

**Charles Lester Cosgrove
Veteran**

**Jim Carozza,
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on January 31, 2003
at the Chemung Country Historical Society**

Q: Maybe I can just given my name and information. Do they want that in the tape too?

A: Algeria to Tunisia.

Q: Then they went into Sicily?

A: Then they went to Sicily. Then they ended up in the 7th Army going into southern France.

Q: They were constantly being reattached, if that's the proper term.

A: Yeah. They formed the 7th Army which landed at Marseille in southern France. All you hear about is the Normandy Invasion but there was another invasion to in southern France.

Q: That's right. That was a very important one.

A: Yeah. And, of course, we went on through it.

Q: He said they never went off of Sicily. They must have been reassigned.

A: Uh huh.

SOME TALK OFF THE CAMERA

Q: Les, as you know, this is a Library of Congress project and we're trying to get your thoughts about your experience in the service. So let me just tell the tape, I'm Jim Carozza. I'm conducting the interview for the Chemung County Historical Society. You go by Les?

A: I go by my middle name. Of course, when you go in the Army, you go by your first name whether you go by it or not - Charles.

Q: So, you're Charles.

A: Yes. but I am always called by my middle name.

Q: So, this is Charles Cosgrove.

A: In the Army, they called me Charlie but I don't go by that name. I go by my middle name Lester or Les.

Q: You have been going by that name all your life.

A: Yes. I went by it before I went in and after.

Q: OK. Basically, I've just got some guideline questions. Obviously, you've been trying to be interviewed for quite awhile.

A: I came in here about a month or so ago and she told me you'd follow up. Then I read the paper where you really got flooded with people to interview. I don't know really why I am doing this but my grandchildren and my boy and I'm almost 85. I'm 84 years old.

Q: You wear it well.

A: My days are short. In fact, I am trying to get this back because I'm in the middle of writing a book or a journal on these experiences mostly to give to my grandchildren. But, I have been approached by my division to do some writing on the experience of the Forward Observer. You don't read too much about Forward Observers.

Q: Forward Observer. Would you just describe that for myself?

A: A Forward Observer is a man that adjusts the artillery fire on the enemy. He does that. He has a radio operator with him. You get as far forward as you can. You are generally with the infantry or in front of the infantry or you're working with Partisans behind the lines, barricaded in a church steeple.

If it's going to be a tank attack, then you go out with the lead tank and adjust and keep the artillery fire...If you're in the ...If you're supporting an infantry unit, you go with the attacking platoon of the infantry to keep the fire, adjust the artillery fire in front of our infantry.

Q: Call back the coordinates?

A: Yeah. If you're on a static front like we were, on the Arno River in Italy, the Po River where the enemy is on one side and you're on the other side for days, then you're up in a Piper Cub flying over the German lines and adjusting the fire on the enemy from the Piper Cub.

Most Forward Observers. I was in the 1st Armored Division. That was my division. Most Forward Observers are 2nd Lieutenants but in an Armored Division they have a different table of organizations. The Forward Observers are generally 2nd Lieutenants and the Staff Sergeant, Reconnaissance Sergeant. That's what I was. You're generally a team. There's two men. One running the radio and one looking through the binoculars and adjusting the fire.

Sometimes I would go out with a Lieutenant and we would switch off duties. Other times, I would go out and I would have another enlisted man with me depending on who was available.

Q: What was your qualifications to be a Forward Observer? Obviously, you had to have...

A: I went in the Army under the Selective Service. I went in on February 12th of 1941. I had just come off of Carolina maneuvers and I had been in the Army ten months back to Fort Knox, Kentucky where we trained. That's the home of the Armored force.

I was laying on my bunk because they were discharging us Selective Service people early because back in those days they were shoving... bringing everybody into the draft, into the Army and they didn't have room. So instead of serving your full year, they were letting a lot of men out prior to that.

Now I had ten months and they told me I was going to be discharged . I was laying on my bunk there in a bed. It was Pearl Harbor Day, December 8th. I was laying there on a Sunday and they were even handing out discharges on a Sunday to get us out. I am laying there waiting for my discharge when it came over the radio about Pearl Harbor and about an hour later it came over the radio that all discharges, leaves, everything was cancelled.

Q: Wow.

A: So, I put another three and a half years on top of that.

Q: Let me ask you a question..

A: As a Forward Observer, I went into the 91st Field Artillery Battalion. There were three battalions in the division. I went into the 91st. There was other local boys in that battalion and a number of Corning. I originally came from Corning. I went into the 91st and the 68th Field and went into training down at Fort Knox. I was on maneuvers. My training was on hands training in the field with actually adjusting artillery fire.

Q: They weren't looking for engineering background.

A: No, no. Well, most of the 2nd Lieutenants were OCS. Not OCS. ROTC. Most of our officers were ROTC. Then we had some 90 Day Wonders. OTC.

Q: As the war progressed, there were more and more 90 day wonders as the term goes.

A: I had a couple of opportunities for a field commission which I turned down because I was on the top of the list to come home in rotation. But, if I had accepted the commission, I would have been the lowest ranking 2nd Lieutenant in my division.

So, I ended up the same as a Staff Sergeant although at one point I did reach Top Sergeant but it was a temporary deal back in the states after I was sent home. That's another story in itself.

Q: As we progress, feel free to tell it.

A: That's down the line. In my training actually as a Forward Observer, I was a Reconnaissance Sergeant. My job was in an Armored Division as the tanks and infantry move forward and the artillery was... we had self propelled artillery. We had 105mm mounted on tank chassis. My job was to locate good artillery positions that had defilade or screen.

Q: Defilade - like camouflage.

A: That's when you've got ground high bank in front of you so the enemy can't shoot at you directly. You'd have to shoot up over. My job as Recon Sergeant as you advanced was to select positions and I was in charge of the fire direction section of men adjusting with aiming circles and transits, adjust the guns as they come in. After that, when everything was settled down if they needed me, then I went out as a Forward Observer to adjust that fire on the enemy. That's basically what my job was in North Africa.

Q: It was a very important job. A very dangerous job too I might say.

A: Yeah. My career started of course.

Q: Your military career.

A: My military time started by pulling out of Corning on a train back there in February 12th of 1941 and went to Fort Niagara or went to Buffalo and they took us to the Hotel Buffalo all the local guys on the train. Then they swore us in. They took us to Fort Niagara. Then., at Fort Niagara, two days later loaded us on trains and took us to Fort Knox, Kentucky.

At this point, Word War II, we were not in the war.

Q: Correct.

A: At Fort Knox, Kentucky, it was a cavalry post and, of course, that where the gold vault is. When I arrived there, they were still riding horses. Calvary is also tanks so they had to get rid of the horses and bring in the tanks.

So, we formed the 1st Armored Division - the first tank division. I was in it when it was formed and we went immediately to Louisiana on Louisiana maneuvers in the summer of 1941 and maneuvered there. I was in the battle of the red and the blue armies capturing Shreveport. Maneuvers ended there and we moved all the way to the Carolinas. We had another month or so of maneuvers.

During that period in between transferring from Louisiana to Carolina, my father had died and they couldn't locate me of course I was in between. When they finally located me, they had held the funeral for him so I had a chance to come home for a few days after the funeral.

After the Carolina maneuvers, we went back to Fort Knox and that's when I told you about laying there in the bunk waiting to be discharged.

Q: That's when they were going to start mustering people out.

A: Then they loaded us straight on trains, not on trains. We took all of our track vehicles we loaded onto flat cars - tanks and half tracks. All of our wheeled vehicles we drove from Fort Knox to Fort Dix, New Jersey. At Fort Dix, we were only there a short time. We were guarding installations up and down the coast there temporarily. If you remember the story about the Japanese and Germans that were going to sabotage New York City.

Q: Right

A: We were involved in that.

Q: Protecting the industrial sites, navy yards?

