

Interviewer: To interview Mr. Bob Cunningham veteran of World War II European Theatre. The date is 20 April, 2006. Mr. Cunningham first off when were you born sir?

Cunningham: The 19th of January 1921.

Interviewer: January 1921 so you were already 20 years old when Pearl Harbor happened.

Cunningham: Right

Interviewer: Give me a little bit of run down about your life before Pearl Harbor.

Cunningham: I was grew up on a farm down in Texas and we were quite poor to be frank about it. And we lived out on a farm until I was about 15 years old and then we moved into a small town and that's where I attended school and graduated from high school in 1939. And went on a trip out to the western part of the state and worked odd jobs and when selective service began I returned home and enlisted in the Army National Guard. And we were called to active duty then in November 1940 and I spent the next 26 years in the Army.

Interviewer: When Pearl Harbor occurred were you already aware had you been reading in the paper about things that were happening in Germany thing that were happening in Japan and realizing that maybe we were heading toward something?

Cunningham: Well the general rumors were to that effect that we would probably be in war before within a year and of course this was in the later part of 1940 and it continued on up until 1941 until December the 7th of course.

Interviewer: Sir when you first heard about Pearl Harbor how did you hear about it from the newspaper or the radio?

Cunningham: From the radio.

Interviewer: What was your initial feeling?

Cunningham: I don't know exactly how I felt. I happened to be on leave at that time a weekend pass and I had gone back to my hometown. And it so happened that I was in a poolroom shooting pool and it came over the radio ordering all active duty personal to report immediately to their unit of assignment in uniform. So of course I went and made arrangements to return to my post immediately.

Interviewer: Being a National Guardsman was your unit already on an active duty status before Pearl Harbor?

Cunningham: Yes we were mobilized in November of 1940.

Interviewer: And what was your unit sir the National Guard Unit?

Cunningham: The 133rd field artillery battalion 105 howitzer unit truck drawn.

Interviewer: And were they attached to the 36th division at that time?

Cunningham: They were a part of it.

Interviewer: Okay

Cunningham: At that time we had no attached units as they do now at various posts and all. There was just one self-contained unit and self-contained division.

Interviewer: Did you happen to hear President Roosevelt's address the next day?

Cunningham: Yes

Interviewer: You did and did you think initially you would be going into the Pacific Theater?

Cunningham: Well I thought for a couple of days yes and then of course Germany declared war on the United States. So then it was a tossup either way and we ended up going to the European Theater.

Interviewer: Now the process of deploying to Europe how did that begin and just kind of run us through when you first received order for where you were going to deploy and how you eventually arrived there.

Cunningham: Well we were at what called Camp Brownville Texas which was just temporary camps set up for World War II there was as soon as the war was over with the camp was over with. But we were there for almost a year about eight months I guess. And then we moved to Florida Camp Landing Florida and stayed there until October of 1942 at which time we moved to Camp Edwards Massachusetts. And from there in April of 1943 we boarded a ship out of New York for North Africa.

Interviewer: Where did you first land at North Africa?

Cunningham: At Orland.

Interviewer: Did you encounter resistance? Was that still held by French at this time?

Cunningham: No there was no resistance there was still a war going on in North Africa. But fortunately I guess we didn't have to participate in it because it was over with within a few months then until our arrival. And but they were still fighting going on but we were not too close to it. We had moved out of in fact we were out of Algeria into French Maraca at the time and from there is where we went and boarded ships for Italy and September 1943.

Interviewer: Do you remember where you landed in Italy?

Cunningham: At Salervo

Interviewer: Salervo

Cunningham: It was a few miles south of Naples.

Interviewer: What were your impressions when you first landed?

Cunningham: Scared that was the general feeling. But being field artillery we were not in close contact with the German infantry and we were just off the beach into an orchid olive tree orchid. And we were strafed by German aircraft and the difficulty with that was that by the time we got our guns firing the Germans were gone. And the British had an aircraft carrier out in the bay there and they ____ the Germans and we shot them shot the British rather than the Germans. But they took it in a good humored way I guess.

Interviewer: So the 105s could be used as a weapon against antiaircraft?

Cunningham: No

Interviewer: Okay

Cunningham: The 50 caliber machine guns.

Interviewer: Okay

Interviewer 1: Yeah the 50 caliber is a whole different _____ very well. One of those will mess your day up.

