

Interviewer: Go ahead and start us off by stating your full name and where you were born.

Matheny: Okay I'm Sergeant Major Wilbert Lamar Matheny. I was born on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of April 1927 in Morgantown West Virginia.

Interviewer: Okay what were your parents' names and what were their occupations?

Matheny: My father's was the same as mine he was Wilbert Lamar Matheny and when he got killed in 1942 I just dropped the junior and kept the name. He was a roller in s steel mill. That is it's a job where you have about 50 or 60 people working for you and the roller is responsible to make sure the steel comes out very precise. And he has a large team I worked in the steel mill because I wanted to see what kind of work he was doing and it's a very physical type thing. And so my father was the roller in other words in charge of all of that. And my mother was a primarily she did do some work but primarily she just took care of the house.

Interviewer: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Matheny: I have two sisters but they are deceased. They both died before they were 21 years old.

Interviewer: Your early education how far did you go were you grade school high school?

Matheny: Well I went through six years in Gary Indiana which at the time was one of the best schools in the country I went to Horseman. And then because of the depression we moved back to West Virginia and I went to several schools there and wound up finishing about the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. And my father when he got killed I had to go to work so. I first went to work for a lady on a farm and that job only paid a dollar and a half a day and the board. But my first real job was working for the B & O Railroad. And I got 56 cents an hour they called it bucket ties what you done was push gravel under the ties and make sure it was level. I worked on that job about 6 months then I went to hitchhiked to Baltimore Maryland. I was 15 maybe 16 I was too young to work so I just changed my birth certificate and made me 18. And I done a miserable job but they was needing people so bad they overlooked the fact they knew I wasn't 18. So I worked for a place called Bendix Radio and I made if you're familiar with a radio I made the stator and the rotor which finds the different station that's what I made I soldered those pieces together. And then my boss was afraid that I was going to cause harm to my health because the acid fumes you know. And he got me a job as an expeditor where I traveled the nine different plants. Say a job was shut down and they needed a part I got the parts for them whatever it was they needed. So I a truck and a driver and I would round up that part to make sure the job did not shut down. And then I decided to go to work in the steel mill because my father was in there. So I worked in the steel mill a couple of years and I had a job where the bar would come out the 14 inch mill you grabbed it with a pair of tongs and you drug it about 65 feet. It came out a diamond shape like a diamond and you picked it up turned it and shoved it in the 9 inch mill and by the time you got back there you had another bar coming out at you. The job was such a physical job you worked one half hour and then you got relived because it was I guess the temperature in there was probably hitting on about 200 degrees. If you happened to fall on the steel plates you got seriously burnt you know and what happened of course by doing a very physical job before I went in the army I got very strong. I could lift a man 200 pounds shove him up over my head with one hand. I was the strongest man that hit there anywhere. Due to the strength that I had and my voice was the strongest voice in the whole 82<sup>nd</sup> and the fact that I was better educated most soldiers at that time were lucky to finish the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. I made the top sergeant by the time I was 21 years old I mean that was the top rank in the army the master sergeant. So when I got the opportunity I went to

school. One of the things I did when I first came in they gave me the officer's candidate test and I scored pretty high on it. And they said bring in your high school diploma and we'll get you signed up for officer's candidate school it was 90 days at that time. I said well I don't have a high school diploma so along about 1947 they came out with a thing called general education development test. So I took that and scored high enough for two years of college. And I went ahead and when I was stationed at North Carolina I attended the University of North Carolina. And when I was in Maryland I attended the University of Maryland. And when I was in Hawaii I attended the University of Hawaii. And when I was overseas where a university wasn't available I would take correspondence course with the University of California. And over the process of 30 years I completed two years of college plus as I said I had already scored as far as the army was concerned they recognized me with two years of college. But getting into civilian life you have to go to school. So over the 30 years I did amass two years of college and I finished as far as education is concerned I used to take these things called the Series Ten where with enough to get direct commission into the United States Army. I started to take a commission January 1951 and turned it the day before commissioning because we had just gotten married July of 50 so and I already had two children by a previous marriage. And she was quite young and I didn't want to leave her and so what they were doing I was being commissioned and then in eight weeks I was in Korea. So I didn't take the commission because one of the things that happened the years began to fall away and I began to get out of age. During the I think it was it was actually before the Vietnam War started the General Commander said were in death com two and I said what death com two. And he said when you're in death com one you're in combat. And this is when they got all excited I think this was about 1961 they got all excited about something and so the general said you go home and pack your gear. So when I got back I said now you're planning on me going with you, I was a re-enlistment career counselor at the time. And I said you won't have any problems with re-enlistment you just tell everyone they're in the army for the duration. He said yeah but I'm going to make you a first lieutenant when you get on the plane and I'm going to make you captain when you get off. He said because you're the best man I've ever seen as far as security is concerned because whenever we went to the field I was in charge of his security. So that's what he was gonna have to do. But we stood under what you would call a stress area for two weeks and the President of the United States made a decision and called it off whatever we were supposed to do I can't remember now.