A: We were involved in that guarding that for awhile then we loaded on a ship and went to Ireland. When we left we thought we were going right into the fight. We landed in Belfast, Northern Ireland and we were moved inland to. You want me to tell it like this is?

Q: I like it.

A: I'm just hitting the high spots.

Q: Let me interrupt you for a second. They give me some leading questions just in case your memory is a little slow but your memory is not!

A: The only thing that's left on me is my memory!

Q: This is excellent. I think this is a good way for you to get your story out.

A: You will hear something about Northern Ireland that very few people in the world know about that was hushed up. We were sent to Northern Ireland and we landed in Belfast and they loaded us on trains.

I've got a little story here. We landed in Belfast. We marched after they took us off the ship. They marched us through Belfast. As we were marching down the main street here's a big sign that says Cosgrove's Pub.

Q: Wow, so you're of Irish ancestry?

A: Yes, I'm related to the first president of Ireland.(William Thomas) Cosgrove. The first president of the Free State. Anyhow, my buddies all said it that any relation? I said I don't know but if we get a chance, we're going to find out.

A: Most certainly.

Q: Anyway, we went on a train down to southern Ireland and eventually ended up into a little town called Killeel and Newry which is on the border of the Free State and Northern Ireland.

The war is on, of course, at this point and the Free State was neutral supposedly.

Q: And maybe with some German favoritism?

A: That's what happened. We didn't know this.

The second night we were there, the IRA came across the border and shot up our motor pool. I wrote home and told my mother my ancestors over here are shooting at me.

Anyhow, all they were after was ammunition and arms and so forth. After awhile, they moved us back to Newcastle, Ireland then back to Belfast. Then they loaded us on cattle barges and took us across the Irish Sea.

Q: The Irish Sea.

A: The Irish Sea to Scotland. We landed at Stranaer Scotland and they moved us to Glasgow. We were there for a few days then they loaded us on trains and took us to Newcastle, England. That was an area full of war factories and so forth.

We were there and maneuvering around the country side there and had chances occasionally to go into London on pass. Now, London, at this time is the point in time between the blitz and what was the things they fired over - The V Bombs

Q: Right.

A: So, it was sort of a quiet period and it was real enjoyable. But occasionally a few German bombers would come over and a couple of times on pass was really our first experience of combat.

Q: Potential danger other than the IRA night raid.

A: What happened with the IRA they eventually agreed. What was happening was that the Germans were using their ports to refuel their submarines. They were supposed to be neutral.

Q: For the North Atlantic.

A: And their neutral. When we threatened to invade southern Ireland and they said ok we're going to be like Switzerland. We're going to be neutral. No country at war will use our port. No submarines, battleships will use our ports. So, from that point on there was no problem.

In fact, there were a number of Irish Brigades from southern Ireland which did fight against the Germans even though they were a neutral country. They were volunteer brigades. There were a lot of Irish from Northern Ireland in the British Army mostly in the British 8th Army.

We went there to England and from England we loaded, they moved us to Liverpool where we loaded on boats there. As they loaded the boats, the men with the boats would pull out in the harbor and they would drop anchor until the convoy was all ready to go. They give the signal to go and everybody goes but us. Our anchor was fouled.

Q: What do you mean fouled? It just wasn't working properly?

A: They couldn't get it up. It hung up on the bottom. So, the convoy couldn't wait. This is the invasion convoy for North Africa.

Q: Right, you can't wait for one ship.

A: So, the convoy takes off and leaves us there. Of course, at that time, we met a convoy coming over from the US.

It took them almost two days. They had to send divers down to free that anchor. We sailed with this big troop ship right off the coast of France with no escorts or nothing through German wolf packs.

Q: Yourself and a big troop transport

A: Yes a big transport. It was the *Duchess of Richmond* was the name of the boat.

Q: You had to be nervous.

A: Just as we were going through the Strait of Gibraltar getting ready to land, they sunk the ship behind us. (unclear). We just caught up with the convoy just as it was about to enter the Strait of Gibraltar. Just as we caught up with the convoy, we were attacked by German submarines.

That boat that they sank was full of ATS girls. They were like our WACS loaded with girls from England.

Q. They were in the service. Woman in the service.

A: They saved most of them. I think there were very few of them. The destroyers picked them up (unclear) but they did raise that submarine, forced it to the surface the next day.

Q: Really.

A: So, we land at Oran.

Q: That's Tunisia?

A: No, that's in Algeria.

Q: Oran.

A: Round the corner of Africa, Patton and the 2nd Armor. I was in the 1st Armored. The 2nd Armored landed in Casablanca. So, then we eventually joined up and defeated the Germans there. When we went into there, we went in with the 1st Infantry Division - The Big Red One and the 9th Infantry Division.

At that point in Africa, we never had an Army, we only had a Corp - the II Corp - just enough American divisions to make up a Corp. A Corp is generally three or more divisions -generally around five divisions in a Corp. Generally, Three or more corps makes an Army. (unclear) only had the II Corp in Africa.

The 5th Army originated when we landed, of course, in Italy. But then we landed there in North Africa our other field artillery battalion went in days ahead of us and took a terrible beating. Our infantry was practically annihilated because we were supposed to land in North Africa unopposed.

The Free French. The northern part of Africa. That part of Africa was Vichy France ok but General Clark and a few men who had landed by submarine there days before the invasion supposedly had made arrangements that we were to come in unopposed.

Q: The Vichy would not put up a fight.

A: They changed their minds at the last minute and sank the first three boats that went in the harbor full of men. The rest of the boats went up and landed and eventually we captured Oran coming around from the rear. We'd only see there were no Germans there maybe a few from their Armistice Commission. High ranking.

Q: Just trying to keep an eye on the Vichy governments?

A: The only troops that we fought were French. They had old tanks from World War I. Their equipment was quite obsolete but they put up quite a fight. When we captured that, we captured Oran. The 2nd Armored captured Casablanca then there was nothing until you went about 1500, 1600 miles across North Africa to Tunisia.

Q: Let me interrupt you for a second. In your capacity as Forward Artillery Observer - now I assume that this is pretty much desert terrain.

A: Yes. North Africa and the desert is separated by the Atlas Mountains. All across North Africa is a string of mountains the Atlas Mountains. From the mountains to the sea varies at points of 50 to 100 miles width and that's a very fertile section. But once you got into Tunisia, you ran out of the edge of those you were into the desert.

Q: What could you do to decide where the artillery should be placed in the desert. What was the ...

A: What you did as an observer, you were called upon by the infantry or by the tanks. We had different observers looking for different things. A Forward Observer in our division is given a call sign of "Fox" . My call sign was like "Fox 12". "Fox 1" was our colonel who was in the air all the time - a very brave man.

Until an artillery observer spots enemy artillery, or enemy tanks or enemy infantry then, of course, his job is to immediately get artillery fire on to that. If I'm adjusting the artillery of my particular battery - which is six guns. If I'm just out as an observer for just my battery, I'd just look for TO "targets of opportunity".

Q: You're more or less trying to find targets as opposed....

A: If, in front of me, is a regiment of the 9th infantry division, I'd go out and I'd contact the company commander and find out which regiment or which company is going to attack and where they want me and where they want their artillery fire. If they wanted a barrage ahead of them or just go along with them and only when they run into a strong point , a machine gun nest or something like that, they'll call on me to do it or unless I see it myself through my binoculars.

It's the same way if it's going to be a tank attack. I have a radio and I'm in contact with the tank commander whether it's a Captain or Lieutenant.

Q: Your guns. Your batteries. They would be following you?

A: Yeah. In an armored division, there are three battalions of artillery. I was in the 91st Battalion. It has three batteries. Each battery has six guns or a total of 18 guns. Then you have two other battalions which have 18 guns-the 68th and 27th.

If you're like on a static front or in the same position for days, your battery might be just firing what we call "harassing fire". Out there somewhere is a crossroad that they enemy is using all the time you just fire live barrages up and down like that and then move it. You can either do that by direct observation by my seeing it or you can do it from map data. They have sounding equipment that can locate enemy guns if you can't see it by the sound and the flash. You transpose that to your map and you can see on the map that maybe there's a deep gully which is a natural place to put an artillery. So, you just fire on that from your map data. That's how artillery fire is placed on the enemy.

