



CONDUCTING ORAL HISTORIES WITH VETERANS SAMPLE INTERVIEWS WITH WORLD WAR II VETERANS

The following transcripts are excerpts oral histories conducted by Paul LaRue and his students at Washington High School in Washington Court House, Ohio. These interviews are with a range of World War II veterans who share their stories and memories from their experiences in the armed forces. These stories are informative, moving, and powerful; they illustrate the importance of hearing and collecting the stories of our veterans. The experiences these veterans share shed light on vital aspects of our nation's history and help students gain new insights into the ways individual men and women helped shape our past. The selections included in this document also reveal the diversity of experiences, training and tasks among women and men in the U.S. military.

LaRue and his students first started working on this project in the Fall of 2004, using materials from the Library of Congress Veteran's History Project as a guide. After two of his students attended a National Park Service session on oral history, LaRue and his students composed a list of questions to ask each veteran they interviewed. A list of questions is included in this document, along with excerpts from several of the interviews with former servicemen and women. Those interested in learning more about how to get started with a veteran's oral history project at their school or in their community can visit the Veteran's History Project website located at <http://www.loc.gov/vets/>. If you have any questions or would like any additional information about this project or the process for conducting interviews with veterans and submitting them to the Library of Congress, feel free to contact Paul LaRue via email at wshhistory@wchcs.org.



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WWII SCRIPT

1. Why did you join the service? What Branch?
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VETERAN INTERVIEW EXCERPT: **William Argyl Anderson**

Name: William Argyl Anderson

Branch of Service: Army, Company K 32nd Infantry 7th Division, private

Dates of Service: October 15, 1942 - September 21, 1943

Medals: Purple Heart, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign, WWII Victory Medals

Date of Interview: March 24, 2004

Location of Interview: Fayette County, Ohio

Names of Interviewers: Alyssa Begin, Michael Moore, and Paul LaRue

Names of Transcribers: Lee Ballman, Lindsey Cox, Camille Galecki, Brittany Runnels

Transcript Coordinators: Carolyn Shoemaker, Darci Mossbarger, and Camille Galecki

INTERVIEWER: How did you join the army?

VETERAN: The real truth . . .

INTERVIEWER: Sure . . .

VETERAN: Doesn't matter.

INTERVIEWER: Doesn't matter . . . Nope. We want the real truth.

VETERAN: Well, it's back in the depression late 30's . . . My dad got sick. He was . . .

I think he had prostate cancer. And we were very poor, but he had a couple pool tables and he had a little pool room and the town of Barnesville went dry, they voted it dry. So the town of Woodsfield, Ohio which is 18 miles away . . .

INTERVIEWER: That's county seat in Monroe County, right?

VETERAN: Right, Woodsfield in Monroe County, 18 miles away. It's still wet . . . So what I would do is I'd go to Woodsfield and buy pints of legal whisky and bring them back to Barnesville, and maybe I paid two and a half for a pint and I sold them for five dollars, see. But, I'd have them for a few months and this man came, kept coming in and buying a pint of whisky, you know. He was dressed, dressed like a farmer, big overalls,

nothing suspicious. So, last time he come in, he says, "I'm a federal agent and you're under arrest."

INTERVIEWER: And you were selling these at the pool hall?

VETERAN: At the pool hall, downtown Barnesville.

INTERVIEWER: And that's where your, that's your home, that's where your native?

VETERAN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

VETERAN: Well, I got me a lawyer. Cost me fifty dollar to get a lawyer. The county seat is St. Clairesville, Ohio. I showed up for the hearing, he came out and told me, said, "No char . . . All charges been dropped if you enlist in the army."

INTERVIEWER: Now, what year would this have been?

VETERAN: 1942.

INTERVIEWER: (laughter)

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INTERVIEWER: No kidding. Now how long did this . . . how long did this battle . . . I mean how long did this go on?

VETERAN: Aww, I . . . I would guess . . . two weeks, maybe, a little longer. Three weeks at the most. That's about when I got . . . that's about when I got shot, in about two weeks.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so at . . . towards the end of the battle.

VETERAN: Yeah. (Bad spot on tape) I was on the move all the time and had little sleep or food to eat; only "K" rations. My mind has gone blank on a good deal that happened during those extremely harsh days. Then, into perhaps the second week, several of us soldiers was behind a large rock getting it . . . getting ready to attack the Japanese

position at the top of the hill, when an artillery shell hit the rock. Splinters wounded all the soldiers ex . . . and one fell right on top of me and soaked me with blood, and I thought I was dead, but I . . . I wasn't even injured, I just had blood all over me. The next move was to, uh . . . I knew there was a tent hospital like M.A.S.H., like in M.A.S.H.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

VETERAN: At the bottom of the hill. My captain was there. He had been shot in the head. He told me to get some clean uniform on and something hot to eat, then go on back to my post. They figured if I got scared I'd never wanna go back, see, so they . . . It's

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

VETERAN: Good psychology.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Right.

VETERAN: It's force you right away. That day we stormed the Jap . . . machine gun position . . . and was . . . and I was hit in the shoulder with shrapnel, shrapnel from a hand grenade, I think, I mean . . . I got hit. Okay, then . . . I left there. Instead of going to that tent hospital, uh . . . where I'd been I went to the tent hospital that was down on the beach. And they, uh . . . they . . . it was in the shoulder, they operated on that . . .

INTERVIEWER: Were you carried? I mean, did you . . . ?

VETERAN: No, I was able to walk.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, I was going to say, you said you were able to walk. Okay.

VETERAN: Until I got my shoes off. Then my feet swollen up and my toes turned black and blue.

INTERVIEWER: From the frost bite?

VETERAN: That's right, from the frost bite. After the operation, they stuffed gauze in there. It was a round hole and they kept stuff gauze and then everyday they'd pull a little bit out and clip it off. I suppose as it healed up. About three . . . two or three days we were placed on a hospital ship . . . and it only took . . . about two weeks to get back to San Francisco . . . to, uh . . . Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco.

INTERVIEWER: So, how was your shoulder at that point?

VETERAN: Pretty bad. You know.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

VETERAN: Couldn't use it. It was kind of in a sling. My feet were all bandaged up. They kept putting, uh . . . like iodine solution type stuff on it. And . . .

INTERVIEWER: Now, did lots of guys have the same problem with their feet?

VETERAN: Yes they did. Uh-huh. Yeah. I kind of got a picture, maybe, that'll kind of give you an idea.

(Paper ruffle)

VETERAN: Pictures so old and fragile that (Bad spot on tape) other half of that (Bad spot on tape)

INTERVIEWER: Oh really (Bad spot on tape)

VETERAN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Is that you?

VETERAN: Yeah. Oh here, here's the other half of that one.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay . . . Did you end up having more trouble with your feet or with your shoulder?

VETERAN: Picture here was in Life magazine.

INTERVIEWER: I'll be darn. I want to see that.

VETERAN: Barely see them but here, here we are. Right there.

INTERVIEWER: Is that right? That's cool. Where did . . .? Obviously you came back because you were injured. What was the next . . . Do you know where the next place . . .?

VETERAN: Kiska.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. And then what was after . . . Do you know where was?

VETERAN: Yeah, they ended up on Okinawa.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So they . . . so they would have been coming up from the north.

VETERAN: To the south.

INTERVIEWER: To the south.

VETERAN: To wait . . . they ended up ready to invade.

INTERVIEWER: That would have been the big invasion.

VETERAN: Of Japan.

INTERVIEWER: Of Japan.

VETERAN: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Versus some of the other guys who came up from the south.

VETERAN: Well the marines and them that fought in . . .

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

VETERAN: Coming back, they fought in Guadalcanal. Uh . . . the same year that we went, they were coming back. They had already had the battle in Guadalcanal.

INTERVIEWER: Right, and that's what's interesting about the story, is the story you normally kind of follow the marines and then more than the . . . and now . . . but, you know what I'm saying?

VETERAN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: That . . . that northern . . . that northern route doesn't really get talked about nearly as much.

VETERAN: It doesn't. No, no, no . . .

INTERVIEWER: I mean, and . . . and as a History teacher I'll have to say I'm as guilty, you know, I'm as guilty of that as anybody, which is kind of interesting.

VETERAN: Well, it's not . . . The only way, uh . . . the . . . your best bet to get good knowledge is to read, uh . . . this . . . this . . . this . . . this private he was from, um . . . Taos, New Mexico?

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Yeah. Taos?

VETERAN: He was awarded, the only person in the Aleutians that was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. He was a private, Joe P. Martinez. He stormed a Japanese embankment and killed all of the Japs in it and got killed himself.

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INTERVIEWER: Um . . . do you have any recollection of the day your service ended?

How you felt, or what you did . . .