Interviewer: What were your recollections of the great depression?

Matheny: Of the what?

Interviewer: What was your impression of the great depression do you remember?

Matheny: Oh yeah I remember the depression because as I told you in 1936 my father was only working one day a week. And he put everything he could load in the car and we drove to West Virginia and I moved in a place called Allsgood West Virginia where they used to operate a coal mine but the coal mine had shut down. And so we were trying to stay alive or find food you'd scrounge for food every day. Because remember I think I mentioned to you in Chicago when I went out there in 1932 there were just thousands of them out there just starving to death. Put newspapers on them to keep warm and try and get under cardboard boxes. So as things got tough and we was living in Gary Indiana is where we was living. And as things got tough my dad decided he was going to leave that. So he come back where is mother and father was at and there was an oh I call it a shiny type resident anyway but his friend he had been working with before he went to Gary Indiana let us occupy part of the house and it was separate I think it was built for two families. And of course there was no electricity and no water and it was well in today's standard you would call it primitive I guess. But we finally got a house up in Allsgood a little

community I guess it had 24 houses up there and they was willing to let you stay in the house so the house wouldn't get destroyed. But they did hand pick the people that got to stay in those houses. And there was no electricity no water I had to carry the water I guess it must have been at least a quarter of a mile it was a long way off to the spring. I carried all the water that was used in the house and of course you had to heat with what they call bituminous coal which is soft coal, gives out a lot of waste. And so every morning you had to take all of the ashes out and clean things up a little bit and you had to do all of that before school. And so one of the things that I did during the summer months was pickup coal out of a slate pile. This is coal that they have discarded as not being suitable for coal. But you could always find coal it would take two weeks about ten hours a day to find a bushel a ton of coal. And what we had to keep us warm was a grate like system where you could get hot on the side if you were close to the grate but you got cold on the other side. Very inefficient heating and it used a lot of coal and it took four and a half tons just to make us through the winter. Then I would sell the coal it took me two weeks to get a ton of coal and then I would sell the coal for a dollar a ton. And my mother canned 300 quarts of blackberries because that was part of the food chain. And then after I got those 300 quarts then I sold blackberries 15 cents a gallon. Now you could buy a pound of salt for a dollar you could buy a pound of beans for two cents I mean one penny is what I meant to say one penny bought you a pound of salt and two cents bought you a pound of beans. And corn meal was about two cents too and you didn't buy no butter because it cost too much. If you cooked you cooked with a thing called lard this is the direct boiling down the fat on a pig you know and that's what you cooked with. And you gathered up what we called greens in other words the dandelion the root was eatable the leaves were eatable and dandelion was a little bit bitter but if you was smart you could get some of that bitterness out. And then they had a thing called poke I have a lot of that growing in my yard. So you picked the poke of course you've got to remember you've got to get the poke when it's young you can't let it grow and get those burs on it. And you have to boil it and then you have to pour off the water but it's very tasty particularly when you're hungry. And then I picked raspberries and huckleberries and little tiny strawberries and I picked crabapples I don't know if you've had any experience with them. But you could take crabapples and take elderberries which is a berry and can mix them together and make jelly out of them. And so I got enough stuff like that and so for lunch my mother would bake three or four loaves of bread and since I wasn't very far from the school I walked home. And so what I ate for lunch was two pieces of bread and some of that jelly or jam on it. Now around where I lived you couldn't grow anything because you put out those ashes around and nothing grows. And my father went and worked some on the farm of his uncle and would get potatoes and things. But it was very difficult no one had any money I mean there was no money at all. Things were very cheap but there was one thing that wasn't cheap and that was a chicken. To buy a chicken with the feathers on it cost a dollar. And now with this the way they have rapidly increased the birth of I mean the growth of chickens you can almost buy a chicken as cheap as you could buy a chicken back then. So you didn't have chicken very often you might have chicken once a month but normally it was only when the preacher was coming for dinner. See the preacher didn't get any money either he just went from different houses to whenever it would come your turn you would invite the preacher over and you would normally have chicken. The primary meat source in the winter time was those dead falls I would put out. I put four dead fall it's a flat rock about that thick it's pretty heavy and you put a you put a trigger on it and you put a piece of potato or a piece of apple or something and when the rabbit nibbles on that the dead fall falls down and kills the rabbit. And on an average with four traps four dead falls I would get three sometimes four rabbits a week. You could only do this in the winter time because rabbits have warbles which is a very deadly disease to man so you've got to make sure it's cold like it is here now. But I was continuously scrounging all the time to help supplement the income. I would make \$27 in a summer that was selling iron for 15 cents a pound selling copper for 5 cents a pound aluminum for 5 cents a pound something like that. And so everybody from about 4 or 5 years up was part of the food gathering process. Because to stay alive you had to have the food you

