

H.G. Kirby

Interviewer: Could you state your full name and where and when you were born?

Mr. Kirby: H.G. Kirby born January, the date? January 10, 1923.

Interviewer: Where?

Mr. Kirby: Smithville, Tennessee

Interviewer: Did you grow up there or

Mr. Kirby: Moved to West Moreland when I was five years old.

Interviewer: What did your parents do what did your family do?

Mr. Kirby: They we had a business here in grocery and we had a lunch counter. And then 1930 and they went this was 27 in 1930 they built a building and put in a dry goods store and also had the grocery store and lunch counter in there.

Interviewer: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Kirby: One sister it was almost 16 years older than I. I went third fourth and fifth grade to her then I had senior English under her in high school.

Interviewer: Do you have any recollections of the great depression or?

Mr. Kirby: Yes I was small then ten or eleven years old when it hit but almost all of our people in this small community was poor. But no one thought about being poor they just thought about making a living. And but they survived because there was people who just helped each other through that time. And as we began to come out of the depression people began to leave and go to Indianapolis and some went to Detroit and they to make a living.

Interviewer: Do you recall where you were or what you were doing when Pearl Harbor happened?

Mr. Kirby: Yes I was in high school and I was flying and so Sunday afternoon in my last recording in my first log book of flying was in Bowling Green, Kentucky on December 7, 1941. And of course that day they stopped solo flying. And then I went in the service the next December.

Interviewer: When did you start flying and how did you get into that?

Mr. Kirby: I had a good friend here by the name of E. B. Upton he had a grocery store didn't have any children and my mother had a dry goods store next door to the grocery store and he would go to Bowling Green to fly and I would go up there with him. And I'd save up my money I had a paper route and I'd save up my money for that. And fly 15, 20, 30 minutes at a time a lot at that time.

Interviewer: What branch of the service were you in.

Mr. Kirby: In the Army.

Interviewer: Why did you choose the Army?

Mr. Kirby: Well they were enlisting in the Army a group of Tennessee people and we went through our training and go to North Africa and I was still high school and then I was to graduate that year that spring then went in in December. Then got my diploma when I left in WWII if you were in high school a junior and you went in the service they would automatically give you your diploma when you got back. That's what I did.

Interviewer: Where did you go for where did you go first for training?

Mr. Kirby: Went to Santa Anta Racetrack in Los Angeles, California.

Interviewer: Whose horse saw were you in?

Mr. Kirby: According to the Los Angeles paper that I have a copy of Bob Hope and some movie actors came out and put on a show there for the troops and that same article it tells it that I stepped in Sea Biscuits stall which was a famous horse racer horse at that time.

Interviewer: That seems kind of was that strange to go from Tennessee to Los Angeles?

Mr. Kirby: Oh yeh

Interviewer: What were your impressions?

Mr. Kirby: Of course I had never been in a town but Arcadia which Santa Anta Racetrack then it was a small town close to Pasta Zara in Los Angeles. So now its all one town at that time it was Orange groves between Race Track and Pasta Zara .

Interviewer: How was training for you did you like it or how did you adjust?

Mr. Kirby: Training?

Interviewer: Yeh

Mr. Kirby: We had been training we stayed three months out of thirteen weeks in the Mohave Desert in maneuvers getting ready for North African Campaign and fortunately the North African Campaign was over before we got through with training. So we went to England rather than to North Africa.

Interviewer: Is that where did you go to training after Los Angeles did you go to England?

Mr. Kirby: Went to England.

Interviewer: Where were you in England?

Mr. Kirby: I was in my outfit was based in a little town called Tewksbury. In that was about 40 miles south of Birmingham in the Midlands. But in the positions that I was in in waterproofing we were on the coast of England around South Hampton for most of the time that I was there.

Interviewer: How did you get to England just by?

Mr. Kirby: By boat

Interviewer: Was it a normal boat or?

Mr. Kirby: No we were on the USS well it was called the USS Manhattan when the when the war broke up they took it over. It was the largest ship that the United States had at that time I think we and the Queen Mary out ship and the Queen Mary were the only two ships that made it by themselves without convoys.

Interviewer: How was the trip?

Mr. Kirby: Very good there was no problem I think we were 6 days going across but the weather was good we didn't have any bad weather at all.

Interviewer: What was your job what were you trained to do?

Mr. Kirby: We were an ordinance company we supplied and we would go after we got into Europe further into France Belgium in Germany we would go into units that were in combat the tanks we would retrieve the tanks and repair them for the units.

Interviewer: Where were you in England just remind me?

Mr. Kirby: Pardon?

Interviewer: Did you say Hampton?

Mr. Kirby: South Hampton is where that's where I was D-Day well two weeks before D-Day we started loading on the boat and inspecting them for the water. I and had the fortunate of seeing three boys that I knew that was in the 2nd infantry division there and loaded onto the boat and inspect their vehicles.

Interviewer: How was camp in for on the base how was living in general?

Mr. Kirby: Very good we in England we had five men tents they were called they were the living conditions were good.

Interviewer: Can you describe maybe a typical day or just what would you do day to day?

