

Interviewer: My name is Sarah Spencer and the date is April 21, 2005. What is your name and your birth date?

Harris: I'm Thomas V Harris birth date January 24, 1921.

Interviewer: Alright where were you born?

Harris: I was born in Cheatham County.

Interviewer: Did you grow up there?

Harris: No we lived there until I was two years old and then we moved to Montgomery County.

Interviewer: What did your parents do?

Harris: They were farmers.

Interviewer: What are your recollections of the great depression?

Harris: Oh man I just know it was a hard time. Everybody had it hard though it wasn't any money to be made you worked for 50 cents a day sometimes you might get 75 cents a day and that's from sun up till sundown. Can you hear me alright?

Interviewer: Uh huh. Did you hold a job at all during the great depression?

Harris: No I wasn't old enough during the great depression I was just a kid and I started school about seven and it was beginning to get a little better then.

Interviewer: I saw in this little biography here you were in part of the civilian conservation core. How did you get that job with them what led you to go to work with them?

Harris: That was one of Roosevelt's programs it was kind of like welfare program really only you worked for it. It paid \$30 a month and you stayed in camp they sent \$25 of that home that was during part of the depression that was help your parents.

Interviewer: How did you get that job?

Harris: Well there wasn't any job to it you just went down and signed up and if you qualified you got in. If you didn't why you if you had a decent living you didn't get in it was just for the poor I guess.

Interviewer: What did you do as part of the CCC?

Harris: Oh we had little rocks out of big ones we worked at a rock query and they used the rock to gravel roads there in the mountains.

Interviewer: Where in the mountains were you?

Harris: I was in Caves Cove up in the Great Smokey Mountains.

Interviewer: How long were you there?

Harris: I just stayed in there ten months. I decided I could do better than that so I just you could get out anytime you wanted to if you write the lieutenant saying you had a better job so I just wrote him a letter and told him I had a better job.

Interviewer: What was your job?

Harris: Well I went to Detroit and just got me a job up there you know in the factory.

Interviewer: What kind of factory did you work in?

Harris: It was well they called it Hub Mobile it was a part of General Motors. We made the front wheel drive to the army trucks.

Interviewer: What did you do in the factory what was your particular job?

Harris: Oh I was on one of the drill presses just a monotonous job just standing there drilling holes in a piece of metal and passing it on to someone else.

Interviewer: Did you like that better than the CCC?

Harris: Oh yeh well it paid a lot better.

Interviewer: How long did you do that for?

Harris: I worked there around two years probably then the army got me then. I was a draftee I didn't volunteer.

Interviewer: Were you what was your feeling when you got drafted were you worried or excited or?

Harris: Well not really I was just a young punk I didn't think much about it just everybody was going you know so I thought just my time I guess.

Interviewer: What date were you drafted do you remember around the time?

Harris: I can remember the year 1942. I think it was November.

Interviewer: So do you remember the bombing of Pearl Harbor? Were you worried that perhaps you'd be drafted or?

Harris: Well let's see that was before I went into service. Well I guess it kind of worried me because I thought maybe we were asleep I think we should have known better. It's about the same way with bombing of the towers I think I may say things you don't want to hear

Interviewer: No that's okay whatever you say is fine.

Harris: I think the CIA was asleep I think the FBI was asleep if they'd have both been awake this never would have happened I don't think.

Interviewer: And that's how you felt about Pearl Harbor too?

Harris: Yeh

Interviewer: Did you ever think that you would be drafted during that time or

Harris: Oh yeh I knew I would be it was just a matter of time.

Interviewer: So you lived in Detroit when you were drafted?

Harris: Yeh

Interviewer: Where did you go once you were drafted?

Harris: We left from Michigan and went to Camp Walden Texas. That's close to Fort Worth, Texas that's when they had the infantry it was an infantry basic training.

Interviewer: What was your training like? What did it consist of?

Harris: Kind of ruff it was in it you know you walk everywhere you go you know you don't ride anything. So we had basic training in M1 riffle, machine gun 30 caliber machine gun, E1 mortars so you qualified in all of that.

Interviewer: What were your days like did you have to get up early and run or?

Harris: You know the army you get up early then wait we'd get up before daylight get your pack on and everything then lay around for an hour or two then part of the time you had exercise each day there wasn't too running. Just more or less exercising real good I guess you'd say. Some running in it but we had combat obstacles I guess you would say that you had to train on climb the walls and things like that.

Interviewer: How long did the training last?

Harris: Oh 16 weeks.

Interviewer: Okay

Harris: Which was very little to send you into combat you know.

