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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH FREDRICK KERR

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview with Mr. Fredrick Kerr in Long Valley, New Jersey, on April 21, 1999, with Sandra Stewart Holyoak and ...

Shaun Illingworth: Shaun Illingworth.

SSH: Mr. Kerr, thank you very much for allowing us to interview you. To begin, where were you born?

FK: Okay, ... I was born ... in Northern Ireland. My parents brought me to this country when I was about eight years old in the steerage [compartment] of a boat. They didn't have much money, and ... we settled with relatives for the time being, and I attended school and got good grades. I was usually on the honor roll most of the time, and, whenever I had gotten through high school, why, I worked at ... a cousin's business for a while, just to make money, and then, the war started. ... I was put in the draft, more or less, and I decided, first, that if I was going to be drafted, I didn't want to go in the Army. I wanted to go into the Coast Guard, but, they wouldn't take me. "Why?" I asked them. "You have to be a citizen to be in the Coast Guard." I couldn't become a citizen until I was twenty-one. Then, I went to the Navy and I went through all the gymnastics and all kinds of tests and interviews the whole day. The last thing I had to do was put my hands on the table and spread my fingers. They sat me down and said, "We can't take you." I had hurt my hand on a machine a few weeks before and one finger wasn't healed yet and was crooked. So, that's why they wouldn't take me and they just stopped right there. So, I didn't particularly want to go in the Army, so, I waited until I was ready to be drafted and went through the draft as usual. I'd worked in the meantime, but, went in the draft, and they sent me down to Fort Dix, I think, for the ... basic induction, yes, and I went through the physical things and all those sort of things. ...

SSH: Before we go into your military career, can we talk a little bit about your mother and father?

FK: Okay.

SSH: Coming from Northern Ireland, was your family Protestant?

FK: Yes, we were.

SSH: Did you have any relatives in the United States at the time your family emigrated?

FK: Cousins.

SSH: Your father's name was George Kerr.

FK: George Kerr.

SSH: Where was he born?

FK: In Magherlin.

SSH: Which is in Northern Ireland. Did your family speak Gaelic?

FK: No, just English. [laughter] We were in the northern parts. No, we didn't.

SI: In the early 1920s, around the time that you emigrated, the political and social climate in Ireland was particularly volatile. Did your parents have any opinions on any aspect of that situation, such as the creation of the Irish Free State, for example?

FK: ... No, we weren't involved with that at all. ... There, there was a religious difference between Catholics and the Protestants. The Protestants had been brought down from Scotland by the English ... to take over in part of Ireland and it was conflict all the way through, of a religious nature. Everybody hated the other guys, you know. So, I don't remember too much about it, except that there were some killings, and fights, and those sort of things. ... So, we came over. We decided to come to the United States, because they wanted to give me a better opportunity than there were there, and we went on the *Corinthia*, and we went in the steerage, 'cause we didn't have ... any money, right down in the bottom of the boat. ... It was wintertime, and it's rocking and rolling, and everybody was sick as a dog, and it was not a nice experience.

SSH: What does an eight-year-old do on board a ship for that long?

FK: Get sick. [laughter] Really, I just had to stay with my parents, because it was disorganized. There was a crowd of people, and so, I just ... kept to myself, and they took care of me, more or less.

SSH: What did your father do in Ireland?

FK: ... He made shoes from the ground up, and he had a ... little chicken farm, well, a little chicken farm, it was a thousand chickens, and he made a fairly good living, and so, whenever we come over to the United States, why, ... he started making, you know, ... [shoes] and he worked [in] New York for a while, ... loading the ships, but, then, that fell through, and so, he went back to [shoemaking]. He had his own shoe shop and his [own] shoes. ...

SSH: Did your mother work on the chicken farm also?

FK: Oh, yeah. ... She had to work as well, you know. In fact, she worked as hard as he did, really.

SSH: Was she also born in Magherlin?

FK: Yes.

SSH: Did you have any contact with your grandparents after you settled in America?

FK: Not really, not too much, no.

SSH: Were they still living when you left Northern Ireland?

FK: They were living there, yes, but, ... they spent the rest of their lives there.

SSH: What did your grandfather do?

FK: Grandfather, let's see, ... I'm trying to remember what he did. ...

SSH: I was wondering if the chicken farm was a family business.

FK: It was part of the family, yes, yeah, the whole family. ...

SSH: Did your father need to sell the farm when you left or did other family members take over?

FK: No, we had to sell it. We sold it. We sold everything and took off. ... As I say, I remember very well ... [the] rolling of the ship over and how sick everybody was. It was terrible. ...

SSH: Was it mostly Irish families on board?

FK: It was a mixture of English and Irish, all types of mixtures going to the new country, you know, but, I wouldn't call it mostly Irish, no.

SSH: Do you remember if any particular event in Ireland was compelling these families to move to the United States?

FK: No, but, there was a tremendous hatred between the two religions. ... They [fought] really bitterly, you know. They're both loyal, Christian people, but, they'd cut each other's throats, you know, that sort of thing, and that's one of the reasons ... they wanted to go to the United States.

SSH: Did your father leave a large family behind, brothers and sisters?

FK: No, he had his mother and father and I think he had one sister. That's about all.

SSH: She stayed in Ireland.

FK: They all stayed in Ireland, yes.

SSH: What about your mother's family?

FK: On my mother's side, I don't really remember. ...

Helen Kerr: Two brothers, three sisters. One brother eventually went to Australia and the other to New Zealand.

FK: Two brothers, three sisters. I told her and she remembers it better than I do. [laughter]

SSH: This is good. We also have Mrs. Helen Kerr in attendance.

FK: And she's going to help out. [laughter]

SSH: Did your father belong to any societies in Northern Ireland?

FK: No, he was not, well, other than the fact that he was a Protestant.

SSH: I was just wondering if he had been politically active at all.

FK: No, no, no.

SI: I know that the British impressed some of the Northern Irishmen into the Ulster Defense Force. Did your father or any of your uncles serve with the Ulster Defense Force?

