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New York State Military

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Museum Interview

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INTERVIEW OF FRANCIS CURRY

6

August 17, 2005

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2 MR. CLARK: Okay. One moment.

3 This is an interview at the New
4 York State Military Museum, Saratoga Springs, New
5 York.

6 It is the 17th of August, 2005
7 approximately two forty-five p.m. Interviewers are
8 Wayne Clark and Mike Russert.

9 BY MR. CLARK:

10 Q. Could you give me your full name,
11 date of birth, and place of birth, please?

12 A. Francis S. Currey, June 29th,
13 1925, Loch Sheldrake, New York.

14 Q. What was your educational
15 background prior to entering the service?

16 A. Completed high school, graduated
17 1943, high school.

18 Q. Do you remember where you were
19 and any reaction that you had when you heard about
20 Pearl Harbor?

21 A. I was in my third year of high
22 school as I recall, yes. And like everyone else, I
23 was shocked.

24 Q. How did you hear about it? Do

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2 you -- do you recall?

3 A. Over the radio.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. We did not have television.

6 Q. Right. Did you enlist or were
7 you drafted?

8 A. I enlisted.

9 Q. Why did you enlist and why did
10 you select the army?

11 A. Well, at that time they had a
12 special class coming up and they give a national --
13 national wide examination. They were selecting one
14 thousand for the special class that -- at Fort
15 Benning in Georgia an infantry school.
16 I qualified for -- for that. But the state alleged
17 you had to get in the army actively before your
18 eighteenth birthday, otherwise you were subject to
19 the draft. That was when I decide -- qualified for
20 that school.

21 Q. Okay. Could you tell us about
22 where the school -- what your tour while you went
23 there? And could you tell us about it, please,
24 your experience?

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2 A. Well, it was the infantry school
3 which is actually Officer Candidate School in the
4 army and that it was a special class. They wanted
5 to try to see if they could take them right --
6 right from high school -- in into the military
7 without the basic training. So, in affect I had my
8 basic training right at the infantry school.

9 Q. Was it similar to basic training
10 anyone else received? Everyone else received
11 or --?

12 A. It was much better, let's put it
13 that way, because at the time I got out of there,
14 at the end of the ninety days or whatever, I'm not
15 sure, about -- about a hundred and twenty days, I
16 could handle any weapon the army had. Where as the
17 infantry replacement program usually you would just
18 qualify with the M -- M-1 rifle, that was about it.

19 Q. So you were trained then in all
20 the weapons?

21 A. I trained right with the Officer
22 Candidates.

23 Q. Okay. After the a hundred and
24 twenty days where did you go from there?

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2 A. Okay. At that time they told me
3 I was too immature for a commission. So they
4 said -- instead they gave me -- the army gave me a
5 little sales talk and they asked me -- and they
6 sent me to the engineers. That was fine because
7 they told me you know, the war would be over soon
8 and the world would have to be rebuilt. What a
9 great advantage for engineers.

10 So I went right -- direct from
11 Fort Benning to Cornell University, I think, in New
12 York. That would have been about December of
13 1944 -- or '43. And then come in the spring, I did
14 one semester there. They were getting ready for
15 invasion in Europe.

16 So one day we had a colonel in
17 charge, the R.O.T.C. at Cornell called me in and
18 said, hmm, he said, you've had infantry training?
19 When you're had infantry training out you go.

20 Q. So where did you go from there
21 then?

22 A. Okay. I'm in a -- I'm in a nice
23 bunk in Cornell University one night, a week later
24 I'm out in the woods in Louisiana. And week later

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2 I am with the 75th Division.

3 Q. Okay. How long were you there?

4 A. I think maybe a couple of months
5 on the -- with the 75th. And then from there they
6 went up -- we went up to Camp Breckenridge,
7 Kentucky and I served with the 75th until I shipped
8 overseas.

9 Q. When did you go overseas?

10 A. I was scheduled to go overseas in
11 May of '44. At that time the ship went down with
12 the five Sullivan brothers?

13 Q. Oh, yes.

14 A. And President Roosevelt, Franklin
15 D. at that time was president, signed and accepted
16 a order that you couldn't ship out to overseas
17 until you're nineteen years old. Well, I wasn't
18 nineteen yet, I was still eighteen. So they had to
19 hold me back for two months, otherwise, I might
20 have made the invasion.

