

Mr. Harris: I'm Thomas T. Harris and I was born in Cheatham County in 1921.

Mr. Harris, what were your parent's names and what were their jobs.

Mr. Harris: My dad was a farmer and his name was Ed Harris. My mother was just a housewife, Rosa Harris.

How big was your family?

Mr. Harris: I have seven brothers and three sisters.

How was your early education, how was your schooling? How far did you go?

Mr. Harris: I went through high school before I went in the service.

Do you have any recollections of the Great Depression?

Mr. Harris: Yes, everything was hard. It was just hard to make a living. We used kind of like the Indians, the borrowing system. We would take eggs to the store and trade them for coffee and sugar. I would say public work was hard to find. It was tough.

Is it fair to say that coming up from an agricultural community though, maybe ya'll didn't have to worry about food?

Mr. Harris: No, we raised all the food we had that we needed. We had plenty of hogs and beef cattle and vegetables. But as far as buying from the store, of course then they didn't have fresh foods so you had to raise what you had to eat.

Before your time in the service, were you old enough to have a job of any kind?

Mr. Harris: I didn't go in the service until I was 22 years old. After I finished high school I went to Detroit like all the other hillbilly's did.

What year was that that you went to Detroit?

Mr. Harris: 1940. I was inducted in the service in 1942.

What did you do in Detroit?

Mr. Harris: I worked at one of the car factories. Back then they was making the front drives for the Army trucks.

What year was you drafted?

Mr. Harris: 1942.

Did you have a preference of what service you wanted to do at the time?

Mr. Harris: No, I don't guess I had any chance. When I was drafted they sent us to Camp Walters, Texas, and said this is the infantry and this is what you are in.

Did you have to take any skilled test of any kind?

Mr. Harris: It seemed to me like they ran some test to see if you were blind or if you could hear. But that is about all.

Before Pearl Harbor how seriously did you take the threat to America from the Germans tojo in Japan?

Mr. Harris: I was just a kid then and didn't think much about it. I thought that this was so far off that it would never have an effect on us. Then I realized it just before I went in the service.

Is it fair to say that was just the public sentiment at the time?

Mr. Harris: Right.

Well, do you recall when and where you were when you found out about Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Harris: I was working in Detroit, but I didn't think much about it.

Why is that?

Mr. Harris: I don't know. Well just being young I thought that it would settle down.

Did you have a radio at the time?

Mr. Harris: In our room we had a radio.

Did you get to hear FDR's speech?

Mr. Harris: Yes.

What was your opinion of FDR at the time?

Mr. Harris: I thought he was an excellent man. I think he is one of the best presidents we ever had.

Did you maybe agree or disagree with the way he was handling the European affairs and the Pacific affairs?

Mr. Harris: Well I am not a politician but of course you know I didn't realize what all was happening. I think he did an excellent job.

You mentioned you did your basic training in Texas. Is that the same place you did your AIT, your advanced training?

Mr. Harris: Well we only had 13 weeks of training before they shipped us over to New Jersey; New York New Jersey; then we left America after that.

Can you tell me a little bit about your training; what all ya'll did?

Mr. Harris: I guess in infantry you kind of lived like a rat. Most of it was just running problems, digging foxholes, going to the range and firing rifles. That was the main thing.

What kind of weapons did ya'll train with?

Mr. Harris: We had the M1.

(Pause in tape)

We were talking about the small arms that you qualified with and you went to the range on.

Mr. Harris: We had the M1; that is the \_\_\_\_ rifle and we had machine guns; the small caliber machine gun-30 caliber. We also had the 45, the side arm. We had to qualify on all three of those.

Did you train any with the anti-armor bazookas?

Mr. Harris: No, I sure didn't.

They didn't train ya'll with any of those?

Mr. Harris: We had some outfits there that worked with bazookas, but it wasn't in our outfit.

What was your living conditions like while you were there in Texas?

Mr. Harris: They were okay. It was I guess about 100 in each barracks. It wasn't bad and the food was good.

That was my next question. Was it mess hall food?

Mr. Harris: Mess hall food. Camp Walters was kind of an isolated place so you just more or less ate the food that they gave you.

What is that near in Texas?

Mr. Harris: It is close to Fort Worth.

You mentioned that they put you on a train and sent you to New Jersey.

Mr. Harris: Yeah. I spent one night there and then they put us on a boat the next day and shipped us out to \_\_\_\_.

What kind of boat were you on?

Mr. Harris: We were on a British boat.