FK: Were they what?

SI: I know that the group is called the Ulster Defense Force, today. I am not sure what it was called then.

FK: Oh, sure, the Ulster Defense Force. They didn't go into the Defense Force, no. He supported it. He liked the [Ulsters].

SSH: Were any of your family members involved in World War I?

FK: Not that I know of.

SSH: When you first arrived in the United States, did you stay in New York City?

FK: No. ... We came to relatives in Belleville. You know, they were cousins of ours. We lived there for quite a while, until ... he got a job and [we] got on our feet and started out. So, the Boston family were the one's that we lived with. [As] I say, I'm trying to think, it was way back in my childhood, you know. [laughter] I was a loner. I read a lot.

SSH: At the time that you emigrated, did you have any brothers or sisters?

FK: I had my sister, Mildred, and that was it.

SSH: Is she younger than you?

FK: ... Yes.

SSH: What did your father do for a living here? Did he work in New York?

FK: He worked on the docks for a while and he was a shoemaker by trade. He worked ... on the docks and made some fairly good money, but, then, the Depression came on, and he lost his job over there, and so, ... he had to go to shoemaking.

SSH: Did he make shoes in Belleville or in New York?

FK: Yes, in Belleville.

SSH: What was Belleville like at that time? Were there several different ethnic groups or was there just one cohesive group?

FK: ... [They were a] cohesive type of people.

SSH: Did you enter the first grade in Belleville after you had moved there?

FK: Yes. Let's see, ... how long did I stay in Belleville? Most of the time. I actually graduated from school there.

SSH: Did you stay in the same house for the entire time you lived in Belleville?

FK: No. Right before the war, we bought a house and moved a few blocks away.

SSH: What about your home in Ireland?

FK: As I say, in Ireland, he had the thousand chickens and we lived in a stone house, right on the farm. ...

HK: Dirt floor.

FK: Oh, yes, and ... the toilet facilities ... were crude. [laughter]

SSH: Did it take very long for your family to find a home of its own while you were staying with the Boston family?

FK: Well, my father, as I say, started to work in New York, and, as soon as he could afford it, why, we moved to a rental ... in the area, and I just attended school. I don't remember anything particularly about me.

SSH: Did your mother work at the time?

FK: She did sewing and she contributed to the [family income]. She worked as much as my father, I guess, more or less.

SSH: Did your mother sew at home?

FK: ... I think she worked ... with a company and sewed there, you know, 'cause she didn't do any sewing at home.

SSH: What did you do to entertain yourself?

FK: Not very much. [laughter]

SSH: What were your favorite subjects in school?

FK: ... I used to read a lot, and ... I could go to the library and get five books out at a time, and I'd go up maybe fifty feet ... in a tree and read books. I was all by myself and I was reading adventure stories and all that stuff. So, I read a tremendous amount of books. That was my life.

SSH: Do you remember your favorite author?

FK: Gee, I had a whole bunch of them, but, adventure stories, mostly.

SSH: Did you play with your sister very much?

FK: ... She didn't have much to do with me.

SSH: Did your parents have any more children after they settled in the United States?

FK: One more. Who was that? ...

HK: Betty.

FK: Betty. Oh, Betty, yeah.

SSH: She was quite a bit younger than you.

FK: Yes, ten years.

SSH: In 1940, you began attending the College of Engineering.

FK: Yeah, I was [at the] Newark College of Engineering, and I'd saved some money, and I was able to [go there]. I was interested in this. So, I went, how many years, I don't know, one? ...

HK: I thought it was one semester or one year.

FK: Yeah, because I was drafted after that. ... One thing I wanted to tell you, whenever I knew I was going to be drafted, I didn't want to go into the Army. ... As I say, I tried to get into the Navy, and I went all through conniptions, you know, had to go through it, and the last thing they

said was that, "We can't take you," and it was a real blow to me, because I felt as if I was an inferior, you know. I wanted to go in the war, and I wanted to do my part, and they didn't want me. So, it ... upset me quite a bit.

SSH: The question of your citizenship had never come up when you were registering for college or anything before that?

FK: No, no.

SSH: That is interesting. Did you ever wonder how you could be drafted by one branch of the military and not accepted by another?

FK: No, I just let things go as ... they came, you know. There's not much I could do about it. ... The Army thing, I went down to, ... where was it?

SSH: You enlisted in Newark, I think.

FK: Yes.

SSH: You went from there to Fort Dix.

FK: Fort Dix, yes. I was drafted, really, and went to Fort Dix for the basic training, and, after that, I went down to South Carolina, I think, wasn't it?

SI: Fort Bragg?

SSH: North Carolina?

HK: Well, no, he wasn't in the paratroopers [yet].

FK: No, I wasn't a paratrooper. I was just in infantry.

SSH: Did you go right from high school into the College of Engineering or did you work for a while after high school?

FK: Yes. ... After high school, I went to the College of Engineering.

SSH: Did you have to work and go to school at the same time?

FK: Yes.

SSH: Where did you work?

FK: I was working for a while in New York. ...

HK: No, you were delivering shoes.

FK: Oh, I delivered shoes on a bike with one pedal on it for a long time. That's my father's stuff, but, that was before. ...

SSH: As a grade school kid?

FK: Yeah, as a school kid, and I got tips, and I'd give them to my mother, and she'd put them aside. [laughter] So, I didn't have too ... much stuff, ... but, like I said, we were a poor family. ... They didn't use the money for themselves, but, ... she put it aside for my education.

SSH: Did your sister, Mildred, have a job also?

FK: She didn't have a job, no.

SSH: In high school, what was your favorite subject?

FK: I always thought it was math, and I was very good at it, and it came easily to me, and so, I got very good grades in math. I got good grades in most of the things, because I was a good reader, and I got out of high school with high grades. Now, I'm out of high school, and I got some jobs around the place, ... jobs that I could handle, you know, just to keep working, but, then, I knew that the draft was coming up, and, as I say, I tried to get in the Navy, and I told you everything that happened there. So, I was drafted, and went down to Fort Dix, and went through the basic training, and then, I was sent down to South Carolina, to an infantry outfit ... down there

SSH: Fort Jackson.

