Earl T. Brooks
Narrator

Richard Tucker
Nicole Gianpicaro [?]
Interviewers

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Rome Free Academy

Earl Brooks **EB**
Richard Tucker **RT**
Nicole Gianpicaro **NG**

RT: My name is Richard Tucker, and [I'm with] Nicole Gianpicaro [?]. Today is Tuesday, May 29, at 10 a.m. We will be interviewing Earl T. Brooks for the New York State History Collection Program.

RT: Your name is Earl T. Brooks, and you live on 7730 Old Ford Road in Rome, New York, right?

EB: Right.

RT: What is your birthdate and place?

EB: Birthdate: 10/25/23 in Wickham, Ohio.

RT: Do you want to tell us about your life before the war, growing up?

EB: I was raised in the Township of Milton, Vermont, and went through eight grades of school in the next town, Colchester, New York. I went to high school in Milton, Vermont, all towns and townships. That would have been 1936. From there, I didn't do too

much until, I believe it was 1939, we moved into Burlington, Vermont. I did a lot of hunting and fishing and working on the house. Dad had a dine-and-dance place, whereas in Milton, Vermont they voted for beer licenses in the towns and certain towns went dry. You couldn't sell beer there, and having a business, you would be out of business practically. This happened three years running, so Dad lost the place. On Christmas Eve, I believe it was 1938, a man came out from the bank, gave him a hundred dollars, and told him to take whatever he wanted and go. And that was on Christmas Eve. We had to leave the next day, Christmas Day, into Burlington. And Dad went to work at bowling alleys and I set pins for the next two or three years.

When I was 17 I went to Olympic [?] Art School to learn welding. Then I went to Hartford and tried to get a job--I was still 17—in the defense plants, but they wouldn't hire me because I wasn't 18. So I went back home and waited until I was 18, then I went back and started welding on the Liberty ships in South Portland, Maine.

RT: You want to talk a little bit about that?

EB: Yeah. That wasn't very long. I was only there for, gosh, it seems like a year, but I don't think it was quite a year. Then I left there. One instance I had there that sticks in my mind was when I was totally blind for 24 hours from welding. There were four of us welding on a hatch cover perhaps half the size of this room, and we were welding on the four corners. A hatch cover has a lot of risers in it. When you got to each riser and you got to the end of the rod in your holder, you would lift your hood to replace it. When you lifted your hood you would catch a flash from that one or that one (there were four of us). I ended up that morning and I couldn't see. Hot sand, tears running down my cheeks. It was stupidity, but you just did it because it needed to be done.

Anyway it wasn't very much longer after that that I moved to Cleveland, Ohio, which was near my birthplace, and went to work in a defense plant there, welding. I actually had a deferment from the

draft from there. I guess it was about—I went into the service in February of 1943.

RT: Do you want to tell us where you enlisted?

EB: I was drafted. I tried to enlist and they wouldn't let me. I was drafted in Burlington, Vermont, my old home.

RT: So you had to go back home to Vermont to be drafted?

EB: Yes. They wanted to give me another deferment and I didn't want it. I said no, I'm going. My dad, who at the time had one arm, he for years had that one arm, but he walked with me; we had to walk through a snowstorm, through a foot and a half or two feet of snow, for a mile and a quarter down to the bus depot to take a bus to the induction center. The induction center was in Rutland, Vermont, and we had to travel from Burlington to Rutland by bus. In order to get to the bus we had to walk through these snowdrifts, and I worried about my dad getting home. I got a hold of a taxi driver that I knew, and he made sure that he got home all right. But I went to Fort Devens and from there they shipped me to Camp Maxey, Texas, the field artillery battalion. The 733rd Field Artillery Battalion, and they were the Long Toms rifles. They would fire 18 miles within 100 yards accuracy. That was the type of gun it was; it wasn't the howitzer that flies like so (gestures up and then rapidly down). More direct fire, but you couldn't see your target. They would direct your fire according to the aiming sticks.

RT: What did you do during your time at Fort Devens?

EB: Devens? We weren't there very long. We just went through the indoctrination period, a series of needles, uniforms, getting you set to go, really, and to assign you to a place, which was the artillery outfit. The basic training was in Camp Maxey, Texas. That's when we went into the actual field artillery.

RT: So how long until you reached the battleground?

