

Elfrie Key

Interviewer: I would like to thank your family and we are just so appreciative that ya'll would let us come and visit with you and that you would share your story. If I could have you start by introducing yourself Mr. Key to our viewers?

Mr. Key: Well I'm Elfrie Key. Born and raised in Stewart county and inducted into the army in 1943 and I spend 3 or 4 months in the service and 22 months overseas. So I the beginning of the story really and I remember when the war broke out and I don't remember if it was 38 or 39 but they kidded me that I'd be headed for the service and I said well there will be a lot more with me, I said I won't have to go by myself. We laughed about it most of the evening but then it sort of you took it up as it come to you but. It was an experience I don't ever want to have to go back over but it's an experience I'm glad I went it just turned out. But I was inducted in February of 43 and I went to Fort Overthorpe, Georgia and.

Interviewer: Did you go to Fort Oglethorpe with a lot of other men from this area?

Mr. Key: Do what?

Interviewer: Were you on the troop training at Fort Oglethorpe with a lot of other people from this area?

Mr. Key: Yeh I was inducted there in two or three days then they put us on troop train and headed for California. We didn't know where we were going but we spend five days and nights on a troop train and winded up in Camp Hook, California.

Interviewer: Had you ever been out of Stewart County or this area before?

Mr. Key: I had been to Nashville two or three times. My daddy was sick and a doctor in Fayette, Kentucky wanted me to drive the car and he'd carry my dad to Nashville. That was the only time I think the first time I was in Nashville. But I didn't know nobody no nothing and got with the boys and we headed to Fort Oglethorpe and there was a little drinking going on on the bus and one of the boys or somebody threw a liquor bottle off the bus so when we got to Fort Oglethorpe well they were waiting they wanted to know who throwed that bottle. The bottle busted right in front of a restaurant up there in Murfreesboro and the glass split and a fork in that glass cut a woman's ankle and they was waiting on whoever it was and the bus driver said I can I'll vouch for these boys right here behind me but who threw the bottle I didn't know. And of course that didn't release us they held the bus and I never knew for sure whether they found out or not but anyway we went on and was at California and was quarantined for 12 days supposed to be put in the army or the 5th arm division and was put in the 6th after the quarantine was over.

Interviewer: Now you talked about the quarantine and you said earlier that if someone had the measles that was the cause of it?

Mr. Key: Yeh there were measles on the train and they just quarantined that car whoever was on that car. And we spent 12 days there and they tried to go over some things like what type of gun this is and

what type of gun that is but they didn't have time to go into assembling and disassembling and this the a salute and all that stuff that goes along with the gun training you know. But they tried to keep us busy. There was two T5 Corporals in charge of us and they tried to keep us busy. But anyway after that we was put into the 6th arm division instead of the 5th then we was singled out and some of us put in the 69th regiment and some of us put in the 68th regiment and I happened to be one of them in the 68th regiment. And one of my buddies that went to Fort Oglethorpe with us two of us three of us one of us was put in the 69th armor and I was put in the edge company and my buddy was put in A Company but we could see each other from morning to the next. And then we'd see each other every evening after duty but anyway it worked out that way. Then I had all of us that was put in there we didn't have any training to do other than just following the troops following the veteran GIs in order to get what training we could get out of them like that.

Interviewer: So what you saying Mr. Key earlier you mentioned when you arrived there they didn't have the time to run you through any basic training at all?

Mr. Key: Oh they didn't they told us when we was put into the division now these people have already been trained said you'll get your training from them. And you won't have to pull any guard duty or anything like that. But I had the experience of getting put on guard accidentally and I hadn't been through any training and the officer the guard approached me that night and asked me a few questions and I shouldn't have answered. He went on and he asked me how long I'd been in the service and I told him I hadn't been in there very long and he said how much training have you had and I said I don't have any. So he saw he didn't chew me out he didn't get nasty about it or anything he went over some things that I needed to know incase somebody else approached me which I didn't know. But he did tell me when I left he said you won't have to pull any guard duty for a while and I didn't. It was six months I guess before but it just went on from day to day like that. And I'd ride with this bunch today and I'd ride with somebody else tomorrow and if they needed me to do something I you know. But it was quit an experience but it went on about six months like that then they come in one day and they had almost told us there probably wouldn't be no chance of coming home. So they come in one day about I don't know what day it was they wanted to know did I want a furlough to come home. I said furlough to go home. Three thousand miles from home and broke flatter than a board and your telling me I can go home. So the sad story was joy in the barracks there he said he asked me how much money would you need to go home I said more than I've got and anyway they pitched in there all of them pitched in and told me said you go home. So there was a boy from Kentucky up here just the other side of Elkton he was in the company and he was a veteran GI he told me said I'm going let's me and you ride together. So we rode the train home all through California and Texas into Arkansas and Tennessee. I spent I believe it was 7 days here and the other they was sent on the road coming and going it was three days I believe it was three days each way. So I got to come home then we went overseas and I don't know whether it was January I went over seas it was ten months it was January no December no it wasn't either we landed in England January 12th I mean we left here January 12th the 22nd or a special day was it the 12th of February. Anyway we landed there and spent five months in England never had been assigned to any special you know any certain thing to do.

Interviewer: Were you learning to do just a little bit of everything?

Mr. Key: I was PFC for until I got over there then when I got over there one of the sergeants told me he wanted me for a driver to drive his tank they sent one boy home and one got court marshaled and one got sick so anyway they needed some drivers. And my platoon sergeant told me said I want you to drive sergeant Steels tank said you'll be assigned to that. So then went on to there in England until D-Day and I don't remember how many days it was until there until we went over you know I got either 12 or 14 days that we went into combat. See we had to wait until they cleared the beaches for the tanks to go in. And when we did go in we never stopped we just kept going.

Interviewer: I bet they were glad to see ya'll.