FK: ... They had a program that you could go to Clemson College and learn ... how to handle the people after the war was over. In other words, [I said], ... "That's a very good course," you know. So, I jumped at it and was very disappointed. The course was terrible. They only used, not the professors, just the extra people around there. ... They didn't have good studies. They didn't have good programs at all.

SSH: When you say, "handle the people after the war," what do you mean? What was the purpose of this course?

FK: ... Just to be able to, after the war, go in ... and help in their education [and] replacement. ...

SSH: Were you going to be working overseas, as part of the occupation force, or in the United States?

FK: No, no, all in the United States, and so, I went there in a very poor course. It was very ... poorly handled, and so, there were about fifteen of us [that] said, "We don't want it anymore. We want out." Well, that was a no-no, and so, ... we were moved out. They couldn't do anything

about it. [We were] moved out, but, I was moved down to South Carolina, to an outfit that was going through basic training. It was forty miles away from the nearest town, and we were ... sitting in tents, and that's just going through the routine, and I ... got in touch with a guy that was pretty smart. He knew his way around, and we got to be pals, and he said, "They ... won't allow you to make any changes." So, he says, "Why don't we go over to the divisional area and ... maybe they'll help us there?" you know, and so, we moved over there, and we ... continued the education, but, then, we checked in to see what possibilities there were for transfers, and there were none but one, [laughter] the only one that they allowed you to take, and they had to [let you go]. [The deal] was, you'd get transferred to Fort Benning, for airborne assignment, and I was miserable enough, so, I said, "Yes." The other guy, "No way," you know. So, they put me in a train, and I went up to Fort Benning, and I went through, oh, geez, about ... a two or three month course in paratrooping. We were running every day, and they start us off with, ... you know, these towers like they have at the circus, where you get up, and then, they let you loose, and you go down. You learn ... how to drop and hit the ground. ... After about a month of that, well, then, they put you in a C-47 commercial plane and you went out the door. [laughter] The plane itself had a steel rod right through from the front to the back, ... and they had these seats on the side, and whenever you got ready to jump, you stood up, and you put your hook onto the thing, and then, went out the door, and, at first, ... it was individual jumps, you know. You went to the door, and they said, "Jump," and if you didn't jump, they'd kick you out, but, most of the guys jumped. ... You jumped, and you learned how to ... steer the parachute, and you learned how to land. Keep your feet together, and flex, and hit your side, and it wasn't too much, ... primarily just how to use the parachute, and, after that was over with, they transferred me to, where the heck was it? Helen, you remember more than I do. ...

HK: Fort Bragg.

FK: Yeah, Fort Bragg. ...

SSH: You went from Fort Benning to Fort Bragg.

FK: Yeah, ... and they were waiting for a division that I could trial run [with], and I went to [the] 105th Airborne Group, part of the 82nd Airborne, and we went on quite a few exercises, but, we were also used for emergencies. So, in other words, ... if there was some activity that we had to go and help with, we went on the planes, and went up, and jumped, and got to [the] thing. ...

HK: They might be interested in what you all had on, strapped to you, when you jumped, so that you didn't just jump.

FK: Oh, yeah, we had ... to go out with our equipment, and it was a little pack, about so big, you know, that they had ... strapped to our legs, and so, ... whenever we went out, we turned to the left when the parachute opened, and then, we pulled ... our release, and the pack dropped down about ten feet down, so it wouldn't affect the [landing]. Hit first, then, we made sure we didn't stand on it, and we went through a lot of jumping and training that way. ...

SSH: When you were at Fort Bragg, down South, how different was that for a young man who had been born and raised in Ireland?

FK: Nothing at all. They accepted me just as well. ... There was no objection to it at all. They considered me an American, I guess, and they weren't too inquisitive. So, I had good fortune, in that I was learning a lot and I was getting some stripes on my shoulders. I was a corporal at first, and then, after I had made the jumps, I made sergeant, and, ... after I'd been in the field a while, I'd made staff sergeant. So, that's where I wound up. ...

SSH: Did you get any liberties during training? Did you get to go into town? I know the one place was too far way. It sounded like it was forty miles from town.

FK: Yeah, most of them were ... too far away and we just didn't get any leave. We were isolated, more or less. ...

SSH: What did you do for entertainment?

FK: We played cards and just joked around, you know, and we were comrades, and we did all right. ...

SSH: Were you ever offered a chance to go to Officers' Candidate School?

FK: I'm trying to think, not that I know of. ... It was a political thing, more or less, within the Army, and until you know how you're pushed, [you cannot get in]. As I say, ... eventually, I was a staff sergeant. That's as far as I ever went. ...

SSH: Backing up a bit to before the war, did your family have any conversations about what was going in Europe?

FK: ... They didn't have much communication with me at all on that. I'm sure that they were [concerned].

SSH: When you were in high school, were you aware of things like Hitler's rise to power?

FK: Yeah, they were ... Irish and Scotch-Irish, and, of course, they were on the British side, ... and they were Americans, too, so, ... they supported them and not the Germans at all. The Germans were the bad guys, really, ... to most people.

SSH: Were you shipped overseas after Fort Bragg?

FK: No, no. I shipped to an airborne outfit, and then, that was the outfit that I was assigned to, and that's the one that we went overseas with. I stayed in the 82nd Airborne, ... parachute infantry. ...

SSH: Did you go overseas with your unit from Fort Bragg or did you go somewhere else in the United States first?

FK: We went for some training exercises, and we made some jumps there, ... quite a few jumps, but, we trained in the United States, and ... we went overseas. ...

HK: I thought you said England?

FK: England. We went to England, and then, I don't remember too much about that section of it, because it wasn't something that I retained. She should know more about it. [laughter] ...

HK: You were probably scared stiff as to what you were getting yourself into at that point.

