RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH GLEN HILL

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and
REGINALD BEST

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Nicholas Trajano Molnar: This begins the interview with Mr. Glen Hill, on October 12, 2012 in Avenel, New Jersey with Nicholas Molnar and Reginald Best. Thank you Mr. Hill for having us here today.

Glen Hill: … You're welcome.

NM: For the record, to begin, could you tell us when and where you were born?

GH: I was born in Charleston, West Virginia on September the 1st, 19 and 24.

NM: I want to ask a little bit about your family background. Could you tell us about your father and a little bit about his history?

GH: My father was born in Leeds, England. When he came to the United States he was a young man. They settled in Huntington, West Virginia.

NM: Did he ever talk about why he came to the United States?

GH: No. He was a bookbinder, for the Jarrett Printing Company in Charleston, West Virginia.

NM: Did he have any family in the United States?

GH: Yes, he had two brothers. One lived in Colorado. The other one is [in] Upstate New York.

NM: Did they come to the United States before him?

GH: They all came together as a family.

NM: What about your mother?

GH: My mother came from Germany. She was twelve years old. They settled in Gallipolis, Ohio. How my mom and dad got together [laughter] … I don't understand how they finally wound up getting married, how they met, that I don't know.

NM: What are your earliest memories growing up in West Virginia?

GH: … I can remember, we were on Columbia Boulevard, which runs along the river. We had a great time. We had boats, canoes, go fishing all the time, go swimming. It was a great childhood, wonderful. I had a wonderful mom and dad, wonderful. Then as the time went on, I wound up with six brothers and I had three sisters. [They] were the oldest, then come seven boys, two years apart. We just had a ball. When the circuses came to town, there was no school for two days. We would sit on our front porch on Columbia Boulevard and once the circus unloaded from the railroad cars, they would bring them all past our house to the fairgrounds. We would watch the elephants and the horses. Those wagons that carried these tents were so heavy, they used to have a six team horses pulling the wagons and if the back wheel hit the curb, it would take the curb right out, that's how heavy they were. So, when the circus set up and all of

us boys would go up and get a job, so that we could get to the circus. Our job was to water the elephants most of the time. They were right on the riverbank, the fairgrounds were right on the riverbank. They wouldn't take the elephants down to the water because they couldn't get them out. So we had to carry buckets of water to the elephants [laughter] and they would tell us, "Okay, you carry water to this elephant." … So, we'd carry go down the riverbank, take the two five gallon buckets, and come up and water the elephants. Well, seems like when the elephant had enough, the one you was assigned, he'll take up his trunk [laughter] he'll blow right in your face, must be telling you [laughter], "Hey, I've had enough." That's the childhood we had, it was just wonderful.

NM: How old were you when you worked at the circus?

GH: Well, I would say I must've been about maybe twelve, about twelve years old. … The sad part was we had everything on the riverbank, everything we needed. Bunch of boys on the riverbank is wonderful, but what happened is the state come along and they bought every house for five miles along the river, and they wanted to make a Kanawha Boulevard, from Kanawha River, they called it Kanawha Boulevard, so they bought all the houses up. Well, my father had to buy another house, so he moved across the river, South Charleston. So that's, then we started going to school, we had to register for school. So they come through with the boulevard, I even have pictures of that, construction along that. I'll tell you a very funny story about that. Along Kanawha Boulevard, Elk River cut into Kanawha, so they had to build a bridge over at the mouth of the of Elk River to continue the Kanawha Boulevard. Well, on Saturday mornings, our thing to do on a Saturday was to go to the movies. They always had something at the movies, ten cents to go to the movies. We'd walk along the boulevard. Well, constructing the bridge, they had the steel work up, that's all. So, my brother Donald said, "Come on, we're not gonna walk all the way down, cross over the other bridge. We're gonna go over this." So they had the I-beams up. Well those I-beams must've been sixteen inches across and maybe two feet this way. So we straddled those I-beams crossing that river. We got about halfway across and on the other side are police cars, see the lights flashing. I said "Don, we're in trouble." He says, "Well don't stop now, keep going." The guy gets out with a bullhorn, "Take it easy boys, take it easy, we don't wanna loose ya." We thought sure, they were going to give us a hard time when we got off but they didn't. [laughter] They said, "You really did a dumb thing," but we were Hill boys. It just come to us to do those things.

NM: I know Reggie prepared some questions so I will let him jump into the interview.

Reginald Best: You said that your mother was from Germany. I was wondering, did she speak German at home or did you ever learn how to speak German?

GH: My mother learned English. She did not allow German to be spoke in her house. My mother's famous words, "You're in America now, you're American. You speak English only," and that's the way she brought it up. When her sister would come to our house and talk to Mom in German, Mom would straighten her out. "No German in this house. English." That's what my mother would. They were so proud to be American. …

RB: Growing up, did you have a tight-knit extended family with uncles and aunts and cousins in the area, or was it just your brothers and your sisters and your parents?

GH: Yes, we did. We had a lot of relatives in the area because, seemed like everybody came out of more or less settled in a group. My grandfather was from Dunbar, he'd settled in Dunbar, West Virginia, which is only about two miles from South Charleston. My Aunt (Lilia?), she was in Charleston. I have a lot of paperwork in those books but I don't remember all those things, but the Hill family and the Bandusch--my mother's name was Bandusch--and they all seemed to flock together. As a group they moved, as a family they moved. They were a very close knit family.

RB: Growing up, I was wondering, was your family religious? Did they attend church regularly?

GH: Well, I wouldn't say that they were very religious, but they did, they went to church. When Mom had so many children, she couldn't get out to church, but she said her prayers in the house. … She wanted us all to respect the religion. They were Presbyterian.

RB: I was wondering, when you were a kid did your family own a car? How did you get around town?

GH: Yes, we had a car. My older brother did the driving. … Wherever mom and dad wanted to go, he did the driving. … On Sundays was a visiting day. On Sunday, the families would all visit one another, that was our day out, to stay knitted together, and my brother would drive us, would drive mom and dad and whatever kids were home at that time, my brothers, we'd go with him.

RB: I was wondering, what was it like growing up in your neighborhood? Did you play sports? What types of activities did you do?

GH: … We played football, we played baseball, we played, [laughter] what, "Ante I Over," "Indian Trapper." Everything was physical. I think that's why they call us the "Greatest Generation," because the guys, everybody was in such good shape. When the war came, everybody was in good shape. But that's what we did. In the neighborhood, it seems like you get all the guys together, maybe five, six, seven guys, we'd go down and play, "One Old Cat," two old cat, whatever it is, baseball. We had a ball field that we played in, we made it ourselves. So it was our thing to do, after school and Saturdays and Sundays, there was always something to do physically. Indian Trapper was probably the roughest game, but we were all in good shape to do that. That was our life.

NM: You mentioned that you have many brothers. At what point did you come along?

GH: Okay, I'm the, let's see, [laughter] I'm next to the youngest.

NM: Okay.

GH: Lee was the youngest, and then I come along, and then I have Donnie--Donald--and then Bob, then you have Charles and then you have Cecil and Cy. …

NM: You mentioned that you had this job at the circus when you were young. Did you have any other jobs growing up?

GH: I delivered papers. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

NM: Go ahead Reggie.

RB: What was school like growing up? Did you guys attend school all day or were there shifts? I know sometimes during the 1930s people went to school on shifts.

GH: No, I attended Glenwood grade school and we had regular hours. I'm trying to think the hours, was it nine to three, I guess, something like that. … We had plenty of time to play after school. That was a daily thing and we were off Saturdays and Sundays.

RB: What type of subjects did they teach?

GH: Well, Geography, History, Math, penmanship. I guess that's about it; English.

NM: Were there any subjects that you liked in particular?

GH: Well, I loved History. I was good with History. I kind of excelled in that, because I read a lot of history at that time, because at that time the big thing was Civil War, trying to learn more about the Civil War, but I liked it.

NM: You would have been very young to recall, but did the Great Depression impact your family?

GH: You have to kind of more or less explain this to me better.

NM: I am sorry; did you notice any impact of the Great Depression on your community?

GH: No, I guess at that age being so young I really didn't realize what my father was going through. See in those days, women didn't work because they all stayed home and raised families, but I knew what was put on the table and my mother would say, "Hey, this is it." I remember my mom taking milk and adding water to extend it. So, yes I guess my family; you know, trying to feed seven and eight youngsters back then I don't know what my father's salary was, I had no idea as a bookbinder with the printing company, what he made, but we never wanted for anything. We always got sufficient food on the table. Milk was not delivered to us because I guess they couldn't afford to have the horse and buggy stopping every day for milk. But our milk that we got was Carnation milk in a can. You used to punch holes in the top and you put so

much milk and so much water. Our cereals at that time were shredded wheat and corn flakes or pancakes whatever, but we ate well and that's through my father's efforts of working.

NM: Your father had steady work during the 1930s?

GH: Oh yes, oh yes. Yes, he was never let go on the job, he always had that job. He worked for Jarrett Printing Company for, god I don't know, until he retired. He had a lot of years. As a matter of fact I have a picture someplace taken outside the printing company with his group. It's a father and son trade. The only way to get that job is you had to be a son of somebody that worked there. That's why they call it father and son. He used to take us to work hoping that we'd take an interest in taking over when he retired, we would do it. Well, when I went with the workers there a few times and I saw these guys minus fingers, I asked my dad, "What's the problem?" He said, "Son, there are safety rules. When you shove paper into a cutter, it may be this thick. They have a block of wood that you push the papers through." He says, "Some of them don't use the block, they use their fingers to push it in, and if the paper goes too far, it cuts their finger." How often that happened I don't know but when I saw that I said, "Hey." [laughter]

NM: Just out of curiosity, was the company that your father worked for in the town or an adjacent area?

GH: No, right in town. Well, he had to take the streetcar at that time. We were in South Charleston. When we were in Charleston it was fine, he could almost walk to work from Charleston but when the state bought all the property we had to go across the river, he had to take a streetcar to go to Charleston.

NM: I also want to ask, you mentioned that you had a few older brothers, I think four or five?

GH: Well there were five other brothers and then I had one younger one.

