

**Edward Olvera
Veteran**

**Michael Russert
Wayne Clarke
New York State Military Museum
Interviewers**

**Interviewed at
Baldwin, NY
August 8, 2006**

MR: All right, this is the home Interview in Baldwin, New York. It is the eighth of August, 2006, approximately ten AM. Interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clarke. Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth, please?

WC: Hold on till after the airplane. Okay, go ahead.

EO: My name is Edward Olvera. I am eighty three.

MR: When were you born?

EO: August 26th, 1922.

MR: Where?

EO: I was born in New York City.

MR: What was your educational background prior to entering service?

EO: I did grade school in the Bronx, and I was in James Monroe High School when the war broke out. I was the first from James Monroe High School to volunteer. I volunteered on December 27th, 1941. [refers to his notes throughout the interview]

MR: Obviously, going into service at that time, You must have been affected by Pearl Harbor. Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

EO: Oh, yes, I was right here. I was in a movie theater on December 7th. It was a beautiful day, actually, a mild day, even though it was December. I was watching a Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers picture, I remember that. Then they cut off the film. The house lights went on and the manager came out. He was walking, you know, sadly, and I think

he was even crying, I don't know. He announced that the Japanese had attacked us in Pearl Harbor and all military personnel had to report immediately to their bases.

MR: Did you know where Pearl Harbor was?

EO: That was the next thing. Everybody turned around and said, where's Pearl Harbor? The film went on and I saw the rest of it. When I went outside, you see, at that time people didn't have TVs. The only ones that had radios were the taxi cabs and everybody was around the taxicabs listening to the news. And always the same question, where the hell is Pearl Harbor? The following day, Monday the 8th, I went to school. They herded us into the assembly. They had the radio hooked up so that we heard Franklin Roosevelt ask Congress for a declaration of war. After that, I went up to my first class, which was English class, the teacher was Mr. Sutton. And I'll never forget, he was a real Englishman, who had served in World War 1. He was crying. He said, our country is at war. I remember he pointed at me and said, every one of you young men are going to be involved in this war. I want you to remember one thing. When things get rough, this too shall pass away. Then he dismissed the class. And no sooner did he dismiss the class, the air raid siren went off. In New York City, everybody was running around like chickens with their heads off. I finally went home. I'll never forget my mother, God bless her. She turned around to me when I got home and said to me, where do the women sign up to fight this war? See, my mother was Mexican and she had been involved with the Pancho Villa Army in Mexico. Women were soldados [Spanish for soldier] back then. I said, Mom, only the men fight the wars up here in the United States. Little did I know that they were going to have women WACs [Women's Air Corp] and things of that nature. But anyhow, on the 27th, I managed to talk my mother and father into letting me enlist. On the 27th, I signed up, and the next thing you know___

MR: You enlisted. Why did you pick the Army?

EO: Oh, I didn't want the Army. I wanted the Navy. They were very strict then. If you had glasses, no Navy. So, I walked across the street and joined the Army. A lot of guys did. I saw grown men who were colorblind. I never knew that they were colorblind. The Navy wouldn't take them because they couldn't read the signal flags. So anyhow, the next day I was on a train in Penn Station with about five hundred volunteers and they were shipping us out here to Long Island to Camp Upton. That was some train ride, because I was a kid, eighteen, and these guys were in their thirties, twenties.

MR: Was this your first time away from home?

EO: Yeah. They were drinking and card playing and everything else. We got to the camp and got off the train, and there was a sergeant there, Sergeant Young, who eventually

ended up in my outfit. He gave us our first military orders. He lined us up, and said, turn around. He didn't say about-face. He just said, turn around. This iss a retreat. Four o'clock in the afternoon.

WC: All right, let's stop for a second. [loud plane flies over]

EO: Then he said, salute the flag. Retreat. After that, they marched us through the shed and gave us heavy white sheets and woolen blankets from World War I. Then they marched us about two miles to the old barracks that were left over from World War I. The floors had little spaces in between them. There was a potbelly stove on one end and a potbelly stove on the other end, and we were supposed to keep warm. I was a good little boy. I made my bed military style. The sergeant came in, looked around and everybody was sitting around twiddling their thumbs. He looked at me and he said, how'd you learn to make a bed? I told him I was in an orphanage for about seven years and I used to make beds. [He said] Well, show these guys how to make the bed. And so we did. Anyway, it was too cold. We all slept with our clothes on that night. It was that cold.

WC: Did you have coal or wood for the stoves?