FK: It took a lot of emotion, yeah, but, there's nothing I could do about it, so, I had a lot of company, so, we just went in, but, we were used more as strike forces. In other words, ... we went into Holland, and jumped on the upper part of Holland as a division, and took the bridge across the ... Elbe River, but, it was part of the Rhine River, and it was an important thing, and so, we took that, and then, went about five or six miles beyond that, and surround that, ... and made that available for the other troops to come through and expand [our holdings]. ...

SSH: Were you sent out of England for these jumps?

FK: No, no, no, we went mostly out of Fort Benning, Georgia, and then, ... we went overseas, and where the heck were we located, in England somewhere?

SI: In airborne training, were you trained how to take a bridge?

FK: Oh, yes, yeah. We were trained ... as ground troops, and ... I had a three machine gun and a mortar group, and ... we were good. We were trained well and ... it was a company. We were the firepower for the company, because we had very little artillery, so, whenever we went in, why, we moved in ... with our Tommy guns. We took the areas, and the machine guns took over to clear out the regular troops, and the mortars went over to blast [the enemy]. ...

SI: Especially in Holland, did you have to get to the bridges before the Germans could destroy them? Were you worried that the Germans might have rigged these bridges to explode?

FK: Well, we didn't have ... to do the initial stuff. ... The regular troops ... had a lot more equipment, and so forth. If they were knocked back, we had to go and knock the Germans back. That's basically what it was. ... We were shock troops (all the way?) and we were mobile. We could move all over the place, and so, when the Bulge came up, ... the American troops took a real licking in there, and they were ... being pushed back bad. ... We went up into the Bulge, and fought our way up to a river, to where the enemy had a division set up, and I remember, ... it was a stream, but, it was about, oh, twenty yards wide, but, it was fairly shallow, and there was trees all around, and we couldn't use the mortars. I couldn't use the motors. ... The three machine [guns] were going, and we blazed away at them, and, finally, I wandered around, and I found a

clearing in the trees. [laughter] ... So, I had five shells. We put the five shells in and aimed right where they were. They were blocking the way through, and you could see them exploding, and soon after that, why, they took off. ... They just ran and it was a "pig shoot" after that, you know, or a "duck shoot," or whatever you want to call it. We just ran after them, and shot all of them that we saw, and ... they were completely disoriented. ... We went a couple of weeks and kept after them. So, that was the end of the Bulge for us, more or less.

SSH: How many paratroopers would jump at a time?

FK: Forty in one aircraft, and there'd be twenty on either side, and ... one side'd go out, boom, the other one would go out, boom, we'd come together, ... come down, and then, contact them, and go out. They were regular, commercial planes. They weren't armored planes. What else can I say?

SI: Did you ever come under attack from flak while enroute to a drop zone?

FK: Yeah. ... There was flak, yes, but, we tried to avoid flak. ... We were very vulnerable. There was no armor, so, we tried to avoid it. So, they put the other aircraft through to try to get the flak at least silenced, and we came in, and then, boom, we hit, and as soon as we got on the ground, ... we were okay.

SSH: What happened after you took the bridge in Holland?

FK: Into Holland? Well, we took the bridge, and then, the Canadians ... were coming up the side, and they were having quite a bit of trouble, but, we had taken all of the territory that we needed to protect the bridge, and so, they just came up, and then, they got knocked back a bit, and we had to reinforce them, but, eventually, why, the bridge was secure.

SI: Was this when the 82nd used rafts to make a cross-river assault?

FK: Yeah. ... We went in rafts, or not rafts, in boats, and then, traveled. That was rough, because you're under a lot of fire, you're going slowly, and, if we could, we went at night, but, it was not too much of that. We just went over bridges, and waded through streams, and so forth. ... The effective surprise of all those troops coming in on the enemy was the best part of it, because ... they just ran for a while, and we were able to [re]group and go after them.

SI: How did the Dutch, and the other people you liberated, react when you came through?

FK: [laughter] ... They were our best friends. [laughter] No, they took us into their homes, and they tried to share whatever food they had with us, and appreciated us a lot, and, particularly in the Bulge, I remember, ... we had cleared up, and we [were] walking ... through the little town of (LeHigh DePue?), I remember the name of it, and the mayor greeted us, and he says, "The town is yours. [laughter] Do what you want." ... Well, we didn't have many rations, so, ... they partialed us off into the various houses, and we slept on the floor, ... [our] bed stuff, and they ... gave us as much food as possible, and we also shared our rations with them, and we paraded for

them, ... and they all came out, and they ... thought we were heroes. [laughter] They were our friends, but that I remember particularly, because they were very friendly with us, and we moved off, and then, got on the forty-and-eights, the old World War I freight cars, and went back to France.

SSH: Did your unit regroup in France?

FK: Well, the war was just about over then, ... and so, we had the opportunity of either staying with the 82nd, who was going to stay over there awhile, or saying, "Hey, I want to go home." I said I wanted to go home, and so, we were ... put on the forty-and-eights, again, and we're taken to ... where we were going to get on the ship, and I know ... the outfit went up a little further, and one of the staff sergeants came back, ... and he looked me up, and he says, "Hey, Fred," he says, "I got a deal for you." He says, "If you'll stay two months, there won't be any more combat, you know, two months, and you march down the street in (New York?), and parade down the street, we'll make you a master sergeant," which was nice. ... I was a staff sergeant then, but, that was a high grade, and I'd get benefits. I thought about it for a time and I said, "[No], I'm going to get on that boat and I'm going home." ... That's what happened.

SSH: Where did you go after the Battle of the Bulge?

FK: From the Bulge, as I say, ... we had to go to Berlin, and, ... as I remember, there were very few incidents in between, but, I don't remember them particularly, you know, just clearing places out, but, Berlin was bad. The Russians had taken it and they ... had decimated the whole thing. ... [The city was divided], basically half-and-half, but, they had ... killed quite a few American troops that ... had been in there, and they were just ... animals, and the women went through a terrible time with them. So, we were sent up there and we got on these forty-and-eights. We got up there, and walked in there, and the ... first evening, we killed five of the Russians. ... They were invading a house and raping the women, and so, we shot them, and we shot several more in the next several days, and, finally, it got through their thick skulls that we were here ... to take over. ... They started to move back themselves, and they respected our line, but, if they went over it, we killed them.