Mr. Key: Patton's division 3rd army and we drove day and night as far as we could go until we just completely had to stop refuel and get something to eat. And I think we went I'm trying to remember the names of the cities there in France but I. From Normandy Beach on we went on up through there and took that there was a peninsula to the right called Brest, France it was the Brest peninsula that we took. So there was a big city there Brest, France but we decided we didn't go that far down so we made a left and come out of Brest and that was several days after we had been in combat. So I had seen a little bit of everything that had happened horse drawn artillery pieces we experienced dead horses dead people and everything you can image. We got a rest period and regrouped and I don't remember how many days wasn't many and I don't remember having a real rest period until just before we went into France I mean Germany. We were still in France and it was in the winter time and we had been in combat I suppose from say the 15th of July to sometime in the wintertime there before we got really a good rest period there. So it was then we had casualties and we had to replace them and we had to deal with all of that. But I had I had made my ranks and tank driver and I had one or two new men come in had one of my good buddies got killed he didn't get killed we got hit there in France and we lost our tank and that was an experience. We well that wasn't the first tank we lost we lost one earlier but didn't lose any men I don't think there was. But this one boy that got hit he was my assistant driver and we was in a bell there one morning and we had to get off the road we had a new lieutenant leading the platoon my sergeant was the platoon sergeant then and he come up talking to the lieutenant that was in charge telling him please get off that road because they got you zeroed in up there don't go over that hill until we check things out. Well we was we was I felt like then I was a seasoned soldier I thought I knew about as much as anybody else well anyway it was something you didn't like to talk about. We sit that and watched that tank get hit blew up it blew the kirks and everything out of that tank and my sergeant was sitting there begging that lieutenant said don't go over that hill until you check things out. But then we had to take over and he pulled up there within 300 feet of that tank and there was people walking up and down that hillside there the Germans had it trenches dug and was we was in other words me and the drive assistant driver was sitting there telling me said look at that hinny there sticking his head out of that hole. So he'd spray him with his machine gun about that time we got hit. So he looked at me and I looked at him and I said it's time for us to go. It had done fire flying out of the tank and smoke all in it and I told him I said I'm going out this hole here and you go out that one well I think I just like a bird I hit the ground. Went around the tank and mud was cutting down about six eight ten inches deep so got around the tank behind the tank where I couldn't I hollered at the commander I asked him said is anybody hurt he said yes gunners wounded. I said can you get out and he said yeh he

told me said don't get up here go on to the ditch of the road. So I said I can't help then I remember saying you don't need me to help he said no we'll get him out. So I run to the ditch and the German were shooting at us and we were watching this and that. But anyway my buddy that was in the tank with me he hollered for me he said Key where are you. I said I'm over here by the ditch of the road I said where are you at he said I'm over here by the tank said they'll tell you his exact words he told me said they've done shot my dam arm off. Said I need the medics I never will forget it said they've done shot my dam arm off. So I headed back I knew there wasn't nothing else I could do up there and I saw the commander get the other boys out so I headed back and from that hill they was watching me go back the road and I had to take the ditch again and they kept firing at me in the water they pushed me down in the ditch and I was in the water trying to ditch bullets. So I got past that and I got behind the bank so I got up and took off and went down there and my battalion commander was down there. Off to one side the road and he asked me said hey soldier what's going on up there and I said they're having a war said we need medics up there that's exactly what I told him and he said I remember him saying calling for the medics he said I've called ya'll three times he said I want to see some flags flying. And I started and when the flags started flying I was going to go back and he told me said you go over there and get in that recovery vehicle our recovery vehicle from our company so I went over there but I didn't stay. When I saw the medic go back well I took off and went back trying to find out what happened to my friend. And I got there and they was putting them in the ambulance and I run up and he had his back to me and I grabbed him and I said are you all right and he said ne they shot my arm off and all there was was a little skin holding it on. And you know I haven't heard from that boy since I never did hear nothing about him. Anyway it just went from there to all of the problems that we had I can't remember half of them there are just so many things.

Interviewer: Did you have any problems let me ask you a couple of questions about first of all I should have asked you what kind of tank was it that you driving?

Mr. Key: What?

Interviewer: What was the designation what type of tank was it that you were driving?

Mr. Key: It was a M1 medium tank it had a 75 mm gun on it and it had some machine guns. It had a 50 caliber machine gun mounted on top of that.

Interviewer: Did ya'll have a lot of problems with that particular type of tank I mean did ya'll have a lot of mechanical problems?

Mr. Key: No not especially they did a real good job except the guns weren't equal to theirs. We went from a 75 mm to a 90 mm in order to you know. And that tank that I lost I had to go back to the ordinance to get a replacement tank and he gave us a I believe it was called a M1 Ford medium tank and it was brand new we had to clean it up. And we got it back and I brought it back up to the company and joined them again and I don't know there is so much that I can't remember that happened in there. But I remember the one I don't know if this was the next thing that happened but one thing that happened one morning well the day before we got in a little scrimmage with the tanks German tanks. We didn't have too much experience with them because they had kept them on the go so they couldn't maneuver

like we did. But we run into them that evening and we backed off to find out what was going on really. The next morning when I woke up I was in the tank the crew was in the tank we slept in the tank most of the time especially when your that close to the enemy. But when I woke up the guns woke me up and I felt something hit the tank well I knew when I felt it I said somebody's shooting. So I just cranked my tank up and threw my air scope to the right cause that's where they was the evening before so I got over there and looked. When I cranked it up I felt something hit it so I cranked it up and started backwards and when I was looking out of this periscope and saw a streak of smoke it was a sail go by so I knew that I said yeh somebody is shooting at us so I went backwards there for several feet and I turned around and looked across in front of me and saw a bunch of half tracks and things like that over the hillside. But anyway we got they call them buggy wheels that roll in them tracks and I don't remember how many buggy wheels there was in it but anyway they had shot one of them and broke it loose. It didn't completely knock it off but it we had to get it repaired but that was one morning that I didn't have any problems remembering it was quit and experience. But anyway we went on through that day and we had to retake some spots that we had backed off of the evening before and then went on from there and I don't remember exactly what all happened. But I wished I did I wish I could just tell you like I used to could.

Interviewer: Well what was Mr. Key what was the experience like when you would get in the midst of a tank battle? You had said like the M1 that you were driving had to keep try to step up in the fire power from a 70 mm to a 90 what was it like to face those German tanks that had a little more fire power? Were your companies the company you were in were ya'll fighting a panzers or tigers or what were the tanks ya'll were fighting that the Germans had?

Mr. Key: Well they was more tank battles went on up in the first army they had more experience with tank problems than we did. We were on the south flank there in southern France and Southern Germany. And we didn't have as much problems with tanks as the first army did. But it was it wasn't a good experience they had fire power that we didn't have.

Interviewer: But were your tanks more maneuverable were you able to get in and out of things easier.