Cunningham: we landed September the 9th as Salervo and our first mission was we were up on the side of a mountain and we were fighting over the top of the mountain which only howitzers can do that because how they just fire. They would go straight over where ours would go up and come down and drop on the reverse over the hill. And from there we moved over to support the British they were having some difficulties on their bridgehead and that was the first time we came under enemy artillery fire. And that was frightening that can still bounce off of you because we had moved in behind a row of trees shrub trees that was running alongside of a canal and we were behind the bushes where the Germans were. And the first two or three rounds the Germans fired they were quite some distance away you could tell form the sound of the shells. And we were ready they started coming close and we got down on the ground of course. And the trees over the years the ground was a little higher than the trees where we were. And a shell exploded on the opposite side of the trees but you could hear the shrapmetal in the bushes right above our heads.

Interviewer: Is it true you can flatten your body to about 12 inches when you're under artillery fire?

Cunningham: Make that 10 inches. One of the young men there we were all in kind of a pile everybody wanted to be on the bottom. This one young man says Oh Lord I wish I was out of here I thought I wish I was too.

Interviewer: Did you all take a vote is there anybody who wants to be here now.

Cunningham: No I think it would have been a unanimous vote.

Interviewer: Did you ever encounter any Italian troops or was it just Germans in Italy?

Cunningham: The Italians surrendered prior to

Interviewer: To your landing okay.

Cunningham: Just I think well the night of before the landings of morning it was announced that the Germans had surrendered and supposable we were going in unopposed. And there was no air or naval bombardment of the beach because the Germans weren't there with the Italians and that was a huge mistake. The Germans had already decided the Italians were going to quit so they had moved troops down into the southern part of Italy just for the purpose of repelling any invaders. So it was well defended we lost _____ we had almost a thousand killed.

Interviewer: I was about to ask you Winston Churchill referred to Italy as the soft underbelly of Europe. I was wondering how soft you found it.

Cunningham: It wasn't soft at all unless you call mud soft. In the winter it was soft the mud was knee deep and if it wasn't raining or snowing it was freezing.

Interviewer: Where did your unit move after Salerno?

Cunningham: We continued to move as we progressed driving the Germans back we moved a number of times because they would set up a defensive line. When we were able to take it they would fall back to another defensive line. And this went on until we arrived at _____ River which ran in front of _____. And the _____ on top of the highest mountain on there and we could not we didn't take it and we tried a number of times and lost a tremendous number of infantry men and we fired a tremendous amount of artillery too. And you could almost read a newspaper one night there when we were going all out all guns within range of the mountain were firing on it.

Interviewer: So you witnessed the destruction of the monastery?

Cunningham: Yes the air force initially destroyed or bombed it and they had the B25s I guess it was or B26s come over and bombed. And we were on our we were just up there sightseeing at this time or I was and the I was on the high grade then you went down and the river was _____ of the thicket. And we could see everything of course in town and then the air force they were good but they made a mistake. And bombed and I think what caused them to the wind happened to be blowing back toward us from the Abby _____. And of course there was a lot of smoke and dirt all of this dust coming up and obscured the view of the city itself and one or two of the planes dropped their bombs prematurely of course they couldn't see where they were bombing couldn't see through the smoke. And one of the bombs hit within about I'd say about 30 yards of where I was. But fortunately there was a _____ I was on one side and the bomb hit on the other side and it made a tremendous crater of course it was about a hundred pound bomb. And it so happened that one of the officers' right there watched the bombing including General Eisenhower and General Clark who was a _____ commander and British Commander General Alexandria. And when that bomb exploded over near us then I was it then I was looking up. And I saw the bombay doors open up and I saw the bomb come out and it looked to me like it was coming right towards me. So a two and half ton truck sitting there beside me and I went under that truck before that bomb got to me but I don't think it would have done any good if it had hit on the truck it probably wasn't going to be too much protection. But it seemed the thing to do.

Interviewer: How far away did it hit?

Cunningham: About 30 yards and by the time I got out from under the truck General Eisenhower and General Clark they were already in their vehicles leaving.

Interviewer: How did that make you feel?

Cunningham: _____

Interviewer: So you actually saw General Eisenhower.

Cunningham: Oh yeah yes he had spent while we were in North Africa taking a walk by.

Interviewer: What were your impressions?

Cunningham: He looked like a pretty good man. I read later that the British didn't think he had too much military sense.

Interviewer: Did you imagine that you were looking at a future President of the United States?

