Nicholas F. Butrico
Veteran

Michael Russert
Wayne Clarke
Interviewers

Interviewed on February 3, 2003
Congers, New York

MR: This is an interview with Nicholas Butrico at his home, 130 Highway Avenue, Congers, New York. It is February 3, 2003 at approximately 3 P.M. The interviewers are Michael Russert and Wayne Clark. Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth?
NFB: Nicholas Butrico [spells last name]. I was born in New York. I was born January 29, 1922.

MR: What was your educational background before you went in the service?
NFB: Well I only went…high school, that's all. In those days, not many people went to college.

MR: Where were you and what do you remember from when you heard the news of Pearl Harbor?
NFB: Well I was upstairs. I think it was about 11:00. I'm not sure about the time; it might have been the afternoon. I don't remember. I was watching the football game, the Giants, the Giants were playing and they interrupted… Pearl Harbor was bombed. I don't remember who was there. I said, "Where the hell is Pearl Harbor?" Hell, I never heard of it. I didn't realize it was our country being bombed. Then I went downstairs and I met the rest of the fellows and they're talking, "You know the United States is bombed and we're going to go to war." I didn't realize at that time. So that's how I really found out that Pearl Harbor belonged to America.

MR: Did you enlist or were you drafted?
NFB: Let's put it this way–I was drafted, but then again, maybe I enlisted. While I was home, all my buddies were gone. I had a few of the younger fellows. I was considered 1A. I still have that stuff hanging around. And I went back to the local board and I asked them, and I said, "How come I didn't get called." He said, "What's your name?" and he said, "We have no record of you." So, I said, "Look in the dead files," so he looked in the dead files and my name comes up in the dead files. Now if I hadn't gone back there, I probably would have gone through the whole war without… Then two weeks later I got the notice. Went to Governor's Island, you know where that is–its right down here and that's where I went for my physical. That's the preliminary–they want to see if you have two

arms, two legs, you don't have a heart condition. That's not a real physical; the real physical came later on.
MR: When were you finally mustered into service, when did you join?
NFB: October '42 I was drafted and I remember going to Fort Dix and Fort Dix shipped me out to Breckenridge, Kentucky. I was with the 98th Infantry Division. A funny story about that is–the 98th Infantry Division was a New York division–Iroquois. Every time I went out on [unclear] we used to get lost. So, I had another buddy, he passed away a few years ago. I said to him, "You know, if we go out to combat with these guys, we're going to get ourselves killed." He said, "Yes, I know. Every time we go out we get lost." Well we couldn't get out. I tried to get in the Air Corps, but they wouldn't take me because I'm color blind. Later on, they were looking for guys that were color blind. And they wouldn't take me. But then a general order came down–it was on the bulletin board. They were looking for volunteers for Rangers. So, I said to my friend, "What can we lose? At least, maybe we get a better outfit. And it's not a big outfit." Okay. Twenty-five hundred men took the physical right there at Camp Breckenridge and only about two hundred passed. I was one of them. All these guys failed–either they were color blind–but I was color blind, but I was a little smarter. I was in the line and when I got up there I used to go to the back guy because they had cotton on the floor and they'd tell you, "Pick the red one out," and I was memorizing. So, when I got there and the guy says, "Pick the red one out…" They could have changed it and I wouldn't have known.

And then the 98th Division was going on maneuvers in Tennessee and I was pulled out–me and my buddy and a few other guys were pulled out–and we were sent to the 5th Ranger Battalion in Camp Forest, Tennessee with the 2nd Ranger Battalion. Both Battalions were there. We trained there for a while and then from there we went to Fort Pierce, Florida and we did a little amphibious training. I said, "Hey, we're going to go to Japan you know, they're teaching us how to–with the rubber boats, and stuff, okay, we're going to Japan." And from there I came up to Fort Dix. At Fort Dix, we stayed about two months, just training and all this. The next thing I know we're in Camp Kilmer, that's an embarkation and of course Camp Shanks is right down the corner here. The 2nd Ranger came out of Camp Shanks, but we came out of Kilmer. We got on the ship…

MR: What kind of specialized training did you get as a Ranger?
NFB: Well actually I didn't get to it yet. All the training we were getting in the States was basic training.

MR: I was just wondering if you got anything special.
NFB: We got on the ship; we got on the Mauritania. Right out of the harbor a tanker hit us in the front, but the boat didn't sink and it shook the boat, and I said, "Are we getting bombed already–torpedoes?" We were going unescorted

because the Mauritania was a big ship and it was fast. Some probably couldn't catch up to it. Then we found out we were going back to port, going to 42nd Street in one of those piers and pull in there. Right away all the GIs, you know there were a lot of GIs on the ship–the war was over, the rumors started. That's why they brought us back to 42nd Street. Then we got the news they were repairing that cut and they probably could have made the trip but to play it safe they worked all day, and the next day when I woke up all I saw was water; we had pulled out. I ended up in Liverpool.

MR: Did you go across in a convoy?
NFB: No single. It only took us six days. We went to Liverpool and from there we were shipped to Wales or Leominster. We only stayed there to do little problems, then the big [unclear] started and they shipped us up to Dundy, Scotland–British Commando School. Most of our teachers were British Commandos. And the training was tough there. A lot of guys were pulled out–couldn't make it–they'd fall out of marches. Every time we'd do anything it was live ammunition, no simulation. Everything was live ammunition. And we had to climb cliffs up and down. From the top down and climb up. They showed us how to do it. I remember, we used to put it through our legs, and you could do good down, but it was up that bothered us. We had a lot of forced marches; we had a march–I think nine miles–and we had to do it in at least an hour. You try force marching with your feet starting to get you and if you didn't stay in, out you went. In other words, they'd ship you back to the infantry outfit or wherever. We made it all through and after we got through with Dundy, I ended up down in the Isle of Wight, right down in the southern part of England, and then we did a little more training with boats coming in and we ended up on Weymouth. And we got on the ship on Weymouth and that's where we got this letter that I showed you inside. But you know, I didn't think anything of it. But we knew now–this was June 4th–we knew where the invasion was coming, but we didn't know exactly what day. We knew where it was because we were getting maps from the Air Corps every time they'd [unclear] on a [unclear] run they'd come back–Pointe du Hoc–that's what our objective was. They'd take pictures–no sooner than they landed, we'd have them in less than an hour on our tables–where this was and where that was and where the guns were supposed to be. While we were doing this, we weren't allowed out. They had us guarded–here we were, barbed wire all around, British soldiers guarding us and then they had another rim–American soldiers guarding the British soldiers and if anybody in our outfit tried to get through the barbed wire, they'd shoot to kill them. Because we knew too much, even though we didn't know the date but we knew too much–we knew where it was coming. I'm on the ship there; the next thing you know, through the night–the boat–they'd pull out. This is about June 5th. I don't know–they'd stayed in the harbor–we lay in that Weymouth Harbor for two-three days eating British food. All they'd ever give you was greasy lamb and stuff like that. We used to have to eat that.