Q: There's a method.

A: Most of it is corrected by an observer. There were times when I was in Italy - up in northern Italy, when we went ahead of the infantry and when we took the town of Pontedera on the Arno

River. We tried to capture Pisa directly. We couldn't so we went up river to capture the town of Pontedera.

We hadn't taken Pontedera yet and there was a young Italian girl that came to us that was familiar with the town. She lead me, the Lieutenant and the radio operator through the lines at night and we got in this church steeple. We took a platoon of infantry with us and we barricaded ourselves in the church and the enemy is all around us.

Q: The Germans.

A: They didn't know we were in there but we could look down and see them. We were in a good position then to take the town or we could really knock anything out that opposed the infantry.

Q: Now this would have been approximately what time were you in northern Italy? 1944?

A: Yeah. All of '44. I'm just getting ahead of myself.

Q: We can go back at any time. Basically, the Germans were the ones who were holding Italy. the Italians army was...

A: Oh yeah. There were a few Italian units that fought with them right through the end. I forget the name of the Italian division. They were die hard fascists . Mostly all of the Italian men belonged to the Fascist party but that didn't mean anything. It was like our unions. If you didn't belong to the union, you didn't work. If you didn't belong to the Fascist party, you didn't work in Italy. I had that explained to me. Only a very few of them were really die hard supporters of Fascism.

Q: Or Mussolini or the war in general.

Let me interrupt you for a second just to get some basic details down. You enlisted in the army.

A: Yes, to get my year over. The work was bad. I was working at Corning Glass at the time living in Corning. Work was slow. I could see where I was going to be drafted so I said this was a good time to get my year over with. That's how I come in. So, I enlisted.

Of the about a hundred of us who went in under that contingent from Corning, I would say probably eighty of them were volunteers.

Q: Why did you chose the army branch of service?

A: That's a good question. I really don't know. My father was in the army in World War I over in France but that's not the reason I went in it. He never talked about it. I think that, at that point in time, under the draft act, the majority were going into the army.

Q: That was the service that they were trying to fill.

A: That's where the most were needed. If you went in under the draft act, you went where you were told.

Q: Went where you were assigned.

A: If you wanted to go in the navy, I would had to enlist for three years. You can't enlist under the draft act. You go in, serve a year, and come out but you go where they tell you to go. So, that's the reason.

Q: You already discussed your first few days in the service. Actually your first year, you were part of this new armored battalion. You were gone from Louisiana to Carolinas.

A: They got rid of the horses and brought in the World War I tanks. Then they started bringing in some of the new tanks.

Q: Let me ask you, your instructors at Knox, they had to be old cavalry instructors.

A: They all were old cavalry men, horsemen. Some of them were- they did have some tanks in World War I. Some of them, like Patton, were tankers and had training in the old World War I tanks.

Q: So, how were your feeling towards your instructors and vice versa about obviously this changing technology. Were they willing to try and adapt to the armored division?

A: Yes. They were either West Pointers or men with college education. They were smart enough to know the days of the horses were gone. No more Indians to fight. You don't need tanks to fight Indians.

Q: OK. My next question but you've been answering them describing where you were in the service and we'll get back to that. Obviously, you told me you did see combat.

I'm amazed that your dangerous position. I'm not amazed it was a dangerous position. The question is were there many casualties in your unit? I've got to believe, obviously, yes.

A: As we landed in Tunisia, we went across...I went on a flat car in the back end of a half track all the way across North Africa. We were jumped a couple of times by German airplanes, Messerschmitts. Most of the time, we were escorted by British Beaufighters. The train going across. We pulled into a rail head at..I can't think of the name of the town now.

Q: My geography of North Africa....

A: Anyhow, it's a short drive from there to the town of Sbeitla. If you saw the movie "Patton".

Q: Yeah.

A: When Patton was driving a long in a jeep and he says "Stop, the battle is over here", he went over there and there are ruins. He says, " I was there and fought" . That movie was in those ruins exact ruins. The move was made right there and that was my first position right in those ruins.

Then, I went on a reconnaissance the next day with a Lieutenant and a Captain to the town of Sidi Bouzid where we ran into the first Germans to make contact with the French who were holding a pass. At this point in time the French had decided to fight, the organized French decided to fight against the Germans.

Q: With the allies.

A: So they pulled back and were holding this pass until they got there. Faid Pass.

Q: What present day country is Bouzid in? Do you know?

A: Sidi Bouzid?

Q: Yes.

A: That's Tunisia. Its beyond Kasserine Pass. We went through Kasserine to Sidi Bouzid. We took out first casualties going to Sidi Bouzid the next day after I came back from the reconnaissance. We made contact where to put the guns the next day. We were bombed and strafed from that point on almost every day. There were very few American planes over at that point. When an airplane came, you automatically shot at it. You didn't wait to identify it because it was German.

Q: They had been in North Africa for two years at least.

A: The 8th Army was fighting. Rommel was fighting the 8th Army further down the coast. This was the point in El Alamein when Montgomery finally broke through and was pushing Rommel north into us. There was a continuous buildup of units appearing on our front that were retreating from fighting the British 8th Army.

There was a lot of activity in that area. The first day we pulled in we were on a forward slope of a hill which you never do with artillery on a forward slope because they're looking straight at you.

Q: You mentioned earlier.

A: We didn't pick that position. We were told to take it. We lost our first men the day before in a minefield. Bert (unclear). He was from the (unclear) family - a very prominent family from western New York, New Jersey. He ran over a mine. We took a bunch of casualties the next day when we were...we took a terrific pasting on that forward slope from German self propelled guns. That's what we had was self propelled artillery.

Q: You were exposed to their guns.

A: We took it for a couple of hours. We had a number of wounded and loss of equipment. We had to pull back about a half a mile but we learned our first lesson there- we don't move toward the enemy until you have your forward observer out in front of you. So, we were caught with no observer out there. (unclear) So, finally an observer on a hill to our right with the 1st Infantry spotted the German guns that were shooting at us and adjusted one of our other batteries.

In artillery, if you are shelling an enemy battery and he's shelling you, you call that a duel. The men had their choice. They could stay at their guns through the shelling and fight it out guns against guns which we did later on when we became more competent or you could get in your holes and let one of our other batteries that wasn't being shelled knock it out.

Q: Hopefully, at a better angle.

A: So, that's what happened there. One of our other batteries knocked the German battery out.

We were supposed to land there and go right on through and take Tunis and Bizerte but, of course, the whole German army was there. They broke out of the pass this one morning very early. The night before they broke out, I was out on an observation post and I could hear tanks. I knew from the sound, they weren't our tanks. So, I radioed back and they gave me the answer that they were our tanks which it wasn't.

When dawn came, it's a whole German Panzer division coming out of the pass straight at us.

Q: Just yourself and your radio operator.

A: I was out there alone at that time. The captain sent me out. We had put an anti-tank gun out on our front and he wasn't reporting in. They hadn't run a telephone line to him and he had just one of these hand set walkie-talkies.

He didn't report in so the captain told me to go out and find him and see what the story was. While I was there, I spotted all these German tanks coming. I am watching them and I tried to raise the battery on the radio and I couldn't.

About that time, I hear a noise and look and here comes a bunch of German tanks from the other side, from another pass.

Q: You're out there by yourself?

A: Yes. I am out there by myself at this point. I got up on a knoll and I could see a bunch of our men that they had already captured. They spotted me immediately. They come right up in a tank and this blond headed German gets out of the tank and says you're a prisoner of the Third Reich. He took my pistol and took my class ring and I give him a...

Q: Is he speaking English or German?

A: Very fluent English. He said I'm taking your ring because if I don't take it, one of the rear echelon boys is going to take it. I said if that's going to be the story, I would rather you would have it. He pointed back to where that bunch of prisoners were and said you walk back and join them. Then he took right on off.