VETERAN: Great.

INTERVIEWER: . . . or . . . ?

INTERVIEWER AND VETERAN: (Laughter)

VETERAN: Yes I felt so good I didn't even check my discharge papers and they got all kinds of errors on it.

INTERVIEWER: (Laughter)

VETERAN: That's how . . . they handed me a hundred and sixty dollars and said, "You're discharged," and I went to town to the Peabody Hotel. You know where the Peabody is in Memphis?

INTERVIEWER: I've heard of it.

VETERAN: They have a duck that walks right . . .

INTERVIEWER: I've heard of the ducks.

VETERAN: . . . through the . . .

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. The ducks that walk through the lobby.

VETERAN: Aw, a duck walks through the lobby . . . took the elevator to the first floor to the ball room . . . all these beautiful women, you know, there in the ball room . . . I asked that nurse, I sensed, she had been waiting (Bad spot on tape) "Let's dance." (Bad spot on tape) "I'm not allowed to dance with enlisted men." (Bad spot on tape) lost your chance.

INTERVIEWER: (Laughter)

VETERAN: Of course I was about half . . . half gone by then.

INTERVIEWER: (Laughter)

VETERAN: So, uh . . . yes. I was very pleased.

INTERVIEWER: I believe it. Um . . . what did you do in days and weeks after?

VETERAN: Okay, uh . . . Took the train from Memphis to Cincinnati . . . Got off Cincinnati at the old train station, beautiful place.

INTERVIEWER: I think it's a museum.

VETERAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Now.

VETERAN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Yeah. I know what you're talking about.

VETERAN: Museum there now, down, down by the Reds . . .

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

VETERAN: . . . old ballpark. Got out there in the evening. Went to hunt something to eat and ended up in a bar . . . and . . . then . . . don't know what happened then.

INTERVIEWER: (Laughter)

VETERAN: From there I, uh . . . got the pla . . . uh . . . train to Barnesville, Ohio . . . and once I got on Barnesville I . . . stayed around for about a week and I got real restless and I told my mother, I said, "I'm gonna go look for a job." I could have taken what they call fifty-two twenty. In other words you get twenty dollars . . . a week for fifty-two weeks and don't have to do anything for it. Well, I said, "I went to Canton, Ohio and got a job at Hercules Motor Company. Well, I stayed there for . . . oh, 'bout . . . going on a year, I guess. (Bad spot on tape) Not quite sure how long I was there. (Bad spot on tape) I started out on the eleven to seven shift and I couldn't sleep in the daytime. I finally

talked them into the three to . . . three to eleven shift. That way you could work and then you could go out in the evening and go to the bars and . . . till 2:30 if you wanted to, and still get plenty of sleep. (Bad spot on tape) I got a letter one day from the V . . . VA. It says, uh . . . “You are entitled to four years college on the GI Bill.” (Bad spot on tape) I never thought about going to college. Never dreamt about it. (Bad spot on tape) I talked to the man and he says, “Your high school grades are . . . are in order and you can get into a college.” (Bad spot on tape) I enrolled at Kent State University . . . (Bad spot on tape) At Kent for . . . (Bad spot on tape) quarters. Spring quarter . . . spring quarter and . . . summer quarter. That’d be 1944. Uh . . . I transferred from Kent State to Youngstown College. I stayed at Youngstown College for one year and then transferred to Bowling Green. And I got a degree in business administration from Bowling Green.

INTERVIEWER: On the GI Bill?

VETERAN: On the GI Bill.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Well that’s good. (Bad spot on tape) While you were in the service did you make any close friends or strong friendships? (Loud Beep) Yeah, sorry about that. That’s . . . ignore that.

VETERAN: Not that I . . . none that I kept in contact with.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Yeah, which is one of the questions we always, uh . . . are there reunions of . . . ?

VETERAN: There is a reunion of, uh . . . for the entire . . . period of service of Aleutian Island. There’s a reunion for that, yeah. There’s a guy from Sunset, Florida that kind of organizes it.

INTERVIEWER: But you’ve never, uh . . .

VETERAN: I've never been to one.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Because I know some people do. You know, it's like anything, some . . .

VETERAN: I . . .

INTERVIEWER: . . . do, some don't.

VETERAN: I wanted to forget everything about it. I . . . I . . . I . . . I just wanted to put the whole thing out of my mind. This is more than I've ever told anybody since I've been out of service about it.

INTERVIEWER: And we . . . we appreciate that.

VETERAN: I never talked about it.

VETERAN INTERVIEW EXCERPT: **Fred DiDomenico**

Name: Fred DiDomenico

Branch of Service: United States Marine Corps.

Dates of Service: September 7, 1942 - August, 1945

Commendations: Silver Star November, 1943

Date of Interview: April 23, 2004

Location of Interview: Fayette County, Ohio

Names of Interviewers: Amy Dean, Drew Dean, Troy Brown and Mr. Paul LaRue

Name of Transcribers: Amanda Janasov and Trenton Strawser

Transcript Coordinators: Carolyn Shoemaker, Darci Mossbarger, Camille Galecki

Serial Number: 461128

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall your first days in the service?

VETERAN: Very much. (laughter) We spent three days on a train, seven of us from the Cleveland area. And we got to a place in, uh . . . South Carolina called Port Royal, and that was my first day of shock. We unloaded from the train, and of course many other recruits came from other parts of the U.S. Oh, I'd say maybe two hundred or three hundred of us gathered at Port Royal. They loaded us on trucks, cattle trucks, I mean, like you would haul cattle. If you can imagine, we got into the truck, and we thought there was enough, and some Sgt. said, "There is room for one hundred more." And they jammed us in, so that was our first awakening in . . . on our way to Paris Island, South Carolina for boot training.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any um . . . other interesting experiences there at Boot Camp?

VETERAN: Yeah, um . . . after the issue of clothing, and the physical equipment, and shots and so forth, we settled into a one . . . one-level barracks uh . . . made of rough lumber. It was curious why the whole area was sand . . . not grass, but sand. And we

found out later why: because that's exactly what we were in training for. It was the combat area, and it was up at six in the morning until late at night, everything done according to orders. Part of my awakening, part of their training, and I'll bring that out just a little later.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, do you remember any of your instructors.

VETERAN: Remember what?

INTERVIEWER: Your instructors?

VETERAN: Uh . . . somewhat. But we were only there three weeks, so that didn't register that much. In fact, they were the bad guys. (laughter)

INTERVIEWER: Let's see, what was your job assignment?

VETERAN: Uh . . . we don't get a job assignment until after you get into advanced training. I ended up . . . my MOS was machine gunner, and so I held that through until my rank of Sgt.

INTERVIEWER: And again, was that . . . did you select that or did . . . was that . . .

VETERAN: No. No, well . . .

INTERVIEWER: Did you suggest that? Was that what you wanted to do?

VETERAN: You kind of make an application . . . you kinda let them know what you want to do. And uh . . . I think I became a machine gunner when I was in training over in American Samoa. Oh, I love to fire a .50 caliber machine gun. Just one of those things you like to do, I guess . . . (laughter)

INTERVIEWER: Okay, uh . . . you obviously saw combat, right?

VETERAN: Very much so, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Could you . . . would you . . . talk us through the time you left Paris Island, just kinda your . . .

VETERAN: Okay, uh . . . from Paris Island, three weeks only, uh . . . and they bused us off to another area in North Carolina, which was the rifle range. And at the rifle range you fire a uh . . . M3 and an M6, which is history now in combat today. You'd fire at several ranges. I think the first was 500 yards, then 600 yards, then 700 yards, then 800 yards. And, um . . . you want to take pride in what you do. But I fired expert. In other words, that was 16 rounds in the bulls eye without a miss . . . maybe that had something to do with my marksmanship. And from there we went to New River, North Carolina, which was in the Jacksonville area, and that was a staging area for about two weeks. And at the end of that two-week period, they loaded us on a passenger train, I can't tell you how many, I'd say three, maybe four thousand marines, and transported us across the U.S., and that took five days . . . to go that distance. And what do you do on a train for five days? You name all the capitals in the United States, all the states and the capitals, those kinds of things. But you're confined . . .

INTERVIEWER: Were you still with any of the people you had entered . . . I mean, you came down from Cleveland with?

VETERAN: They kinda split you up.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

VETERAN: Um . . . I tried to maintain some contact, but they went in different directions. We got to Camp Elliot in California, and that became another staging area. Now what do you do with 3,000, 4,000 marines, uh . . . while you are staging them? When I say staging, they're getting you ready for something, but we don't know what that something is. Uh . . . so we had combat here, almost daily, but not everyday. We would do hikes. And the first one was a moderate five-mile hike. It then became a ten-mile hike, and then it became a fifteen-mile hike, and then it became a twenty-mile hike . . .