Was it one of the converted cruise liners?

Mr. Harris: It could have been. It was the Impress of Scotland. I didn't know much about it, except that I thought the food was terrible. If you were a fish eater, well you had plenty of food. Most of time you were about half sick so you didn't care if you had anything or not.

Were you overcrowded?

Mr. Harris: A little bit.

Did you have problems keeping your convoy? Did you have problems with German U-boats going across?

Mr. Harris: No. We went across as a lone wolf. In other words, we just zigzagged all the way across. It took about 10 days, I believe, to get across.

Where did ya'll end up landing at?

Mr. Harris: Casablanca.

So it was 10 days from New Jersey to Casablanca?

Mr. Harris: Yes.

Ya'll went by yourselves?

Mr. Harris: Yes, by ourselves. We made two trips on it by ourselves.

Tell me about your arrival there in Casablanca.

Mr. Harris: Well it has been so long, I don't remember too much about it. I just know that when they unloaded us, they sent us up there to some camping area. I don't remember the name of it. They said, "We are going to send you on up to the front line." We gradually worked our way up to the front line.

Was this prior to Kaserine Pass or was this after?

Mr. Harris: That was over then. They were fighting in Tunisia at the time. We were going up to for replacements. But Roemel had given up; Montgomery had kind of whipped him by then. So we just got up to the firing but we didn't get up to the front line.

You mentioned that by the time you got up to the front line, were you attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division at that time?

Mr. Harris: Yeah.

Where did ya'll go from there?

Mr. Harris: We came back to around Casablanca, I believe. We trained some more then and from Africa we went across the invasion of Sicily.

What was your training like for Sicily there in Casablanca?

Mr. Harris: About the same it was in basic training, running problems, digging foxholes and things like that.

Nothing new?

Mr. Harris: Nothing new, no.

You landed at Sicily. Do you recall where you landed?

Mr. Harris: I don't remember the exact spot. I just know that we were the first ones that landed there. We had ridden those little landing crafts from North Africa; it carries about 60 people. We had quite a time there. The airborne was coming in and we thought it was the Germans so we shot quite a few of them which from my understanding weren't too good you know. It made a mess really.

What was your landing like? Did you land under fire?

Mr. Harris: Not really. I think we kindly surprised them. We got onto the beach fine but then they counter-attacked. I guess if it hadn't of been for the artillery in the Navy, they would have whipped us real good. The artillery in the Navy knocked out about 10 of the tanks. I think they had about 20 tanks that they sent in.

Do you remember if it was Germans or Italians?

Mr. Harris: It was Italians. They were Italians then.

What was your impression of the Italian soldiers?

Mr. Harris: They didn't want to fight unless they had to. A lot of times they had the advantage of us but they would give up.

Did you ever speak with any of them?

Mr. Harris: I never did. We had a boy in our outfit that spoke Italian and he would talk to them. So he was talking to some of them.

What was your impression of your fellow soldiers; the guys in your squad or the guys in your platoon?

Mr. Harris: Excellent! Excellent fighters.

What was their education like?

Mr. Harris: I don't have any idea. I would guess probably a lot of them finished high school. Some of them finished elementary. Then we had some that could barely write; read and write.

Were you all about the same age?

Mr. Harris: Yeah, about the same age and not much different in our weights. I think the soldiers then were a little smaller. I don't believe they were growing as big; not as large as they are now.

They feed us real good now. What was your platoon sergeant like?

Mr. Harris: We had several of them. I liked most of them. We had one that I didn't like too well but he didn't stay too long anyway. Over there it's a short life you know. I'm just one of the lucky ones.

Were they KIA? Were they killed in action?

Mr. Harris: Most of them were wounded in action or killed in action.

Did your platoon suffer a lot of casualties?

Mr. Harris: Oh yeah. After D-Day I was sent home for furlough. I don't know how I got that, just lucky I guess. When I got back there were only two or three of them left in the platoon.

Tell me what happened on Sicily. Did you make the march to Palermo?

Mr. Harris: We went all the way through; fighting our way through.

Were you supported by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armor at the time? Was the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division traveling with you?

Mr. Harris: Yeah. I don't know for sure. We had the 32<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery. They had the 105's. They were the ones that backed us up all the time. So I don't know for sure but I guess it was the 2<sup>nd</sup>. No I would have to take that back. Patton was over in a different \_\_\_\_ from us. I guess it was the 32<sup>nd</sup> field of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry.