EO: Oh, no. No, they didn't even have wood or coal. It was chaotic. The whole country was chaotic from top to bottom. About three days later, they put us on a train and shipped us to Fort Eustis, Virginia. The barracks there were a hell of a lot better. They were stone brick buildings, two stories high, very fancy. We stayed there for three days and they put us on guard duty. This was the funniest thing of all. They gave us bolt-action 1903 rifles, also from World War I, no ammunition. They had bayonets on them. They showed us how to put the bayonets on. They put us on guard duty to guard these railroad guns that protected Washington, D.C. Now, the damn things, I could see there was rust all over them. And I doubt if they had a crew to even fire those things, or ammunition.

MR: Were you given uniforms also at the time?

EO: No, we had fatigues. No uniforms. We just had fatigues.

MR: World War I fatigues?

EO: I don't know where they came from, but they smelled to high heaven. But anyhow, we wore our civilian clothes underneath them. It was cold and damp there. And here we were doing our guard duty as best we could. It was a real farce. The Germans or the Japs could have walked into Washington, D.C. Little did they know how unprotected we were at that time. About two days later they began our first basic training. For one month we trained diligently there. Finally they shipped us to what is now Fort Stewart. At that time it was Camp Stewart.

WC: What state was that in?

EO: Oh, the state of Georgia. I was assigned to an anti-aircraft unit, the 902nd AA Battalion, a training battalion, made up of anti-aircraft artillery, 40mm guns, .50 caliber machine guns and 90mm guns and searchlights. I was assigned to the searchlight unit. Have you ever been to an opening of a theater? It was a big searchlight like that, sixty-inch. Fox [Searchlight Pictures], I don't know. That's where we were assigned. And here we were, it was months of real training. Hard training in Georgia, mud and rain and guard duty at night. The place reeked of soft coal because that was what they heated the barracks with. You had that smell in your nose all the time. After about six months of this training, I had enough of it. They called for volunteers for special units they were organizing. It was an airborne unit. And oh boy, my ears went up. Rah, rah, rah! Needless to say, I volunteered and ended up in what was to be my regular unit for the remainder of the war. The 683rd AA Airborne Company. We loved that airborne unit. You got more training there. It was very, very intense.

WC: Did you get any parachute training?

EO: No, we got into a plane once. We weren't supposed to jump. We were just supposed to be carried from point A to point B in a plane and then unload. Our mission was to protect an airfield. We got out and set up our guns on each side of the runway to protect the airfield. Because a lot of the airfields were makeshift things. When we finally finished training, we had everything packed and ready to go. Little did I know that we were supposed to go to Africa. At the last moment, they took out my unit, the 681st to the 684th, each unit. I forgot to tell you, each unit was made up of eighty five enlisted men, five officers, and twelve .50 caliber machine guns. That was in one unit, plus of course company clerks and all that sort of thing. We were issued Thompson submachine guns, I don't know who thought that one up, but boy, we thought we were the cat's meow and strutted all over the place. Anyhow, five hundred sixty of the men in the other units from the 685th on, eventually went to Africa. We later learned that they tried to protect these airfields, but the Germans were too good for them and wiped them all out. They were dismembered and they ended up in the infantry because they were no longer useful. Anyhow, the rest of us, the 681st to the 684th, were put on a train and off we went to the West Coast. There were four companies. And we ended up at a place called Fort Stoneman, S-T-O-N-E-M-A-N. I guess this was a gathering place for troops. North of San Francisco. We stayed there for about two days.

One morning they got us up at four o'clock like they always did, and lined us up. We had breakfast and then we marched to a nearby road and stayed there until four o'clock in the

afternoon. Finally, they marched us down to the dock, put us on the ferryboat to go down the Stoneman's River and then to the San Francisco Harbor. I wrote down here, [reads from his notes] "I remember how scared I was. Playtime was over. This was for real. The Army band was playing patriotic tunes. People were cheering and waving flags and I was a frightened kid, nineteen, on my way to war." It was the first time that this really, really sunk into me. Playtime was over.

We got down to the dock about nine o'clock in the evening and they had a big long shed. They marched us through the shed and all I saw was a big black wall and a little [unclear] 17.20. That was the side of the ship. We went up the deck and staircase after staircase. We were carrying Thompson submachine guns, our duffel bags which were fully loaded, going upstairs, upstairs, upstairs. We finally got to the promenade deck. And they marched us into what used to be the Promenade dining room. There were three tiers of bunks and I climbed up into the top one, dropped everything, and went to sleep. I was exhausted, and I think everybody else was. It wasn't until the next morning that we discovered that we were on the [SS] Il de France. We sailed about eleven o'clock in the morning of, I think, on November the 3rd, 1946. We went under the Golden Gate Bridge which was loaded with people waving and shouting and flags waving and everything. I thought to myself, you know, they had that saying, loose lips sink ships. I was thinking, what's all this about? We got out into the water and there was one little naval vessel to escort us out, a Coast Guard boat, and he didn't go very far. But the Il de France could outrun anything that they had. We did about three to four days, I never figured out if it was three or four days. We sailed into Pearl Harbor and right into the channel, Battleship Row Channel, and they stopped us in Battleship Row. From the deck we saw the [USS] Arizona and the [USS] Oklahoma and all the other damage and everything. As soon as we docked, two tugs came with anti-submarine nets around our ship. It was quite a thing; this was real. This was where it started.