We landed in Normandy with the British–it wasn't with the British–but with the British LCAs they called them–very low in the water. You've heard of the Higgins boat? You've seen the movies where they'd come down–the doors opened in the front? We were on this ship and the next thing I know it was the 5th and they told us it wasn't going to happen because the weather was bad. Then on June 6th as far as we knew–I found out after–June 6th was better but it wasn't any better because I was seasick. You know we didn't have to climb down the ropes like you see in the movies to get on the…we just stepped right on as if we were going on a lifeboat. See they used to lie right along the ship and used to drag us down into the water. We'd get on there, about five or six boats for the whole Battalion and then we'd circle around the ship and the USS Texas–big cruiser out there, big warship out there–were firing, "Boom, boom." Every time they fired the whole boat shook. You know, the little boat we were on shook. And as we were going into shore the water was so rough we started to sink. So, the limey there, the British coxswain said, "Hey you Yanks, you better start bailing out or we're not going to make it." Okay, so everybody took their helmets off. And me, I was so sick my rifle was lying on the bottom of the water. I wasn't worried about bailing out so we could get the ship out but we finally got it out because a couple of them did go down. And we made it to shore, but this is where I really found out what war was like. As soon as we got there, there was this Chester–he came from Brooklyn–he said to me, "Nick," you know, he was one of my buddies, he said, "Nick I don't know how to swim." I figured, well you have a life jacket; it's got to be a piece of cake. Well as soon as we got in, the coxswain opened the doors. My friend and Sergeant Walters were the first two off. Now when they went off, they went right down. There was a shell hole there from the Air Corps, and it was deep. The Sergeant held onto the door, but the kid, he was only seventeen or eighteen, didn't hold onto the door so he just jumped out and a big wave–the water was so rough–just came over right on top of him. And I found out a few days later from headquarters that they found him on the beach. He died and I felt bad and then I knew what war was like. And like I said, that letter it tells…

It wasn't so bad; once I hit the land I didn't even know I was seasick anymore. I was worried about my ass. I hit this dune. When I got there, I stood there a while and I saw what was going on and I saw the 29th Division and the 1st Division coming in, and some of these shells that the Germans were throwing out–88s or mortars, one of them hit. They had these big ships, these LSTs, with ramps on the side that you walked down. Well one of those shells–while the guys were coming down–hit that ramp. Everybody flying all over the place and I said, "Jesus Christ, what the hell am I doing here?" Now our objective that day, we landed on Omaha but our objective was to go into the Pointe. Now we had three companies and the 2nd Rangers went right into the Pointe–the 5th Ranger Battalion and three companies of 2nd Rangers landed with us. We were attached to the 29th Division. Now our job was to get up to the road and head to Pointe du

Hoc which was about five miles away and capture these guns from the rear. Everything was so snafued the original guys that were going to Pointe du Hoc were about three miles off course, so they had to bypass along the shore to get to the Pointe, and the Germans were shooting at them as they went by. Well, they made it to the Pointe, but if we didn't hear from them in a half hour from the original time… We had Colonel Snyder go into Omaha with the 29th, get up to the draw and meet on the top–get to the Pointe. That was his job. Get to the Pointe, Pointe du Hoc. Okay, when I hit that sand dune, I looked out there and said, "Jesus Christ, what the hell am I doing here?" There were a few other guys and we turned around and the whole countryside was burning. So, we had to put on the gas masks to get up to the top. I finally got up to the top–everything was disorganized. I finally happened to see my Captain and he said, "Nick, what are you doing?" and I said, "I don't know, there are only three of us here." So, we picked up a few more Rangers. We ended up picking up twenty-three because they were scattered all over the place. So, twenty-three Rangers… The captain–he got a DSC for this–and he said, "Let's go to the Pointe." Actually, we were supposed to meet the whole Battalion and then go to it; let's go to the Pointe and we went to the Pointe. Twenty-three men and the Captain were the only ones on D-Day that got to the Pointe Du Hoc on June 6th. It's in all the books you read that. The rest of the Battalion never got there; they got there three days later. Because what happened–the 29th was taking a hell of a beating–they were getting counterattacked. When they knew we had the Pointe secured, they told them, "Stay with the 29th Division and give them a hand," and they were supposed to come to the Pointe too; that's what happened.

And from there I was okay–I didn't get a scratch, not a scratch. I was pretty lucky–I could see what was going on. We stood at about D+10, maybe 13–I don't remember the date–that's when I wrote the letter and they took us off the line. Cherbourg had fallen. They made us take care of prisoners, prisoners of war–take them down to the beach. We were about three or four miles; they had the thing lit up like Times Square. I suppose the Germans knew that it was a prisoner of war camp so they didn't strafe it or bomb it and there was another one right down on the beach. But this was about D+15 or somewhere around there, and we used to get one hundred prisoners and we got Italian prisoners, German prisoners, Polacks, everything and we'd take them down to the stockade right on the beach and then they would put them on ships to England or America or wherever they were going. And we did that for–I think we lasted two days on the job. When you hit the beach, the Navy's in charge. The Navy put in a complaint that the Rangers weren't following the Geneva rules because we had one hundred prisoners, but when we got to the stockade we had ninety-eight or ninety-six. What happened to the rest–we know they didn't run away because we had a lot of nuts in the outfit and one incident–it happened with me and nobody ever believes me, but this is the god's honest truth–whenever I say this story people just laugh–they don't believe it. Going down to the beach–now you try to walk in