After ya'll had occupied Sicily, did they send you back to Casablanca before going to Palermo?

Mr. Harris: We went to England.

So you went straight to England?

Mr. Harris: Yes, from Sicily we went to England. We stayed there; I don't know how long we were there, until D-Day.

Did they have ya'll training again while you were there?

Mr. Harris: We had taken over some of the camping areas where the English soldiers were. So we trained there just like we did at basic training.

Any special new type of.....?

Mr. Harris: No special, just the same thing; just to keep you in shape.

What were the English citizens like; the civilians?

Mr. Harris: Real nice. It was so crowded there with all the American soldiers there. I don't know how in the world we stayed on that island.

Really?

Mr. Harris: The soldiers were a little jealous of the American soldiers. We made a little more money and had a little better food. Other than that everything was fine.

What was your impression of English soldiers?

Mr. Harris: I thought they were good fighters.

Pretty tough?

Mr. Harris: Yeah. They didn't believe in wearing helmets. They didn't wear helmets like American soldiers.

Did they ever tell you why?

Mr. Harris: I don't know unless they just didn't want them. Of course our helmets, all they were good for was to keep from bumping your head at night. They make them like they were bullet proof; but they weren't bullet proof. Anything could shoot through them.

Oh really? When you were in England, were you housed in temporary barracks or were they permanent dwellings?

Mr. Harris: It must have been permanent dwellings; at least for while the war was going on.

Did you ever get any 24 hour passes or anything while you were in England?

Mr. Harris: Well you could if you wanted it. I never did because we were close to a town we had recreation trips two or three times a week.

Tell me a little bit about the D-Day preparation. Was it kind of you're on a boat, they pull you off t hey cancelled the operation, you're on a boat, they pull you back off. Was it one of those type deals just waiting for good weather?

Mr. Harris: We played around on the boats that one time about 30 days thinking that every day we were going in. But we didn't for a long time on account of the weather. We never did get off the boat. We stayed on those boats and finally made the invasion. We were on one of the troop carriers. We were supposed to have gone down a rope ladder to land which carried about 20 men. That particular day a storm had come in and kind of surprised them all. So they had to pull our boats up and put us in them and lower us down on the cable net. So then you tried to make it to the shore.

What regiment were you in?

Mr. Harris: I was in 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry.

Which day did you land on D-Day? Did you say D-Day +2?

Mr. Harris: It was the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave on D-Day.

Oh you were on the second wave on D-Day.

Mr. Harris: Sixteen went in first and 18 the following.

Well I know this is kind of an asinine question, what was running through your mind while you were on that boat?

Mr. Harris: The main thing was getting to land. That is the main thing because it was so rough, you know. You just thought you were going to sink anytime. Then you just wondered if you were going to make it.

Was the rate of fire coming from the German positions still pretty strong?

Mr. Harris: Oh yeah. I don't know if you have seen Saving Private Ryan or not. That is a pretty good example of what it was like on D-Day.

Well had the 16th made much of a push by the time you had landed?

Mr. Harris: Very, very little. Most of them got killed. If you saw Private Ryan where the water looked like it was blood, well that was the truth. The edge of the water there in the bank, the beach was just bloody from so many that had gotten killed. There was a few that got off the beach, but not too many of the 16. We took a pretty good beating but we stayed on the beach, not right on the beach, but it took us about a week or more to get off the bank and back up onto the beach.

Were the Germans trying to hang on with everything that they had?

Mr. Harris: Oh yeah, they were in the pill boxes which had been built years ago and they were using the artillery too. It took a good while to get them out. Our shells wouldn't shoot them pill boxes down but it would jar them so bad that it would either kill them or they would one.

How long did it take you to get off that initial, that first line?

Mr. Harris: Well we were up on the higher banks the first day. Like I said a while ago, we were still hanging around. You could still see the beach and all for about a week, and then we began to move out a little bit then.

Where did ya'll go from there?

That is a good question. All I know is we were just \_\_\_\_ and we were just trying to take more land.

Just pushing forward.

Mr. Harris: Pushing forward!

Do you recall any major opposition?

Mr. Harris: One of the biggest ones I think was at Saint Lo. We ran into a big obstacle there. It took several days. We stayed around foxholes waiting for the bombs to work them over then we finally broke through.

What was your impression of the German soldiers?

Mr. Harris: If you got the leader, the rest of them would give up. They weren't like the Americans. If a Sergeant got killed in the American Army, the next guy would take over. But with the Germans, most the time you could get the sergeant, captain, or lieutenant and of those and the rest of them would probably give up or run. Other than that, as long as they had their leader there, they were good fighters.