21 Q. Well, when do you eventually go
22 over there?

23 A. I shipped in July of '44. I had
24 my first combat in September of '44 with the 30th,

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2 Infantry Division.

3 Q. Now, how did you go overseas?

4 A. With a troop ship. It was
5 British ship "Laurietania" a big -- I think at this
6 time it was a big luxury vessel and we did not go
7 in the convoys because --.

8 Q. So it was because --?

9 A. Yeah, because no submarine
10 couldn't overtake them because they went -- they
11 went that fast.

12 Q. Okay. So you went in as a
13 replacement?

14 A. As a replacement, correct.

15 Q. Where did you get placed into a
16 unit? When you hit England or?

17 A. Well, actually you're in a
18 replacement tempo. I don't know at what point they
19 signaled you out unless you were competent. But I
20 know I was scheduled for the 30th, but they had
21 broken out of the hedgerows at that time and I did
22 not catch them until they got up to the meadows.
23 So really I went through Europe at that time almost
24 like a tourist.

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2 Q. Now, the 30th was out of the
3 Carolinas and Tennessee? How --

4 A. Uh-huh.

5 Q. -- were you accepted as a Yankee?

6 A. Well, they had been so decimated
7 in their invasion and all that they were very happy
8 to get the bodies. And -- and the whole squad went
9 in and attacked as a squad that was the replacement
10 system.

11 Q. Oh, so you went in as a --?

12 A. As a Squad we had met during the
13 system.

14 Q. Yeah. Okay. So your first
15 combat ended up in September of '44. Can you tell
16 us about that? Your first experience?

17 A. First experience that I can
18 remember, I was only within a couple days and we
19 were up at a place called Crucifix Hill out side of
20 Achen, Germany. Green as grass and when we were
21 dug in we were -- we placed a platoon in rotation
22 and we took over a foxhole behind the hedge.

23 As I recall that night, the --
24 just watching through this hedge and as I recall

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2 that night and out in front of me I just see a
3 German patrol. And I was so scared that I couldn't
4 get my rifle up. So by that time the I fired --
5 fired. People think of warfare as -- the front at
6 night is just as quiet as a graveyard. And I
7 fired, which I shouldn't have done-- I heard about
8 that the next day.

9 Q. Now, what was your rank at this
10 time?

11 A. PFC.

12 Q. Okay. How did you feel about the
13 officers around you at that time or any other
14 time --

15 A. Okay. I -- I --

16 Q. -- in general?

17 A. -- the company commander I had
18 received a DSC from our king he was a great guy.
19 But if you ever watched the Mash program, and they
20 had this Frank Burns, no matter where you went in
21 the army, you always bound to bump into a Frank
22 Burns.

23 Q. Okay. And you told me you were
24 in how many days of almost consecutive combat?

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2 A. Nine months.

3 Q. Nine -- or nine months. Okay.

4 What was it like basically day to day?

5 A. One day just like any other.

6 They shoot at you, you shoot at them. That's all.

7 Q. Did you suffer heavy casualties?

8 A. During the bulge we went up with
9 a full company of two hundred and fifty plus men.
10 We came out with some like forty-eight men and we
11 received replacements in the line and that was six
12 weeks. But that was the only time in Europe that
13 two armies stood toe to toe, seven days a week,
14 twenty-four hours a day, slugged it out everyday.

15 Q. Now, by the time of the bulge,
16 did you have much winter gear at all?

17 A. None.

18 Q. Not even boots or anything?

19 A. No.

20 Q. You just had your --?

21 A. No. Just the regular OD's and
22 jacket and shoe.

23 Q. Now by that time were you a
24 sergeant?

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2 A. No. I was a PFC at that time.