Mr. Key: They had one tanker destroyer that would fly and we had some that would fly too. But I don't remember getting into a battle that we had to have those tank destroyers with us we were in some premises. I remember one morning we woke up and we was going to attack the next morning and it was so foggy you just couldn't see your hand before you but it had already been planned and they started maneuvers in the fog I mean we didn't know where we was at but we was going through this area there it was a wooded area it wasn't wooded to the point that you would call woods but it was thickets and I remember and I heard and I remember some of the other crew that were talking about they drew fire from the enemy while they was going through those thickets. But we pulled out of the thicket area and headed for the town we was going to take that morning and we don't know why but the fog lifted. After we got through all of the area we was concerned about but when the fog lifted and we was going to go into the town we could see more people going out of the town up the ridge from the town than we could see between us there the enemy was trying to get away. I remember that .

Interviewer: They saw ya'll coming didn't they?

Mr. Key: They head us coming they couldn't see us. They didn't know how many there was of us but there was quit a few. Just things like that you'd never think about.

Interviewer: Well what was it like Mr. Key when you would come into a town where you're tank unit ya'll were just on the move ya'll were on a transportation mode and you'd drive through that had already been taken and were the French in particular were they happy to see ya'll when you come into town?

Mr. Key: Most of the time but you go into area they'd would throw eggs at you or they'd throw rocks at you or they'd shoot at you if they had something to shoot with. We had some experiences where we'd go through these towns and if they had upstairs windows and you know high rise or something like that well we had to watch going through the towns where we had problems with you know either shooting at us or they'd throw eggs or tomatoes or whatever they could find to throw. I remember after we got into Germany I remember crossing the Rine River, that was an experience, and we had an experience before a few nights before with cross maneuvers where were was waiting to get in line to cross the we had some we had to pull outpost duty and there was several of us that had to go out. And they had bunkers out in the not woods but thickets and didn't nobody know we was out there and we was out there to watch and see if there was anybody out there other than we was. And I remember going out there and you could hear German patrols walking and we didn't know what they you know if you didn't know German you didn't know what they was talking about. I don't remember whether if there was four five or six of us in a bunker we had to a lot of times stand in the hole and watch the hole to keep people out. And I could hear this patrol coming down the road and we were about 20 maybe 25 feet off the road like into the thicket and it was just an open space through there that everybody when you in and out unless you had a flashlight you didn't know where the pad or anything like that but anyway I heard the patrol coming and I told the people behind me I said you know they work and you could hear them and you know they was talking and they got to the little ole space where we went out into the road and they stopped. I said oh lord I hope their not coming in this bunker here. But they walked two of them walked up in this space where we walked through but they didn't have no lights they couldn't shine a light or anything so they just stepped up in this one open area there and stood there and talked and turned around and walked back out and took off down. And I thought lord have mercy man that's something this is something I won't ever remember but I did I remembered it well. But that I believe that was the only outpost deal that we had to pull most of mine was pulled in the vehicles maybe sleeping inside the vehicle. Then when we got into Germany we got to the you remember the Battle of the Bulge that they was talking about we were down south of that. But you got these paratroopers pinned down there in the Bulge and they hadn't wanted our division to go up there and help in the Bulge. We were told when we got back up when we got up there and I don't know a coupe of days and nights that we drove to get to it. There where we were supposed to be then they had done been shot all to pieces up there the 10th long division had been hit real bad and we had to go through all that area and see what all they had done to them and it was enough to scare you to death you know to go

through it but. I'm trying to remember it was I was I'm trying to say it was about the 2nd day of January when we were really pulled in to the area there and they were those paratroopers that was penned down in there I don't remember how many there was not many of them in there but they fought them off and fought them off and kept fighting them off until we wasn't engaged directly in the area they were but we was en the vicinity ready to do what we you know you had to have people out there to do a little bit of everything. And when they got them out I think they said there was 22 of them or maybe 21 of them and I'm not sure but not too many of them. I've seen some of the movies but they don't look the same as they did when I was up there but anyway we left there and we headed north into on into Germany and we didn't get but about a mile or mile and a half up through the country there and there was pine thickets you know pine groves mostly trees and a wooded area and there would be pine trees. Well they didn't have as much room I don't' guess as we had over here so. And it was snowing cats and dogs so we got up there that evening and that's where my bronze star came in. I never dreamt of such a thing until after it was all over with and months later and they come put and said you've got your bronze star. But anyway they we got up there and started off the hill and got there was a hill and the hollow was back to my right and I was going off the hill this a way but to my right rear was that flank and I was along here and my platoon sergeant platoon commander then he had made lieutenant sergeant and he I was going off of the hill in a little ole town in a bottom but I would see him over there coming up front and I said that would be an awful good lace for the enemy gun you know. And I kept watching that and when the time they let me get on down the hill and I just happened to stop and I thought my commander the lieutenant was you know I thought he was supposed to be talking but I couldn't hear nothing and I didn't know what was going on. And he was talking on it but he was talking on it but he wasn't talking on the intercom he was talking to everybody but me so I was the flash from the gun and it come in from my right like this it come in and went in the ground maybe 10 15 feet down the hill I said I can't stand this and I come this way the lieutenant he never did come around so I just started backing up. I backed this a way and he had come in this a way and he fired five rounds at me counting the first one and I missed them the good lord was with me but I missed them zigzagging I'd go this way and he's try to get this way and he'd miss there and I'd go back the other way and by the time he'd get I'd done out maneuvered him. So we got back to the top of the hill and it all stopped. And I thought where in the world is lieutenant Steele at he was and he come over there and he said Elfrie he said you done a fantastic job he said I've been talking to everyone in Germany but you I said thank you I was wondering where you was but. Anyway he said I'm sorry man I don't know what we would have done if you hadn't just took over you know brought us out of there and I did and of course it was just in days work to me I never even thought of such a thing but later on well I got my bronze star for it. And we sat there in snow about that deep we couldn't go then so we had to wait until the snow melt so we could but we killed about as many Germans sitting there in the snow as we would have moving. Because every night they were well not every night but several nights they would come up there and they would just shoot them down you could see them in the snow and then you just opened up these machine guns and start shooting. And I remember one night we was sitting there and there was well I guess I know 15 of our things was lined up on this ridge there and about every I don't know 50 to 75 feet there was a tank and a crew and one night we had enough that entered the zone it they got through the machine gun fire and we got shooting them off of our tanks. We'd shoot them of that tank and they'd shoot them off of our of course there wasn't that many but it was something that happened. It was

pretty scary then we'd sit there at night and we sat there about 28 days waiting for the snow to clear where we could move. Then they had well one night there was a group of them come up there and they had shot them down then it had snowed on top of them and when they got up that next day to move well this tank commander he got out and he never thought about what he was doing really so he gets out and he's just kicking them over like this you know and this one got up it liked to have scared him to death I remember he was Sergeant Short and he said son of a gun got up on me we laughed about it later on but it liked to scared him to death. This German had played dead all night laying there in that snow he was afraid to get up you know I guess and this when he got up he thought well it's time to get things moving I guess he just got up and they took him prisoner then. They got to checking on them and there was some more of them that was wounded but they stayed on the ground you know. It's just things like that you won't ever forget.