Finally, after he took off, I started to go back towards this group and I didn't see the tank any more so I figured I could walk back to my outfit and that's what I did. They never spotted me. I ran a couple of hundred yards. I saw another tank and I went and ran into an Arab tent there. Some Arabs motioned for me to come into the tent. I went into the tent and there was three GI's already in the tent that were hiding also. He was hiding us from the Germans.

I was in the tent there maybe a half hour. There was kind of a lull in the battle. The shooting had subsided a little. We could see more tanks coming and German infantry. I said oh oh, we were going to get captured again.

Q: So, the Germans would leave the Arabs alone?

A: Yes. The Arabs they helped the Germans and they helped us. They just wanted to see a good fight. You could never rely on them. I'll tell you another story about them later. Anyhow, I look out and saw this infantry coming in the distance. I knew there was a deep wadi just about 50 yards away. I figured that if we got into the wadi, we could get back around...

Q: A wadi is like a ravine.

A: In the rainy season there's water, it becomes a river.

The guys in the tent I said I don't know about you guys but I am going out of this tent and run like hell to that wadi. Two of them did and one guy said no I'm going to get machined gunned if I run out. He stayed in the tent and was captured again. He spent the whole war in a prison camp.

We ran and got into the ravine. They never spotted us. I got back in my outfit. They were just getting ready to pull back because they could see the German tanks. Back through the town of Sidi Bouzid.

Then all the infantry and tanks. There were tremendous tank battles going on all around us. We lost over 200 tanks within a matter of just a few hours. Tanks were running all over the place. All of our infantry on the mountains in front of us are all mostly the 1st Infantry Division and infantry from our division, the 6th were encircled so there was no way to relieve them. My battery fought the rear guard action going back through Sidi Bouzid.

Q: To help support the retreat.

A: Back to a place called Kerns Crossroads. That was probably in the World War II history we set up our first defense there where we finally slowed the onslaught. Stragglers would drift through each hour. A tank would make it back through or a bunch of infantry or an artillery piece.

We lostB Battery, my B battery was to our left. We lost the whole battery. They were overrun completely all taken prisoner guns and everything - a hundred and some men. We only lost two tanks on the retreat back. They were fired at by direct fire by German tanks. We lost two of our tanks. We got to Kerns crossroad we ran into the 68th Field. They had their guns in place so we joined them at that point and put up a defense.

Then we pulled back the next day to the very same ruins in Sbeitla where we had started out a week or so before and then we got orders to move back through Kasserine Pass. Then, you know all about the Battle of Kasserine Pass that's where Rommel was finally defeated in North Africa. It was his first real big defeat.

After we stopped him there at Kasserine Pass, we were moved all the way north because the German 1st Army was up in the northern part up around Bizerte at that time. We were in a position up there near the town of....it was before you get to Mateur but we went through the valley there where there was the Battle of Hill 609 which was in Life Magazine. I should have brought that with me - a whole page in Life Magazine showing the exact stone fence that I was behind in the battle.

Q: Let me say something here Les. Your recall is excellent. Your memory obviously is excellent. You're remembering the battalions and the cities. Do you go over this a lot in your mind or is this something that..

A: No, once and awhile.

Q: You're trying to put some research...

A: For years, I went through like a lot of men had battle dreams which eventually disappeared over a period of time but that is embedded in my mind that whole experience. Once and awhile something will trigger it and I will think about a certain situation that I can refer to that happened. Then I will remember a few things that I didn't remember before. I kept diaries but I don't have them. I lost them in the '72 flood here.

Q: What a shame.

A: I had a lot of pictures and a lot of my souvenirs and everything.

Q: Maybe the act of just writing it down has really helped your recall at this state.

A: I had written articles that went into our division puts out a journal type of thing; a couple three times a year. We have division conventions each year. They've asked me to do different things. I submitted things that are in this book here. In fact, I just went through this book (opens book). I lost the cover.

As I'm telling you. There's Mateur (points to picture in book) which I was just talking about. There's Ernie Pyle right there. This is men from my battery. That's their names I wrote down.

Q: You've written down the names of each person even though there is no captions.

A: Ernie Pyle.

Q: The famous journalist.

A: He was with us on a couple of occasions.

Q: This is a great resource for your own memory.

A: Yes. That's near the town of Livorno - Leghorn. When they knew we were going to invade Italy, they sent me to a place in Algiers where they were going to teach me Italian - to speak Italian in about a week.

The only problem is they taught me ...they thought we were going to land down in the southern part of Calabria where they speak Calabrese. They taught me Calabrese but we didn't land there. If you are ever in Italy, there are about eight dialects.

Q: Numerous dialects.

A: I mean they are so different. For example, the word to understand (unclear, speaks Italian) depending on where you are.

Q: Italy is sectioned off by mountains with their own little cultures.

A: There's my battery right there (points to book) you can see them right down the line. That was on the Gothic Line.

Q: That's what it says. Fascinating. This is a great little book.

A: This is my division history.

Q: When was this book written and published. Right after the war?

A: Yes. It probably tells you right in front here somewhere.

Q: 1954. George Howell took quite a while to compile this but obviously it's a nice accurate....

A: There's the ruins right there. The Roman ruins in Sbeitla.

Q: There they are.

A: Right here. We had a position right here.

Q: It says a bridge but looks like an aqueduct.

A: That is an aqueduct. That's wrong. (Unclear)

Q: You mentioned that one of the guys in the tent you were there with the Arabs was captured. Were they shipped back to Germany for incarceration?

A: All of our men that were there taken prisoner were flown out of Africa back to Italy and they were put on trains.

Q: You were never able to find out his final fate by any chance. Did you ever correspond with that gentleman?

A: Oh yeah, I saw him after the war.

Q: Is that right?

A: At one of our conventions.

Q: Does he regret not making a dash?

A: Oh yes. He damn near died nearly starving to death but he had no animosity towards the Germans because he said his guards were starving to death too. They just didn't have the food to give them.

Q: Right.

A: Let's see. This is. I am trying to find a picture of me.

Q: How about you? Did you have any animosity towards the Germans?

A: No. I had great admiration for their fighting ability (unclear). I never got even with the Japanese for killing my brother.

These are generals that we captured - Von Armin (again, pointing at book).

Q: I just got to check the tape Les. We only got an hour and I want to put a new one on. OK. We've just got a few more seconds and then we'll put a new one on.

My father said the same thing. He had no animosity towards the Germans. They were doing what they thought they should be doing.

A: The German soldier would fight until he fired his last bullet and only then would he surrender and he would surrender when he couldn't do any more damage but not until then. But I understand the Japanese they just would not surrender. Period. Because they believed also that they would go to heaven I guess if they gave their life for their emperor.

Q: From what I read, that's what their opinion was.

A: (unclear)

Q: This says it's still recording so I guess we'll just keep that one in there for a few more minutes.

A: There's a picture of me in here.

Q: There's a picture of you in there?

A: Yep.

Q: I'd like to see that.

A: You're not going to recognize me. I know it's me because (unclear) taken from the rear. It was right in front of Cassino when we were shelling Monte Cassino.

Q: You were involved in that action also?

A: Oh yeah. Anzio and...there's an 88 there and a Tiger tank.

Q: Look at the size of that gun.

A: That's the only good picture I have seen of a Tiger tank. Right there.

There's Faid Pass taken from the German side. We were down in here. These are mountains in front here. They'd hide behind here. The road goes this way. That's Faid Pass.

Q: You're right, the terrain is quite more mountainous than I would have assumed.

A: That's the Atlas Mountains. That's really the only mountain range there.

Q: There's a nice picture of you.

A: Yes. That was taken in Rome, Italy after I came out of the hospital. Is that the only picture? That's not the best. Is that the only picture? That one there is the better one.

Q: So yourself..

A: This is me right here (points to book) with Joe (unclear)

END OF FIRST PART OF TAPE.

