

Interviewer: Let's see today's the 10th of February 2002 and I'm in Kissimmee Florida the snow bird reunion of the 101st and I'm talking to Mr. Robert Salley a veteran of the 101st and sir you were with the 326 engineers right?

Salley: 326th engineers that's right.

Interviewer: Okay well let me let's start a little bit with your background. What year did you go into the service?

Salley: I went into the service in Camp Clyburn Louisiana in 1942.

Interviewer: 1942 now did you immediately volunteer for paratrooper?

Salley: No I my intentions were to get in an army band.

Interviewer: Really

Salley: And I had been in a high school band ever since 8th grade.

Interviewer: What do you play?

Salley: Clarinet and I the man that interviewed me said he couldn't himself put me in an army band. The best that he could do was send me somewhere where there was a new army division being formed and they naturally have a new band. So they sent me down there and I got in the 82nd infantry division World War I infantry division.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: Which was an old square division they called it.

Interviewer: Right the box division.

Salley: And on August 15, 1942 they split that 82nd airborne division right in the middle and made the nucleus for the 82nd airborne and the 101st airborne. And then I stayed with the 82nd until we got to Fort Bragg and just before we went overseas our company clerk and I put in for OCS.

Interviewer: Okay

Salley: And the battalion commander he didn't like that so he just pigeon hold me and that's against the rules he had to send that to divisions whether he liked it or not. So we asked for a transfer to the 101st and we got it.

Interviewer: Okay

Salley: And I was well when I was in the 82nd I was the battalion bugler all the time.

Interviewer: Oh really

Salley: So I didn't get a whole lot of basic training.

Interviewer: Now were you assigned to an engineer company then?

Salley: I was in the 307 airborne engineer battalion the 82nd.

Interviewer: But you didn't get much training?

Salley: Not much training every time I went out in the field our cadre sergeant said you go on behind that tree and practice your bulge he said so.

Interviewer: So did you feel a little ill prepared for the mission to come or?

Salley: Well no it didn't bother me much. But anyway when we asked for a transfer the company commander transferred both of us to the same place and the 101st and I got to be a supply sergeant there.

Interviewer: Now were you already a sergeant at this point?

Salley: I was a three stripe sergeant.

Interviewer: A three stripe sergeant by then.

Salley: And the company commander called is in and said the first three brigs of sergeants

Interviewer: Right

Salley: The first sergeant he didn't bother with the master sergeant the first sergeant we called them a tech sergeant at that time they're what an E6 now or

Interviewer: Staff sergeant

Salley: Staff sergeant

Interviewer: Right

Salley: And so we went in I was yeah I was just a three strip sergeant I don't know how I got in the group. Anyway we were all standing around in front of the company commander and he started down at the end of the line and he'd ask like the motor pool sergeant the motor sergeant he'd say tell him what the job was open and ask him if wanted it and he just flat out said no. And so he went to the next guy and you know there several of us there and everybody and I was on the other end. And everybody refused it and here I was left standing alone so he asked me did I want the job and I said yeah I'd take it I wanted to find out what's the matter with that job. So I knew it was a promotion.

Interviewer: So it became a promotion to staff sergeant?

Salley: Yeah

Interviewer: Very good that's a way to get a little bit more money.

Salley: So then I got in the when I was transfer to the 101st I was transfer to the 326th engineers airborne engineer battalion.

Interviewer: Okay

Salley: And when I reported to engineer battalion headquarters there was a captain there that I had known before in the 82nd. He was I forgot what he was he was a captain but I don't know what his job his job was right there in the battalion headquarters. And I reported to him because I knew him and he said why yeah he said you know they need a supply sergeant in Headquarters Service Company over there why don't you go over there. Report down there to supply room and they'll fix you right up. And of course I'm all ears you know I did just exactly what he told me I reported to the supply room and I was in the company for a week before the first sergeant knew it. And that didn't work that didn't go over.

Interviewer: I don't think that set well with the first sergeant.

Salley: So at one point later on in our relationship he was gonna have me court marshaled and I told him go ahead let's get it over with and he didn't do anything about it.

Interviewer: So did you receive any training to prepare you to run a supply room for an engineer company?

Salley: No I didn't now we had a our battalion commander turned out to be Colonel Papas John C Papas. And he was the commanding officer of headquarters and Service Company the 307th engineer battalion of the 82nd so I knew him too see. And so when I finally caught up with him again he was the battalion commander of the engineer battalion of the 101st. And so I went down there anyway and I got through this riff with the first sergeant. And there was a corporal running the supply room down there and here come Colonel Papas down there one day and he said to this corporal he said corporal he said I'd like to see your books your expendable book. Okay he got them out opened them up. Here you don't keep track of soap you don't keep track of gun patches, oil, toilet paper none of that stuff. And this fellow that was running it he could care less about the army all he wanted to do was go home really you know. Well no sir he said why would you do that you get a case of soap in and it's gone in a week. Well he said I'll tell you Corporal Underwood he said I'll be back in a week and we'll look at them books again. So he came back and Underwood hadn't even opened them. And so when Colonel Papas looked at them again he looked all through them and he said Corporal Underwood stand up he stood up he said Private Underwood set down. He said Salley you've got a job that was that.