SSH: Were the Russians already in the American Zone when you got to Berlin?

FK: ... Yeah, they were there. They were terrible animals. They were in different sections and ... different commands. ...

SSH: When you were liberating populated areas, like in Holland, how did you communicate with the civilians?

FK: ... Most of them spoke English, or some kind of English, and they didn't even have to talk to you. ... They embraced you and you were part of their family, really. ... You could see. ... Some of the older men were so grateful that their families were being saved, you know, and their houses were being saved, so, we made a parade for them. ...

SSH: How effective was your supply system? Did you get all of the supplies and rations that you needed?

FK: Very, very poor. We had to eat off the land a lot of times, because ... we had no real transport. We were a moving outfit and ate a lot of, you know, K rations and C rations. Sometimes, [as] I say, we got some help from the people. ... It was a rough life. We didn't get fat.

HK: Tell them about the stew you made. ...

FK: The stew?

HK: In the helmet.

FK: Oh, yeah, in a helmet, steel helmets. We took the stew and ... it was knocked over. You tell me. I don't remember.

HK: ... He told me this many times. I thought you'd be interested. They were on ... some farmland, and there were vegetables growing, and you gathered up the vegetables, and you put them in a helmet, and you had a nice stew cooking, and you can take it from there, and along came a plane. ...

FK: ... And started strafing us, put a bullet right through that helmet, and we lost all our stew. [laughter] I remember that. If we could have gotten them, we would have gotten them, but, it's just one of those things, ... those little items that happen, because we were hungry most of the time.

SSH: How did you get into Berlin?

FK: Let's see, to Berlin, ... we jumped into Berlin. ...

SSH: Oh, did you?

FK: Yes, into the area, you know. ... Well, as I say, it was fairly well secured. There wasn't any anti-aircraft, or anything of that nature, and it was the Russians that were the biggest thing, 'cause they had done a job on those poor Germans.

SSH: Do you remember any of your commanders?

FK: Well, Gavin was one of them. ...

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SSH: How did the weather and living conditions in the field affect you, specifically, and the paratroopers in general?

FK: Well, as I said, we had no supply outfits. We had no transportation, so, we lived ... off the land and what we could carry on our backs. ... It was cold, because we had ... these green outfits on, you know, and we had our boots, ... which were pretty good, but, if you put a tent flap around [yourself], you know, it didn't keep the cold out too much, and ... we had to harden ourselves to giddy it up, and stamp around for a while, and go back. We were sleeping in two to three feet of snow much of the time and it was very cold.

SSH: Was the airborne considered an elite force and treated a little better than the regular troops?

FK: Well, they were ... thought to be better troops, but, they weren't treated any [better]. ... They used us [laughter] in places where other troops couldn't do it, or they thought they couldn't do it, or hadn't done it. ... For instance, in the Bulge, we had taken quite a bit. We hit the Germans pretty hard. We were about five miles ... past the area where we had to take it, and we spread out, and ... they brought regular infantry in while we got back there. We just barely got back and they came back with us. They had been knocked back to us. So, we had to, the next day, go back and take the whole area back again, and I remember, I was with our machine guns. We went at night, because we usually traveled at night, and we're getting machine gun fire from them. They had set it up and the bullets were going about four inches above our heads. We're down low and crawling, and I still remember that, because a lot of them were the tracers, you know, and you could see them and hear them, but, we kept on going, and whenever daylight came, well, we started attacking, and the others broke up completely. They took off and it was a duck shoot after that.

SSH: Do you remember how you spent your holidays in Europe?

FK: What were they? [laughter] I don't remember getting much leave at all. If it was, it was just locally, where we could go into town, and see it, and maybe go into a beer garden, have a couple of beers, but, that was about it. We didn't have much contact ... with the people at all. ...

SSH: Some of the people we have interviewed have talked about where they spent Christmas that year.

FK: One day was the same as another for us, really, and ... we got used to it. We didn't expect it.

SSH: Did you get regular mail?

FK: We got it once in a while, yes. The mail came, but, ... it wasn't delivered daily to us. By the time I got a package, everything was stale.

SSH: Were you able to get all of the ammunition and material that you needed?

FK: We got all the ammunition we needed, usually. It was brought up to us. It was usually small stuff. You know, I had mortars. I had to have maybe ten rounds for the mortars, and you

can't do much in a real big attack with ten rounds, and we had no resupply. We had to go with what we had and the machine-gunners ... had the bands. ... They had boxes of ammunition. They were better off ... than [the] mortars.

SSH: Did the supply of ammunition keep up with the speed at which you were moving?

FK: Well, they tried to, or else they gave us enough so that we could keep moving for a while, until they did get up with us.

SI: What about medical supplies and treating the wounded?

FK: We kept them in our bag. We had bandages, and so forth, and, if we were badly hurt, they got us back somehow, but, most of the time, we had to take care of ourselves.

SSH: Did you have medics with you?

FK: There were some medics with us, but, they didn't have any better supplies than we did, you know. ...

SSH: What about chaplains?

FK: With us? No way. No, we didn't go to church either, no.

SSH: Some of our people have talked about going to church in the towns that they went through.

FK: I don't remember it.

SSH: Were you able to do any exploring in the areas that you secured?

FK: Not too much. Actually, whenever we stopped, we just wanted to ... rest and relax. We didn't want to go, had no ambition to go, around, look at the area, ... as long as it was comfortable enough for us, ... location-wise, but, we very rarely had any towns near us. We were isolated ... quite a bit and we got used to it. We didn't expect it.

SSH: You spent three months in Berlin.

FK: Yeah.

SSH: During that time, you were basically securing the American Zone from the Russians.