Cunningham: No no that was the last thing I would have thought of.

Interviewer: Well General Clark seems to have been pretty popular is that an opinion that you would share? Did you think highly of General Clark as well?

Cunningham: Yes General Clark was a fine officer and he got kind of a bad rap and everything because every defensive army's dream was to be there. And he was blamed for every defeat that we suffered or failed to take a position it was you know naturally his fault because you know he was the commander. Which that's the way the army works the commander is responsible for everything.

Interviewer: What was your rank at this time?

Cunningham: At the time of the bombing? I was let's see I was first sergeant. I was when we landed at Salerno I was a three strip sergeant. And less than a month later my first sergeant was wounded shot up pretty bad and I was promoted from E4 to E7 I never served in E5 or E6.

Interviewer: That just doesn't happen anymore.

Cunningham: Well you know it was wartime then and every _____ got a promotion that wanted to.

Interviewer 2: How did your duties change after you know going from what a Master Sergeant to a First Sergeant.

Interviewer 1: No he went from three strip he went from Buck Sergeant to first sergeant.

Cunningham: E4 to E7.

Interviewer: Goodness gracious.

Cunningham: And see at that time there were no E8s.

Interviewer: Okay well your duties changed radically.

Cunningham: Yes they changed considerable because then I became responsible for the entire battery rather than just a section.

Interviewer: What were the responsibilities of maintaining a battery and what were some of the responsibilities you would have had as a first sergeant?

Cunningham: Well the first thing you had to maintain order and discipline within the unit and see that everything was carried out as the battery commander directed. He would tell me what he wanted or what he didn't want and left it up to me to do everything he wanted done. And you know you have quite a number of different people in a battery. You've got your gun sections, your mess section, your ____ section, your ammunition section, your forward observers and the forward observers they were the people that directed the artillery fire. And their place in the order was be on the front line when the ____ where the infantry regiment or battalion was planning the attack. And they would be in radio contact and phone contact when possible with the battalion staff the S3 who was the operation officer. And he would figure where the guns should fire from the information given him by the forward observer then he would pass it on the battery who was to fire if he directed. But it was quite a difference in the responsibilities because rather than being responsible for one gun section of maybe I think we had seven people who had a gun section at one time. And from there you went to responsible for 120 or 245 people.

Interviewer: You talked about the duties of the first sergeant being to maintain order and discipline was that a problem in combat?

Cunningham: No not during World War II no. I understand that in Vietnam it did create a problem. But at that time in World War II everyone was wanting to win and they didn't care how they won just so they won. And then we just couldn't stand to be defeated that was our main objective was us win. And everyone did their duty even though sometimes were scared half to death that did not interfere with people doing the duties that they were supposed to do. None ever baked down as being a coward so to speak.

Interviewer: Now you said that after you joined in 1940 you spent the next twenty five years.

Cunningham: Twenty six

Interviewer: Twenty six in the army so that would have put it at 1966 that you got out so Korea was that in your?

Cunningham: I didn't go to Korea I was in Germany at the time Korea come.

Interviewer: And when Vietnam first began did you end up over there?

Cunningham: No when it first began I was out here at Fort Campbell as post Sergeant Major out there.

Interviewer: Post Sergeant Major.

Cunningham: And from there I went back to Germany and it had gotten in Vietnam to the point that I just didn't want to go. Not because I was afraid of the North Vietnamese but because of the lack of discipline and drug use all this kind of stuff that was going on. And to be frank about it I knew that if I

went over there and ran into that kind of undisciplined troops that I would probably either kill one of them or they'd kill me and I'd spend the next 100 years in prison.

Interviewer: You didn't want to be the post sergeant major at Fort Leavenworth did you.

Cunningham: No

Interviewer: Well you would have been out in time to give this interview. But now from when did things just totally bog down in Italy? And when did they make the decision to start shifting troops to France?

Cunningham: Well we had let's see been in Italy from September 43 until June of 44 and we had taken Rome that's where the Germans put up no resistance in the cities there because of the Vatican and all. But that was all up until ____ and then we fought ____ took Rome.

Interviewer: That was June 6th as well?

Cunningham: I think it was the 5th.

Interviewer: The 5th the day before D-Day.

Cunningham: Yeah and that by the way was the first time since I had left New York and got off the ship in Africa that I had slept anywhere except in a tent or no tent. And we were on the outskirts of Rome and moved into a barn had cattle and all that. We got in the loft with the hay and had a pretty good bed considering what we had been sleeping on.

