

**Harold D. Erdrich
Veteran**

**Robert von Hasseln , Interviewer
Michael Aikey, Videographer**

**Interviewed on February 27, 2001
Freeport Armory
Freeport, NY**

Q: This is the interview of Mr. Harold D. Erdrich, on 27 February, 2001, Freeport, Long Island Armory. Interviewer is Lt. Colonel Robert von Hasseln. Videographer is Mr. Michael Aikey. Mr. Erdrich, tell me where and when you were born?

HDE: In the Bronx, NY, August 7, 1919.

Q: And is that where you grew up?

HDE: Yes, until about 8 years old, approximately. Then we moved to Brooklyn.

Q: To Brooklyn. Why did you move to Brooklyn?

HDE: Oh, I don't know. I don't recall. My father... what the reasons were. He was a salesman in the custom jewelry field, I recall. He also, my mother, were college graduates. May I continue?

Q: Sure.

HDE: My mother was a concert pianist and my father played the violin and I thought I'd take a lesson in the violin when I was about 8 or 9. I played it all through high school. I was in orchestras and bands. I also, one time, my mother said to me, "Harold, we are going down to the city to take an audition." I said, "Okay." I took my violin and it turned out to be the Horn & Hardart Children's Hour on 57th Street somewhere and Madison Avenue and I played Ave Maria on the violin and I was a good singer and I sang "Just the Gigolo" which was a Russ Columbo song. Then they had me on the show on a given day – I don't recall, it may have been a Sunday. And that was it, I never was on it again. But I played the violin through high school. I enjoyed it very much. I played with my mother and father just for our own pleasure. She, unfortunately, couldn't play after a while because she had arthritis in the hands and that finished her playing but she was a superb piano player. I worked at 11 years old. When the depression hit, I was 10 years old. My father couldn't do anything in the field he was in. He was in the custom jewelry field and he asked me one day, do I want to sell ice cream with him? Sure, and I was 11 years old, and we went to the east side of Manhattan, Ludlow, and Stanton Street – I remember this so vividly – and picked up a pushcart from a store there and they had a box that they put bricks of ice cream in with dry ice and we pushed it all the way down to Division Street. You'd make a right on Division and you'd take that street over to the West Side Highway. We sold ice cream to the ferry lines at Cortlandt Street and Rector Street. There were

ferries that used to run to NJ at that time. We sold ice cream, made some money and when the summer came, my father stopped doing it, but I did it myself. I picked up that pushcart and pushed it and I made money and came back and paid for the ice cream and gave my mother the rest of the money and maybe I had four quarters in my pocket, you know? That's what I did for a number of years. Public school. Then I stopped and I was working for grocery stores after school and weekends and holidays and things like that. Then I was interested in the printing field because I, my wife, and her father – this gentleman I was talking about – the composing room superintendent of the Journal American and the Mirror newspapers... That's the department that puts the paper together, linotype, Ludlow machines and make ups, all the pages. That's what I eventually became. But I got my union card in CT. I worked in Hampden, CT. This is before the war. Which is a suburb of New Haven. I worked for a typographic shop for five days a week. We were married and I ... No, no, we weren't married yet. That's another story. I came home Friday nights. I didn't have a car. I came home by train into Manhattan and then subway and I'm living with my folks in Brooklyn, which wasn't far from where my future wife lived, just two short blocks away. I have a story I could tell you about something that had to do with the end of the war, WW II, that involved my family.

Q: Sure.

HDE: We were the first boatload of soldiers to be sent back from the European theater. Coming from Southern Germany, because I was in four invasions, five invasions. The first invasion was a practice invasion near Casablanca in Africa after we had left Newport News with a tremendous fleet of boats. Then we got back on the boats and we headed towards Greece and Crete. Middle of the night they turned around and headed back and we invaded Sicily. After Sicily, we invaded, we had two invasions in Italy and then we invaded on the Riviera by Saint-Tropez, France. We went up France, about the middle, made a right turn, crossed the Rhine River, and headed south. That's why I'm coming to this southern, what happened going back when the war was nearly over. We're returning to go to Le Havre, France. The Colonel says to me – I was good friends with the Colonel, David Meyerson was his name – and I was in the 2nd Chemical Mortar Battalion, big mortar, 4.2 mortar, 26-pound shell. He said – I was a staff sergeant at that point – he said, "Harold," he said, "Go up that road." "I know where we are, Colonel," I said, "I know where we are." I knew what was ahead of us. He said, "Take two of the boys." I said – the road was like this, dirt. I said, "We have to..." "I know what you have to do," he said. We took out our bayonets and we crawled on our stomachs, probing the ground for mines. There were no mines. The German soldiers, whoever they are, had gone, they were gone already. We got up to the gate. We probed the gate for booby traps or whatever. We watched the trees, snipers, nothing there. Opened the gate and went in. We saw a lone figure standing way across a big open field. Coming out of the woods was a train which was not moving. Open box cars. And then we looked and we didn't see that figure any more. He must have seen us and then he left. So, I said, "Let's go over to the train, fellas." We went over to the train and as we approached the train, there were dead bodies on the ground. I said, "Let's climb up and see." We had seen this before in Türkheim, Germany while going south, chasing the Nazis who were trying to escape into the Alps. We were given that job because the shelling of targets was over by then. So, we climbed up and the boxcars were loaded to the top with dead bodies, children, women, men, all ages. Then