Interviewer: Right

Harris: But we were needed so bad there was so many getting killed over there they trained you just as fast as they could they said.

Interviewer: So when were you done with training do you remember?

Harris: Oh let's see 42, 43 must have been the middle of 43 probably.

Interviewer: Okay did you feel prepared at the end of your training?

Harris: Well to tell you the truth I guess I was just kind of ignorant. I didn't know I knew we had good training there but I didn't know for sure what we were getting into. So you don't think too much about it.

Interviewer: Did you develop a close relationship with the men you were training with? Did you get to stay with the same men the whole time or were they moving you around?

Harris: Well we had basic training with the same guys but when they shipped you out they scattered you then. Part went to the infantry part went to the artillery I don't know just moved you ever which way. Overseas I stayed with the same outfit overseas the whole time I was over there had the same Sargent the Lieutenants got killed two or three of them got killed so they would just send another one in there. But most of the time you stayed with the same group.

Interviewer: Where did you go once you were done with your training?

Harris: You mean from basic training?

Interviewer: From basic training.

Harris: Oh we shipped out from there to Camp Killman which I mention in the writing. Camp Killman was a base where they shipped you out to go overseas.

Interviewer: It was on the East Coast?

Harris: East Coast.

Interviewer: Where on the East Coast?

Harris: Close to New Jersey, New York, New Jersey.

Interviewer: What did you do at Camp Killman?

Harris: Oh we just stayed there a day or two.

Interviewer: Oh it was just like a holding kind of area.

Harris: Just a holding place long enough to get a ship in and put you on it.

Interviewer: What are your recollections of the troop ship?

Harris: Oh sea sick you don't eat I ate very little food cause I was always so sick. It was rough we went across in a convoy I think it took us about 14 days. I don't know and to make it worse I guess we rode a British ship and they fed fish about half the time which I didn't like.

Interviewer: Were you excited to get to go into actually what you were trained for or you just nervous or?

Harris: Well not really but it was just one of those things you just took for granted you know you were trained so nothing you could do about it. I guess you might played off crazy and got out I don't know whether you could have or not. I didn't think much about it.

Interviewer: Where did you land once you got over there?

Harris: At Casa Blanca and we stayed there a few days and they were fighting up in Tunisia and we were going across I remember going across the city of Iran and Algeria and they called it Tunis I believe Tunisia. And we got almost up to the front line there and the Germans gave up and started pulling out so we didn't get into battle there.

Interviewer: Now what did you do when you first got to Casa Blanca did you have any training there?

Harris: No no had tents they figured your training was over you just had tents to get in you just go by numbers. So they just move you from one place to another until they got you up on the front line if they needed you. No training there.

Interviewer: Were you with the same so did you start to develop a relationship with the men in the group by the time you made it through the troop ship and?

Harris: Not really you was just all strangers to each other. Your friendly you talk to each other but no relationship really.

Interviewer: Did you write home often? Did you have an opportunity to write at all?

Harris: Not too much they used female.

Interviewer: Okay I've heard of that.

Harris: You've heard of that? You'd write it all and they'd make a copy of it and if there's anything in there that they don't like they mark it out or the letters not, my mother died when I was young and my daddy kind of moved around place to place. So I wrote to my sister more than anything.

Interviewer: Would you get letters or care packages from her?

Harris: Not much no not much.

Interviewer: So how long were you in Africa total?

Harris: Oh we were only there probably a month maybe two months I can't remember for sure. But we left from Africa to Sicily we went across there on those little ole landing craft barges they call them.

Interviewer: Did you know what your mission was going to be in Sicily?

Harris: We knew we was going to land on the beach we didn't know for sure what we was going to run up against. But the Italians didn't want to fight much it was easier to whip them than it was the Germans

cause they would give up they wanted to get out of it as quick as they could. So it took us in all about 30 days to concur Sicily.

Interviewer: So you landed on the beaches and invaded from there?

Harris: No we went from there to England.

Interviewer: Okay

Harris: We stayed in England oh I don't know six months to a year probably something like that before we made the invasion on D-Day. But we were training we went through rigorous training there every day.

Interviewer: So when you were in Sicily were you in combat actually?

Harris: Oh the whole time.

Interviewer: Really

Harris: See it took thirty days then we stayed there a few days just long enough to get organized and ship us to England.

Interviewer: What was the combat like were you using trenches or what was the experience in Italy?

Harris: Well not too much in Sicily it was we was moving so fast it didn't do much good to dig a hole or anything you was just running from building to building. Sometimes you'd stay over night and dig you a fox hole maybe or a slip trench or something. But they were pretty well organized and didn't take long to whip them

Interviewer: Where would you sleep at night?