know so we was much better off than people living in Chicago and places like that because they had nowhere to scrounge. The depression was difficult but there is some I'd say some very good things about the depression. Number one you never had to lock the doors of your house number two everybody shared with everybody else you know everybody worked together as a team trying to make sure not only they survived but the survival of their neighbors. It was what we did for entertainment was well my grandpa showed me how to make a rubber gun which you could shoot rubber bands with and he showed me how to make a squirt gun that you could squirt water with. How to make a pop gun that would make a pop and fixed me up with a sling shot. And I had some skates that I had had in Indiana and I took the wheels off them and with my grandpas help I made a scooter I made a scooter out of that. That scooter that you see that they use there I made one long before they got paid the big bucks for. And that's what they use the roller skate type. And you had what's called a corn roast where you get together in the fall when the harvest of the corn was and normally you could have the farmer give you some and all of us we'd build a big fire and all of us around and we'd roast the corn and then we'd eat the corn. And also popcorn we'd put popcorn put strings around a tree and we would cut out and take some crayons or something and carve out things and put on the tree. And anyway we got through the depression my father got what I would say was his first good job working in the coal mine. What that meant we could get a house a much better house with the mine which we had electricity and water which was a big benefit. And my father was feeling pretty good and things was looking up and he came home one night about 12 o'clock and this was Father's Day it was Father's Day a little after 12 so he said to my mother I want to take you out to eat since it was Father's Day. He didn't have a car but my sister's boyfriend loaned him a car. So my sister and her boyfriend went but the boy that loaded the car he didn't go and there had been a rain and he was coming over they had what you call a red dog road this is a byproduct from the coal mine and it's red you know so they call it red dog. Anyway he was coming down the road and there was a little curve not much of a curve but as he rounded that curve there was a tree that had fell down over the road. And he swerved to miss that tree and he went down over a little bank it couldn't have been much higher than eight foot but he went over but this was a car that had a rumble seat I don't know whether you're familiar with that type but you pull it up and it makes a seat in the back of it too. And it was also well you might call it a convertible and so my mother and father sat in the front seat and my sister and her boyfriend sat in that back. Well as it turned over it threw my sister and her boyfriend out they was in the rumble seat and it threw my mother out of the car but my father had a hold of the wheel there. And as it turned over there was no support up there and it broke his neck and so my mother came crawling up the hill and said there's been a terrible wreck. And I got down there and everybody was standing around looking at the car burning. Boy I jumped in there and tried to turn it over and when they seen that I had jumped in there trying to turn it over about 25 or 30 of them they turned the car over.

Interviewer: How old were you when this happened?

Matheny: I was fifteen and of course I was quite strong at that time too. But of course I didn't have the strength to turn that car over. I burnt my hands doing it but when he flipped up he just flipped over like that well I pretty much knew he was dead. And so they grabbed me and held me while they went in there and took him out of the car and so this meant of course that I was the man of the house and I had to make a living. I was well trained for that but the coal miners came to see me and they was going to get me a job in the coal mine I said no I'm not going to do no coal mining. They said well you have to work to support your mother I said I'll support my mother but I'm not going to do it in the coal mine. See while I was a boy there in 1936 there was 250 men killed explosion in the coal mine. And then ten or twelve miles from there there was 107 killed in a coal mine. And then another place about 25 miles away 121 was killed all of this happened in less than a year when I was about 12 or 13 years old. So I

didn't want none of that coal mine and besides everyone that worked in a coal mine was coughing you know. And so that's when I decided to go to work on the railroad and I didn't know it at the time but the guy that was the boss down there he was my third cousin you know and he was always trying to give me special things to do where it wouldn't be hard on me. And I had a cousin he worked with me and he said how come you get all of that favoritism? I said I don't have any idea I said I guess he likes me but as it turned out he was a relative you know. But I didn't know he was a relative he never mentioned it. And so I just worked there long enough to earn well I gave my mother most everything I earned but I did save about \$42 and one of the boys I went to school with he said that my cousins wife was down there in Baltimore and she'll let us stay there until we find a job. And so we hitchhiked to Baltimore and I stayed with her about a week but I got a job the first time I went out but I changed my birth certificate. Then I moved out with a room now the problem with a room which cost \$5 a week is you have to eat in the restaurant. And eating in a restaurant back there cost \$25 you know to eat three meals in the restaurant. And so I finally realized that wasn't for me I never liked this restaurant anyway so I got an apartment. And I took two boys in with me that I knew I went to school with them. But they was too lazy to breathe they didn't do nothing so one day I just pitched them out in the middle of the street and had the apartment on my own. But I began to make a good bit of money back then I had a they had a thing called piece work I don't know if you're familiar with that. But you're supposed to produce so many an hour I think it was four and I produced three times that amount. And in 1942 I was earning about \$142 a week by working that piece work. But I was getting all of that acid that hot acid coming up and I was afraid they didn't even have anything to go over your mouth and your nose. So I worked at that job and then I got that job as an expeditor and then I was in the steel mill when I got drafted. And my boss said you know you're a good worker he said I will get you a deferment. I said I don't want a deferment I said I don't know anything about the army it couldn't be no worse than this you know. We had four people killed where I worked in that steel mill. One of them we were making wire and he missed is que and it wrapped him up. By the time we got the coil cut off of him he was black totally black. And then one of them caught a bar on that job I was doing right here in the chest. And by the time we got him off of that he was black. And so it was a very dangerous place to work. I don't know how many times I got burnt and it was physically very very difficult. So anyway I told the boss I said I don't know what the army's like but it couldn't be any worse than this.