EB: Not very long. I'm trying to remember the date of departure. We traveled overseas on the Queen Mary, seems like it was in the fall, because there was just six weeks basic training, and we went in February. So it should have been somewhere along in October that we went overseas on the Queen Mary and landed in Glasgow, Scotland. Then we traveled down to, and were stationed in Wales for a while, and it was June 22 when we went over to the Normandy beach. That was D plus 16.

We went in as a field artillery unit. There is one instance that I told Mr. Fiddler about. These guns that we had, the Long Toms, were very long rifles, and they had a special apparatus to pull them that was called a big cat. That's all it was, a big cat with a turret on the top with a 50-caliber machine gun mounted.

RT: So it was like a small tank?

EB: Not a tank. It didn't have much armor. It was just a puller of these guns because they were so huge. There were four of these guns in a battery, and I was in Battery C. One day as we were moving from one position to another in France, a Messerschmidt came over and strafed the column. I'll never forget it because it was my turn on the machine gun. At this time I was the gunner corporal so I had to watch the cat and take care of everything. But this ME 109 was strafing the column; it made two passes. The first pass we didn't hardly fire at him at all because each one of these cats had a 50-caliber machine gun. The second time around, he came right along the length of the column. I got on that 50-caliber and started firing and swung around to the other side as he was going away. All four of us were firing; I swear I hit him (laughs briefly). We saw the smoke trail from the crash. We didn't see the actual crash, we saw the results of the crash, the plume of smoke where he hit the ground. That was rather exciting to me at the time, it sticks out in my mind.

From there we moved on to France; we passed through a town called Sens, France. We were laying wire through the town. I had

transferred into the communications department at that time. In France, these small towns had very narrow streets and the buildings were very close to the streets. We would climb up a pole and string a telephone wire to our gun positions and as we would climb up these poles, these people would stick a bottle of wine out a window and hand it to you. And we'd take it back to the truck and put it in the case we had. We ended up with a case of wine back there, and we all got pretty high (laughs). We had the captain of the battery talking to the kitchen instead of talking to the gun emplacements, and battalion was talking to the gun positions, and we had it all mixed up. Every man in the section got broken down one grade (laughs). Anyway, it worked out all right because things went the way they should have gone, however there was a lot of confusion.

RT: Can you tell me about switching from the field artillery to communications?

EB: Well, I'm talking about the communications division IN the field artillery. And then, when I transferred into the infantry, it was slightly after the Battle of the Bulge in Metz, they shipped me to…. I volunteered to go into the infantry when they called for volunteers because they were short due to Bastogne, they were losing all of the men in Bastogne. So I transferred in and that was in Metz—Metz, France or Metz, Germany? What is it?

RT: I'm not sure.

EB: I'm not sure either, anymore. Anyway, it was in Metz. I won't forget it. They put me into the 26th Infantry, 106th Division.

RT: How big exactly was this gun?

EB: Well, it fired a 155 mm shell. The projectile weighed ninety pounds; it was about yea long (gestures about 2 feet long). The powder implements were equally as long. It was a three-part loading system. It had to be rammed into the bore; you insert the powder and start the primer package, which is three separate items. The

recoil was some 36 inches—that I remember. We wore earplugs, we were supposed to wear them, anyway, but we didn't have time to get them on most of the time. My job at the time, for firing, I was the gunner corporal, where I had to sight into the aiming stake. They would position an aiming stake behind the gun. The order would come down with quadrant and direction, and you'd line up with that aiming stake and get ready to fire.

RT: So you weren't actually aiming at anything on the ground?

EB: No you weren't aiming at anything at all. We were firing long range, probably average was about 8 to 10 miles, because they wanted to stay well within the target range. I got to visit the forward operating post once, with the forward observers, and we had taken one of these cats that pulled the guns up forward to the OP. It's hard to speak without talking about abbreviations which you might not know anything about. But we were standing on top of this cat, two of us, watching a dogfight in the Ruhr Valley, just watching these planes go all around, just like this (gestures with both hands going around in circles).

RT: How many of them were there?

EB: Oh Lord, I don't know. I'd say there had to be ten or twelve planes in the air at the same time. They were fighting it out, the P40s and the ME109s, and there were 51s in there too, and that was the fighter of the day. Those were the ones that really took care of the ME109s. But while we were standing there watching, all of the sudden… it was sort of a sandy soil where we were on this hilltop, and there were no trees around but we had a good [unclear] view. And all of a sudden down in front of us in the sand we see these machine gun bullets, tick tick tick tick tick tick, coming down in front of the cat. We all dove off the cat just to get out of the way. It was funny, but it was serious too. It could have been that much higher, where we were. They were that close. You could hear the whine and the roar of the planes going into dives and turns and trying to out maneuver each other, it was quite a thing to see that.