Interviewer: So you learned by doing. You learned the army supply system by doing. Logistical preparation for going overseas can you tell me a little bit about that what it was like trying to get the necessary equipment in? And now you had a brand new engineering battalion correct?

Salley: Yeah well

Interviewer: So they had to be outfitted pretty much from the ground up.

Salley: I didn't have a lot of trouble because I had a real good friend who was a battalion supply officer and sergeant too.

Interviewer: Okay

Salley: And so every time something I needed something I had it you know I didn't have to worry about it.

Interviewer: So they helped out quite a bit.

Salley: Oh yeah

Interviewer: Which helped you to learn the system.

Salley: No I didn't have any problems.

Interviewer: The army I grew up in I was in from 78 to 98 kind of floated on a sea of paperwork.

Salley: Yeah

Interviewer: Was it the same then I mean you couldn't get anything I couldn't get anything out of the supply room when I was a platoon sergeant unless I had the right requisitions and everything else.

Salley: That's right

Interviewer: That didn't change that was the same that was the same. Now when you folks were getting ready to go overseas did you have most of your equipment and take it with you or did you pick up a lot of your equipment when you arrived in England?

Salley: You mean personal equipment.

Interviewer: Personal equipment for the unit the unit equipment.

Salley: Well I think we must have taken it with us because we had it immediately.

Interviewer: So you took most everything with you to England.

Salley: The big stuff of course like planes and gliders and 57 millimeter guns and stuff why we probably had to ship them over but yeah we took everything with us.

Interviewer: Now were you all airborne trained or glider trained or both?

Salley: Glider trained.

Interviewer: You were glider trained so they never sent you to paratrooper school?

Salley: No never and the first the very first glider ride I ever had I was here in the states. They gave us parachutes so I walked in that glider you know and when everybody got loaded in there I think it had 15

men and all our equipment. When everybody got in there there was a little seat that kicked down and you shut the door and the seat tipped down in front of the door so that last man could sit down.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: And that was me at one point the first flight I had. And I looked across the other side and there was nothing but paper and water pipes you know that was all it was made of. And I thought boy if anything even feels like it's going to go wrong I can just run right through that paper over there I ain't got no problem you know I've got a parachute. Everything went fine got down on the tarmac again and I go walking away from the glider and I looked at this guy in front of me and there was straw hanging out of his parachute. There were no parachutes in there they were stuffed with straw.

Interviewer: They issued you an empty parachute.

Salley: Yeah just a moral support.

Interviewer: Well it's a good thing you didn't run through the paper and try to pull your rip cord you'd have been in serious trouble.

Salley: Oops it would have been one of those oops situations.

Interviewer: I think it would have been a little stronger than oops perhaps. Now we'll start with shipping out you went of course by boats to England.

Salley: Yeah we went well let's see probably the part of the story you need to know after we left New York. We went on the a big British ship oh a big one the USS Strosinator.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Salley: And when we left New York we left it was dark at night and the main motor wasn't running.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: We were running on auxiliary we had two motors we were running on the auxiliary motor. And that wasn't really up to par so when my friend and I that had been transferred with me to the 101st we got up on deck and that big harvest moon in September come up over the edge of the waters you know and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. I said to him man we were on H deck that was the last deck down hull above the hull. I said we're below the water line I ain't going down there I said man there was German submarines planning the eastern coast up and down at that time.

Interviewer: Sure

Salley: All they had to do was hit us between them and that moon and we've had it that's all. So he and I slept on the hatch cover right up in the cold like to froze to death.

Interviewer: I bet it was.

Salley: We had everything the army issued us on but anyway we.

Interviewer: Now did you have assigned bunks? Some folks I've talked to shipped over had a bed like every other day because they didn't have enough

Salley: No we had assigned bunks.

Interviewer: There was enough room that everybody had a bunk.

Salley: But we had half the division on that boat half of the 101st airborne division was on that boat plus some other contingents. We had a whack contingent on there I don't know how many thousands of people were on there. And then we went we didn't take right off there was no convoy that I know of at the time anyway so we went up to St. John's New Finland.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: And we pulled in there and stayed there about a week and they repaired that motor.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: And then what the heck was the name of there was an army camp there on St. Johns I met a boy from my hometown there. It don't make any difference after that week and they had the motor repaired they decided to try it and they had a submarine net across the harbor they pulled that. And we started out and it was the largest boat that had ever been in there and it dragged bottom and it sprung a plate in the front end. So we went out in the ocean and dumped the garbage and turned around and went back in. And then they put us on another boat we stayed there another three or four days. They put us on another boat and put us on the SS John Erickson and took us to Halifax Nova Scotia and then we sat there for a few days until we could get a convoy. It took us 43 days to cross the Atlantic Ocean.

Interviewer: Not the six day journey that you were expecting.

Salley: No we got the American Theatre ribbon for being in the United States combat zone for over 30 days.

Interviewer: From being on ship?

Salley: Yeah

Interviewer: Now arrival in England were things pretty chaotic at first until you got settled in?

Salley: Wasn't too bad we landed in Liverpool and we took a train to Pangborn England I think it was. And that was about seven miles from there to this big manor house we stayed in Basalon Manor.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: And we walked at night carried all the equipment that we had the personal equipment that seven miles and it seemed like every step was up hill. Man I couldn't I don't know how I ever carried that. But we got to this big manor house and it was battalion headquarters is what it turned out to be.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Salley: And there was 90 rooms there.

