

Interviewer: Well first of all I'd like to thank you both so very much for taking the time out of your day to share some of your story with us.

Betty: You're welcome.

Interviewer: Our audience will be so excited in years to come from now that they will be able to hear yaws story and y'all telling it. And I'd like to first of all begin by introducing y'all to our viewers and I'd like both of you to tell to take turns start with Mr. Winfrey to introduce himself to us and I'd like you to do the same Mrs. Winfrey.

Virgil: I'm Virgil Winfrey from Damascus Arkansas.

Betty: I'm Betty Winfrey from Damascus Arkansas.

Interviewer: Welcome

Betty: Thank you

Interviewer: Thank ya'll well this morning we'd like to start by asking first starting the interview Mr. Winfrey specifically about his life and experiences in the second World War. And first of all I'd like to begin by asking you to give us a little bit of back ground of what your life was like. Have you always lived in Damascus was that the community that you grew up in? Tell us a little but about years before the war.

Virgil: Well I lived in Damascus until I was about 15 years old and I went to Lancaster California and I worked out there and stayed there then. In January in 43 I got in the army so went down to L.A. and got inducted and went to San Pedro and stayed two or three days and they sent me to Camp Barley Texas. So I spent 11 weeks in basic training there then they started shipping me towards Pennsylvania and New Jersey for about a month and got on the Queen Elizabeth and went to England. Stayed a year in England then and got on a boat for the invasion of France.

Interviewer: So in other words just really fast it seems.

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: Well tell me if let me ask you some specific questions about if you recall what it was like and where you were when you heard about well wait a second I need to back up. Do you remember hearing things on the radio or people talking about what was going on in Europe as far as what the Germans were doing and also what went on with the Japanese? Did you recall hearing anything like that before Pearl Harbor?

Virgil: No I didn't hear anything about the Japs or anything before Pearl Harbor. But I know where I was at when Roosevelt declared war on them.

Interviewer: Yes sir.

Virgil: I was up in Lancaster California standing on the streets and they had a loud speaker on the radio and so they had his speech on there and he declared war on Japan that morning.

Interviewer: So you heard that that very morning when he was making the speech then?

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: What was your reaction to that? You said you hadn't know previously what was going on with the Japanese was it shocking that America was gonna enter into war?

Virgil: Well I didn't hardly know what to think back then I hadn't hardly kept up with none of it. And they had some soldiers out there in an airbase that came up around Lancaster I'd see around in cafes and things. So I was glad to get to go I'd get them Penny Arcades places they have guns where you shoot you know and shoot at planes and things. I'd shoot at them and I was getting pretty good at shooting at planes. So I'm glad I went.

Interviewer: Well I appreciate you sharing that with us. Let's see you've already given us an idea about your enlistment so you went then to you enlisted in the army was it in 43?

Virgil: I was drafted.

Interviewer: You were drafted?

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: You were drafted in 43 and tell us a little about you said you went from California to Texas you said Fort Barkley is that right?

Virgil: Yeah Camp Barkley down in Abilene.

Interviewer: In Abilene Texas.

Virgil: Uh huh

Interviewer: Well at that time when you went through your basic did you take I think we talked about this earlier this morning did you take an aptitude test or something that would that helped you that helped them to format what job they wanted you to do as far as being in the army?

Virgil: Well they did when I was inducted but I never did know anything about it I mean what the deal was you know. Didn't have no idea what I'd be put in so they called us out went to the train station and ole Bing Crosby some of them knew him he was walking down the platform there. They was hollering at Bing Crosby while we were going.

Interviewer: Well what when you finished your basic what then the units that you were assigned to could you tell us the unit, division, regiment and company down straight.

Virgil: When I left Texas I didn't know what I was in I just went to Camp Chenango Pennsylvania stayed a couple weeks then we went on to Camp Kilmer New Jersey. And wait there then until about we went to New York nearly every night catch a bus or train then ole fast cars. Went down there one day and we went up me and another boy we went up top of the Empire State Building and they had a café up there with a fence around you could look out.

Interviewer: Well that's interesting.

Virgil: Had to change subways or elevators about three or four times to ever get up there.

Interviewer: That's a mighty tall building was that a unique experience for y'all to have boys coming from all over the country that may never had seen those things in New York before?

Virgil: I'm pretty sure it was I just had to follow that ole boy around and see what they do.

Interviewer: Oh wow well I'm curious

Virgil: We went in a café there or liquor drinking joint there one time me and a couple guys had an ole boy in France got killed right by me but he was with us and he's from Minnesota he's a Norwegian boy. And he got a little drunk and had glass around there and he walked into that door though it was open but it was a glass door bumped his head.

Interviewer: That was a mighty clean glass door wasn't it?

Virgil: Yeah it was.

Betty: Must have been using Windex.

Virgil: That ole boy I liked him. He went with me because his name was Wig and mine was Winfrey them Ws went together on everything that they'd call out you know that was the order. So one time we dug right over there in France we dug foxholes there right close together and got in there and stayed in there all night. And I had a dream about another ole boy thought he got killed and I got out that morning and I went down to tell that ole boy what I dreamed about him. And while I was gone a shell come over and hit that boy and killed him and I guess I was about eight or ten foot from him. If I'd have been there it might have got me too.

Interviewer: Well that's sure good that you got up to move definitely.

Virgil: I had a lot of close calls D-Day I hung my foot on I thought it was a boobie trap a can of some kind there. One boy had his leg torn off from a mine and so I they had a string around somebody went through and put a string up to walk on. I stepped around a guy and hung something on my toe and it looked like it was one of them Bouncing Betty's they called it. I just didn't step on it that's the first casualty I can remember having there on the beach.

Interviewer: Well I was curious about you were talking about your units when you said earlier you were telling me about the time you shipped out from did you ship out from was it Fort Kilmer New Jersey?

Virgil: Camp Kilmer.

Interviewer: Camp Kilmer and you shipped out from there to go over to England at that point?

Virgil: Yeah I went to Glasgow Scotland we were on the Queen Elizabeth.

Interviewer: That was a mighty big ship wasn't it?

Virgil: Yeah it was but that thing would still rock around a little.

Interviewer: Did you see a lot of the boys getting sick from being on the boat?

Virgil: Oh my goodness I'd say if folks ever seen them they'd come over there because they would never come back. She came over

Betty: We married when the girls would go down to eat they'd smell that food and they'd all pass out. The Padre said he'd never caught so many beautiful girls standing there catching the wind was fighting that food smell.

Virgil: Sometimes that boat would turn sideways and we'd be eating and all the dishes would roll to the other end down there.

Interviewer: As big a ship as that was it still had all the motion?

Virgil: Yeah but I thought we got about half way across the Atlantic and I had my hear sticking out from the ole portholes there one day near the guns cut loose shooting and I thought sure we was attacked. But they was just practicing.

Interviewer: Just practicing well that was good.

Virgil: Yeah it went so fast that they couldn't hardly catch it no way that Queen Elizabeth. They changed courses too and they didn't have no escorts.

Interviewer: Wow well it was good that it was fast moving.

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: To not have any escorts.

Virgil: I never did know for sure but some of them said there were about 22,000 boys and their equipment going across there.