Interviewer: Did they seem to be happy to surrender?

Mr. Key: Oh yes there was quite a few of them that, I was broke down one time and set there a couple of days me and the crew and we worked our way up to an intersection there where there was a three way stop there was another road coming in. We sat there and we got our tank up there to a tree where it would be safe so we sat that and we repaired and we took more prisoners that you could think about coming out the woods we would see them there would be two or three of them. And I told I remember telling the crew that was sitting there around the tank and they said five just came out of them woods over there. Well we got to watching and it ain't not telling I don't remember how many we did take. But when we take them we would just sit them down there and the first it was always a line of traffic you know gas trucks fuel trucks ammunition trucks and everything and we'd put them on them trucks on their way back and that's how we got ride of them. And one of the boys there was one incident one of the crew my crew his name was Weise and he had captured somewhere he had got a hold of a motorcycle. One of them little motorcycles the Germans had and he was playing with that thing while we was setting there. I don't remember where he got it but he bought it and we all was riding it all up and down there. Just things like that you know I won't never forget.

Interviewer: Well what was something I had to ask you because you were talking about January and the winter time and everything two things I would like to ask you. First of all what was it like during the war as far as keeping in touch did you family? Did ya'll get letters being on a tank crew did ya'll have access like other GIs? Were you able to get your mail?

Mr. Key: Well we just got it ever so often. If we was in an area where they could get to us we got it and we didn't they just kept it until we wasn't exposed as much so as the infantry people was. The infantry people they had those dug fox holes every night and every time you turned around they was this way. They didn't get to well they was exposed more to the weather than we were but. We got our mail pretty good.

Interviewer: Did they censor it did those censor yawls letters or anything? Were you aware of any of that?

Mr. Key: Any what?

Interviewer: Were you aware of any censorship or anything being cut out of yawls mail did ya'll ever experience anything like that? I've heard some people talk about that.

Mr. Key: Not too often not with us I don't know if others had but every so often you might see something that was censored. And we got a lot I don't know what you would call it, it wasn't letters like they would write home. They would take it and I don't know what they would do what did they do. But any you might not get the same letter that you got from home but you got the same answer. It would be in a whole lot smaller.

Interviewer: That is some kind of compressed mail I can't think of what that is called. I've heard of that where they shorten it down, they had to save space as far as transporting stuff.

Mr. Key: It would be more like a little post card. They'd have most of whatever it was I guess everything was in there that was in the letter. Nobody wrote me I don't think but my mother. My dad never did write me.

Interviewer: Did you write home also?

Mr. Key: Yeh every so often if we got a break we'd always right home.

Interviewer: You mentioned back home what was it like being away being in Europe well actually being at war during Christmas time. What was your Christmas experience like with other GIs? Did ya'll have any did ya'll take a break or anything just to have a rest or anything or what was that like, I'm just curious.

Mr. Key: Yeh we'd I remember in celebrating Christmas or a special day like that I don't remember exactly what I remember one Christmas let's see I don't know where just one Christmas was all I was over there. Let's see I went over there in January and come back in November so I was over there one Christmas. It was about the same I would say I heard them talk about it. I don't remember what we were doing during that Christmas period and I don't know why I can't remember that. It will probably come to me later on.

Interviewer: Well if you think of any details about it where ever we're at just jump right in and say and by the way please feel free to do that. I'll ask you another question what was what you were talking about ya'll would have breaks from time to time or if you got a chance to slow down what was I guess I'm trying to think how to synthesize this question. What was it like a day; give me an example of what an average day was like for you. How you would start the day out when you were in the midst of your movements how early would a day start just depending on the situation could you give me an idea of what an average day was like for you?

Mr. Key: Well it was just it most of time we was in combat and we was moving if you had took a break during the night you know to spend the night you know you had to be ready at all times. If the enemy was near you somebody was on duty all the time. The rest of us might sleep in unless we were woke up now that was the way it was with the tanks. Now I think the infantry they had people listening all night we did too we was in combat we got naps between naps you know.

Interviewer: Were there particular things you had to do each day as far as specific duties for the tank it's self such as daily maintenance or I'm just curious.

Mr. Key: Well we didn't do too much maintenance work myself we had maintenance work to come up and do the work that had to be done.

Interviewer: I bet ya'll were gold to see them weren't you?

Mr. Key: Yeh we were glad to see any of the crews coming in. If they had to come in and do repair work if we could help we helped if we didn't most of the time they had tools to do it with and they done what they had to do. But things like that you didn't I didn't you know I don't remember too much about what we had to do except one tank that I had to go back and help them cleanup to get it back into combat. That was the only time I had any experience with it. I'm sure there was other people that did have more experience than I did have.

Interviewer: Well you mentioned earlier Mr. Key about the infantry and about their experiences and their exposure and everything and that ya'll had a little bit of an advantage about being able to have the ability of the shelter of the tank what was it like to be in the confinement of the tank. What kind of experience was it for you and where there people that you worked with that really had a hard time being in a confined space?

Mr. Key: Well I don't remember too much detail about it but my experience and they way I felt about it I was glad to be inside rather than to be out there I know we had infantry people that rode the back of the tanks in all of the battles. They would just get on the tank and ride until they would run into trouble then they would get off and they'd do their thing on the ground. We'd do ours in the tank and if it wasn't a tank around shooting at us then we were glad to be inside rather than outside. We had protection where the infantry didn't have that protection and we would if we were in the daytime and we was on the road and they enemy came there we'd have an air thing come out with the airplanes and stripe us a little bit I remember some of that. One boy in a half track got sot in the leg he was sitting in a half track and they stripped him and shot him in his leg and other than that I don't remember other than that you know.