Interviewer: Well prior to Pearl Harbor how seriously did you take the threat to America from Nazi Europe and the Japanese?

Matheny: Well actually we felt with that ocean on either side of us that they was no threat to us. I mean we was sort of naive we didn't feel threatened by Hitler rattling his sword. And we didn't feel threatened by Tajo rattling his sword. We just didn't feel they had the capability of causing us any harm. And so Pearl Harbor was a wakeup call. Now we had ample warning that we could be attacked. But Americans it is very difficult to get them to rise up and go to war and defend the land so to speak. And so but when we are hit and hit hard we come back very angry and very energetic with a lot of force. So I don't know whether they deliberately let us get that strike or not there is some people that think we could have prevented that strike. But anyway it was a big wakeup call we just didn't realize Japan had that kind of power. And they should have many of the admirals of the Japanese the higher high archive realized at the time they didn't have a prayer because they had got their college degree in the United States. And they realized before they made the attack they didn't have a prayer of winning because one thing that we had that nobody else had we had the greatest industrial might in the world. And it was awesome because no one had the ability to produce like we could produce. You lose a few aircraft we produced so many aircraft it was unbelievable. And right there in Baltimore they had two shipyard going

building ships all the time. They built the Liberty and they built the victory ships it was just a continuous mass of producing that staggers the imagination, that's why we won.

Interviewer: Do you recall where you were when you heard the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Matheny: Yeah I was in my father's house in this place called I think we was still in let's see that attack was December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941. We probably just moved to Everettville and I heard it over the radio. We also was able to get a radio I still have the radio that worked by battery. But anyway I heard it over the radio and I was at home and all the people that didn't have radios was getting in there listening. And Franklin Delano Roosevelt had a very distinctive voice you know and even though you couldn't see him you was very inspired with him making a speech. And he used that radio as a tool to communicate his thoughts and his ideas to the American people he was very good at it.

Interviewer: So would you say that you approved of the way FDR handled his office at that beginning of the war?

Matheny: Well I FDR was a motivator and many people felt like he was a God like creature. And they felt like this man was one in a million or one in several million that could do no wrong that he would always do right. He made a speech one time he said, "Eleanor don't want war and he said he named over each of the children said they don't want war I don't want war." But he was actually laying the ground work to get us into the war. Because everything he done, WPA and all these projects he had really didn't work none of those began to get us out of the depression. But you can bet your life December 7, 1941 with that wakeup call that was the trigger to get us out of the depression because we had no depression any more after that. So when you study Franklin Delano Roosevelt one of the things you have to realize is he was not that saint and he dealt ruthlessly with any enemy as much or more than any other president. He would get them chopped down and put them out of business in nothing flat. But my father thought he was God here on earth. But he dealt harshly with his enemies and done a lot more than Nixon done and some of the others done.

Interviewer: Well when you realized that you would be drafted did you have a preference of which branch of the military. Or if you were going army what you wanted to do in the army?

Matheny: Well not really they drafted you but they did have people there that was in the Navy and the marine Core that was there and if they came over to you like they came over to me and said you look like you're a real husky boy and said how would you like to go in the paratroopers? I said what is the paratrooper? And they said well they jump out of an airplane and I said what do you mean they jump out of an airplane they will get killed. And he said no they have a parachute and I said what is a parachute? So he described a parachute to me then he said the magic words and the magic words was that pays \$50 extra a month. And I said does that mean I'll get \$100 and he said yes and I said sign me up for that. So I didn't really know anything about what it was so it wasn't exactly that they sometimes you didn't get no choice at all they just put you. But if you was someone that looked like you was a hard charger or someone that looked like you'd be an asset to their organization they did invite me to come in.

Interviewer: So did you ever take any of those IQ level tests or those skill level tests at the induction center prior to that?

Matheny: Yeah I done on that in fact on what they call the verbal skills out of 160 I made 149. But of course I read hundreds and hundreds of books so I done pretty good on all that stuff because I feel it was the reading that helped me.

Interviewer: Where did you do your basic training?