Interviewer: Good gracious it sure did serve a lot of men and equipment then. Well I was curious you said you landed in Scotland and how long was the period that you were there in the United Kingdom during the staging process? What was that experience like for you?

Virgil: Well I stayed a year was all I was there by the time I landed and Scotland and got on the boat again. And we had some tough training down there around the south part of England in Plymouth and Bargeman and some of the grass over there would grow up in kind of like mud holes. You'd jump on a piece of grass and the more would sink up and it would just jump up and down just like jello. Some of them said that was the first time they'd ever seen water run up hill like that.

Interviewer: that must have been a unique training environment.

Virgil: Boy that was as rough as they could get. They thought that was the kind of territory we was gonna hit in France. I guess France didn't have any worse than that because it was wet I know one time we

went down there we'd have to go about every couple months maybe for about a week. We went three weeks one time and it was so wet and muddy down there. Freeze we done beach landings around pretty cold weather. You'd have to jump off in your clothes and get them wet and we'd take them ole ducks and go way out around I guess half a mile and come in then and hit the beach and jump out and go through they said mine fields. I didn't know if they were mine or if they were just telling us that.

Interviewer: The ducks were those like amphibious jeeps?

Virgil: Yeah they were the kind that sunk down here around Hot Springs a year or two ago. There'd be about 17 of us get on them things and we'd double around.

Interviewer: Well so they spent a lot of time it was extensive training and preparations for the invasion that would soon be coming.

Virgil: It was worse down there doing that than anything I got into in France without being shot at you know.

Interviewer: That's interesting that's interesting that you say that. Well I guess as far as preparing y'all physically for the environment and such they really I guess they really went over they went to extremes for y'all just to be able to be able to handle landings and stuff.

Virgil: Yeah worst it could get. I some ole boy one time I said if they don't have the invasion pretty soon I'm gonna go awol.

Interviewer: Well what did you tell me that was your pay during that time?

Virgil: Two dollars I day I mean \$60 a month and that's all you got it didn't make no difference how many hours or just show it for the month.

Interviewer: Wow well y'all certainly overly earned your pay.

Yes

Virgil: Definitely

Interviewer: And people now most people now don't care about it. They don't never even think of a veteran or Veteran's Day or nothing else. They just

Betty: Well some do some don't.

Virgil: Yeah but not many. There was one the other day thanked me for having I got a D-Day sign on my bumper so he come up and seen that on there and thanked me for it.

Betty: There's two people done that.

Virgil: Yeah one guard

Interviewer: I'm glad to hear that.

Virgil: Wells Fargo or something another.

Interviewer 2: What's the sign say?

Virgil: I did D-Day June 6th 44.

Betty: Two different people.

Interviewer: Well that's nice that they were being respectful in that way because I don't think I probably shouldn't say this in our interview but I don't think a lot of people today think about the significance of that. And there's only a few a short decades ago that that was the very center point of our very saving of our civilization.

Virgil: Yeah and there's one more deal I want you to know about about cigarettes. Now if it hadn't been cigarettes we would have lost lots more people. Because everybody nearly smokes and you'd have to l've lit one right off of the other because they'll settle you down and stuff.

Interviewer: We heard it was promoted they said it was people and that's why we heard there were a lot of rationings of cigarettes so the GIs could be able to have the cigarettes.

Virgil: Yeah they'd send them out in boxes. Have boxes like Cracker Jacks with peanut butter and crackers and cheese in them and have two or three that little ole thing would have four cigarettes in it. Of course they was off brand most of them but they was still cigarettes.

Interviewer: Not all of them were Lucky Strikes.

Virgil: No

Interviewer 2: Most of them was Lucky Strikes. That's what GIs had was Lucky Strikes. You know them by Lucky Strikes.

Virgil: I run out of tobacco once over there. I'd been in a replacement depot I was in the hospital and they sent me back over in France and I didn't have no cigarettes I smoked a pack or so then. So I got me some leaves off of an ole tree I guess it was an oak tree crumbled them things up and smoked them.

Interviewer: Well you made do with what you had.

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: Well let me back and talk we were talking about your year you spent and you told me that you got in about June 1st of 43 is when you got to you got to the United Kingdom?

Virgil: Yeah the first of June.

Interviewer: And you spent right about a year there

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: Preparing for the invasion and did you and your fellow soldiers did y'all have any idea what was it like waiting? What was the experience like form a day to day basis?

Virgil: Well now most people was kindly glad for it to hurry and get here because some of them say the only way home would be through Berlin. So they were glad to see it going on and. But you can keep things a going like aggravating people like that training I was telling you about. You'd just about do anything to change.

Interviewer: Well I was curious if there was a lot of I know from what you told me it sounded like y'all were busy most of the time in preparing and the training. But were there times where it was lulls of time where a lot of where you and a lot of your fellow GIs very very nervous because things were maybe too quiet or you had a lot of anxiety that you wanted to know what was going on? When word would come down from the officers that you might be moving out I mean were you pretty much on alert most of the time or what was I guess what I'd want to ask you is could you give me an idea what a day was like a typical day for you while you were stationed in southern England. What like from you getting up early in the morning to what a day would be like for you I guess is what I'd like to ask.

Virgil: Well we'd get up real early about daylight or before sometimes I guess. And we'd have to get out and have revelry and maybe run for five or seven miles sometimes and do pushups and all that stuff. But another thing I didn't mention about we had some dry runs on this invasion both landing stuff. And we thought sure as heck we'd be gone they even called our name down on the pier and everything and headlights and they'd be hollering out everybody's name and the boats out there blinking around there. But they were doing that I found out for the German spies. They knowed there were spies there and then after while they'd put us on a truck we'd go back to camp. We'd just think well this is it this time they way they'd have our

Interviewer: Well in order to fool the spies they had to keep y'all had to keep the wool over yawls eyes too.

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: That's amazing. So were there several of those dry runs over the year?

Virgil: I guess probably we had probably three.

Interviewer: Three okay that's interesting I bet that's something a lot of people would be real interested in knowing about. Of course I'm sure each time it was exhilarating and scary and all that all at once because you thought this is it. Well

Virgil: But they told us about when we was going to France after it all got said and done. They even paid us in French money some. Wasn't supposed to see nobody they moved us to another camp close to the dock down there. They had it fenced in and no passed but some of the boys them English kids would come by and they'd hand them out one of those French monies would be through the fence. So there wasn't no secret about it going on. That ole General was standing down there when we'd go loading those folks he said where y'all going?

Interviewer: Well tell us you were telling us about what your day would be like. You said you'd get up early for revelry and then you'd go through work. What would tell us a little more about what the rest of the day would be like any given day.

Virgil: We would do a lot of hiking. We'd go up hills boy that was another thing that was hard on your legs. Some of them steep little hills over there in England and we would be sure and take our raincoats with us because the sun would be shining and everything and wouldn't be two hours there until you'd have to use that raincoat.

Interviewer: Don't go anywhere without those huh.

Virgil: And we come in we'd got off over there in the summertime we'd get the sun don't go down until about 10 o'clock or something like that. We'd get out on an 11 o'clock pass lots of times and get back in before dark.