Harris: On the ground?

Interviewer: Just on the ground in the open?

Harris: Yeh anywhere you could find a place. You don't have a house or anything to sleep in just wherever dark catches you.

Interviewer: When you would take over towns in Italy would you ever got to go through them and swim in their pools or do anything for leisure at all?

Harris: No most of the time when we captured a town it was torn all to pieces.

Interviewer: Already

Harris: The air force got a hold of it then the artillery then the infantry come in so by the time they get through with it there's not anything left. You've probably seen pictures of it and it looks just like it.

Interviewer: Were you on foot the entire time?

Harris: All the time all the time. Somebody asked me onetime what I rode when I was in the service I told them I didn't know I had anything to ride.

Interviewer: So how long were you in Sicily after you were pretty much done concurring the area?

Harris: Probably two or three weeks maybe I don't know.

Interviewer: What did you do during that time?

Harris: Trained it's not much to do you know when you've done tore all the towns down and everything so maybe trained a little bit but most of the time just wait until time to ship out again.

Interviewer: And did you know what you were getting ready to get into in England?

Harris: Not really they told us we were going to England that's all we knew. We didn't know where or anything but we landed in England I reckon it was the Southern part in Wayman's that's one of the largest sea ports. From there we I don't know what the name was of the little ole place we went to but it was only about a thirty minutes ride from Wayman. It was some of the British quarters that we took over you know to train.

Interviewer: Now when you started training in England did you realize what you were training for

Harris: Yeh

Interviewer: Or did you just think you were doing more training?

Harris: No we knew we was getting ready for the invasion but we didn't know when. You know that was a secret didn't anybody know until the day before.

Interviewer: Right

Harris: We were on the boats one time they put us on the ships and we stayed 30 days thinking we were going then they took us back to land to England. The next time we went it was the real McCoy.

Interviewer: Now by the time you got to England you had already seen combat. Did you feel like your training in England was any different because you had already been there you had already

Harris: Not really, went over the same thing machine guns, riffles.

Interviewer: Were you any more hesitant or nervous about the experience because you already knew sort of what was going to happen?

Harris: Not really it's rather funny you'll get a little nervous until the shooting starts then you kindly forget about it. Just think well every mans for himself just shoot who you can.

Interviewer: So what was your training like in England?

Harris: In England? Typical to basic training running problems and shooting at the dummies and things like that.

Interviewer: Did you do any special you know amphibious landing you know practicing getting out of the boats?

Harris: No

Interviewer: So the first time you actually jumped into the water was when you were on the beaches of France?

Harris: No the first time was in we left to go invade Sicily.

Interviewer: Okay

Harris: And they put us on those landing craft and the front end comes down so they run it just as far as they can until they hit the beach then they lower the gate and you just run off of it. Now when we made the invasion of France we were on those big troop carriers. And we meant to they meant for us to go down the rope ladders, you've probably seen them, but the sea it was so rough that we couldn't get down it so they brought the boats up to the top part of the barge with cables. Then we got in and they lowered us down to go to hit the beach it was really rough.

Interviewer: What were your feelings while you were in that boat getting ready to move up on to the beach?

Harris: I reckon just like everybody else I hope the hell get there.

Interviewer: At that point had you become any closer to the men knowing what you were doing?

Harris: Well maybe a little bit maybe a little bit. It's kind of funny everybody's kind of from themselves thinking I may get killed I may not.

Interviewer: Did you have like a battle buddy or a what do they call it a trench buddy?

Harris: No you're all pretty well you're close you're going to help each other all you can. But as far as real buddies I don't guess you had any.

Interviewer: And you'd have the same Sergeant from Sicily to England and now where you're about to go to France?

Harris: No after D-Day I had the same Sergeant. I don't remember who I had in Sicily.

Interviewer: Really do you remember who your Sergeant was leading you into France?

Harris: I can't remember his name to save my life.

Interviewer: Did you feel like he was going to be a good leader? Did you trust him?

Harris: He was good and we had one lieutenant I remember a second lieutenant King was his name but the artillery they laid in on us one evening with artillery and he broke his leg so he left I never did see him anymore. Then they sent us a new one in and he was good then we got one ole first lieutenant that had a yellow streak up and down his back so got ride of him.

Interviewer: So when you guys invaded I remember in your little biography here that you were the second group of guys to go in. What was it I mean what was it like to jump into the water and see everything around you?