Matheny: Camp Blanding Florida and I'll tell you how that sort of happened. They told me I was inducted at Fort Meade Maryland and they told me to report to sergeant such and such. Well I went down to the building and nobody was there and I met him and they had a thing called BBDs. They had the arms out but it was one piece you know underwear. And he said I told him I was told to report to you and he said well I'll tell you something young man I don't want to be disturbed. But you get this barracks cleaned up top to bottom boy I looked at the barracks and you know in the war you had 80 men in a barracks it was made for 40 men and it was two stories. And when I looked at that building I thought oh my god this is impossible for me to do this but I figured this man was what he said went. So I started cleaning up and so just about that time 77 troops came to the building and said they were to report to the sergeant. I said you're not going to first of all you all need to shut up and I said you need to be quiet I said the sergeant don't want to be disturbed. And I said I'll tell you what we're going to do we're going to clean this barracks. And I just began to break them down put so many on the latrine so many on the windows so many on here. And in about two and half hours one of the troops said to me said what are you he said are you a corporal and I said no. He said are you a sergeant and I said no he said you're not one of those second lieutenants are you and I said no. He said well what are you and I said well I guess I'm a private I just got here a few minutes before you boys came in. So boy when they found out they had to do all of that work they began to get loud and boisterous. So the sergeant came out and he was madder than a hornet you know said what's going on. And I said well as you know and I know one man can't clean a barracks and you said not to disturb you so I went ahead and put these people to work. And the barracks is standing tall so he called all the troops over and said I'm going to tell you something this young man is my assistant. He is an acting sergeant and he will tell you what to do. Now the sergeant was a womanizer so he left the barracks about 1800 hours he left and he got in about oh normally around 05:30. He give me orders before he left and he give me orders when he came back that morning at 5:30 then he went to bed because he was chasing women all night long. So I took them out to get their clothes I took them to get their shots I took them to the rifle range and I done all of the processing for that three weeks. I took them everywhere they went and he gave me a band that had a sergeant stripe on it and so when they got on the train there was about 80 men on the car. And they so they put me in charge of the care and so by the time the train trip was over they was calling me General Ike. And after a little while they cut off the general and just called me Ike. So when we arrive at Camp Blanding Florida they said who's in charge and I said I'm in charge so right away they said okay you're going to be the acting platoon sergeant. And so I performed that job and so I never really done what you call private because I was always in charge. And I think part of it was well you know if you're name is Matheny you're a very forward type individual and then I had that very big physical power. And I liked the idea of giving the orders some people won't take the job that gives orders for nothing. When I after the war ended and I was down in the 82<sup>nd</sup> I had about ten privates that had seven, six, ten, twelve year service so I put them to work. And one boy named Roland I said Roland I said how long you been in the army he said oh about eight and a half years. I said well why haven't you been promoted? He said oh I don't want anyone to ever promote me but I seen him about 18 years later and he was wearing the sergeant first class. And I said well I see you got your first class. And he said well it boiled down to this they were about to throw me out of the army. So a lot of people just enjoy being a private with no responsibility.

Interviewer: So now when you went to Florida that was for basic training?

Matheny: Yeah

Interviewer: At what time did you leave for AIT to be MOS qualified?

Matheny: Well you done it all it was 17 weeks you done the whole things down there. But some way or another they put me in the engineers I don't know why. So you had to go to Fort Belvoir for 8 weeks of school. And then of course you wound up in Germany and they said I was a utility repair man. And I said what is a utility repair man? And they said you know you fix electrical things and plumbing etc. etc. And I said well I don't know how to do none of that.

Interviewer: Now this is in Germany or is this in Belvoir?

Matheny: No this is at Germany.

Interviewer: What year is this?

Matheny: Huh?

Interviewer: What year is that you went to Germany?

Matheny: I got in Germany in the latter part of 1945 and it was winter. When I got there it was right in the middle of the winter. But they was trying to figure out what I was going to do for them because I didn't even know what a utility repairman was. So they sent me out to guard the prisoners of war and I had 8 prisoners of war and I had a couple of other guards along but they put me in charge. And one of the as I was getting into the back of the truck one of the prisoners reached for my riffle. So I broke I chomped right down on the riffle and broke his hands and he said he was just trying to help me into the truck. And I said well don't ever try to lay your hand on my weapon. And then a couple of days later one of them was edging around he was edging around the building and about to get out of sight. So just as he was about to get out of sight I put a round through his shoulder and he said he was just going over to pick up some paper. And I said you don't ever leave my sight I'm not a bad shot I said I didn't put it between your eyes I said but if you ever do that again you get on right between the eyes. So all of this stuff is filtering back to the company commander and you know you have to file a report when you shoot anybody or injure anybody. So I was on guard duty one night we was losing a lot of gasoline and losing a lot of other supplies and he told me he didn't want nobody to take nothing. I said there would be no one take anything he said well everybody else loses stuff I said I won't lose nothing. And so the OD cone which was the officer of the day and I told him halt and he stopped and he said he was the officer of the day. And I told him I said now you stand right there and he took a couple of steps forward. I put a round over his right ear and one over his left ear and then he froze in his tracks. So when he got close enough I was about from here to where you are I was behind a truck and I went who and made the whole place jump and he jumped out of his skin. And he identified himself as the officer of the day and I said do you have a flashlight and he said yes. I said shine it in your face so when he shined it in his face I jumped out there and put the weapon on the was in arms. And he said what company are you from son and I said I'm from B Company. And he said you about scared me to death and I said well you took steps after I told you to halt. He said well you was trying to kill me I said sir I was just trying to put a round over your right ear and over your left ear because I wanted to get your attention. And I said if I'd have been trying to kill you you'd have gotten it right between the eyes. So he went down and seen my company commander and the company commander immediately made me an acting corporal. So they put me in charge of about 40 what you call civilian workers and I built a large parking lot. I had a