3 Q. Okay. When did you become a
4 platoon leader? You said you became a platoon
5 leader?

6 A. About six weeks later.

7 Q. Okay. Do you want to talk about
8 the bulge and --?

9 A. Well, that's one of the reasons I
10 live in South Carolina. I hated snow ever since.

11 MR. RUSSERT: Did you suffer from
12 frostbite?

13 MR. CURRY: Yeah, my feet were
14 very badly frozen.

15 BY MR. CLARK: (Cont'g.)

16 Q. Now your -- your unit basically
17 was sent to Normandy, correct?

18 A. That's correct.

19 Q. When did you reach there?

20 A. Probably around the 17th, 18th of
21 December, something like that.

22 Q. Were you ever aware the massacre
23 that took place around the 17th -- were you ever
24 aware of that?

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2 A. No. But my unit was the unit
3 that uncovered it. We had picked up -- they had
4 some of the -- they got away with some of that
5 massacre. And we were picking them up, they were
6 coming through the lines. So, right away
7 Headquarters was grabbing them before we had a
8 chance to talk to them.

9 We knew something was wrong up
10 there but we didn't know what until we uncovered it
11 and then -- and then we knew what it was.

12 Q. About the same time the Germans
13 were starting to kill civilians you were not aware
14 of that either or --?

15 A. No.

16 Q. Okay. Now, in the combat you had
17 in that area you were against the one fiftieth
18 Panzer unit which was a special unit. Did you ever
19 see any of the Germans in American uniforms or
20 American equipment or?

21 A. Yes. They had some American --
22 not -- not that was in uniforms though.

23 Q. Uh-huh.

24 A. No, we didn't have any of that.

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2 But they had painted their lead tank like an
3 American to make it look like a Sherman. That's
4 why in our first dispatch and they said the first
5 tank they knocked out was an American Sherman.
6 Actually it was a German Panzer that was painted to
7 look like a Sherman.

8 Q. Did they have US army markings on
9 them too?

10 A. Yes. Yeah. They put the star
11 on.

12 Q. Okay. Could you tell us about
13 what happened on the 21st then, I believe that's
14 when you received your separation?

15 A. Well, actually just one day out
16 of nine months that -- the best part of that
17 citation is what they didn't put down, you know, it
18 looks like that happened just in two hours but it
19 was really a period of about twenty-four hours.
20 They have protect them.

21 Q. Okay. But, would you tell us
22 about that?

23 A. Now, if you ever watched Mash you
24 saw the Jeep with the two spectra guns on it where

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2 they went on the road. That tactic -- that they
3 mention there was a US army hospital that had
4 bugged out the day before.

5 Well that night was dark. There
6 were five -- six of us left. And we decided, hey,
7 we had two -- two badly wounded and one was from
8 our own squad. And we weren't going to leave them
9 behind. How -- what were we going to do?

10 So, we found this jeep with a
11 double mount on it. So fortunately, one of us
12 guys, I got to think, of the six of us, the oldest
13 one was about twenty-one years old. And one of
14 them took driver's standard transmission.

15 So, At the time it just felt to
16 me that I had so much experience we decided what we
17 were going to do. At that time I was Browning
18 Automatic rifleman. So we decided that the one guy
19 to drive. We put the two stretchers on. And the
20 poor guys that rode on the stretchers, and I would
21 ride shotgun on -- on -- them jeeps had a spare
22 wheel on the back. I'd ride shotgun. And then if
23 we were stopped by the Germans, I would hop off and
24 they would then take off. We had it all planned

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2 out.

3 When we went out from there and
4 passed a burning German tank that had been knocked
5 out. And we went right past a German roadblock,
6 never channeled us. Then we get our six guys,
7 young Americans, out in the wilderness, but what we
8 didn't know we were on the main road to Frankenau
9 which is the war that the Germans had wanted.

10 And finally we kept going, going,
11 going. And then we ran into another one of our
12 regiments. But here, we've got a problem. We're
13 coming from the German's side. So they challenged
14 us, and back and forth and then finally they let us
15 in. The first thing they did they took our
16 weapons. And then they took our two wounded and
17 our jeep.

18 And they were not too friendly.
19 In fact at a point, as I told one of them will --
20 will you please point that thing in another
21 direction? And so we went to their headquarters.
22 And they kept pushing us back and forth. And we're
23 telling them our story. Nobody's believing us.
24 And finally the next day they got us straightened

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2 out and we got back to our own unit.

3 MR. RUSSERT: So, they suspected
4 you as being a German?

5 A. There's always that possibility.
6 And then there was the rumor that they were in --
7 you know, in American uniforms so --.