Harris: If you hadn't have know that 16th had gone in you wouldn't have know whether you were in the first invasion or the second wave that went it because they was still on the beach trying to get in you know. They had so much material out in the ocean and all that it was hard to get the boats in there so when they went as far as they could they dumped you. Sometime you jumped we jumped off in water about waste deep. But you know our tanks most of them drowned. They were supposed to have them where they could float but out of the 28 if I'm not mistaken I think about 3 or 4 of them got on the beach the rest of them just when they went off the boat they just went on down.

Interviewer: So when you jumped in the water I mean all of a sudden your clothes are wet everything you have on you are you worried your going to lose something or

Harris: No you was just worried about getting on the beach that's your order. You won't lose anything its all tied on you.

Interviewer: Did you have to keep your gun out of the water could it not get wet or

Harris: You tried to those M1s would fire whether they were wet or dry.

Interviewer: Oh they would so it didn't matter.

Harris: You didn't soak em in water. A lot of times I put a raincoat around my gun instead of around myself keep it dry. But they were one of the best at the time.

Interviewer: So once you got on the beach were all of was your units or platoon still together or did you have to find your Sargent? What were you thinking?

Harris: They were scattered some the first night we got back together pretty good we had those little snappers you've seen it on TV probably.

Interviewer: I don't think so describe it to me.

Harris: Well it's the same thing as a password you'd snap it once and if your buddies were around anywhere they would snap twice to answer you.

Interviewer: Oh okay

Harris: So that's how we got back together.

Interviewer: Once you got on the beach what were you trying to do what was your

Harris: Well your objective was to get off the beach. That's where they were murdering us shooting artillery and machine guns at us. So our objective was to get past the beach and knock out the machine guns if we could. So we could get on in to land fall off that beach.

Interviewer: Did you lose any of your unit in the invasion?

Harris: Oh yeh yeh I'd say 50 percent of them.

Interviewer: Was that upsetting when you got back together and realized that half your friends were gone?

Harris: Probably it would be now but I was young I was in my 20s I guess I thought well I'm one of the lucky ones. So you don't worry too much about that I don't guess you're concerned but you've got so many things to do that you don't worry too much about that.

Interviewer: So once you got back together that night what did you guys do that night were you able to sleep or did you have to keep guard?

Harris: About the first week we stayed on the beach just up on the hill part. You got very little sleep you just watch the artillery firing and the navy guns firing at the planes they were sending in and so we kind of formed a line you tried to form a line you know and try to help protect yourself.

Interviewer: So you eventually took the beach. What did you have to do just get ride of the rest of the Germans or take them prisoner?

Harris: The Air Force and artillery beat them up enough that the infantry didn't have much to do with them right there on the beach because they were glad to get off the Germans were. SO then as the infantry goes on in kind of I guess you'd say take certain areas. Then there's no trouble for the rest of them to come on the beach then that's when all your big jobs your trucks come in with food and carrying the troops forward. The tanks are on land by then their making their way in shooting and the airplanes still bombing the Navy guns they shoot in they shoot about 20 miles in so they help you a lot too.

Interviewer: So while you were waiting up on the beach head what did you eat C-rations?

Harris: You have C-rations you know those little can rations. But you don't stay on the beach you just keep moving. The first night we moved in a piece next night we move in but it still took us a week or two to get where you couldn't see the beach.

Interviewer: Okay so what was your mission once you got off the beach and you were moving? Did you know where you were going?

Harris: Not really they just see on a map they'd show the Sargent this is the area you're going to take. So we'd just take the area it may be a little town it may be a little hill where they've got a machine gun on.

In the infantry you don't know much about where you are. Some of these boys come back and talk about where they've been and I said you weren't in the infantry if you did you wouldn't have known where you were most of the time.

Interviewer: So you don't really see the big picture you just see the immediate we're going to get this.

Harris: Right

Interviewer: So what was your first mission when you guys got off the beach?

Harris: I don't guess you say there was any particular mission we just knew we was going to concur the whole country there. So you just move out a little at a time sometimes the tanks would get ahead of you and shoot up everything then we would go in pass that town. So no slow missions just the idea that you weren't happy until you got to Germany.

Interviewer: What would you do when you would take a town? Was there any would you get to spend the night there would you get to sleep in their beds would you get to do anything different?

Harris: No it wouldn't be anything different much. Most of the time people would all leave it would be a deserted town so you would just set up the tanks and set up around where they could guard the town keep the Germans from coming in. You'd stay in a building sleep outside there's no sleeping in beds or anything like that you're a mole out there.