RT: How long did that last?

EB: Not very long, I'd say maybe fifteen minutes at the most. The skirmishes usually, what I've read about them, lasted about eight to ten minutes. This one seemed to take forever at the time, but it wasn't really very long.

RT: Do you want to tell us about your time in the infantry?

EB: Yeah. It was quite a time. When I transferred in I had the MO of field communications, and so they put me in headquarters platoon, Company A, 26th Infantry. I went in in October. Our first skirmish I remember, we were out in the Hurtgen Forest, and I can remember we had a slight battle with a half-track that didn't seem to be too well armed. As it later turned out, it seemed that they were mostly medical personnel in the half-track and they all surrendered. But we had to fire to disable the vehicle, so we were all shooting at it. I was carrying a radio on my back for the commander. From there, I can't remember exactly where we went after that.

RT: Now is that forest part of the Ardennes Forest?

EB: Yes.

RT: So you were getting pretty close to Germany at that time?

EB: Yes. We were getting there. We went up through Verdun and then up through the Ardennes. In fact, our outfit got a unit citation for the Medal of Verdun due to the fact that our outfit liberated Verdun. Then from there…. I remember spending a night in two gas bags. A gas bag was an item that you were issued because of the threat of enemy planes spraying gas down on us. This bag, you would pull it down over you and crouch down low, and there was a hole in the top to shoot your rifle through. It was opaque—well, clear at the top but opaque mostly--but it was a plastic bag. In fact, it was one of the first plastics we'd seen. But I spent one night in two of

these bags in a snowbank in the Ardennes trying to sleep because I had lost my pack and my blanket. Just about the time you'd get warm, with one over your feet and one over your head, you'd stretch out and they wouldn't quite meet, and you'd get a wet back and cold (laughs). It was a fitful night. I can't remember where we went from there except further up into the Ardennes. I can't remember another battle we had except the one….

I can't remember where we were. All I can remember is we were at the edge of a field, in three-corner position, where trees came out in an area such as that (gestures a corner position). We were in this wooded area, and there was a bald hill in front of us and a field off to the left, and we were being really shelled by mortars up ahead of us, just below the brow of the hill. And then they began advancing. As they came up over the brow of the hill, we knocked them down, but some of them had machine guns strapped to their back. When they fell, another German would crawl up behind them and use the machine gun. We were told later that these were the Polish troops that were forced into the German army. While this was happening, we were getting hurt quite badly, so I said to my captain (I was his communications chief at the time, I was acting in that capacity, I didn't have the stripes or anything). I told him, "I can get out to the left here"; there was a fence line running in a little dip in the middle of the field. "If I can get out there, I can direct mortar fire up on top of the hill and stop this." He said, "Earl, that looks pretty dangerous." I said, "It probably is, but somebody's got to do it." So I grabbed the radio and I ran out there right along this fence line, and directed mortar firing until the outfit on my left, the Bloody Bucket (I can't remember the name of them), they took over the firing. He had more mortars and more guns at his command than we did at the time. So I ran back into… and I could hear the bullets whizzing by, but didn't pay any attention to it because all you wanted to do was get out of there. So I ran back into the safety of the wooded area, and the captain at that time—I didn't know it—put me in for a Silver Star. It wasn't awarded until later. I didn't feel as if I'd done anything grand; at that point you just do what you have to do, that's all. So we repelled the attack literally.

The next memory I have of being over there in that infantry was being taken prisoner.

RT: Could you tell us a little bit about that?

EB: Yeah. We had moved in to these--right up into the Ardennes, just north of Wiltz, I remember that well--we moved into the positions of the former officers and runners, or whatever they were in there, because we had pushed them out of these holes. We had eight men left in a platoon of forty, so we were spread real thin. And the captain took over the old command post of the Germans and we didn't have holes, so we had to dig one. Three of us dug a hole. It was only a couple of feet deep, and we placed logs over the top of the shelter half, and it snowed during the night. At daylight, I guess it was, I'm asleep. We had a guard on duty out of the eight men, one of the runners who ran messages back and forth, he was on guard. And apparently a German had come up and cut his throat and then infiltrated our position and took us prisoner. There were eight of us left.

RT: Were there many Germans?