foreman and then they put me in charge of building what they called a fancy food store. And an ice-cream parlor you know building complexes for the PX. And I controlled their food and so if they didn't do what I thought was correct I didn't feed them. And I had about three SS boys and I didn't feed them for a week so they began to listen very carefully to what I told them. And one of the first things you did when you got to Berlin they took you over and showed you some of these concentration camps you know and all of this stuff. And it was a gut wrenching experience men that might weight 185, 200 pounds just nothing but bones and they put them in them ovens you know and burn them. You see all of that stuff it really gets your attention so I was going to make sure that them Germans paid. So I was very hard on them and I made sure they performed at the highest level and they called me Prima Sordat which means perfect soldier or the very best soldier. And many of the other guys was giving them ice-cream or something like that as far as I was concerned they was the enemy and so they offered me a job over there as a GS9 to do this same type of work. But along came June where they this is June 46 they took General Eisenhower and General Marshall and several others big wheels and about four or five hundred maybe a thousand women pinned them against the wall. And they said why do we still have our boys over there when the war is over? So the first sergeant called me in and said son you're going home. And I said when and he said 2 o'clock and I said I can't go I've got things I've got to get done. He said you have no choice I'm going. So I had about 50,000 dollars in what you call German invasion marks and they told us that the only thing you could take home is what you made. So I had my wife and a child so I sent her everything I had and she received about \$90 a month counting about \$30 they took out of my pay and then my mother I had her on a support so I paid another \$10 she received \$50. And so what I had what you call pay was very little but I believe their story I believed their story that you could only take home what you made. So as the boys got off the ship in Bremahaur and I was that's where I got on the ship was Bremahaur that's the coast the port in Germany Bremahaur. And I would hand each of them a fist full of money and I found out when I got to New York I could have cashed it all in because it was United States invasion marks and they would have given me that 50,000 bucks. You see the currency had collapsed in Germany so what they use for money is cigarettes. Now the army would let you buy five packs of cigarettes a week five cents a pound I mean five cents a pack. So I didn't smoke I never smoked a cigarette in my life and to get their hands on the cigarettes you could get a lot of good deals from the Germans because let me describe to you what it was like being in a city like Berlin. Berlin first of all there was no buildings standing and whatever was standing we took it over so the Germans had no place to go and so we planned on burying 250,000 of the. But we wound up burying about 300,000 of them.

Interviewer: How did that many lives come about I mean these just dead soldiers were these dead civilians?

Matheny: No these was primary civilians and some of these was ex-solders because basically with Hitler's machine if you was alive and breathing and about 14 or 15 years old you was a soldier. So many of these guys were ex-soldiers but at the time they were civilians. And so they died from starvation they died from exposure and the diseases that comes from this sort of thing.

Interviewer: What was your interaction with the Russians there at Berlin like?

Matheny: Well the Russians was all around and I didn't really like the Russians very well. But they had gotten five years of pay and so they wasn't very smart so you could make all kinds of deals with the Russians and get their money. And if they didn't if you felt that you didn't get all of their money just pick them up by their hills and shake them like that make sure you got it all out of them you could sell them a bridge or anything. And once they started to take over that bridge start charging toll to get across well

you found the Russian MP and you told him there's an idiot out there trying to charge toll for that bridge and so the Russian MPs didn't take any chances they all had automatic weapons. They put the muzzle right under the guy's neck right here and they'd lead him in the jeep and if he moved they'd just blow his head clean off. And the only Russians that I found that had any education or any intelligence at all was the Lieutenant Colonel or higher. So years later when they talked about the Russians being a big threat I just couldn't believe that they could be much of a threat because what I run into was a very low grade of Russian. And one day I asked a Russian I said let me see your weapon you know and that's all I said and he just took it and mowed down about ten German civilians with it and then laughed and showed me it worked.

Interviewer: Did any of them talk about their hatred of the Germans with you?