A: ...form the Corning Glass Works disease (unclear)

Q: OK. Les, we're back on the camera. I think you were just telling me that your mother had lived a long time after the war and seen you and your brothers military service.

Is there anything else you wanted to tell me out of this is the Division history book?

A: I was just showing this here. There's a good map came down along here and landed here.

Q: Your action in North Africa.

A: Then came all the way across to Tunisia. This will give you a better idea. This is that long railroad deal on the train going to Tunisia. We had fighting down here then going back up north.

When we defeated the Germans at Kasserine Pass, we moved up to get into our last stages. Our objective was to take Bizerte and the British were to take Tunis which we did after a couple of weeks of very hard fighting and very heavy casualties.

Q: Your unit suffered many large casualties?

A: Yes. We lost large numbers of casualties there fighting on Hill 609. I was an observer and I was run off that hill three different times. We'd take it then the Germans would counterattack and run us off. It happened three times and we finally held it.

Then after we did hold it the last time we were able then having that height we were able to see all the way to Mateur.

Q: Mateur.

A: Mateur is on the way to....that's breaking down out of the mountains and onto the planes. We took Mateur, the city of Mateur, as we were coming out of.

Q: Basically, you've got the Germans cut off right here.

A: Yeah.

Q: How many Germans were actually captured in Africa? Do you have any idea?

A: Yes. There was a couple hundred thousand. The whole army. Actually two armies - The Afrika Corp and the German 1st Army.

Q: This was the first time the German army really had dealt with defeat. This was before Russia, I believe.

A: Yes. Right. Russia was about to happen or was happening. Kursk at that particular time.

But, we captured the city of Mateur. As we were pulling out of Mateur an incident happened there. We come under fire from some German tanks on the hill above us and we heard a lot of shooting on the other side of the hill. It was three P-38's our own planes shooting.

We had advanced way ahead of our own people on the other side of the hill. Our fighter planes were strafing the Germans on the other side they jumped up over the hill and spotted us and thought we were Germans.

Q: So, you were strafed?

A: They banked and came around. I had the back door of my halftrack open. I looked out back right into the propellers of the first P-38. He strafed our whole column and set our half track on fire and some of the men got slightly wounded. Nobody was hurt seriously. The second plane - then he stopped firing he realized the mistake and wagged his wings. The second plane had just started firing and he stopped and then the third plane didn't fire at all. They circled around and came back to wag their wings at us to let us know they made a mistake. When they did that, our captain got all shook up and said throw out a yellow smoke grenade for identification. I said "No, no, no don't do that." He did anyhow and when he did a German battery forward observer spotted us then they really started landing artillery on us and the Captain said, "get out there and cover up that smoke grenade."

We went on and took the town of Ferryville at the end of the lake there and fought all the way on up and took the port of Bizerte which was one of your larger cities in North Africa.

Q: Obviously a key strategic...

A: Bizerte and Tunis are about the same size. They are the largest cities in Tunisia - the two largest cities. Then that ended the African Campaign. We ended up with all these...there's Mateur (points to book) . Here's all the prisoners there, thousands of them.

Q: Yes, you can see that from...

A: For a few days after the campaign ended there, my division was camped right over here, bivouacked and each day had to send men down to guard these prisoners.

I had a funny thing happen there. I had a kid in my outfit whose name was Mike Gross and he was from Long Island and spoke very fluent German. He and I were in one of these towers here one day and there were a couple of Germans who would walk up to the foot of the tower and yell up at us in German. I would ask Mike what are they saying. He said they were swearing at us calling us "SOBs" and so forth.

I said, "I'll put an end to that" . I looked around for my tommy gun. He said, "What are you going to do?". I said, "I'm going to just scare them." He said, 'No, no, no, I will take care of it."

So, we get back to my outfit over here the next day, he's up in a olive tree with a saw and he's making himself a slingshot. He picks these hard olives off the tree and puts them in his sack. The next day when we are in the tower, the same German prisoners came up to the bottom of the tower and they're swearing again and they are all with shaved heads now. The whole Afrika Corp had shaved heads. He put an olive in and poked him in the head. That ended that.

Q: That didn't violate the Geneva Treaty

A: No, that ended that. It kind of funny.

Anyhow, believe it or not here we go again, when the campaign ends...where's the map? All the way back to Rabat in French Morocco.

Q: I see that. It's the length of the Mediterranean Sea.

A: In the meantime, Patton was putting the 7th Army together to take Sicily. We didn't get in on that, the Sicily fighting. Then, we were there for a couple of months getting ready. We went to....some of the convoys left out of Oran. We went all the way back again to Algiers on that same railroad loaded on ships and went in on the invasion of Italy.

Q: Anzio

A: Salerno.

Q: Let me ask you a question. Between the North African Campaign and the Italian invasion what did you do in Rabat. Maneuver? Train?

A: In Rabat, we were right here on the tip of Spanish Morocco. Spanish Morocco was neutral and Spain was neutral.

Q: Correct.

A: And Portugal wasn't. Portugal followed us. There was always a fear that Spain and the other side which was Spanish Morocco would shut the Strait of Gibraltar.

Q: The Strait of Gibraltar off.

A: They always had to have a big force here to make sure that the strait stayed open.

Q: Makes sense.

A: So, when we pulled out another outfit from the states came in and took that duty over. That's why we went back there really.

Q: Did you have any opportunity for leave between the North Africa...

A: We used to go into town in Rabat. Rabat is where the sultan's palace is. It's beautiful city. I have a picture in here with palm trees. We were bivouacked on the edge of town. I thought there was.

Q: It looks like the weather would have been very nice because you has the ocean breezes.

A: The weather was very nice. It was real hot when we were down in the southern part of Tunisia fighting. We were right on the edge of the Sahara Desert there. That was very hot there. You can see the Atlas Mountains. They're snow capped.

Q: I noticed that. I didn't realize that.

A: It's in there. When you try to find something in there, you can't do it. There's a picture of Rabat where the sultan's palace is.

We'd go in and have leave there. Where we were bivouacked outside of Rabat, we were right near a little harbor which had all sand beach and beautiful swimming. The little harbor was full of octopus and we would go out and catch octopus.

Q: You mentioned earlier about your friend.

A: That's the vehicle there that he was in.

Q: I see that. He died because of a land mine.

A: Yes. That's the vehicle he was in. He ran into this off the road. We were being strafed by German planes and the Captain told him to find a place for us to get off the road. He drove into this area where there was a French soldier standing there who only spoke French and he was yelling something at Bert apparently telling him it was a mine field and he didn't know what he was saying. He drove in and drove right on a mine.

Q: Wow. In your narrative here, you were in the forefront of a lot of fighting. Were you awarded any medals or citations?

A: Yes. I have the Bronze Star. I have the Purple Heart. I have the American Defense Medal, the European African Campaign Medal and the Good Conduct Medal and the POW Medal.

Q: Maybe you haven't told me that part yet. Were you an actual POW?

A: They considered me a...

Q: You had been...

A: There's a question there because my Captain said he put it in for the POW Medal. Then they said to be an official Prisoner of War, the enemy has to have your serial number recorded. We didn't know it at the time but when they brought us back after this ended, they were interviewing us that were overrun by the Germans asking us. We didn't know what it was all about. If we said, yes if they had taken us POW, we wouldn't have to fight anymore because once you're a prisoner of war if you escape or are released, if they capture you a second time then they have right to shoot you.

Q: I see.

A: So, they don't put you in that.

Q: They want you in that situation.

A: So, he didn't ask me. He didn't have time. He jumped out of the tank.

Q: He took your class ring.

A: My pistol. My money.

Q: Was it your high school class ring?

A: Yes, it was my high school class ring. We had all those thousands of prisoners. I went all over trying to find that German. I never could find him. So, that's the same ring right there. No, that's not the one. The other one.

They took the class ring and this one. This is a duplicate from my first wife I had. She got me another one.