The next day we sailed out. We still didn't know where the hell we were going. That was the big secret. Where were we going? We all figured we were going to the islands. We were about two days out before they told us we were going to India. What the hell are we going to India for? We kept trailing south and south and south. Oh, you gotta understand what this was about. There were nine, maybe ten thousand American troops on the boat. Nine hundred of us were combat troops. The rest of them were engineering units. They were going to Iran to build the railroad from southern Iran into Russia. And the rest of us were going into India. We had American troops on a French ship with an English crew, English rations, which were vile, and Hindu cooks. When we got to Pearl Harbor, the

Hindu cooks were out the door and they put American cooks there to cook these rations and try to make them a little bit more edible.

MR: Why don't you show us your picture of the Il de France? Show me where you were.

EO: [shows photograph of ship] When we got to Pearl Harbor, they took all the machine guns out of the hull, and mounted them all over the ship for anti-aircraft protection. My gun was right on the fantail and that's where I slept most of the trip over, was on the fantail, because it was so hot on that ship. There was no air conditioning and very few fans for the troops. We went there and got into a storm, a terrible, terrible storm. I don't know if people know, on the Atlantic Ocean, the waves go up and down. But in the Pacific Ocean, the waves are long waves. They build up and then they drop down. The ship was picked up and dropped for three days.

MR: Did you get seasick at all?

EO: Oh, seasick. Let me tell you, we ate two meals a day. That was it. My meal came about eleven o'clock in the morning and two o'clock in the afternoon. You went down in this luxury ship, remember, they didn't take everything out. They still had the big mirrors and the chandeliers hanging up. We went down to what was the main dining salon. You went down these stairs. Do you remember the picture of the Titanic? Those stairs?

MR: Yeah.

EO: Those were the same stairs we went down. You went down those stairs on one side and you walked through the main dining room. They had benches bolted to the deck and long tables. Above it were portholes. So when we were in this storm, you saw with peripheral vision the water going up and down. We went through this main hall, into the kitchen around there, and they slopped the stuff into your tin mess kit. That was all we had. We didn't have any dishes or anything. Then you went around and they had GI cans where you were supposed to dip your mess kit to clean it out after you finished and then go back to wherever you were. Those GI cans were frequently loaded with vomit from the guys who got seasick because the ship was going up and down. To tell you the honest truth, before that trip was over, my gun crew was eating raw potato sandwiches. We couldn't go down to that dining room anymore.

And I forgot to tell you, on the fantail over here, [points to photograph] you just about see the platform. On that was a six-inch gun that the British mounted with a British crew on it. We always laughed at it, oh boy, some protection [said sarcastically]. If we ever ran into a Jap cruiser or a Jap submarine, they'd make mincemeat of us. So anyhow, it was December the 24th and the ship was really going up and down. Suddenly there was a

wham! The whole ship shook and it listed. I was sleeping downstairs by this time, incidentally. We were sleeping in hammocks. Somebody said, Jesus Christ, they got us! What did he mean? He said, Jesus Christ, they got us! I remember my training. This was something. Because we had been trained. I remember I said to myself, okay, don't panic, don't panic. I loosened the laces on my boots, and loosened the belt buckle on my pants. Because they showed us when you jumped overboard, you could use it to catch air. You could float on that. And I said, what else? Flashlight and made sure I had water and didn't panic. About that time, the captain of our unit came down and said, don't worry, we were not struck by a torpedo. What happened was the cargo had shifted. And the following day, they ordered us up to the port side of the ship. Everybody had to get on the port side so that the ship might right itself.