FK: That's right, and killing them. As I say, we had to police them. If they came into our territory and they started to try to do something, we killed them. We didn't fool with them. ... After a period of time, they knew ... what would happen to them if they did it, so, they stayed away. ...

SSH: As a military outfit, what did you think of how the Russians appeared to be supplied?

FK: They weren't any better than us. In most cases, ... they moved a lot slower. So, therefore, they could bring equipment up to them, you know, but, they weren't well supplied, that I could see. We had very little communication with them, because of the language situation and the fact that they didn't like us. So, we didn't have too much to do with them.

SI: You mentioned that they had killed Americans as well. Was that after you had parachuted in?

FK: No, no, no. You mean the Russians? ...

SI: Yes.

FK: No, we went in by foot there. We went in the old forty-and-eights, and got off, and then, walked in there, and ... they didn't fool with us. As I say, we had to show [them] the way we were going to react that first night, when we killed the five of them in our area, and that news went around quickly, so, they didn't try ... to have a fight with us.

SSH: What other cities in Germany did you travel through?

FK: Some small ones, but, offhand, they don't ... stick in my mind. We usually went through them, if we did, on the old freight cars and stuff like that. We didn't stop.

SSH: Did you have any interaction with the German citizens as you were coming through?

FK: ... They were glad to see us.

SSH: Were they?

FK: Honestly, they were, because I think they'd had enough of the war and we weren't wrecking them. ... As long as we were just going through, why, they didn't say anything, and the Dutch were ecstatic whenever we [saw them]. ... [laughter]

SI: Did you have any contact with other Allied forces, the British, the Canadians, the French?

FK: A little bit with the Canadians, but, not too much. ... We were segregated from them. We didn't have too much to do with them at all. If it was, it was only for a short period of time, and we moved through them, or they took over after we had taken the territory. Sometimes, they'd move up, ... and two or three days later, we'd have to go back up and [re]take it. ... They weren't quite as aggressive as [us]. ... It's just a job to them, more or less. That was the impression we had. We didn't have a very high opinion of them. ...

SI: When you were in Berlin, did you have any interaction with the other armies of occupation?

FK: No, it was ... mostly administrative troops, and so, they were glad we were there and didn't have any problems at all.

SSH: What was Berlin like, in terms of the devastation?

FK: It was leveled, and the food supply was terrible, even the water was terrible, and the poor people were starving, and the Russians had been really tough with them, so, ... they welcomed us with open arms. ... [We] were their saviors. ... It got to a point where they would invite us into their homes, if we would go, and [we had] very good communication with them.

SSH: You were allowed to go into their houses?

FK: Yes, more or less, because, if we were on patrol, ... why, they didn't object to us going in. We didn't stay long. We just said, "Hello," and left, but, a lot of times, they'd come out on the street and just communicate with us.

SSH: Do you remember which part of Berlin you were stationed in?

FK: I know we were ... close to the capital. As I say, we were primarily ... [stationed on] the dividing line between the Russians and the Germans, so, we'd patrol there and beyond that. Behind us, there was no trouble.

SSH: Did the French have troops stationed in another section of Berlin?

FK: Not that I remember. ...

SSH: What about the British?

FK: No.

SSH: Really?

FK: It was an American occupation.

SSH: As a paratrooper, what was your biggest fear on a jump?

FK: The parachute not opening, 'cause there's nothing you can do about it, you know, and you're all full of equipment, and you're going to get killed if it doesn't open, or if it fouled up a bit. ... [If you had] trouble getting down, you'd make a pretty heavy landing, but, as I say, you didn't have too much time to think about it, because we went in low, maybe four hundred feet, and we fell maybe a hundred and fifty feet before the parachute opened, and then, we were down before it was through, and they wanted to get us down on the ground. So, I don't remember having any particular fear. In fact, most of the time, we were glad to get out of the plane. I couldn't wait, because we were getting a lot of anti-aircraft fire, and the planes were commercial planes, they

had no armor or anything like that, and they were slow, and so, ... as soon as they said, "Stand up, and hook up, and go," we went. We really did.

SI: Airborne warfare was very new during the Second World War. How did your leaders deal with the problems that emerged from airborne operations?

FK: Well, which kind of leaders? You mean the divisional leaders?

SI: Your direct leaders and your divisional leaders. Since everything was so new, how did they handle a new problem as it came up?

FK: They were very strict. They wouldn't take any fooling around. ... They punished you. After a while, we knew what the situation was and we obeyed orders.

SSH: Were you part of the D-Day invasion?

FK: No, no, that wasn't our cup of tea. ... That was a different type of operation. ...

SSH: You were not sent in during the invasion at any point.

FK: No, no.

SSH: Were you aware that it was about to happen? Were you in England at that time?

FK: We weren't aware of any of this stuff. We didn't get any communication of that type at all from the others, but, whenever it happened, we knew that something was going to happen to us, too, you know

SI: Was your unit a totally green unit or were there veterans from Sicily and Italy integrated into your unit?

FK: Oh, no, you mean my unit? ...

SI: The people you were fighting with.

FK: Fighting most with, they were all the same people. ... We didn't intermix them at all. We were 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, and there was other regiments, but, the regiments didn't mix. Now, they may have all jumped in one area, and they had the areas to take, but, there was not too much interaction.

SI: Were the men of the 505th from basic training at Fort Bragg or were they veterans of the earlier campaigns?

FK: Oh, yeah, they accepted anybody coming through. They made sure that you did your job, and they lorded over them a little bit, not much, once they showed [what they could do], and most of them were well-trained, and they were capable of doing as much as we could.

SI: Were they able to teach you anything from their experiences that you could not have picked up in training?

FK: ... You know, if I had a platoon and I had some newcomers in there, we taught them the weapons, and what we do, and all that, because they were important to us, you know, and we wanted as much out of them as possible. So, there was a good relationship with them, a little bit of, you know, lording over them, but, not very much.

SI: Like hazing.

FK: You can expect that.

SI: It was a very tight group.