Interviewer: Did you ever get like passes while you were in Italy like to go to town or anything like that?

Cunningham: When we were in a rest area we were I remember the battery commander told me one time or asked me I asked him for a pass to go to Naples. And he said you going to see your niece? I said yea sir he said okay that's authorized as long as you're going to visit.

Interviewer: What did you you must have an overall report with your battery commander thought highly of him.

Cunningham: He was one of the finest officers I've served under he was a captain.

Interviewer: It always helps.

Cunningham: When he when he appointed me as promoted to a first sergeant in Italy he told in these words he said you will run the battery anything you say will be done. If it's wrong it will still be done and I will speak to you afterwards and he said the only other requirement is if you ever _____ I'll bust you. I don't care how you win if you break an arm or a leg or something they won't even be asking you questions. Said if you kill one of them though you may have to tell them your name, rank, and serial number and that's all you have to do said you take care of everything else.

Interviewer 1: Good Lord

Interviewer 2: While I'm thinking about it here encountering the German soldiers in Italy what was your opinion of the Germans as soldiers?

Cunningham: They were excellent soldiers some of the world's best.

Interviewer: Did you see a decrease in quality though once you went into France as it started getting closer and closer to the heartland of Germany?

Cunningham: Yes they lost a lot of well just about all their best troops of course. We went into Southern France the 15th of August in 1944 and the Germans were well they were withdrawing because of the troops in Normandy and they were we were coming in where they had been cut off in Iceland if they didn't fall back. So they were retreating and it wasn't too bad until we got up to the Rome Valley and there we ran into some serious resistance. And one time they put out the word that we had the Germans surrounded but I looked around and we had guns pointed in four directions so I didn't have any problems figuring out who was surrounded.

Interviewer 1: You think there was a little bit of a propaganda effort going there?

Interviewer 2: When you see barrels that is a pretty easy one to figure out. When did you arrive in Southern France?

Cunningham: The 15th of August.

Interviewer: Where did you land in France?

Cunningham: On the southern coast on the Rivera.

Interviewer: Okay

Cunningham: But we didn't do too much swimming. But we did to show you how quickly the Germans retreated they had been down you know living it up because well there wasn't any fighting they had it easy down there. But when we landed we landed in some little town I don't remember the name of it but there had been a German headquarters there and building they were occupying and where they were eating their meals. There was a long table already set up silverware china the best china for them to have dinner that evening. But there wasn't no one showed up for dinner.

Interviewer: Did they take the food?

Cunningham: No we didn't get to eat either.

Interviewer: Can you describe the differences in terrain say between Italy and France? What kind of resistance you were encountering in Italy verses what you saw when you arrived in France?

Cunningham: In Italy it was one mountain and one river after the other and we couldn't even use tanks because of the mountainous terrain. And France it was relatively smooth and of course there were _____ mountains and _____. But on the normal countryside to speak of it was smooth and nice terrain to fight in if you've got to fight. It didn't give the Germans too much of an advantage over the Italian troops as it did in Italy. But anything you have it well done have it well camouflaged.

Interviewer: What was your opinion of the quality of the equipment that American troops had in World War II?

Cunningham: I thought it was excellent. We had now remember I'm an artillery man so at the time we were armed with 1903 Springfield bolt action rifles. The most accurate rifle the army ever had I think because even me I could fire 100% at 300 yards with the 03 in pronged position and so when we got on the ship to go to Africa to Italy they placed a large number of duffle bags in the hold where we were that contained a complete set of everything a man needed. If you lost everything give you a bag and you were ready to go. And in each bag there was a Thompson sub machine gun and we left most of them we took a bunch of them with us. And they were good weapons and the M1 rifle it was an excellent weapon too. I don't think you could well to me it wasn't as accurate as the 03 but it didn't have the recoil the 03 did either it wouldn't bruise your shoulder. And most people would be inclined to fire two or three rounds rather than one and they also introduced the bazooka seven pound rocket and it was good a tank destroyer as long as you get the tanks and rode them off of the wheels. But on the tiger tanks and the heavier tanks you had them on the sides it didn't phase them because it was just 2.75 inch rocket. And then the artillery was very good very accurate and we had the 105 was normal battalion weapon and we had a battalion of 155 howitzers that was within the division. But it was under the control in the division artillery officer had it would only use whatever he directed it to be used. And we had another one that I think it was 270 millimeter weapon that fired 360 pound projectile 20 or so miles and it was extremely accurate. And when we were at the Siegfried Line they would fire those 270s and you know you get one short and one over you split the difference. And as soon as two rounds the second round was fired the first one was over the second would be short of vice versa that white flag came up from that pill box because they knew the next one was going to hit it and blow it all to pieces.