NM: Did any of them take part in any programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps?

GH: CCCs?

NM: Yes, the CCCs. Did any of them participate?

GH: I don't recall any of them going into the CCC. A lot of youngsters did at that time, a lot in the neighborhood, but Wesvaco and Carbide and Carbon was the two big plants. They hired probably maybe 10,000 people along the river. This island, we had an island at the middle of the Kanahwa River, well that island was Carbide and Carbon and Wesvaco for miles. All my brothers seemed to get jobs at Carbide and Carbon or Wesvaco, one or the other.

NM: Most of the people in the community were employed by these two companies then.

GH: Yes, right, yes.

NM: What industries were these companies in?

GH: That's chemicals, yes. It was very well protected during the war.

RB: Being that your mother was German, how did she feel about what was going on in Germany at the time with Hitler in the 1930s. Did she ever talk about that?

GH: Yes, she, my mother was very sad and very afraid. My mother had a feeling that the American government would take all the Germans and put them in prison. My mom told me that. She was afraid at times to even go out of the house because she figured if they knew she was German they would arrest her. She felt very bad about that and so did her sisters. They kind of took a, what do you call it, kind of a backseat like in public. … Of course this was during first when the war started, but as time went on I think they more or less learned to accept the fact that they were German and they had nothing to do with what Hitler was doing and that they were more, my mother was more open. She'd take us shopping, she'd take us uptown for shoes or whatever.

RB: Did people in your community ever discriminate against your mother because of her background?

GH: No, never did. No discrimination at all. My mother spoke, you look at my mother, you'd never know she was a German. Her English was impeccable. She learned it so well that she didn't have no accent. A lot of the Germans you talk to them they're speaking English, you can tell that their foreigners from the accent they have. My mother did not have one.

RB: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

GH: I should, shouldn't I? [laughter] I can't really say that I do. I just don't know where I was at the time, it was in '41.

NM: Had you graduated high school by the time the war started?

GH: Yes, I was drafted at eighteen. I just got out of high school and I was drafted.

NM: I just want to backtrack a little bit. Did you have any plans for what you were thinking about doing after high school if the war had not happened?

GH: Well, I always wanted to be an electrician, one of those dangerous jobs in the high wire stuff. Why, I don't know, but I used to see these guys on the pole and handling a lot of voltage and I figured, "Hey, I'm going to be that too someday." So that was my first.

NM: What was the reaction in the community after Pearl Harbor?

GH: Well, people were decimated. They really thought it was the worst thing that ever happened to them and to the whole community. There was constant talk about the Japanese and I guess that what happened is basically in California, they rounded up all the Japanese and put

them in internment camps, didn't they. You remember that? But like anything else, in time, like they say, time heals all wounds, but the Japanese never went away with the American people because of what they did. It just seems like stuck in your mind that why would somebody do what they did at Pearl Harbor and wanted to be respected afterwards.

NM: You have five older brothers. How soon were they drafted?

GH: All of us were drafted within I'd say about three years, they wound up; the draft at that time took from took from eighteen to twenty-four I believe it was. I went in at eighteen, it was in March 19 and 43. My younger brother, he went in the following year. So than that means all six of us were in by the time, '43, all of us were in the service.

RB: I was wondering, what branches did your brothers serve in?

GH: I had one brother in the Navy, one brother in the Air Force, another brother in a medical field, and another brother was in the First Armored Regiment.

RB: This is in the Army?

GH: It's the Army, yes, First Army and I was also in the Army infantry, and my younger brother, but he wound up being in occupation forces of Japan but he was an Army I guess you would still call him an infantryman, but he was in the occupation force of Japan.

RB: You stated that one of your brothers did not serve in the military. I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about him.

GH: The oldest brother was Cyrus, then come six boys two years apart, and during the war the early part of the war, the Sullivan brothers' ship was sunk by the Japanese and they lost all five sons in the family. The Congress then passed the law that they could not take all brothers from the same family. So they left the oldest boy home but then they drafted the other six and that's how that saved my older brother from going. We were very fortunate that all us came home, all of us brothers we all came home from the war, but not like the day we left. So, that's all I can say.

RB: I was wondering, how did your parents take it that all of their sons were being drafted into the military?

GH: I'm sure it took a toll on my mom and dad although they tried to keep up their spirits, but you could see it in their faces and when they spoke, to have six sons away. I know my father was a great politician and he had friends in the high ranks in Washington. I only speak of myself because I don't know what my other brothers did but when I got to Europe there's times when I couldn't write home. I just couldn't do it. Well if they didn't hear from me within three or four days or a week my father went to his friend who was a big politician and he made connections. He wanted to know why he's not hearing from his son. Well would you know that my ranking officer in the Ardennes come up to me and I was in a foxhole, "Write home." I said "Yes sir." … So I know that they were, that they went through hell, I'm sure they did.

RB: I was also wondering, were any of your sisters involved in the war effort?

GH: No my three sisters were the oldest. I'm trying to think back to their ages during the war. They were mostly homebodies because of their families. Back then, you didn't have a lot of women working at that time in those days. Now, all women work today, but back then, family was the number one. I don't recall any of them, other than making Red Cross bandages at that time, no.

RB: Just going now a little bit into when you actually got into the military, I was wondering do you remember where you went to basic training?

GH: Yes. I took my basic training in Camp Croft, South Carolina. I took seventeen weeks of infantry training. When I finished training, they saw something in me so they sent me to a noncommissioned officer school. I spent six weeks in an officer training school, noncommissioned officer training school, and when I got out of the school, they gave me, I was assistant platoon leader and within three weeks I was a platoon sergeant. I came out, they made me a corporal, they made me a platoon sergeant. I was nineteen years old and I had thirty men. I continued training these thirty men along with, I was second platoon, we had, there was four platoons. Each platoon had thirty men and we trained together as a company. I continued training men and finally they pulled so many non-coms out of every company to be shipped to Camp Kilmer to go over to France as replacements for any division that would need you. …

NM: You went directly to France from Camp Kilmer?

GH: Yes.

NM: Okay.

GH: Well, we went to England. Everybody went to England first. That's where they gave you all the supplies that you were going to need to go into combat. You picked up your rifle, your ammunition, grenades, everything.

NM: Just to go back to your basic training, was there anything you found challenging, either physically or mentally, about it?

GH: Well, I have to say this, I think as a Hill boy, we were brought up in the mountains, things like that never bother me. When we were in high school, we used to leave the house on Friday evening and go to the mountains and we didn't come back until Monday morning to go to school. We were on the hills and that put us in such good shape, and to be able to read things, and you never get lost in the woods, never get lost. We knew where water was, we knew where to sleep, we knew everything. This is another thing that came in handy for me when I was a platoon sergeant. Everybody looked up to me, especially when we was in the Ardennes, tree after tree, you're in the forest so everybody kind of looked up to me. Even the officers used to come with me. We'd work things out, not that I told the officer what to do but he'd come to me and say, "Sergeant, what do you think?" I'd say, "Well, I think we ought to do this to avoid being seen by

the Germans." All that training that in my childhood, it came out, and I think that's what they saw in me when I was in basic training. They saw that I had certain things that other kids; basically the kids from New York they had a rough time, they had a rough time. I tried to help them as much as I could, especially on forced marches. You full-filled pack thirty-five miles and that's a lot of mileage to carry and you got forty, fifty pounds on your back, but we made it through. I tried to help them.

NM: When you went to Camp Croft, was this the first time that you had left West Virginia?

GH: Yes. They took us by train when I was inducted in the town hall. They had, I think about twenty of us from the area that got drafted at that time. So you bring your papers down and they had officers there to stamp them and what not. They had a troop train come through and it picked everybody up. From there we went right into Spartanburg, South Carolina, and from there we got on the busses to take us to Camp Croft, which is only about maybe five miles outside of Spartanburg, and it was a big infantry camp; lot of troops there, lot of troops, and that's where we started our, the basic training.

NM: You had mentioned that you saw people from the North. Were there people from all over the country there or were they mostly from the East Coast?

GH: Oh, yes, from all over the country, wherever they were. I wouldn't say all over the country. I think they took care of most of the eastern coast. They didn't come from the west over, because they had their own training camps over on the other side. I think there were about three training camps or four along the east coast. I think there was one down in Georgia. … I think Fort Benning was a training camp and then Camp Croft and then there was one, Upstate New York. I think there was about four camps for training, so I think they tried to take the people who were drafted in the area, the closest to the training that they lived so they didn't have to transport them too far.

NM: Okay.

RB: I was wondering, after your basic training, did you go through an advanced training before you went to your NCO school?

GH: No. … I went right out of basic training right into the NCO school.

RB: What kind of things did they teach you in NCO school?

GH: Well, most of it was kind of a rehash of what you went through, all your armaments; your M1, your machine gun, your .45, all the weapons. Then we took map training was another one, to know where you were at. First aid was another one. Until you could get a first aid man, if you was a platoon sergeant leader or a sergeant and one of your guys got hit, you had to be able to take care of it right away until you could get a medic up to take over, right.

RB: I was wondering, do you believe that your training adequately prepared you for the combat that you would see in Europe?

GH: Oh, yes, absolutely, and of course another thing that helped me too, I was a Boy Scout for years. The Boy Scouts, all, some of these things I learned as a Boy Scout, the first aid and stuff, it just seemed to fit right in to the Army, what I was doing.

NM: Before the interview, you had mentioned that while you were at Camp Kilmer, you would attend dances in New Jersey with local girls.

GH: Yes, they had dances to entertain the troops and this was done by the USO and also the Saint Anthony Church had the Rosary Society. Every church had some sort of function that they would get the women and put them in busses and bring them out to Camp Kilmer to dance with the men before they went overseas, because you were only there usually about two weeks and then they ship you out to wherever you were going, South Pacific or Europe. At that time, mostly was Europe. …

NM: I think at one of the dances you mentioned that you met your future wife.