Interviewer: Wow

Salley: And the big ballroom in the place had gold leaf moldings or something around them like that decoration is up there.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Salley: Around the ceiling and they took all of that down and a great big chandelier they took it down and brought it back here to the United States and started the Waldorf Astoria in New York so it wouldn't get damaged. But then I had my supply room we had a quanza hut out behind the manor house so I was out there by myself. But we stayed there for about nine months before Normandy.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Salley: And I've been back there since to

Interviewer: You've been back to the manor house.

Salley: Well I was talking to X. B. Cox down there yesterday the first time I went back I'd never been back there before and I knew the Lord and Lady Olive lived in this manor house because Colonel Cox had been good friends of theirs and he went back every couple years and visited.

Interviewer: Oh okay

Salley: So I wrote him a letter he was down there in Texas and I wrote him a letter and I said colonel how in the world do you talk to a lord and a lady I never did that before. It will be no problem he said you go down there to what used to be the stables when it was a manor house.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: When we got there we turned it into a motor pool but he said go down to where was out motor pool and there's a nice little knick knack ship down there and that's where you buy your ticket to go through the manor house it was. See Lord and Lady Olive turned it over to the national archives at the time because they didn't have enough money to keep it up. So the government was doing it and they let people go through it so my wife and daughter wen to Normandy. Well my daughter was stationed in Germany that time we went to Normandy in 1992 just the three of us. We drove my daughters across from Heidelberg across France into Normandy. And then we got put the car on a boat at Shemwood and went across the English Chanel to Liverpool or South Hampton. And my wife had a lot of aunts and uncles right there on the southern coast she'd never seen so we visited all of them then we went north up to Redding and back Baslum. And when I bought the tickets to go through Baslum of course they got all excited that when they knew that I had been there. They let me go through but I had to buy tickets for my wife and daughter. And Colonel Cox told me who the guy was that was the general manager or the manager for the whole grounds and everything you know I forgot what his name was. But he said look him up so I asked for him well I had this letter of introduction from Colonel Cox I just handed it to them. And they told me to look this guy up when I got up there in the manor and I did and boy he was all excited and we had to go in his office and sit down and talk and talk. They had had a register out in the

foyer or the lobby or whatever you call that big room when you go into first in a castle where the receptionist was and the public used to sign in. But it got so dogged eared and they were wearing it out that this manager took it into his office and he only let certain people sign it. So he got it out for me to sign and that was in 1992 and person the last person before me that had signed it was in 1986.

Interviewer: Wow

Salley: So he dind't let everybody write their name on that.

Interviewer: I guess not.

Salley: Then he took us personally all around every one of them 90 rooms and showed us. And in each room there was a person to explain to you this was Lord and Lady Olives room and this was her bathroom all about it you know. And so we kind of over stayed out time and all of a sudden I realized there wasn't anybody around the public was all gone the sight seers there was just the four of us. And he said well we closed 20 minutes ago so we started home and went out of the front door and out of the big driveway going down to the motor pool and here come Lord Olive walking up the gravel driveway with a cane all kind of bent over. He was old then and so when the man introduced us to him oh then he had to go back in and we all went back in and he had to talk about when we were there and how many of the fellows did I keep track of. And then especially he wanted to know did anybody from our outfit join or marry any English girls and if they did send him their name and all that you know he was interested.

Interviewer: Very good

Salley: So then I had noticed when we first got there if you stand out in front of this huge building the center section of it was oh I don't know if it was three stories high or something. Then there was two one story wings built out on each side kind of typical way of building things. And the one down to the right is where he and his wife stayed and they tape army tape tables out in front of it there. So I asked Lord Olive I said would there be anything wrong if I went down and jumped over that tracing tape I said I'd like to take a picture of that wing that's exactly where I stayed the first night got here had a straw filled mattress in the down well the one story. He said well why not you were here before I was. That nice yeah I stayed there about nine months.

Interviewer: Right will you talk a little bit about your preparations for Normandy?

Salley: Well

Interviewer: What did that intell from a supply sergeant?

Salley: We didn't really realize what we were getting into at all until maybe two or three weeks before. We knew then there was stepped up activity we were going to the airfields and loading gliders and some 47s. Tying down all that equipment and unloading it and loading it we knew something was up. But I didn't know really where we were going or nothing until finally one day we shipped out to Kart of Whales.

Interviewer: Okay

Salley: And got on this boat then we found out where we were headed. And the Kart of Whales is way over on the west side of England I don't know there was kind of a ____ that goes up in there. We got on that got on the boat it was three o'clock in the morning. And we had to come down sail around Landsem then we went east a little ways just about the center of southern England then we headed south in France.

Interviewer: So you actually crossed the channel by ship.

Salley: By ship well about probably three quarters of the battalion did the engineers.

Interviewer: Well you had a lot of heavy equipment.

Salley: Yeah

Interviewer: You can't put bulldozers on gliders.

Salley: Well not only that there wasn't enough they didn't have enough gliders built for that operation to start with.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: For that invasion because I mean on that boat we were on was the 326th engineers C Company battalion jumped that night at midnight it was the 506th parachute infantry.