Interviewer: Now once you moved in as far as the Siegfried line you were talking about the equipment did you have trouble getting equipment say when it turned cold did you have enough cold weather gear to get through the?

Cunningham: Oh yes we were well equipped.

Interviewer: Never had any trouble with logistical matters or supplies?

Cunningham: The only thing was at one time were about maybe two weeks that we had an ammunition shortage not to that was server or anything. But we didn't fire like we would have if we hadn't have been short.

Interviewer: Now sir you know I was surprised to find out because the German army it was always explained to us you know you heard about ____ you just always heard mechanized mechanized. Now I understand they had a large part of their army particularly their artillery was all horse drawn. Did you ever see that?

Cunningham: I did not see any horse drawn no. But in the Rome Valley there was so much destruction because we did have them hemmed up there and there were carcasses of horses strung along the highway. We had just taken bulldozers and tanks and cleared everything off of the road so we could move up and down it.

Interviewer: Where did you move through the Siegfried line at?

Cunningham: I don't remember where it was.

Interviewer: Was it in Southern German or further up?

Cunningham: Oh it was in the southern part I would say because we were coming up through the southern part of France I'm assuming it was in there.

Interviewer: When the _____ began in mid-December of 1944 what became known as the Battle of the Bulge. One of the first reports came back or were there first reports did the army even talk about it did the army even suggest that there was a problem going on in Belgium in that _____?

Cunningham: Well yes they started moving troops up immediately to try to contain it. And we moved up to the _____ also and there was a lot of snow and it was just miserable weather and it was overcast fog and all prevented the air force from flying in missions. And without those you just felt lost and as soon as it cleared up and you'd look up and see the _____ from the B17 that was the most beautiful sight you ever laid eyes on.

Interviewer: Now once the counter offensive German counter offensive fell apart when you all started pushing back to the east again into Germany did it get progressively tougher as far as the amount of resistance that you encountered?

Cunningham: Not a whole lot it seemed to be that they were all kind of and I think they were the normal soldiers and also the generals who were not in the general staff in contact daily or so with the _____. They knew they were losing and they were trying to look out for their troops and they were would fall back as much as they could without encoring the wrath of Hitler. It wasn't nearly as bad as it could have been it was still bad.

Interviewer: Did you start noticing the difference in the type of in other words the ages of the German troops you were facing? Did you start seeing more older men and little kids verses just your normal _____?

Cunningham: Yeah most of them were young soldiers I think probably around 17 maybe 18 years at least. But I didn't see any of the real old ones.

Interviewer: Once we got across the Rhine and start making the final push was there a sensation among all of you guys that were getting so close and in maybe a little extra causation because you just didn't want to be the last guy tagged before the surrender?

Cunningham: No I think we were determined to accomplish the mission fully without ratting up at any time because you know once you rat up you may get shot. And I think the last casualty in the battalion that I was in was the war was over but there were four of them riding in a jeep and there was a rifle bag down between the front seats and a guy started to pick it up and his hand or finger got on the trigger some way and it went off and killed that guy in the back seat.

Interviewer: Did you notice as you began as you started moving into Germany further into Germany that you did you know more moving and less firing or was it a constant you're always firing then moving?

Cunningham: We moved quite rapidly really in fact the third day we were on the beach _____ France we moved inland over 100 miles. But they were trying to get out and _____ was one of the larger cities that we passed through and there were no Germans there but in two weeks later the Stars and Stripes came out the army newspaper and it said the so and so troops some other division had captured _____. We had already but I think that's where we got into this we've got them surrounded business.

Interviewer: I realize normally it is the battery commanders responsibility to write the letters for were you ever asked you know to help out with that or did you ever volunteer for that?

Cunningham: No I didn't volunteer for it. The battery commander was a very compassionate man he looked out for his men. And any time anyone was wounded or killed he wrote the letters. And I go on _____ after World War II for the dead and that was rather.

Interviewer: Now how did that work you were burying the dead from your own unit?