EB: Well, they had a little patrol, that's all. I don't know how many of them there were. All I saw was probably seven or eight, that's all I could tell. We were too disheartened at the time to really pay too much attention due to the fact that we'd been taken. In this hole, it had snowed during the night; the Germans didn't know we were in there with my three men. The captain's hole was only about 15 or 20 feet away, and I could hear talking. So I yelled out, "Hey, Griff, what's happening? What's going on?" Silence. And I yelled again, "Griff, what the hell is going on up there?" "We've been taken prisoner, Brooks." Oh, great. Then I hear, bang, bang, bang, just like that. It seems this officer had come to the head of the hole, not where the exit was, but to the top side of it, and he'd taken his pistol out and just fired three times into the hole. Coover, our radio man, was in the middle. I was on the left, lying on my left side, and

another runner was on the right, laying on his right side. Missed him on the right, just to the right of him, went through the shelter half, right between Coover's legs, and just barely nicked the stone near my wrist here. Never touched a one of us, all three of us. Griffin said when we come out, "My God, I expected to see at least one of you dead." Never touched a one of us.

(Mr. Brooks and Mr. Tucker decide to take a break at this point)

RT: So we were talking about when you were taken prisoner.

EB: So they took us and marched us down into the town of Wiltz. We were all marching along with our hands behind our heads because they didn't want to trust us. They got us off to just behind the lines. We spent the night in a barn up in a haymow. The next day they took us to Essen, Germany, and we were in a civilian prison for one night. The next day they took us and put us into some trucks and they took us to a castle for interrogation. At this time, I had been promoted to a non-commissioned staff sergeant. I didn't know it, I thought I was still a corporal. But the German army respected rank in non-commissioned officers as well as officers, more so than they respected the lowly private. So they treated us a little different. So in this castle, I was interrogated by a captain, or a major—I don't know--and he told me right out, he said "Sergeant Brooks, we're not going to ask you for any new information, or anything special. We would just like to have confirmation of what we already know." And I told him, "Sir, all I can tell you is my name, rank, and serial number," and that's all I did tell him. He asked me if I was hungry, and I said yeah—I hadn't eaten for a day or so. Over on the sideboard there he had wine and cheese and meats and bread. And he said, "Go make yourself a sandwich," and I did, and he sent me back to my cell. This was a cell in one of these castles you've seen on tv or in the movies, with a circular stairway with cells leading off from it. As I was going back down to my cell, I noticed a room; they had one room that was without a roof, open air, that was a urinal. There was a trough on the floor, that's all, along the edge of the walls. And the men urinated

against the walls, and it just ran out. Two men standing in there were two of our boys, stark naked. This was in February, so it was cold, there was snow and ice in that room. And they were apparently being interrogated and they wanted some answers and they weren't getting them—that's what I had to assume at the time. Of course I couldn't do anything about it, I was being escorted back to my cell. From there they put us in boxcars--no that wasn't till later. They took us to another camp, I believe, I'm not sure; it was Luft IV, I'm not positive of that--

RT: How would you spell that?

EB: L-u-f-t, and Roman numerals four, I-V. And this camp was a prison camp for officers and non-commissioned as well, they were considered officers. This is the camp where General Patton sent a task force into Germany to rescue his son-in-law: that was a fact. He sent a task force in, and I don't know how many tanks and men he lost, because when we were marched out of there, the rest of us…. When he came in there, he took his son-in-law. He wouldn't take anybody else. Wouldn't take any other men. Two or three men were kicked off the tanks, because they didn't want the excess baggage, I guess. Anyway, when we marched out of there, I'll bet we had—I saw a good ten, twelve tanks shot up, American tanks from this task force. But anyway, they got him out, that I know. I read the history books, too.

From there they marched us to a point and put us in boxcars, I can't remember exactly where but we ended up in Frankfurt, Germany. And they marched us from there clear to Munich, or Moosburg, the 7A prison camp, that was where we ended up. But that's about 300 kilometers from Frankfurt. Along that route we were fed by the Blue Angels from Switzerland. These were trucks that came through from Switzerland, and they had a little blue rotating light on the cab of the truck, and they would bring food parcels and stack them along the road throughout the march as we were going through. Overnight we'd sleep in the ditch…. it took us about two or three weeks. I can't remember exactly how long.

RT: How many men were on this march?