Interviewer: Well

Virgil: So we had plenty of time to roam around.

Interviewer: Well that was really handy for y'all.

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: What was the experience like for you being in I know you it sounds like you got the opportunity to do some traveling when you were here in the United States from moving from Damascus to California and then ending up being shipped to Texas and then getting to go to the east. What was your experience when you first got to what did you think about being able to go to Scotland and to England? What kind of experience was that for you just like on being somewhere different?

Virgil: I was glad to go and just see the country. But as far as traveling over here I didn't know where I was going didn't even know which way. I thought maybe I was going in the Pacific or something another. They didn't tell us where we was going or nothing. We just got on a train and we wound up out in Pennsylvania and somebody asked somebody where were we at and they said you're in Pennsylvania some town Greenfield I believe.

Interviewer: Well so they really did keep everything quiet and you didn't know what to expect where you were going.

Virgil: Yeah I didn't know where I was going.

Interviewer: Well Mr. Winfrey that's something else. Well what

Virgil: And I didn't know where I was going to England or nothing they didn't tell us we just called our name out to get shipped out.

Interviewer: Well what was the experience like going when you'd get on those furloughs or passes what was it like to be able, what were some of the things that you were able to see when you were in England. Some of the sightseeing or

Virgil: Well I could go to Plymouth down there back across the river and catch a ferry when we were there. And Lou was another port that it was about seven miles I done most of my going over there. I'd go over there a lot of nights by myself. One night over there the moon was shining I was going back about 10 or 11 o'clock to the camp heard an ole owl up there in the tree kindly scary sounding like up there me back in there by myself. But I run most of the time I could run seven miles there. Of course that would give you out though healthy speed.

Interviewer: That's amazing.

Virgil: We had the advantage over a lot of the other guys there because our aid station and things was there and that's where we picked up our pass. And the ole doctor he'd just sign his name on them and we'd fill them out to what we wanted.

Interviewer: Well that was really handy.

Virgil: I went to London a time or two. Made me a 48 hour pass on the weekends. And they'd keep me in for about seven days but I didn't have no more money anyway and it just didn't bother me but to have a stay in. Yeah they court marshaled me one time. I was in the hospital over there in England and they aimed to send me back to the front over to France with my outfit. So they had a signup there for 7 and a half till nine days for a bulletin board the summary court martial that was just a \$39 fine. So I was aiming that's when I was engaged to her I thought well I'll go up there then. I went up there and stayed three days and we went to a show at night and I wore an overcoat where her brother-in-law had where they wouldn't see my uniform. And I went back down there and there was about nine big wigs there to court martial me. And I had an ole second lieutenant and they gave me a special court martial and that was a \$150 fine six months in jail. I was glad to get it but that didn't work they kept me in there two or three days and sent me back to the front line.

Interviewer: So their bite was not near as bad as their bit was?

Winfrey: No and our ole general he got the fine canceled then when I got back. I didn't lose nothing and got to stay off and that saved my life I guess.

Interviewer: It must have.

Winfrey: Some of them there went and got there they had an attack there and they lost a lot of our men just before I got there.

Interviewer: So there was heavy casualties on your unit then?

Winfrey: Yeah

Interviewer: Well let me ask you this and I want to be able to come back to you talking about during that time you were away and getting to visit and about y'all getting married and getting to spend time together. I guess my question for you is you talked a little about your unit being in France first of all tell me ask you tell me about your unit. When you did get your orders and you got to England that's when you knew you were in the 29th division could you tell me the breakdown of your unit?

Virgil: Well I didn't know where I was going until I wound up down at Bondman. That was the 116th regiment and there was about a week there where they shipped us about six or eight of us up to another place. And that was the 115th so that's where I stayed there then. And they had a nother unit of the 175th it was in a different town. Of course Bondman was a different town too but it was closer to the 175th. So that 175th they went out on maneuvers trying to just before D-Day. We didn't know it back then but I got a little wind of it form one guy telling another did he hear about it. But they let the German submarines slip in out there on it and they lost about 1,000 men. And I didn't find that out until after the war was over. But I heard one of our boys talking one time to another one said Cat did you hear what happened to the 175th the other night? And they never said another word about it but there's some woman I read about then after years later about seeing them unload GIs in bed sacks. And come to find out now in the books we get they told how many that they lost in it. Said they let a German submarine slip through back there and sunk that boat. They were just over there checking close to France to see how what it was like.

Interviewer: See what was going on huh?

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: My goodness well you told me you were in the 115th regiment and it was the 29th division. Did you said that I would like you to tell us a little about your job. What your training and your expertise were in and you told me that there were three of y'all. Were you assigned to the whole company or did you have specific oh I'm asking the wrong question I'm sorry. Tell us a little about your job that you were a specialist in.

Virgil: Well I done everything a person could in a doctor's office you know. I had to take a satchel with me and I carried different kinds of pills and morphine little tubes of shots of that.

Interviewer: Well I was curious about so your training was all centered on being a you said earlier that it was an aid man. You did all you were a medical person.

Virgil: Yeah if one got hurt anyway well I'd take care of them even blistered feet or anything else.

Interviewer: And you told me how many of y'all were assigned to a company?

Virgil: There was just three of us to each company.

Interviewer: Y'all were certainly people they wanted to see the most.

Virgil: That's right back during when the war was going on I know I'd like to have been close to one too. An old captain one time they got to shooting some shells over hitting Hejlsberg in the air and an old captain was there and me sitting there and boy he was sure proud to be there. And them things boy they like to drive you crazy popping that loud.

Interviewer: So did he stay pretty close to y'all?

Virgil: Yeah and the first sergeant was a company one of the other company's too he always stayed around close to where we was at. One of old lieutenant's one time he was a crying when we went back up there for some I don't know just what we went back for now but he was just crying. He said I better

never hear nobody say anything about my medical men. They sent me and my buddy in for Silver Stars but I didn't get nothing but the bronze out of it. Some of them said they didn't have it worded right.

Interviewer: Yeah that's interesting.

Virgil: And we went by one time had a little truce up there so many wounded persons and what I read about it is they said a German officer brought a slip of paper back got it all fixed up to carry them out. But I do know with my own eyes we went and got them and I went from a German machine gun sitting on a road bank they had a little ole German medic that they had captured he was helping carry them out both sides there.

Interviewer: Did y'all ever care for one another's wounded?

Virgil: When we went in St. Low France there was a wounded guy with his leg broke a German I guess he was SS Troop because I read about them being there. And went out there and I give him a shot and fixed him up like I did our own and I poured him out some water to drink too some kills.

Interviewer: Well did y'all work a lot with the Red Cross?

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: I read somewhere

Virgil: I've had them to shoot down people out in the field just plain open. And I finally got me a little ole flag to carry with me but I had a Red Cross on my arm.

Interviewer: You had the armbands?

Virgil: Yeah because I know one time especially that one I went crawled out there just an open field where snipers had shot him and I stuck that thing up in the ground and I doctored him up and everything fixed him up. And I crawled back and they never did shoot at me.