INTERVIEWER: Now, how long would that take?

VETERAN: Uh . . . we would do it in the daytime. Some of it had to be on the double.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

VETERAN: And, uh . . . but it was conditioning, and also to occupy our time. Uh . . . from there we had some liberty. We could go to San Diego on occasions, but not very often. The next move was to pack your gear. We knew it was overseas, but you don't know these things . . . you just go with the flow. And, so now we are aboard the troop transport, and that's the ship to carry troops. And, I would venture, I would guess, 5,000 on board a ship. And it was a ship that one time was President's Line. It was a cruise ship back in those days, not like what they have today. (laughter) Anyway, on board ship, we probably was there still tied up to the dock for about two days. And then we finally pulled out, and that was another shocker. We got out into deep water, and everybody ran to the rail to chuck up seasickness and so forth. Why I didn't get seasickness, I can't answer that, but I didn't.

INTERVIEWER: Most folks did get seasick?

VETERAN: Most, I'd say 90%.

INTERVIEWER: Is that right?

VETERAN: Yeah. They would fight for an area to get over. (laughter) Many of them didn't make it. (chuckles) Anyway . . . that's another one of those shockers. But then we spent 14 days, and we knew in November, of 1942, we were headed to Guadalcanal. In Guadalcanal, at that particular time, we were kinda losing that battle. So we just knew we were headed as replacements at Guadalcanal.

INTERVIEWER: You knew that for, I mean . . .

VETERAN: Scuttlebutt . . .

INTERVIEWER: Okay, that's what I mean. That was just kinda . . .

VETERAN: Scuttlebutt is gossip. (laughter) Okay. So that was what we were thinking, though. One day, we were marshaled down into the . . . below deck, no one above deck by the P.A. system. And so we wondered what was going on, and that was early in the morning. We were not allowed to go up on deck until we were told to do so. So about late afternoon, we were allowed up on deck and we were in a lagoon, and all I saw was tropical jungle and so forth. And what they had done, they had taken a portion of us from that boat and put us into American Samoa, Pago-Pago was the harbor, and uh . . . it was an American territory. And they took A through D off the ship and put us on this island. Our purpose was to . . . the garrison duty for . . . in case the Japanese wanted to come in and take over American Samoa. The contingent, probably 200 marines, and we docked at a little island they called Mormon Valley, which was a neighbor of American Samoa. And they had this little village. And so we built a camp there, and we'd been there for nine months. What did we do? Not much other than training, and war games, and going through a volcanic uh . . . crater, uh . . . developing a pass over the mountain over to the other side. The island was 13 miles long, and about 3 miles wide, not very big, but tropical. The native people were very generous. They were very helpful. When we first got there, we could get our clothes laundered, and cleaned, pressed, somewhat, for a candy bar. When we left it took six dollars.

INTERVIEWER: (laughter)

VETERAN: But I would like to go back to American Samoa, sometime. I think about going back, but I haven't had . . .

INTERVIEWER: Where did the people that didn't go where you went, end up going?

VETERAN: Prob . . . I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: You don't really know?

VETERAN: I don't really know. As I said, I . . . we were suspicioning Guadalcanal, but whether they got to Guadalcanal or not, I don't know. They called replacements, and it's like somebody, a dispatcher . . . they send so many here, so many there, but from American Samoa we went to Auckland, New Zealand. And . . . didn't know why, but that was to fatten us up for combat. Anyway, we got to Auckland, New Zealand. It's a beautiful place. I enjoyed it . . . a lot of ice cream, a lot of steak and eggs.

INTERVIEWER: You mean, they really were putting flesh on you?

VETERAN: Well . . . Uh . . .

INTERVIEWER: When they were giving you . . .

VETERAN: Yeah, right. And they put our camp in a cricket stadium. You've heard of cricket? Okay, it was a stadium. Pretty much like any stadium, and our camp was in that stadium. And we were there from . . . April or May, the first part of summer through September. What was strange about it is (laughter) . . . is that this is summertime, but it was snowing. But they had hot springs . . . beautiful, beautiful country. The people treated us very well.

INTERVIEWER: At that point, did you have any idea where you were going to end up?

VETERAN: No.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

VETERAN: None. Probably going in from Auckland and Samoa, [I] probably weighed 170 lbs. During those three, four months, I probably weighed about 205, 210. (laughter) We'd have a long bus haul, but then we go out on liberty and go downtown. Steak and eggs, baked potatoes, and all the ice cream you wanted to eat, and so forth. So we lived it up. As far as the beer drinking and so forth, it was free at the base, but we would go out

if we wanted to have British beer, which was . . . had more content, I guess. That's what we would do, so, anyway, I put on weight. Uh . . . we'll talk about when . . . Anyway, from there we went from Auckland, New Zealand to . . . back to Guadalcanal and unloaded our ships and struck camp. Made our camp in Guadalcanal. In the 3rd Marine Division, which was my division . . . was formed in Auckland, New Zealand, not technically, but for the time we got to Guadalcanal, the 3rd Marine Division was in tact. So we made camp in Guadalcanal, and . . . not here, this is after . . . anyways . . . um . . . their division was formed, and we began serious training for our next combat, not knowing where we were going. But . . . uh . . . then, I think this was when, I said, "Yeah, I want to be a machine gunner," when they asked for volunteers to do this. But that is what I was volunteered for. And uh . . . we went to extensive training in Guadalcanal, and got ready for Bougainville, which was our first campaign. And that happened November 1, 1943. So I think we were on board ship, probably in mid-October, and the one thing we wanted in . . . we wanted to go to combat because we could get good food via the Navy Ship. And there was always better food there. Back to American Samoa, most of our food was dehydrated . . . uh . . . canned food, and that was where I was introduced . . . introduced to Spam, which I do not like to this day. (laughter) A lotta Spam, anyway you could cook it, they had it. Uh . . . we would later have Spam in other combat conditions, but anyway, um . . . Guadalcanal was still . . . the food was better, because we would like to go aboard ship, because the Navy had better food. But we were aboard ship probably mid-October and ready for Bougainville, and we landed in Bougainville, uh . . . October . . . November 1, 1943. First wave, we'd go down a cargo net. You understand what I am talking about? In a LDCP, which is a landing craft that has a front that drops . . . and we'd go down the cargo net into this landing craft, and

there was 42 of us . . . in this landing craft. And then they'd wave us out, and we'd go into our rendezvous waiting for the command to do the first wave. Well, there's a coxswain that controls the boat, and he's supposed to be . . . he's a Coast Guard man. And there is supposed to be two Coast Guard men to man a .50 caliber machine gun on the starboard side, and on the portside. And we had to go around a small island, Puruata Island, in order to get lined up for the first wave. Well, the coxswain didn't get aboard, so they asked for volunteers. "We need volunteers to fire the machine guns!" So I climbed up the ladder, just about 8 feet, to get up to the stern, strap yourself in, and I got the starboard side. Other marines got the other side. So we started around, and I'd empty about two magazines . . . then we got ready to go for the ram, and they said, "Secure your piece!" So I took the belt off, and secured a piece, and knowing that the boat now is full throttle heading for the beach. Instead of climbing down the ladder to get down in the boat, I jumped from the stern down some 8 feet. I got 80 lbs. of gear on my back now, so you don't jump stiffly. So I fell to the floor and I hit the deck, and at that time the boat was hit by Naval Artillery . . . excuse me . . . That's okay . . . Well, from that point, what I saw was bodies . . . arms and legs and red water . . . From that point I can't give you an answer from how I got from there to the beach, but I ended up on the beach, one of six out of 42. And that was my introduction to combat. Um . . . let me back up . . . in boot camp, the 4th . . . 5th day out, they marched us out to low tide in South Carolina, and the platoon is two sections. They put the first section in a makeshift boat, and left the other section back on the beach, on the grass area. And on the whistle, we jumped out of the makeshift boat and ran to the other group. And when we did that, they threw stones, and rocks, and sticks, and whatever they had at us. We reversed it, and did the same thing

with the second half. After completion they said, “This is why you are being trained. This is your activity. 70% of you will not make it.”

INTERVIEWER: And they told you that?

VETERAN: Yeah. 70% will not make it. It is in that article you have, um . . . I knew I was in big trouble. There is no backing out. So I said, “Okay, I’ll be the best marine I can be. And maybe, I can be in the 30%.” Okay, now we’re back to Bougainville. 42 of us, six of us get to the beach. We lived it out. Then it became hand-to-hand combat, then they . . . to get away from the open area on the beach, and we got into the jungle. We moved ourselves down to the center of the activity. And guess what? We found ourselves behind pillboxes.