Interviewer: One of the things I have to ask you is I'm thinking of several questions to ask you that are tank related. You spent most of your time on and in a tank Mr. Key what was it like as far as did the tanks have good heaters on them? Since ya'll were there in the winter time were they warm at all?

Mr. Key: No

Interviewer: Being surrounded by all that metal I'd think it would be mighty cold.

Mr. Key: As a matter of fact I got the Leaf Chronicle from home my mother sent me that. And I would get them when I would get my mail and my papers there might be 25 rolls they would roll them up like this in rolls and I kept them inside of my tank. Well while I was up there in that Bulge up there I used them to wrap my feet at night and I had frost bite on my feet. I had trouble with them a long time after I came out but finally got past you know problems with my feet except right now it's getting warm

enough now and I don't have any trouble keeping my feet warm but at night my feet just if I can get my feet warm then I'm alright. But I had that trouble over there and I would they would I'd keep them papers rolled up and I had a rubber band around them and I just they them over in behind the wall of the tank from where I sat. And I kept it full of papers and at night when we were sitting there I would wrap my feet and I guess if I hadn't of had them I don't know what my feet it was cold there was not heat. We had a little ole what did they call him we had a burner that was about this big around and it had some kind of propane or something in it. We'd heat out rations up with it drink our coffee. That was the only heat we had you could burn it but you didn't want nobody you know you couldn't use it at night.

Interviewer: Because of the fumes?

Mr. Key: Well yeh the fumes but because of the light.

Interviewer: Yeh you didn't want to give your position away.

Mr. Key: You didn't want the light. If you lit a cigarette you had to cover up the light.

Interviewer: You mentioned heating your meals up how did ya'll eat as far as eating onboard the tank?

Mr. Key: We had the k-rations and we had a ration for breakfast and a little meat can you know potted meat like you buy we had just a little can of eggs and you had a little bar of ration of come kind and a pack I believe it was eight cigarette in the k-ration. It might not be your brand but if you didn't' have one they was alright. But we eat the k-rations and then we would have a break and we'd get a good hot meal.

Interviewer: Well I was wondering if there was ever did ya'll ever experience times when food was short on hand or where ya'll always able to get rations easily?

Mr. Key: We had some periods but we was never out of it long enough that we was hurting. I'm sure there was people that was but we were fortunate enough that we had k-rations. Of course you have them stored on the tank and if you run out well there was always someone else that had some and would share it with you. But most of the time it was I feel like I was fortunate in a way because we have captured prisoners' over there that was so pitiful looking. We captured a whole group on evening we went in behind them and we got the enemy was leaving them and we pulled around the corner on them. And they saw us and we saw them I remember this like it was yesterday. They didn't have nothing but skin and bones and they were almost so weak they couldn't run if they wanted to. Then the Germans were trying to get away they were trying to save their own neck and they just left them. So we captured them and I remember several different occasions where we'd get a group but this one group stood out, it was pitiful. But we give them everything we could throw at them but then here come the word don't give them nothing they said don't give them nothing. They were afraid they needed medical help before they got food but most of them got what we could throw at them you know k-rations or cookies and stuff we'd get from home we'd have it stored inside the tank. We'd throw it at them chocolate bars that would come in the k-rations we kept them just piled up somewhere.

Interviewer: Well what was some of the things you did for what was some of the pass times that you had did ya'll play cards or games or anything when it was quiet time?

Mr. Key: Aw yeh we played cards and we there wasn't much pass time done I mean if you got a break and you went to town you might get with a buddy and just walk up the streets if you was in town you might just walk up and see what was going on. I mean just look you couldn't talk to nobody because most of the time it wasn't then like it is now most people they say a lot of people over there can speak English and could talk to you but back then very seldom you ran into somebody that could speak your English you know. We didn't have much it just wasn't too much leisure time. In other words you spent most of it in the area where you was at you didn't. I remember going to Paris from Germany on a three day leave so oh boy here we go. We got to Paris and I can't tell it all cause I've done forgot most of it. But any how I remember this much we had a these prisoners that we captured they had a payroll these Germans did and they couldn't get ride of it in time to well they scattered money all over that hillside where these prisoners were. And we got out and picked a bunch of it up and put it in our duffle bags. But then come the word that we couldn't send it home so we thought well if we get the chance to go to town we might spend some of it you know. We carried I carried I don't know how much I carried with me to Paris cause I was the only one from our company to go. But I run into other people other GIs that they said come on let's go. So we got to Paris and I can't tell you everything that went on because it's been too long but I remember one ole Frenchman he had a horse and buggy and he used it for a taxi. So he got there was three of us and we said we'll just see Paris while we're here. So we drove him until he just played out that old man got tired of fooling with us and we wouldn't let him loose. And he we kept dogging him to buy his buggy and horse we had money enough and we just paid him so when we got we got tired of fooling with it then we just left it where we left it you know. I remember talking to one of the boy and one of them asked me you know anything about a horse I don't know if this horse I said he'll last as long as we do. We left the ole horse and buggy I don't know what happened to it I've always wondered what happened to that horse and buggy but anyway we got through with it and we just left it. Then we got the railroad got bombed between us and home where we was supposed to go. And we were late getting to where we were going I know the company commander he laughed he said ya'll had quit a time getting back home didn't ya I said yeh quit a bit I said were running late and he was telling me what all had been going on. And I said well with them bombing the rails we couldn't get back home but the only experience with a horse and buggy we had was quit an experience. I never will forget it. But I it gets fuzzy when you get to thinking about it you know 20 30 years ago I probably could have told you all about it.

Interviewer: So what one of the questions I was going to ask you Mr. Key was what was one of the most memorable things that you could think of that you enjoyed during the war so would that trip to Paris pretty well fit the bill for that one?

Mr. Key: Well probably probably. But the war being over with was the most something you don't ever forget you know.

Interviewer: Well before I get you to tell us about that I've got to ask you because I feel like I'm in suspense right now did ya'll spend all that money? Did you have any to take back?

Mr. Key: I don't remember. I don't remember but we had a bunch of it but we didn't know how much we had.

