did you say you were finally being shipped home?

HERMAN: In May of 1946, I was discharged on Memorial Day, May 31st.

MARRAPODE: When did you finally get back to your family?

HERMAN: That night. It was at Fort Sheridan. I took the train home. I was a sergeant by this time.

MARRAPODE: Can you tell me what that was like going home?

HERMAN: Most of the servicemen had come home already. There was no greeting whatsoever anywhere. No parties, none of that, the war was over more than a year by that time so there was no particular attention paid. I just joined the 52-20 Club and started taking courses at the junior college and went on from there.

MARRAPODE: Out of all the experiences you've shared, what do you consider maybe your most memorable experience from World War II?

HERMAN: The fact that I survived. I never figured out why. It was pure luck. That's the most memorable thing I took out of that, but I don't think it made an on me that the Depression did, because it was an aberration. I had nothing to do with the military. I never fired a gun before or after the war. Nobody in my family was military. It was just something that happened because of the timing. Obviously it made a lasting impression because lately I've been involved in it, but for 45 years after the war I did not pay much attention to the whole experience till they contacted me in 1990 and I got involved in it. Once I got involved in it, I wanted to figure why, where and how everything happened as it did, and I've satisfied myself with all those questions because I had no idea while it was going on at the time.

MARRAPODE: It really was forty years before you had any understanding of what it could be...

HERMAN: Right exactly. I didn't even remember the names of these guys in 1990.

MARRAPODE: In the questionnaire you submitted to us, you mentioned that since 1990 you've had more time for reflection about all this, what has the reflection brought up for you? What have you kind of gotten from that time to of thinking about this?

HERMAN: That everything is chancy; there are no guarantees in life. There are no real explanations that I have found yet and probably never will find.

MARRAPODE: Years later, Captain Greenwalt evaluated you right?

HERMAN: Yes.

MARRAPODE: Can you tell me about that evaluation and what it meant to you when you found it?

HERMAN: I have it here. Well, you have to remember Greenwalt is a military guy through and through. His whole family is military, and he had loyalty to his men. Have you seen this?

MARRAPODE: No.

HERMAN: His memoir.

MARRAPODE: I saw it referenced in your memoir.

HERMAN: You ought to get it for your library in fact I'll give you one of mine if you want it.

MARRAPODE: We can do a deed of gift for that if you like.

HERMAN: I don't want to give you a deed of gift. I'm going to give you the damn thing and I'm going to sign any paper, if you want it. It's a printed copy of exactly what you've read. Will the library be doing anything with this or will they just throw it away?

MARRAPODE: We can put it into our collection.

HERMAN: This is printed up, and this isn't bound good enough or if it isn't good enough for any reason you can take the email that I sent you and can print out as many as you want if you want it, but in meanwhile I'll give you this and it's exactly the same as what you read. Maybe somebody will want to read it later on in this form. Well Greenwalt made a comment about a number his men and as to the people he did not like he did not make a comment, you know what I mean? He's not going to down, bad mouth anybody. I bad mouthed a few people in my memoir, Boyle and a couple of guys, but I'm not the kind of guy he is. He's a "Duty, Honor, and Country" guy all the way. I did like what he said about me: "His intelligence and proclivity for being where the action was enabled me to depend on him to carry out any kind of task that needed minimum supervision. He was young, he was smart, he was sometime brash, and he was always a positive factor in Company C operations." I was gratified by those words even though I knew that he's such a nice guy he's not going to say anything that isn't nice. I still was gratified by that, so that's my answer.

MARRAPODE: It's good to hear years later.

HERMAN: It's good to hear praise even if you know that it's just praise, but it was true. I was useful, and I gave him some trouble, but he was able to live with it. Some of these guys that he writes about, it is obvious to me that he didn't even know them, but he still says nice things about them.

MARRAPODE: But you knew him quite well.

HERMAN: I knew him very well, and he knew me very well too. During the war he would never let down his hair at all, never, and we could see that. Now I let down my hair a few times, but still you knew he was that he really, he really had a great deal of feeling for his men. You knew that. You could tell and you could tell that a guy like Boyle didn't care a shit for his men, but Greenwalt did and every man in the company though he was terrific.

You ought to get this for your library if you don't have it. This is the only copy that I have.

MARRAPODE: It's titled the *Red Scarves* right?

HERMAN: Yes, I don't know where the hell you could get it anymore.