8 BY MR. CLARK: (Cont'g.)

9 Q. Now, could you go into detail
10 about what happened in the 21st of December?

11 A. Well, that's about it.

12 Q. Yeah?

13 A. Well, it's -- it isn't a big deal
14 and all that. But it ended up being all day long.
15 Like I got credit for taking out four German tanks
16 and someone in the German infantry. And yeah --
17 rescuing the two men who were -- well one of they
18 had but the five of them turned and ran.

19 There was a German tank out in
20 front of us. And they had been run -- over run by
21 these here but five of those fellows were able to
22 get fox holes out of sight. And they were faced
23 with three German tanks. And I managed to get out
24 there where they were.

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2 They had -- we had to get rid of
3 them tanks before they could get us so again, with
4 that -- I had some German -- or some American
5 grenades in our tank to take care of the tanks.

6 Q. While you were doing this, did
7 you think -- just do this automatically or any --
8 what went through your mind? Do you recall?

9 A. No. Just -- I was nineteen years
10 old.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. I think that would tell you.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Now after this date then we
15 basically were in combat for another four or five
16 months.

17 Q. Five months.

18 A. Five months.

19 Q. Were you ever aware that you were
20 put in for a citation?

21 A. About March sometime. Well,
22 first of all, right after that Hal Brown (phonetic
23 spelling) who was the correspondent for the -- I
24 think it was International -- no, it wasn't then.

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2 In January sometime I was in the New York Daily
3 News that I had been in the action there but not
4 without a -- but in March somebody told me that I
5 had been put in for it. But that was just
6 recommended. That was all.

7 Q. And was it your company commander
8 that had recommended you?

9 A. Yeah. Yeah.

10 Q. So basically then you just
11 climbing the ranks for the next several months?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Does anything stand out more than
14 others in that time or was it just day to day?

15 A. After awhile -- after you get a
16 few months of combat, one day just runs into the
17 other.

18 Q. What about casualties? Did you
19 still continue to suffer heavy casualties?

20 A. My -- my platoon, believe it or
21 not had the fewest casualties. That's one thing
22 that I admire General Patton for. This front line
23 troops have -- because I was young and my platoon
24 was young, we were always in the lead. All we had

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2 to worry about was small arms fire.

3 The ones coming up behind us had
4 to worry about our tour, the artillery was going
5 over our heads and like more enemy fire and I
6 wasn't getting any casualties just the others were.

7 Q. How -- how did you feel about
8 Patton in general?

9 A. Well, at that time I really -- at
10 that time I had no opinion. Today, I -- I believe
11 a lot of his philosophy. I don't use his language.

12 Q. Okay. Now, what did you think of
13 the BAR? Is that your favorite weapon?

14 A. Even as a platoon leader, I still
15 carried the BAR.

16 Q. What were the things you liked
17 about it?

18 A. The way it didn't jump like the
19 Germans Schmeisser. Sort of like that rapid fire.
20 I like the firepower period. In fact one time it
21 saved me -- there's a little town called Saramon in
22 January of '45.

23 We -- we were up against a
24 paratrooper Division. And they were all going --

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2 and they all had automatic weapons, mostly
3 schmeisser. And the schmeisser would jump.

4 And I went in this one house
5 there, well actually I had a (indiscernible) taken
6 out. The regiment of command post of the Paratroop
7 Division and this young German paratrooper was on a
8 stairway and he fired at me as I came in and his
9 gun jumped and it hit my -- his first shot hit my
10 helmet and I had the Browning was held steady.
11 That's one of the reasons I liked it.

12 Q. Now is -- is a BAR, would that
13 make you more of a target than the rest of your
14 platoon, do you think?

15 A. Not really. I don't think so.

16 Q. How -- did you end up going all
17 the way through Germany then?

18 A. We met the Russians in Wittenberg
19 in May, '45.

20 Q. Do you have any young feelings
21 about the Russians themselves when you met them
22 or --?

23 A. Strange -- strangely enough at
24 first they were not friendly. And I don't think we

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2 would have had a problem but then officially, after
3 a couple days they separated us. That was it.