Interviewer: Are they mine sweepers C Company?

Salley: No

Interviewer: What was there mission why did they jump with the infantry?

Salley: Well they jumped as an engineer unit so they could do bridge work road work or anything to do we did it.

Interviewer: Did they do demolition as well?

Salley: Oh yes otherwise they were infantry.

Interviewer: Okay

Salley: They were an airborne infantry division.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: But on this ship there was like the 326th airborne engineers the 907th glider field artillery the 321st glider field artillery the 401st oh there was 3,000 troops on that boat. And it had a crew of 450 and the name of it was the Susan B Anthony.

Interviewer: Okay

Salley: About five miles from the French coast it hit a mine and sank.

Interviewer: The ship that you were on?

Salley: The ship that we were on that was the morning of the 7th of June about 8 o'clock in the morning. We had just eat breakfast.

Interviewer: So how many how did they get you off that ship as it was going down?

Salley: Well he was tick tacking what they call tick tacking to avoid submarines you know every now and then they'd change directions. And when he swung the fantail of that thing around it hit a mine right on the screws back there. And there was nobody killed nobody not one person lost his life until that thing went down and then it went down by itself. Took about an hour and half get off. I was two decks down I think I was sitting flat on the floor waterproofing the gas masks they used to have little rubber plugs you put in the canister to keep the water from getting in in case you got in water.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: And man that thing it hit that mine and immediately you know a ship is a living thing when it's moving. People talking and moving around and noise and lights and that things went dead.

Interviewer: You feel the vibrations from the engine.

Salley: That thing went dead in the water and the lights went off. I happened to be close to a stairway and I got up on the upper deck and got up right in the front end of that. And there was a big mast up there probably about as round as that table and I had a friend of mine in the company there he had worked in the shipyard down in Florida someplace I don't know where it was Key West down there somewhere. And of course the captain he was up one deck one level above us and he had a level laying on the railing up there I bet it was eight feet long just a regular ole carpenters level you know. And he'd say now fellows he was from the south and it took him a week to say hello you know. He'd say now fellows when I say take the weight off your right foot and put it on your left foot I don't mean run over there to that side of the boat just take your weight off your foot. And he keeping it as the guys were going down these rope ladders he was keeping it level.

Interviewer: Keeping even keels as they thought.

Salley: Did a pretty good job of it to. And we went down these big old thick heavy rope ladders and I got on an English frigate.

Interviewer: You were in convoy of course.

Salley: Yeah

Interviewer: Did the other ships just pull up alongside to take on as many as they could?

Salley: Yeah a lot of them did yeah. And I got on an English frigate and they are just kind of like a tug boat. And the first thing when my feet hit the deck they handed me a hot buttered rum. It was British you know and typical. So then we floundered around out there and I got separated right there someway

I don't know how from this friend of mine he was a company clerk. He went back to England on some kind of boat.

Interviewer: Oh really

Salley: But we were headed for Omaha Beach to start with that's where we were headed.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Salley: But then when that boat went down and it took an hour and a half to go down well my friend getting back to my friend we were standing by this mast. He said do you got your trench knife in your boot? And I said yeah, he said cut the laces in the jump boots you've got on. I said why? Well he said if you do that and you feel this thing laying over get up that mast just as far as you can get and I'll be right behind you because when it goes we'll be that much further away from it and from the suction when it goes down. So we did all of that well we didn't need to because we got off. We watched it go down.

Interviewer: Did they get all the men off?

Salley: Everybody

Interviewer: Every single soldier.

Salley: Every single soldier got off.

Interviewer: Wonderful

Salley: It was the only troop ship in the Normandy invasion that was sunk that was without a loss of life. And some years later in 1988, we were talking about that year yesterday down there that was the year I went to Steven Ambers.

Interviewer: D-Day ____ yes sir.

Salley: Nineteen eighty-eight the crew of that Susan B Anthony had their first reunion. We'd never had one since the war until 1988 down here in Coco Beach. And the guy that was hosting it lived in about the middle of Illinois. So I wrote him a letter and asked him if it would be okay if a passenger that was on that ship could come to his reunion. And man I got more literature and pictures and stuff than you could shake a stick at. So we went my wife and I drove down there and so then that's when that little talk that I give to the high school history classes that was born right there because they wanted me to make a little talk to them. The main speaker was an admiral some retired admiral. And I had to follow him and I said thanks a lot you guys put a guy in a good situation man that's a hard act to follow. So I wrote a little kind of sketchy little thing and that's where that little talk I got was born. And so anyway we out there in the after going on that English frigate there was a man in charge of that harbor that landing traffic. We had to find out where to go and what to do.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: And they had put us on an LCI off of that English frigate. And he said, we were close enough you could see Omaha Beach, he said you see that Omaha Beach he told that guy. You just point that right at

it and don't ever shut it off just run it right up on the sand. So he did that and in doing that we passed in front of a great big ole battleship with 16 inch guns you know I don't know I don't remember whether it was the Nevada or the Missouri or one of them. The Missouri was sunk wasn't it in Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: Pearl Harbor

Salley: Well one of them great big heavy ones you know. And they were shelling Carrington just in.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Salley: Not too far. And they let go of the broadside and I thought that muzzle blaster was going to beach us. Boy but we got on shore and then we didn't have anything.