Interviewer: So where did you keep moving in France where was the next big place you remember getting to?

Harris: Oh I don't remember for sure I just know we fought across France and into Belgium which I mention there. I think I got five stars I think, five campaigns we went through. Anytime you went into another country you got a battle star for it put on a ribbon.

Interviewer: Now you talked in here about the Hurtgen Forest and what was that experience like? Did you what was the purpose did they tell you we've got to get through this forest or

Harris: Well that's just part of what was in front of us so you've got to get through that before you can get to another town. That was the purpose of going through the Hurtgen Forest and you just fight your way through it hoping you'll get out and to another town. And if your in there you know they've got roads and highways just like we have here so they'd set up block aids they'd put a tank right here so if anything came up the road you'd just shoot it and the same way in the forest. But it's worse fighting there cause the Air Force couldn't do much bombing cause they couldn't see for sure what to do.

Interviewer: Right so you were describing to me earlier about the pine trees.

Harris: Oh well that made up the forest and I said when the Germans they knew we were in there so they'd pick out any particular area they thought we were in they'd just shoot the shells in there and they would hit the trees and they'd burst and the shrap metal would fly everywhere so that's why its so bad on you. If your out in the field if the shell hits it won't scatter near as much as when it's hitting the trees.

Interviewer: You said you had the same Sargent once you got into France did you enjoy him was he a good leader?

Harris: Yeh we liked him yeh we had I can't remember his name I remember two Corporals we had I don't know whether they have Corporals now. That was two stripes I think I don't believe they have them anymore.

Interviewer: Sometimes they have them yes.

Harris: They were next to the Sargent they were real nice and they'd been in it through they had been fighting in Africa too. They were pretty well trained.

Interviewer: Now would you get new men in when you would lose men in your unit?

Harris: Yeh

Interviewer: And did you get guys that had never been in combat before?

Harris: Yeh replacements yeh.

Interviewer: What was your relationship with them? Did you maybe not trust them as much did they have a different

Harris: You'd trust them but you wouldn't send them out on a mission by themselves or anything. They would come in some of them scared to death and the Sargent he'd kindly calm them down. Then after one or two good shellins well they'd get used to it. You know what I mean by shellins? It's were their shooting at you and the artillery is bursting around you is that I'm talking about.

Interviewer: Were you ever wounded?

Harris: Never got a scratch, just lucky.

Interviewer: Did you have any friends that were wounded that were taken away?

Harris: Yeh and some got killed I knew they got killed some wounded where they'd take them back yeh.

Interviewer: Would you ever see the guys that got wounded return if they

Harris: No they was usually shot up so bad they was probably discharged. The ones that got killed you know they'd just take them on and ship them back here I think I don't know surely they shipped them back I know they didn't because they've got some burial grounds down on the beach and all.

Interviewer: So once you got through the Hurtgen Forest where did you guys go from there?

Harris: Well I'm not I don't remember exactly where the Hurtgen Forest was but we still hadn't got to Germany and that was our objective to get into Germany there you know. We were already in Germany I think Hurtgen Forest is in Germany.

Interviewer: Yeh I think so just on the border.

Harris: So it was just a push on we could have taken Germany I guess but we decided to let the Russians take it. They wanted it which saved us a lot of lives because they lost I forgot how many million more trying to take the Germans. So we just got up so close to it then we just stayed there until the Russians took it.

Interviewer: Just held the border?

Harris: I don't know how far we were from Berlin we weren't too far from Berlin.

Interviewer: What did you do once you stopped? Did you just kind of patrol the area or what was your job then?

Harris: We just set up landry defense they called it and some would watch take pull guard say half a day maybe at night maybe two or three hours at a time. Just more or less fun then we knew it was about over then.

Interviewer: Did you ever got to do anything leisure activities did you play any games or

Harris: No not there in England we got to go to the movies and things like that but not over there. IT was just strictly business.

Interviewer: So when you got guys got done there were you in Country in Victory in Europe Day?

Harris: I was in Germany when I got discharged. In other words depending on how many months you'd been over there whether you got points or not and I'd been in enough campaigns that I had enough points to get out. So as soon as they told me I had enough points to get out I started my papers you know to leave and then they'd ship you out. Sometimes there'd be two or three shipped out together to the back sometimes there might be a half a dozen. So you'd just pack up and turn in all your gear and come back this way then.

Interviewer: How did you feel when on Victory in Europe Day? How'd you feel when we were done there?

Harris: Well I was proud it was over tickled you know. I just thought well I'm one of the lucky ones so many of them didn't get out.