sand. It's tough and we used to speed march because the quicker we got to the other stockade, we'd go get a truck–a lot of trucks were going by–we'd get a truck and we'd get a break. We didn't have to dig a foxhole because it was light and the Germans knew it was there. We were walking down and we had couple of older Germans and so my Sergeant came to me and said, "Nick, these guys are holding us up. Take these two guys, with the medics, tell them to walk slowly and we'll meet you at the stockade." I said, "Okay," and it was dark because this was at nighttime. We were walking and I fell in a shell hole; there were a lot of shell holes there and when I fell I lost the rifle. I had the rifle and it fell out of my hand–right into the sand it went–and these two Germans and the medics jumped in the same hole with me and right away something went through my head and I thought, "This is it." They grabbed me, they picked me up, they started wiping all the sand off my clothes. They picked the rifle up from the floor, they cleaned it and they handed it back to me. Every time I tell that story, nobody believes me, but that is the truth. Then I said, "Maybe they figured they were through, where were they going to go? The front line was maybe six-seven miles away. What were they going to do–escape so they could go fight again? They were smart, they didn't want to fight. In fact, most of the Germans didn't want to fight. They thought, "What the hell are we going to fight for?" Then from there, they threw us off that, I think we lasted two or three days. We got thrown out because they said we weren't following the Geneva rules. We used to take the one hundred prisoners and there were a lot of ships and we had a big storm there and it blew a lot of these big ships right onto the beach and every time we'd take them down to the beach, we'd run them along the… We'd line them up–the five of us–we'd line them up; that's where they got us. Because when they were in the stockade they were interrogated, they left them with their watches and stuff like that. And we used to line them up and we used to clean them out, in other words, the Germans have watches…There was one German that didn't want to give up his watch. He had a lot of [unclear] and I struggled with this guy and so I just took the bayonet out and put it in the thing there and he got an idea of what I was talking about. "Okay, you can have it." So, I took it out and I thought it was going to be a valuable watch he was keeping and I opened it up–it was a glass eye. I was so mad I felt like shooting him. I took the eye and I threw it right in the ocean. I said, "You made me do all this for a glass eye?" I said, "Don't worry about it, when you go to America, they'll probably give you another one." That was some of the reasons why threw us out of that… In fact, we weren't made to take care of prisoners. We had to get new men, sometimes coming back that were wounded, we had to get new men, we had to train them again, they didn't get the training we got–but they got some of it.

I ended up in Brest. Now in Brest, I got stuck with the 29th Division again. The 29th Division, the 8th Division–now people don't know this, I don't know if I should say this–the 8th Division ran. Now they sent us up there to Brest with the 2nd Ranger Battalion and the 5th for support to protect their flanks because the

flanks are the weakest part of anything. The Germans come in on the flanks–they wouldn't come this way [with two arms directly in front, motions towards himself], they'd come this way [with two arms spread to the sides, motions towards himself]. The 29th Division used to go up about three miles and we used to just wait behind there to go right up there–we didn't have any firing to do or anything. We stopped right alongside the Division. The Germans made counterattack. They pulled back. But they didn't tell us. We were stuck out there by ourselves. We had a Colonel–an Irish man, his name was Sullivan–because the other one we had went back to the States. He said, "I'm not giving up. I got here and I'm not going to… We stay until they come back." And then a couple of days later they counterattacked and they came back again, but they always… Now in Brest there were twenty-six objectives. Now mind you there were two Divisions there, I think three, the 8th Division, the 29th Division which we were attached to–I think the 2nd was attached to the 8th–and we had a couple of armored divisions there and there were other personnel. There were twenty-six objectives in the whole Battalion. And we weren't supposed to do any fighting. Out of twenty-six objectives, we took twenty-four. And we were only four hundred fifty men, that's all. We weren't a big unit. You know a Division has eighteen thousand men and we took twenty-four objectives which they were supposed to take. They only took two. And then we had this guy–I'll show you the book inside–he went up to the… And Brest was submarine base for the Germans. They wanted Brest very badly because it was a big port, but the Germans wrecked it; when we got there, they wrecked it. This Sergeant Elms with eight guys went in there. With him and eight guys, he talked to the Colonel and he had the Colonel believing that they were surrounded–he had eight men–so he told everybody to throw their arms down and go out the front door. Eight hundred, there were just seven guys, captured. He got a DSC and I think he got the Silver–he got two awards for that.

While I was in Brest I lost my hearing. We were making one of the objectives that we were going after the 29th. We were running across this field–now this was July and it was hot–and the Germans opened up. I was with two other guys and we hit the dirt–and, dead cow and the cow blows up like a balloon, you know lying in the hot sun and they stink. So at least it was cover, so I said to the others, "If we stay here, we're going to die. Either we're going to get shot or we'll die of the stink." The smell was terrific. We got up and we started to run through a little hedge there and as we were running the Germans threw up–they had forty millimeter mortars–and I could see it coming right at me and I just froze. It went right threw my legs and didn't even touch me and exploded in back of me and killed the two guys in back of me. All I got was a concussion. I was on the floor. The next thing I know I found myself at an aid station. I said, "What am I doing here?" They said, "You have a concussion. You didn't realize it–that the shell had knocked you out." But I didn't get anything on me. Pretty lucky.

Right after that I started [points to ears] –I don't know if it was that–my hearing. The guys said, "Hey Nick, can't you hear what we're talking about?" And they always had to holler and as the years went by it got worse and worse. If I took this hearing aid off, I'm dead; I'm so bad–the hearing is so bad–but then the old age too–that helps.
And from there I remember I came back to the outfit a couple of days later; they sent me back. They put us on a train–just a company, one section, the guard train. The French–the Frogs we used to call them–were stealing the rations off the trains. Every time the train stopped, they'd steal the rations. We had this train, maybe one hundred cars, we were the last in the caboose in the back, and every time the train stopped we had to jump off, some on this side, look up the line and see the French and somebody stealing the B-rations. The guys driving the choo-choo trains, they probably were in cahoots, that was why they stopped. The Americans were losing a lot of stuff that way. But we took some of the B-rations which was good stuff like peaches and stuff like that. It was all good rations. We took it, but at least we took it because we didn't know–what the hell, we always had K-rations you know, the crackers. You know what that is, is a box of crackers. That's what we had. When we were on this train and we got to one of these boxcars there and took a box and there were peaches in a can–a big can–and other good food, eggs, powdered eggs, we didn't get that. We took that to a town in Chars. When we got there the town was flat. Paris had fallen. There was nothing there but just a train depot. We turned this over to some outfit waiting for us; they took over the train. Now we gave them the train; we were about six guys. What do we do now? They were supposed to pick us up there. Our Colonel was supposed to pick us up there. The rest of the Battalion went on to Arlon, Belgium. I said, "What do we do now?"