EB: There were at least fifteen hundred, two thousand men in this column. They weren't all Americans. Some were British and other nationalities too, I can't remember just who they were. We stayed together most of us. Of course, the officers had gone on with officers; they probably rode; I don't know. I walked, and I walked with my radio men and one of my runners, but I remember my left knee giving out part way through this march. When I say giving out, it just hurt terribly to the point where I was limping badly. And Coover said, "Why don't you get on the truck and ride? They'll let you get on." I said, "No, there's guys here that are a lot worse off than I am." I made it through, but it was not fun, and my knees still give me trouble. It's minimal now because I get a lot of chance to rest. Then, you didn't. You had to move, you had to jump. But there were lots of times during that march you'd see these women and they'd come out and curse you and swear at you. Well, they were mad at the flyers, you see, the Air Force boys, because of all the bombings and so on, you see. But they didn't necessarily pick on any one person; any American soldier was a "flieger". They didn't like us for that. But mostly we got good treatment from the farms and farmers along, we ate sugar beets on the march to beat the band; they were good. Have you ever tasted a sugar beet? They were sweet, sweet as can be, sugary. They grow large (gestures about 8 or 12 inches with his hands), they grow a good size. If you'd get one, it'd last you two or three days.

While we were in camp… we were in one camp, I can't remember where it was… It seems to me it was after we left that officers' camp, Luft IV, we went to another one before they shipped us on to Frankfurt, actually. At this, they housed us in two horse barns. These horse barns were huge; they would have handled 150 horses with stalls. They were huge buildings, and they had two floors. We slept in the upper floor, most of us. Some of the guys slept downstairs. We were pretty crowded. And I remember, you get a bunch of guys together, especially GIs, and they'll start talking about

the women they knew, and all the escapades they'd been through, the drinking, and so on. At night, after the lights go out, somebody would call out a recipe he knew of that his mother used to make, with graham crackers covered with chocolate baked in the oven. This is what you'd hear all night long, these different guys would speak of a certain… stuffed pork chops, candied hams, and how they were made, exactly. That's what you heard all night long, you never heard anything else, because we were hungry.

Our daily ration in this camp was three-quarters of a liter of ersatz coffee, made of burnt barley; that was breakfast. For lunch we had about three-quarters of a liter of soup. It could have been grass soup, it could have been…. there was never any meat, never, never. On Sunday we got what we thought was horsemeat in the soup. For supper…. oh, and one of these soups was potato soup, and they would put the whole potato in, they wouldn't clean it, they wouldn't do anything with it, and you would taste the grit from the sand. But you ate it, because that's all you had to eat. For supper they gave us a loaf of German black bread, which was about yea long (gestures about 12 inches), and about that square (gestures about 4 inches), and it was made… I can't remember the percentages, but it seems like it was three-quarters sawdust, but it was very nutritional, and they'd give you a loaf of bread for seven men. You'd get seven guys around you with a loaf of bread, and you would cut it evenly sliced as possible. Then you would draw straws to see who took the first pick, because the first draw got the best, biggest piece. You looked in micrometers – if you had one you would use it! – because let's face it, that's all you had to eat. Once in a while on a Sunday, they'd give us a quarter pound of margarine—it was white margarine, it wasn't yellow. And we would split that seven ways to go with the bread.

RT: So all you had for dinner was a loaf of bread? One slice?

EB: One seventh of a loaf of bread. It was two pounds of German black bread is what it was, a two pound loaf. That was our daily ration. But I'd say you were always hungry. You were always thinking of food. You weren't thinking of the gal you left behind or

anything else. You weren't even thinking of your family. If you thought of your family, it was mostly all by yourself. You didn't discuss your family with other people, with the other guys. Once in a while, but very rare.

When we got almost up to Moosberg on the march, we walked on the Autobahn, and we walked by Dachau. You've heard of Dachau, the ovens? Well, we could smell it. And the gate was a good mile to the ovens, back to the camp. We couldn't see the camp, but we could smell it. I can remember that gate being so horrible to look at, because we knew what it was. We had read *Stars and Stripes* at the time, which was the local paper, when we were back on the line. We knew what was happening, but we sort of didn't look for it, but we could smell it.

When we got to Stalag 7A, I guess there were some fifteen thousand prisoners there of all nationalities.

RT: How many?

EB: Some fifteen thousand. That's in the history books. I don't remember the exact numbers. But there were at least five thousand American prisoners there that I know of, that I'd heard of. When I say know of, we didn't really know much of anything. There was no way of finding out. The day we were liberated… there's not too much that I remember about 7A except, again, we were given food parcels to split with seven men.

RT: What did that food parcel have in it?