4 Q. Did you ever liberate any of the
5 concentration camps at all?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Were you aware of them prior to
8 that?

9 A. No. In fact the first couple up
10 in north -- northern Germany that we liberated, we
11 knew something was wrong, but not what. The one --
12 what happened that Hitler knew about it. So, we
13 would take a -- and they were all small camps.
14 We'd take the camp, round up the guards and right
15 away ANG was right behind us, yanking us out of
16 there and they'd take over which was wise because a
17 lot of disease and stuff down there.

18 In fact at the Holocaust museum
19 in Washington D.C. one of the camps I took a whip
20 out of a guards office, out of a rack. It was like
21 a cat of nine tails, it still had the goop on it
22 where they were beating the prisoner? And that's
23 when I -- eventually when I moved from up north to
24 South Carolina I donated that to the Holocaust

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2 Museum and they have it in a -- it's in a -- what
3 would you call them, display case where this was
4 captured by Sergeant Francis -- Sergeant Francis --
5 Francis Currey, thirty-third Division. And that was
6 in April of '45.

7 Q. Now, you had mentioned at the
8 start being a platoon leader and being a sergeant,
9 would you talk about that again?

10 A. Yeah. Well, what happened, three
11 of us were put in for commissions right after the
12 bulge. And I had never wanted to be a platoon
13 leader, I always wanted to be a platoon sergeant
14 because you had a list of man status but the
15 responsibility. I don't need to be platoon leader.

16 So, one of the fellows -- one of
17 us three was killed on the Sauer River Crossing in
18 February of '45. So, the other guy said you don't
19 want no part of it. He didn't want the commission
20 and he suggested that I not do it it's a jinx.

21 But by that time I was pretty
22 well known in my division. He was a staff
23 sergeant, I had already been promoted -- promoted
24 to a tech sergeant. So I told him I didn't want no

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2 part of it. So they said, okay, that's fine, but
3 you're going to be a platoon leader anyway. I
4 think I was the only tech sergeant platoon leader
5 in the division.

6 So then when I picked platoon
7 leader I had this other guy, I said I'd like him to
8 be my platoon sergeant, he refused it. He didn't
9 want no part of it. So, I made him my platoon
10 guide. And he's still staff sergeant. And we went
11 through the war together and he came out okay.

12 Q. Do you recall where you were and
13 any reaction you had about the death of Roosevelt?

14 A. Okay. We're up in Germany, yeah,
15 I recall that. We were heading out -- we had just
16 taken this small town. And by that time we're
17 moving pretty fast, it was towards the wars end.
18 And the German's Divisions told us -- told us.
19 First we were like what? We thought it was
20 propaganda but it wasn't. They knew about it
21 before we did.

22 Q. So you ended up -- you ended in
23 Germany, meaning the Russians in that side were in
24 the field?

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2 A. We were at Magdeburg on the Elbe
3 River. That was the end.

4 Q. All right. When exactly did you
5 receive your congressional medal of honor?

6 A. That was in August 1945, just
7 before we left Europe.

8 Q. Oh, so you were in Europe when
9 you received it?

10 A. Oh, yeah. As you can see by the
11 program there, we had just got off the line and I
12 needed a haircut badly.

13 Q. Now, when you received that --
14 the medal of honor, did they offer you a commission
15 at all?

16 A. No. No. That was it.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. But if they had I would have
19 turned it down anyway. The war was over for me.

20 Q. When did you return home?

21 A. That was in August of '45.

22 Q. Did you have a lot of
23 celebrations when you returned back home?

24 A. Oh, they had a a great camp and

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2 all that.

3 Q. Well, when were you discharged?

4 A. Well, I -- I had a gunshot wound
5 that wasn't healing properly.

6 Q. Well when -- when were you
7 wounded? I guess we didn't talk about that.

8 A. Yeah, I had three of them but --
9 so I stayed in for a few months. I came back with
10 the Division back in Fort Jackson, South Carolina
11 and they disbanded and I went back to South
12 Carolina, National Guard status. I was transferred
13 up to Fort Jakamer in New York Harbor to finish out
14 time.