Interviewer: I was going to say you didn't have any equipment did you. Did you even have a rifle?

Salley: No nothing

Interviewer: All that went down with the Susan B.

Salley: That's the reason they took us there wasn't so much fighting going on Utah Beach.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: It was the first one to the west it was Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword. And they took us about a mile inland and they got us some trenching tools. Enough to scratch us a hole in the ground and get down below small arms fire you know for the night.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: Then the next day they re-outfitted us with everything we needed for the they had stacks of it one the beaches down there you know guns and raincoats and gas masks. And then we went finally went on in to where we were supposed to go our battalion or our company was at a bidwhack at a farmhouse in a French farmhouse.

Interviewer: How long did it take you to get I mean as a supply sergeant the company turns to you for their logistical needs but everything you had went down with the ship. How long did it take to get things sorted out? Was there a lot of confusion for several days?

Salley: There's points in that war I can sometimes when I haven't got anything else to do I can start thinking about stuff that happened and there's spot in there I don't remember nothing. I mean like just for instance and it's not very significant but when the war was over we were down in Austria and I took a we drove from oh it Loafer Austria we were there for a while but there was another little town south. We drove from there to Lexar France and I don't and I don't' hardly remember anything about that road trip. I road in a two and a half ton truck with all the stuff on it for the company. Don't remember anything about the ride and there is spots like that.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Salley: And I don't know how long it took us to get our equipment back after we got situated in Normandy.

Interviewer: Sure I was just curious because it seemed having lost everything that it would take a while before the logistical system which was your main function would start to work right again where you could start issuing you know ammunition and food and things out to the troops.

Salley: And so anyway that was probably after we got settled there it was about the 9th or 10th of June or something like that.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: And the 13th our battalion commander was killed Lieutenant or Lieutenant Colonel John C Papus.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Salley: And I told Colonel Cox a story yesterday that he had never heard before and very few people have ever heard this. I told General McCalif one time several years back and it didn't excite him too much. So I don't know if it's true or not. I told the last year I told the officers and noncommissioned officers of the engineer battalion at Fort Campbell I told them that story. But I told it before I did I asked the battalion or the battalion commander if I could if he thought it would be alright. He said you tell them guys anything you want to because that's what they need to know.

Interviewer: Sure

Salley: So okay well on the 13th Colonel Papus being the engineer battalion commander was automatically the division engineer officer.

Interviewer: Okay

Salley: And all bridges and anything for instance that needed to be inspected or roads that needed to be fixed he'd take a look at anywhere the division permitted. So on the 13th he went out on a bridge reconnaissance and he took with him in a jeep he took Dominic Calley who was about a 19 year old Italian boy nice friend a good friend of mine he was a machine gunner on the jeep. The jeep driver who was a friend of mine I knew him. There was Captain Rodgers from one of our companies I don't remember which in the battalion great big guy seven foot tall, Colonel Papus and then there was a there was a quarter master colonel with them and I don't know why what he was doing with them but he was with them. Well they got ambushed the Germans cut a big log down in front of them and behind them and they had them on the road there. So when they realized finally that they were cut off of course everybody bailed out. Well they killed Dominic Calley right there and Colonel Papus and Captain Rodgers got out and headed for the woods run for the woods. And the jeep driver Drennan that was his name he and that quarter master colonel went on the other side of the road there was a farm house over there they made it to that and they got back alive they were the only ones. And they had five flat tires on the jeep when they got back so they were shooting at them all the way out and in and everything else you know. But when I got back to England I was in a tavern one night and I got to talking to a graves registration sergeant that had picked up their bodies Colonel Papus and Captain Rodgers. Now you've got to know this story Colonel Papus was about that tall a little Greek fellow and he just hated anybody that was taller than he was.

Interviewer: That was probably everybody in the battalion.

Salley: Yeah just about. And he was I don't know I don't feel right telling you about it I told it to not too many people know it. He would he would set a curfew at night for the officers to be in if they went to town. And they had to sign in and it was a on your honor.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Salley: If it was 11 o'clock at 11:10 you signed in ten minutes late that sort of thing. So he abided by that too Colonel Papus. And he'd go out and stay out on purpose until a quarter after 11 come in and sign in late and restrict himself to a company headquarters a company area for a week just so he could get at them officers. And he'd come out and he'd fall a whole battalion out in front of that dazzling manner you know and he'd come out with a riding curt and a pair of riding gloves and he'd just stand there in front of them with his hands behind his back and just look at the whole battalion rock up and down on the balls of his feet. Never say a word for maybe fifteen minutes and finally he'd turn around and walk away and they'd excuse the battalion. Just I'll tell you and I got along with that guy just handsomely man I never had a bit of problem that's what I was telling Colonel Cox yesterday. But anyway this grave registration sergeant we got to talking about it and he said let me tell you something Colonel Papus was shot in the back with an army 45 revolver and Captain Rodgers was right behind him.