EB: Well, the Americans' were good ones. They had a can of cheese, and two packs of cigarettes, which was [unclear]. A C-ration can of crackers. I think it was a loaf of cheese that I remember. A D-bar, a chocolate D-bar, which was very highly nutritious. And we would split those up with seven guys. And a can of powdered milk. You'd take that powdered milk, and each man had a cup or something, a can, whatever he could keep it in, and we'd dole that out to seven

guys, as evenly as you possibly could. Very rarely did you ever see a fight over the division of food; that was extremely rare because everybody knew that everybody else had the same problem. They seemed to get along whether they wanted to or not. Once in a while, you'd hear "You took too much" but it was rare.

In 7A they didn't have any food for us at all, so we lived on food bars, period. That had to last you three or four days. We weren't there too long before we were liberated. When we were liberated, Patton came in, sitting on his tank, with his twin ivory handled six-shooters on. We didn't have much love for General Patton. We called him "Old Blood and Guts" – our blood and his guts. That was the way we felt about him. But when we were liberated, I snuck out with another guy and we went into Munich. We snuck out of the camp because our own men didn't want us to leave, because after all they didn't want us running all over the country. And we hitched a ride on a truck into Munich, just a short distance. But just walking through, we were offered a meal at one of the kitchens from one of our outfits stationed in Munich. We were offered something to eat, and we'd say no. So, we went into these wine cellars, and I don't know if you're familiar with them or not. They still have them. They're underneath the whole city. They're huge--the vats in those cellars are the size of this room. Huge, great big things; I've never seen anything like it. We were walking through wine ankle deep because when we went into the cellars, we went down through a manhole, right in the street. All of Munich gets their wine that way. I'd never seen it before, so I was duly impressed. We filled up a couple of bottles and brought them back to camp. We enjoyed that very much! (laughs)

RT: How long did you have to stay at the camp?

EB: Well, until, I guess, that was the 29th when Patton came in. The war wasn't quite over – May 8th I think it was—but we only stayed there for 3 or 4 days after that. I don't remember just how long I was at that camp. It took almost three weeks for the march. I was a prisoner for 109 days.

RT: So after you were liberated, you had to stay in the camp for a period of time?

EB: Because they were going to fly us back to Camp Lucky Strike, Le Havre, France, and they flew us back there…. An interesting point was our first meal back – white bread tasted like cake, I mean literally. We had some of that in the camp, the bakers came in and baked some bread. But when we got back to Camp Lucky Strike, they gave us our first meal and they cautioned us: "You will not be able to eat all you can take. Don't waste too much food. Don't take too much on your mess kit. First you have to take a vitamin pill." So we took the vitamin pill. And of course, we had white mashed potatoes, chicken, peas – I can see that meal yet. You could not eat more than one bite of each. You simply could not, and you'd simply stare at it thinking "I can't throw this away." I bet you I sat there for a good hour until it was stone cold. After that, you just felt full, bloated, just as if you'd just eaten the biggest turkey Thanksgiving meal you ever ate in your entire life, with just one spoonful of each. God.

RT: How long did you stay in France?

EB: We stayed there seven days at Camp Lucky Strike, then we shipped out on a troop ship, and went back to the States.

That's another story unto itself, coming back on that troop ship. The first day out, they issued us $10 when we got to Le Havre, at Lucky Strike. And coming back on the ship, we saw all kinds of poker games, penny, nickel, dime games, because each guy only had 10 bucks. It took us seven days to get back to the States. Second day out, fewer games but maybe dime and quarter games. Third day out, there were the quarter and half games. The sixth day out, three of us had got all the money. I had a pile of bills in front of me like this (gestures a mound of money), all singles, fives and tens --- not tens, fives. So we're shooting crap, and we're rolling the dice like crazy. So I break this one guy, and now there's two of us left, and I've got

the bulk of the money. I asked him how much he's got, and he had something like a little over $1100, and I had almost $2600. I said, I'll cover you, and it's my dice, so I roll them. Two big sixes. Crap, I lose. So now he's got the $2600 or so and I've got about $1100 left. I pick up the dice and throw them overboard, the last pair of dice on board the ship.

When I hit Boston, that's where we came in, Camp Myles Standish, I had about $1100 in my pocket. My first night in… what was it, Camp Devers in Boston? –something like that. Anyway, we go into town, and I take all my buddies with me, four or five that I'd met in Le Havre, France. Four or five of us went down, and we had a ball. First night back in the States, and we skipped camp. They're not going to prosecute us because they think we're heroes. We don't think we're heroes, but they think we are. We had a ball. Back into camp at just about daybreak, and the guard didn't want to let us back into camp. A taxi had taken us. He called the provost marshal, and the provost marshal said "Let them get in there!" So they took us to our barracks. All of us are drunker than skunks. But that's about all I remember of that night. It was a lot of fun.