FK: Yes, very, yeah. Airborne was airborne, [laughter] better than anybody. Really, we had a lot of pride in our outfit, and it showed, and the people, ... whenever we were in a parade or something like that, we got a lot of applause, much more than the other troops were getting.

SSH: Did you ever meet any of the Polish paratroopers? I know there was a Polish airborne unit.

FK: No, we never ... saw it.

SI: Did you ever form an opinion on how effective these airborne operations were, such as the Market-Garden operation? What did you think of the 101st Airborne's performance or the British Airborne's effort at Arnhem?

FK: We didn't really know much about it. ... You know, we didn't have newspapers around like that and it was primarily what we were doing and what support we were getting. We were glad if we had certain support, but, other than that, no.

SSH: What was your opinion of the German soldier?

FK: They were a badly beaten group. They had no pride anymore and they were utterly defeated. ... That's what we saw. They just wanted to be alive. They were glad they were alive.

SSH: Among the troops that you encountered after the Bulge, did you notice if many of them were either very young or very old?

FK: You mean in the paratroops?

SSH: No, among the Germans that you were encountering.

FK: A lot of them were older, towards the end of the war, particularly because they picked up everybody they could, but, they weren't very effective, you know. They just weren't capable of doing it.

SSH: Did any German units surrender to you?

FK: Yeah, we had a few, but, what happened was that they would surrender, and we'd just pass them on back, you know, and let the rest of them take care of them, make sure that ... [they had] no weapons or anything like that, and they usually were pretty well battered by then. [They] just moved back [and were] glad to get back.

SSH: Did your medics take care of the wounded Germans?

FK: I guess they would. I don't remember it, ... because, by the time they had reached us, they had had medical attention, or had been left behind, or whatever. So, I'm sure that the medics would have ... tried to help them, if they had the supplies. Supplies were short sometimes. ... We didn't have any respect for the enemy at all. They were enemies and it was tough if ... they were hurting, you know. You get that kind of an attitude.

SSH: Being such a tight group, it must have been very difficult to lose any of your comrades.

FK: Oh, yeah. ...

SSH: Did your unit have a high mortality rate?

FK: Oh, yes, we had quite a high mortality rate, and we got replacements from it, but, I told you about the guy that got shot in the head while ... we were back to back, the sniper. ...

SSH: No.

FK: In the Bulge, we were sitting back, because there's no action around, and this good friend of mine was sitting with his back up to mine, and we were relaxing and trying to get some rest, and a sniper got him right through the head, just about six inches from my head, and killed him immediately, and that was a shock. Of course, I saw he was dead and I took off for the trees, you know. I still remember that. That was tough. ...

SSH: Did you have a lot of trouble with snipers, especially since you were usually leading the front?

FK: Well, whenever we first penetrated, ... usually, if we had broken through, those snipers were trying to pick us off as we went, but, we had enough firepower so that ... we soon got away from them.

SI: Did you encounter any of the die-hard units of the German Army, like the SS?

FK: We did, but, ... they weren't combat units, so, it's only, ... say, if we went into a community. ... The people were terrified of the SS troops, and so forth. They weren't as what I would call combat troops at all, so, we didn't have much to do with them. If they were active, why, we took care of it, but, I don't remember too much of it.

SI: Were the SS troops trying to hide among the population or did you just happen to go into a town where there were SS troops stationed?

FK: Oh, no, we knew. ... We could tell them right away, you know. They were a very savage type of people. You could tell them right away, [that] they're different from regular civilians, but, as I say, as long as they were in control, we took care [of them]. ...

SSH: Did you have good intelligence reports helping you with your advances?

FK: It was standard, I guess. ... We had maps. We were given maps before we went into the thing. We knew where we were going and what the locality was, but, as far as any up-to-date intelligence, unless we got it over the company radio, why, then, ... if there was a pocket that had to be taken care of, why, we moved over and got them, but, not too much.

SSH: Where did you fit into the hierarchy of your unit?

FK: Well, I had a three machine guns and mortar group. ...

SSH: Were you in charge of that group?

FK: That was the group that I commanded, and ... I [was] used with the company to attack, and they were good men, and ... they did a good job. They knew how to use those mortars and the machine-gunners were fantastic.

SSH: Were your replacement troops well-trained when they got to you?

FK: They were as well-trained as most soldiers and they were very well-trained [laughter] shortly after.

SSH: What part of the country did most of your men come from?

FK: They were voluntary groups and they were from all parts of the country.

SI: Does anyone in particular stick out in your mind as being just so completely different from your background?

FK: Didn't care. As long as they had that gun and used it, they were good guys. [laughter] There were no black troops, though. We didn't have any black troops in there.

SSH: As a young man, did you have an accent?

FK: I guess I must have, a little bit.

SSH: Did you have a nickname?

FK: Just Sarge. That's all.

SSH: I understand that you were awarded the Silver Star.

FK: I know I got the Bronze Star.

SSH: What was that for?

FK: I don't know. It was something I did, I guess. [laughter] For meritorious achievement. ... It was in ground combat.

SSH: When we get your transcript back to you, I hope you will remember and add it in.

FK: Well, a lot of this stuff, I want to forget, you know.

SSH: Well, we are trying to get you to remember. [laughter]

FK: I know. Well, you're doing a good job of it. I'm remembering stuff I'd forgotten a long time ago.

SSH: Do you think that your background in Northern Ireland, particularly the farmhouse without modern conveniences and plumbing, helped you to adjust to the primitive conditions that you had to live under as a paratrooper?

FK: We just expected it, you know. We adjusted to it. There was no groups coming back, you know, with toilets. ... We were us, that's all. [laughter]

SSH: How long would you normally go without bathing or wearing clean clothes?

FK: A month without a bath, and whenever we got near water and stopped a while, we washed our clothes and ... took hot baths or showers, but, it wasn't too often. We were a pretty filthy group. I remember wearing the same socks for fifty-six days.

SSH: In Berlin, were your living conditions better?