INTERVIEWER: I know, I read that they initially didn’t think there were pillboxes. Was that the problem? They didn’t think there were bunkers. Pillboxes are like bunkers.

VETERAN: Yeah, made out of coconut logs, and sand, about two levels. And the artillery is at one level, machine guns on the other level. If the marines tried to come in, they’d crossfire . . . and the possibility of getting through that was remote. They would carry hand grenades and TNT rocks in our packs. So this guy and myself . . . put a . . . together, a hand grenade and a TNT rock with a detonator cord. We crawled up to the opening of the pillbox and threw in the charge. I took the one and Bobo took the other, and that started the troops from getting killed in the machine gun crossfire.

INTERVIEWER: And this is part of your train . . . this again was something you were trained to do?

VETERAN: You do what you had to do.

VETERAN INTERVIEW EXCERPT: Reverend Howard Gray

Name: Reverend Howard Gray

Branch of Service: Army, Sgt.; Red Ball Express Truck Convoy

Race: African American

Dates of Service: June 4, 1943 - November 12, 1945

Date of Interview: November 25, 2003

Location of Interview: Fayette County, Ohio

Names of Interviewers: Paul LaRue, Bennie McRae, Michael Moore, Jennifer Ortlieb,
Sarah Smith

Names of Transcribers: Jennifer Ortlieb and Sarah Smith

Transcript Coordinators: Carolyn Shoemaker, Darci Mossbarger, and Camille Galecki

There's a gap between the interview and the pre-interview. The interview is complete, but it carries over on both sides.

INTERVIEWER: Um . . . do you remember any boot camp training experiences?

VETERAN: Uh . . . well ours wasn't boot camp. Um . . . I didn't call it boot camp. We called it a . . . a infantry training. I was at I.R.T.C., Infantry Training Replacement Core. And that's where I took my training at. That was in Fort McClellan, Alabama. I took 18 weeks of basic training, infantry basic training; learning how to fight.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember anything specific about that?

VETERAN: Well, um . . . we . . . we . . . we learned how to kill. We learned how to use a bayonet at your throat.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hm.

VETERAN: And give you butt. How to get you off of us if it, you know, hand to hand fighting. Um . . . we learned how to go through the gas chamber, use a gas mask. We learned uh . . . how to fire the rifle, we got a score for it. Um . . . think that's about . . .

INTERVIEWER: Um . . . do you remember any instructors . . . that you had?

VETERAN: Yeah. Um . . . there was an old fellow that, Sgt. Orange. Sgt. Orange was in the old war before WWII. He was in Bougainville, or someplace in the South Pacific, and Sgt. Orange was one of the troopers that came back to train us, and he told us, “Listen to what I have to say because I’m here to keep you from being killed.” Our slogan was “To kill or to be killed.” That was our slogan. Sgt. Orange was one of the trainers. I don’t remember some of the other ones. They were hard- nosed, old timers . . . were . . . were we wore leggings that was laced up, you know? And we were crude looking soldiers. We look . . . we didn’t look anything like that.

INTERVIEWER and VETERAN: (Laughter)

INTERVIEWER: So how did you get through it?

VETERAN: What?

INTERVIEWER: How did you get through it, was it tough?

VETERAN: Not, no, not if you apply yourself. I have learned that whatever situation that I am in I apply myself, and by applying yourself you can make it tough or you can make it easy. I was learned to make it easy. I did everything that they told me. Exactly like they told me, and I never got in trouble.

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INTERVIEWER: Um . . . do you want to tell us about some of the discriminations you experienced?

VETERAN: Uh . . . I told one, I don’t know what, do you want me to retell that about that bar?

INTERVIEWER: That’s fine. Yeah. That’s fine.

VETERAN: Okay, okay. Uh . . . I was . . . I was coming home from uh . . . Paris, Texas, and I had to come through Texarkana, Texas. And in Texarkana, Texas they have uh . . .

a bus depot. And this bus depot the black people, if I may say this, sat right in the middle and you're caged in. Not allowed anywhere else without you get permission. Your sitting . . . old couch, old beat up chairs, strings . . . uh . . . springs coming through them. So, I wanted a drink of water. To get a drink of water . . . the white people they have signs up; White Only and Colored Only. So to get a drink of water, I get permission come round to . . . to drink out, but during this time there was no signs. I didn't see any. I did see the cooler . . . pop cooler with a spigot coming out of it, it didn't say colored or white. So I thought well, I'll wait my turn. Never step in front. If your gonna drink a water I don't dare step in front of you, I'm in trouble. So I waited 'til all the white people got a drink of water. I didn't see anyone else . . . I'm retelling this . . .

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

VETERAN: I didn't see anyone else, and I went down to get a drink of water, and three guys was watching me, and they snatched me. "Boy! Get your mouth off that fountain." Bam! Knocked me in the mouth. And they thought I had my mouth on the . . . I didn't . . . I was taught better than to put my mouth on that . . . on that . . . you . . . you hold from it. So anyway, uh . . . they asked me where I was from, and I said, "Camp Maxie." "What state you from, boy?" I said, "Boy?" "Yes, boy." And I said, "I'm from Ohio," and they said, "Oh you're one of those Ohio N's." And that began to bother me. And that . . . they used that word very, very well, very well. So they said, "You want a drink of water, boy?" And I said, "Yeah." "What?" "Yes, sir. Yes, sir." Every . . . say yes sir to them. And so they got an old dirty pop bottle, and they filled this pop bottle full of dirty pop that somebody drank out of, filled it full of water, and gave it to me and said, "Drink all of it boy or you're going to die." And the people around were laughing, making fun, ridiculing me. I'm a sergeant. I'm dressed. I'm dressed in my khaki's. I'm

standing tall. And I'm proud. I'm 18 years old, little over 18 years old. And this was how I was treated in Texarkana, Texas. But I'm still fighting for my country. This is my country, born and raised here. I gotta fight for it. I gotta protect it. That's what I'm trained to do. Regardless of how I'm treated, I'm gonna fight for my country. 'Cause if for your statement, if you wanna know what happened in Germany and France, notice we've got a great country.

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INTERVIEWER: Um . . . I was wondering if you were able to stay in touch with your family while you were in service?

VETERAN: Uh . . . the only time I stayed, I had an eight day furlough . . . I was in the service two years and six months and something, and that time I only had eight days at home, and I had to use the eight days with travel time and everything. That, 'scuse me, that's the only time that I ever . . . I could . . . I could write, but I never got many letters. Overseas we'd hardly ever get a letter. In the States, I would get a letter from my mom and uh . . . but uh . . . that's the only touch I had.

INTERVIEWER: Um . . . let's see . . . what'd you do for entertainment?

VETERAN: Well, okay, we had USO and USO would come, like I say, we were all black and all black in . . . in Texas, and I never . . . I never danced, never could dance. I never smoke or drank. And I would go . . . I would go to where the USO was. That's where the girls would come out. Paris. And uh . . . I would look. You know, be a wallflower. I stand around, you know, and . . . and they would go on through havin' all their fun, but that wasn't for me. I was more . . . my dad was a minister and I was always trained that you refrain from smoking, from cursing, from drinking. And just like my voice . . . I had a terrible voice to be a sergeant. And they'd laugh at me: "Doggonit men!" They'd

laugh at me. I mean this, I can't help it because the voice that I was born with, that's not a . . . not a good voice that a sergeant should have. So . . . so actually um . . . entertainment, I played a lot of ball. All my life I've played ball. I've played fast pitch softball. I've played in the army. I played here in Washington Court House. I've played for Rockin' Charity and I've played for National Cash Register. So all my life I've played sports. I played ball.

INTERVIEWER: Um . . . do you remember any humorous or unusual events?

VETERAN: Any what?

INTERVIEWER: Humorous or unusual events?

VETERAN: Not right off had I couldn't tell you.

INTERVIEWER: Um . . . what did you think of other officers and soldiers that you were in contact with?

VETERAN: Oh well, the officers, I didn't think much of 'em. They were all white. And they'd treat us like dirt. So I didn't think much of them. But I obeyed them. They say, "Sergeant Gray, yes sir!" But there was . . . there was on one occasion this Lieutenant Mullen, something came up and I didn't go along with it, and he didn't like for me talking to him. I said, "Lieutenant," I said, "Listen here: I'm a sergeant you're a lieutenant." But I forget what the situation was but because of what I told him he said, "I'm gonna have you court marshaled." I said, "You want my stripes? You can have them!" "You don't talk to me like that!" I said, "I did." He said, "You wanna go the . . . the stockade?" I said, "If that's where you want me to go. I'll go to stockade." 'Cause I felt because he was white; he was a lieutenant I'm a sergeant. I'm over the men. He . . . he said, "I don't care about you boys." That's the way he felt about it. Then I don't care about you. So that answer your question? I'd go to stockade rather than to eat what he

wanted to give me. That's the way I'm brought up. And he was scared, too, he was scared to come out on guard duty at night. He was scared. He knew that if he come out, he'd send . . . I would be the Sergeant on guard duty, but Lieutenant Mullen over the guard . . . he would never come out for a guard 'cause he knew he would get clobbered. See, he had bad . . . he had a bad reputation.