Did you run into the young boys and the old men in the German Army?

Mr. Harris: Well, quite a few. I think we found more young men than we did old men in the infantry. But you now if you are on the front line fighting, you are not in contact too much with them. If they capture them they send them on back. If they kill them, they take them out and bury them.

What were your fears in infantry? What was your biggest fear of the infantry?

Mr. Harris: Well just like everybody else. You just think well everyday you will get shot. When the battle starts, you forget about being scared. You just try and get the other guy then.

Do you think your training was good?

Mr. Harris: It was excellent.

Maybe where you could conquer that and just drive on.

Mr. Harris: Excellent.

What was an infantryman's biggest fear? Was it artillery, ADH, the Panzers? Was it the Lufe Rifle?

Mr. Harris: I guess probably, they had an 88 that was one of the best shooting guns that I have ever seen. It would shoot a hole through our tanks; go through the front and out the back. We were over there with the smaller gun for a long time so they had the advantage of us. But I think one of the most feared weapons is the mortar.

Really?

Mr. Harris: You don't hear it. When it goes off, well it is too late then.

The Germans had a lot of mortars?

Mr. Harris: A lot of mortars. They had excellent tanks. We were just way behind them as far as artillery \_\_\_\_\_ for a long time.

After Saint Lo and you will have to forgive me, I should know this with my history, what role in the Bulge did the Big Red 1 fight?

Mr. Harris: We had the whole division there at Saint Lo. I believe but I'm not for sure but it seemed like the 16<sup>th</sup> was in it and helped us. I'm not for sure to Saint Lo. Anyway, the whole division was waiting for the bombing to finish so that we could move forward again. Of course that is when you know that they got back on our lines and killed a lot of our own men.

After Saint Lo did ya'll progress toward the Rheine?

Mr. Harris: Oh yeah.

How was that movement?

Mr. Harris: Tough and fast.

Did you do a lot of the...transportation, was a lot of it your feet?

Mr. Harris: Well I walked from North Africa to almost Berlin. Somebody asked me what we rode. I said, "I didn't know we had anything to ride." Occasionally the tanks would let us ride. If they thought the Germans had pulled back say 15 or 20 miles while we was making our rush sometimes we could ride on the tanks. But it is hard to hold on to them. I just assume to walk.

What measures did you take to take care of your feet?

Mr. Harris: We didn't have any. We were just lucky I guess. The Captain or whoever was in charge would say that every time you got a chance to wash your feet to be sure you washed and dried them good. But you didn't get that chance very often.

Did you have a lot of problems with trench foot?

Mr. Harris: No. I got by pretty good I guess.

Your boots were pretty good?

Mr. Harris: Yes. They stayed wet a lot.

What was your shelter like? Did you have a pup tent or did you just sleep out underneath the sky?

Mr. Harris: You just slept out. You just dug you a hole and slept in it. You have heard of foxholes and slit trenches; if there was two of you together a lot of times you would dig what they called a slit trench where you kind of stretched out in it. One guy would guard a while and let you sleep and then you would trade.

What were your rations like; mostly K-rations?

Mr. Harris: C-rations. K-rations came in on the latter part of the war.

Did you get to bathe very often?

Mr. Harris: No, unless you could find a stream or something. I think during the whole time I was over there on the front line, we got one hot shower.

I imagine that was a treat.

Mr. Harris: It was a treat. We thought it might come more often but it didn't.

Throughout the war did you have much communication with home?

Mr. Harris: Not unless you wrote a letter home or something.

Did you get many letters?

Mr. Harris: Oh a few. The communication is much better now than it was. You can see them now on TV, but back then you didn't have anything like that. They sensed everything you wrote so you couldn't say anything much. You couldn't tell them anything about the war zone or where you were or anything. You just say, "I am ok." That is about all that you could say to them.

What was your impression of the relationship between the officers and the enlisted?

Mr. Harris: It was good with the ones up on the front. They were all looking out for each other so the relationship there was much better than it was in the rear I think. Overall, during the war time, I think the relationship was real good.

Were you ever promoted during the war?

Mr. Harris: Well I was a draftee so they don't expect you to stay in long. I went from private to tech sergeant.

So across the Rheine River, what was the fighting like in Germany?

Mr. Harris: It was rough. The closer you got to Berlin, the tougher it got. We had superiority on them. We had more planes and more artillery so we could usually run them out of the place in just a little while; especially if the weather stayed good.