Interviewer: Well you mentioned about that war closing what was it like the last days of the war for you as far as do you recall what it was like right before the war wrapped up? And tell us please about when you heard do you remember the situation concerning around where you were and how you heard and tell us what it was like the experience for you and your comrades.

Mr. Key: Well I don't remember the towns and I would have you know but it was somewhere in the southern part of Germany. And that I could have told you but I don't remember Luxemburg and Frankford and places like that but I don't remember the town we were in. But I do remember before it ended we had a twenty miles are there that we wasn't supposed to be in. The Russians was coming in from this end and we was coming in from that end but there was a 20 mile space in there you wasn't supposed to be in. But we went over we got over into that area and when we faced the Russians there we was in their area we wasn't in our area. But we turned around and was trying to get out and my tank bogged down and we had to get a recover vehicle up there to get it out and we could see the we called them hineys and hineys was coming in behind us and I remember when we come out looking back and you could see them. They was in bicycles and walking they had their guns pulled by horses and cows anyway they could get it they didn't have fuel enough to do what we was doing. They had fuel enough to run their tanks but some of the guns were being pulled by horses you know. But I area was there we felt like we had the advantage over them because the word was then are we going to have to fight the Russians or are we going to go home. But we felt like that was something that we wasn't going to have to fight somebody that had to pull guns on a cow or when we had what we had we felt like we had superiority over them. That wasn't a real problem for me my main goal was to get it over with and get out from over there. So I couldn't tell you right now what I was doing the day that it was all over with and what it was really like. I know we was all cheering and clapping our hands and thanking the lord that it was all over with you know now we can go home. Then later on in I got one more things that I would like to bring out and it's the one thing that happen going from France I mean going from England to France. When we left England to go into the zone over there we pulled a ship or boat or whatever they called it. I don't remember how many tanks they were a light company tank company on the boat they went off first and I think I was the fourth tank off of the boat. And we had to wait until the tide went away we pulled in and I had to sit there and wait for the tide to go down before we could get our tanks off. And I just want this on record as something that happened that I'll never forget. I did forget it this far but when the light tanks went off there was one that went off into quick sand and it just went down they got the crew out but they couldn't get the other tanks off so they found out they could get one I guess they found out by sending one off the side. When it went off that way well there wasn't quick sand that's what they called it quick sand. So then the whole bunch had to go off that way either this way or that way and I remember going off with the tank that I was on going off my tank that I pulled off there jumped off the side of that ramp on solid ground and ever tank that went off that boat and there was I don't know how many tanks there was I know our whole company was on there then there was the light tank company cause the light tanks went off before we did.

Interviewer: That must have been was that one of those big huge landing one of those big LST?

Mr. Key: Well there just they do now I mean it when they pulled in you had to wait till the tide went down to they just let them things down where tracks that you go out on. And it just so happened when they let it down there well that one particular spot where that one went off see he just went on out of site they got the crew out but they lost the tank it went down. But the rest of us we went off on one side or the other.

Interviewer: Do you remember what time of day that was when ya'll made that landing?

Mr. Key: It was early. It was daylight but we went over during the night. That was in the early morning hours.

Interviewer: Had ya'll practiced when you were in Plymouth did ya'll do a lot of maneuvers on how to maneuver that tanks and everything?

Mr. Key: You mean just as far as pulling off a ramp like that? No that was one thing they left out.

Interviewer: That was on the job experience on that one.

Mr. Key: We had to figure out our own experience.

Interviewer: I guess that's why that one ended up getting lost because of not having the time to see if all of the shore was solid. The something else I would like to ask you about a couple of things I wanted to back up to. You had mentioned on the earlier conversation about them calling you the kid. Did they call you that pretty much through the war or was that just earlier?

Mr. Key: well I went by that for a long time but.

Interviewer: Could you tell us a little bit about it again?

Mr. Key: Well that happened when I first went in you know everybody hangs a name on you when you go in like that. I was just 18 and half year old and most of them that were in there were from 21 on and we had some of them as old as 35 36 3 years old. Then we had one here we go again we had one that was a 7 year veteran and I never will forget him because he went in even before the war was thought about. That CC Camp deal way back before I was ten years old I guess. He was one of the main real soldiers we had. He could march you and just sit there and count your cadence and he was so short I never will forget it. And I thought a lot of times about coming home his name was Watson Sergeant Watson and I would up marring a Watson and I just don't believe it but it happened. But he the first battle we were in he took one of the command vehicles and left town. He really blew before he even got into combat. I remember later on he wound up in a back area driving a command vehicle for one of the big generals not a general but a high ranking officer. He wound up in our area one time and you talk about some soldiers being upset were upset. And some way some where in the company I probably knew but I don't remember word got from where we was to where they were please get him out of here don't leave him around here because he may not get out alive. Cause everybody was up set about it cause he was so he would give everybody a hard time he would borrow money from you and wouldn't pay you back because he thought well you can't say nothing you ain't going to say nothing to me. But

they got him right on out and it was the best thing for everybody. You didn't want to get caught shooting at somebody but there was several of us that would have shot him we would have got the chance. Then we had one guy we had a lieutenant that put his tank in position one day and I was in the same area and in fact I saw him I didn't know what was going on but I saw him. We was in a battle and a bunch of antitank guns and they had one set up in the areas where this lieutenant was and he pulled his tank off in the raven and the antitank gun had him zeroed in. And they hit him and he jumped out of it and left the tank and the tank crew didn't know what was happening didn't know where it was coming from and we lost the whole tank crew. He hightailed it back and he was one of the ones before we went in that said if I ever see one of you turn your back on another crew I'll be the first to shoot and that word went around just like that when it happened. We found out when it happened and I was one of them that saw him when he left the tank and headed back and he was the lieutenant of another platoon in our company there was three platoons and I remember that. I remember the area where he made his promise that he would shoot the first one that he ever saw turn his back on and he was I could almost pronounce his name. It was just so much stuff like that there is no way that 50 years later you could figure it all out if I could have made it if I could have done this 40 years ago I could remember a whole lot more.

Interviewer: What was it like there were just a couple of things I happened to think of and one of them when we were talking earlier I don't remember if I asked you but do you remember anything about the bombing of Pearl Harbor and did you remember what people were saying about that when you still were school age?