MARRAPODE: Can you tell me about the nickname your unit got "The Red Scarves?"

HERMAN: Yes. When we were clearing a building in Forbach, we'd go into the building and we'd clear it from the basement to the attic. We'd go through the building room by room to make sure that there are no German soldiers in there and no guns and armaments or anything. We're clearing a building in the apartments were a lot of framed pictures of Hitler on the walls of living rooms and we would break the glass of the pictures of Hitler just to have something to do. In one room there was a stack of Nazi flags, large brand new Nazi flags with a black swastika in a white circle on a red background. I don't know what they were doing there but apparently they would haul them out where there was a Nazi parade in town or something; and anyway after we cleared the building we had nothing to do. We had to wait for orders, so we went back up to the apartment, some of us, and we got out these Nazi flags and we started tearing them apart because we wanted to destroy Nazism. One guy took one of the red pieces and tucked it into his jacket as an ascot tie and it looked good so we all did the same thing; four or five of us. We started walking around with these things, and everybody said, "Hey, that looks sharp. I want one!" We went back up to the place and tore all the rest of the Nazi flags up and gave everybody a scarf and we all were wearing these Red Scarves. We walked around Forbach for about a week as I said. I had my picture, a watercolor drawn in one and this guy Kennedy had his picture done by the same artist, a woman who was married to a doctor in one of the houses that we liberated. We all walked around in these red scarves, and some colonel came and visited us and saw these red scarves and said, "What are they doing with those?" They told them and he said, "Get rid of them. You're not in uniform. You guys are still soldiers." So we had to get rid of them, so that was the story.

MARRAPODE: Military discipline response to that.

HERMAN: That was our discipline. We were out of uniform. That's the only time in combat anyone ever said, "You got to stay in uniform," but he was right. You can't be undisciplined like that; each guy, each company doing things

like that, so that was our lesson. Greenwalt was very unhappy because he thought it was esprit de corps. That was our business of The Red Scarves.

MARRAPODE: You did manage to stay in touch with a good number of the people from your unit?

HERMAN: After 1990. Between 1945 and 1990 I didn't contact any of them, and I didn't do any veterans stuff at all. After 1990 I guess I was ready to finally learn what actually happened. I wanted to find out, so then I got back in touch and then we had a very warm relationship since then except that most of them are dead now.

MARRAPODE: Did you get involved with the actual veteran organizations?

HERMAN: With the 70th Division Association, yes, I went to all of the reunions, but I never went to any other veteran organizations.

MARRAPODE: You mentioned when you went home there wasn't parties. There wasn't a whole lot going on. How would you compare what you found on homecoming to maybe what soldiers today get when they come home and what's available to them?

HERMAN: Apparently they show an immediate appreciation. We weren't, but last year I went on one of these honor flights to Washington and they gave us a pageant when we got home. This was last October at Midway Airport. It was only 67 years later but it was alright. I didn't expect any greeting in 1946. They gave us a steak dinner when we landed at Fort Dix that was our welcome home, and then they shipped us to Fort Sheridan, then they discharged us.

MARRAPODE: What do you think younger generations can learn from your experiences? Is there any advice that you'd like to pass on?

HERMAN: I hope it gives them some confidence that they can survive a stressful situation. My grandchildren, they're in stressful situations now. They can't get jobs, and the ones that are still in college are looking forward to the same. This war experience if it was anything positive at all it gave me confidence that I could survive a stressful situation. That sums it up about anything positive about it.

MARRAPODE: Is there anything else you'd like to share or anything you thought that I would ask you that I didn't?

HERMAN: No.

MARRAPODE: Thank you for your service. Thank you for coming in and sharing your story. I really appreciate you. I know it was a long haul, but I glad that you came in and shared all of it.

HERMAN: What are you going to do with this?

MARRAPODE: We're going to transcribe it, and then put into our records and make available to people.

HERMAN: How will it be indexed; under infantry veterans or 70th Division?

MARRAPODE: We'll put together, those are probably terms we'll attach to it, so we'll attach multiple terms to it so anybody searching for information, infantry, World War II, 70th Division; some of the areas that you were operating in as well.

HERMAN: Forbach, Wingen, that sort of thing?

MARRAPODE: Exactly; Nordwind.

HERMAN: Nordwind?

MARRAPODE: Yes.

HERMAN: There's been a lot of stuff written already, but alright.