We had an Irish Sergeant. He said, "Let's go to Paris." We weren't that far from Paris. We knew Paris was off limits at that time. We got to Paris but we got in. The MPs grabbed us–the first thing they know, there were a few Air Corps men there–they put us up in the Grand Hotel, a beautiful hotel in France. We stayed there, we had a lot of trouble… We had our Sergeant and another guy fighting with the MPs. They wanted to go out and scout around and see what they could find. The Captain from the MPs came up to this Sergeant and ordered something. We happened to be upstairs–they had locked the doors on us, the MPs locked the doors on us–they didn't want us to go downstairs. But these two guys–they both were Sergeants–this Captain from the MPs comes over and he must have said something and this guy just hauls off and flattened the Captain right on the floor. That's a court martial offense. They arrested him. Now finally our Colonel finally comes to Paris, "Weren't we supposed to be in Chars? What are you doing here in Paris?" "Well, there's nothing there, so we decided to come here." He said, "Where's the two Sergeants?" We told him. He went down to the MP. "They're in the stockade there." He got them out of the stockade but they never were court-martialed. Usually it's a court martial offense. He just took

them right out–I don't know–maybe he threatened them and we went to Arlon, Belgium. We stayed there–a little training there–we got some new men.

The last mission we were on–Zeef–it was called Zeef. Patton had gone to the Bulge, left us down and the Bulge… [claps hands together] We were told they wanted us to go over the Sauer River; the Battalion went over the Sauer River. We had to go by rowboats because the 94th Division had a piece of it on the other side. We would go through them eleven miles into enemy territory and sat in secret–crossroads–and all they wanted us to do was to stop anything that came through there, tanks, anything. Well I got a break on there; maybe I wouldn't have made it out of there. The Battalion was spread out, company here, company there. So, they were going to get altogether at night–was about twelve o'clock at night, pitch black–we were going to go eleven miles behind enemy lines. As we were going the Germans threw an [unclear] fire; it just happened to land right in the middle of us. A lot of guys got killed; a lot of guys got wounded. I helped one guy up–he was hit in the stomach. I remember his name; it was Anderson. He was, "Oh, oh;" he finally died. I helped him. An ambulance pulled up and I put him in the ambulance. And then when I got out, the doctor in the ambulance or the medic said, "Where are you going?" I said," I'm going back to the outfit before they go over there." He said, "You're not going anywhere. Don't you know you're hit?" I didn't know I was hit. I was hit right above the eye. "You're lucky it didn't come down an inch. You'd have lost an eye." I was hit right about here. A small piece of shrapnel, but I didn't even know it. And it was bleeding, but I thought it was from the guy I was helping. And I kept… [wipes eye with hand] I must have felt relieved I didn't have to go. They took me back and checked it out and they said, "You're all right, it didn't affect your eyes." But I couldn't get back to the Battalion anymore; they had gone eleven miles into German territory and sat there. They were supposed to be relieved in three days–the 94th Division and Patton made this big push to the Rhine. We were supposed to see that the Germans didn't bring up tanks or anything. Well I heard this from the other guys because I wasn't there. A car pulls up, a German car; it's got the little lights in the headlight. They stop him. A funny story. A major of the German army and two medics, and these guys said, "You are our prisoners." And he said, "It can't be–the frontlines are about ten miles away." He said, "What are you doing here?" The Germans didn't know we were there yet. And we took them prisoners. We captured a bunker and we were kind of using it for headquarters. When the Germans found out we were there, oh Jesus Christ, they kept making counterattacks. They'd go through our lines, we'd send in our own artillery on our positions to get rid of them. They were calling, "Goddamn Yankees, Yankee bums go home." But the thing is, I wasn't there–I missed all this, but then again, I could have gotten killed too because we lost a lot of men there. I'll tell you about the guy that jumped off the boat in Normandy; he held on, his name was Sergeant Walters, he was the nicest guy, he had two kids, I don't know what the hell he was doing in the Rangers with two kids. Well another Sergeant–and he

just passed away–wanted a cup of coffee. Somebody had to stay in this foxhole. Walters said, "Go ahead, I'll go in your hole. You go for the coffee." Now while he went for the coffee, the Germans were throwing artillery and one goes right in the hole and killed Walters. And I always said to the guys when I got back, "He could have just as well died on the beach." The war was almost over; this was March. He went through all this and he had to die that way. The guy that he covered the hole for went berserk. They put him in the bunker. He went berserk, you know. He passed away a few years back; he was an alcoholic. I don't know if that caused it or what. But what happened–we had so many Germans dead; we had German prisoners stacked in a barn. The barn–you could barely close the door–they had them all stacked in there. The Germans were dead all over the place. Every time they came up the road they'd blast at them, kill them. They were all over the place; the place looked like West Normandy only they were Germans. We had a lot of wounded so all the wounded would go back to the bunker. The German wounded–we had a lot of German wounded–they were brought back to the bunker. Now our Colonel turned around to the Major, the German doctor, and he said, "Our men are… We have our medics and doctor taking care of ours; you have free… the bunker; take care of your men, with your two… and promise that you …." The doctor said, "Yes." Well one thing about it, it turned out our Colonel shook his hand when he left. He worked on Americans and Germans–the ones who were wounded. He was a doctor even in Germany. Not all Germans were Nazis; not all Germans even wanted to fight–they would rather give up.