Q: Speaking of your family, how did you keep in touch with them during the war?

A: Vmail! Writing. It was the only way.

Q: Your brothers were in the other branch of the service.

A: Yes. Once in awhile, I would get a letter from one of my brothers, Roland, who was in the submarine. In fact, when he went in the service, I was already in. When he told me he was going to join up, I told him if you are going to get in the service make sure you don't get in the infantry in the Army. So, when I heard he was in the Navy, I felt a lot better but I didn't know he was going in the submarines.

Q: As you mentioned, where was his submarine sunk?

A: It was sunk in the Battle of Makassar Straits I think it was. His submarine was....the Japanese fleet was coming down from the north. They intercept the fleet in the straits. The captain of the submarine got orders to move his sub through the straits at night and he refused it because the straits were mined. Every time he refused the order, it came down from a higher source. Finally, I think the admiral of the fleet or somebody who said to take that sub through. When he did, he hit a mine. There were only about six or seven..six, I think, six survivors. They were the ones..they went through the straits at night with just the conning tower out of the water. Those that were in the conning tower were blown up out of the tower into the water. They were the only survivors.

The captain came to visit my mother after the war because they always listed him as missing because there were no bodies. But he came and said he didn't survive. There's no way he could have. The sub went down immediately and the only survivors were the ones with him.

Q: The captain visited every one of the...

A: Yes. He went around and visited all of the families who lost a son.

Q: Let me just make sure we're recording properly here. Very good. Now, if you wanted to continue, I'd like to hear about the Italian campaign.

A: Ok. Then we left Algiers and landed there north of Salerno. Then we bypassed Naples (Napoli) and went through to cross the Volturno River at Caserta and went right on up to the Mignano Gap which is 15 miles south of Cassino where the Germans had put up their big resistance. The (unclear) Line. This was around Christmas. It started to snow.

Q: Christmas of '44. No '43. Christmas of '43.

A: '43. We did a lot of heavy fighting there trying to take a town called San Pietro. We lost some of our own men there. We lost one of our own Lieutenants who had been a staff sergeant in North Africa and who had gone back to OCS after the Africa campaign went to OCS and came back to us as a 2nd Lieutenant.

We were out on this hill just short of Cassino. We were spotted by German artillery (unclear). He was killed instantly. There was another sergeant and myself we hauled him back.

The next day, we lost our Captain. He stepped on a mine- an S-Mine. SCHU.

Q: What's a SCHU mine?

A: There called SCHU - S-C-H-U but we called them SHOE, S-H-O-E. They're a mine, an anti-personnel mine, you step on them and you hear a pop. The mine shoots up in the air and it gets about six or seven feet in the air and explodes and shoots round iron balls about that big around in all directions.

Q: That's a very...

A: Generally, when somebody steps on it, you hear the pop and whoever hears it yells "S-Mine". When you hear somebody yell, you hit the ground. Your chances are very good of surviving if you hit the ground because it just goes like that - aside.

The Captain, I think, was a little bit hard of hearing. I don't know whether he heard it or not but he stepped on it and it exploded. One of the balls went straight through the middle of him and came out the back. Believe it or not, he was back in combat just a few weeks later. That ball went straight through him and never hit anything vital. It never hit his spine and never hit any bone. It never hit any organs.

Q: Wow. he was a lucky guy.

A: It was amazing. We saw it and figured he had bought the farm.

So, just as after we took San Pietro, and we were fighting on the edge of Mount Torchia which is just prior to Cassino, we got the orders that we were being pulled off the lines back to Naples, Napoli to load to go around and land at Anzio.

Q: Which is.

A: Behind the Germans.

Q: Which is south of Naples.

A: No. North. Way north.

Q: You did have a map there.

A: Here's Anzio here.

Q: So, what did you think of this strategy?

A: Well they knew that they weren't going to break through that line there without taking horrendous casualties. They tried it for months there at Cassino so they figured they'd bypass it and get around it.

We landed with a couple of other divisions on Anzio then we went on. We fought there at Anzio for about six or seven months. We couldn't break out from that beach head all that period of time. We were always under German observation and fire.

Many, many battles were fought back and forth and the Germans tried to push us into the sea a number of times and were just flooding Panzer divisions down the road at us.

Finally, we built up enough troops on the beach head. They brought in other divisions on the southern front, the Cassino front. With the two coordinated attacks, we finally broke the German lines. Then we flowed into Rome.

Q: Rome was declared an open city?

A: We were one of the first units to go into Rome. In the history of mankind or warfare, we were the only army that ever took Rome from the south. Of all of the armies through history, Rome was never captured from the south but our Army did.

Q: That's quite an accomplishment.

A: We pulled right in. As we were going around - the picture is in here - the coliseum. I was in a half track and there were German snipers on the top of the coliseum shooting down at us. We were not allowed to shoot back at them because of the historical value.

Q: Even though the Germans had agreed it would be an open city, there was still some sniper action.

A: They did not agree to Rome being an open city really. The German commander of Rome was given orders from Hitler to do all the damage that he could do, but he didn't. He happened to be an art lover and everything.

Q: He respected the culture..

A: But they did blow up a lot of railroad stations and other installations. What we ran into really was this rear guard action to keep us from over running great numbers of their troops. They would fight at various street corners. In fact, when we went by the Vatican, as we came around the edge of the Vatican, we heard a lot of cheering and that and I don't know if it was the Pope but there were Cardinals that came out of the front of St. Peters. There were a number of American prisoners that they had been hiding that came out to greet us as we went through.

Q: That must have been quite a feeling on your part.

A: As we got up near the edge of Rome when they caught up with a telegram about my brother. Just as we finally cleared Rome, we pulled in on a bivouac on the edge of it we took the port of Civitavecchia . Before we took that, we had a day's reprieve to repair our vehicles and tanks and gas up. We had a day's rest. I had charge of a detail to go back to visit St. Peter's and the Vatican. I had charge of a truckload of guys.

When we got there, we only had enough time to either have an audience with the Pope or seeing St. Peter's at the Vatican, the art galleries and all of that. The guys had their choice. I wasn't even a Catholic but I chose to have an audience with the Pope.

Q: Who was the Pope at the time?

A: Pope Pius the...

Q: The VIth?

A: The VIth (It was actually Pope Pius XII), I think. (unclear). In fact, we had a little problem to begin with. When we got up there, his secretary or something came and we had side arms. He said we couldn't have side arms in the presence of the Pope. I said that we are not allowed to take it off.

So, they went back and there was a lot of discussion and so forth. They agreed that we didn't have to take them off. But what we did, we took the clips out of the guns.

Q: A compromise.

A: We took the clips out of the guns.

Q: You mentioned in this picture that you were recovering in a hospital.

A: Yes. I was in a hospital in Rome. I had malaria fever I had contracted in Africa and I had yellow jaundice real bad. I had...Yes, that was from the malaria and jaundice. I got so that I couldn't ever stand up I was so weak. I had dysentery. They sent me back there for a week to get me built up again.

That was taken at a restaurant near the Trevi Fountain.

Q: The Trevi Fountain.

A: Right across the street from the Trevi Fountain.

Q: Very good. So, did you have anything special on your campaigns that was a good luck charm or that felt it brought you good luck?

A: No, I can't think of it. I didn't have the preverbal rabbit's foot or anything like that.

Q: OK

A: I'm a believer that you make your own luck.

Q: You seem to have done. How about pranks that maybe you had pulled.

A: I'm the world's master at that.

Q: Oh yeah?

A: You want to hear some?

Q: I'd like to hear some of your pranks.

A: Back in Africa, when the campaign and we went back there to Rabat, that got to be real monotonous.

Q: You were there for a couple months.

A: It got to the point that the practical jokes started doing these different things and doing things to guys mess kits. Everybody is trying to top each other.

I thought up this idea when we moved into an area and knew we were going to be there for weeks, the engineers would come down and dig a big slit trench and build a ten holer, five by five and put two big timbers across a ditch and put boxes to sit on for toilets.