.....

VETERAN: You ever hear of the Autobahn, sir? The Autobahn Highway was . . . all it was . . . it was like our road, it was built before we even thought of seein' roads like I-71 and all them. And we'd go on that Autobahn at nighttime and drive with our lights on. The Germans would not bomb us on the Autobahn. They preserved it. It was beautiful road. And we'd run that Autobahn at nighttime, boy, we sit up there, just laugh and have fun, boy, and the Germans we'd hear . . . the airplane go . . . they wouldn't be irregular, they'd be smooth. But we could hear 'em, but they wouldn't bother us on Autobahn. But what'd we do? 'Bout a mile before we got off the Autobahn we'd flip the lights off. And we'd run blackout, then get off the road. They wouldn't know where we went to. See what I mean?

INTERVIEWER: Oh!

VETERAN: Then one time a driver came into our bivouacked area and forgot to turn his lights off. And we called the German, Bed Check Charlie. You ever hear that term, sir? Bed Check Charlie. Well, Bed Check Charlie come around man he just tore . . . he just _____ men run. Like I ran for my life. I thought I was hit. I hear the tracer bullets comin' down at me. But I didn't get hit. But he really tore apart our outfit. And this guy got scolded for coming in. We were taught . . . you turn those lights out before you get off the Autobahn. And he didn't do it. That's another experience that I had.

INTERVIEWER: Jennifer, is there anything else in the . . . you . . .

INTERVIEWER: Um . . . do you recall the day that your service ended?

VETERAN: Pardon me?

INTERVIEWER: The day your service ended?

VETERAN: Yes sir, yes, ma'am. Um . . . November the 12th of 1945, I was uh . . . discharged from Camp Atterbury, Indiana. But on my discharge they asked me if I would re-enlist and go, and give me a promotion and go over to um . . . uh . . . South Pacific. Over to . . . probably in Japan. However, I would . . . I was only going over to the Army of Occupation. The war ended in Japan. That's why. In 1945 the war in Japan ended, too. And we were came back from Rig . . . in Rigensburg, Germany. We came, Marseilles the town . . . Marseilles, France right off. We came back to Marseilles and we . . . we changed clothes. Over in the South Pacific you wore khakis, didn't ya? We wore . . . we wore OD's, all drab wool, and so we turned in our wool uniforms for khaki uniforms. And we were going to go over to the South Pacific and . . . and when the war ended we left uh . . . Marseilles, France, the war ended and we came right to the states to Newport News, Virginia. And then I . . . I had my khakis. I came home . . . I brought all my clothes. I brought my gas mask, my duffle bag, where you keep . . . everything you have you carry with you. You would carry 'em on our trucks. We had duffel bag and we'd strap 'em to the fenders of our trucks. Everything you have you carry with you. At all time run we had all of our clothes with the gas mask we carried with us. Always keep the gas mask with ya.

INTERVIEWER: You . . . you didn't uh . . . you didn't uh . . . you didn't go to South Pacific?

VETERAN: No, sir. I didn't . . . I didn't get to the South I didn't get there. Uh . . . I would have . . . I would have had I re-enlisted. I was headed for the South Pacific had I re-enlisted.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, Okay.

VETERAN: And with a promotion. With promotion. Yes, sir.

INTERVIEWER: And you got discharged at Camp Atterbury.

VETERAN: I got discharged at Camp Atterbury, Indiana November 12, 1945. Yes, sir. I went in Fort Benjamin Harrison. I didn't go in from Ohio. I'm from Ohio, but they sent me to Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana . . . and from Fort Benjamin to Fort McClellan, Alabama. Fort McClellan, Alabama to Camp Maxie, Texas . . .

INTERVIEWER: Right.

VETERAN: . . . then overseas.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

VETERAN: But we went . . . we left from New York . . . pier 90 up in New York . . . Staten Island. And we had to go below. I was telling the people we had to go below and they . . . they put us in a . . . this boat, one that was called U.S.S. Exquisitor. They put us in these compartments and closed the doors . . . sealed us in. We couldn't come out. No one could see. They thought it was just a freighter goin' across, but there's troops in there.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

VETERAN: And I was tellin' 'em . . . that was before . . . if the torpedo hit that compartment we would be killed but it would stay afloat. Hmm.

INTERVIEWER: How long did it take?

VETERAN: Eleven days.

INTERVIEWER: Eleven days.

VETERAN: Yes, sir. Eleven days and eleven nights. Now we . . . we hit, I'm gonna say this too, we hit a terrible storm going over. And it was a tornado, it was a hurricane. And it . . . it just took that little . . . this wasn't a big . . . this wasn't like the Queen Mary or Queen Elizabeth, this one little . . . this was a freighter. This converted freighter. And that's what they crammed us into goin' over. And this thing was . . . was really whippin'. And we thought it was gonna capsize. So they call us all out on . . . out on the boon docks, up on it. And I was standin' up on it and that wind . . . I had never been in a terrible situation. I mean, you have to tie yourself on there to stay on there. And . . . and we . . . we went through it. But that was one of the scariest . . . that was worse than the German shooting. I thought it was gone . . . I can't swim. I never could swim. They . . . they sent me to a swimming camp on the base. Why couldn't I swim? When I was 'bout ten years old, I went with some white boys to a place where I wasn't allowed, and they threw me in the water, and there was a snake in there. They threw me right where the snake was . . . a moccasin. I guess what a black moccasin, and I went down. I came up again. When I came again, thank God, they came and got me, drug me out of there. I wouldn't be here. That's why I can't swim. When in the army they had me, I'd go 1, 2, 3, 4. Man, I thought I could do it. Took us to a pool, man my feet went down. I never . . . I couldn't swim. I'm just scared of water.

INTERVIEWER: Jennifer, is there anything else?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, one more. Did your experience influence you views on the military or war?

VETERAN: No, no my experience in there, I loved the army. Uh . . . like I said in the beginning, we got a country that we've got to fight for and live for. After going through France and Germany and all the things they went through. People eating out of our trash. We threw garbage away . . . and they'd pick it up out . . . they'd pick out of there and eat it. They had no food. That's what France people did to German people. They had no food. We've never been like that. We've had . . . we throw away food that . . . that they could have. And they ate . . . they ate what we left over. Regard . . . cold, they were hungry. Munge . . . food was munge.

INTERVIEWER: Bennie, do you have anything else?

INTERVIEWER: I have some questions . . . I don't want to prolong it.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, we're pretty . . . this is probably . . . and we may . . . and also Reverend Gray said he may . . . he would be glad to come back.

VETERAN: Yeah, I'll come back. I'll come back anytime.

INTERVIEWER: What we're probably gonna do is make a transcript, and we may wanna do a follow up. 'Cause we're . . . this is about perfect on time.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, it's very, very, very interesting. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: This is a great one. It's a great one.

VETERAN: And I told in the beginning that I'd tell the truth, you know. I'm truthful, and what I said I will stand on it . . . put my hand on the Bible because it's true. I don't believe in exaggerating. Sometimes people give big ol' war stories. This is not a war story.

INTERVIEWER: This is a story about war.

VETERAN: I lived this. I lived this. I lived this. I don't tell war stories.

VETERAN INTERVIEW EXCERPT:

Robert E. Renshaw

Name: Robert E. Renshaw

Branch of Service: U.S. Army, Quartermaster, Staff Sergeant

Race: African American

Dates of Service: March 5, 1943 - Jan. 2, 1946

Date of Interview: December 28, 2004*

Location of Interview: Yellow Springs, Ohio

Names of Interviewers: Chris Burgess, Paul LaRue

Name of Transcriber: Leisel Willis

*Mr. Renshaw passed away in 2007

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall your first days in the service?

VETERAN: Yes

INTERVIEWER: Can you elaborate on it at all?

VETERAN: Well, there was five of us boys lived on Mound Street in Springfield and we all got on a Greyhound bus downtown on High Street and went to...two of us went to Indian Town Camp, Pennsylvania. No, I take that back. We went to Indiana...the fort in Indiana, and two went to Cincinnati, and there they passed out your clothes to you, your weapons, your duffle bag and everything like that and showed us the barracks and then, later on we had interviews for things we could do and couldn't do and at that time, I had just started flying airplanes. I had started flying airplanes at sixteen. I was there about two weeks, and from there I was shipped to Fort Campbell, Kentucky where I stayed for a year – Fort Campbell, Kentucky – in basic training with the armored division.