Interviewer: I was gonna ask you that if you ever experienced in your medical work if you ever experienced when you I read somewhere there were a lot of problems for medical personnel with snipers. And I was curious if you ever had any really hairy experiences when you were trying to do some medical care giving. If you had to if you had to ward off actually were you armed did you carry?

Virgil: No I didn't carry a gun at no time.

Interviewer: Okay

Virgil: But I'll tell you about what I read about it too on that the Japs were worse about shooting the Red Cross people than the Germans. Now the Germans they could have killed me I'm sure lots of times if they would have done it. I've had them to shoot though knock limbs off the trees right beside of my head.

Interviewer: I imagine it's not comfortable to have that.

Virgil: And one time we was pinned down in a wheat field there in France going up the hedgerow and there was two guys ahead of me and the first one up there got hit and I crawled around this one got up there and seen he was dead. I turned around to crawl back around this one here I just passed and he got killed too. So it went right over my head there and got him too.

Interviewer: Both times

Virgil: So I crawled about 50 yards I guess down there to a road crossing and I jumped up and I went over there. They'd have had me zeroed in to have got me because I didn't lose any time.

Interviewer: You didn't lose any time.

Virgil: I've had them we lost so much sleep I'd doze off to sleep sometimes over there in France in the fields the hedges and things. And they'd just shoot you'd just hear them bullets whizzing knocking the tops out of that ole wheat there. I'd doze off to sleep there for a few seconds wake up.

Interviewer: That's mighty close right there.

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: Well boy you're giving our viewers a really really wonderful insight on what it was like to be there. Let me ask you this let's back up to D-Day itself and tell us a little about the experience you had in the morning preparation and getting onboard the boats. And then what it was like to make that trip across the Chanel and then the landing. Could you tell us about some of that?

Virgil: Well it was they had to postpone the landing for one day. It was supposed to been the 5th and it was so wavy and everything there. I had a temperature that night but it I don't know what caused it but it wasn't enough for them to send me back to camp or anything. So we gobbled around there that morning and boy there were a lot of according to them books I've got there were so many people that was sick vomiting and things that they just drowned when they'd get off in the water and things.

Interviewer: Was that something that you saw a lot of?

Virgil: No I didn't see it I just read about it. When we went to we got closer to the bank when I went in. I jumped off in the water I guess probably 75 feet out from the bank you know had to wade. But some of the rest of them according to what I've seen in the books I don't know they probably had people taking pictures there but I never seen none. But they said they'd jump off over their head and drowned.

Interviewer: Because of all of their gear being so heavy?

Virgil: Yeah and the shell graters the bombs and things where they'd hit in the floor sometime and they had holes.

Interviewer: That would be a deep hole to step off in I imagine. Well Mr. Winfrey you had said that your unit the 115th was you said that the 116th of your division went in and they were the first wave?

Virgil: Yeah the A Company was.

Interviewer: The A Company and then y'all were on y'all were off shore waiting to be the next group to come in.

Virgil: Yeah we was supposed to go in about an hour and a half after they got in there. But they was all been down and shot up.

Interviewer: Do you remember hearing I think you mentioned to me earlier that you heard on the radio that they were that they were pinned down on the beach.

Virgil: I heard two of my buddies saying that one told the other. They worked at the aid station there that was on our boat you know. And I heard that one there said Chip they've got them pinned down on the beach. And then according to this book here ole Ormond Bradley he got couldn't get no good news of no kind and he was thinking about pulling back from it there. They said he had tried to request a ___ from the headquarters but he never did get back further enough or something and it got to getting better then.

Interviewer: Wow that must have been a hard machine to stop once it got going. What was it like when you could I imagine y'all on the convoy over it was dark and what do you do recall hearing the planes flying overhead?

Virgil: I never heard nothing we went to sleep and when we did wake up it was between midnight and daylight because we couldn't hear a plane from there.

Interviewer: Well what was it like to look out could you see out over the boats that you were in could you see out over the walls or what was it like to all of the convoy all of the ships and being off shore right off shore when you would see the first group on? What was that experience like seeing all of that?

Virgil: Well we couldn't see much see we was in when we changed boats out there and got on these LCIs they had a door raised up and they was head high. And we was standing in there like cattle I could see some of the cliff but it was all smoky and foggy and everything else there at times.

Interviewer: So y'all couldn't see really until the door was dropped down where you could see what was going on?

Virgil: No that was the first time we could see anything.

Interviewer: Well did you when you got there did you hear any of the boat swans or the cock swans or whatever they were called the LCIs did they make a lot of trips back and forth then? Did you when you you said you got off on shore about 75 feet out

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: Were there a lot of were there a lot of explosions and artillery and things going off when the door dropped down and y'all started to move out?

Virgil: There was a lot of well there was a lot of shooting going on too but I never did look back when I got to the bank. We were trying to get off the beach.

Interviewer: Were the casualty rates pretty high in your unit when you were trying to get up and on the beach?

Virgil: It wasn't too many on my bunch there. I don't I seen two got killed when I got up on top the hill one radio 300 radioman and he had a one of those big ones on his back.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Virgil: Him and another boy was sitting there on the side of the road and the Germans shot an 88 form somewhere back that way and it come over and hit him. Just tore him all to pieces threw some parts on the other boy and he jumped up shaking his head. And then about 150 yards down the road there another one come over and killed our supply sergeant.

Interviewer: My goodness so y'all definitely it was hot a lot of shrapmetal and bullets flying and like you said the German 88s were going off.

Virgil: Yeah they had smoke screens throwed up on the beach where they couldn't see they just had them shooting I guess mostly.

Interviewer: Well that was certainly good for y'all that you had that smoke screen to be able to go through. They just had to pick and shoot where they wanted to until those guns were

Virgil: Well what them Germans they had a tunnel where walk dug out all the way from that beach back to town place.

Interviewer: Did you see that Atlantic wall that they talked about having formed they thought that it would be not able to penetrate any way but y'all proved that to be a wrong concept.

Virgil: Well yeah I never seen the beach anymore after I got on it and got up over the hill.

Interviewer: Well what was it like Mr. Winfrey seeing did you as you were wading the shore did you see all of the staffs that they had to impel things on and the big dragons teeth and the big bear cage that they had to try to inhibit any kind of landing force and barbed wire?

Virgil: Yeah I seen a bunch of them but the tide was coming back in then. And a lot of people drowned according to what I read about it.

Interviewer: Well your job you had said earlier this morning when we talked that that when things really started to get bad your business really picked up. You had a lot of work to do I couldn't imagine what it would have been like to have been a medic and done the work that you did. But like you said you told us that there were three of you to a company I'm sure that y'all were especially busy on that day.

Virgil: Yeah well when really it wasn't just the company we took care of just anybody.

Interviewer: Anybody that

Virgil: Yeah anybody they'd holler medic wanted you they'd holler. And I've seen all different kinds the worst one I've ever seen though I better not say that on this one just shot his whole jaw off he was

hollering and trying to. So you see all kinds and another thing that we hadn't talked about there was a lot of guys there we always thought maybe they had shot their self through the leg.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Virgil: I bet there was 30 or 40 hauled away through my bunch around there the ones I knew that had claimed they were crossing the fence or something and they'd shoot. Well one time one morning about daylight over there before we took St. Low just getting light one of them was hollering for a medic and I hear the gun go ka-bang. When I got over there he took a shot and he splinted up his leg.