Interviewer: My God

Salley: So I told that later on I told that to General McCall one night at a reunion. But I was telling X.B. yesterday how well I got along with Colonel Papus. And while we were in Normandy or in England before Normandy everybody had a trench knife and in the supply room I had a big wooden box with a cover on it and a pad lock on it and everybody had to bring their knives down there and put their name on them and we locked them in that box so they couldn't take them to town and get in a fight. So just before we went to Normandy we passed them out again. Of course Colonel Papus had brought his knife down only it wasn't a trench knife. Somebody right here in Orlando I remember I think he was from Orlando. Somebody had made him the most beautiful hump knife hand made you ever saw. It had a leather handle and a big engraved blade on that dutifully he brought it down. Well when he come to get it it wasn't there. I have no idea where it was and I knew I was on my way home right then I was discharged from the army right now. You know that man never said a word he turned around and walked out of the supply room and I never heard a thing about it.

Interviewer: Any idea what happened to it?

Salley: Well later on I did find out the sergeant major of the battalion got it someday. I don't know he lived in Shreveport Louisiana and he told me himself that he had it. I don't know how he got it unless the guys who worked for me in the supply room had a key or got one to that padlock or something. I have no idea no way. But Colonel Papus was just I just got along great with him I had no complaints but everybody else didn't like him. So and then just here a couple of weeks ago I told Colonel Cox that I said I was watching a golf game here they were playing a tournament out in Hawaii and there was John Papus a young fellow playing golf. And I got to thinking real seriously about that if that couldn't be him. He would be like his grandson you know or of course I guess Papus is like Johnson, Peterson

Interviewer: Fairly common Greek name.

Salley: Yeah Papus yeah but so then anyway then we got back to England and we had a new battalion commander then Mosley Colonel Mosley. And fooled around there until September we finally took off for the invasion of Holland. And we took off from Chill Bolton airfield in southern Holland about 12:30 one day and a tug plane pulled us off the ground.

Interviewer: So this time they had enough gliders to get you.

Salley: Yeah and I rode in the copilot's seat and we had a jeep in there and the jeep driver rode in the jeep. So it took us we landed in Holland it took us three and half hours to cross the North Sea after got organized and near got the group and convoy of gliders and tug planes. And this pilot said to me when we got on said did you ever fly an airplane never did well he said there's a wheel in front of you just take a hold of it said if I tell you to let go of it let go of it. And he said that wing out there if it gets a little high on you just kick it down it'll go down. And he said stay a little above the tug plane out of the prop wash you know and no problem. And then he said the reason I'm telling you this is one of us is going to land this thing. Thanks a lot. Well anyway we had on our left wing our tug plane wasn't pulling two gliders it was a C47 a C46 couldn't pull two gliders.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: But there was a plane over there pretty close and we had one of the company officers in there just him I suppose because it had a load of TNT in it. And they caught some flak and they just disappeared. When we looked out later didn't hear nothing but well there was a little bit their tug boat was longer they were behind us for some reason. But we looked out there and their tug boat was just flopping and I found that captain's grave about 20 years later. There's a marker out in the cemetery in Southern Holland. And so then we landed we landed about a mile north of Son Holland and there was a bridge there in Son. Of course the 101st division had they dropped the 101st division right startle this road from the Belgium border north to well I'm not sure but they dropped the 101st and the 82nd both of us startle that road from the Belgium boarder to Arnold.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: And we were to keep that open. And there was a bridge there in Son and the God darn Germans blew it before we got there. So they made a temporary bridge and then the finally some tank outfit British tank outfit made a good bridge out there. I got a letter from that guy that was in that unit here about a year ago.

Interviewer: Oh is that right

Salley: Wanting to know he realized saw my name on the unit that I was in the engineer battalion and he said how much they appreciated the engineers ride their tanks after they got across that river. Because they are all in the infantry is busy mopping up towns down south that they come through. And so we fooled around there for a while and then we had a company commander that was just a camera happy guy. He was just wanted to take a picture of anything that even moved. And every time something happened along that road of course the British the Germans would run in there with tanks every once in a while and just cup that road in two.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: And back them tanks up back to back and just fire up and down that road as far as they could. It was a suicide mission.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Salley: But as long as it lasted they were in control you know. So that happened one day up by ____ and that was the first town north of Son. And it was back over in that it doesn't matter they cut the road. And he'd holler Salley get your equipment and I knew just exactly what we were gonna do we were gonna go take pictures. So we got up there and there's them two tanks they'd been knocked out by that time. And we had a quarter ton trailer behind the jeep too. We always took that in case there was something to salvage. So we got going down the road up there and there's a German motorcycle laying in the ditch on the side over there and the front wheel was still going around. And the German he was laying over in the other ditch dead and oh we had to get that motorcycle. So we threw that on the jeep took it back to company you know. Got it back there and somebody had fired a shot at that German when he was going away from them on that motorcycle. And the bullet had hit the top of the back fender and went right up through the seat right straight up the seat.

Interviewer: Oh for drying out loud.

Salley: Then there was a day or two later after that they had another tank battle at what was the name of that next town north.

Interviewer: Iowan

Salley: No it was oh that was St. Olen where we just were.