Matheny: Well the language barrier was very intense. They didn't speak any English and I certainly didn't speak no Russian. You had to sort of motion you know so we didn't get to do what you call talking with them because they didn't understand me and I didn't understand them. The Russians was trying to dominate the whole city. As you know we divided up the city with the French had a sector the British had a sector we had a sector and the Russians had a sector and they was trying to dominate the whole thing. And we carried no weapons at that time because we let the troops carry weapons and we wound up with four or five people dead you know when they would get in an argument. So we kept the weapons but the Russians all carried their weapons. And the Russians would come in our sector all the time and when they was coming through our sector there was a major one time he come through the sector and he didn't stop. And I was on duty boy and put I put them rounds right over him and he knew then it got him stopped and boy I raked his butt over the coals and I told him don't ever do that. So he was sufficiently frightened he wasn't going to do that no more. But the Russians in my opinion were one stop away from being an animal like creature you know they was uneducated and they was explosive you didn't know exactly what they was going to do. But they come in our area whenever they got the opportunity. We had eight people that come up missing now we don't know what happened to them whether they went awl but I always felt that the Russians killed them. And then one of the things we was also doing up there was taking mines see when you put down a mine you're supposed to have a chart you know where so it shows where every mines at. Well the Russians just put them out they didn't have no charts. So we didn't have the sophisticated equipment you know where you know had a mine sweeper to go over it. We would get down on our hands and knees and stick the bayonet in and then another four inches stick it in and we got the mines up doing like that. And of course we had people killed and people wounded doing that. The Berlin surrendered you know in May of 1945 and this was you know January, February, March, April and that time when the Russians took Berlin they if a man fell they buried him right on the spot. Where he fell down about one or two feet or so because they ground was hard I had two of them buried in my back yard where I was staying and of course come spring they'd stink to high heaven. So we had to get them up and rebury them and that was a very miserable job.

Interviewer: What was your living conditions like while you were stationed there at Berlin?

Matheny: Well see I had there was an old lady about 50 years old owned this house it was a very nice house. And me and my squad just moved in there and we threwed her out and this was lavishly furnished. And she come down every day to see her house and she'd cry you know and of course I didn't have no coal no coal no place to keep warm so I burned her furniture. So the IG the Inspector General he come down he was a Lieutenant Colonel and he said I'm the IG and of course I didn't know what an IG was. And he said do you have anything to complain about and I said yes I've been eating sheep here for

about nine months and I said I don't like sheep. And he said well it's not even on the menu and I said I don't know about a menu I just know that they serve sheet twice a day here. And he said what would you like to eat and I said I'd like to have a steak and he said you'll have one at your plate tonight. And he said how about coal no he said how do you keep warm I said I burn this lady's furniture. And he said you don't have no coal and I said no I don't have no coal. He said where do you want your pile of coal so I showed him where I wanted it and

Interviewer: You were a squad leader at this time right?

Matheny: Yeah a squad leader. And so what happened he got a hold of the company commander and really raked him over well he actually relieved him. But anyway he called me down the Company Commander Captain Hessen and he said why didn't you complain to me if you had a complaint to make? I said well I came down here about four times and you wouldn't see me. And he staring all over me and the first sergeant said this boys been down here several times trying to talk to you and never did get a chance to talk to you. So what had happened the supply sergeant and the mess sergeant was selling the coal and selling the beef and stuff on the black market. And then sheep was they had a lot of sheep and you could get sheep cheap so that's why we ate sheep over there for nine months. Captain Hessen was really mad but he got relieved so he didn't bring no pressure on me. But the opportunity to make money you know if you wanted to be crooked was there in fact the guy that run the PX he wanted me to go in with him on doing something illegal and I said I'm not about to do that. And a few months after I left they got him and put him in Fort Leavenworth. But with many of the people starving to death the opportunity to get rich or the opportunity to go to jail is very evident over there. It was a war time situation with the peace treaty being not the peace treaty being signed but hostility stopped in May over there but people continued to die. We buried those dead by building a large ditch which was over six feet wide and then we could lay a hundred bodies down shoulder to shoulder we put lime down and then cover them up. You had to get them in the ground because you could imagine a dead body the diseases that can spring forth and we had to get them in the ground so that's what we did. It was a very difficult job to do. I think I probably pulled a lot tougher duty than my battalion did. When they was coming in they was held up for six days when they finally killed what was holding them up it was a 14 year old boy a 12 year old girl a couple of 8 year olds that was in a tower. It was much easier duty back there when the war was officially going on I pulled a very difficult time. But anyway they put me on that ship at 2 o'clock in the afternoon and I smelt the steaks being cooked and all and some of the troops said boy I'd like to have some steaks and I said well I'll get you some steaks. So I took one of these great big army pitchers down there and I put filled that up with steaks. And the lieutenant came up and said what are you doing and I said I'm filling this up with steaks and I'm going to take it up to my friends and eat it. And he laughed he thought I was joking so I just walked out I brought those steaks up to my friends. And so at night time they had a guy that was a professional gambler from New York probably from the mob I guess. And he told me he said he'd pay me \$250 to guard him and he never picked the dice up he took all the bets on the dice he played the odds. And he said now I'm going to wind up with all of the money and of course he did and he paid me \$250 dollars a night and I guarded him. The trip was about 12 days long so I accumulated a lot of money doing that. But like he predicted he wound up with all of the money.