And from there we stayed–it was supposed to be three days–eleven days before they got to us. Running out of ammunition, and I wasn't there all this time. I'm telling you the story of what's happening–the guys told me when I finally got back. Eleven days the ammunition was low, the food was low, the food was practically gone, they were eating German stuff. Our Colonel was going to throw in the towel because there were only three other Ranger Battalions that gave up to the Germans because they were surrounded and that was [unclear] and he said, "We'll be the fourth." But it turned out–he said, "We'll hold on." They held on. They said, "We'll send in some Piper Cubs and send you in supplies." Just like the Army they snafu anyway. They sent in the Piper Cubs and threw ammunition and food down; most of it the Germans got. All our buddies got was the ammunition; but most of the ammunition–you know, machine gun ammunition comes in belts; they were sending it down and it came in clips. So, we had no way, we had to do it by hand. You ever try putting it in by hand? We didn't have a machine. We were putting these bullets in… They started giving us belts. Finally, after eleven days, they held out, the 94th and I think the 10th armored finally got to us. And they passed us up and then we were pulled back. I went back to the outfit and the doctor called me in the office and he said, "Nick," –everybody was Nick, none of this… [makes a saluting motion] We didn't salute–none of this saluting–nobody saluted anybody. Our Captain–you never saluted him. We used to call him Ace; he never carried bars on his shoulder

because the Germans would shoot bars. "Don't salute; I don't want you to salute me." Well this Captain, he came back and he called me in the office and he said, "Nick, we've reclassified you." I said, "What does that mean?" I thought maybe they were going to send me home. "No, you are going on limited service." The war was almost over. The war ended about a month later. This was March and it ended in April. He said, "We're going to send you back to another outfit."

They sent me back to Compiegne. I was in limited service–Compiegne, France. That's where in the First World War they signed the … and Hitler took the train back out of there. I went there. There were six of us. Pretty quiet–there was no war going on. We took care of Italian prisoners. They had their own kitchen. We didn't have a kitchen. We used to eat with some outfit there, some platoon outfit… The food stunk. We had a Captain–he was reclassified–so he said, "Let's go to the Italians." Now, they were prisoners and they were eating better than we were. He set it up where they would feed us. We would give them the stuff. They made spaghetti, we had good…. We couldn't eat that other stuff those guys were giving us. We were only six guys. They would serve us; they had a table all set; we had a tablecloth. We ate like kings. I was there until the war… See I would have come home–they had a punch system. I was going to come home under the punch system. Even though the war was going on, I was going to get discharged. But I had no priority. The war was still going on and Japan–the war was still going on. Even when the Germans surrendered, I still had no status to go home so I stuck with the [unclear]. They finally repatriated all the Italians back to Italy. Now I remember a couple of days before we were going; I was with a big GMC. We were driving. It was about seven o'clock in the morning. I had two Italian prisoners and myself; they did the driving. I said, "Come on, pull over." The roads are narrow in France. So, they pulled over because the roads are narrow. We went in this café and had a cup of coffee, even though the coffee stunk, it was coffee. While we were inside, some dopey Frog, you know what a Frog is; he was on a motorcycle coming up that road. I don't know if he saw the truck–he hit the truck right in the middle and went right through the windshield and he got killed; he died. The MPs came and asked, "What are you parked here for?" We told them, "We got a cup of coffee." Okay, we went back; we drove back–the two Italians and me. The two Italians couldn't go back to Italy; they had to get charged and I was charged with manslaughter and they were charged with manslaughter. But the Captain in the thing says to me, "Oh, don't worry this is a technicality. The reason that they do this is if you or these two prisoners decided to stay in France after the war, their family might sue you, press charges against you. We don't want that. And if we put you on trial whatever comes out–I didn't get anything." I was busted down to a Private and what did I care–I was going home, and a carton of cigarettes–that was the fine. And the Italians too–they finally went home. I got on the ship. I remember I was at Camp Lucky Strike. Those days you came home… I got on a liberty ship to come home. This is from Le Havre. The name of the liberty ship was Colonel Dobie. You know who

Colonel Dobie was? He started the 1st Ranger Battalion and all the 5th Rangers were under his command. That ship took eleven days to go from Le Havre to Brooklyn. Eleven days, and that ship bounced all over the place. It was November. Bouncing up and down; bouncing up and down–I thought the ship was going to split in half it was so bad. I remember we took it out when it was a blue calm day. I looked out–the Rex–the Italians had a big ship named the Rex. It wasn't as big as the Queen Mary but it was named the Rex. It was in England–we passed it while it was docked in England. We had been out in the water maybe three or four days and it passed us. You could see it passing us. I said, "Why don't they put us on that ship?" They put us on this thing even though it is Dobie. Well that ship, every time it went up it came down, boom, it hit the… and the whole ship [makes a shuddering motion] –Jesus Christ. I went through the waters– "I hope this thing holds up." We finally got home but it took eleven days. And then I got discharged. And while I was getting discharged–they give you a physical–so the doctor said to me, "You're losing your hearing, you know." I said, "Yes, I noticed that. The guys were talking to me." "That's probably because you were shot, the firepower–that's what could cause it." He said, "I'm just letting you know." Somebody put me wise; it must have been a Jew that put me wise. He said, "Tell them to put it down." Later on, I came back and put it down on the records. I went back and said, "I want this put on the records that I'm losing my hearing," because if I hadn't done it, I wouldn't be compensated for my hearing because I get a pension for this. I wouldn't be getting compensation and I wouldn't be getting hearing aids for free or anything because it's not service connected. But today they do give it to you even if it's not service connected. But they wouldn't give it to me. These two hearing aids I have, this one is broken [points to left ear]–you know how much these cost? Six thousand dollars. You're paying for it and you're paying for it. Three thousand each, and I'm getting new ones tomorrow and I don't know what they cost. Because I got these–every two years they give me new ones, these are two years old and then they take them back and they give you another two and I keep these two.

[Phone rings] That woman's husband [points to phone] –4th Ranger Battalion–we get together every so often. The funny part of it is I picked him up–we always go to the reunions and that's where I made friends with him, but I picked up something on the internet on Ben, he lives right in Queens. He was from the 4th Ranger Battalion; this guy's name is Black, his second name. His son put on there, "My father was a 4th Ranger and he's looking for so and so. Fifty years ago, they were in a hospital together in Anzio and they came home together during the war and he's looking for this guy." Right away, [points to head] a black kid. So, I wrote his son, "Yeah he lives in Clifton. Yeah, I know the guy." I wrote back and I gave him the… He finally came to the Ranger reunion in Atlantic City and they met after fifty-six years, and I was responsible for that. That's his wife that just called because they call us every so often.

Well, that's the story. I hope it was interesting.

WC: Yes, very interesting, fascinating.

MR: A couple of things I'd like to ask you questions about.