Interviewer: Goodness

Virgil: So that's the only one a person could prove that did do that that way because he hollers before he done it that way.

Interviewer: So what did you say to him I'm just curious?

Virgil: Well I don't know I had several of them that way been crossing the fence or something. But lots of people would do anything to get back from the front that might save their life and they would in a lot of cases.

Interviewer: Yes sir. Well I just I wonder you told me a little about some of the gear that you carried with you could you tell me a little more about that what you carried in your medic bag?

Virgil: Well I had a cubes or boric acid and stuff like that and phenobarb tablets aspirin and cough syrup and shot needles and stuff like that and morphine.

Interviewer: So your bag was probably pretty heavy to carry around.

Virgil: I had just a square one it wasn't too bad. I had a lot of bandage and stuff I used lot of that and tape.

Interviewer: Well I was wondering you must have done everything to help out form a cough to a headache to

Virgil: Yeah I did

Interviewer: To the most horrible wound that a person could have.

Virgil: And sometimes back before the invasion well after the war was over too I worked some at the aid station you'd have to pull ever so often overnight. I was working in the aid station when they dropped the atomic bomb on Japan. I remember hearing it on the radio one morning about two o'clock over there in Germany when I heard them tell about that. About having a big explosion they had and all that stuff.

Interviewer: Well I was wondering I wanted to read I would find some history on your unit the 29th but I didn't find everything I wanted to read on it. And I was curious of the places where y'all went to after landing in France what towns that you went to and.

Virgil: Well yeah I wish I had one with all that. This book I've got here I believe has got now that's one thing now that I can't

Interviewer: There's the beach right there

Virgil: In Omaha yeah but there's a place on here they just had the 1st division they left the 29th off.

Interviewer: Well they sure did shame on them for leaving that off.

Virgil: Yeah well I my buddy that comes by he tells about it too that they think that they 29th didn't get the recognition their name that it should have got.

Interviewer: No sir not at all.

Virgil: The first division to go in on D-Day.

Interviewer: Well the beach that you were on that your unit landed on was Omaha was that correct?

Virgil: Yeah it's right here that's boats I guess they've got showing there. Omaha well there's two of them here somewhere. Maybe it's on something else right over here.

Interviewer: They show it right there it's Point Dehawk.

Virgil: Yeah that's that bluff there where that guy had to shoot that ropes up.

Interviewer: Here it is it just lists the first infantry division.

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: Well shame on them for making that map that way.

Virgil: I've seen them do that on something else too yeah.

Interviewer: Well hopefully they will get that straight in the future maybe there are some other publications that have it right. I know there's always room for a mistake in things like that.

Virgil: Of course there's some places in there where it tells about it where they've got them both. The second going into St. Low here there's some of them tried to claim some credit for being the first ones there but we was the first ones there because I remember all about it.

Interviewer: Well

Virgil: That's where I doctored that German soldier I was talking about.

Interviewer: Yes sir well you told me that you didn't carry a side arm. Somewhere I read that some medics got to they had such harrowing experience that sometimes they would stash a side arm or something with them in case things got bad. But I'm glad that

Virgil: Yeah I heard that too but we didn't it's in the rules they said to not carry so we went by it.

Interviewer: Well that's good that's a good noble thing to do. And it's really interesting you said you worked on American boys as well as Germans. Did you ever have did you give aid to French as well since there were civilians.

Virgil: I never seen the French well I did a civilian woman some boys right after D-Day up in the hill these little boys were bringing a woman down through there and had her leg broke and he laid her down left her for me. I don't know who come got her.

Interviewer: They were trying to keep you busy like you weren't busy enough.

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: Well what you said once you got to the beach you never looked back and so you spent the rest of that time going

Virgil: We were trying to go forward was the way we was trying to get off the beach because that's where all of the firing was taking place.

Interviewer: So you got real familiar with the French countryside you were talking about the wheat fields and the hedgerows.

Virgil: Oh yeah that's the first 42 days was the worst part we had because over there in Normandy they had I don't know I was trying to think coming down here it might have been two acre blocks or four or something. Anyway it was all blocked off with mounds all around it for fences and the Germans would be on the other side somewhere or in the corner up there. And we'd stick our head up over on the go that's what we had to face now for 42 days.

Interviewer: Well no wonder that was difficult I mean that must have been rough trying to get across that terrain.

Virgil: They was finally they didn't know what to do but some ole sergeant told them how to do it. He said take one of them tanks out there and nails and fix you blade and put on it and use it to bulldoze and tear a hole and they done it.

Interviewer: That was the smartest thing they could have done right then.

Virgil: And they'd go through there then with the tanks.

Interviewer: I've seen those old Sherman tanks with those ole things you're talking about on the front of them I think they could have sure enough done the trick right there.

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: Got that cleared right on out of the way. But those first 40 you said those first 42 days

Virgil: Took us 42 days to get to the dill that they said we'd take it in three days.

Interviewer: Good gracious they just didn't know did they?

Virgil: No right there in St. Low

Interviewer: Well

Virgil: And that's where I was telling you they didn't have about three or four artillery pieces on the beach and they give us those.

Interviewer: What were some of what was one of the most funny things that happened that you can remember that was comical that took place in your time there?

Virgil: Well the only thing I can remember I don't know where it would be funny or not but one of our guys aid man with the A Company or B Company one. He was going down the road behind the squad one day and they told it on him and he did too he said he looked up in a tree and seen a sniper up there he just dropped his head and went on. When he got on down the road a good ways he told some of them said I know where there's a sniper but I won't tell you. So he was afraid to say anything afraid they would shoot him in the back and he finally did get shot too in the back but I don't know whether he got over it or not.

Interviewer: Well

Virgil: But he wasn't then so his name was Younger. Yeah them snipers would get up in well I like to got shot too once right after D-Day. The first little ole town over there about St. Claire I think I crawled over in a garden there they had cabbage head and stuff I was aiming to eat a little on my own. A big ole post there and I heard a sniper there and boy he wasn't very far from me and that think sounded like it hit that post.

Interviewer: Oh my goodness you certainly had a lot of close scrapes there.

Virgil: Oh yeah and another place up there in Julie where I got hit with a piece of shrapmetal. A sports plaza there and we were trying to clean it out on that side of the river found a they had an old bunker up there to get in and we'd a bunch of us or a bunch of the other boys had got up there and we did too. And I started to go up there and go in there and them Germans were shooting cut loose there and just knocked some limbs off right above my head and I fell down in the door. And one of the boys he lives over here at Atkins he grabbed me by the arm and jerked me in. That's the closest I ever got shot at because that thing was right by my head knocked them leaves or limbs.

Interviewer: That was woo that was too close for comfort.