Interviewer: You talked about in your biography here about being at St. Lowe and the event there, what happened?

Harris: Oh that was I can't remember where it is but they had set up a real defense Germany had and we had a time breaking through there. So they finally they would bomb it a certain area just bomb all of it. So they picked out an area there I forgot how many miles wide it was they started bombing and they was going to go two miles deep in it juts bombing everything. That's when they killed a lot of our boys they bombed our boys had got farther ahead then they thought they had and they killed several

hundred of them bombing them. That tore their defense down so then we broke through at St. Lowe there that was one of the meanest battles I guess we had.

Interviewer: What was the experience of combat like?

Harris: Well I guess you would say that if the Germans were in that house over there and we had this one you'd sneak out around the house any way you could and try and get a shot at them and if you get a tank then maybe see if they can shoot the house down before you go in there. So that's the way it operated.

Interviewer: What about when you were, were you ever kind of face to face with them?

Harris: Yeh

Interviewer: Like aligned?

Harris: Not too much but in France it was real bad. They had hedge rows they call it they'd set up they'd put mounds up they'd been planning this you know since WWI so they had built mounds and set tress and bushes on them. And they would fight you from that and shoot you when you came up. Then our tanks finally put some cutters on the front where they could cut that mound down that's how we broke out in France and saved a lot of lives with those tanks with the cutters on them.

Interviewer: What about the German technology like there guns? You know we always hear about the Panthers did you guys feel like they had superior technology compared to ours or how did you feel about their equipment?

Harris: I think they caught us sleeping. They had the 88 millimeter which would shoot through our tanks just like paper just like shooting through a paper bag. I've seen our tanks where they'd shoot through the front and it would go out the back. Then we had a started out a 57 I think then we had a 75 on the tanks. Then before the war over why they came out with a 90 which would shoot through theirs too. But they were ahead of us as far as tanks I guess we whipped them with number.

Interviewer: What about our tanks like I've talked to some men and they say they didn't want to be near the tanks because they were always just perfect aim for the Germans. Did you feel like that at all?

Harris: Well I wasn't in it I thought at first I'd like to be in the tank, I thought that would be protection. But they would do everything they could to knock a tank a out so I thought well their after the tanks more than they are the infantry. So I decided infantry is about as safe as the tanks. But our tanks were poor they were poorly constructed compared to the Germans up until about the time maybe a year before the war ended somewhere like that.

Interviewer: What unit were you in were you with while you were there?

Harris: It was the 1st Army the Big Red One they called it I was in the 18th Company 1st Infantry 18th Company boy that's going to sound good now.

Interviewer: No that's okay

Harris: Company F 18th Infantry is what I was in.

Interviewer: Okay

Harris: Had the 16th Infantry when I said they landed first we landed second and I can't remember the other infantry which unit it was.

Interviewer: Now when you guys were in Germany waiting to know if the war in Europe was coming to a close were you guys worried at all about having to go to Japan?

Harris: We were training they started yeh they were training us to go to Japan. We had already got the word that if they didn't give up that we would probably go to Japan next.

Interviewer: How did you feel about that?

Harris: Oh boy we didn't think it was such a good idea cause we knew they would murder a lot of us if we did. BF Truman BF Truman was the benefit of that he had enough guts to use the bomb. A lot of them didn't want to you know but they hadn't been in battle.

Interviewer: So when you heard about the atomic bomb did that you know excite you?

Harris: Yeh I was thrilled. I feel like saying something else but I won't because everybody will talk about it.

Interviewer: Alright

Harris: I just wish we had more good bombs.

Interviewer: Really

Harris: That we could have used.

Interviewer: Well they saved a lot of live.

Harris: See the way they treated our prisoners I'd like to I wish we could have sunk Japan.

Interviewer: Really did you ever meet any soldiers that had been in Japan?

Harris: No

Interviewer: No

Harris: We met a lot of Ari Force and we captured a lot of our Air Force boys who had been shot down in Germany and they were just skeletons, they said they hadn't had anything to eat but potato soup. You could just see every bone in their body and their eyes was sunk back, looked like dead people. They rationed them to start with cause they wouldn't let them eat what they want to start with.

Interviewer: Did now while you were in Germany or while you were in Europe did you ever meet any civilians.

Harris: Oh yeh most of them spoke English the Germans and they were against the war so they were more or less or us.

Interviewer: Did you what do you have any memoires of interactions with civilians or any friendships that you might have formed with them?

Harris: Not really not really as soon as I found out I had enough points I was working on getting away from there.

Interviewer: So once you got back from being in Europe did you have out processes here or what was the experience like back on the other end?