GH: Yes, the Rosary Society, she belonged to the Saint Anthony Rosary Society, they came out by bus to dance with the troops. I wound up dancing her with a few times and then when it come time for the chaperones, they had four or five chaperones that were older women. When it was time to go back, I walked back to the bus with her and I asked her for her phone number and she said, "No, I won't give you my phone number, but I'll give you my address." So, she gave me the address and then she got on the bus and they took off. The next day we went to Jersey City to board the transport to go to England. Well, they did not tell us we're going to England. They only told you after you was on board. So, but anyhow we got aboard the ship, thousands of us, right, and we get about maybe a hundred yards off the dock and another ship coming in hit the side, ripped about a sixteen-inch gash, sixteen foot, in the side of the ship. Well, they had to bring us back. So, they took us back to Kilmer, but I had no way of calling her to tell her I was still home, that we didn't go. So, I decided to walk down the tracks, because I had her address and I walked and I walked and I walked and I walked. I came to a crossroad, and in the crossroad was a candy store or a newspaper store. It was Mac McGettigans store. I went in there and I asked, "Do you know where Port Reading's at?" He says, [laughter] "You're in Port Reading." He said, "Where do you want to go?" I said, "Oh, Marion Street." He said, "Oh that's about four blocks down the road." I said, "Okay." So I walked the four blocks down the road, or five, whatever it was, and I had her number, 28 Marion Street and so I knocked on the door, her mother answered the door and I said, "Dorothy home?" She said, "Yes." "Oh, could I speak to her?" "Who are you?" [laughter] I told her who I was, so Dorothy came, well I didn't have a pass, so you can't get out or MP's would pick you up "1, 2, 3." MP's were like this all over the highways, all over down there. We sat under the apple tree in her backyard for, until maybe eleven o'clock, so then I had to walk back the way I came in. When we got back to Kilmer I had taken a poncho to slide down the coal chute, so I hid it in the weeds. So when I got back I put the poncho on and I went back down the coal chute. [laughter] Then, the next day they called us all in and said, "You're going to be leaving, you got forty-eight hours." So they gave us a forty-eight hour pass. So I contacted her and we went to Newark someplace, some club we went to and enjoyed the evening. We went by taxicab at that time. That's how I met her, so when I went

overseas I started writing letters to her and we stayed in touch. When I came home, I came up to visit her from West Virginia.

NM: You snuck out a coal chute to get out of Camp Kilmer?

GH: Yes, oh, yes. I told the guy, I told all my guys, I says, "If the officer is looking for me, give them some kind of excuse," but they probably never looked for me because they just, we just unloaded the ship and came back and everything was in topsy-turvy. You had all these thousands of guys that was going to go onboard ship, they were all over the camp trying to do something with their time. So I say that's when I'll sneak out, you know, and that's exactly what I did. I put the poncho on, went down in the freight yards and slid down the coal chute and that's out the back of Kilmer. Kilmer is still there today.

NM: Tell us about the trip to England when you eventually do embark. What do you remember about the journey over? Did anyone get seasick?

GH: Well, we landed in Glasgow, Scotland. We took a train, eighteen hour train trip to Tidworth, England. That's in southern England, right out, not too far from Southampton. Tidworth was a big post, lot of acres that they had the English Army going back in the First World War. The barracks were all brick, it wasn't something just built up recently, something was there a long time. The billets were, like I say, were all cinderblock. You had a lot of free time. I went to Stonehenge, I met an English girl. Her name was Kathy Vesey and she was a conductress on a double-decker. We became very, very good friends. I went to her house, she had three brothers, two of them was in the British Army. She had two sisters and their mother and father were very nice to me, very nice. I used to go to the pub with her father and we'd play darts, and had fish and chips, and then I would walk back to Tidworth, which was only about two miles from their house, they lived in Shipton Bellinger which was right outside of Tidworth. We became very good friends. Eventually I went to France, I lost contact with her, but her mother used to write me all the time and when I got back to America after the war I was still getting letters from her mother and then I got them from Kathy. Well, Kathy lost her husband and my wife had just passed away in '02. Kathy wanted to come over to visit me. So, she came over from England and spent a week here and my daughter and all of us, we took her around, showed her different places. She went back to England and about a year, two years later she died. With her condition, her heart, but we had a good relationship and it was nice. Her only son she had was named, she named him after me, and my daughter Jean still hears, he writes to her, email, right, email. He's, good, he's fifty-something years old now.

NM: Well, thank you for sharing that story with us. Now, approximately how long were you in England?

GH: Before I went into France?

NM: Before you went into France.

GH: We were just there to pick up supplies, okay. We got our rifles, our ammunition, grenades. We were loaded down with about sixty pounds of equipment, okay. When the 84th Infantry

came over, like I said, they were short platoon sergeants, platoon leaders, whatever. Then they come to this "repo-depot" as I call it, and they would pick out by your MOS. Whatever number you were, I was a platoon sergeant, so I had a number. So, they needed that number, they didn't know me, but they had the number. So, I connected with the 84th Infantry Division at that time. It was only a matter of a couple of weeks they we were aboard … trains going to Southampton to board the troop ships. … We went to Omaha Beach in France, and we had to climb down over the ship's side on rope ladders to LCIs, these little LCIs down in the water with a whole platoon of men. Then they would go up to the Omaha Beach, drop the ramp and then we got on the beach. Then we walked up that long hill. I have a picture here to show you, the hill of Omaha Beach, to the top. Then from there, the Red Ball Express took over. There must have been five-hundred, maybe a thousand trucks, if you can picture that. The whole 84th Infantry Division got aboard these trucks. So, we went from Omaha Beach, all the way up to Belgium in those trucks. That's where we started our first engagement with the Germans.

NM: Before we get into that, since you were a platoon sergeant, I just wanted to get a little bit into the first time you meet you actually get to meet your platoon.

GH: Okay, they introduce you to your platoon. I was in Company G of the 333rd. The officers then would say, "This is your new platoon sergeant," or squad leader, whatever you are, and then you work with the men. You get to know each individual. That's why it took about two weeks in Tidworth. You went out on the range, they kept you busy, went out on the range to practice firing at targets and you get to know your men. Then you board ship, you practically know everybody by name by that time.

NM: One of the things I forgot to ask was, you had mentioned previously that you actually received training in demolitions.

GH: Yes, I did that at Camp Croft.

NM: Okay.

GH: Alright, they sent me to a school to learn explosives, how much to put together. At that time, the big explosive was nitrostarch. You could take nitrostarch and bang it on the floor, kick it, and it would never go off. It needed a cap, you know what that is, a little cap that goes and nitrostarch came in like quarter-pounds, half-pound, full pound, or you could put together as much as you want, and they all had a little hole in it, like a little wafer, so the electrical cap had like six-inch wires to it, like a firecracker, and you put that in the nitrostarch, you may have a pound of nitrostarch and you put that cap in there, and you can set it off with electric, you have a little battery, you just touch it, and that sets the explosive off. So, they had me doing, to put the fellas under conditions of being in combat. They used me to go set up booby traps throughout the obstacle course in order to get these fellas familiar with a blast or a gunshot so that they don't flinch and run the opposite direction or whatever. So I used to set up booby traps on these fellas. There's a bridge, a short bridge, maybe ten, twelve feet over a creek. Well, I'd take one board and loosen one board and I'd put a switch underneath it and down in the water I'd put maybe a quarter of a pound of nitrostarch, something that wouldn't hurt them, you know, so I'd put that in the water. So, when they come across the bridge, and somebody stepped on that board, it made

the contact, the nitrostarch would go off and blow water up all over the guys and the officer would be there waiting to see what the reaction was, right, and that's what I did. I put them up in trees, … smoke bombs. We used take smoke bombs and set them off … and encapsulate the guys in smoke to see what they'd pull out their gas mask and put them on right away. These are things to make them aware of what they could run into in combat and that's what my job was at that time.

NM: Then you were taken out and put into NCO school.

GH: Then I was, like that, I was taken away from that and they put me on the list then, to be, as a replacement and then they got me, shipped me out of Camp Croft.

NM: Did your training in demolitions help you when you became a platoon sergeant later on?

GH: Well, I don't really think so because when we got up to, in the Siegfried [Line], where you had fellas, you had regular demo guys. [Editor's Note: The Siegfried Line was a series of German defensive fortifications which the Allies encountered after the D-Day invasion.]

NM: Okay.

GH: I think they just took advantage of what I was doing in the training camps, but you had engineers who were far more experienced than what I was, you know, they had weeks and weeks and weeks, like Bangalore torpedoes, those things could be six, twelve feet long. These guys knew how to arm those things and we got into the pillbox areas, some of these pillboxes as much as six and eight foot thick, twelve foot thick. They had them built into the little knolls and they covered them with dirt and then grass. Sometimes you walk on them, "Hey, there's a pillbox." That's how well camouflaged they were in the Siegfried, they had this all set up years before we ever got there.

NM: Okay.

RB: I was wondering, you said that you were a replacement in the 84th Division. All those men trained together before you came to them.

GH: Yes.

RB: How did they receive you? Were you a little bit of an outsider?

GH: Yes, I was an outsider.

RB: Yes.

GH: I was an outsider coming in and I think a lot of it depended on your personality and the way you handled them. I seemed to make out very well because once the fellas like you got; you more or less got it made. [laughter] I seemed to hit it off with the fellas. I never had any real bad problems with them, to get them to do what I want them to do.

RB: I was also wondering, at this time, some of your brothers were in the military. Were you able to keep in touch with your brothers through mail or other means?

GH: No I didn't. No I didn't. As a matter of fact, I don't even recall writing any letters to any of my brothers. I would ask about my brothers through my mom and dad, whenever I wrote a letter home. I would ask, "How's Doc? How's Cec? How's Donnie." I know Donnie was up in the Aleutian Islands when the Japanese attacked up there. He was in the Air Force. So, I inquired about my brothers whenever I could.

RB: But you did not have any direct communication?

GH: No, no direct communications.

RB: I was also wondering, when you were in France, your division, the 84th Division essentially drove through France. When you were going through, was there anything that really impressed you about France or that really stuck out in your mind?