Then they sent me on a thirty-day leave to home. And from there they sent me to Lake Placid for sixty days rehabilitation for being a prisoner of war, and Lake Placid was just a total camp, they sent all the prisoners there. Some of us weren't quite as bad as the others. I was very fortunate that I never got a scratch during the whole war. What impressed me about Lake Placid more than anything was that my folks came over when I was presented with a Silver Star in Lake Placid in front of the entire battalion. They read the citation at the same time. That sticks in my memory very strongly just because my folks were there more than anything else. It made me really proud to think that my dad and my mother were there.

RT: Were you awarded other medals, or just the Silver Star?

EB: I had other medals, yeah, but not awarded medals like the Silver Star is. The Silver Star citation, the citation is read in front of the

entire battalion and whoever is there. The other medals: I had the Medal of Verdun, Prisoner of War medal – they gave us a medal for that, and I always thought that was a little strange—they gave us a Purple Heart because we were prisoners of war. Then there was the DAMTO Battle Stars, and I guess I've got seven or eight Battle Stars.

RT: Those were awarded for the battles you were in?

EB: Yeah, skirmishes, battles that were registered in the name of the regiment, so they awarded us the Star. What that did was give us points for discharge. Being a prisoner of war gave us the final anyway. But all the guys were out for all the points they could find, just to get out quick. Because we were in for the duration plus six. We didn't have to wait for the six if you were a POW, that was the difference. I was discharged on a delaying route from Placid to Camp Siebert, Alabama. I ended up on V-E Night in Cincinnati, so I was three days late getting back to Siebert, Alabama because they wouldn't let me go. We were on a delaying route, and I had to switch trains in Cincinnati and never got on the other train because the celebrations were going on when we arrived there, and the streets were full. It was just one great party for three days. I don't remember much about the three days, either—I used to be a drinker at that time. (Laughs) I remember being at a house, sitting in a chair, and having this gal say, "Come on, Earl, dance!" "I don't dance," I said. "Well, you danced last night!" she said. That's all I can remember about it, really, other than the fact that I ended up in a hotel room with no money, no ticket, nothing. This gal had probably taken off with everything I had, which wasn't much. I didn't blame her, I guess. I don't even remember her, all I remember I waking up in that hotel with nothing, no ticket. So I had to call my uncle in Cleveland, Ohio and he sent me 10 bucks so I could get a ticket to get back to Siebert, Alabama. But that was, that night was something to remember, I'll tell you, and I wish I remembered more of it.

There was something else I wanted to tell you….. When I first went into the infantry, we were going up on line and there was sort of a holding place there, just before you jumped off, just behind the front

lines. What happened was there was a bunch of fellows in different holes, you were all in a hole somewhere. I got out of line and went to pick up a can of C-rations out of a box of C-rations. C-rations are a small tin can. I picked up the can, and just as I did a round exploded a ways off, and a piece of shrapnel hit that can—it never touched me—and took it right out of my hand. That's how lucky I was, never getting a scratch.

Another instance: Christmas Eve, one of the first battles I was in. Colonel Seevy [?] (he was relieved of his command after this battle), we walked into an ambush on Christmas Eve, walking across a moonlight plowed field. He was attempting to encircle a town when he should have been pushing the Germans back because we didn't want any more prisoners. Let them feed themselves, this was our upper commander's feelings. That's the reason he was relieved of his command because he disobeyed orders and he tried to take prisoners out of this town. There was a crossroads at the far end of this town, and we were going to try and go around this crossroads. At this crossroads was their escape route, and they had a Tiger tank in a house, and machine guns on this house. Now this was an old farmhouse so there was this plowed field we had to cross to get to it. Moonlight night, just as bright as day out, and we were strung single file, the entire company; we had some 48 men in the company at this time. And they let us all get out into the open before they opened fire. The colonel got a piece of shrapnel across the bridge of this nose. At that time I was his radio man, and I was right tight behind him. The minute the firing started he dove for cover and so did I, so far down I couldn't even see this house, and I'm trying to get lower. And they literally shot the straps of the radio right off my back. The radio just flopped down when I got up. I didn't know it until I got up – again this is just how lucky I was.

RT: So they took the position, the machine guns and tanks?