Cunningham: No this was in this was 1947 I guess it was. The World War II dead from all theatres were being shipped back for burial here in the United States if the natural kin desired it. Now a lot of the natural kin no we want them their where they are in the national cemetery overseas. But the ones that they brought back I was in Fort Worth Texas at the _____ there and that was the collection shipping port you know where _____ distance I guess. And they were all already in caskets and everything was ready you know the morticians had taken care of everything. And they placed them in new caskets when they arrived in Fort Worth. And our job was to be the escort one escort one body and it was our responsibility to make sure we had the right body. So we had to check our orders there were dog tags on the casket and make sure that we had the one we were supposed to have. And also the railroads had been our primary of _____ station back in those days we didn't have enough trucking industry as we do now. They were very cooperative and unless there was an escort standing by the casket when it was ready to be loaded on the train they would not move it they would leave it sitting on the dock because they weren't going to ship one without an escort. And they were placed in baggage car and as soon as we got to the stop next to where the body was to be removed we would be riding in _____ but at the last stop before the destination we would get out and go into the baggage car so when the doors were open the next of kin or the honor guard or whoever was there to meet the train the first thing they saw was the escort. And it wasn't too bad unless the next of kin was just the guy's mother and it was rough.

Interviewer: I imagine that could be looked at as a double edge sword and now this is 1947 so once the war ended most people were looking to demobilize and get out as quickly as possible. Now you had made the decision already by then that this is a way of life that you just wanted to continue?

Cunningham: Yes I was I was demobilized in I think of August of 1945 and I returned home and even then there was not very many jobs to be had and the ones they had did you wasn't too thrilled with them. But I decided I would go to school so I enrolled in the University of Texas. And in high school I had been an A student in math, geometry, trigonometry and all of this I had no problem with. But they whipped calculus class on me the first.

Interviewer: So calculus made you think the army was so bad.

Cunningham: I decided right then that I believed I better go back in the army. And also I could reenlist at the rank I had when I was discharged so I just reenlisted as a master sergeant.

Interviewer: Did you reenlist in the regular army or back in the National Guard?

Cunningham: No regular army.

Interviewer 2: Okay

Interviewer 1: Last days of Germany coming down from the last couple weeks before Germany surrendered can you run us through that particular period? Did the sensation grow that this is just about over did you hear the Russians were coming fast on the other side?

Cunningham: Yeah we were told that the war was in the final days and that there was still some fighting going on but most of the ____ on both sides there was lower ranking commanders you know unit commanders they all had the same feelings we had. Why go out there and try to kill somebody when they're going to surrender in a couple of weeks anyway or go out there and get yourself killed. And that was the feeling on both sides I think so we that was a time when you just didn't want to be the last casualty and you didn't want to cause the last casualty. So I think that was the feeling on both American and German troops.

Interviewer: When you got news of the German surrender do you remember where you were and what you were doing and how you felt?

Cunningham: Well I was in a small town and we had taken over some of the houses of course to live in. And we had liberated a train down the village that had a baggage car full of beer barrels on it.

Interviewer: That's pretty good liberation.

Cunningham: So when the news was announced we were well on our way.

Interviewer: Sounds like the guys who were at Burgess Garden. So the war had come to an end now how long before the guys started getting the idea you know there's still that war in the Pacific and you may be shipped to the west coast of the U.S. and on our way to that one?

Cunningham: They had designated some of the divisions and shipped them out immediately for the Far East but my division was not one of them. So we knew that we were coming back to the states and the only thing we came back on the point system where as rather than the whole division coming back at one time and having a big parade as a division. We came back as individual soldiers based on how many days we had been over there and how many Purple Hearts we'd gotten and all this kind of stuff. So they had a points system set up that took care of everything and then there was a big difference in how many points individuals had even though they would be in the same unit. Some of them would go home early some of them would stay later.

Interviewer: Do you remember how many points you had when the war ended?

Cunningham: Do I've forgotten whether it was based on the number of months or years or what. And also on the well I didn't get a Purple Heart because I didn't get shot anytime. But if you had a Purple Heart that was so many points if you had a Silver Star that was so many. And I guess ____ Murphy had every decoration they ever had I guess he left before the war was over.

Interviewer: Well we were talking here before we started and you mentioned going to ____ before you saw what had been happening there did you ever hear any rumors before you moved into that area about what was happening to the Jewish and the concentration camps?