GH: Well, the biggest thing that I recall is the people were so appreciative. They would be out on the street and they would throw roses and flowers at our trucks. As our trucks went by, they'd throw things at us and the kids would come out, you know, and we'd throw candy to them. We had, you know, American soldiers never wanted for anything. The American people really bent over, they did so much for the American soldier and I think the French people were very appreciative. The kids would come by and we would throw candy to them and cigarettes. They would say, "Cigarette for Papa, chocolate for Mama," and if we had a couple cigarettes, we got the cigarettes for nothing, I mean, everybody either got Camels or Lucky Strike. We shared them.

NM: Just out of curiosity, did you smoke at all?

GH: I couldn't smoke cigarettes because they made me sick, so I was allowed two cigars. So I started smoking cigars, yes.

RB: Where did you first enter a combat situation against the Germans?

GH: That was in Geilenkirchen. That's right after we made this stop, they gave us a R&R after we got off these trucks. You couldn't walk after sitting in these trucks all those hours. We stopped in a town of Gleen, G-L-E-E-N, that was in Belgium. I call it Holland because it had these huge windmills and we stopped in Gleen and my company, G Company, was able to stay in the farmyard of this family and the people in the houses wanted us to go into and live in and stay in their homes but the officers said, "No. No GI's in the homes," because it was cold, it was cold, it was November, it was cold. So, okay, that's all right, so we put our pup tents in their yards, all over there. We loved it because they had outside "johns," you know, they had two big, two outside johns. Before that, you had to go in woods and dig a hole.

RB: Oh.

GH: Yes.

RB: That is horrible.

GH: Yes. The American G.I. left no waste anyplace. If you were smoking a cigarette you had to field-strip it. You know what field-strip a cigarette is? Okay, whatever the stub you had left, you split it open, you take the tobacco out and you spread it out, you wad the paper up, and you bury it. In case the Germans ever made a counter-attack, and you move back, they could see the cigarettes, they would know how many guys, they could just figure out how many troops were there, whether to continue on or try another place. … So we had to do that. So, while I was at this courtyard or in the farmyard. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

NM: Go ahead, you can continue.

GH: Okay, while I was in this farmyard, we were there, they gave us an R&R for two days, okay. At that time we didn't know it was for two days, but they had this huge windmill outside and the father came and he said, well the daughter was about maybe, I'd say probably maybe fifteen, sixteen years old, they had her taped down, her hair cut like a boy and she dressed like a boy, and you look at her at a distance, that's to keep the Germans from, right. So, when the time came for us to leave, well the father first came with his daughter and said to me, "Sergeant," the daughter said, "Sergeant, my father wants to waterproof your men's boots." I says, "Oh, that's fine." So I got all the guys in my platoon together, we took our boots off, and they had a big oven in the back of their home, big oven. He put all the boots in there and heated them up and they took them out, he had some kind of a fat, the brush, I don't know what the brush was made out of, but he took each boot and he coated them with some kind of a fat to waterproof them, which I thought was great. So, I said, "Okay, everybody has to give up a K-ration." So, all the guys, we all gave them a K-ration. They wound up with about sixteen to twenty K-rations. The ones we didn't like, the breakfast, that was the worst. So we gave them the K-rations. Then he took me and the young girl over to the windmill. I never knew this, even today I would never know, is that they take the grain, we went inside this windmill, there was a huge stone in circles, it must be maybe sixteen to twenty feet in diameter and it must be this wide. It's stone and the windmill shaft, everything is wood, the shaft came down from, you're talking about two stories up, right. The gears up there were wood, the shaft coming down must have been six inches in diameter, it came down to where this stone is. On the bottom of the stone was an arm like this. The stone was round. It was just as wide as the stone that they had put on in the circle. Well, as the windmill went around, this arm would move this stone would roll over the stone that was in a circle. Well, somebody, a woman would stay there and feed the grain. She'd put the grain on this wide surface, the other stone would come along and crush it. She'd take a whisk broom and sweep everything off and put more on. So by the time it got down and around again, she would have it loaded with maybe a couple feet of grain and it would roll over that, crush it. They'd take a broom and sweep it off and I thought that was very interesting. So, when it come time for us to go I told the girl that, "We'll probably be leaving tomorrow, you know." … The next day, must've been, I'd say maybe five thirty in the morning, she come out and start kicking my heels

in my pup tent. She's going, "Sergeant, sergeant." I got up and said, "What's the matter?" She says, "My mom wants to see you." I said, "Okay." So when I got up to go, the other guys, they heard it too. So the girl was leading us up to the side of the house, up the steps, going into their home and all these guys are behind me. She got to the top of the steps, she turned around and says, "No, no, no, only the sergeant." So [laughter] the guys start laughing. So we went in, into the house, they're huge, these Belgium homes are like two stories and they're square, just square, but the rooms are enormous. We went in what I would call a living room, I don't know what they call it. There is a fireplace that must've been eight feet on each side and you could go back there and get dressed, put your shoes on and just, it had this huge fire made. They used wood a lot and coal and that's how they kept warm. So, the girl says, "Come on." She could speak pretty good English. So we went through the living room, out through the back and there's a room in the back, must've been maybe eight feet square, which is, I would think is like a bathroom, which I knew it wouldn't because they had outhouses. … She opened the door, her mother was already in there sitting in a chair. She opened the door and as I looked in, I could see all candles lit, all the way around, must've been twenty candles all lit, and there was a picture of Christ, the cross, and I says, "Well, what's going on?" She says, "My mom is going to talk to you." So, her mother looked at me and said that, "You're too young to die in the war, and if you will carry this Saint Theresa capsule with you, you will see your mother and father again." On this capsule, I took a nail, you might need glasses, your eyes are better than mine, but inside this capsule is a Saint Theresa and that's what she gave me. … On it, you'll see, I don't know if you can, you'll see my name and on the bottom is Ana, here, see Ana and I think it says 84th Infantry, November, sometime in there.

NM: Wow, thank you for sharing with us, oh my gosh. Just for the record, Mr. Hill gave us the capsule that he has been speaking about in the interview. Wow, well thank you for sharing, Mr. Hill, it is a very personal story.

GH: Yes. …

NM: We appreciate that, definitely.

GH: So, after that, we took off towards Geilenkirchen and we were only there a short time, one day, and they pulled us out to go to the Siegfried. We were the first division to break the Siegfried Line. We were in the Siegfried only two days. They pulled us out of the Siegfried because the Germans had broke through, which started the Battle of the Bulge. [Editor's Note: The Germans launched the Ardennes Offensive, later known as the Battle of the Bulge, on December 16, 1944.] They were on the way to Antwerp so they broke the armies, the American armies in half and they didn't take any prisoners. You probably read the stories of Malmedy. Malmedy is where they slaughtered some two hundred fellas. The snow had covered their bodies and they had to sweep the snow away to get the men. … [Editor's Note: Soldiers of the First Panzer SS Division summarily executed eighty-four American prisoners of war on December 17, 1944, near the Belgian village of Malmedy.]

RB: I was wondering, you talk about the incident at Malmedy. That was actually the SS that did that. I was wondering how did your men feel towards the SS versus the regular German Army?

GH: Well, the news of that sped around the frontline like wildfire. "Take no prisoners. Take no prisoners. Take no prisoners." You could hear that up and down the line when we, when they found out about that. It was a sad day for all of us when we found out about what happened.

NM: Now, just before we get in depth into this, you had mentioned that you and your platoon had been sent to the Siegfried Line and you were there for two days. Could you talk about during those two days what your duties were?

GH: Well, what happened there was, the engineers, see the Siegfried Line had these stone pyramids if you want to call them, it's been so long I don't even know what the terminology is anymore [laughter] but these things were built to stop tanks from going through and the engineers got in them and they'd blow them. They'd put charges on them and blow them, but there was not a lot of opposition. I don't know where the Germans were at the time but we walked through there with no problem. I think that's one of the reasons why they pulled us out when the Bulge started. When they broke through going towards Antwerp, I think that's why they pulled us out because, and then we went back to cut the Germans off. Then when we had that thing that had all the stuff I took off the prisoners, right there, that's when that happened.

NM: Okay.

GH: Yes.

NM: Okay.

GH: Yes, that's it.

NM: Just for the record, Mr. Hill is showing us some of the things that were taken off of German POWs. This was at the Battle of the Bulge or someplace else?

GH: The Battle of the Bulge. You can see that these Germans were already down in France and, of course, we had pushed them back up towards, you could tell that by the coins, the French coins that they had, so you know they're down in France and this one necklace is from Paris, it tells you right on it, so you know these troops were down into France. As Americans made their advance, these fellas retreated, but they got rid of it when we captured them. They didn't want to take the chance on getting shot because at that time, we'd already known what they did at Malmedy, okay, we knew that they slaughtered the troops so, that's why they got rid of this stuff. There's one fella here, there are Germans, there were good Germans, I'm not, you know, just like there were bad American soldiers too, there's the bad American soldiers that think nothing of shooting anybody. But the Germans were nice too. I can tell you a story about a German that I had met. It was up in Marche, Belgium, where I took these at. I happened to, there was something like ninety, we had captured something like ninety men and we were searching them. Well this one fella's name was Hans Schmidt and I took about everything he had, except I did not take his pictures. He had pictures of his wife and his daughter and I thought, you know, "I'm not going to take that away from the guy." He was, I was what, I was nineteen, he was about maybe twenty, maybe he was about twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old at the time. But he spoke very good English, very good and at the time I didn't know where he was from, so all I did was