Interviewer: What was your impression of the German soldiers?

Matheny: Well the German soldiers as a I told you when I was guarding them they done exactly as I told them to do. But they with others they laughed they thought they was big joke. The German soldier was a very highly disciplined soldier. One of the reasons they lost several battles was when the officer got

killed they didn't know what to do. See in the America army the lowest private in the last rank would take command of everybody else. The Germans went by the chain of command and if the leader got killed they fell apart they didn't know what to do. But as far as obeying orders discipline highly trained they were probably the best soldiers in the world. But they weren't as good as us because they fell apart when the officer got killed. And every overbearing American figured he was more capable most of the time than the people over him.

Interviewer: Were you ever wounded?

Matheny: No I have a big scar right here it looks like a bayoneted wound. And they used to ask me how I got that scare and I said well I was in the wax and the wax was pretty tough we was out there on guard duty and.

Interviewer: What's the wax?

Matheny: I'm just telling this.

Interviewer: Oh just telling a tale.

Matheny: Yeah I said I was in the wax and they was tougher than I was. We was out there in a lot of heat and I said I passed out and I fell over on run the bayonet in my thigh there. But actually what happened when I was two years old a second operation appendicitis done that. But I used to tell things like that. I was the first man in the army that received the seniors parachute badge. And you had to graduate from jump master school so I was one of the first to graduate from jump master school this was post war you know. And so the girls all wanted to know what that star was doing on my wings. And I said I don't want to tell you about that and they said go ahead and I said no I don't want to talk about that. And she said oh tell me and I said well you know of course that they don't always have enough parachutes to go around and she said they don't. And I said they've got to have somebody to go ahead and jump without the parachute and they make a big deal over it. And she said well didn't it hurt and I said well it did sting my feet a little bit. And so they were all gullible enough to by that story and then after about six months they started seeing parachuters' wings. I told about 40 or 50 of them I let them worm it out of me I never cracked a smile. But of course the fact is when you are traveling 110 miles an hour if that parachute don't open your dead and you see it happen a lot. I draw them a diagram of a live parachute jumper because I'm about to have my physical status upgraded. And I said understand a live parachute jumper I'm going to make up a diagram. First of all when you jump out of an airplane the wind picks you up 150 miles an hour and physically moves you at a very rapid pace if you've got your eyes open it looks like the tails going to slap you right in the face. But by some miracle you get under and you start falling through the air at 110 miles an hour and when you get to the end of that static line at the end of that parachute you fell about 100 feet or so. But the opening shock is so terrific that it turns your head up where your feet used to be then it snaps you back down. And when you're jumping out of a T7 it's not like a T10 where they can control the plane it's like hitting the ground jumping out of truck at 25, 45 miles an hour. If you're not in perfect shape you're going to break bones. So I was the jump master most of the time becuawe they didn't really have too many jump masters. And to graduate from jump master school you had to hit a field that was about 75 feet wide and about 300 yards long that's with 8 men on that thing there. And you what you draw to jump was whoever needed it see you got to jump three months to get paid you know and every three months you had to have a jump. So I would draw whatever was available at that time to jump and I was making a night jump. And so I saw a lieutenant colonel and a major and a captain and a couple of lieutenants and some enlisted men and they was sort

of shook up. I told them you're not going to have anything to worry about I will be the first man out I will just barley be in line with the trees and the rest of you if you don't dilly dally you'll hit the right point. And so the first stick went out and they went in the trees the second stick went out and they went in the trees. I told them I said the first and second stick hit the tress but I said you ain't got a thing to worry about if you get me. And so they hit the ground I got in from here just to the line of trees but I wanted to make sure I had plenty of room for the other troops to get on the drop zone. They call came running up there and said boy you're an expert how many times have you done this I said I've never done it before in my life. But I said the difference between me and those others is I understood the map and most of them boys don't have any idea what's going on. See they sent you up some smoke at 1,000 feet and you could look at the smoke strip and how fast the strip and by the formula you could calculate it and determine how much the wind was going to move your troops. And if you didn't have a good understanding of math you couldn't do that. And so there wasn't too many people graduated me and one other man the rest of them you know they couldn't get on. But a lot of people back at that particular time didn't understand the math. I was very good at math and I always understood it. And so due to the fact that I got through the jump master school I wound up being the first man to get the senior parachute badge. And you had to make two jumps at night and then of course to get the master parachute rings there were other requirements. But I made a lot of jumps I was testing aircraft British bomber and they had about four bombers and the French bomber they had about three or four various and German bombers Russian bombers and the V24 and the V25 they made them in Baltimore. And the B17 the B29s and sometimes I would jump five or six times a day sometimes seven. What they was trying to figure out if a person with a static line could fasten on a ring and safely jump out of those things that's what they was testing.

Interviewer: Sergeant Major I appreciate you taking this time doing this interview with me. I'm going to go ahead and shut this tape off.