INTERVIEWER: Any specific experiences in boot camp training?

VETERAN: Nothing unusual I can think of. We had a lot of hikes, bivouacs – camping out – exercises. At Fort Campbell we had a large stockade there of German prisoners and

different companies would have to take responsibility for guarding those prisoners at times. Other than that, I can't think of anything unusual that happened at Fort Campbell.

INTERVIEWER: What were your instructors like?

VETERAN: Well, to be honest with you, we had...At Fort Campbell, Kentucky, we had four sets of officers, and what we had was this. If you wanted the truth, now I'm going to give you the truth. We had four white, non-educated officers from Texas – very prejudice, couldn't read and write. Our outfit was made of boys from Ohio, Detroit, and Chicago, and they just would not soldier under those officers. And while we were there, they had the race riot in Detroit, and the boys didn't care whether they got court-marshaled or not – they took off and went back home to Detroit to protect their families. When they got back to camp, very little was done, and they realized that they made a mistake by taking northern blacks and putting uneducated, white Texans over us. We had education, they didn't. We at least had high school education and back in those days, a high school education would get you into officer's candidate school or into the Air Force. Also, after we got four black officers...I'll never forget the first day Lieutenant Campbell come and met with us. He said – he told the company – he said, "Now look. You're here, I'm here. I don't want to be here, you don't want to be here, but we gonna straighten up and fly right and we gonna make soldiers out of you." Boys started straightening up. Boys started listening to him because we could talk the same language. We knew what all of us had been through, and you must realize, back in the '40s, they were still prejudice. There was so much prejudice going on it wasn't funny. As a matter of fact, me, for example, I didn't know anything about it until I got in the army, because I was raised in a mixed neighborhood in Springfield, and when any whites died in our neighborhood, my mother and grandmother, they'd bake cakes and pies and stuff to take

to that family. If one person died in one of the black families, the whites would do the same thing. We went to each others' house. We ate at each others' house. We played together. We went to school together and all that.

INTERVIEWER: So you experienced more prejudice in the army than you had ever seen growing up in Springfield?

VETERAN: Yes, that's right. You're right. You're absolutely right. So when I _____ here I was in an all black outfit. It didn't bother me, but I just couldn't understand it. But as the war went on, you could begin to see the changes because they were beginning to put blacks in the paratroopers. They were starting the Tuskegee Airmen down there. I had an opportunity to go to Tuskegee after I was at Fort Campbell all year and they seen that I had flying experience on my record, but I turned it down, because I had been with these men – 215 men and four officers – for over a year. I was a book sergeant then. I got my stamps right on the ocean going over to England. So I wanted to stay with the outfit I knew then, and I'm glad I did.

.....

INTERVIEWER: Let me just – I'm sorry – I'm going to ask another question, because I know you're an attorney. Were you at that time thinking about the law, or was that something that came up later?

VETERAN: No. In the back of my head – let's put it this way – in the back of my head, as the youngster seeing some of the injustices that were done to our people, I thought that someday, if I'm ever able, I'd like to be a lawyer or a doctor. I took some tests, and they told me I'd probably do better in law than I would a doctor. So when I got ready to come home from Germany, my company commander called me into the office and says, "Bob, I want you to start issuing khakis because you're going to Japan, see," so I started doing

that, and he called me and says, “Bob, you’re not going to Japan. You’re going home!” I said, “Why?” He said, “Because you’re married and got a daughter and that gives you extra points”. So I got to go back to La Havre to get shipped back home. I didn’t get to Japan, but when I learned of the benefits – willingness, education, housing, that type of thing. I said, “Well hell, here’s my chance.” So I was discharged January 2 of 1946. June of ’46 I was at Miami University taking my Pre-law with my wife and daughter.

INTERVIEWER: And I knew that part, but I didn’t know if your military experience had anything...

VETERAN: Yes. Military paid for all my education except my senior year in Law School, and I had to pay for that myself.

INTERVIEWER: I’m sorry. I’m jumping off the script here. That’s my problem. I listen to these stories and I get caught up. So what was your specific job assignment in the army?

VETERAN: Supply Sergeant.

INTERVIEWER: Did you see any combat at all?

VETERAN: All kind of combat, yes! Saw combat all in France.

INTERVIEWER: Were you involved in any?

VETERAN: Listen, so the two of you understand what was going on. You see that wall there? Now take that wall and just start taking block out of there and just make it stone. That’s Omaha Beach. We had grappling hooks; we had to throw them up on top of the thing – up top of these rocks to get a hold and then climb up there to get up there to get up on top. Before that, airplanes and some of the tanks and infantry had started through. We were right behind them, OK. So we got up top of the hill, and when we got on top of the hill, we had to reassemble, then we started moving north – that’d be northeast, I

believe – to a town called Barfleur, France, which is up on the point. See, France is almost like this _____. Here's Barfleur up here, Cherbourg and Brussels over there, see? So as we proceeded, we were in all kind of gunfire. _____ The German soldiers – also from our big ships still shooting their big guns into the area trying to get a stronghold. Airplanes were flying over, crashing, and all that stuff, so as we were walking, a building like this...in that wall would be one great big round hole that looked like somebody took a pair of scissors to cut a round hole in it. But it wasn't; it was a hundred of those big guns off of them ships shooting them big things – churches and everything else. Now as we marched through there, I happened to look up at one of the church steeples. And there's this woman up there, and she's all rouge, lipstick, and all that stuff, and I looked up at her and I realized what she was, and we had certain orders. Don't shoot them – we don't want them. We want the Germans. Those were German sympathizers and prostitutes. Now, you probably don't realize; I know you don't realize, but in France, how the prostitution over there like drug stores all around her and like filling stations – almost one on every corner. But the police are there, too, and they'll check those girls out everyday for their health card. They don't have a health card, they're going to jail. We ran across many American soldiers with a bayonet in his back ...

When we got up to Barfleur, it seemed to me the war began to change because the German soldier was tired of fighting – wanted to go home, and was not paid by Hitler. So many of them come running to us to give themselves up. I remember one night we were in a fox hole and some of our men came to me and said, “Bob, here I got a couple of German prisoners. I don't know what to do with them.” “Well – put them in the stockade!” They were giving themselves up. And then, this one night, the Germans got back in there and set a fire in a cemetery after they had set booby traps in there and when

that blaze went up, that lit up the whole sky. Now that we didn't want. We couldn't even smoke a cigarette at night unless you were really covered up with it, because a cigarette or a match, you'd be surprised how much that'll light up and all around us were fields with ammunition, food, liquor – you name it – trucks, tanks, everything all around you, see, and that light would show the Germans where we were.

Every night before we'd go to bed, this German aviator would fly over, and I mean he'd fly real low. You'd see his face, see, and they said don't shoot him; only let him go on back to Germany. Why? Because if we shot down that one little, single Cub airplane, that pilot could have taken that plane and dived it right into our gasoline dumps – and our gasoline dumps wasn't nothing but a great big field full of gasoline – five gallon gasoline cans. Or he could have hit an ammunition dump and done more harm, so don't shoot him. Let him fly on by.

After about...I'll say a month or two months, we came out with a P-52. That was our night fighter. After he come out, you didn't see no more German airplanes in the sky. They went on back, because they knew they'd get shot down, and constantly the Germans tried to sneak back, as I told you about the fire that was at Barfleur, and when we got to...I meant to tell you this; one of my buddies that went into the army with me, and I didn't know where he was, but he was in the fire detachment – fire truck, fire men. And he come, put out that – you know, he's the man that put out that fire. That's when I met Fat. We called him Fat before; that's where I met Fat. So, glad to see him.

After we left Barfleur, we headed for Cherbourg. Christmas of '45. I was going up toward Cherbourg and who did I see but my old boss at Barr Brothers Manufacturing Company in Springfield whose father owned Barr Brothers where we made 105 mm shells for World War II. I had Christmas dinner with him.

So, we got in Cherbourg. We were fortunate to get some pill boxes. Now, pill boxes were solid cement structures, not quite as big as in here. It had peep holes in it like this, you know, where the Germans could look out and see, and one night, a German submarine got into Cherbourg Harbor and sank a few of our troop ships. We had to go get German prisoners and sleeping bags. Sleeping bags were no more than nothing but a white bag that you put straw in to make a mattress. Dig men out of the channel - our men, American men - and bury them. And that got some of our men – we had to restrain them, because they were getting cruel to the German prisoners and kicking them and shooting them. Some of them it wasn't necessary, and stuff like that. Nothing like doing that, but anyway, that happened.

From Cherbourg, we went into St. Lô. That's where the Germans tried to stop us. They did a lot of heavy fighting in St. Lô because they didn't want us to go – that was the gateway to Paris.