just take what he had and then we gave him to the combat MPs. Well, the war went on, and when the war was over, I was sent back to Camp Lucky Strike in La Havre. I wound up driving for a colonel, Colonel Wiggins, I had a 19 and 39 LaSalle that was made in Belgium, right. So as I say, the war was over now and the troops were splitting up or waiting to go home. So there must have been over a thousand guys at La Havre, Camp Lucky Strike waiting to go home, but I couldn't stay up there. I wanted to do something. So, I went to the commanding officer and I said, "Ain't there something I can do?" He said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "Well, anything. Drive?" He said, "You like to drive?" I said, "Yes, I'll drive." So, he contacted this colonel, Colonel Wiggins, and he turned out to be in charge of Channel Base Section. He was in charge of all, everything, all the way on the coast of France. So I had this black LaSalle with the flags on the, you know, and we drove all over. I took him all over the place. Well, one day, we're down in La Havre and Colonel Wiggins there was talking to other officers. They had fifteen or twenty German prisoners down there cleaning up the thing. So I had my back turned and I was listening to what the colonel was saying and somebody in the back said, "I know that sergeant." The colonel turned around and looked at me and says, "You know that German?" I said, "Yes sir, we captured him in Marche, Belgium." "Oh, well if you want to talk to him, it's okay." So who was it. It was Hans Schmidt of all the, you know, Hans. So, he was billeted in La Havre to do all these odd jobs. So, I knew there was something he wanted me to do for him because he was always, every time I turned around, he was there, you know. So he said, "I'm going to do something for you." "Well, what do you want?" He said, "Well, I can make you a, I can make you a ship, I can make you [something] out of C-ration cans or if you have money, I can make you a ring. You have money that's big enough?" I said, "The only thing I got is what I took from you." I meant to bring that to show you, I do have his coin, I still have his German coins that he had, and he said, "You still got those?" I said, "Yes, I still have them." He said, "Well they're not big enough for what I want, you got something bigger?" I said, "Yes, how about a silver dollar?" So, I took out a silver dollar and I showed it to him. My father had given me that silver dollar, all of us boys for good luck, and I had taped it to my leg. So, I gave him the silver dollar and he made a ring out of it. It turned out he was a jewelry designer out of Frankfurt. So, he had that silver dollar for, I don't know, a couple weeks or so, and it was beautiful. It's almost made like this. It has my initial "G" on it. I don't have it to show you because my son has it, and inside he put my name, and where I had met him and the date inside. On the top he had roses, he put roses--it was roses, wasn't it--yes, around it, and around my initial and I thought that was so nice of him to do that but I knew he wanted me to do something for him. So after about maybe two or three days he asked me, he says, "Gee, I got to ask you for a big favor, I don't know whether you can do it or not." I said, "Well, what is it?" He said, "I haven't heard from my wife or my daughter for a couple of years. I was wondering if there was any chance you could possibly go to Frankfurt and see if you could find my daughter and my wife." I said, "Hans, I don't know if I could do that or not." I said, "That's, that's pretty rough." He said, "Well, I just thought I'd ask." So one day I got the nerve to ask the colonel, I said "Colonel," I said, "one of the German prisoners had asked me to do a big favor for him." I said, "He did some things for me," and I showed him the ring he made me and, "he said he wants me to go to Frankfurt and see if I can find his wife and daughter. He hadn't heard from them for two years." He says, "Sergeant, it's up to you, but I don't know nothing about it." So I said, "Yes, but if you need a driver to go someplace, you have to go to Paris [you won't have a jeep]." He said "Don't worry about it. You can take the Jeep, take my Jeep, and you can go and do it. But don't tell anybody and I don't want to know anything about it." I said, "Okay." So the next day, I took

the Jeep and I drove from La Havre, France into Frankfurt, Germany. Well, a Jeep, you don't need a key, you just turn a switch and it starts. Because you can understand why, because you can't have keys in a Jeep and be in a war. So anyhow, I went all over Frankfurt looking for, he gave me the address and he wrote a little note, you know, in case I did find them, I could give it. So after about maybe a couple of hours up there I did find the street but the place was in shambles. Our bombers had been in there and destroyed so much of Frankfurt but I did find it. I parked the Jeep where I could hide it as much as I could because the MPs ever see it, I'm in trouble, in big trouble. So I hid the Jeep like in an alley and I was about maybe, oh I couldn't have been maybe a hundred feet from the apartment building she was in which I thought she was in. So, I knocked on the door and the daughter answered the phone, answered the door, and I told her, she could speak a little English, her daughter could. I says, "Is your mother home." I no more said that and she was right behind her daughter, and she just motioned like to come on in. So I came in and she started walking up the steps. Well, when she went up the steps she started taking off her clothes. I said, "No, no, no, no. Hans. I have a letter from Hans." She immediately stopped, put her jacket back on, and came down and I gave her the letter, that little note that Hans had given me. They both broke out in tears and they hugged one another, but their daughter, her leg was blown off from the knee down. There was no medical help at that time I guess for them, so they had a broomstick, and they had it taped to her leg. She was on a broomstick and nothing on the bottom just a wide pad on the bottom so it wouldn't sink in I guess. I felt so bad, but I felt so good to see them, that her father was alive. So I said, "Please, whatever you do, write something quick from Hans. I got to get out, my Jeep is an alley. If they find it, I'm in a lot of trouble, big trouble." So, the daughter told her mother to write something and as she was writing I went up and I said, "You can't write anymore, I got a get out of here," and so the daughter understood what was happening. So I did, I got back to my Jeep, and I went back to La Havre and the next day Hans was out on a work crew. I went down to where he was working and I gave him the letter and he broke out crying too and me too. I felt so good that I did something, although like I said there were good Germans and bad ones too but I felt so good that I was able to do something for him. He hugged me and he was thanking me. That was the story. It was very touching.

NM: Well, thank you for sharing.

GH: Hans Schmidt.

RB: I was wondering, why when you came into the house did she start to take her dress off?

GH: The what?

RB: The mother, you said she started to take her dress off.

GH: Well, she thought I come there to have sex. That's what they were doing to stay alive. There's no money. Nobody had nothing. So on the way up the steps, she was getting ready.

NM: Since you were driving all around, what did some of these cities like Frankfurt look like?

GH: Piles of rubble, piles of rubble, especially, even in France, but France was better because the Americans were there you can see, I don't know if, I have pictures where automobiles are all pushed on the side with a big bulldozer with all bricks and stone and even the roads that were concrete, were just filled with dirt in order to keep using them, but every so often you'd see big piles of debris, apartment buildings that are tumbling down and a lot of skeleton buildings from the bombings and from the shelling, chasing the Germans out, artillery, just so many things happened. … They bypassed Paris, they saved Paris because they must have signed some type of papers to prevent the destruction of Paris, but the small towns, villages, were just flat.

NM: While you were in France and a little bit in Germany, what were the living conditions among the civilians you encountered?

GH: Very poor, but most of the places were women, either Germans shot them or they got killed during the raids that the Germans made. The Germans were very brutal, the SS troopers were very brutal. I'll give you one incident what happened at a little town, oh let's see, outside of Saint Lo, maybe five miles outside of Saint Lo, I can't remember the name of the town exactly but what they did the SS troopers they took the population and forced them into the church, and then they set the church on fire. The whole population was in that church. As they tried to escape the Germans would shoot them as they come out the door. That's how bad they were. It was just brutal for these people. That's why when the American troops came in they were hugging us and kissing us, throwing us flowers, because the average G.I. was just, how should I word it, he was just, I don't know, happy doing things for somebody although we weren't happy fighting but we were accepted very well.

NM: I want to backtrack a little bit. You mentioned that you were at the Siegfried Line. Can you pick up where you left off, when you were sent to the Ardennes.

GH: The Ardennes was really the worst offensive. In the Ardennes, 13,000 got killed Americans soldiers 13,000, and 81,000 wounded in maybe a little more than five weeks time. It was brutal because it was the coldest winter in twenty years. It was a terrible condition, terrible conditions, but we were so many troops I think there was like 275,000 troops that went into the Ardennes. We just literally just pushed the Germans, they had no alternative but to back up, you know. They went all the way back to the Rhine and into the Ruhr. They just fled, there wasn't too much fighting, hearsay, you had to fight for every five yards to get it, that was not so. When they see the American troops coming they kept retreating, they kept retreating, and they were using artillery more instead of this hand-to-hand so to speak or the German across the street, he's not there anymore. He already took off. I think the Germans feel that the war was going to end for them and they were trying to save their own skin. I mean to have that many be pushed that far all the way from Saint Lo, France all the way back into Germany and over to the Ruhr River. They had their backs on the Rhine, they had their backs on the Ruhr. So they wanted to try to save their own skin.

RB: Do you think your experience at the Siegfried Line prepared you for the Ardennes?

GH: Well, I really don't think so. I think it just, it seems like one battle is just as bad as the next battle and you don't, the only thing you learn is to try to take cover better and to protect yourself.

NM: You were talking about how the weather was terrible. How did the weather affect you and your platoon? Did that affect the equipment?

GH: Yes, it did. As a matter of fact, the bad part about it was the M1 rifle, once you fire a rifle, M1, it ejects the shell. But in cold weather, what happens is that the heat that's generated from exploding that shell, if you didn't fire your rifle within the next four or five minutes, the condensation that's built up in the bolt, when you pulled the trigger nothing happened. So you wound up the bolt is froze in position. So you had to take the button and put it on the ground and take your foot and kick the bolt open and then you're all right. So what we learned to do, after you fire a rifle you stick it under your arm, unless you were going to fire a whole clip, which you'd probably never do unless you were in tight quarters someplace. But that's how we, you learn, you learn from your own mistakes. But you'll see men, you'll see it even on the film, you'll see guys walking through your Ardennes with the bolt, the rifle, the M1 rifle under their arm. They hold the barrel.

NM: While you are Ardennes, are there any particular actions or situations that you and your platoon experienced that stand out?

GH: Well, they are some that was very upsetting. When we were into the Ardennes, no this is, I think it was the Siegfried. We were in the Siegfried, and like I said these pillboxes are almost hidden, they were covered with Earth and they grew grass over and weeds. The only thing sticking out was just a machine gun. So we had moved the whole company, the officer, Lieutenant Colonel Pedley, P-E-D-L-E-Y, had moved us in and we were maybe a hundred yards from the pillboxes, you could see them. During the night we were unaware and the "old man," we called him the old man, he was unaware of that too, the artillery, 105s, 155s, had moved up in back of us. Somehow it mixed communication or they didn't know we were there. So, they got the orders to fire point blank into these pillboxes because they were like I said, some of them were eight, ten, twelve feet thick, reinforced concrete. Well what happened the next morning when they opened fire at point blank they were killing us, the sound, concussion, blowing your helmets and the guys were holding their ears. Well, the old man was so mad he got up and he ran right for the artillery. Well, when he got up to run, the Germans saw him and they hit him with machine gun fire and got his leg. … However it happened, the artillery stopped immediately. Either a forward observer had saw what was happening, it didn't see us, but they saw the old man run. They must have cut the fire off right away, that's the only way you stopped them. That was one of the saddest things that happened that I can recall.