Mr. Key: I just remember Pearl Harbor but I don't remember enough about it to go into it. I knew they bombed Pearl Harbor and that there was a war on with Japan and all of that. I don't remember where I was or what I was doing. I was probably somewhere in Stewart County maybe not even old enough for the draft. When was Pearl Harbor 41? You remember 41?

Interviewer: You would have probably been a little too young for the draft. But I just thought of something else I failed to ask you. I'm sorry I'm just thinking of all of these questions all at once. Do you recall the circumstance of being able to get home and did you have to stay anytime to get in the points that you had to have to be able to render your service?

Mr. Key: When it was over with see my getting in to the company in the beginning that's when I got called a kid when I was in the Army with a bunch of people that were a year older as far as the war was concerned. So when the war was over they come up with this points system you come back on the points. And your age if you was age 38 you would come back home with the first group. After that they come up with a system of points I don't remember there was one guy that was in the company with me that was sent out there with me but he went on sick call every day for I don't know how many days I don't know but anyway it was every day seven days a week. And they decided well you don't want to serve in the army anyway and they sent him back home he was from Nashville his name was Bean. And I don't know I lent him \$7 and didn't ever expect to get it back and I lent it to him to get home I was really glad to get him out of the way I mean it was really embarrassing to know we got a guy here that would go on

sick call every morning just to get out of the army. Well I didn't worry about that I didn't you know that's his thing that was his way of handling it.

Interviewer: How long did it take you to get back you know when you did put your time in?

Mr. Key: I had to stay over there for five months?

After the war was over?

I had 78 point and you need 80 to come home in the first group. And they sent me I was in the 6th armor and when the war was over they broke the 6th armor up into the 3rd armor division which was going to stay in the observation over there. I don't know why unless it was because the commander general transferred from the 6th armor to the 3rd armor he come home and then later on they broke up the 6th he come home and spent so much time at home and he come back and took over when they transferred us out from the 6th into the 3rd armor division. But then after so much time I don't remember how much but the outfit that I was put in was called a light tank company was the 3rd armor and when I went over to the third armor I think I was the only one out of my crew I think I was but I was there and the commander come out and he had mostly new people it was people that had been pulled into combat or remaining younger people. I didn't remember anybody being as young as I was but they was they didn't have anybody at the time in the service that I had my company commander that I had then everybody was just acting you was acting platoon sergeant or acting squad leader of whatever you was into. But the company commander wanted me to be in charge of the platoon in other words platoon leader. I didn't have the rank but they felt like I had experience enough to work with the people that were having to stay over there for a long time. So I made platoon sergeant while I was there waiting to get get back home. I remember him calling me in telling me wanting to know how I felt about it I said that's up to you I mean I'm not going to ask you to make me staff sergeant because I'm asking I mean I'm not here to stay I'm coming home if I get a chance he knew that but he made me platoon sergeant. And then after they transferred me out I was put into an engineer company to come home with there was probably I don't know how many people but there was an awful lot of people. And they all got on these troop trains and headed home from Germany back through France and wound up in southern France to get on a boat to come home. And on the way to the boat one night it was a kettle car we was on and it was raining and it was leaking in the car and we had some of those canvas cots we was sleeping on and one guy of course everybody didn't know nobody you know it was unbelievable to run into somebody you were acquainted with with that many people. But anyway this guy got at the end of the car he was cussing up a storm and said anybody here from Indian Mound, Tennessee and I said lord have mercy where in the world did that guy come from. And I was raised in Indian Mound and Big Rock and one of the guys that I talked to he said is he talking about Tennessee? And I said yeh Indian Mound, Tennessee that was the town I was brought raised up in so he said we going to find out who he is and I said yeh I'm going to find out who he is so wound up I don't remember exactly how I worked it around. But he was a cook I mean he could cook a pork chop I mean that would just melt in your mouth. And I worked my way around there and I asked him I said did you say you was from Indian Mound, Tennessee? And he started with his big mouth and he said yeh and I thought I know some names I'll make sure you know who you're talking about and I had two uncles that lived down there and I asked him said so you know

Edgar Lewis aw man I worked for him I said well I believe he is from Indian Mound, Tennessee. Bu they all laughed at me and kidded me about being from Indian Mound just because he I said well he warmed up to you he was a pretty good buddy there. We spent about three weeks in that area stayed in the area we were put in. I don't remember how many people but there was a whole boat load and we come back by our self just one boat. And going over another thing I went over in that longest convoy that they had ever had that went over and you couldn't see from one boat to the other and in the day time you could see and the destroyers' they were just working there way in just like a bunch of ants from one section and then boats just as far as you could see this was and that way and the other way. And whether they said it was longer than the longest convoys that had ever went over at one time.

Interviewer: I bet that was amazing to see all of those ships.

Mr. Key: So it was it wasn't that way coming back cause we was all out there by our self.

Interviewer: Did you come back on a big ship?

Mr. Key: I never flew a flight while I was in service. And every brother I had that's all they did was fly from one area to the other but they didn't do no flying when I was in there it was all boat.

Interviewer: The boat that you came back on was it a civilian ship that was used as a troop transporter or was it a military ship?

Mr. Key: Merchant Marines were in charge of the boat I don't remember what it was but it was merchant marines running it. And they liked to have starved us to death.

Interviewer: On the way back?

Mr. Key: On the way back. They would sell you a sandwich for about \$5 a sandwich but they wouldn't feed you nothing on the way back and you better not be telling nobody that I know the first lieutenant was in charge was from my old outfit, lieutenant Heart he come tome and told me said Elfrie he said don't let nobody don't you mention merchant marines to nobody he said they are trying to find out who it is that's selling these sandwiches to all these troops at \$5 he said if you say anything to anybody about it they will throw you overboard quicker than lightening. I passes word on to all I could forward to just don't mention it. They did they were selling sandwiches.

Interviewer: Trying to incur some hardships on ya'll on your way back home sounds like.

Mr. Key: Say what?

Interviewer: Said it sounds like they tried to put some hardships on you on your way home.

Mr. Key: Oh they was just trying to make an extry buck. They didn't care about us no more than we did them. One experience that we had on the way back we hit some stormy weather out there we had to anchor up for a short amount of time. And they said we'd drifted off course about a mile or mile and a half it got so rough that they had to drop anchor. I said well I don't know where that anchor stopped. It was deep enough that it would hold you pretty well they said. But it was so rough that I remember the

boat got to rocking so much and it would go down and you couldn't see nothing but water but when it would start back up it felt like it was going to pitch you plum out of the water.