On December 25th, seven o'clock in the morning, we were sailing into the entrance to the harbor of Wellington, New Zealand. The beaches were on each side of the entrance and crowded with people. The people were going crazy, absolutely crazy, cheering, everything. The ship sailed majestically into the harbor. All they saw were American troops. The Japs were already bombing Port Darwin in Australia and they were marching down through the Philippines and the New Zealanders thought that maybe they had come into New Zealand. That was the hysteria at that time. We stayed there for about three or four days. That was Christmas Day. Everybody was ordered into their dress uniforms and they marched us through Wellington, New Zealand. People were crazy. Anything you wanted, you could have. They marched us to the best theatre there, like Radio City Music Hall, and showed us a picture. Mrs. Minerva. I'll never forget that one. We got back and they served us a turkey dinner on board ship, rather. The best meal we had in the whole trip. Then we sailed from Wellington, New Zealand...

The second day we were able to move around the city in units, but not alone. They didn't want us scattered all over the place. So we went up a big hill. Wellington is a beautiful city, beautiful. It was then anyway. A lot of hills. Very much like Santa Cruz. We got to the top of this hill and there was a little store, not a big store, like a delicatessen. The officer went in and asked the owner if our men would like to buy some goodies; he had some damn good goodies. I said, we don't have any of your local currency, but we have a lot of American money. He said, would you mind if I put my officers behind the counter? They will charge the same price as you would in the United States. He agreed to it, and we emptied out that store. [gestures about a foot] I got a jelly roll about that long and a quart of milk. Now the milk was not the skim stuff that we have. It was thick, heavy milk, real milk. We were all drinking it and the result was many men had diarrhea because we hadn't had anything like that. Well, anyhow, we sailed and went down further south

around the island of Tasmania, into the northern part of the Antarctic Ocean and up to Perth, Australia. We stopped there for one day. Perth is on the west coast of Australia. At that time it was a little cow town. Now it's a city. We stayed there one day. They refueled the ships and all. When we sailed the next day, we spotted one of these huge Japanese flying boats. And of course we went on alert immediately. Everybody was red alert and everybody put [life] jackets on. We waited for the inevitable. We thought a cruiser would come over the horizon or something like that. Nothing came. The only reason I could figure it out is that they were so overextended they had no submarine or cruiser that far south. A few days later, we ended up off the coast of Bombay, India.

MR: How long was the entire trip, approximately?

EO: Uh, I'll tell you in a minute. I think it was, and this is only guessing. The whole thing took about...oh, here it is. When did I say? November? We ended up in Bombay in the latter part of January. So that would be what, thirty or forty days? It was a long trip, I know that. And then the other poor souls, had to go further yet to Iran. Then they took us off the machine guns and put us on barges because the ship couldn't go into the port. He said that there was not enough water there for it. They put us on what they called troop trains. The cockroaches were at least an inch long and plenty of them. Then we began to feel the culture nightmare of India. It was now January 1943. [reads from his notes] "The trip across India was a culture nightmare. A real eye-opener for us American troops. I always thought my family in the South Bronx was poor, but India showed me what poor really meant. The heat was unbearable. The stench of death, disease, and filth were all magnified by it. The noise of music, people, and animals could be heard as loud and clear as if they were on the train with us. The first Indian word we learned was buckshee which was the call of the beggars. Soldiers threw coins out at them. The more coins we got, the more [they called] buckshee. And this went on. I see it was a heartbreaking scene. The sights we saw all across India." Now I'm talking about a five-day trip across India. "The masses were there all the time, [calling] buckshee. And some of the sights we saw were terrible. Wounds and women holding up their emaciated babies. We got to Calcutta after five days, and there it was again, hundreds of beggars and prostitutes, the likes of which could quell even the greatest of desires."

The next day we headed north until we got a large river, it was very, very wide, like the Hudson. Learned that that was the Brahmaputra. We pulled alongside another train, and we had to unload our train to their train. [unclear] 37.00 We began to go north again, and entered a plateau, flat, and saw high hedges like this. [points to something in his yard] High hedges. We later learned that those were tea plants. One on top of the other, and in between there were rows where these tea planters went in and picked the tea. The tea that