one of the fellas went back and waved to the Colonel and they came in with all the vehicles and everything following us, and they saw all this and then we went into the concentration camp. There weren't too many people there, a couple of hundred and they were in pretty bad shape. There were no Germans at all. On the other side of the field, where we saw that lone figure standing, there were three houses, nice houses, like a football field away. When our outfit came in, we saw three people starting to walk towards us, dressed in civilian clothes. Two men and a woman. I had taken German in high school and I took a refresher course at Fort Bragg where I was put into this outfit from basic training in Fort McClellan, AL. And I could get along in German. I wasn't fluent, but I could question prisoners of war and I did that many times. So, I questioned these people and they had nothing to say. The Colonel said to me in English – and maybe these people understood English because I didn't see them again – he said, "They may be understanding everything we say." I said "That's very possible." But he wanted me to ask them, "Did they work in the concentration camp?" "Oh no, no, no." So, what happened with them later, because behind us would be coming the outfit that was going to take care of doing all that work, the grave registration work and everything. On one side of the camp, we were searching, looking, the whole outfit. There was a big trench cut, dug out, 40 feet wide, a couple of hundred feet long, loaded with dead bodies. They had poured some chemical on them. But we didn't stay long. When the other outfit came in, we packed up and we continued out trip back to the boat. We got on the boat in Le Havre, France, just us, one single boat of soldiers, 3,000 approximately. Going back to the war itself, we always supported the infantry. I'll get to that in a little while. Took the boat. We thought we were going to NY because we were a bunch of New Yorkers, also. We went to the Commonwealth Pier in Boston. We pull into the dock and tie up. There's a troop ship and we're all ready to get off. A train comes into the pier. The train wasn't there yet but there were train tracks, two sets of them. That's what the officers told us. The train's going to come in, and we're going to get into that train, go to Camp Miles Standish for a day or two and then go to Fort Dix where we were drafted into, and be sent home and discharged. We're standing near the gangplanks, me and my friends, and over the amplifying system, they're calling me. "Hey, what's that?" The fellas said, "What do they want you for, Harold?" "I don't know." Go to the Captain's office, the Captain of the boat. I did. I asked sailors how to get there and they told me. Knocked on the door. "Come in." The Captain is sitting there behind this desk and there's a civilian and a Colonel from the Army standing there. The Captain said to me, "Sargeant, you can go with these two gentlemen. They're going to take you off the boat. They're going to take you down to the end of the pier and then you'll come right back. Won't take but a few minutes." "Anything wrong, Captain?" "No, everything is fine. You have my permission to do this. Go ahead and do it." I did and you can imagine my friends screaming, "Where are you going?" "I don't know. I'll be right back." We go to the pier, we go up a flight of steps, cross a little landing and down a flight of steps. The Colonel opens up the door and there's my wife and father-in-law. When she got a letter from me that I sent from France, that we were going to Le Havre, France and I don't know the dates and everything but we're coming home. She gave it to her father and he went to work with the Hearst management and the Boston American newspaper in Boston and with the pull that they had, they called him to come up and they arranged to have me taken off the boat. [Laughs.] Unbelievable. So, we kissed and hugged and I had to go back. Walked up the gangplank and said goodbye to the Colonel and the civilian. The civilian was a reporter from the Boston American newspaper. I don't know if the story

made the paper or not. I never heard about it after that. But I came up the gangplank and all the fellows were screaming and the Colonel had told me, "Please Sergeant, don't tell your friends yet. After we're gone, you can say anything you want." After they were gone, I told the boys and the officers. [Laughs.] It was quite a thing; it was quite a thing. But I just wanted to tell that story about what I was discussing.

Q: Well, let's go back a bit. You graduated high school in Brooklyn?

HDE: High school, James Madison High School in Brooklyn, and I started to go to night college – Brooklyn College at night. I was working nights. No, I was working days selling printing and – no, no, sir, excuse me. I was working in the grocery store and I drove a taxi on the weekend and I did that for a year or two. But I had to stop college because I couldn't keep my eyes open. I was sleeping in the class every single night, so the teachers and professors said, "Harold Erdrich, you might as well quit it. You're not getting anything out of this. You're not going to pass the test." So, I stopped.