NFB: Now I am going to tell you this–I was known as "Looter Nick". Every place I went–I don't care if it was a French house, Norwegian house, I don't care–I looked for loot. They used to call me Looter Nick. One time I went into a German house and I always wanted a grandfather clock. I took it out of there, but the thing is how would I get it home–how do I get this thing home? When I go up on the front line, what do I do? I knew a lot of guys in the kitchen because wherever we went the kitchen went. It wasn't like the infantry where the kitchen was way back somewhere. But our kitchen–always when we moved, they moved. In other words, if we needed them, they'd tell them, "Drop your aprons," and they'd give them a rifle and they'd get out there because they were trained like we were. I said, "Do me a favor. I have a grandfather clock and I've got to get it home some way or other." I said, "Would you put it on the truck?" He said, "Yes, I'll leave it on the back of the truck and we'll move. But [unclear] on and off–it finally got damaged and I told the guy to forget about it, leave it somewhere. But I did take a cuckoo clock; the Germans are good for cuckoo clocks. The cuckoo clock I got home because, you see, it wasn't as big. I put it in a box and I shipped it home, but one of the weights was lost through the mail. My mother treasured that clock so much she finally went down in [unclear]and got a weight and just to keep… I had that clock for years but I finally gave it to some guy because the cuckoo didn't cuckoo anymore because the lambskin inside dried up, but it kept pretty good time. I got tired… I finally gave it away to somebody. I don't remember what I did with it. Those days… That's why they called me Looter Nick. Every time I went into a German house, I opened all the drawers. I used to curse them because they must have taken all the good stuff with them; they left the sheets–who the hell wants sheets? A lot of things I didn't do–what I know now if I knew then I'd be [unclear] in a lot of money.

I remember I was in a repple depple, you know what a repple depple is? I was in, when I got into a repple depple after coming out of the hospital–they could not send me out as a replacement to the infantry like the 3rd or whoever they needed. They had to keep me there until our Colonel picked us up because they weren't going to send me to the regular infantry. So, the guy that was in charge said, "Listen, you guys are going to be here a while." We were in a German Camp. He said, "Look around the camp and see if you can find some stuff." The troops that were coming through had a day room where they could play. So, okay, so we went down there and we went into one of these things that is an empty building. I go into the cellar and what do you think I find down there? German loot. Pictures, big framed pictures and I looked at the date–1600. I said to the other

guys, “What the hell? Who wants these old pictures?” What the hell did I know? If I knew, I’d have cut them out, rolled them up and taken them home. But I didn’t know. There were so many pictures there I said, “Who the hell would want these here?” And we went back and I told him, “There’s a lot of pictures,” and he said, “Where?” So, he went down there and the next thing I know there’s a couple of trucks backing in and taking it all out. But I didn’t know. Like I said, "If I knew then what I know now, I probably would have taken a couple but I didn’t.’ I said, "What the hell am I going to do with these pictures–they're too old."

MR: Did you ever have any encounters with Patton?
NFB: Yes, I did. Patton. One time. I don’t remember–it was someplace in Germany or in France. I don’t remember. Three of us were sitting on the curb. We’re sitting there and we’re just bullshitting–there was really nothing in the town–and this command car comes up and it’s his car. The command cars are wide and you know [unclear] because it has the flag and the three stars there, and he went right past us and he squeezed the brakes and stopped and he had the driver back up. We were sitting there; we weren’t getting up for shit. We were still sitting there. He looked down on us and then we realized who he was, but we still didn’t get up and he went like this [salutes with right hand] and he left. He never said a word. He must have seen the patches on our shoulders. He didn’t say a word. He figured the infantry, you know, he was more infantry than… He respected the infantry more than he did the army. That's the only time I really saw Patton. Other times I read in the papers where he slapped this guy in the face. I read that in Stars and Stripes.

MR: What was your reaction to the death of President Roosevelt? Do you recall that at all?
NFB: I don’t remember too well. I might have said, “Gee the President died,” and then it got around to everybody–the President.” And I think I said, “Who’s this Truman? Who’s this guy–I never heard of him.” Personally, I think he was the best President we ever had. We need more like him. Because I worked in the Post Office and he was a man that came up from haberdashery–worked his way up. Whenever the Post Office was looking for a raise–in those days the Post Office could never get anything until now, recently it’s not so bad–in those days you couldn’t get anything. Every time they gave us a raise they gave us a big two per cent, maybe about three bucks a year. Well he came out with something different. We got two raises under him–four hundred dollars across the board a year for all government workers. And the big guys up in the–you know–they didn’t like that because if it was a percentage raise they’d get more. They only [unclear] so we all got four hundred. We loved this guy. And then we had Eisenhower; he was another one–he vetoed everything. Then we had Nixon–that’s when we went on strike. After that the pay in the Post Office today is good. I can’t see these post offices… you got all [unclear] now. The kids don’t

want to work anymore. You know how much you start at in the Post Office? Now that's an unskilled job. Sixteen dollars an hour, fifteen days a year vacation, twenty-four days' vacation, you get paid all holidays and you get hospitalization–now you pay a little but it's cheap. I'm still paying it today. We have a letter carrier, a nice guy, he's an Indian–he took the job. Americans don't want to work. You know how Americans are–they want to start at the top. When I left the Post Office in '77, I retired in '77; I got a job right here in town. It was a pretty good job, pretty good salary I was getting there. I was in charge of the shipping. We used to make machines to make the chips for the computers we have today and I worked there for ten years. I had no Social Security. When I got out in '77 we never paid Social Security. Now they do. We didn't pay Social Security. You had Reagan calling us people who were getting two pensions double dippers. You son of a bitch–he was triple dipping. He was collecting Social Security, he was collecting from the theater guild's pension and he was collecting, I think, for the President. And he's calling me a double dipper. I'm a double dipper, but he's a triple dipper. Well, that's Reagan. Well I worked there for nine years and I finally built up my Social Security. I don't get much but it's better than nothing. I worked there nine years. I retired from there at 64. They gave me a buyout and I took it. I was 64 going to be 65. I took the buyout. That was a good company to work for. Boy, I wish I had that. I was 100 per cent dental. You see all this bridge here, they paid for everything. They paid for my daughters–I have two adopted daughters–they're married now. They paid for the delivery of the baby and they paid the hospitals. I was getting hospitalization free, it didn't cost me anything. The company finally went under. They sold it to the Japs–Sony and then… I had got out after that. They gave us a buyout and I took it.

MR: Did you ever use the GI Bill?
NFB: Yes. I used it when I got out. First when I got out of the service–at that time I wasn't married. I said, "I'm not going to work."