Cunningham: No there was you never met a German that knew about it of course you never met a German that was a member of the Nazi party either. But there was a code of silence to never speak of it and I guess maybe some of them were truthful in that they didn't know about it. Because it was strictly off limits to the German population there if they got out there they ____.

Interviewer: But you never heard you hadn't even heard any rumors before?

Cunningham: No

Interviewer 1: Okay

Interviewer 2: Now there are a lot of people today who say the Holocaust is a myth how do you feel about that?

Cunningham: They are sadly mistaken it existed because it.

Interviewer: How bad was it?

Cunningham: I saw the most horrible thing you could ever lay eyes on. There was the ovens where they burned the bodies there were open rail cars with bodies just thrown in them naked arms hanging over the sides all full. And the odor was once you smell it you will never forget it because it was just terrible conditions. People they couldn't take a bath they couldn't brush their teeth and couldn't wash their clothes if they had any clothes. It was

Interviewer: And this particular camp was literally almost in downtown ____ but it was pretty close to Munich wasn't it?

Cunningham: Yeah

Interviewer: But nobody knew about it?

Cunningham: No one knew about it. So they say.

Interviewer: Did you follow the course of the just out of interest the course of the ____ trials afterwards because of the fact that you had seen the?

Cunningham: I watched it on TV as much as possible because I was still having to work then I wasn't retired.

Interviewer: Did that come across in newsreels or?

Cunningham: No some of it was live broadcast.

Interviewer: I didn't realize they were doing live broadcast that early.

Cunningham: Maybe not live as we see it today but the film and all was

Interviewer: Recorded live.

Cunningham: Recorded live yes. And the division I was with 36th infantry Herman Gordy the chief of the German air force second in command next to Hitler of Germany he surrendered to my division. And the assistant division commander went behind the German lines to pick him up and bring him back to our headquarters. And our division commander was Major General ____ who was a full blooded German spoke perfect German and English both. He joined the American army he had been a citizen of the United States all of his life. And unfortunately someone wasn't doing their job as ____ or press officer or what have you because they let it be known that Douglas and ____ had fried chicken for dinner and you know all this kind of stuff. When we were eating just ordinary GI rations and then they were going to fly ____ to Supreme Headquarters in ____ aircraft and someone I guess talked General ____ into putting his arm around ____ shoulders and they took pictures of it. And I know it happened because I have one of the pictures I don't know what's happened to it in the last 66 years. But I have a picture of it and this caused General ____ to lose one star and General Eisenhower thought I guess he would retire after he busted him back one star but General ____ stayed on and became a four star general before he retired.

Interviewer 1: I remember seeing the picture with ____ with his arm around John Dillinger right before Crown Point in Indiana that's another one of those pictures of ____ against me.

Interviewer 2: Well you saw a few nobles during your time overseas let me see Eisenhower and Clark did you ever seeing Deering personally or anybody else?

Cunningham: No just pictures.

Interviewer: Okay

Cunningham: Now I did see _____ and he also surrendered to my division. And you may remember there was a general brigadier general _____ that used to be at Fort Campbell back in the early 60s. He was second lieutenant platoon leader of the platoon that general _____ surrendered to. And that was in ____ Germany and one day I was out sightseeing and passed by the house almost a mansion where the field marshal and his staff were under house arrest I guess. But he was free to do whatever he wanted to do and he and his staff were out walking in the court yard and he was the he was a real he looked like a general or a field marshal. That was my idea of what one should look like and that was him.

Interviewer: When you were in North Africa did you ever hear anything similar about Romald?

Cunningham: I heard Romald was the best tank officer that in the German army. And he proved it even though he was defeated at ____ by Montgomery he had driven Montgomery back almost to the ____ canal there. And Montgomery was not to take anything away from our friend but Montgomery was in all ____ he was very cautious general. He was more interested in not losing the battle than he was in winning one. That was the way some of the American officers German officers described him. But Romald was he knew he was defeated that Africa was going to fall so left and went back to Germany on sick leave. And then unfortunately when the attempt to assassinate Hitler Romald was passively involved in it but the way he got caught was one of the guys that knew about it and was in on it was in the hospital severely wounded and was under drugs I suppose. And they were questioning him and he didn't know what he was saying I guess and he mentioned Romald's name so of course that ____ a

meeting with a name and then they gave Romald a choice of committing suicide or standing trial and being executed. Because he was going to be guilty and Romald knew they were going to find him guilty so he chose suicide.