Q: What part of Brooklyn were you living in?

HDE: East 24th Street and Avenue Z.

Q: Flatbush?

HDE: No. Sheepshead Bay. In an apartment. We never had a house with my mother and father.

Q: Now, do you remember when you first heard about Pearl Harbor – what you were doing?

HDE: Oh yes. I was at my future wife's house and I was going to eat there. They lived on East 1st St. and Avenue S. I lived on Van Sicklen St. and Avenue S, just two blocks the other side of McDonald Ave. We had a train and a trolley car. I heard about Pearl Harbor and I ended up going home later and I said to my mother and father, "I'm going to go down to Whitehall St. tomorrow morning and enlist." They tried to talk me out of it. But, I'm going, I'm going to do it, I'm going. I went down. I took the physical. I passed everything. 20/20 vision. I took the color-blind test and I flunked. I was color blind. I didn't believe it. I said, "Doctor, come. I'll take the test again." You know, the test, little colors, you see a letter and a number? I called them all wrong, all wrong. So, I didn't become a flyer. Two months later, I was drafted, February 10th. I was drafted. When I got to Ft. Bragg, I took the whole test again. Flunked. Couldn't be a pilot. I was on the list to go to Officer Candidate School when we got the alert that we couldn't because we were a frozen outfit. We didn't know it, but we suspected we were due to go overseas. My wife and I were talking over the phone and in letters and we decided to get married. We weren't married yet. I asked the Captain. He said, "Okay, you can go home next weekend because the weekend after we have to go on mountain maneuvers in VA." That's just what happened. I called up. Her folks and my folks, they made a wedding. Do you know Brooklyn at all? Grenada Hotel on Flatbush Ave. – they had a penthouse and ballroom up there and that's where the wedding took place. I took the train from Fayetteville, NC

on a Friday evening into Penn Station, and went home to my father and mother, on the subway, because I had to see them. Then in the morning, Saturday, went down to Court Street and got our marriage license, my wife and I, and we were married Sunday in the Grenada Hotel there. After the wedding, oh, had about a hundred and some odd people there, we went back to Penn Station, Florence and I, and we both went back to Fort Bragg. We got a room and then I had to go 5:00 in the morning back to camp for reveille Monday. So, I was with her Monday night, and Tuesday night and Wednesday morning the Colonel told me, "We're going on mountain maneuvers Friday. You better send your wife home tomorrow, meaning Wednesday." That's what I had to do. I went in, told her, "You gotta go, Flo." We went on mountain maneuvers and then we went to Newport News and got on the boats and we went to Northern Africa for a practice invasion. That was October, we married October 25, 1942 and I was discharged September '45, so I was in the service a little over three years.

Q: Tell me about your unit, the 2nd Chemical Mortar Battalion.

HDE: Right. We were put into that battalion – we fellows said, "Chemicals, we're never going to use gas. We are not going to go anywhere. We'll probably be in the U.S. for the whole war." Then we found out that it wasn't such a thing at all. Those shells held high explosives or smoke. There were four companies of mortars, A, B, C and D. And I was in the headquarters company. We were liaison between the mortar companies – help them and then I was given the job because they found out that I had won medals for running in public school and high school. I had one medal – I was a fast runner. In high school, I was on the track team with Marty Glickman, who broke the 100-yard dash – the city record – and I was on the team with him but I was a year and a half behind him. I knew him, but I didn't know him well. So, when the Army and my records saw this, I had it in the record, they teamed me up with an officer and we were target spotters. We were always with the infantry, right behind the infantry, with them practically. If they saw a target ahead, they'd send somebody back to tell us. We had a telephone, no radios. Radios weren't even invented then, to be used like that. A telephone with a wire, with a spool of wire on my back, so I had my helmet, my rifle, two pistols, hand grenades, extra ammunition in my pack and a telephone, and the other end of the wire was at the gun position. We'd see a target and, of course, I had a map, a chart. You didn't have to open it up like that. I had just folded it to the area and just kept changing it, you know? And we'd give them code numbers that had been raised before, what coordinates we were at and where the target may be. And then we'd say, "G," just in case somebody was tapping the line. 'G' was go and they'd fire one shell. The shell had powder rings on the back and a shotgun cartridge in the back, so that when it comes down, the firing pin hits the shotgun shell and it explodes and off goes the shell and the powder rings give the distance that the shell will go. That's basically the raw explanation for that. And, of course, the tip of the shell is primed, so when the tip hits, "Boom!" We had a fabulous weapon and nobody even knew it until we started to use it. We used it in Sicily. We supported many divisions, 36th Division, 45th Division, Airborne. We were in the Third Army, Seventh Army. I saw Patton, General Patton, a number of times. He didn't know my name, but he would come traveling around, shake hands^{23:15}. I would do this target spotting with an officer. I would climb trees, bombed out churches and buildings, hills, wherever we could get and not get shot by a sniper or something like that. And we'd relay the information back to

the gun position. Very successful with the targets and the damage that we did to the German Army.