Q: Latrines?

A: Latrines.

Q: A latrine trench.

A: After we were there for a couple of weeks, all these practical jokes were going on you could be the tops. I had this idea that I went out there one night and borrowed this saw from the maintenance department and sawed those two timbers about three quarters the way through.

Q: You weakened them.

A: I'll tell you something. I couldn't have planned it or sawed it any more perfect because when the 10th guy got on there, there was a big crack and they all went right down in the hole. The Captain had lined up everybody the next day to find out who did that and they never did.

A number of years, I'm back in the states at a convention, our Captain was there and the fellas had been drinking and reminiscing about the war. The Captain said I never found out who did that latrine job. I said, you're looking at him.

Q: Did he laugh?

A: Yes. He laughed then. But at the time he didn't laugh. I won the prize.

Q: That was a good one. It did break up the monotony.

A: There were all kinds of stuff going on.

What we would do each night, especially on the Anzio beach head, to endure that shelling, there were four or five of us guys we would get together and sing and harmonize. We would get around the executive track where all the information would come in for the guns and sent out to the guns by wire, telephone.

We would kind of congregate there each night and we'd sing these songs that we would make up and so forth and joke telling and like that to get through the tough parts.

Q: At Anzio, were you supplied by ships?

A: Yes. Everything was supplied by ship.

Q: That's how you were able to maintain the beach head.

A: The officers on the beach head got American whiskey ration. They kept everybody loaded to endure the shelling. The enlisted men, we got local cognac - Italian cognac - which was by far better than American and English whiskey. In fact, the officers used to trade their Schenley's and Jonnie Walker for the Italian cognac. Once and awhile they would have a beer ration. That was very rare though.

Q: I could imagine that would take up a lot of room in the ship to supply the troops.

Do you want to just continue through the Italian campaign?

A: Yes. We were there at Anzio fighting for months (unclear). Then the Germans fought a rear guard action all the way up for a couple of weeks until we approached....

Q: Pisa.

A: We did approach Leghorn first - Livorno. We had quite a battle taking that port then we went on to take Pisa. Pisa is separated by the Arno River there and, uh, where is my coat?

Q: Where is your coat.

A: I had some pictures with me. I've got pictures.

Q: Here you go.

A: We came up to the...(unclear). That's just before Pisa on the coast near Sassina. The coastal defenses. There's a dead German.

Q: A dead German.

A: (unclear). I thought I had a picture (unclear).

Q: I don't see it. What's this?

A: That's at (unclear). That's where we ended up.

Q: Oh yes.

A: I took this picture and lost the other one in the flood of me.

Q: That's you.

A: No this is Hugh Cunningham. Here's a kid from Elmira. He just died here a couple of years ago. Hugh Cunningham, he drove my half track. He was with me all the way through.

As we came up to the Arno River, we were shelling the Germans going through Pisa and I spotted some German artillery (unclear) up in the tower.

Q: The actual tower (of Pisa)

A: There was a lieutenant with me. This lieutenant had a bad case of the stutters. When he got excited, he stuttered. I don't know how he ever got in the army especially as a Forward Observer

Q: A command position.

A: Anyhow, I said Lieutenant we ought to knock the leaning tower out we got observers there. We could see them with binoculars looking at us. He said, "We can't do that". I said, "Let's have

some fun" so I radioed back the coordinates of the leaning tower. I said "Enemy observation post, request one round of smoke to adjust" and I gave the coordinates. There was a long silence. They came back on radio, "Repeat those coordinates" and I repeat the coordinates.

Finally, they came back and said, "That's not the Leaning Tower of Pisa, is it?" I said, "Yes". They said, "You can't. That's one of the seven wonders of the world. You can't drop a round within a mile of that on either side." I said, "But they are using it to observe us". They said, "That's alright. You can't shoot at that." So, that was my experience.

We couldn't take Pisa. We could've probably but we went up to the Arno River and took the town of Pontedera. That's the place where I told you we holed up in this church and had this partisan girl that took us in - an Italian girl - and took us through the lines at night and we barricaded ourselves in the church and we took the town on the other side of the river than came back and we took Pisa from the rear then. So, we didn't lose all of the casualties then.

Q: And you saved the tower?

A: Yes. They wouldn't let us. I was just joking when I gave the coordinates. I wanted to see what their reaction is. I didn't say it was the "leaning" tower.

Q: Well, they were sharp enough to figure it out.

A: After the Italy campaign, I believe you were involved in Normandy operation?

Q: No, no. I went up to the mountains. We were holed up in (unclear) the mountains just north, just south of Bologna where you break down in the plain in the Po valley. From there, I got slightly wounded when a Lieutenant who was with me stepped on a mine and lost a leg and I got hit here.

While I was recuperating, I came down with a very bad case of dysentery and my jaundice came back. So, then back in the hospital there back in Rome, the second time they looked out at my war record and said my god you have been out here so long the Colonel says we are going to give you a soft job back here. You can drive a general around or something like that. I said, "no". He said, "What do you mean, no?" I said, "If I am well enough to stay in the army, send me back to my unit." He said, "I can't do that". I said "Then send me home." He said, "Are you serious?" I said, "Yes." So, they sent me home.

I came back on a hospital ship to Charleston and I was in Stark General Hospital there for some weeks then came back up and was in a recovery and rehab hospital on Long Island.

Q: Recovery just from the Malaria and building your strength up?

A: Yes. And getting my head together. To go right from that back into civilian life, they were giving us a little buffer there to check us out. I would...I had a nice duty while I was there. That's when they made me temporary 1st Sergeant.

Each weekend, they would let a number of men go home. They were men who had been badly wounded with different types of things - faces shot off and arms and legs missing. The first time I came home weekend, we had a 2nd Lieutenant in charge of the detail and it didn't work out too good for a number of reasons I don't want to go into.

When I got back, they called me in and the Colonel wanted to know what happened. I said that it would be better off if you put an enlisted man in charge.

Q: An officer?

A: Of course, some of these were Master Sergeants and I was only a Staff Sergeant. He said, "You got the job." (Unclear). You're a 1st Sergeant. He put the stripes on. He said it was temporary and it's not on the table of organization and can't make it permanent. While you are here, you are 1st Sergeant in charge of the barracks.

So, each, almost every weekend there for awhile, I would come back with a train load coming out of Long Island dropping off men at different towns. Their parents had to meet them there or someone responsible.

Q: Around New York City?

A: All the way back to Hornell. Every stop I'd leave off a man or two and somebody would meet them. Some of the soldiers were blind. I had one that was terrible. He wore a mask. All you could see was his eyes because his face was completely blown off.

They would brief me before I left and give me a clip board tell me each soldier's problems and who was to meet them and so forth. I was supposed to pick them up on the way back (unclear).

The first sobering experience that I ever had if you can picture Grand Central Station during the war. Have you ever been to Grand Central Station?

Q: I have been in there.

A: Thousands of people traveling through there.

Q: Busy. Busy.

A: I'm in that station and I am leading about twelve or fourteen men on crutches, one guy with the mask and as we moved across that floor, the noise started to subside until there was no noise at all.

Q: Hard to imagine.

A: People just stood there and looked at us.

Q: Out of respect?

A: Well, they were taken back I think. A lot of them had never been exposed to anything like this. These guys had legs gone. In fact there was one. I will never forget when we got on the train this guy with the mask he just sat there and he couldn't talk. Most of the jaw was gone.

A little bit of a girl came up to him and sat next to him. She offered him a pack of gum. He kind of shook his head. I tapped him on the shoulder and went like that (nods his head) to take the gum. So, he took the gum. This little girl sat there with him until he got off the train. I think he got off the train in Deposit, New York or someplace like that. But I had a lot of experiences with that detail I'll tell you.

Q: Just check to see if that's still going ok. We're on our second tape.