So we get to Paris; I couldn't believe it. No bullet holes, no gunfire, just walked through Paris just like you were walking through the school, but on the other side of Paris, we split. Half the First Armored went straight into Germany where the Battle of the Bulge took place. Our half went up through Belgium and Holland and came into Germany from the North from _____, though we had to wait on this woman general from Russia so the United States and Russia, we could go in there together.

On our way there, we went into Auschwitz, and there was a concentration camp that Hitler had with these great big ovens with cubicles in them and he'd put bodies in; gas the people. The stench was something – just, you could hardly stand it. First time I'd come in contact with DDT. And out in the courtyard were stacks of men's, women's, children's shoes and stuff. Beside that was just ditches dug and dead bodies laying in

there, skin and bones, and the way they got...I just couldn't claim that one human being could treat another human being the way Hitler treated those Jewish people over there in Germany.

So, we could only stay there a week. We had to keep moving. There was another outfit coming along behind. We finally got up to _____, and then we took over a buzz bomb factory, where the buzz bomb was no more than a bomb with wings on it. That's where the first jet engine I saw – Germany developed that. Well, we took over this buzz bomb factory. It was a storage place for the Germans; kept their P-38, which was a pistol that the flyers used. Officers used the German Luger, and we, every man in our outfit got a brand new German Luger. Also while in Germany, being Supply Sergeant, we ended up in a place called Eisenburg. In Eisenburg, we had taken over a bar and had a jazz band and entertainment, and I had to take a 6 x 6 truck and trailer and go back to Bremerhowen twice a week – on Tuesdays and Thursdays – and got Lowenbrau beer for 215 men and four officers. So you know I had my share of beer loads. _____

Then it wasn't long after that before they dropped a bomb on Japan and the company commander called me and told me I got to go home because I was married and had a daughter – that gave me extra points.

VETERAN INTERVIEW EXCERPT: Mildred Caroline Garringer Shaper

Name: Mildred Caroline Garringer Shaper

Branch of Service: US Naval Reserve and Navy Nurses Corp.

Dates of Service: March 16, 1945- - July, 1946

Date of Interview: February 18, 2004

Location of Interview: Fayette County, Ohio

Names of Interview: Sarah Smith, Michael Moore, Jennifer Ortlieb, and Paul LaRue

Names of Transcribers: Jessie Hunter, Rachel Heinz, Elyse Ream, and Tobin Perrill

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall your first days in service?

VETERAN: Yes, uh, I left my home over on Market Street in Washington Court House, and traveled by bus to Chicago, Illinois, to the Great Lakes Naval Training station, caught a train and rode it all the way over to San Francisco, California and then took a bus and went out to the base where I was to report.

INTERVIEWER: What did it feel like?

VETERAN: What did it feel like? ...Nothing different. Because I was being stationed at a hospital, and it was a hospital that took care of soldiers who had been wounded. And it also took care of the dependents, that means the families of the service personnel, and also it had some veterans there from previous wars.

INTERVIEWER: So was it like uh, a veterans home? Or...

VETERAN: No, it was a regular hospital

INTERVIEWER: Okay

VETERAN: And it was strung out in wings that looked a great deal, like the bottom of Fayette County Memorial. Only from the nurses residence to the last ward that I worked

on, it was exactly one mile. So it was really, you know, spread out, I guess, you could call it .

INTERVIEWER: Now, did you have to go through any training when you enlisted ?

VETERAN: No, none because I was a registered nurse, and what I went into was the Navy Nurse Corps.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, Let me ask a question about it, so did you pretty much know going in cause you were already a nurse pretty much what was going to, I mean was it pretty much what you expected?

VETERAN: Oh, I think it was what we...what I expected, although when we reported to U.S.S Shoemaker, it was called, when we boarded there, we had to go through basic training, uh the exercise program. (laugh) I might say, which lasted about two weeks. I think was all just an orientation period, that was all.

INTERVIEWER: And uh... They didn't teach you how to shoot or anything like that right?

VETERAN: Oh, no.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, alright.

VETERAN: Cause they wanted us only for our nursing skills.

INTERVIEWER: Did you stay in touch with your family while you were at the hospital?

VETERAN: Oh sure, I stayed in touch with my family ..My mother came to visit me once.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, did you send letters and stuff?

VETERAN: Oh, yes

INTERVIEWER: What was the food like?

VETERAN: The food was good. I never had any trouble with the food.

INTERVIEWER: The supplies were good. Did you have plenty of supplies?

VETERAN: Yes, the supplies were good.

INTERVIEWER: Now let me, did you...was there... were there people that you were trained with who ever got shipped out, out or was the.... Were you...pretty much, know that you were going to stay here in the country.

VETERAN: No, that isn't true. (laugh)

INTERVIEWER: I mean that's what I'm... I guess that's what I'm trying to ...

VETERAN: Um, there were a group of us, about two dozen of us that were taken out into the bay to a hospital ship which was (sound of disgust) and uh when we went out there it was to see uh, what the ship was like and give us an idea of whether or not we would like to go on a hospital ship. While we were out there a little storm came up (laugh) and we ended up staying all night because it wasn't safe to put us in the boat and take us back in and uh some of the girls volunteered for duty on a hospital ship, but not I.

INTERVIEWER: Just because of the ship I mean...

VETERAN: I'm just not fond of water.

INTERVIEWER: Oh Okay (laughs with Caroline). Did you have a lot of pressure or stress in your job?

VETERAN: Oh no...no it was, it was a job I enjoyed... when I first went you might find that interesting um, I worked I think where the veterans or the sailors wives had their children, had babies, I worked on the maternity ward. Then the next assignment I had was on a veterans' unit. Then the next assignment I had was on a psychiatric ward, and then the next one was on a whole ward of marines that had malaria. And then the last

assignment I had was on a medical surgical unit of marines that had been sent back in to the country from Okinawa, and they were long time coming to us. My understanding from talking with them was that they uh, after they were hit, they were flighted over to Guam and then from Guam they were put on a ship, and they sailed the seas into San Francisco. And this was probably the saddest, one of the saddest experiences of taking care of people that I had.

INTERVIEWER: Were they, were these people who had been severely, I mean were there all levels of wounds I mean were these.

VETERAN: Oh yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I mean, Severe not so severe the whole....

VETERAN: Well there were a lot of shall I... I could describe it...

INTERVIEWER: Well, I mean I don't want you to be uncomfortable (laugh) I'm trying to get some sense of...

VETERAN: No, no

INTERVIEWER: I mean these are severely wounded, some of these men were severely wounded.

VETERAN: Some of them severely wounded. There was a lot of bone injuries, and a lot of them were, had gone to surgery and come back, were in traction. And one of the experiences that I could share with you, I worked nights on that unit. But I had this little fellow from I don't know where his home was, but every night he would complain. He would say, "Ahh my heel hurts, my heel hurts". And you know I would note it on the chart and they would tell the doctors about it. The doctors didn't pay much attention but finally one of the doctors decided, "Well, if his heel hurts we really ought to see what's wrong." And when they ... What had happened he had been hit by a bullet in the field and

they slapped a cast on his leg. And when they slapped this cast on his leg evidently the flies had already been in it and had laid the eggs and there were maggots in there. But they used maggots during the First World War, to debride things, in other words to take out the old dead and decayed material. So, once they found out there were maggots in this thing they just put the cast back on. But it's funny when I was on nights every night this kid complained about that heel! (laugh)

INTERVIEWER: Now these were all naval personnel in this hospital I mean these were marines or navy...

VETERAN: Marines or sailors, some veterans

INTERVIEWER: So were there guys there from ships that had been...

VETERAN: Oh yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Okay did you ever get to go on leave?

VETERAN: Never.

INTERVIEWER: Never had leave? Never?

VETERAN: Never. I wasn't in long enough. I was only in about 15 months.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, but I mean the whole time you were there you were...

VETERAN: Um I never had leave.

INTERVIEWER: What did you think of other officers or the soldiers that came in did you have any?...

VETERAN: Oh we had some interesting people in the nurse's quarters with us you know in and out. Girls coming and going, people coming and going all the time.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, Now how does that work as a nurse in terms of uh were there nurse officers I mean was there like... I mean because that's uh I mean was there like a...

VETERAN: Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Like a...

VETERAN: Go

INTERVIEWER: I mean how does that...

VETERAN: Go...how does that go

INTERVIEWER: Yeah I mean how did that

VETERAN: Same as the, same as the navy you know

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

VETERAN: And some lieutenant J.G. and then full lieutenants and then what's next, next captain?

INTERVIEWER: Captains... and was there I mean I guess what I'm sayin' is was there a nurse that was a captain?