was ready to be picked. The American military carved out about five or six airfields there. Those were the fields that they used to supply the Chinese flying off. We were going there to protect one of the airfields. The other three as well. We began to see the American planes overhead. My unit was assigned to a place called Dinjan. D-I-N-J-A-N. It was a big field, about the size of, uh, the one in Queens. [unclear] 38.27. We put up our guns as quickly as we could. The Air Corps, they were Air Corps then, personnel kept saying, hurry, hurry, get those guns up, because it was dry season and they expected air raids anytime. Our first air raid was February the 14th, Valentine's Day. I'll read it out. It's easier that way. [reads from his notes] "February 14th, Valentine's Day dawned bright, hot, and clear. About ten in the morning, we heard a steady roar of aircraft engines followed by the howl of air raid sirens. We sighted high-flying bombers. I jumped into the harness of our gun. There were about twenty nine bombers in all. They were much too high for our machine guns. What we did not see were the Jap Zeros at tree level streaking in over our field. I opened fire at once. The enemy planes were firing at anything they could see. Planes on the ground were hit, as were many buildings. There was a lot of noise and total pandemonium. The sound of exploding bombs was intermingled with the rattle of our machine guns. The anti-aircraft machine guns put up a curtain of fire. My gun was soon red hot. I could hear Corporal Sal." Corporal Sal was in charge of our group. [reads from his notes] Corporal Sal behind me was screaming, leads, leads, leads! And my buddy Kenny was feeding the gun belt of ammunition into the gun in a very calm manner. I remember he had a smile on his face as if he was enjoying the whole event. I was firing my gun. I opened fire with my gun at any Zero that came into my line of fire. My glasses fell off, but that did not matter to me. I spotted a Jap Zero about twenty feet above the main runway. His propeller was scattering gravel in all directions. I noticed that he was halfway down the runway. He pulled up and took off with a trail of smoke coming from the rear of his plane. The bombers in the meantime dropped their bombs. Most of the bombs landed in the nearby tea patches. All the action took place within ten minutes and then suddenly it was over. All that was left was smoke from burning planes and buildings. I realized I had pissed all over myself and began to cry. Our team checked each other, then we either laughed hysterically or we cried. We had been bloodied. I hadn't known if we shot any planes down, but the Air Force personnel told us we shot down about six Zeros. The Air Force no longer made snide remarks about our "pop" guns. The next day, Chabau Airfield, which was about ten miles away, got hit. On the 16th of February, our field was hit again. The Zeros kept a respectable height. Sometimes some tried to break through but were quickly driven off by a wall of fire from our guns. On the following day, the Japanese sent over forty bombers over our airfield. Our fighters had been alerted; they were made up of P-40s, and they were ready and waiting for them high in the sky." The Japanese were always very funny.

They flew their planes always at the same altitude, which was about twenty nine thousand feet, and never deviated one way or the other. Every bomber did not have a bomb sight. Only the lead bomber had a bomb sight. So, he flew in and they came in, made a weird curve, and then came down. The bomb leader dropped his bomb and the others went after him. That was the way they did it. [reads from his notes] “Our fighters were above them and they pounced on the jet formation, shooting down many of them. There were bombers falling everywhere. Rumor had it that all forty bombers had either been shot down or damaged. I can only say that the flyboys were the real heroes of the CBI that day. There were no more heavy raids after that massacre. Maybe a few sneak raids of four planes at the most. Boredom set in. It rained constantly, day after day.”

MR: What kind of shelters did you live in?

EO: Oh, we had pretty good barracks, better than this. [shows photograph]

MR: Now, what is that made of?

EO: Bamboo. Everything in India was made of bamboo.

MR: Now what's the roofing material?

EO: That was canvas. That was it. Mud floor. There were three, three, three tiers of bunks inside. Very crowded, little room. We lived in that one there for eleven months. The most exciting thing that happened during that period was that we went through a massive earthquake. That was a funny thing. I was on duty that night. We were all sitting there. The other guys were in the bunks sleeping, and I was writing a letter. Suddenly, my ears perked up. It was about nine o'clock in the evening, and there was a full moon. My ears perked up and I said, damn, that sounds like a subway going through the town. All this happened one, two, three. I realized that the corrugated steel shower that we built outside was rattling. And I knew instantly what it was. I yelled, earthquake! Six naked bodies ran out through a little doorway. I remember grabbing the gas tank and holding it up because I'd seen in movie pictures where the earth opens up. I didn't want to fall into one of those holes. The big transport planes were jumping up and down, and then it was all over. The following morning, we saw clearly that the whole contour of the Himalaya Mountains had been changed, what we could see. We later learned two main rivers in India had changed, and the casualties were kept quiet because of the war. At least four hundred thousand people, I think, were wiped out. They had a tsunami come down each river, and these people lived right on the edge of the water. It wiped out everything. It was a horrible thing, I guess.

Anyhow, December 1943 came around, and we were all ordered to pack up our guns. I wrote here. [reads from his notes] "Immediately the rumor mill opened up. We were going to be shipped out to the Philippines, we were going to be shipped out to Europe, we were going to be shipped back to America, and we were all wrong. We got on a plane and the next thing you know we were flying over the Naga Hills and onto a dirt and gravel runway in the middle of the jungle in a place called Shimbuyang in Burma, northern Burma." Our mission, of course, was to set up our guns and protect this little airstrip. And the runway was a funny runway. It ran uphill. It was on a hill so that the flyer was like landing and taking off on an aircraft carrier. You dropped at the south end. There was a big drop. And that was the way they were. When we landed, it was cold. I remember it was very cold even though it was in the jungle. We unloaded the guns and everything. We were very, very depressed, to tell you the truth.