A: I had this one kid who that shot up real bad. He was from East Orange, New Jersey or someplace like that. He had his parents and his fiancé meet him at the station. The parents came right up to him and hugged him. She stood back and she had this funny look on her face and she wasn't dealing with this.

When I.. can't remember what the town. I think it was East Orange.

Q: You said it was East Orange.

A: When the train is waiting to pick him up, the mother was the only one at the station. He committed suicide.

Q: Oh my god.

A: He went out in the barn and hung himself. I think it was because of his girl. She couldn't handle it.

Q: Wow. The best effort movie...

A: Those are the kind of things here the war is over but it's still going on.

Q: The effects are...

A: We went on by division of course, without me, then went on all the way up through the Alps.

Q: I saw your map showed Austria.

A: All the way up to Austria in the Army of Occupation.

Q: Wow. Well Les, let me uh.... after the war did you take advantage of the GI Bill?

A: No, when I came out of the service, when I was discharged, my health was still bad. I couldn't eat and I was on medication. I was taking quinine. I was having bouts of malaria and I wanted in the worst way to go into forestry. I wanted to get into Syracuse. I went up there and took the

entrance exams and everything. They said because of my health condition, they would not recommend that I enter at that time but they'd hold it open so I never did get the second opportunity to ever use the GI Bill.

Q: That's too bad. Where did you work after the..

A: When I first came out of the service, I got a job through a friend of mine he was an artillery pilot one of the planes. After the war he was coming through, remembered me and stopped. He was flying for TWA - Trans World Airlines. At that time, they had a school in Kansas City, Missouri they were training radio operators and station agents and ticket agents and all of that out there. He got me a job representing TWA and they set me up in an office in Albany. I did that for a couple of years until the Korean War started.

When the Korean War started, the government took that school over, the training school (unclear) so I lost my job there. Then, the school went private after that - after the Korean War - so I didn't go back there.

I worked for American France for a few years. (unclear) then worked for a number of years as a salesman for Worth Cigar Company.

Q: Which cigar company?

A: Worth.

Q: What was their brand of cigar?

A: They carried all kinds. They were like (unclear) Tobacco

Q: I see. I see.

A: A competitor. In fact, (unclear) Tobacco bought them out. When they bought them out I went to work selling for NJ Thompson Company.

Q: That was a Dry Goods wholesaler.

A: I was with them until they went out of business.

Q: You put a lot of people out of business.

A: Yes. Everyplace I went, went out of business. That's what I told George Howell when Howell Packaging hired me. I worked there until I retired. Twenty years. I was on the road as a salesman for FM Howell.

After I retired from them and after I sat around for about a year, I was mowing the lawn one day and Bob Roller stopped. He was the head of Solid Waste.

Q: Solid Waste.

A: Bob came up to me and said I've got just the job for you. I said I'm retired and don't want a job. He said, it's not a job, it's a position. Take it and if you don't like it, quit. I said maybe I'll try it for a year for something to do. That's about 18 years and I'm still there.

Q: I was going to say. Some of the guideline questions to ask, have you continued any of your relationships from the service? Are you a member of a veteran's organization and obviously, you mentioned earlier that you are still active.

A: This picture was taken at a convention some years ago. Most of them are all dead now.

Q: You are 86?

A: 84.

Q: So, you were born in 1919?

A: Right.

Q: How long ago was this picture. Let's see if it says. 1990.

A: Yes. I don't have any....my last buddy died here just a few months ago. The only one left is my Captain. One of my Captains. The one who stepped on a mine. He's a banker down in Texas. I think its Breckenridge, Texas.

Q: He must be retired as a banker.

A: Oh yes. He's retired.

Q: That was his occupation.

A: Out of my battalion. Out of my battery, you've got about 120 men in a battery. The Captain and there was a kid down in Florida, Robbie Robinson are the only two I know that are still alive.

Q: You certainly had..

A: That's basically...

Q: I appreciate you taking the time to share.

A: I couldn't get into describing some of the real tough stuff. I wouldn't know how to put it in words.

Q: I understand.

A: I've tried to do that. I can remember the humorous things and the things that let you survive.

Q: Is this one of your British...?

A: No, that's me taken at Fort Knox before I got into the 91st.

Q: They changed the helmets.

A: Yes. That's the old style helmets.

This here is me and this is the kid that I told you that spoke German, Gross. I went back in Italy to visit my cousin Tommy Cosgrove in the middle. He worked for a trucking outfit. He was assigned to a trucking outfit. He supplied my division. That's why you see a tent. We never never lucky enough to have tents.

Q: How was when you were bivouacked in Rabat, what were you in?

A: In Rabat, we were on the ground (unclear).

This is the half tracks with 50 caliber machine guns. (unclear). This is one of my Lieutenants, a terrific guy whose name is "Hogleg" Ramswell from (Jim) Hogg County, Texas.

Q: Wow.

A: There's my cousin. There's me on the beachhead.

Q: Is that a beach head?

A: It's on Anzio beach head.

Q: It's just with the trees in the background.

A: Its Anzio beachhead. That's taken outside of Rome. That's me there on the right and Murphy on the left. That's a big field gun 240mm. It was behind us (unclear) .

We came off the lines in Italy there one day and went back uh, what's the outfit.

Q: You were going to.. you've signed for the library.

A: If you are going to use these and want to know about these, you better write down.

Q: That's what we want to do now.

A: That's Bernard.

Q: That's your brother Bernard.

A: Bernard J. Cosgrove.

Q: You mind if I just write a #1 on this because that's how we're going to log it. Is this our copy?

A: Yes. I think that's yours. I don't know. I guess. Yes. I've got the originals.

Q: The place is just a studio portrait. Is that correct? They want me to put down the place. It's just a studio portrait.

A: Yes. That's probably.

Q: He was in the Navy.

A: Naval Air Force. He was stationed all over the country at different places.

Q: Well, it says 1944.

A: I don't think there's anything on the back there. Yes. He's living in the heights now.

Q: I'll tell you what. If he wants to sit down sometime and go over his experiences. I'd be glad to do it. The photographer would not be known, I don't believe.

A: Nope.

Q: This will be #2. This is your brother Harold, right?

A: Harold Cosgrove. He's deceased. Two years ago.

Q: Longevity runs in your family I would say.

A: Yes. Pretty good. That picture there was when he was in the..

Q: Coast Guard.

A: No. The Coast Guard, I'm wrong. The Merchant Marines. Then he went into the Paratroopers afterwards. I don't have a picture of him in the Paratroopers.

Q: Wow.

A: Yes. He wasn't getting enough action (laughs). That's the last place I'd want to be is the Merchant Marines with all the ships they lost but he..uh. That's me taken in Rome, Italy right across the street from the Trevi Fountain. (unclear)

Q: The date is what? 1943

A: That would be '43.

Q: Any idea of the month?

A: Probably (unclear). That would be '44.

Q: It looks like its summer there.

A: I think around September. August or September '44.

Q: Yes. It might be fall.

Q: Your brother Harold. You have any idea when that picture was taken?

A: That was taken probably in about 1944. I don't know what month.

Q: This is Roland, the 4th photograph.

A: That would have been taken in '43. Early '43.

Q: You don't know these photographers. These are actual military portraits, I believe. This last one is of you again.

A: It was taken by a photographer.

Q: I don't know why they ask. In case they wanted to trace it down.

A: There was no water in the Trevi fountain then.

Q: Why is that? I'm curious.

A: The Germans blew up the water system.

Q: Oh.

A: Beautiful city, Rome.

Q: I have been there.

A: Northern Italy is the most beautiful place. I love it there. I could live there. Get up around Florence.

Q: Florence. Your Italian lessons that they gave you that week. They went well with you. You pronounce the Italian cities Napoli, Florence.

A: Leghorn, Livorno. Roma. Napoli. It's funny how the different dialects how they change over....you can drive 20 miles and the dialect changes.

Q: Yes. I knew that. Les, thank you for your time. I certainly enjoyed it.

A: If you need anything further, just give me a buzz.

Q: Absolutely. I've got your number.