Interviewer: Okay

Salley: The next one was Veckle that's right. Well they had there was a bridge there too and they had C no A company of our battalion was having some problems there. And there was a captain oh we called him mousey he was a West Point graduate had a little bit of a mustache about that wide right there it was just like Hitler's. Oh captain something it might come to me but he was they were he was under attack up there and he called back he wanted some mines and some caps. So we got in the jeep the jeep driver took a trailer load of mines and we put the caps up in front of the jeep and we got up there maybe 500 yards from that bridge and man I'll tell you the small arms fire was just so hot that you couldn't stand up you didn't feel like. And so we stopped right there and the jeep driver and I crawled down in the ditch alongside of the road. And Captain ____ crawled up there to see let's see captain well anyway he come back pretty soon and he said well he don't need those mines said he died in my arms. And just before he got there he said the Germans had seen him he was standing up or something and they took one of them machine pistols they had and just cut his head off they cut him right through here. And several years later in fact after the war I was over there for one of our reunions I saw his picture over there, I'll tell you about that too. So anyway we went on we worked out way north from then until we got up to Noatum and we went across the river to go around what they called the island.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: And we were bid whacking an orchard over there and about the only action that I saw there one night they were making river crossings in the arm and that British first airborne division was getting

hammered you know. So there was a dike up there right along I don't know if it's the Wall or the ____ Rhine or one of them. One was the North Rhine and the Wall River and the ____ Cannel and all. And there was a Canadian outfit right on that dike making river crossings over there every night trying to get some of them guys from that British first airborne over there. And there was a Canadian colonel in charge of it and so he called down there he wanted some rubber assault boats to make them river crossings. I took a load of British they had collapsible rubber assault boats that you could stack them on a two and a half ton truck and get half a dozen of them on there.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: So I took them up there and got about maybe a half three quarters of a mile from where he was and the MPs stopped me said you can't go no further. I said why they said that road from up here to the dike is about every ten minutes the Germans or fifteen minutes they mortar that thing just hammer it you know. He said if you think you can you can't go in that truck but he said if you think you can make it up there report to that colonel you go ahead but you can't take the truck up there. So I run up there to that oh I can't think of the name of that little town there right tight up against the dike. And everybody was gone there wasn't a sole in that town and it was just as quiet as you could. And I go down through the town through the street of that little town you know and a shutter a wood shutter on a house you know it blowing the wind a little just squeak and man just scare you to death.

Interviewer: I bet

Salley: Anyway I got up on the dike and I reported to that colonel told him I had his boats. And he was just drunker than the lord just absolutely drunk. Yeah he didn't need them right then he said I suppose he need to be drunk to get them boats to go across that river. Didn't need them then but you go on back and if I need them I'll call you. Well we never got the call. So then we worked our way a little further north well not that was as far as we ever got north in Holland. Then in January of course we or September November we left there we were there 73 days.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: And we went to

Interviewer: Went back to rest camp in France.

Salley: Yeah we went back to Mourmelon.

Interviewer: Yes sir that's where you got trucked from there into Bastogne.

Salley: Yeah we turned everything in oh everybody got passes to Paris and it was getting closer to Christmas and my dad sent me a brand new wallet with a 20 dollar bill in it you know and man I was going to Paris with that thing. And one night about two or three o'clock in the morning we had out supplies the four companies in the battalion we had our supply rooms in a horse stable and they were all of them in a row. Headquarter, A Company, B Company, C Company and so here come this guy from A Company this supply sergeant he come beating on my door and I let him in about two o'clock in the morning. He said get out the cards you got a deck of cards? I said yeah what do you want to do with them he said I'll cut them for you with you the man that gets the highest card gets 100 bucks. You've got to be out of your mind what's the idea? I said I don't want to lose no 100 bucks. He said well it ain't

going to make no difference where you're going you ain't going to be able to spend no 100 bucks. He heard we were going to Bastogne see.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: So well we cut the cards and I ended up with a 100 bucks. So anyway we go the whole division we re-outfitted in 24 hours and we were on our way you know. We went in trucks that time all night long in open trucks stood up cold it was 109 miles from ____ to Nijmegen or Bastogne. And took us we got there early in the morning nine o'clock or something. And the Germans knew we were coming you know I mean we had headlights on all the way up there and that was no secret. So they just opened up their lines and let us in and shut the lines and they had us for eight days.

Interviewer: Out there there really wasn't much of a job for a supply sergeant was there you didn't really have any supplies.

Salley: No the first stop I made it wasn't woods but it was a group of trees I remember. And it was along a big open field like it had been a hay field in the summertime great big thing. And I didn't have a foxhole you really couldn't dig a foxhole very quick it was froze pretty good.

Interviewer: Hard sure

Salley: So we had some chainsaws that I had in the truck about six of them and I'd stacked them up on top of each other so there was an opening underneath right on the ground I could kind of get under there and get some protection you know. The second night I thought well I'll in the meantime I don't know maybe it took two days I got a foxhole dug and it was right along the fence line. And I was getting ready to move into that thing and here come a mortar down and it was five German tanks coming right down that big open field. And there was a tank destroyer going to move in right beside my foxhole and I said that ain't no place for me.

Interviewer: No that's not a good place to hide.

Salley: I've got to vacate that place. So we stayed there a few days and then we moved across the road into a nice woods. And it was kind of on the side of a hill and everything was so mixed up there I mean the 9th armor division and the 10th armor division they were all running around there loose. And we had some guys with us from the 9th armor division that got lost and they just attacked themselves to our company. And this one night the company commander Captain ____ he put me up on guard with another young kid way up right on the top of the hill and that was the edge of the woods too. And we had a big bon fire burning all night it didn't make any difference you could go down there get warm you know.