MR: Why?

EO: Well, one, we didn't know what the hell we were doing there. We heard the guns. Oh yeah, we heard the field guns in the distance. The front line was not too far away. We were making coffee that night over an open fire, and we heard a voice that said that coffee smells good. Can I have a cup of coffee? We all looked up to see who the idiot was who wanted a cup of coffee. It was General Stilwell. And there he was, campaign hat, boots, the whole works. Tall, thin man. Naturally, we all jumped. He said, no, no, no, no, don't. He didn't have any insignia on or anything. He said, I don't want no sniper killing me. We gave him coffee and then he talked to each one of us, [and asked] where are you from, what are you doing here, you know, like a general does. Morale [unclear]. 50.18 He was good. He was a good man. We learned a lot from him. Later on he had been fired because he dared to call Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek the little bandit, the peanut. You got to understand what the background of China was at that time. The whole political background was the Sung family. The Sung family came here from the United States, brothers and sisters and everything, and they controlled Congress. They got a lot of money. Madame Chiang is still alive. She lives up here in Glen Cove.

MR: Oh, I didn't know that.

WC: Oh, I thought she passed away.

EO: No, she's still up there, last I heard. She was one hundred and something. She was a charmer. She charmed everybody. Anyhow, that's why. The general discovered that, and he didn't mix with these people. We stayed in that place. You got to understand that this was a jungle strip. I lived in that building for eleven months. Our nearest neighbors were the Naga headhunters. The first time we saw them, I was cleaning the gun and I turned around and I looked and there were three of them sitting there. They were looking at me,

squatting down and looking at me. All they had on was a loincloth, a derby hat, and a big wicked-looking knife. And they were headhunters. They still hunted heads then. The British government paid them thirty silver rupees for every Jap head that they brought in. Their women loved the silver rupees. The silver rupees, not paper money. They made necklaces and everything. They never said a word. We looked at them, they looked at us. We offered them cigarettes, which they loved. They loved American cigarettes. Then they disappeared. Never saw any more. It was quite an adventure.

My outfit was made up of eighty five men, and I think six of us were [unclear] 53.42 Yankees, and the rest of them were all Southerners from the hills of Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia. Our cook was from Tennessee, and he was a character. His nose was splattered all over his face. Ugliest looking man you ever wanted to see. He had been a cook and a lumberjack prior to the war. His one big failing was that if it was female, he ran after it. He got into a lot of trouble because of it. But he was a damn good cook. He knew how to cook. He said, you guys are always making fun of me. One thing these Southerners knew how to make was whiskey. This cook traded our sugar to the black engineers troops down the road for the raisins. The raisins, of course, we never saw again. They were in the still. We had a [moonshine] still in the jungle and everybody knew about it. The officers got a bottle of Cutty Shark or something, once a month. They came down from their area and traded a bottle of Cutty Shark for one gallon of this horrible moonshine. I never understood that because I wasn't drinking at the time. How did they do it? And of course I now know because it lasted longer. They put in orange juice or grapefruit juice and made it taste better. But we were always well supplied with whiskey.

MR: Did you have much sickness among your men?

EO: Oh yes, oh yes. We had a lot. I developed malaria. There were a lot of...we lost a few fellas for what they called Section Eight. We were never dry. Our clothes were always wet.

MR: How about your feet? Did you have trench feet?

EO: Oh yeah, trench foot and all that. The morale was low. Christmas came, 1944, I think it was. Yeah, Christmas of 1944. We were in the jungle. I'd been there one year by that time. Nothing came in. The fog was down on the runway. In January, a plane managed to land, and when he taxied over, he asked if there was a 683rd there, and we told him yes. He said, I got a planeload of mail and Christmas gifts for you. And the party started. I'll never forget it. Corporal Sal had an Italian background. His family sent him a whole box of spaghetti and meatballs. We made the spaghetti in a pail, and the sauce in a

galvanized thing that we had where we washed our faces and everything. Kenny, my buddy, who was a health nut, his mother and father sent him a bottle of Ovaltine. He said, I don't want this thing. He gave it to me. I opened it up and took one whiff. I said, you better take this, it's bourbon. Because your mother and father are smarter than you think. And off to the races we went. The Japs could have walked in anytime they wanted. But those are the kind of things we had.