Were the Germans getting desperate?

Mr. Harris: On the last, I think they were. They realized the mistake they made I think in getting in to it with Russia. Some that we took; they said that they were glad the Americans took them instead of the Russians.

You mentioned that you finished up there in Berlin; did you get to see any of the Russians?

Mr. Harris: No, we could have taken Berlin but for some reason they wanted Russia to take it. It saved all of our lives too by letting them take it because they really fought right on the last. We just sat around and stayed around you know. We didn't do anything but wait for the Russians to take it.

What happened from there?

Mr. Harris: After they took Berlin, we just more or less pulled back and that was kindly the end of it for the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Then they began to count up our points. If you got enough points, you came home. If you didn't well you stayed a little while longer. I had enough points on the first time that they offered me a chance to get out. I took advantage of the money.

Were you ever wounded?

Mr. Harris: Not a time. I guess one of the worst battles we went through was Aachen. That was the first German town that the Americans took. They used a lot of artillery. One night they cut the stock off my gun. We were down in a foxhole but they were shelling us. That took the stock off my gun. That is about the closest I guess that I ever came to getting hurt.

You mentioned that mainly your platoon suffered heavy casualties.

Mr. Harris: When they sent me home on furlough that one time.

Did you keep in contact with any of your old.....?

Mr. Harris: I wrote one old boy I was in the service with for a year or two, and then I lost contact with him. I don't know what happened to him. He never did answer my letters on the last. Other than that, not really.

What year did you get to come home?

Mr. Harris: I was discharged in 1945.

You got out of the Army at that time?

Mr. Harris: Right.

Tom Brokaw had made this statement of your generation being the greatest generation.

Mr. Harris: I read that book. I have that book and I read it and I will have to agree with him. I just wonder sometime if our Army now has the ability to fight like we had then. Of course I know that they have much more sophisticated weapons, but I just wonder.

The book I read talked about the majority of the soldiers in World War II weren't professional soldiers. They were draftees. They were normal country boys or guys from the factories. When they were drafted and went into the military, they viewed their service in the military as a job. They were there to do their job and they didn't shy away from it because most of them had grown up through the depression and they understood how important it was to have a job and do a job well. Do you think that is a fair assumption?

Mr. Harris: I think it is a fair assumption to the ones in World War II. I wouldn't agree with it now. I could say some things but I want dare say them because I wouldn't want people knowing how I feel about it.

That's fine. If you want to say it, say it; if you don't, don't worry about it.

Mr. Harris: No, I want say it.

That is quite alright. Do you remember the Red Ball Express in Europe?

Mr. Harris: Yeah, I remember a little bit about it. I have seen some of the trucks flying up and down the highways over there. As far as I know they did an excellent job hauling the material in and out.

I just now am starting to learn a little bit about that. I got a book on it I am wanting to read.

Mr. Harris: I don't know a lot about it. Like I said you know, in the infantry, you don't know too much except you are trying to take care of yourself at night and daytime.

Well if you had to do it over again, would you be infantry again?

Mr. Harris: No, I don't think I would. I think if I had a chance I would go for the Navy probably or the Air Force one. If you make your run and get back at least you would have a warm place to stay. In the Navy you got your home there until you get sunk. In the infantry you just live in the ground like a rat.

Did you ever get to see or meet Ernie Pyle?

Mr. Harris: I never did. I saw Montgomery one time.

What was your impression of him?

Mr. Harris: A little guy. I was expecting to see some big guy maybe. I was in a parade we were having over there one time and here come that little guy. He weighed about 135-40 lbs; tough. I also saw General Patton. They came through our lines one time going to the front. He was standing on the front of this tank with his two pearl guns.

What was your impression of Patton?

Mr. Harris: I thought he was a fighting guy. He didn't agree with the president at the time I don't think as some of the others, but he was a fighter. He was up there with them. He didn't send them.

Do you think his men respected him?

Mr. Harris: Oh yeah, I do.

You mentioned before I turned the tape on about seeing a USO show. Who was in that show and where was that at?

Mr. Harris: Well it was Bob Hope's show. As far as remembering the names and things, I don't. But I do remember Bob Hope putting on a show there in Sicily for us. I remember him telling the boys that his two \_\_\_\_\_ said he was too fat to fight.

Was that a good treat from home to have?

Mr. Harris: Yeah. You enjoyed it because you didn't have much recreation at the time.