NM: Were you dug into the Siegfried Line? Were you in a foxhole?

GH: Yes, well we couldn't dig too deep because the ground was frozen. We just tried to mostly try to make like slit trenches, just to get your body from grazing fire, when the machine gun, they'd rake the whole area. They don't fire on one area, they spread it all around. So if you could get just enough, just your head and that's what we did because you didn't have time to dig a hole. Usually a foxhole, was you're talking four feet deep or three foot, you know, you could crunch down in. In France you could do it but up there it was too damn cold.

NM: You mentioned that you had your boots waterproofed. Did you have winter clothing?

GH: Yes, we had an overcoat and believe me, they were heavy as hell when they got wet, so you saw them laying all over the field. If you get shot at a couple of times and you're trying to run and you got that coat on, forget it. So what the guys did, they dumped them, relied on their field jacket, but they wore their raincoat. See we had a camouflage, well it wasn't camouflaged, it was green, camouflage didn't come out until after what, Korea and those other wars, but during World War II everything was either OD or green. That's what we did, but they came out with what they call a combat artic to put over your combat boots. If you ever try to run in them, you get shot at a few times and you're trying to run, it's like having a couple cinderblocks tied at the bottom of your shoe. So you saw them laying all over the battlefield, you saw your combat arctic. That's why we were so happy when this guy come up with the goo to put all over our boots and he did a good job. He really kept them waterproof.

NM: How did you get out of that situation with the pill boxes in front of you?

GH: Well that's, not that we retreated, they just, the pillboxes were done away with. They were done.

NM: They had taken care of them.

GH: Yes. So, once you got those out of the way, I don't know when the next ones were because they pulled us out before then, but the first row of boxes we got. We got through that. Once they got the men out of there, the artillery could fire and do what they want. But at the time we were there and they fired, it made it difficult, that's why. But they did pull us out of there and then the artillery came in, took the boxes. Then the demolition men come in and they blew every pillbox, no pillboxes left. The only ones you'll see now, pillboxes, and they're still there, is on D-Day. You see them all along Omaha Beach. They're preserved, I guess, you know, for future generations to look at.

RB: During the Battle of the Bulge, did your unit suffer heavy casualties?

GH: Yes, we did. That's what I was saying before, there was 81,000 in the Bulge that was wounded, and 13,000 died. I have a list here if you want to see that of all the casualties of the 84th Infantry Division. They break it down, people that were captured, people that were killed and the Germans buried them in the Ardennes to cover up what they did, they murdered them. That's what I was saying before, that's when the cry went along the line not to take any prisoners because of when we heard what had happened.

NM: Did your platoon sustain any casualties?

GH: In my platoon, yes. We lost four men in the Ardennes out of my platoon and I'm sure some of the other sergeants lost as many. I think it was something like, I think there was over a hundred and some were captured and taken back. The Germans captured them. That list I have, it's in one of these books, it tells you how many was captured, how many died, but right off the hand I can't remember the numbers.

NM: The numbers are important, but we are trying to get at the experience there. You had mentioned previously that because you were in the Boy Scouts and had a lot of experience in the woods that people would come to you for advice. Could you talk about some of those situations?

GH: Yes. Well, I know that we were in the Ardennes and the old man come to me and said, "Sergeant, you got to take five or six guys and go out and reconnoiter, find out where the Germans are. … I said, "Six, seven men? No. I don't want six men. Two men and myself." I said, "It's hard enough to take care of myself and two men and worrying about four or five other guys." So, not that we argued, but he wanted me to have more protection, and I didn't need it, I didn't want it. So that was another thing I, I knew the woods, I knew woods, I got in the woods you're not going to lose me. … He said, "Okay." I said, "I'm the one that's going, so I should be the one to take who I want. So, I didn't take any of the fellas that were married and had children at home. They always volunteered but I said, "No, I'm not taking you." I said, "Him, him and him," and if they want to refuse, they refuse; I'll pick somebody else. "I don't force you to go." I picked the three guys that I wanted and we went out and reconnoitered and we find out. But those experiences come from the Boy Scouts, learning compass in the Boy Scouts. They take you out into the woods and they turn you loose and they give you a compass and they tell you where to go and you use the compass to get there. So, all those things help you.

RB: I was wondering, do you remember any cases of battle fatigue among your men during the Ardennes offensive.

GH: Yes, yes.

RB: Was it very prevalent?

GH: There was; I'm one of them. I spent almost four or five months in a hospital, fatigue. I was shell-shocked. They took me out of the Ardennes and they took me back to England. So I spent four or five months in the hospital up there. It was along with maybe, I don't know what the number on that slip is, about 1200, because it was just a constant, a constant drum all the time, it never let up, and sooner or later it does affect you. That's why they try to get people off the line, they give them R&R, rest and recuperation, they try to put you maybe five days on the line and come back for a couple days, but during the Bulge they needed everybody they could get a hold of. As a matter fact, they even took Air Force guys, gave these Air Force guys an M1 to fill the gap. That's how bad it got, but that constant bombing, artillery, you lose your, not sense of direction so much as you do your ability to tell somebody else what they have to do.

NM: If you can, could you talk about what you remember from the point where you leave the Ardennes and when you are in England.

GH: Well I can tell you the incident that happened taking me out of the Ardennes. I was put into an ambulance along with three other guys, and the Ardennes is very heavy, heavy forest. They got little roads here, little roads there. So the ambulance picked up the four of us. On the way back I guess the driver made a wrong turn. He'd gone back into German territory. So anyhow as we approached this road in the end of the woods two Germans came out of the woods

to stop the ambulance. They opened the back doors to see who was in there. We thought, I thought they were going to shoot us, the four of us. They shut the door, went around to the driver. They could speak a little English. They said, "You made a wrong turn." That's why I'm saying, they got good Germans too. They told the driver where he has to go to get back to the American lines. So, the ambulance jockeyed this damn big ambulance around on a little road like this to get turned around. He went down the road, we weren't going a mile. He stopped. He turned around, he jockeyed again and he turned around and he went back to where the Germans were. They come out of the woods with the rifles again and stopped him. He came over to the driver. The driver pulled down, pulled out two packs of cigarettes, Lucky Strikes, cigarettes. He gave each one of those Germans a pack of cigarettes and said, "Thanks." Now he turned around went back again. [laughter] I thought that was so, you know, that's so touching. Like I said before, I ran into Hans, there are good Germans, and these two fellas steered us back to where we were supposed to go and then we went to an airfield. Well, they put us on a train and went all the way down to Paris and we went to their airfield where Lindbergh landed. I think it's called, I forget the name, is it "Lindy" Field or something I forget. It was named after Lindbergh. But anyhow, the C47s were lined up as far as you could see. They were like taxis. So, they all open the doors and we got on the C47s. They loaded up, take off, another one would pull up just like a taxi. They were loading up the wounded and those what they call walking wounded. I had a tag on me marked "UK." "ZI" means Zone of Interior which you would go back to the United States if you were bad, [if] you had a leg blown off or you had head injuries. You went to a different place, but all the UKs had a big UK on you and these C47s would take off just [interviewee makes "whoosh" noise] and go back to England. I went into Birmingham hospital up in England. I have a record up there someplace in my, of the hospital, and your name and everything is in it. I kept that.

NM: You were in the hospital for about four months you said.

GH: Yes.

NM: Was the section of a hospital you were in strictly for those who had combat fatigue or were there also people who sustained physical injuries?

GH: Each ward, each section was whether you was, I forget the word that they used. It's not coming to me. But the wards were set up so the people who, their minds were disturbed by the war, they had a ward just for them. They had to have special care you might say, versus those who were wounded. You were kept separated, okay.

NM: Where your parents notified of what had happened?

GH: Yes, there was a notification that I was in a hospital in England. My mother and father got that, okay. I did wind up, I did write to them and try to explain to them what had happened to put them at ease, their mind.

NM: What were some of things that you did in the hospital to recuperate?

GH: Well most of it was, you had the Red Cross girls. They're wonderful, wonderful. They come and read to you, or you read to them, or they got you doing things with your hands make sure that your mind has control of the movements. They gave you games to play, checkers. [laughter] Things like that, they even gave you things to build I think, I recall puzzles you put together like blocks of wood, like kids do in kindergarten. There I met Lena Horne, I met Lena Horne she come to the room, she gave me a kiss right there. Mickey Rooney was in the ward and Mickey Rooney came in. When I first went to the hospital, they said, "Sergeant, we're going to put you in a little room off to the side." It's like maybe an 8x8 room, something, there's a bed in it, you know. So they put me in there. A day later, the guy come in and says, "Hey, sergeant, we got to move you out of here." I said, "Okay." He said, "Mickey Rooney's coming in. We're going to give him the room." Mickey Rooney had what they call exhaustion from performing. He performed till he was just dead on his feet. So, they had to give him some R&R, rest and recuperation. So, they sent him to this hospital. … He saw me, he says, "Sergeant, I'm sorry I'm taking your room." I said, "That's all right, they'll find a place for me." So they found a place for me in the ward and see, who else did I [meet]. Well I told your Rita Hayworth but I met her, that was after the hospital. See, they didn't send me back up anymore because of the condition, right, so that's where I got a chance to drive. That's when I started driving for Colonel Wiggins. I was sent back to France, though. The reason why I was sent back to France because the British Army, the British Eighth Army was down in … [Africa] all those years. Well, they wanted to get all the Americans they could out of England because they figured when they come back, they don't want any repercussions of what went on while they were gone. So, they took all the men that they could muster and they sent them all back. So I went back to La Havre and that's where I started driving for Colonel Wiggins. If you want to see the jacket that she signed I'll show you that. … Turn it off because I got to go get it.