We had no USO. The only person of any note that ever came over there was Pat O'Brien. When he got on the stage, he was so drunk he almost fell off the stage. Anyhow, it was horrible, horrible. We watched movies in the pouring rain. The camera was covered, the screen was covered, and we sat there in the pouring rain and watched Betty Grable dance or something. The audience was usually made up of American troops, British troops, Chinese troops, Indo-Sheiks, you name it. Finally, we were ordered to get our guns together again and get ready to go. We were getting ready to ship out. The officers were ordered to headquarters for final [instructions]. They came back in the jeeps to keep us from going wild. We were screaming and yelling and everything. We were going home, we were going home. It was May.

MR: This was 1945?

EO: Yeah, 1945. Two days later, we were on a plane to Calcutta. We landed on the night that Germany surrendered to England. Anyhow, when we got to Calcutta, it was VE night. I was so tired I laid down on the bunk. We were encamped in a temporary camp in a park in Calcutta, and they had some bunks there. I just laid on one of the bunks and slept right through the whole thing. A day later, the next day as a matter of fact, they marched us down to a nearby dock where there was a military ship. We marched down a big long dock. The Coast Guard crew members of this ship came, and they were in nice white uniforms, and in good health, nice tans. They looked down at us, and told us we look like the walking dead from [unclear] 1.01.30 because we were so thin. Our uniforms hung on us. We didn't think there was anything wrong with us. [unclear] 1:01:40

MR: Did you take your equipment with you or did you leave all of it behind?

EO: Left it all behind. I never did find out what happened to it. I never did find out. It may be still in Burma for all I know. We all had dark brown skin with a yellowish tint from the Atabrine, we had to take. After that was over, we got on board the ship and they fed us. They put all this food in front of us. We looked at it, we all grabbed it and ate it and shoved it into our mouths. One of the crew members said, Jesus Christ, what did they do to you?

The ship sailed. Pretty uneventful. We went from Calcutta to Ceylon, from Ceylon up through the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, and then finally the Mediterranean, and then the Atlantic Ocean. Then we sailed to Newport News and landed. The minute we got off the ship, they marched us to the nearby theater, locked the doors, and put guards on the doors. A man got up and identified himself as being from New York, from the United States State Department, and he ordered us, "You will not tell anybody what you saw in China, Burma, and India. It's a state secret, and if you do, you'll be court-martialed, etc., etc." Then they marched us to the mess hall, and that's where I saw my first prisoner of war, a German POW serving us food. They looked in better health than we did. Two days later, they gave me my thirty-day leave. I came up to New York Penn Station. I was absolutely confused. A taxi cab driver in a yellow cab came up to me and said he'd take me to the Bronx at half price. And he did. He said he had a son in the Pacific somewhere, he didn't know where. I wanted to give him a tip, but he didn't...well, anyhow, when we stopped, it was summer, and people were sitting outside. I remember I got out of the cab, I was paying off the cab driver and I heard my cousin yell out, it's Eddie, it's Eddie! Then I heard my mother scream, mi hijo, mi hijo, gracias a Dios. My son, my son, thank God. I don't remember too much about this thirty-day leave. But during the time that I was home, orders came through and I was shipped off to Greensboro, North Carolina. That was where I was the day Japan surrendered.

MR: Were they going to train you for the invasion?

EO: I think so. They were gathering troops for the invasion. I'm sure that was what it was for.

MR: So, how did you feel then when you heard about the atomic bomb?

EO: You know, all I felt was, at least I don't have to go to Japan. I don't have to land. I don't have to land because I saw the pictures of what happened in Tarawa and the other islands.

WC: You're getting washed out by the sun. Can you just move over this way a little?

MR: When you were in India or Burma, were you aware of events and what was going on? Were there theaters?

EO: Very little. As a matter of fact. We weren't kept up close. The only way we kept up with the news was the BBC. We picked that up by radio. I will never forget the BBC. They gave the radio the news.

MR: How about your mail? Did you get that very often?

EO: Not very often because it was very difficult to fly in the supplies and mail. Mail and supplies were very scarce. Frequently supplies were airdropped in. Not by parachute. The plane came flying in as low as possible, stuff was loaded at an open door, and then they pushed them out. Especially feed for the animals, the mules and the rest of it. We had Chinese laborers and they used to giggle. When they got a new load of Chinese, they died like flies. The older ones said to the younger ones, in order to be really good in this outfit, you have to catch one of those bags. The bags were thirty, forty, maybe fifty pounds. They tried to catch them and naturally they were splattered. The first time that happened, my officer was so shaken up. He asked the Chinese officer what he was going to do with the body. How are you going to ship it back? He said, ship it back, why? He pushed it off to the side, buried it. That was it. I learned a great deal about the Chinese then, and it was not nice.