15 Q. Now what -- how were you wounded?
16 What kind of wound did you have?

17 A. That one, that was one was --.
18 It was after the war. What they did was they
19 transferred us down to Bavaria and there was a
20 little German army down there and disarming them.
21 And with a little fluke, some Germans had picked up
22 they caught me right in the knee. So, that --
23 that's finished me.

24 Q. So you had three purple hearts?

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2 A. Yeah, I have three purple hearts.

3 Q. Okay. And what about the other
4 two? Were they gunshot wounds or --?

5 A. Oh, yeah. Well, that day got one
6 I hit and basically I couldn't do anything about it
7 and it went right through.

8 And it's funny because in combat
9 I couldn't do anything about it. So, I had to go
10 to the aid station take a look at it. So I went
11 into an aid station and they took a look at it.
12 And he said gee, that's a nice and clean. Same day
13 he said pack your bags back I said I just want to
14 go home.

15 Q. What about the second one?

16 A. That was the first one. I got
17 just glazed above the eye.

18 Q. Okay. After you were discharged,
19 did you make use of the GI Bill at all?

20 A. No. I was offered -- I had met
21 General Omar Bradley. He at that time asked me if
22 I would like to go to paratroop school. So he
23 asked me if I could travel to the -- at that time I
24 hadn't made any plans --. And I said yeah, I'll

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2 give it a try. It was one of the smartest moves I
3 made. I was right there in the New York harbor,
4 They arranged for me to go up to New York City.

5 Q. Did you ever make use of the
6 fifty-two twenty Club?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Okay. How about Veterans
9 organizations and any organizations that you
10 joined?

11 A. Oh, I belong to the AA, VFW,
12 American Legion.

13 Q. How about the Purple heart?

14 A. Military Order purple heart,
15 yeah.

16 Q. Medal of Honor?

17 A. Yes. Andrew Jackson Post Station
18 of South Carolina.

19 Q. Did you ever attend any reunions?

20 A. Oh, yeah. Oh yeah. I've been
21 president 30th Division of the Andrew Jackson's in
22 South Carolina. Now there's a good group. Going
23 from New York State what am I doing? President of
24 the Andrew Jackson's of South Carolina, it

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2 happened.

3 Q. I know this is going to be -- how
4 do you think your time in the service and your
5 being a recipient of the Medal of Honor has changed
6 your life?

7 A. Oh, quite -- quite obviously as
8 you can see. I -- I go to Presidential
9 Inaugurations, sometimes one on one with generals,
10 which obviously I didn't have. They're not
11 honoring me, they're honoring that medal.

12 MR. RUSSERT: Do you think you'll
13 ring the bell at Wall Street?

14 MR. CURREY: If they ask me.

15 MR. RUSSERT: Okay. Well, thank
16 you very much for your interview.

17 MR. CLARK: Well, one other
18 thing. How did you feel when they asked you about
19 the GI Joe model?

20 MR. CURREY: Okay. I've got a
21 summer camp up in Lake Michigan. We have our
22 headquarters at the Medal of Honor Societies in
23 York Town down in Charleston Harbor. So I'm up
24 here, I get a call, it was our director from the

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2 New York Council that -- I had never heard of him.

3 They said they wanted this deal and if you're

4 interested. And I said -- this is ridiculous. He

5 said, well try it. So, he gave me the phone number

6 to call. And it was the head designer. And I said

7 well, will you put that in writing? He said he'd

8 have a contract made out for you this afternoon.

9 MR. CLARK: What do you think of
10 it?

11 MR. CURREY: Well, I made a
12 hundred thousand and I bet I've autographed half of
13 them.

14 MR. CLARK: Okay. Well, thank
15 you very much. It was an honor interviewing you.
16 Thank you.

17 (The Interview ended)

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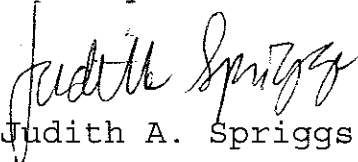
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1 Francis Curry - 8-17-2005

2 I hereby certify the foregoing,
3 consisting of pages 1 to 29, inclusive, to be a
4 true and accurate transcription from the audio
5 provided to us, to the best of our skill and
6 ability.

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8 Judith A. Spriggs

9 Associated Reporters Int'l., Inc.

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