VETERAN: Uh huh

INTERVIEWER: That was like the head of the oper...

VETERAN: Yeah

INTERVIEWER: Might have been the head of the operation or whatever...

VETERAN: Yeah , mm uh huh (yeah)

INTERVIEWER: Okay

VETERAN: Just like you'd have a nurse supervisor, you know...

INTERVIEWER: And how many nurses were at this?

VETERAN: You know I can't tell you that. We had a nurses residence and it was full. But I couldn't tell you how many.

INTERVIEWER: Did you keep a personal diary?

VETERAN: No.

INTERVIEWER: No...Do you recall the day your service ended?

VETERAN: I could tell you all about it (laugh)

INTERVIEWER: Go ahead if you want to.

VETREAN: I...I...I...do want to tell you about another interesting experience I had which I did not anticipate ...I was sent from Shoemaker. They decided they would close U.S.S. Shoemaker, and I was sent from there down to Balboa which is down at San Diego. And when I got down there they had the same kind of thing going on. They took care of the veterans. Took care of the families, the children, and the wives and the soldiers and ect. But my first assignment down there was to take care of, of uh some dependents that had the Poliomyelitis. And that was at the beginning of the epidemic of polio so that was in 1945-46..1946. And it was very contagious so that I got assigned to the polio unit. We had those persons that were involved that had polio in one building by themselves and it was a building when you entered you had to take off your clothes take a shower, and put on scrub gowns...get in an elevator and go up stairs where they were. They were in iron lungs, all those, and then when you left , you went through the same procedure, you took off, you got on the elevator, came down, took off all of those scrub clothes in a separate part of the building, and if I remember right none of those people recovered that I took care of. Because it was at the beginning of the epidemic, and all...they, they didn't really know what to really do about it except get the iron lungs, put them in there. So that was one of the assignments I had when I went down to San Diego.

INTERVIEWER: Let me...let me back track a bit when you said you were on, in a malaria ward or you were in a malaria ward....

VETERAN: Um huh.

INTERVIEWER: At that time...what did they do or, what I mean was the treatment or whatever for malaria at that time?

VETERAN: They gave them, what was, not quinine.

INTERVIEWER: They used to talk about quinine in the old days.

VETERAN: Well, well another derivative at...brine or Atabrine that doesn't sound right...I don't, I can't remember the name they used

INTERVIEWER: And were they also quarantined? Or was this...

VETERAN: No huh uh, because they, they were recurrent once you get malaria

INTERVIEWER: You always have it.

VETERAN: You always have it, you have recurrent episodes.

INTERVIEWER: And were these folks who had it serious, I mean...

VETERAN: No. They had other allergies too, but I remember uh, being involved with the marines that had...malaria.

INTERVIEWER: Now you mentioned at one point you were also in a rotation on like a psychiatric ward or whatever...now would these be like shell shocked or were these, would these be like shell shock I mean were these folks that were shell shock?

VETERAN: I don't, I don't remember much I got (laugh)...I had my keys taken away so I wouldn't tell you about it. (laugh) I had my keys taken away and got locked in a room with a fella once, and another fella just happened to go by that belonged on the unit and (laugh) saw me in there, and saw that the door was closed cause you leave the doors open when you go in and come out. Anyway (laugh) they had found somebody and they came and got me out. But we had, a good, we had a unit of different things at Shoemaker and I think this had the same thing when I was down at Balboa Park, but I never worked with those. (laugh)

INTERVIEWER: And, and a lot of these uh were they probably going to be in long term care after I mean like some of the uh, psychiatric and some of the more serious injuries I mean those were probably...in for a long time...

VETERAN: Oh yeah, they would be and they sent them when they closed Shoemaker.

They sent them to other naval hospitals some place or to a veteran's hospital.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do in the days and weeks after your service ended?

VETERAN: I came home and went right to work, entered in Ohio State, went to Ohio State I didn't...I didn't tarry much. (laugh)

INTERVIEWER: Did you use the G.I. Bill for Ohio State or did you ...

VETERAN: I certainly did

INTERVIEWER: Okay, uh, did you form any close friendships while you were in the service?

VETERAN: Yes, I ...I...I still talk with, you know, two or three of the girls that I served with.

INTERVIEWER: Do you ever attend any reunions?

VETERAN: No

INTERVIEWER: No

VETERAN: And I wish I did.

INTERVIEWER: Are there reunions for your...

VETERAN: Not that I know of.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, cause that's one of the things, one of the things that some of the folks we've talked to ..

VETERAN: I think there are...I think they do have some nurse reunions, but I never attend. We never have had a reunion. I have one of them I call every Christmas.

INTERVIEWER: Some folks we talked to are in groups that are very active and you know...

VETERAN: Oh yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And some folks haven't seen a soul you know since

VETERAN: Hmm...

INTERVIEWER: Or you know like you...that maybe kept in touch with.

VETERAN: Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER: With one or two, but your particular I mean I don't have that...would that be by the unit, by the hospital?

VETERAN: Well, it would have to be by hospital.

INTERVIEWER: It would have to be by the hospital.

VETERAN: How else could it be?

INTERVIEWER: Right that's what I mean; I don't know how else they would

VETERAN: Uh huh

INTERVIEWER: Would organize that, ok, good question. Did your military experience influence your views on the military or war?

VETERAN: It influenced my views on war. I would think it would with anyone uh, I don't want you to think that I'm anti-war, I guess, but after you take care of those people that come back from the battle field, maimed and injured, it influences your thinking. You see emotional problems between husbands and wives, because when husbands come back injured the wives come, and sometimes it's a difficult adjustment for them. Sometimes it's an adjustment that isn't pleasant and, uh huh, I cringe everyday when I hear the war news. When I hear how many men have...it I don't know how males feel about it.

INTERVIEWER: It's almost scary sometimes right? You almost get numbed to hear that uh, two more guys...I mean you know how like everyday on the news it just seems like

it's the same you know? It's just more of the same where, two more, it's almost sad that you almost are like well okay, it's almost like you know, what I mean? It's almost like its where, but you know what I'm saying.

VETERAN: And you've taken, you've taken care of the fellows you know, doesn't make any difference how much we have rehab...habilitation you're going to give them. It's not going to be any better physically or mentally. And you see broken families and they're just too much.

INTERVIEWER: Is that part of the reason that there were families at the facility you were at?

VETERAN: No, the navy just took care of families.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay, I mean that...was just...

VETERAN: Uh huh

INTERVIEWER: Is that standard? I mean is that true?

VETERAN: I don't know whether it's standard today but it was back then.

INTERVIEWER: And was that also true with the army? I mean, I don't...

VETERAN: I don't know about the army.

INTERVIEWER: (laugh) Okay I was going to say you're our first uh nurse to talk to so that's what I'm curious about that.

VETERAN: I don't know about the army.

INTERVIEWER: How did your service experience affect your life?

VETERAN: Well I don't think it really has effected it much. I just continued to go ahead and do my things, (laugh) you know?

.....

INTERVIEWER: They really feel like its absolutely something that they should you know...

VETERAN: It's interesting to note that the place I was at USS Shoemaker I call it, later, that's out in the valley close to Pleasanton, California and out toward Modesto and out there. But it became a prison after we vacated it...closed it down, and I got sent down to San Diego. It became a prison...a prison for woman and Patty Hurst was there.

INTERVIEWER: See there's some good, some good news, now so by definition then the folks that were coming in were coming out of the Pacific? So...

VETERAN: Right

INTERVIEWER: So the, the people that you saw, I mean you mentioned Okinawa these were folks that came specifically out...of...

VETERAN: Right

INTERVIEWER: Out of the do you remember any particular ships or things or I mean you mentioned Okinawa is there any...

VETERAN: No, but I really took care of, you know, a bunch of men I would like to know what happened to ...

INTERVIEWER: I mean yeah, that has to be interesting when you see...

VETERAN: Yeah, I really would like to know what happened to 'em.

INTERVIEWER: But that would but you have seen no one out of the Atlantic right me these would all been [VETERAN: No] folks, all would [VETERAN: No] have been navy folks coming out of the Pacific.

VETERAN: And they were mostly marines rather than navy.

INTERVIEWER: So these were people who had probably seen fairly heavy action.

VETERAN: Well, they were in action!

INTERVIEWER: By, by definition

VETERAN: In action, they were all in action.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know any other uh nurses like yourself in the country?

VETERAN: Well, I know a couple that have already died.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs) That's the problem that's our basic... That's our problem.

VETERAN: I'd said that's not going to help you any.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah well that doesn't really help us!

VETERAN: (Laugh)

INTERVIEWER: Because really this is a neat, this is a great interview for us because you really are our, our first uh ...

VETERAN: Aren't you glad that I'm still alive mentally...