Interviewer: Did a lot of people get sick from all of that?

Mr. Key: Oh boy I got sick going over and I got sick coming back but you get over it. We had my company commander got sick going over and they had to put him in the hospital and you know everybody sort of failed him. Well he was so tough he can't handle that sickness you know somebody had to start something. But anyway he had to go to the hospital he was a pretty good sergeant captain. He was a lieutenant when I went in but he made captain before we went overseas. After we got into just before we went into combat he got promoted and captain Meads took the company over. You know you can go back and find some areas where you skipped jumped and hopped you know anyway anybodies looking at this can say well he's going back finding areas where he skipped but you know after 50 something years.

Interviewer: Oh that's fine I think you're doing a wonderful job recalling. Think of all of the stories that you've thought of since we've been talking. Mr. Key said she's learned an awful lot she didn't know before. Well let me ask you a question. There are a couple of things I can think of to ask you and one of them is what would you say was what was the advantage you would say in life that you got from having served?

Mr. Key: What now?

Interviewer: What would you say Mr. Key that was the advantage that you got as far as in your life from having served? And would you have done it again?

Mr. Key: Just knowing that I served I really wouldn't take nothing for that. I wouldn't want to change that for nothing. But it's something you wouldn't want to do again but for your country I've always felt like that was my duty. That's I'm really really glad to say that I served my country.

Interviewer: I'm sorry I didn't mean to interrupt where you going to say something else?

Mr. Key: No

Interviewer: I was going to ask you if you'd care to share your uniform with us. That is something that we were delighted that ya'll had that is to be able to see the uniform that you wore.

Mr. Key: You mean put the uniform on?

Interviewer: No if you would just hold it up. It's got your unit on there the 3rd this was the last unit you were apart of when you were wrapping up your career?

Mr. Key: Let's see this is my regular unit the 6th armor division and this is the 3rd armor division that I was transferred to until I could get my points system to the point I could come home. These are tank buttons and all of that and this was a spare head and the 6th armor never did come out with their unit the was called the super 6. I believe if I'm not mistaken that's what it was the super 6. And this is a

Eisenhower jacket they come out with they did have a longer jacket but they come out with later with these Eisenhower jackets they call them.

Interviewer: Anything else on there you want to tell us about as far as your stripes and your rank?

Mr. Key: Well I started out as a private then a PFC then I a corporal T5 rating that's just a tank driver's thing. This is right here this is what they call a ruptured duck this is what you get when you get out of service they call it a ruptured duck. This here is just a bronze start metal and a good conduct.

Interviewer: Was that newspaper article local of you having received that? Was that a local newspaper?

Mr. Key: Yeh I guess Momma and them saved that for me. That's what I did for that bronze star when I brought that tank out of the hollow on my own. And they was everybody was hollering at the lieutenant said man your talking to everybody but your driver said get I the intercoms. So that's when he go ton there and said I've don let you down here said you've brought it out of there all by yourself. Anyway that's it.

Interviewer: Is this a photograph of you early before you started your career?

Mr. Key: Yeh that was when I first went in. A little age but I don't guess there is anything I really have to say about that.

Interviewer: Well I'm just so glad that ya'll have these to be able to share with us cause this really puts things into perspective for us and your uniform looks just like yesterday you took it off. It's in pretty good shape.

Mr. Key: Well she took pretty good care of it.

Interviewer: Well I've got to ask you a question though. That comes after the war and after you came back and that's how ya'll met?

Mr. Key: Well I don't know about that now. We met I believe it was March 15, 194 I don't know and we was married in about three months.

Interviewer: Wow that's awesome. And how many years have ya'll been married?

Mrs. Key: 52

Interviewer: Well congratulations that's super.

Mr. Key: Long time a long time.

Interviewer: Well ya'll have gotten to know each other real well by now haven't you? Well I wan to thank ya'll so very much for taking the time to share your story with us. And we just appreciate it so much and you made the interview so easy on me you were able to remember a lot things that you probably thought you wouldn't be able to starting in.

Mr. Key: Yeh I'm still thinking of some things. I would like to say this about after I got home. We anchored in Boston got on a troop train and came to Fort Knox. And 4:30 the next evening me and my buddies from Sparta and the other one from Nashville called a taxi cab out of Fort Knox and the guy that picked us up was headed to Memphis a Naval Station down there he told us he said now they are going to stop us before we get out of here. He said they think I'm hauling passengers said I make trips up and down here so often here in Fort Knox he said I always pick somebody up but said I'm not charging them if you want to give me something said I can take it but I can't charge you. So we all agreed to give him \$10 a piece but I'm not charging nothing now because they will stop me before I get out of Fort Knox and they did. The MP stopped us and held us up about an hour trying to find out if he was hauling passengers or not they about the bus company Greyhound said the was interfering with their passengers and they wanted to know why. So we got to the, that was about 4:30 and it was about 6:00 probably before we got off Fort Knox. Then we got us bite to eat and went on to the I don't remember where we eat we eat somewhere on the road then they all had to get them a bottle. And I remember taking a drink or two I don't know I was never drunk but one time in my life and it happened while I was overseas and I tried to whip my best buddy and he was the one that took me to the tent and put me in the tent. So I'll always remember that but I'm glad to say that that one drunk broke me from drinking. But I did on the way home I took a couple of drinks but I got to Nashville about 1 o'clock and the guy went on and left and had us go savage from Sparta went that way and I come west and believe I got around somewhere around 2 o'clock I got to Clarksville and I got boy driving a cab to bring me out here and my Mom and Dad they didn't own a home they just rent and they were renting a house about a mile and half from right here on this Dover Road. And when I come home in July before I went overseas they was living in a house right the other side of where this house was. And when I got out of the cab when I come home the cab come on down here and turned around and went back to town up the new road so when I got over there where the house was supposed to be well there were weeds higher than the ceiling and I thought well there ain't nobody in here. So I had to walk all the way across the other road. Mr. Charlie Daniels I woke him up about 2 or 3 o'clock I never will forget him hollering who's there and I told him who I was and he hollered and laughed and said well they moved in a hour about 300 yards up so I had to walk all the way back and find out where they lived. That's about the end of it. That's my I had a little yellow dog there that they had got since I'd been gone.