Interviewer: It's not like the Germans didn't know you were there.

Salley: The Germans knew you were there they were right there with you had their uniforms on and everything else. One time a guy a couple of them drove up in a jeep out there and said to one of our guys he said hey buddy where's company headquarters? And if you told him man about 15 minutes from then company headquarters would get a shellacking then.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: So they had a Germans had a general or a colonel or somebody that was that's all his unit did they were trained for that. And they could speak perfect English and they knew all the baseball players that we had.

Interviewer: Right the slang and

Salley: Yeah anyway this guy and I had been up there all night long in that cold you know. And it was just beginning to get light a little bit light and I looked down the hill down there we were just looking down there. And I saw a couple of guys they'd run over behind a tree and another guy would come over behind a bush and they were getting closer all the time. And finally guy Tony Desal his name was he had been laying there on that ground all night long and he finally he got up and he stretched like that you know. I said Tony get down I knew they could see him right against that light you know. He didn't get sit down the shot rang out and got him right in the gut he sat down right there and died. And it was those two guys coming up to relieve us from guard duty.

Interviewer: So it was two Americans.

Salley: Yeah the 9th armor guys the company commander had sent up there. So well then that was that was just about the 24th I think of December. And that day I had a good friend from Shreveport Louisiana Corporal Gerard he'd said Salley how about tomorrow that was Christmas Day said how would you like to jam your legs under a table and get some chicken and gravy and all that stuff you know. We talked about it and oh that would be great you know. Well Christmas day there was nother ridge kind of a high piece of ground on the other side of the woods from us and there was a big ole tiger tank come right on top of that going on and two or three little tanks the Germans had following. Looked like a duck and then three following ducks coming well our company commander he was going to be a big hero and he was gonna knock that tiger tank out with a bazooka. So right in the point of that woods down there is Gerard he had foxhole and a machine gun 30 caliber machine gun. So then Carol said Gerard cover me I'm gonna crawl across this ditch and I'm gonna get up there and get that guy. Well when he when Gerard started firing at that tiger tank you might as well have thrown popcorn at it you know. And I saw that dog gone tank he stopped and shifted gears and the turned that turret right around and pointed that big 88 right at the corner of that woods you know and he fired one shot. Well it was short the distance wasn't right. He shot the second time and right behind Gerard's foxhole there was a tree about that big around and that shell hit that tree and cut it right off about that high above the ground and a piece of shrap metal went right down through the top of Gerard's helmet and came out his face. And then after that well it was the 26th of December when Patton broke through.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: A friend of mine had got a piece of shrap metal in his heel and it went through his overshoe and his combat boot and everything and he didn't even know it it was just like a hair off your head you know. It just went right through there and then he didn't know it until it festered a couple days later. And he was up there in Bastogne in a hospital and another fellow and I went up to visit him and that was exactly the time that Patton broke through. And of course you know they brought about 50 ambulances in there. There was nothing anywhere but ambulances and if you were in that building let me tell you buster they didn't ask you no questions they jammed you up on an ambulance and you were gone. And they got me and this other

Interviewer: And you weren't hurt?

Sallie: No no we were just visiting this guy. And they took us down to Mets France and there we got in a big well I think there was a replacement depot there. Got in this great big building and there was a nice big open wall like that and some German some artist had drawn a map of the area right there the main road and everything. And that main road went right back down there to Mourmelon. And I said to this guy that was with me Big Dog is all I can think of they called him I said look all we've got to do is just walk out of here. They don't know we're here no more than nothing get on that road and we've got a rear echelon right there in Mourmelon we can get back home. And he wouldn't do it so I stayed with him and we horsed around and we didn't get back to our outfit until February and they were down in Alsay Serine.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: Well they fooled around down there and then we went to I think we went up north then up by ____ up in ____ or did we go back no I guess we went back to Mourmelon for a little while because we were there twice. Then we went up there by ____ we were on the west side of the Rhine River from ____.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: A little town I was in called Munchin Glodenbak

Interviewer: I've been there.

Salley: Have you?

Interviewer: Sure I have

Salley: I've been there too since then. And we made they were making river crossings every night they'd go across the river.

Interviewer: Right

Salley: They'd go down there was a big expanse of flat ground before you'd get to I don't know what you call it it kind of just tapered down to the river and no trees or nothing. And we'd carry them lousy lifeboats down there and had outboard motors on them and you couldn't whisper you couldn't make the least bit of noise nothing. Sit them in the water real easy and then wow you could hear that thing clear back to New York. Gee well anyway they run out of these little sealed two cylinders. Every guy had a life jacket on and he had two little CO2 cylinders and if you got in the water there was a little string hanging out about that far and you'd pull one of them and they would blow your life belt up. Well they had run out of them so they told me said you go find some more of them and you go up to the 3rd army Patton's 3rd army they were up by Vessel I think Vessel Germany but they were headed east. And I so I went up there and I started chasing them and I couldn't catch them. I could not catch them so I turned around and went back and the company commander said well there's an engineer depot in Paris and you know how far we were from Paris.

Interviewer: Sure

Salley: We had to get down there and get some. Man I made that trip down there to get them and well I got them.

Tape ended