Virgil: They killed one of our lieutenants there they had a bunker going around an ole pond thing and a door over here at the other end of it and steps going down. He was arguing back to headquarters that we couldn't move without getting shot at because they Germans were just across the river there. And a shell come over and hit right up there by his head and killed him dead there while he was talking on the phone. And they sent another one up to take his place and that night that evening late they was aiming to try to run to get to that place there in that ball field that sports plaza they called it. And that lieutenant told me to stay there and they would run out there and try to get him. So they run out there

and two of the boys come a dragging him back a shell had hit the top of the building and busted his head and you could just hear them guns pouring out that artillery.

Interviewer: Good gracious

Virgil: He died I think the next morning. I bandaged him up all I could and everything but he lost so much blood.

Interviewer: Well y'all were expected to do just everything short of being a field surgeon weren't you?

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: What did to go back to your training did they run y'all through a wide variety of training to deal with any situation you might come upon?

Virgil: Yeah I think that's right I believe we did because we had to practice doing things on each other and all that. The hardest thing there was about the training though was trying to stay awake. They put me and the rest of them in a place where it was kindly dark a big building and you couldn't hardly keep from going to sleep they just kept busy there trying. They'd ask them questions you'd have to answer or try to. And I'm proud my name started with a W cause they'd always run out it would be time up before they'd get down where mine was at.

Interviewer: They were too close to running out of the alphabet weren't you?

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: That's good.

Virgil: That was one good thing about it. I've stood in line over there in Germany we took a prisoner of war camp well it was more it was just a prisoner camp. And they had a lot of wine or beer in there some of them said they had about 35 or 40 barrels just for the guards there over there. We loaded a keg of that on the jeep and took it down there and drank a little of that one day. And one of them guys was in there that day eating the ole peelings off of potatoes. He wasn't nothing but bones and hide just stretched over him he was starved to death.

Interviewer: Do you remember the name of that camp?

Virgil: No I don't know it was just on our way where we was still going. And after the war was over me and two of my buddies went off one night just roaming around went into a prisoner camp like that. Old ladies like chickens lying just in a path going through they just lay them on the ground on each side on quilts or blankets or something. But they had a pretty long building too.

Interviewer: Good grief I bet they were sure glad to have you all there I'm sure.

Virgil: I'm pretty sure I was told several times they probably wish they were in my shoes and the other boys. Betty's cousin he was a prisoner over there he got killed by the Germans I believe it was in Dunkirk might have not have been. And he slipped off from them him an a Canadian they was marching them

somewhere and he got away and he come to an American place and said boy they really fed him steak and cigarettes and stuff sent him back to England.

Interviewer: Good gracious he did good then.

Virgil: Yeah he rode his bicycle up to London to see us onetime we was over there. He stayed about 12 miles he's still living because he calls her brother every day.

Interviewer: Well bless his heart that's amazing he just wasn't gonna let them keep him around he decided he was gonna go back home huh.

Virgil: Yeah she calls her brother at one o'clock every day I bet he's sitting there waiting. He's in a veteran's home now he's in bad shape and couldn't take care of his self he lost his wife about a year ago. She slipped down on ice and hurt her spine or something just got paralyzed.

Interviewer: Well how long had they been married? Did they marry close to about the time that y'all did?

Virgil: Well just a little while after we did.

Interviewer: Well I'll tell you what it sure sounds like it was an interesting experience in many ways.

Tape ended

Tape 2

Interviewer: To have seen the things that you must have seen and been involved in just. Did you feel well I guess let me ask you this question Mr. Winfrey what if you were to summarize your part in the war effort your part in the invasion and your job what would you say about what you were able to do?

Virgil: How do you mean that?

Interviewer: I'm sorry by being in the job being one of the company medics that must have been a position where you really felt like you were able to make a difference in helping.

Virgil: Oh yeah

Interviewer: I'm just curious what you would say about your experience in being able to do the job that you were assigned to do.

Virgil: I think it was

Interviewer: Your contribution that's the word I need to say is what your contribution was.

Virgil: Well I think I saved lots of people and I was glad to do it and everything and I just but I like I'm proud I done that because I bet there's a lot of people now that would like to have known who I was back then. I mean just see that might have saved their life.

Interviewer: So that medic on that hillside or whatever and wonder.

Virgil: That's right and that boy I was telling you about got killed in that foxhole he was from Minnesota I've always wanted to wish I could find out some of his people and tell them about what kind of a boy he was and all that.

Interviewer: Did you ever help any of the officers write home about any of the boys or did you did anyone ever interview asking about things or I'm just curious?

Virgil: No

Interviewer: Because I'm under the impression that may be a Hollywood thing once again about some of the officers having to write home about the boys.

Virgil: I've never known one.

Interviewer: Well okay I sure appreciate you sharing that with me. No doubt you did make an incredible impact on a lot of people's lives by being able to give them aid they needed right there on the spot to keep them from

Virgil: Yeah they was proud of it too because they was hollering

Interviewer: They were glad to see y'all weren't they?

Virgil: Yeah I seen one one day we met him coming back and he had his arm off here he just laughing he got that morphine shot he said y'all can go on I'm going home.

Interviewer: Nobody stopped him from saying that did they?

Virgil: No

Interviewer: No sir

Virgil: It would be worth that to a lot of people. My buddy he tried to get me to break his leg and I wouldn't do it. So he'd get sent back.

Interviewer: Well I sure appreciate you telling me about your job. I wanted to ask you about that contribution because obviously any of you gentlemen that were there made an incredible contribution. But you especially being medical personnel you put your life on the line to save lives.

Virgil: Yeah I got combat medical badge, Purple Heart.

Interviewer: You didn't tell me you told me you'd gotten injured with some shrapmetal was that when you received

Virgil: Got the Purple Heart from that.

Interviewer: Yes sir well I saw a list it sounded like you got a lot of medals.

Virgil: Yeah I had another one I got for my discharge it was a wreath of some kind. I didn't take time to dig out the discharge to see what that was.

Interviewer: Well

Virgil: I've got it in a picture frame.

Interviewer: Well tell me something about the medals. You said you got a Purple Heart and that what all were the other things?

Virgil: A Bronze Star well the first thing I got a medal for going overseas that ETO medal. I got an arrow head for D-Day and four battle or three battles campaign medals or stars and I got Bronze Star and a good conduct medal and a combat medical badge and I don't know.

Interviewer: So something that you got a Presidential

Virgil: Oh Presidential Citation

Interviewer: Yes sir well that's a long list of things.

Virgil: Yeah I've got about seven or eight of them. I'm kindly proud of them I've got them where I can look at them.

Interviewer: Oh good that's supper. Well you certainly earned those definitely and

Virgil: You know that made me I felt so proud of them and when I'd go into town or anything I'd have them ribbons on my blouse.

Interviewer: Well

Virgil: I'm gonna put my flag pole back up and hang it out.

Interviewer: Yes sir more of us ought to fly that.

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: I'll tell you what I didn't get to thank as many people as I wanted to this past Veteran's Day. But anytime that we saw someone and heard them talking we took the time to say thanks and it's a little belated thanks but we'd like to thank you for your effort and your contribution to our freedom.

Virgil: I appreciate it to do what I did.

Interviewer: Would have done it again?

Virgil: Well if I was yeah I'm proud I done what I done.

Interviewer: Yes sir well let me make a transition at this point you had shown us some photographs before. Tell us a little bit about the latter part of your duty and about meeting a very dear friend of yours and a little bit about the last bit of points that you earned and being able to come back home after the war.