[TAPE PAUSED]

GH: … When I first went into [the service], my father gave me the silver dollar, I thought, "Well, once I get into France, if I get shot, they going to take my clothes off and I would lose my silver dollar," because I had it in my pocket. So, I figured well I'm going to take the silver dollar off and I taped it to my leg above my boot. Well, a couple weeks went by, weeks went by. The next thing you know, I started breaking out. My leg became infected. So, the fellow in my platoon, every platoon had a medic to go along with you. So, I told them about it. He said, "Okay, "Sarge," I'll take care of that. So I took the silver dollar off and he patched it up and he kept giving me some kind of a cream to keep putting it on, putting it on. So, he said, "Next time you put it on," he said, "let me fix it for you." So he took the silver dollar and he embedded it in adhesive tape and then he put it on my leg, on the backside he put on this time and that silver dollar is the one that my son has that's made into a ring. You should see that, what a beautiful job he did with that.

NM: Well if you have a picture we can include it with the interview.

GH: In fact, I don't think I even have a picture do I? I don't think so. …

NM: Perhaps your son can take a picture of it and send it to us so we can include it with the interview.

GH: A lot of things you don't think of at the time, you know.

NM: Just for the record, when did you get transferred from England into France? Do you remember what month it was?

GH: You mean?

NM: After you were in the hospital.

GH: Oh, that would've been, I guess in December; I believe it must have been in January some time. … No, it was longer than that.

NM: Was it before the war had ended in Europe, or after?

GH: Well, the war had not ended yet. They took me out of the Ardennes. …

NM: Tell us about where they sent you in La Havre. Did you go to a replacement depot?

GH: Yes, well I went to Camp Lucky Strike. There, you know, you got a thousand troops up there in tents. It was good, just to lay out but I was one that wanted to do something. I couldn't get up, and those guys were playing cards every day, you know, and walking around. I couldn't do, I wanted to do something. That's what I went to the commanding officer and asked him, "Gee, is there something I can do. That's when I started driving. So they gave me this Jeep. I'll tell you little story about that. They gave me the Jeep, boy it was beautiful. It was brand new I guess just got out of the crate. Well, I put my girlfriend's name across the Jeep in the front. The headquarters got an announcement, said, "Hey, Sarge you got a go to Paris, you got to pick up General Lee--General. He's coming to inspect the Channel Base Section." I said, "Okay." "So take your Jeep, get it cleaned up, and go to Paris and pick up General Lee." "Yes, sir." Well I go get my Jeep, and the officer said, "Before you leave I want to look, make sure that it's up." I said, "Okay." So I pulled up to the headquarters company. He says, "What the hell is that name on the front for?" I said, "That's my girlfriend." "You're going to pick up General Lee with Dorothy written across the front of that Jeep? Take it down to the motor pool and let him repaint it." So I had to take it down to the motor pool and a German came out and he sprayed OD, olive drab, over the name. He said, "Okay, now you can go." [laughter] I thought that was funny, you know. At nineteen you don't know.

NM: At Camp Lucky Strike, was it German POWs who were doing the work?

GH: Well they weren't in Camp Lucky Strike. No see, Lucky Strike was made, was built, it was nothing but a tent city of veterans, war veterans waiting to go home. You had to have so many points to go home, and when you have so many points, than La Havre is right there, you board ship, and go home, but the Germans were billeted down in La Havre area. They had a building built that they can keep an eye on them. I don't think there were that many, maybe a hundred they had there. They only used them for detail, cleaning up and making things right. The rest of

us were at Lucky Strike. We ate all the meals of there, everything. It was nice. It was just that I couldn't get up every morning and play cards and pitch horseshoes.

NM: How long were you a driver for Colonel Wiggins?

GH: Colonel Wiggins, I drove for him for about, I guess, about three months. I got a picture of him with the '39 LaSalle. … The story with him is that papers came through for him to get transferred to Camp Hood, Texas. So he said, "Sergeant I want you to go along with me and be my driver." I said, "Sir," I said, "I've been over here for eighteen months." I said, "I want to go home." He said, "I'll take good care you. I just want you to go with me." The colonel must have been, I guess he was in his fifties, I guess. … I kind of begged off, I said, "No." He said, "All right. I accept that." He said, "but you can have my car," a '39 LaSalle. It had about 35,000 miles on it I guess something like that it, made in Belgium. So, I said, "Well, what am I going to do with it? He says, "I can't drive it." He said, "Send it home, it cost you 500 dollars to send it home." I said, "Okay." After he left I said, "No, I don't want that thing," after he left, I thanked him and everything, but after we broke up, and he got transferred, he wanted me to go to Camp Hood in the worst way. He said, "All you have to do is sign up for three more years." … When he said, "You got to sign up for three more years," I said, "I don't want to spend that much time, I want to go home." So then I gave it to a captain, the captain that I knew, because they, when I was driving for the colonel, they rented these big chateaus, these big French chateaus, oh god, they're enormous, beautiful, driveway is from here, a half a mile, and trees lining it. So in the back of them they had cottages for drivers. So, I had the car parked out in the front and I had the cottage. I'd go out every morning, and shine that thing up and wax and clean it, clean the inside when I knew we had to go someplace.

NM: You mentioned that you had the jeep and you put your girlfriend's name on it. Was that the only time you had drove that jeep?

GH: No, what happens is it all depends where the colonel wanted to go. See, if he wanted to go down to the La Havre shipping area because it was his responsibility that he had to go aboard every ship that landed in La Havre to go aboard and check for contraband because they were bringing in whiskey, illegal cigarettes, and everything. These sailors were selling the stuff from the black market. So the colonel's job was to stop all that. He used to use a Jeep, you run down on the docks and all over. If we had to go someplace like to Paris to a conference, meeting, or something, then they use the LaSalle and then I had to put the flags on the front. One thing about the colonel, once we got outside of La Havre, he'd say, "Pull over sergeant." I'd pull over. He said, "Okay, you get in the back, I'm going to drive," and he'd drive all the way to Paris. He loved to drive. He'd take the hat off and take his jacket so you couldn't see his colonel [insignia]. When we got close to Paris, he'd say, "Stop." You'd say, "Okay." "You can drive now," he'd put the stuff back on. As soon as we entered the limits of Paris, the MPs they're right there, every entrance or every exit had MPs. They would see the car coming with the flags, they'd come right up on motorcycles. "Where you going colonel?" He would say, "Channel Base Headquarters." "Yes, sir." The two of them get in those motorcycles, they'd take us all through Paris up to the headquarters. Then we get there the colonel would say to the officer there in charge, said, "This is my sergeant, I want you take good care of him. I'll be gone for the next three or four hours but I want you take good care of him." He always set me up with something, and these guys would

take me, show me Paris all over, went up in the Eiffel Tower, went over to the Rhine, no not the Rhine, what's the river, Seine, the Seine River, and take me on all kinds of tours, took me all over. As a matter of fact I went underneath the Seine where the Princess got killed, remember?

RB: Princess Diana?

GH: Yes. God, I've been through there half a dozen times and I see exactly what happened. It's funny that they had these pillars that hold up the highway underneath, and they're open. You'd think they'd have a wall. If you hit the wall you bounce, no pillars and that's where she ran into them, right.

NM: Are there any other places that you went with the colonel that stand out, or any other experiences that stand out?

GH: No, because most of the time you're driving. He's either going to a meeting which you're not involved in. You drop him off and you'd stay there and he says, "I'll be gone," or it's up to me to check to see how many hours they got left or how many minutes, when to drive around to pick him up. But I can't drive the car with the flags on it. The only time you can put the flags on is when he's in the car. So mostly they would tell me in advance. I would check in. What I'd do is I parked the car and I used to walk, just walk around just to see the neighborhood. Then I'd come back and say, "What's it look like?" "Well, it's going to be another hour so." Then I would just sit there and wait for him.

RB: I was wondering, what was the reaction of the people around you when they learned that President Franklin Roosevelt had passed away?

GH: Yes, well I think it was very sad. I think most everybody felt remorse when he passed away. It was sad.

RB: How did you guys feel about Truman taking over, did you guys trust in his ability?

GH: Oh, yes. I think when you're at the age you're not into politics, you really don't know what the guy is like, but you accept it because you're in the Army, and you're told, "Hey, this is what you are going to do." So you accept it, but he turned out to be good.

RB: Where were you when you learned that the war in Europe had ended?

GH: I was in La Havre. …

RB: What was the atmosphere when they learned that the war had ended?

GH: Well, it was very good. Everybody was out on the streets, and you couldn't get on the streets, the French girls would jump all over you. They were hugging and kissing you. They were very, like I say, very appreciative of the American troops. The Belgians were the best. The Belgian people were really, because they took a lot from the Germans. The Germans actually just, I shouldn't say slaughtered is not the word but they treated them very badly and when the

Americans came they just they couldn't get over our friendship that the American soldiers had. Sometimes you give them your last bar of candy, because that's the way the GIs were. You'll see in history books about how well the GIs treated even their enemies. They were very nice to everybody. …

RB: When did you actually receive enough points in order to be sent home? You talked about the point system.

GH: Every year, every month you got so many points. I don't remember exactly how it worked but you had to have so many points to go home, I think it was forty-eight or something, but what had happened, what made the GIs mad that if you were over there and you married a French girl, she got to go home before you did. That kind of upset, not me, say the American troops there in Camp Lucky Strike, been up there for maybe six months, seven months, waiting for a ship to come home. Then they were told that, no you can't go home, war brides get priority. It kind of made you upset to think that.

NM: When did you leave Europe?

GH: In March. … I was discharged in March, I left … February 1946. … See, I got a chance to go to Switzerland because it was, they had a tour set up by the Army. You got to realize, they had twelve million troops in Europe and to keep people, keep us out of trouble they set up these tours to keep us busy, otherwise you going to wind up getting in trouble, nineteen years old, right. So, I signed on and I was able to go to Switzerland and the Army paid for everything. All you had to do was, they only allowed you, I think it was seventy some dollars was all they allowed you to take in because you didn't want to break their system, their money system. If a G.I. brought all the money and went in, it's no good. So I chose to go there. I spent a week there in Wengen. It was a ski resort, it was wonderful, they treated you like a king. I enjoyed myself for the week and then when I came back; in fact, I called my mom and dad from Switzerland and I told them, "Mom, I'm going to be coming home pretty soon, maybe next month," I didn't know the exact date, so I just said, "probably sometime in March I'm going to be home." The first words that my mom said, "Are you home, son?" "Not yet, Mom." I said, "Pretty soon, a couple months, I'll be home." …

NM: Can you talk about your return to the United States, the trip over and coming back to see your family again?