Q: Now, who were you normally assigned to – was it an infantry company or you would be attached to?

HDE: I was attached to the Headquarters Company, the 2nd Chemical Mortar Battalion.

Q: Right, but when you were doing the target spotting duty, you'd be attached or you'd be with an infantry company or battalion?

HDE: A company. Which is part of a battalion. I have two books here, 2nd Chemical Mortar Battalion. David Meyerson, the Colonel, he was the second Colonel. The first Colonel we had, that started with the outfit from the States, was Robert Breaks, the word "break" with an "s." Pronounced "Brecks." And then after Sicily and a little of Italy, he was gone. They switched him or whatever. And then Colonel Meyerson came on the scene. Colonel Meyerson was a native of Texas and a West Point graduate. And he had been in some very secret action that we never knew about, but he had been in something. We didn't know what it was. He was a very brave man. I used to go with him in Italy and France and Germany, just me and him. I drove the jeep, and two fellas – we had a 30 caliber, a 50-cal machine gun mounted there and the Colonel was sitting next to me and he wanted to go investigate something. We'd go down roads. Twice, we came in on a German patrol that was on the road, also with a vehicle. They quickly jumped out of the vehicle and ran like hell. We didn't even go up to their vehicles because we didn't know what they had around. So, we just raced back, reported it and the mortars, send some mortars over in that direction.

Q: Now, you said that many of the guys in the unit were from NY?

HDE: Oh yes, NY and NJ.

Q: Any particular reason why?

HDE: No. Just the drafting process, I suppose. We all were sent to basic training in AL from Fort Dix and we were... Well, some of them did not go with us to Fort Bragg and some did go. May I tell you something about Sicily?

Q: Sure.

HDE: We were the first wave in all the invasions. They made an attempt to fire a mortar from a boat, but it really didn't work. The movement of the ocean could have caused the shell to go up instead of that way and we'd be in our own danger, so they never tried that. We landed in Sicily and there wasn't much problem. The infantry and of course, all our planes, the aircraft carriers and all the shelling, had chased the enemy north. We had a father, Frances O'Brien, a chaplain, who was assigned to our battalion from the Bronx. He and I were good friends. After the second day, he said to me, I was a corporal then, he said, "Can you get two of the fellas and I'll get a jeep – the Colonel gave me permission to

ask you and I have to go investigate something ahead of us here, not far, as far we know.” The night before, there had been an awful lot of aircraft activity over us. The LST’s and the whole fleet of both had had anti-aircraft guns and were shooting. We didn’t see anything, we were huddled down in our foxholes trying to stay alive, you know. So, the chaplain and I and two of the fellas in the jeep and he told me, “Get one of the Italian fellas,” and the fellow Lou Demasi from the Bronx, was a friend of mine. He spoke very good Italian. He came along. We went up this road and that road and we see a farmhouse. We pull over. There’s two women. They heard the jeep coming. And a few small children. Lou questioned them. The chaplain told him to ask, “Did you see any airplanes here last night? Anything crash?” “Yes,” she pointed. We went and we found it. It was an open field plus an olive grove. There was an American paratrooper plane, all burnt. Everyone was killed. I would say, I’m not sure of the figure. This information is probably available. You could find it if you had to. I’m taking a guess but I thought it was about 47 crewmen and three, the pilot, the assistant pilot and maybe a navigator. That was the crew. We see this, and the Chaplain says, Father O’Brien says to us, “Fellows, we all have to get all the dog tags off the bodies and bring them back.” I said, “Well, what’s going to happen with our outfit? They’re going to be going forward?” “We’ll catch up with them.” So, we start on the dog tags. That took us the better part of that day. Then I had to ask the question, “Father, we have to bury them?” “Yes, we have to bury them.” We dug 50 graves in sandy, hard ground. He had asked me, “Tell everybody to bring their shovels.” I didn’t even think of it, you know, why? That was the reason. We just didn’t dig the graves. Father O’Brien and we dug the graves. We were just full of blood, sweat and finally got the job done. It took us three days to do that. Got back in the jeep. We went back to the farmhouse. We had had our own rations, so we had something to eat. We had water in our canteens. He had brought some extra water because he knew what we were going to run into. Went back to the farmhouse. We kept them away from us. We just used their well. We cleaned up as good we can. We got back. We went all the way to Palermo, Sicily. By the time I got there, I had a high fever and I was shaking. I had malaria. The other fellows didn’t get malaria. I got malaria. There was a big hospital ship in the port, anchored out in Palermo. They took me out to it. I was there four days. Father O’Brien and the rest of the fellows went to where the outfit was. I didn’t know where they were. Four days, I was fine. They let me off the boat, took me ashore. There was an information, little building to go to. I found out where the outfit was. A truck took me and other fellows. They were in Messina, the other end of Italy. They found out where my outfit was, near the water somewhere. Found them and the boys, “Wow, you’re here. You came back just in time, Harold.” “Yeah, why?” “We’re invading Italy tomorrow.” Absolutely the truth, what I’m telling you, 100%. We invaded Salerno. The second invasion was Anzio.