EB: Well, they zeroed in some artillery and they knocked them out, but in that length of time that it took, we had to withdraw because we had taken so many casualties. We'd taken a number of casualties,

how many I don't know. I remember one medic patching up a sergeant in the buttocks. He had his pants down, and the medic was sitting behind him with these little dot sized bandaids about the size of my thumbnail, and he was peeling them apart and sticking them on these bullet holes. Thirteen shots on his rear end; never touched a bone, everything went right through. And the sergeant said, "Hurry up, would you please? I gotta get back up there. Those guys need me." And the medic says, "You ain't going nowhere, son, you're going home." Thirteen rounds, yeah. I saw that medic sitting there patching up those bullet holes. They weren't bleeding much because the ammunition was steel jacketed—all of ours was, too, there was no lead jacket on them-- so they didn't spatter when they hit, they just punctured right through. This is a misconception I had, a lot of people have about the war, in fact, but they used steel jacketed ammunition to a point, they'd just go right through. I'll never forget that first sergeant--that was just something else. He wanted to get back up there on the line.

RT: So back to the United States, where did you go from your camp in Alabama?

EB: From Siebert, Alabama, I went through the medical and was discharged from there. They paid me to travel all the way back home. Isn't that crazy? First they assign you down there to be discharged, and then pay me to go all the way back. So that was about the size of my military career, a total of two years and I forget how many months, two years, five months, something like that. That was enough. That was all I could hack, believe me. I was anxious to get home.

From there I went into managing a bowling alley for the University of Vermont in Burlington. They had a recreational area with four bowling alleys and three pingpong tables and three pool tables, and I had to maintain and take care of them all. I stayed in that job until I decided to go to school, piano tuning school (laughs) in Boston. Spent a year down there, 1949-1950, learning how to tune a piano. Still do it today. In the meantime after that, I had a few problems

where I couldn't go into business, so I had to go to work. I went to work as a milkman. I worked for HB Hood and Sons up in Burlington. Then I went down to Cleveland, Ohio and worked for Old Meadow Creamery as a milkman. I made good money in those days for delivering milk, believe me. For most of my customers, I would walk in the house and stock their refrigerator. To a certain level, that was predetermined. You didn't even have to see them, the people, you'd just stock. That's how trustworthy the milkman was. I had some twenty years of that, running every day. That's why I [unclear] coming up here, I run out of breath. I used to run for 5 or 6 hours of the day. (Laughs) So it feels terrible to have to say, "Hold on, I need to rest."

RT: What brought you to Rome?

EB: My wife's family. My wife had a sister who lived in Utica; in fact, her husband was a project engineer for G. E. in the military division. And I moved up here after we were married, and I'm still here. I came here 35, 38 years ago. I lived at the [unclear] for a while, and lived in Utica for a while before that.

RT: So do you have any feelings looking back on your experience?

EB: I wouldn't trade them for the world. I wouldn't want to do it again. I would probably do the same thing again not knowing what I know now. But I wouldn't trade them, the experiences that I've had. I sold insurance for a while. I used to sell dollar-down-dollar-a-week merchandise door-to-door, knocking on doors. So I've done a great deal of things. You could also say I couldn't hold onto a job for long. But it wasn't true, because these were all optional jobs, jobs that I wanted to take, wanted to do. It wasn't something I had to go and do and quit because I couldn't do it.

But my life has been… I've had a real good life, I guess. Raised some children, my wife and I. She died ten years ago, lung cancer, from smoking. And if I can impress upon you kids not to smoke, well then let me do so. Because believe me, it's bad. The long-term effect is

bad, that's all. Short term, you can get away with it for a few years. That's what I used to say to myself, "When I start to get bad I'll quit." I waited too long.

RT: So you said that you don't feel like a hero from the war. Do you have any other feelings about the war?

EB: No, other than the fact that I feel that all of us did a job that we felt we had to do, it was one of those "somebody's got to do it, it might as well be me."

I remember December 7, 1941. Pearl Harbor. An announcement came through to Burlington, Vermont. I was standing on the number 5 bowling alley in the YMCA in Burlington, Vermont. I was standing on the approach waiting to deliver my next frame when the announcement came through, and the entire YMCA became hushed. I'll never forget. It was on the loudspeaker. My dad was running those alleys at the time. It was terrible. There was a bunch of us, and I was just 18 at the time. I went down and tried to enlist in the Navy Seabees and they said their quota was full, they wouldn't take me; "you've got to wait for the draft." That's when I was [unclear], and waited for the draft. Hmm. (Shakes head) It's hard to think about.