MR: Did you use that 52-20 Club?
NFB: I was one of the record holders–a whole year. But the funny thing about it was we used to have to report–today you don't, you send letter that you're not working and they send you a check. In those days, you had to report once a week, and they had a special line for veterans. So, the other line was for people who worked and got laid off. And every time you went there, there was always a line. I had to be there at 1:00 in the afternoon, but I used to go maybe 9:00 because the guys got together–we had an old beat up car and we went to Jones Beach swimming. I was getting twenty dollars a week and that was a lot of money. I was keeping it and I was getting a pension for my hearing and my mother used to keep that. I was getting twenty and whenever we used to go to the unemployment office–that was on 149th street–when I walked in there…

Break in tape
NFB: Want me to read it? [examining a magazine]
MR: I think that just tells about you down there.
NFB: [reading from magazine] "Nicholas Butrico, a Private in the 5th Ranger Battalion, received the Order of the Day issued by General Eisenhower to all the troops heading into France; he scribbled a brief prayer at the top. Shortly after D-Day he wrote his memories of landing on the bank. Years later, he talked about what had happened to the "Buddy" he mentioned. We were on the landing craft. His name was Chester and he was standing next to me and he says, "Nick, I'm afraid I can't swim." I said, "Don't worry about it; this boat will go right up to the land." But a sailor dropped the ramp too early and, "my buddy happened to be the first one out and as soon as he went out, a big wave caught the craft and pushed it right over his body… a few days later I heard from headquarters that he was found on the beach."

MR: Why don't you show the front of that magazine? Where did you get that?

Camera focuses on magazine with title:

D-Day
The National
D-Day Museum
New Orleans

MR: So this came from the D-Day Museum?
NFB: I think when they opened the museum a couple of years ago. I don't remember the date. The opening of the D-Day Museum down in New Orleans and when you go into the museum they have a Higgins boat, they have a B51 hanging up and if you go they have a lot of things about D-Day and on the third floor, it was more dedicated to the Rangers. Now, I never knew I had this. I didn't know they did this. But when you go on the third floor–they had this; you could see it–this picture. [shows the picture of Nicholas Butrico in uniform]

MR: When was this picture taken?
NFB: The picture was taken in Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky in 1942, around there. In fact, I have the picture inside.

MR: What is the significance of that letter that they had you send to them and copied?
NFB: Because this is the only one–there are a lot of these around–but this is the only one that has a letter written on it. Nobody had it.

MR: Where did you keep that when you landed?

NFB: I had it in my pocket. I didn't realize it–if you notice it on the top–June 4th–now that's two days before the invasion, and if you'll notice on the back of the letter–June 6th.

MR: And you wrote that while you were on the beach?
NFB: No, actually I didn't write the letter on June 6th. I just put down what I saw on June 6th and I mention that on the bottom.

NFB: Would you like me to read it–it's a prayer more or less?

"June 6th. Landed one hour before D-Day, H-Hour. It was my first combat. As I turned around I could see hundreds of bodies lying on the beach, not one moving. Some tried to move and some were drowning. I'd never prayed before, but I really prayed that day. I lost somebody but I made it and we took our objective. That day I'll never forget–we landed on the worst beach of the invasion–Omaha. At night Jerry's planes would come and try to knock us out and we held out. We had to or all the plans would go haywire. All I thought was if anything happened to me that my family wouldn't take it too bad and I'm glad I made it for my family's sake. I thought of the boys that didn't make it and how their families would feel. I lost my best buddy on the beach. He never got to shore–just a kid of eighteen. He came from Brooklyn and he was Italian. All I can say is I am thankful that I made it. Please protect me for whatever lies ahead for me. I thank you Lord."

Now this is the only one; there is no other one. This is what they were interested in.

MR: Now you say your received a phone call from Stephen Ambrose?
NFB: Asking me if they could copy that. The next thing you know I got a phone call from somebody from Virginia telling me they would like to have it. I said, "Well, I don't know–my kids don't want me to give it up." They said, "No, you send it to us. The copy that you sent to the Eisenhower Museum is just a copy. We want to make a copy the way we want to copy it." They sent me a box, Federal Express, prepaid. They said, "Put the letter inside, seal it and if you notice it's insured for $1500." [unclear] So I sent it. I think a week letter I got it back and they sent those things I have on the wall. They sent that as a thank you. Then a couple of days later I got a call from California. A woman got on and she said, "We saw your letter," –I don't know how they saw it, they must have seen it somewhere. It was in a magazine–Forbes. I remember getting that–I was sitting in here. My wife says, "Here–brown envelope," and I open it up and see the magazine. So, I opened it up–in the first few pages, there–the letter is there, big–and it tells the story and I call my wife, and my daughter-in-law got all excited and the next thing you know she's in the store buying all these magazines. Then a few days later I get this call from California. They'd like to interview me

for the D-Day Museum opening. I said sure why not. I was on Channel 7, I was on Channel 2. I've been on all these channels. I've got a lot of newspapers I've been on around in this neighborhood. In fact, some friends of mine just went to New Orleans, senior citizens. They went on a tour and they asked me, "Nick, tell me where it is." I said, "It's on the third floor," but they couldn't find it and they finally did find it and then he's telling these people–they're all senior citizens and they were all gathered around here, this was only a couple of weeks ago– "This fellow comes from our own home town, Congers. We didn't know he lived in Congers and that's how that…"

Oh, what was that other thing? Oh, the Forbes magazine. Then I got the call and they said, "You just sit still. We'll send a limousine to your house, pick you up and take you to 52nd Street and 5th Avenue, up in a big studio. We want to tape." Like you are doing only, they have bigger cameras and put a wire on my neck. The limousine picked us up and I talked to the guy. I said, "Is this limousine you are using only for celebrities?" and he was telling me, "I've taken President Nixon in this limousine and I've taken big movie stars. We don't cater to college proms." He said, "It costs you a lot of money to use it." So, I asked him how much would it cost because my nephew, my daughter's son, is Jewish and he's getting bar mitzvahed at Tavern on the Green and we're all invited, so I asked, "How much would it cost us to rent this to take us one way and then back–that would be 57th Street right off Central Park?" and he said, "$1800." One trip. That's what they charge. I said, "Forget about it." He took us to the city and they took me to this room and they asked me all kinds of questions. I must have been up there for two hours and the guy said to me, "I'm talking to you and you will not hear it. We'll just hear your voice." Now he gave me all kinds of questions and took pictures–you know some of the stuff that you've seen inside and I didn't have that with me. I don't remember if I had that with me and they sent me two tapes–one of the tapes had no interruptions, right through, the whole two hours, everything there. Now when it came onto the History Channel, they cut it, they just took the parts that fit into the… because there were other people on there. They sent me that–they sent me two tapes and plus my daughter, when I was in New Orleans, she taped. I was treated like a king in New Orleans and then I was on the podium–I was sitting here and guess who's sitting next to me on both sides? Tom Hanks and Stephen Spielberg. Because Stephen Spielberg made Private Ryan.