GH: Seeing my family?

NM: Can you talk about getting out of the Army and coming back to the United States?

GH: Oh, I see, yes. When the troop ship landed in Hoboken, there was a lot of people there. When I called Mom in Switzerland I told her, I didn't expect them to come all the way up here, no way, but there was a lot of people who like me were from Jersey, people, they had people there. So when we looked over, I had pictures taken, over the railing, mobbed with people from, to see their sons coming home, and everybody again was throwing roses and flowers. … The biggest thrill that I had was when we entered New York harbor and we saw the Statue of Liberty,

I have pictures taken, I took with the camera, has the Statue of Liberty, all the fire boats, it must have been maybe fifteen fire boats, they turned on their hoses, and they formed a big arc of water with the hoses for the ship. I thought that was so touching. It was very nice. The people were so pleased to see, don't forget twelve million troops and to bring them home, it takes a lot of months to bring them all home but that was very exciting I thought.

NM: When you get into Hoboken, where do you go? Back to West Virginia?

GH: No, I went to Fort Meade in Maryland to be discharged. Then you go through the turning in your equipment, your rifle whatever, but I saved some of my stuff. I got my .45 I carried. I still have that. I don't have it to show you, my other daughter has that one and stuff like the canteen, I kept my helmet, I kept my uniform. So that was out of Fort Meade. From Fort Meade, you were allowed to wear the uniform for six months, because there was no clothing. I went home you couldn't buy a pair pants, a shirt, nothing. So that's why they give you six months to wear the uniform. So when I got back to Charleston, or South Charleston, West Virginia, why I couldn't wait until they started advertising that you could buy civilian clothes. It was nice. So we had to carry our identification with us all the time, because even the MPs in Charleston, South Charleston, they'd stop you. You're in uniform and you should have a pass while on discharge. So they give you what they call a "ruptured duck." I don't know if you ever seen, you ever see a ruptured duck? I don't know if I got one in here or not, but it's what it is, it's a ruptured duck, it's a big pin to show that you're discharged from the American army. I think Jeanie has that. She got my complete uniform, everything on it.

NM: By the time you had returned, were some of your brothers still overseas?

GH: … They were all home before me because they had gone in before me. The only one that was still in was my younger brother Lee because he got occupation [duty], Japan. So he didn't come home until, oh I guess maybe four, five, maybe six months later he came home. He was a big football star with West Virginia University.

NM: I just want to get at you transitioning back to civilian life.

GH: Okay.

NM: You are back in the United States. What did you think you would do?

GH: Well, first of all, they gave you what they called "52/20." They gave you twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks. They were hoping that you would find a job by then, okay. So, I decided that, being that I met, my future wife was up here. I talked to her a lot on the phone and she was an IBM technician, I don't know if that's the correct title or not but she worked for Raritan Arsenal. They used IBM machines for everything, all your Army equipment, tanks, guns, bits, nuts, bolts, screws, all done with IBM. You probably all know that, that everything "categoried" in the Army or Navy, Air Force, everything was through IBM systems with a code number. If you wanted a nut or a bolt, it had a certain number. Well, that's what she did. So, over the phone from here to West Virginia she suggested, "If you want to, why don't you go to the school under the G.I. Bill and learn IBM," which was the big thing at that time. So I

hemmed and hawed and I thought about it a long time. So then I decided, "Yes, that's what I'm going to do." So I told my mom and dad that I'm going to move to Jersey. So I stayed about almost a year at home I think before I moved up here, and I got an apartment right next to Woodbridge town hall in a home. … I rented a room upstairs in her house. I went to Newark and I signed up for IBM training. So I went to IBM school, I think it was sixteen weeks, I think I went for IBM to learn all the machines and tabulators and all that, and when I got out of school, they place you. So, they had an opening in Ontario, Canada. I said, "No, I am not going to go up there." So I had to wait a while and then later I got a call that they had an opening at Recording and Statistical Corporation in New York. I said, "I'll take that." So I went to New York and I took my resume and everything with me and they hired me right on the spot because it was IBM installation and I went to IBM school so it fit right in, okay. So I went to work for Recording, it's only a block away from Wall Street. I think my salary at that time was thirty-three dollars a week. My commutation ticket was like, I think I must've paid about five or six dollars a month for a train ticket, everything was fairly cheap. So I worked for Recording for, god, years, until finally it got to the point where it was tough, a nine to five job and living in Jersey. I had to get up and catch a train at 7:30 to be to work at nine. You get off at five o'clock, I got home at 7:30 at night and you had no time to yourself, you had to eat and go to bed. So my brother-in-law was a politician in Woodbridge Township and I went to him and I says, "I got to get out of New York." I said, "It's just too much traveling all the time." So he got me a job with Shell Oil Company. So I started, I worked in Shell and I worked my way up to a compounder, which blended all your motor oils, I blend all the motor oils. From there, I made foreman, I was a Shell foreman. I used to board all ships coming into Sewaren and Hess. I had to go aboard the ships and make sure that they were pumping off what they were supposed to. In other words, it's a spy more or less, because these guys were robbing you blind. They'd take the dipstick, "Oh, yes, only twenty feet." "Okay," and there was only fifteen in there. So then they'd charge Shell. So I was called on the side by Shell supervisors and told what was happening. … So, anyhow that's what I did. I was a supervisor unloading of tankers. When the tanker come in, I stayed with that tanker until they unloaded it. Then I give them the okay. They could not sail off of that harbor unless they had my signature on that thing. That's what I did with Shell.

NM: How long did you stay with Shell?

GH: I stayed with Shell for about fifteen years I guess it was. They went on strike. Well I had this one in college and I had another one in college and I says, "I can't make it this way." So I started, I got a part-time job with Van Kel Industries over on Oak Tree Road in Iselin. They liked me so well that they said, "We'll give you whatever Shell was paying you, we'll give you all the benefits that Shell was giving you, we'll give you everything Shell was giving you if you just come and work for us." I did. On top of that, they give me a raise. So I started working for them.

RB: What is it that you did for them?

GH: They were a manufacturer of pharmaceutical testing equipment and there's a patent up on the wall up there that I have, the company got it I didn't get it, they got it. In fact, they got three others too. I made, I'm handy, I just, I would make all kinds of "do-dads," all kinds of crazy

things, some of them are up there, all kind of things. I got yo-yos that talk to you, you name it, I probably made it. So they treated me real well, they're good.

NM: You stayed with them?

GH: Van Kel, I retired. I was, I think I was sixty-five when I retired. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

GH: Well, we had not launched anything in outer space, and they were working on rockets to go there. Well I built a machine that sprayed urethane foam on the fuel cell of the Columbia Space Shuttle, … about 10,000 square feet of foam we put on the Space Shuttle. As you know, it was a big tank. They put it on a "Lazy Susan" maybe about fifty feet in diameter, and as the Lazy Susan went around, they had two guns, a "weed whacker" and a TV camera on an I-beam up the side of the tank. So the urethane foam was sprayed on the tank as it went around, the guns would go up and spray the whole tank with about, I think it was about an inch and a half of foam as an insulator, because if it got into outer space, it's so cold up there, it would freeze the liquid oxygen and the liquid nitrogen would freeze in the tank so they had to protect that. So I built a machine to do that. I didn't invent the machine, I built the machine, okay. I worked with the inventor to manufacture this machine. I have a picture of that someplace too if you want to see it, I have a picture over there, I'll show you that. …

NM: Your daughter had mentioned that the company had sent you to New York because you are ambidextrous.

GH: They sent me for tests to find out just how much coordination and dexterity I had. Well I guess I blew their mind because I had the ability, my left hand is just as good as my right, and they couldn't stump me, with whatever they gave me I could do it either way, either hand, I could do anything. So they recorded that, and they sent it back to the company. That was a plus.

NM: You mentioned you used the G.I. for IBM training. Did you use any of the other G.I. Bill benefits such as lower rates on mortgages and that kind of thing?

GH: … Yes, you're right, yes I did. I did use that when I bought the house, yes.

RB: I was curious you said that you met your wife before the war. When did you and your wife get married?

GH: In '47, I got married a year after I get discharged, I got married.

RB: After the war, did you join any veterans associations?

GH: Yes, I belong to the VFW and I still belong to the VFW. I'm a life member, I have a special pin that tells you that you're a life member of the VFW.

RB: Had you been able to keep up with any of your comrades that you knew from the 84th Infantry Division?

GH: I did up until about five years ago. I have the address of our division. They still have reunions every year, they still have reunions. Now, this one coming up is in Kentucky, but the problem is everybody's up, I'm eighty-eight and some of these other fellows are also in their nineties. So, the turnout is not that great. The turnout now is writing letters, but it's been about four years or so since I made any contact with one of the fellas.

NM: I think we've come to the point where were going to conclude to interview but before we conclude I want to give you an opportunity to add anything we may have missed to the record.

[TAPE PAUSED]

NM: Could you tell us a little about your family before we conclude the interview?

[TAPE PAUSED]

GH: … A little bit about myself is Dorothy and I, we had three children, we had two daughters and a son. My two daughters are, went to college and my son Glen is in California, he does acting. He's a model actor, and Mary Ann has a son and a daughter, Bradley and Tara, and Jeanie is still single and Buddy is married, he has no children. So, as a family so we get along very well together and we do an awful lot together. I'm hoping that I'll be around to see my great-great grandchildren. Jacob is my great-grandson and he's in Florida with Bradley. So that's about it, really.

NM: Reggie and I appreciate you welcoming us here today and we were glad that we capture your story. This concludes the interview for today and thank you again for having us.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Nicholas Trajano Molnar 07/11/2014
Reviewed by Mary Ann Ernst 08/28/2014