Virgil: Well the way they went on the points was the medals you got and how long you was over there too.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Virgil: So that's the reason I wound up with the points I had. You get so much for each year and each thing counted so many different points. I kindly liked it over there I wouldn't have cared to have stayed a while longer after the war was over.

Interviewer: Yes sir were you in did you wind up in Germany were y'all there?

Virgil: Oh yeah that's where I was at in a little town out from Bremen. That's in the north part of I guess its north up next to Holland on up there. The Germany navy place up there Bremerhaven. Well yeah that's the town that they bombed so much and they had a factory there I forget which one it was and they tore the heck out of it. And you know according to these books all of them England bombed Dresden Germany two different times and they Americans one. And they killed 142,000 people. That was a long close to when the war was about over too was in March 142,000 civilians and things.

Interviewer: All that trying to destroy the industrial center of that area.

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: Good gracious well I was going to ask you finished up when did you meet your wife?

Virgil: Well I met here the first trip I went to London when I got over there. I don't know just exactly when that was.

Interviewer: Okay she's telling me that we need to take a break for lunch so can I pick back up with that question here in just a few minutes?

Virgil: Well I don't know what she could go or not.

Tape restarted with several people sitting around the table talking.

Virgil: I got a hold of her to lift here up and was standing on her dress and just tore the back out of it.

Interviewer: Oh my goodness what a way to meet.

Betty: Yeah well I used to go roller skating every night because it was full of GIs you know. And that's where I met Virgil because in between time there was bombs dropping everywhere you know and when he'd take me home at night bombs were dropping here and there and everywhere. And search lights was out and then the doodle bugs come over during the daytime of course they didn't have no part in them they just crashed anywhere. They didn't care where they crashed.

Interviewer: And that was common everyday activity?

Betty: Every day that was night and day we had them night and day they bombed us night and day over there. And ole Churchill would say we will never surrender we will never surrender. Ole Churchill he's the one that give us hope because you know we was down we was getting bombed so bad. And ole Churchill he got up there and made a speech and he said we'll fight on the land and we'll fight on the sea but we will never surrender.

Interviewer: Now what did your family think about when they heard things like that?

Betty: What about Churchill?

Interviewer: When he would make speeches?

Betty: Oh they were all confused he made our day Churchill did because if it hadn't been for him to give us hope we didn't have no hope.

Interviewer: The British Prime Minister hadn't given y'all a lot of

Betty: No no ole Churchill was the one that give us hope. He made us feel good you know when he'd make the speech and stuff.

Interviewer: Well what was life like prior to the war beginning for Brittan?

Betty: Well see I was 14 when the war started but see when it started everything was rationed we couldn't get anything over there. All of the food was rationed the clothes was rationed of course we could get fish and chips they wasn't rationed so we lived off fish and chips.

Virgil: She still likes them.

Betty: Fish and chips

Interviewer: Well some things never change do they?

Betty: No and but they'd bomb us night and day over there and of course we'd go to the air raid shelter when it first begun but then we had it so long we didn't go to them no more. And we'd go down in the basement in the house and we'd sit there by the wall but lots of times you could feel the wall just a shaking where the bombs would drop and

Interviewer: Oh my

Betty: Of course the dropped the sangria bombs on our house that's the fire bombs and of course they put them out. Then they dropped a rocket on the next street to us like I said that's where that girl I knew got killed. Of course we was all lucky to get out of it alive.

Interviewer: Yes ma'am what was it like for your family having to live under such pressure like that?

Betty: Well it was bad because my dad worked at night and he would have to go off and leave us you know there he'd not be there at night. And he never did know if we'd be there when he came back the next morning or not you know because we were getting bombed so bad. But anyway we was all lucky to get out of it alive.

Interviewer: Well what did you think when the allies started a mass and huge force in England and brought in more and more troops?

Betty: Well first they used to give us scare us about the paratroops German paratroopers coming over those dropping German paratroops you know. And old scary things like that oh I think they did try to drop some. And but we were glad when you know the GIs coming because you know we was gonna get help.

Interviewer: Yes ma'am well you were talking about y'all would go down in the basement cellars of your homes during the bombings. You had blackouts every night and

Betty: Oh yeah every night yeah you couldn't show a light you had to have blackout curtains you couldn't show a light there was no light nowhere.

Interviewer: Were there a lot of people that went in to the train tunnels and places that were

Betty: Yeah they lived on the subways they'd sleep on the subways. You know they had cots and stuff where people lived and slept there.

Interviewer: Were y'all able to carry on life everyday life despite all that going one?

Betty: Well yeah

Interviewer: Did you go to school and

Betty: Well yeah make it you had to because there wasn't much else you could do. But now people lived on those subways there was beds all over the place wasn't there Virgil? Of course we didn't go there we went down the basement of the house is where we went when it was bad. My mom had a time always had a time trying to get us up out of the bed get up she said it's bombing bad get up and go down to the basement.

Interviewer: Oh My

Betty: Of course I know how she felt now trying to get us up.

Interviewer: Hard to get young people out of bed sometime isn't it?

Betty: Yeah especially when you have a late night you know. And like I said I'd go roller skating every night nearly.

Interviewer: Well do you remember you were telling me a little about when you met Mr. Winfrey do you recall what year that was? What time of the year that was what month?

Betty: It's when he had a leave there in London.

Virgil: Yeah I probably didn't get one until I was over there about six months might not have been that long.

Interviewer: So it might have been around December?

Virgil: Yeah it probably was might have been about August I guess that had been three months.

Interviewer: Okay well what this is a little bit off of that subject but what was it like to celebrate holidays and such during the war time?

Betty: It wasn't very much because you couldn't get very much to celebrate you know you couldn't buy nothing of course you didn't have no food. We had I think it was 22 coupons clothing coupons to last us for a year. And to buy a pair of shoes it cost seven and you had to have at least 12 so when you got that you didn't have nothing left. You couldn't buy nothing and no candy of course we had ration box and stuff a little bit of meat we didn't have much. But my mom used to have to line up for hours and hours to get a few vegetables my poor ole momma did when the war was on. And it was cold you know stand out there and line up for something.

Interviewer: Do you think it was easier for the people that lived in the countryside?

Betty: Oh yeah because see they had stuff in the country that we didn't have. Of course they probably had chickens and stuff and had egg we never seen an egg when the war was on. Of course they had stuff in the country that they raised but we lived in town.

Interviewer: Good gracious it must have been difficult to be in larger cities.

Betty: Yeah it was bad.

Interviewer: Also they were the targets of the bombing.

Betty: Oh yeah they used to try and get I lived close to railroad stations and they'd try and get it. But they never did hit us they went all around it but they never did get it.

Interviewer: What did you tell me the station name was and also the church that was so significant to y'all?

Betty: St. Paul's Cathedrals that was that was in the way not where I lived but not very far though. But Brunsbury Station is where I lived that was the name of the railroad station there Brunsbury Station. And Kilban Station I lived in Kilban is where I lived.

Interviewer: Well was it in Kilban that y'all met?