MR: Did you see that movie?
NFB: Yes.

MR: What did you think of it?
NFB: Even the beginning–it's ridiculous–the guy running around with his arm [raises left arm overhead] –that's overdoing it–and another guy running around with his guts hanging out. That's overdoing it. He's hollering, "Mama, Mama."

Well I hear guys hollering, "Mama," but the guy has his guts out; he's not going to be living. A lot of the Rangers–we go to reunions and we talk about it. Well, the Army would never have taken one section out of the Rangers to go look for one guy to get him home because the Rangers, when we landed in Omaha, we had one objective, Pointe du Hoc. Pointe du Hoc was a big thing–in fact we had artillery support. The USS Texas and the Arizona were our personal artillery support because they bombed the shit out of that place. In fact, they even saved the guys [unclear]. They threw so many shells into that cliff it practically was going up this way [moves left arm upward]. But when the 2nd Ranger Battalion got to the top, there were no guns there–the Germans had moved them. They had like telephone poles for guns, but they moved them back about a mile. And just happened [unclear], I see him so often–he's still alive and he and Sergeant Coon–he just passed away–were going with a few men up to this road because they see heavy tracks and there were the guns all ready to shoot ammunition all over the place and nobody there. About a hundred yards away there were about one hundred Germans. They were talking and eating, and they were getting ready to do something, so what he did was, Sergeant [unclear] got in there and he had a termite grenade and threw it into the breach, into the barrel, and you know what that did–it melted everything. He only had two, but there were six guns there, so he had to knock out the other four so he came back. He got a couple from the other guys in the back and they knocked out all the guns. Because these guns were facing Utah Beach. They could have been traversed to Omaha; that's why they wanted Pointe du Hoc captured, because those guns could fire on the Texas, they could fire on the Arizona, they could fire on the whole damn front. Today General Bradley had said, and it's in most of your books, "The Rangers had the worst objective in the whole Normandy invasion–those guns," but they didn't realize they weren't there. The French did find that they weren't there, but it was too late to get us because we were on our way. But the guns had been moved. When we got there they still had to hold on to a crossroad there so the Germans would… But Pointe du Hoc was between Utah and Omaha and they wanted a link up and we were in the middle–Pointe du Hoc was in the middle there. They wanted us to protect the road so the Germans wouldn't come in there. They wanted to keep us separated. But it never happened, they held on, so that's the story. And I had a good time.

Now I will tell you a story about Dinah Shore, which I never told. We were just outside St. Lo. I tell you the truth, in all the time I was in the service, in combat, overseas, I never saw a USO show. We always said, "If you are in the Air Corps, you see it." You don't see it, maybe if you're in the hospital. The rear echelon always saw it. It just happened this jeep pulled up and Dinah Shore was in there with two Captains or something and she was going to entertain us. This was just before we were going into St. Lo and [unclear] and they were pushing towards Paris. So, we got there and that's just before we went to Brest because they sent us to Brest, and she got on the jeep and no sooner had she sat on the jeep, "All

right, get your stuff ready, we're pulling out." But she's sitting on the jeep and the two Captains are mushing her up like mad, feeling her up. She said, "Now behave yourselves, boys." You know how she was. Jesus Christ, that's the only time I ever got close to… John Garfield came to the USO–I heard this from a guy up in the 4th because he was there–so he went there to entertain the troops. Just to show you how this government works… When he got out [unclear] he said, "First of all, ladies and gentlemen, before I start, all you people in the front, Colonels, Generals, you know, all brass, I will not entertain while you people are sitting there and all the GIs and wounded veterans are all back there. Have them come up here and you go back there." The next day they shipped him back to the States. That was John Garfield in those days.

[Holds up framed board with military medals displayed]

MR: Want to explain to us what you have there?
NFB: [Points to various medals] This, as you know, is New York State–I got it a few years ago. This is the original dog tag that we first got when we first went in the service, but they were taken away when we went overseas. But I kept mine because your address is on here–where you lived and they didn't want that to get in German hands. Now we come over here–this one and this one, two small towns in Normandy dedicated this to the Ranger Battalion, these two. Plus, the rest of the guys in Normandy, I don't remember. This is the Bronze Star. That's for gallantry, I don't know how I got it. Now this is the Purple Heart and that little thing in there is the oak leaf cluster which means you were hit twice. They don't give you a medal every time you get hit; they gave you a cluster. This is the Good Conduct Medal which everybody else gets. This is the German Occupation. This is the American Campaign. This we don't talk about. Now this one here is European Theatre of War. Now if you'll notice there's stars. Each star is a campaign and on the end, it has an arrowhead, and an arrowhead is for invasion. And that might be the Victory Medal, I don't know. And this right down here is the Presidential Citation with an oak leaf cluster. It's equivalent to the Medal of Honor only in a unit. We got a cluster–one was for Normandy, the other cluster was for the Zeef, that I told you about.

MR: Now you said the Ranger patch is the original?
NFB: [Points to patch] That's the original Ranger patch but the 1st, 3rd and 4th had this patch [points to another patch] in Italy. We didn't get this until we got into combat, so we landed in Normandy with this patch [points to original Ranger patch] and right after that it was taken away. Actually, during World War II, you didn't wear patches on both sleeves. Today they do I think, most of the service. In World War II, you only wore the patch on your left side. That's the only place you wore the patch. The Rangers were the only ones that wore patches on both sides. Course the English wore them on both sides. The Commandos had them on both sides, so we had them on both sides. Actually, if you were in the 9th

Division, 8th Division, wherever you were, you only wore it on this side. [points to left side] And that's the story.

MR: We want to thank you very much.