Harris: Let's see where did they process me Fort Dix I think is where I was processed to get out I believe. And I went back to Detroit and started working up there again when I got out of service.

Interviewer: How did you end up back here in Clarksville?

Harris: How did I get back here?

Interviewer: Yeh

Harris: Well I had a brother that lived over there at South Side and he was in the service he was in the Air Force and he invited said come over here I've got a girl I want you to meet. So I recon that's how I stayed down here I guess. So we married and went back to Detroit stayed about a year then we moved back down here.

Interviewer: Have you ever contacted any of the men that were with you while you were in Europe?

Harris: I've corresponded with one boy that lived in Texas I think. But something happened to him I guess we wrote for awhile then he quite writing me so I don't know whether anything happened to him I never did hear from him anymore. But other than that I didn't have any.

Interviewer: Did you feel strange leaving these men that you had been with for so long?

Harris: Well you miss them you really do but you know you get used to it because you didn't know them before you went into service it doesn't take long to get them off your mind.

Interviewer: Well what made you want to come home the most after being there I mean what?

Harris: Well kind of like a rabbit I guess you like to live where you was raised I didn't have any love for anything those places over there so I'd rather me here than over there so I reckon that's the reason.

Interviewer: If you had it to do over again and you could have chosen whether to be drafted or just not to have gone would you do it over again?

Harris: I think well I couldn't have come out any better than I did but I always thought I would rather have been in the Navy or the Air Force but after seeing so many of our planes shot down over there I thought well I'm as safe here. I've seen them knock down those planes 10 and 15 at a time when they was going on a bombing mission. See they had real accurate artillery and they were using the 88 millimeter the same thing they had on their tanks and they could just knock them down coming and going for a long time until they finally bombed their factories and everything out.

Interviewer: How would it make you feel when you would be seeing our planes going down and our artillery being demolished? Did it dishearten you at all or did you just know that you were doing the right thing?

Harris: Well when you seen those planes shot down you'd think well maybe a few of them will make it. The poor ones that were shot down didn't have a chance because there was little to them bombs to start with when you hit them they would just explode up there. You would just see debris falling.

Interviewer: What kept you motivated through the whole experience?

Harris: That's a good question. I guess probably our leaders. We knew we didn't have anything else to do you know but try to win the war. I think it's a different war that what we're doing now. I think we're in a mess now. We can't rule the world and I think WWII was a good thing we had to fight there but I think we need to leave these other countries alone to a certain extent.

Interviewer: Yeh did you really believe in what you were doing did you fee there was no doubt in your mind that you needed to be there?

Harris: No doubt in my mind about whipping Germany. Yeh there wasn't any doubt in my mind about that. But I have a lot of doubt in my mind about some of the mess we're in now.

Interviewer: Yeh I think a lot of people do. Now when you say that you feel like your leaders kept you going would that have been your Sargent or FDR or war it.

Harris: No it's form your non-coms and maybe the first, second lieutenants. The second lieutenants right up there with you. And the first lieutenants some and captains most of them are right up there with you. So that's the ones that keep you going.

Interviewer: Did they just encourage you through telling you things or were they just demonstrating their leadership?

Harris: They were just good fighters and they'd say well we whipped them SBs now we've got to wait till tomorrow or tonight one and we may have to whip them again. So that's the way it operates. In one tight battle one day just fighting there and carrying on there we had a second lieutenant there after it was over there was this little ole house he ran in about one squad ran in there with him he pulled his pants off and he said I thought sure as hell they was going to bust this bottle of liquor. So he took it our and passed it around. So you'd have a few comical things you know not a lot.

Interviewer: Were there ever would you ever get special food or special did they ever have a special meal maybe for Christmas or Thanksgiving?

Harris: Yeh a few times we had a Thanksgiving it all depends if you was on the front lines or something you didn't have. But most of the time we were fed we didn't go hungry and the cooks were pretty good they stayed up pretty close to us and they'd cook us a meal every now and then. If you're right in the battle you've got to eat your C-rations but if you're not well they'll give you some of those powdered eggs and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Would the cooks set up tents or how would they?

Harris: They'd set up tents and they had little ole cookers that used gasoline to heat them and some of them might have had kerosene I don't know for sure.

Interviewer: How did you perceive the medical care to be? Did you feel like if I was going to get injured I would be in good hands or were you?

Harris: We had medics with is all the time if he got hurt they'd send another one up so we couldn't complain too much. And penicillin was the big thing then you know it would almost cure everything and anything. It saved a lot of lives and they were pretty good. Their not as good as they are now because they fly them out now in helicopters and all you know but I'd say it was good no complaints.