Q: Tell me about Salerno.

HDE: Salerno was very terrible. We could hardly get ashore. Infantry was pinned down a mile up the beach. The Italian soldiers were very few and then after Salerno, the Italian Army surrendered. They were out of it. Strictly the Germans, we were against. So, they maybe thought it was going to be an easy invasion, but it wasn’t, so the aircraft carriers and the warships, they shelled like the devil. They strafed and bombed and then we were able to get ashore and put the mortars into operation.

Q: Do you remember what actually happened to you on the day in Salerno? I mean what was going on, what did you feel about, what were you thinking about, what were you doing?

HDE: We were dug in. We dug and it was earth, it wasn't a beach. There was a beach but it was earth. We dug in. I don't think we moved from there for at least a day or more. Then of course, we got the border companies ashore with all the mortars and all the ammunition. And the mortars – the base plate of the mortar with the barrel was on a 2-wheel carrier. You put that on. And of course, trucks were used to bring the shells because there were two shells to a wooden box. That was 52 pounds, 53 pounds to lift up. But then the mortars went into action and I think we were with the 36th Division, and these two books here will give that information, if I'm guessing wrong. It's all pinpointed in here, and you're welcome to have them and then you can always just return them to me in the future. It's okay.

Q: Great.

HDE: We went then, we invaded Anzio. We were at the Rapido River for quite a tussle. We were at the Abbey of Monte Casino. We were at the bottom of the mountain and there's the Abbey up on top. Germans had gone into it and, of course, they had dug in in front of the Abbey as you come down the mountain. It wasn't really a high, high mountain, but it was high enough. The infantry, the airplanes strafing and bombing and our mortars – four companies of mortars shooting shells. Then at one point, we heard there was going to be a big aircraft group coming over and they bombed the monastery. It was unbelievable. We could see the bombs coming down. The monastery was a tremendous structure. And as the bombs hit, big tremendous chunks came down the hill. So, whatever Germans were there, they skedaddled. Otherwise, they'd have been crushed or something. They were gone. The monastery was pretty much destroyed because we were able to advance then and we went up the hill and everything and all of us, all of the outfits that were around there and there was nothing in the monastery that was worth waiting for or fussing about, you know, so we just kept going.

Q: What did you think of the bombing? Did you feel like any reservations about us bombing a monastery?

HDE: No, no, we did not, Colonel, no, we did not. By that time, we were resigned to the fact that we were going to be in this until the end. I certainly understood that this mortar was an unbelievable weapon and they're not going to stop using it. We went to Rome, and the advance on Rome – the Germans just retreated, that's all. We got into Rome. We were there a few days. We were all allowed to visit St. Peter's and the Vatican. And the Pope had come out, I remember. Then we went past Rome and we went towards Florence, Italy. The same thing, we weren't in too much action because everything was moving fast so we were moving fast, too. Sometimes, we supported tank outfits. They were advancing. They used the mortars to shell ahead of the tanks. We got through Florence and we were in a rest area and we were advised that we were going to the coast and we're going to prepare to invade – another invasion. They didn't say southern France. So, we said,

“Well, we’re going to Corsica or Sardinia.” Those are those two big islands. No, we bypassed that and we went to southern France.

Change tapes.

Q: Tape 2. Interview of Mr. Harold D. Erdrich on 27 February 2001. Harold, we were talking about, you were just about up to the invasion of southern France.