Mr. Kirby: We were from the day we got there in England we went to water proofing school and we were there about four weeks. Then we began to go on through the 2nd infantry division then the 4th armor division and taught those troops how to waterproof their vehicles for the invasion of France. And then about three weeks before the invasion we began to load we loaded the 2nd infantry division on

liberty ships in part of Wales and they came around and they went into France on day plus one. Then we loaded the 4th armor division on South Hampton for the invasion.

Interviewer: When the invasion happened how much did you know?

Mr. Kirby: We knew the invasion was coming but we didn't know when because we were put under quarantine we couldn't go out on we couldn't go out on pass or we couldn't tell anything we knew about activity about people coming in to the station area to be loaded onto the boats two or three weeks before the invasion that it was going to be soon. And then we knew by the flights out of England into France but we didn't exactly know exactly when the first that my unit knew anything about it was when they began to bring the well they wasn't wounded bullets but they were also would bring back wounded soldiers from the evasion that afternoon from France.

Interviewer: Where did you go I mean what did you do from there past that?

Mr. Kirby: We waterproofed from that time up until I think it was the 16th or 17th of June and then we my unit we went across to France about August the 1st in France and from there to Paris and from Paris up to Luxemburg with the company and I was in Luxemburg when the Battle of the Bulge was on in Belgium and then of course then the Wright Land Campaign from the time of the brake through from the Battle of the Bulge then we got into crossed the Rin River into Germany.

Interviewer: Now when you say you were in the campaign what did you do?

Mr. Kirby: My unit was we retrieved tanks we had what you call tank retrievers and they were some of them were like a half track that pulled a big trailer that had a boom on it that would hook onto a tank and pull it on the trailer then carry it back and repair it and if it was repairable if it wasn't repairable we just left it in the field. But if it was repairable we carried it back behind the line and repaired it for combat.

Interviewer: How close to combat were you?

Mr. Kirby: Well we were in the combat area we didn't we weren't we was small arms but on our tank retriever we had 50 caliber machine guns on returns. We would go out but it would the battle would be on at that time firing at our tanks and our tanks would be firing at the enemy at that time when picked them up.

Interviewer: Did you what did you do from there?

Mr. Kirby: Pardon?

Interviewer: Where did you go from there?

Mr. Kirby: The war was over in May and I was home July the 4th. Here and then I was home on leave when the war was over in Japan. Then I went from here to New Boston, Texas and was discharged then from Camp Fanning, Texas October the 16, 1945.

Interviewer: While you were in France and England what did you do say on a day off while you were for R&R.

Mr. Kirby: Well I played we had a basketball team that we played ball and the team that I played on were fortunate enough that we had a tournament in England and the team that I played on won the tournament that year. I played basketball in high school and played on the Army team before the war and then after the war over here.

Interviewer: Did you get to experience any culture while you were in England?

Mr. Kirby: Not much we didn't have that much time permitted off time when I was over there.

Interviewer: What was your impression of the country?

Mr. Kirby: Very good enjoyed it enjoyed the people were real nice in fact I kept in communications with one family for a few years after I came back.

Interviewer: And what did you after you got back what did you do?

Mr. Kirby: I worked in the post office for a few years and was post master then when the change of administration came and Mr. Eisenhower came in I transferred and went to work for TVA for a couple of years. And then I put in the first Western Auto store up here in West Moreland and kept it for about five and a half years and sold it and went and put a Western Auto spot up as store manager in Miami, Florida. And then I set up four Western Autos in south Florida. I also managed a store in West Palm Beach. Then I was our division headquarters for Western Auto was in Jacksonville and we covered part of Georgia and close to all of Florida and I was promoted to Sales Manager and then Division Manager in 1970 then I transferred back to Nashville and stayed in Nashville for a few years and we closed it. Then I went to Delaware Ohio and stayed up there until I retired from Western Auto.

Interviewer: While you were in the service did you keep up with letter writing and all did you correspond with anybody? While you were in the service?

Mr. Kirby: Back here?

Interviewer: Yeh

Mr. Kirby: Oh yes I was I got married while I was in the service and I corresponded with my family I kept in touch with people.

Interviewer: Anything else you would like to add any stories or anything you remember? Anything else you would like to add any stories or anything?

Mr. Kirby: No

Interviewer: I have a question for you. You were already flying before you left you had had some practice in that how come you know they didn't look at that ability and use that? Put you in the Army Air Force?

Mr. Kirby: To get in the I did look into that but to get in there you had to have a high school education.

Interviewer: Oh since you were a junior.

Mr. Kirby: I didn't have a high school education going in.

Interviewer: That doesn't make a lot of sense you would have thought they would have used that ability that you had. They don't make sense in the service. Could you have continued and then gone into the Air Force? If that was something you want to do could you have finished and

Mr. Kirby: Well after I came back yes I began to fly and I was I taught to fly and then my son is still flying. And I had a heart problem which I don't fly by myself anymore but I still fly with him some. He flies in air shows and does aerobatics and flies with but we are still very active in flying and we've got two airplanes now. We've got an old cub and we've its original and we've got a Swift airplane.

Interviewer: You've got another one right now you just bought another one?

Mr. Kirby: A 472.

Interviewer: Well I think that covers it now we're ready for you.