Interviewer: Did you feel like the enemy kind of left the medics alone that they respected that they were the medics?

Harris: To a certain extent but our medics carried a gun all the time it's tough.

Interviewer: Well what about prisoners did you ever take any German prisoners? What would you do with them?

Harris: I've seen them go back through our lines where other guys captured them and taking them back and every now and then one of them got shot going through the line.

Interviewer: But you never really had to deal with them yourself?

Harris: No we didn't have to deal with them. Most of the time that was the Rear Issue they called it or the MPs that fool with them. They didn't pull the infantry off the front line to deal with them.

Interviewer: Did you have any guys in your unit that were taken prisoner or?

Harris: At one time we got in a battle up there and they got three or four of our men but we got to fighting and we got then back.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Harris: Yeh we got them back the same day.

Interviewer: Were you aware of the men around you when you were fighting or did you just were you just focused on the task ahead?

Harris: No you know where yeh this guy on the right he may be in another building he may be 20 feet behind you or beside of you and he says shoot that one over there so you just you all fight together.

Interviewer: So if somebody was taken prisoner was that even more incentive to get the job done that day?

Harris: Yeh if it's was a little ole village a few of them got ahead of the group and the Germans got them but then we got in on them so hot that they turned them loose. In fact they shot most of the Germans.

Interviewer: Now what about the winters there I hear they are really cold. What were your memories?

Harris: They are cold.

Interviewer: Did they give you I hear you had snow suits I mean did you have.

Harris: We had the long johns they called it insulated underwear. You had wool the old knees you wear and they overcoats then I don't know whether they have overcoats now or not they was heavy wool. You just done the best you can with it and there's not as much fighting going on in the winter time if you get stationed there maybe two or three weeks there at a time just on the same line. But it is cold.

Interviewer: So if you were stationary over winter would you set up tents or?

Harris: No no dig you some holes and three or four of you stay in there together no you didn't set up tents.

Interviewer: How big of hole did you dig?

Harris: Well sometimes we would use theirs they were pretty well fixed you know. They'd have places there six or eight feet across and four or five feet deep so we would use theirs. Other wise well you'd just dig you out one of course the grounds froze you know you don't do much digging. Hide behind some building or something.

Interviewer: But you would never stay in the buildings of the town you'd take?

Harris: No

Interviewer: Would it get hot in the summers were you ever?

Harris: Oh yeh you switch back to khakis then get in your khakis.

Interviewer: Now how much weight were you carrying with you what was in your pack?

Harris: Well you carry your C-rations and use a you roll a blanket around all of it because at night there was places you need a blanket in Africa you'd freeze there at night if you didn't have a blanket and some of the other places too. I'd say the pack weighted about 25 or 30 pounds something like that plus your

rifle it weighted 9 pounds. And you had about two stands of ammunition let's see 6, 48 I'm guessing you usually had around 100 rounds of ammunition that you carried. And that gets pretty heavy and grenades you've got three or four grenades tied on to you so you're carrying around 40 I'd say 40 or 50 pounds probably.

Interviewer: During a battle how would you get more ammunition if you run out would you run out of ammunition or?

Harris: Well sometimes you might but the ammunition man would bring it up there to you. You're going to get ammunition.

Interviewer: So somebody is running it up to you?

Harris: Oh yeh very seldom do you run out if you don't just shoot up in the air all the time. By the time you and the tanks get through with them their either gone or your moving back one so.

Interviewer: How do you feel like from the end looking at yourself from the end of the war from the beginning of the war how do you feel like you grew from that time? How do you feel like you might have changed as a result of the experience?

Harris: (laughing) Well I felt like it was about three years wasted that's what I feel like. It didn't have any effect on me it didn't tare me up or anything. I think I might have had night mares when I first got back maybe according to her she said I'd kick the cover and carry on a little bit. But it never did tare me up as far as nerves and all.

Interviewer: Now as a soldier from the beginning of the war to the end how do you see yourself as did you improve did you learn things just from being in the situations so often?

Harris: I learned how to be a soldiers but I don't like it that's why I got out.

Interviewer: By the end of the war did you looking back at your basic training did you feel like you'd been prepared or?

Harris: Well I'd say pretty good they get you to where your tuff. Some of the sissies come in they make a man out of them you know so it helps you. I thought I was about as well trained as anybody I guess as far as going over.

Interviewer: Well thank you very much for your time and your interview.

Harris: I bet that's a mess.

Interviewer: It's not.