HDE: Yes, the invasion was not troublesome at all. As we got ashore on the beach, there were and [unclear] there were some German and American boys who had been killed. I remember seeing them. In Italy after Florence, there was talk of preparing a glider landing in southern France, where they bring in the mortars and us in the gliders. Planes would pick us up at an airport, you know? Wow, that was unbelievable, you know? Never came to be because they found the airplanes that they sent out to photograph, Germans had put up barricades on fields, wire, and poles and all that, whatever fields were near any major arteries, major roads or towns, couldn’t land, so they forgot it. They didn’t do it. We went up France and that was a fast trip until we got to Metz and there was a lot of resistance there, so we did a lot of target spotting there and then the Germans headed towards the Rhine River. So, we did the same in pursuit and we crossed – we crossed in pontoon boats. Then they put up a pontoon bridge after that to get vehicles across, but we got across on foot. Then we headed south, doing the same thing, same target spotting through different towns and our mortars, of course, also contributed to the destroying of some parts of towns, churches, other industrial buildings possibly, as we went. We never questioned what it was. We reached city called called Türkheim. We got in there. The German soldiers themselves had left the area and there was a labor camp there and we were directed to it and we found it. It was a barbed wire prison camp and we found in there a good few hundred young Polish fellows and girls from Poland. They had been taken there from Poland to that place and they were used in the village, in the town, as domestics, as doing work for the people, in whatever businesses they had, cleaning and all that, and the U.S. Army and other outfits that had entered after us. All these people were set free, but not to just go wherever they wanted. They couldn’t go. They had to stay there. A young fella came to me when we were eating with a lot of these young people. Some of them could speak a little English and this fella said to me, “Oh, hello.” He said, “New York.” I said, “Do you have family in NY?” “Yes.” Gives me a piece of paper. My apologies, maybe I could find out the name, but I don’t have it now. It was an uncle of his who had a little clothing store on 6th Avenue, between 43rd St. and 46th St., on the south side of the street. I said to him, as well as I could, because I spoke a little German so maybe he understood a little German, that I would try to get this paper to his family there. I came home about a week or two after. I said to my father, “Want to go with me there, we’ll go there.” “Sure.” We went, got off the 6th Avenue subway, right there, walk along and there’s a clothing store. We went in, the man comes over, middle-aged man, maybe, no more than 50. I gave him the paper. I don’t have my Army uniform on. I kept it on for a few weeks, but I had switched. He looks at it. He looks at me. I said, “This is your nephew?” “Yes.” That was his nephew. I said, “I can’t tell you anything about him. We told them what to do and all the people that came after were going to help him and I said, “If you are able to bring him here...” He said that’s what he’s going to try to do. I did give him the name of something in the government, a contact. Oh, it must have been two

years. He called, "My nephew is here. He's working in the store." I went with my wife and walked in and there he is, speaking a little English already. That happened. Absolutely.

Q: Great story.

HDE: Unbelievable. All we did was cry. So, that was the gist of my adventure in WW II. Just let me say this. I was awarded the Bronze Star medal and I have papers on that in case you need it. Colonel Meyerson, after I was awarded the Bronze Star medal, said to me, "I've also recommended you for the Silver Star." I said, "Colonel." I knew what he was talking about. I said, "Colonel, all the fellows were with me there. I didn't do all of that myself." We helped a mortar position – bring them ammunition while we were under fire. Thank God, we all didn't get hurt. I never got wounded in the Army, in the war, but I got hit by shrapnel once in a while from shelling or bombings. Once we were in a railroad station in Germany and we were bombed by a German plane. I didn't get hurt badly, but just like a scrape, like a band-aid, some mercurochrome with a band aid and that was all. So, I never got a Purple Heart. I never applied for a Purple Heart. And that is about my story.

Q: Good. Let me ask you a couple of questions. Well, first of all, let's complete the story here. What happened after you came home? What happened to you after the war?

HDE: I went back... I had gone to printing school before the war. Now I'm back to printing school and I was taking hand type, setting hand type. Then after that, I went to Mergenthaler Linotype school for a linotype course. But I never used the linotype when I worked. I didn't do that. I became, what you call, the makeup man, a compositor. Then I was working in printing shops, two in Brooklyn, one in Manhattan, getting experience. One for three months, one for six months, one for another six months and then my father-in-law said he heard of an opportunity through the CT union and the two fellows up there were dear friends of his. They were Presidents of the union up there. They knew of a shop in Hampden, CT, called Southern New England Typographic, and I called them and they said, "Yes." They were looking for makeup men, compositors, night work only, no days. I said, "Can I come up and see you?" "Sure." I didn't drive up. I didn't have a car then. My father-in-law had a car and he wanted to loan it to me, but "I'll take the train. I'll take the train." I saw them. They hired me. I went out in the shop. They gave me something to do and I did it. You know, I wasn't super qualified, but I could do it. I went back. I was to start the following Monday. But before I went back, I told them I had to come up here and get a room. They knew of a few boarding places, they gave me. I went and I found a very nice room in somebody's house and I had access to their kitchen and bathroom, very nice and shower. So, I had a place to live. I went home and then I came back on Sunday eve, Sunday afternoon and I was up there five days a week. No Saturday and Sunday. Friday evening after week, I went home. I worked there for nearly a year. Then I heard of another opportunity in South Norwalk, CT. Much closer, I could travel back and forth every day for that, with a car, of course. So, that turned out to be a shop... It was called C.J. O'Brien. I'm sure of that, just like Father O'Brien from the war. They were in South Norwalk and they did newspapers and they also did Moody's Index, a financial thing that they did. And I worked nights, 6PM to 2AM. The first night I started