Interviewer: You went back to Germany I guess a couple of times in the course of your military career between the end of 45 and 1966. Did you ever go to the cemetery at Normandy or to any of the places did you ever go to Italy and see or any of the places you had been to see what that looked like then?

Cunningham: No I never visited one I visited in the United States here national cemeteries in fact my brother is buried at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery he was killed on Okinawa in May of 1945 before Japan surrendered what in August.

Interviewer: August

Cunningham: And he was in the Marine Core. But there were four of us four brothers two of them were in the Marine Core and two of us in the Army. And the two in the Marine Core were in the Pacific and I went to Europe and my other brother went to the China Burma India Theatre.

Interviewer: Where were you when you heard the news about your brother?

Cunningham: I was in Germany we were of course the war was over with in Germany at that time and we were in a small village there and one of my one of the men in my unit asked me he said about my brother being killed. I said I don't know what you're talking about which I didn't and he said oh I'm sorry he didn't want to be the one to break news like that you know. And the next day I received a letter from my family stating that he had been killed.

Interviewer: Now your last time in Germany was 65, 66?

Cunningham: Uh huh

Interviewer: Now you have seen Germany in its ruins literally now how bad how bad did Europe look I mean overall the town the cities the infrastructure bridges what did that look like in 45 and what was the difference 20 years later? Was it was it something you could even describe?

Cunningham: Well in 45 there was there wasn't any bridges very few inhabitable buildings. And the business areas of the cities they were most of now the larger cities they were bombed out there wasn't anything left of them. But in 1965 and 66 they were coming along good they had rebuilt they had the auto bond which General Eisenhower liked so he got the interstates going in the United States that's where he got the idea from Germany. And everything was being rebuilt and some of the cities a lot of them you could never tell there had ever been a war fought there.

Interviewer: Did you feel like the Marshal Plan was a good thing that the United States did in helping even though they were former enemies do you feel like that it really helped us to hold a line against a possible soviet encouragement in Western Europe?

Cunningham: Yes I think the Marshal Plan was an excellent thing in that it not only helped rebuild Germany it also indicated to Russia that Germany was on our side now. And that we were not about to let them occupy even though they had the eastern zone there and had tried to ___ us out. Cut off all

transportation to Berlin and President Truman ordered the air lift and then we flew the air force really and coal and food and everything really to keep the ____ from starving to death. And I think the I think Stalin knew that if he pushed us too far there would be a war and they didn't have a nuclear bomb and we did.

Interviewer: It must have been a tense time to be in Germany.

Cunningham: Yes it was and also any division commander over there could have started World War III. All he had to do was commit his division and the war was on whether the Germans had made a hostile move or he just thought they had and he could get it to division there was no backing down. And we did have what they call the technical ____ which was artillery shells over us.

Interviewer: I've seen pictures of the atomic Annie's trying to get through some of the streets some of the German cities. That must have been a lot of fun. Mr. Cunningham do you have anything you'd like to add in particular that you think should be remember especially?

Cunningham: Well one thing I left out we were landing in Southern France. We were more LSTs landing ships tanks and they just run in come up on the beach and drop their ramp and you go off. And we were landed and dropped the ramp and we all got off and that LST backed out and another one was coming to the same landing spot. And a flight of German aircraft came over I think about three bombers and it was dusty dark and you could look out and you could see this radio guys bomb. And he looked like he was about that far in front of the bomber of course it was further than that I'm sure. And down a little bit lower and it came in and when he got to the right stop he sat it down and it hit right in the center of the LST just put it in where we had just left. And it didn't sink it but it killed a pretty good number of troops onboard it. And it was an artillery unit and they lost a bunch of their artillery weapons. But it was I guess rough if I had been ten minutes longer there I'd have been on that.

Interviewer 1: That's got to be a pretty chilling thought to think something like that and just a slight turn of events.

Interviewer 2: Well Mr. Cunningham I want to thank you for your service to our country and it is our honor and our privilege to record your story. And I hope future generations will take count of this and learn from it and profit from your experience.

Cunningham: Well thank you. Thank you very much for inviting me to be here to have an interview with you gentleman.

Interviewer: Our pleasure

Cunningham: It's an honor and privilege really to try to pass on the firsthand knowledge to a younger generation. Whether its war or whatever it may be if you don't pass on what you know the younger generation knows nothing except what they learn that just began.

Interviewer: Well thank you so much.

Cunningham: Thank you