MR: When were you finally discharged?

EO: August 1945. Then I re-enlisted.

MR: Oh, you did? You didn't put that down here.

EO: No, no, I didn't. I wound up in Germany. I re-enlisted in 1945. At that time, thousands of people were being discharged, and I had no trade, I had no real education, so I re-enlisted. The government was very nice to me. They sent me to the vacation land of Panama. The barracks in Panama were super. I spent two years in Panama, and then they shipped me back here. I spent about a year or so over here at Mitchel Field when it was still operating. I was there on Sunday...funny, war's always started on Sunday. I was there the day that the North Koreans invaded South Korea. I was the intelligence officer at the time, NCO, and my captain, who was the intelligence officer, Captain Simons [?] was getting his flying time in. The general of the Mitchel Field was screaming on the phone at me, why didn't you tell me this was going to happen? And I said to him, sir, we did. We told you a long time ago, four months ago. On the intelligence report, which was confidential, we always marked an X by what we thought the general would want. He put his initials on it. We sent it over. See, we told you. Then they were going to ship me off to Korea, but there was another sergeant, Sergeant Starkey [?]. I will never forget him, a heavy set fella. He didn't have any overseas time and I already had plenty of overseas time. So, off he went. Last we heard from him, he was in Pyongyang just before the Chinese broke through. They shipped me off instead to Germany and I ended up in a little town called Hof, H-O-F. which is just north of Bayreuth, a big opera place. It's right on the Czechoslovak border. Where East Germany, West Germany, and Czechoslovakia come together. We heard the Russian artillery every Saturday morning and then tanks. Their little game was to run up, [unclear] 1.11.47 wait, then pull away from the border,

and then make a mad dash for the border. We never knew if they were going to come across because it was the middle of the Cold War. I finally got home about 1951, and I was discharged. I decided I didn't want any more service, and I entered the civilian field.

MR: Did you ever make use of the GI Bill?

EO: I tried to, and I ended up in, of all places, Columbia University. But I couldn't hack it. I couldn't hack it. I helped to support my mother and father.

MR: Did you ever use the 52-20 club at all?

EO: I think I did. There was a brief period between the time I was discharged in 1945 until I re-enlisted. It was good.

MR: Did you join any veterans organization?

EO: Never.

MR: No interest at all?

EO: No interest at all. I went to one or two meetings of the CBI people. No offense meant against the other veterans of CBI, but there were very, very few of them that really...they were mostly what I call rear-end commandos. The first and last time I ever met the Marauders, I forgot to tell you about that. We met the Marauders when they came down from Ledo, India. They were well equipped and everything like that. They were all veterans from the South Pacific and their campaigns. Horrible campaigns. Their mission was to capture an airfield, a big major airfield called Myitkyina. They did capture it finally, and then they turned it over to the Chinese infantry. The Chinese infantry ran down to the village of Myitkyina, which is in the north part of Burma, where the English used to come to spend the summer away from Rangoon. They lost the town and they almost lost the airfield and they had to bring these poor guys back. Some of them were in the hospitals, and were brought back to recapture the field. In my organization, we were the heavy artillery. We had to keep the Japs back. The Japs dug into Myitkyina town and it took almost seventy two days to get them out. They were tenacious people. Something like today's guys, [unclear] 1.15.04 , the same thing. They dug in and they stayed there. They were tenacious. Well, I guess if I was a Jap, the same thing. After all, they had no place to go. They couldn't be shipped back to Japan or anything like that.

MR: Did you stay in contact with anyone that was in service with you?

EO: Never. I met one guy on the New York City subway. I was sitting down, the train was crowded, and he looked down at me. He said, hey, Ed! Needless to say, we didn't go to work that day. [We said] I'll get in touch. I'll get in touch. That was the end of that.

MR: How do you think your time in the service changed or had an effect on your life?

EO: Like some people, not many, I became an alcoholic. Not because of that, I don't know, maybe. I haven't had a drink now for more than a year, [?] 1.16.30 because of AA [Alcoholics Anonymous]. It does play tricks on you. Many years later, I was watching a picture once and they had a scene where they were burying a veteran and started playing Taps and I started crying. I started crying. Not just crying, everything. That was years later. We had eighty five people who went over with us, and thirty two came back. They weren't all military casualties. Sickness, reassignment, things of that nature. Some were psychiatric cases. The ship I came back on, the [USS] General Thomas, was loaded with psychiatric people, people who had been brought back. It's all in the story. [points to his notes]

MR: Okay, well, thank you very much for your interview.

EO: Thank you very much for coming.