to work – the foreman gives you your work, you know. You take it back to your table where you are. I have access to get linotype slugs done and the Ludlow was the bigger type that I did myself. I knew how to do that, you see. And put the jobs together, so to speak, on a small tray. Then I'd take a proof of it on the proof press and bring the proof and the job to the foreman. He checks it, makes sure there's no errors, fine, and he gives me the next job. That's the way you work in a typographic shop. I worked there and the first night, after I did a few jobs, a middle-aged man comes over to me, one of the men who did the work, too. He said, "Young fella, why are you working so fast?" I said, "Well, this is the work. I go to the foreman. He gives me the job and I do it." Then I understood what he was getting at because he said, "Slow down." I said, "Sir, this is how I do it. This is how I will continue to do it." So, I never bothered with him again. I was working too fast. I was getting too many jobs done.

Q: You eventually got back to working in NYC?

HDE: Yes, yes. I worked for Fairchild Publications, on East 12th Street in Manhattan, nights also. I never worked there steadily, at a steady job. I was an extra. I would show up whenever I wanted to, at 6:00, and the foreman would put you on because he always needed men and I got \$2.00 more for that night. It was a union rule, a union contract thing. The foreman of that department was a Mr. New, who knew my father-in-law because they used to have meetings of all these superintendents every month of all the newspapers and the big publications in NY. So, Mr. New knew my father-in-law. One point after there a couple of weeks, Mr. New calls me over and says, "I understand you work during the day." I said, "Yes, I'm selling printing." He said, "When you break up the work..." See, after we did the work from 6:00 to 10:00 PM, they check it all, and if it's all acceptable, we break up the copy. We throw all the leads into the tub to melt it down, you see, and then we set it up for the work that we're going to do after that, from 11:00 to 2:00 in the morning. So, Mr. New said to me, "When you finish breaking up and it's all approved, just look at me and I'll go like this [nods head] and you can go home." That's what I did. I didn't do it every night. But it was a little break. I was able to get an extra hour or two of sleep before I got up and I went out knocking on doors to sell.

Q: Did you have any children?

HDE: Yes, we had two boys. We lived in Wantagh first. First, I could have gotten a house in Levittown, on a rental basis, \$60 a month, and we didn't want it. We went there but we decided no, we were looking for something better. I was starting to do okay and we found a split level in Wantagh which was brand new. They were just going to build a house. There was a model there. The house would be up in a couple of months and we took that house and came home and told my mother-in-law, my mother and father and then my mother-in-law and father-in-law and my father-in-law said to me, again, gentlemen, this is a true story, he said, "Can we move in with you?" I looked at him, "You want to move into the house with us? With Mom (his wife)? How are you going to get to the Journal? You'll be way out in Wantagh and now you're in Brooklyn." They lived in Vanderveer Estates, an apartment project. "I'll manage. I have plenty of men out on the Island who work out there. I'll have plenty of rides and you're going to be going in. You have to work too, in your business." I was in business on Mott St. then, 262 Mott St., right

off Houston St. I said, "Okay, you can join us," and they did. We gave them the bedroom and we took down the garage and we made it into a bedroom which was perfect because we kept our cars outside. We didn't put our cars in the garage, we were using them so much. They were with us 3, 4 years and the Journal American, the Hearst papers decided to put a stock page in the Journal. They never had a stock page, like the Times and the Tribune, and they put it in and the pressure on my father-in-law was so great and he was a smoker and he was a drinker. One night I hear noise. I jump up. It's him. He could hardly breathe. I got him up, I opened up the window, I held him out. They called the ambulance. The ambulance came, took him to the ambulance. I went with the ambulance. Before we even got to – it was Meadowbrook Hospital, called then, on Hempstead Turnpike – he was gone. It was a shame. He was like a second father to me. Wonderful man. Wonderful man. Before that, may I talk about the business I got into?

Q: Well, actually, we're running out of tape, so I want to come back and ask you a couple of questions on WWII.

HDE: Absolutely.

Q: Okay. You said that the 4.2 deuce was a fabulous weapon. Why did you think it was?