Betty: In Creekwood, Creekwood Skating Rink is where we met.

Interviewer: Well after that first meeting how long did it take before y'all started

Betty: Well he wanted me to get engaged in the second deal.

Virgil: She got that wrong.

Betty: I didn't get it wrong.

Virgil: You said how about let's get married.

Betty: I didn't do such a thing

Virgil: And I said who do you think would have us.

Betty: I didn't do no such a thing he's just saying that I did. I didn't say that you know better than that.

Interviewer: Uh oh well how long did y'all date?

Betty: Not very long.

Interviewer: I know the war much have definitely been in the way.

Betty: Well let's see he was we got he got we got married in June and he was sent home was it in October?

Virgil: Yeah sometime in there.

Betty: And I didn't come over until the next April. So

Virgil: She landed Easter Sunday.

Betty: Yeah in New York.

Interviewer: Was that in 46 or

Betty: It was 45 wasn't it?

Virgil: No it was 46.

Betty: Was it 46 landed in New York. See all the girls that was getting off of the ship that was getting off in New Jersey waiting we had to stay on the boat until Monday.

Interviewer: Oh my

Betty: And we couldn't get off the boat until Monday then I got on a train it took me three days on a train to get from New York to come to Arkansas.

Interviewer: Well

Betty: I had a lovely place on the train I had my own room and bed and everything on the train. The other girls were over there in the thing with the curtain pulled but I had a room all to myself.

Interviewer: Well that sure is nice it must have made the trip a lot more easy.

Betty: Yeah and when I got to Conway Virgil wasn't there and I didn't know what in the world I was going to do.

Virgil: At the time Mrs. Kirkendall the Red Cross woman brought her out up there.

Betty: Well I was fixing to get a taxi and I asked the taxi man I said how much would you charge me to take me to Damascus and I think he said \$5. So I was fixing to get in the taxi and here come Mrs. Kirkendall he said she's not going nowhere I'm taking her to Damascus no she's going with me so I went with Mrs. Kirkendall. And did you ever know Mrs. Kirkendall?

Interviewer: No

Betty: Well she's a lovely person she took me to her house and I met her mother and everything. And I always remember she had strawberries and cream for she let me have dinner there. She had strawberries and cream and they was lovely people and she took me to Damascus. And in the meantime Virgil was we passed him on the way.

Interviewer: Oh no

Betty: So she dropped me off to Virgil's bothers house so I stayed there until Virgil come there. But Mrs. Kirkendall she was a lovely person and I used to go see her a lot.

Interviewer: Well I have to ask that must have been quite an experience of y'all meeting and deciding that you wanted to marry and what was did I'm trying to think about the period in between did y'all write one another?

Betty: Yeah we wrote a long time.

Interviewer: During the time that you were in France and Germany?

Virgil: Yeah over in England they'd sensor mail all the time. I'd walk out the back gate and go put it in somebodies box and mail her letter.

Interviewer: Oh that's good that was good planning on your part.

Virgil: Yeah

Interviewer: That got shipped right on through then?

Virgil: Yeah it got there all the time I don't know whose box it was it was about a half a mile from the camp.

Betty: Yeah we wrote a long time we wrote each other a long time.

Interviewer: Did Mr. Winfrey indicate some of the things that how hard the days were for him and some of his experiences or did he pretty much just tell you the good things?

Betty: No we just didn't talk about nothing like that just tried to have a good time that was all.

Interviewer: Well that's good. Did you write often?

Virgil: I don't know I wrote about every day I guess.

Interviewer: That's pretty often. Well I'm sure you were mighty glad to hear from him so often.

Betty: Yeah well I used to write him too I'd always answer his letters back you know.

Interviewer: Well I'm sure that y'all were really.

Betty: But I was so homesick when I came over.

Virgil: There was just one thing that got us together my second leave I got I wrote and told her to be up there where I'd meet her at. Well I never did hear from here and I was fixing to go to another town that evening and some of our mail come in early that evening. And some of the boys brought it there and I got a letter from her she was aiming to meet me there at that place so I changed my mind. That's how close it come.

Interviewer: Wow

Betty: He almost threw me away didn't he?

Interviewer: It was hinging on a letter.

Betty: Yeah

Interviewer: Good gracious well I'll tell you that's an amazing story that y'all have. You had just mentioned that you were incredibly home sick.

Betty: Oh it was terrible when I first come here I was so homesick and I didn't like it. Of course it was a lot different see I lived in London and then we lived way out in the country and I just hated it.

Interviewer: That must have been an incredible transition to make for you.

Betty: Yeah and I was so homesick I couldn't I was homesick for a couple of years. It's a terrible feeling I'd cry all the time I never did think I'd stay but I did. Look how long I've been here now.

Interviewer: You think you might stay?

Virgil: She's got half her time spent here.

Interviewer: That's right

Betty: I've lived longer here than I ever did in England.

Virgil: Well sure you've been here

Betty: Of course you know I'm getting up in age now.

Virgil: About 55 or 6 years?

Betty: I got married when I was 20.

Interviewer: Well show us the photograph maybe we can share with our viewers. Oh isn't that a lovely couple and that was right was that in 45?

Virgil: June the 6th 45.

Interviewer: Wow what a nice looking couple.

Betty: We a colored one of the bridesmaids and stuff too this is just a little one. And that was a picture they took of Virgil in the paper.

Interviewer: I was wondering why he was smiling so big.

Betty: Yeah Virgil Tony took that and they took it off of it was bigger picture than this and I think they got one of him

Virgil: They got one

Betty: One of them in Wal-Mart in Little Rock.

Virgil: Standing around people

Betty: They kept it on display or something I don't know what they done with it.

Interviewer: And what Cathedral was it again that y'all got married in?

Betty: It was St. Paul's Cathedral where we went to get the marriage license but we got married at St. James Church close to by where I lived in London.

Interviewer: Well I just I want to I know that y'all have got things to do this afternoon but I wanted to thank you so very much.

Betty: I bet Penny's has sold all of my stuff out.

Interviewer: I'm gonna head that direction too. I wanted to just thank y'all so very much for taking the time.

Betty: Well we appreciate yours.

Interviewer: I'll tell you what it will sure mean an awful lot to people years from now I mean it means a lot to us. And it will mean a lot to the museum to be able to have yawls stories to share with future generations. But people I think more and more are realizing the value of this yawls stories because we haven't been quick enough as historians to jump on and say hey. You know I personally missed out on interviewing some of my family members and I have this incredible desire to get the opportunity to have these shared with us so that y'all so very much.

Betty: You're welcome

Virgil: You know there's a lots of soldiers that's never heard a gun shoot.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Betty: Virgil thinks he's bad because he never did get no money for doing what he done. Well you see they give so much money away I think they ought to help the veterans some myself.

Interviewer: Sure enough

Betty: You know for what they done for the country.

Interviewer: Yes ma'am of course that's my opinion and my opinion won't get nowhere but that's my opinion.

Interviewer: Well I wish I would have had time to ask you some things but I will have to at another time or something maybe corresponding with y'all. I would love to know some more of your experiences but I want to thank y'all so much for taking the time to share with us.

Betty: You're welcome

Tape ended