HDE: Because it was a big shell that caused a big explosion when it hit and the gun position could be quite close to the target and still shoot a weapon a couple of hundred yards if it had to. When I interrogated German prisoners-of-war, and some of them were not just privates, they were majors and captains, I asked them the name of their outfit. That was the kind of information I had to get from them. Their rank, the name of their outfit, where were they heading, if they were willing to give this information. What these fellows were always telling us about the weapon, the weapon that you use, what is that weapon? We told them, big mortar. In fact, they even saw it, you know. They said, "That weapon beat us. That weapon took over the whole thing." The small mortars were no big problem because they had small mortars too – the Germans. But that big mortar was the terror weapon.

Q: That really seemed to shake them up.

HDE: I don't know if that weapon is still involved in the Army. I have no idea.

Q: Do we still use 4.2's?

HDE: I wouldn't doubt it.

Q: Did you ever have any experiences with any of the other Allied soldiers in Italy, I mean from the other armies, British, Polish?

HDE: Oh yes, oh yes. We were attached. They were attached to us. Australian, New Zealand, British. Once we had, from Africa, French Guianese – big tall black fellows, all big guys and they were attached to us and they had guns but they worked with their knives. They didn't use a gun. They were attached to us. They were more interested in seeing

how the mortar, they wanted to know about the mortars, because I think the plan was to give the mortars to the French. You know, the French Army was still from Africa were coming in to chase the Germans also.

Q: Any other particularly interesting characteristics of nationalities stick out? Anything about the Poles or the Greeks or the British?

HDE: We couldn't converse too well with some of them. We couldn't make ourselves understood. We only could really understand German, because I spoke a little of it, and Italian. I had taken French in school, but I couldn't converse in French. I could say a couple of words, that's about all.

Q: What was it like? You're a young man from Brooklyn and you're in Rome at the Vatican. That must have been something. How did you feel, being in Rome?

HDE: Excellent. I went in to more churches with fellows from my company and the officers for different holidays wherever we happened to be. I went into more churches than possibly many people who go regularly to church in that span of 2 1/2, 3 years. In fact, I went into churches here with the boys in AL. They were going to church. "Harold, you want to come?" I said, "Of course, I'll go. Of course." I had no problem. It was great. They were very appreciative and I was appreciative.

Q: Did you ever think as a young man in Brooklyn that someday you'd be in Italy, in Rome?

HDE: No, No. About ten years ago then or approximately, my accountant and his wife and I and my wife went to Italy. I had first up wanted to go. Another man who is my – wait let me get it straight – my daughter-in law's father, Gerry Kaufman, was a teacher of languages and a principal of a high school. He had been taking groups of students, seniors, in their last year, to Spain, Russia and Italy. I missed the Russian trip. But I made the Spanish trip with him. He took about 20-25 students and he always needed a few parents who would volunteer to go. My wife and I offered to go, so we could help out. So, we saw Spain, Madrid, we went to a ranch in the Costa del Sol. We went to Alhambra. We didn't go to Barcelona because we were only there about a week, that's all, a week.

Q: But how did you feel about being back in Italy again?

HDE: I remembered it and I was a tour guide, really, because I knew where to go, so to speak. I remembered it would be nice to see the Vatican and St. Peter's. In France, now I never went to France. I went there myself. I went to the Versailles and the Louvre. We went in Florence, when we went with my accountant and his wife and my wife, part of the tour ... We landed in Venice. We started in Venice. Came down to Florence, Rome, Naples, Sorrento. That was the tour. I had been in all of those places. So, the Florence trip, just a day, the museums and the art galleries were just unbelievable. We saw paintings from Goya and Michaelangelo and all that kind of stuff. Sorrento, I had been in Pompei as a soldier when Mt. Vesuvius erupted, and the ash coming down was eventually that high [motions to knee] in the streets and on the farms and everything. I was there when this

happened. We went back to it when I made the personal trip, and of course it was all cleaned up, it was gone. But we ended the trip in Sorrento before we went back to the airport to fly home. That was very lovely because we had been there also.

Q: Two last questions. A couple of minutes left. What was it you didn't like about Levittown?

HDE: Nothing. We liked it. But we wanted a bigger house with a nice room for a patio and so on and so forth. That's why we didn't take the Levittown house.

Q: And the last couple of minutes we have here – is there anything you wanted to add, anything that really strikes you about your experiences in WWII or something that you'd like to sum up with?

HDE: Well, I felt I was most – lucky wouldn't be the exact word, but – appreciative that I survived WWII. I went through plenty. We were able to help the infantry. That's what our job was, support them and help them and we were successful in doing that. We fellows felt we played a good part in helping defeat the enemy.

Q: Thank you.