FK: It was much better. It was absolutely flattened, but, there were areas ... on the outskirts where there were facilities, and ... we slept under roofs all the time, and they were glad to have us. It's amazing, you know. You'd think that they'd hate Americans and all that. ... They reached

their arms out for us, because the Russians were there. ... We were a protection against the Russians and we did, ... I think, a very good job of putting the Russians in their place, in our area.

SI: Did you have to deal with many refugees coming into the American Zone from the Russian Zone?

FK: If they came in, they were on their own. We didn't have to [help them]. ... They weren't aggressive or anything like that. They just wanted protection and a lot of them just came in, because Berlin was just leveled. There wasn't many houses left or anything like that. ...

SSH: Were many German civilians trying to get into the American section?

FK: Oh, yeah, sure. If they could, they would.

SSH: Did you help any of them?

FK: No, not really, because we didn't know what the situation was, and ... the relationship between the Russians and us was bad enough as it was, and it would just have made it worse. ... No, they kept on their own side, after we got our side, and we kept on our side, and there was very little transportation between them. The only thing it would be ... if they allowed them to come into our area, but, they were on their own. I mean, we had no facilities to house them or anything like that. The place was leveled. There was absolutely just nothing left to it and they went through a tough time of it. ...

SSH: After Berlin, where did you go?

FK: Let's see, after Berlin, we left there. The war was over, right? So, we left there, and we went back to France on the old forty-and-eights, and we were given an opportunity either to stay with the division another two months, and then, it would go back to the States, or go. A great many of us said, "Go." We wanted to get done with it. We wanted to get out of it. ... Like I told you, I was offered an advancement if I'd just stay the two months. I don't think they asked too many of them, because they needed officers or people that controlled things, and, as I say, I was just ... in a mood that I'd had enough and I just wanted to get out of it, again.

SSH: What did you think of France?

FK: Didn't like it.

SSH: How did the French people treat Americans?

FK: They didn't relate to us too well. They were glad we were ... there, but, we didn't get a very, very close connection with them.

SSH: It was different from the Dutch and the people in Berlin.

FK: Yeah.

SSH: What time of year did you come back to the United States?

FK: I don't remember. ... It was in the fall. It was near Christmas, I think it was, that I'd come back, and landed, and came back home, and I felt very strange whenever I came back, you know.

SSH: Really?

FK: Yeah. ... I had a lot of memories and had experiences that they hadn't, and they couldn't communicate those to me, and they didn't understand it, ... but, it was gradually eased out.

SSH: Were you concerned that you might be called back to serve in the Pacific?

FK: No, ... unless there was an emergency, but, they discharged me. So, if they had to get me back in, either draft me or put a rifle to me, because that's the only way they'd get me back in.
[laughter]

SSH: Did you join the Reserves?

FK: No, I did not. I didn't want any part of it.

SSH: Did you return to Belleville?

FK: Yes.

SSH: You said that you felt a little strange when you returned. Were there other veterans coming back to Belleville at the same time?

FK: I didn't see too many of them and ... I was more or less of a loner. I didn't have many friends, and so, I kept more or less to myself. ...

SI: Did you keep in touch with any of the men in your unit?

FK: ... They had a convention once a year. I went to one of them, ... down South Carolina somewhere, and I got in there, and they were in a hotel, and they're drinking quite a bit, but, all they're talking about was the war, and how great it was, and how great the 82nd Airborne was, and ... what they had done, and so forth, and I said, "What in the heck am I here for? ... I'm not here as a part of unit. I'm just a guy that is out of the Army and they're trying to have 'em back in again," you know, more or less. So, I had ... a very poor experience and I never went to another one. Number one, it was all over the country, because of the various states you had to travel [to], but, I had no desire to go, and ... one of the guys in the company wrote me a very nice letter, stating that ... he noticed that I wasn't coming out, and they said that, "We'd been together a long time and we'd like to have you here," and all that sort of stuff, and I just didn't answer it.

SSH: You did not keep up a "Christmas Card correspondence" with anyone.

FK: None whatsoever. That was something that was behind me and I had a new life to live. ...

SSH: Even considering how close you felt at the time?

FK: Yes, well, we were buddies. ... You can't call them friends. They were ... part of your life, but, we didn't have any chance to go out, and [go to] dances, and all that sort of stuff, and whenever we left, why, that was the breaking point. As I say, the guy asked me to come back, a guy that I knew well, ... asked me to come back and stay two more months, and I didn't want to.

SSH: Did you use the GI Bill?

FK: Oh, yes, oh, yes, sure. ...

SSH: Did you have any trouble using those benefits?

FK: No.

SSH: Did you ever become a naturalized citizen?

FK: I did, ... when I was training in the Army.

SSH: When you were in the Army?

FK: Oh, yes, sure, sure. [When] I was old enough, I'd become a naturalized citizen.

SSH: How did you do that?

FK: ... I went and filled out the form, and they gave me my citizenship papers, and, boom, that's it. [laughter]

SSH: What did you use the GI Bill for?

FK: ... Where did I go to? Well, I used it for Rutgers and I got some benefits from it when we bought our first house. ...

SSH: Did you go to Rutgers-New Brunswick?

FK: Yes. No, no, no, ... the Newark branch. I know she's got a better mind than I have, [laughter] but, anyway, I had good grades, excellent grades, and I went into Rutgers, and I went as an accounting major.

SSH: Oh, really?

FK: Yes, and I got out of there with very good grades, and I become an accounting manager of a company, and ... moved up the steps of other companies, and ... had a good experience. We did all right, didn't we, Helen?

HK: Yes. [laughter]

SSH: How did you meet Mrs. Kerr? This is a test. [laughter]

FK: I saw her on the dance floor.

SSH: You finally got to go dancing.

FK: Yes, with Red Huels, right? and I saw her on the floor, and then, a little later, ... we went over, why, the two of us were just shooting the breeze, down at the bottom of a ramp, and she came walking down, and that was it. [laughter]

HK: Well, I think you should tell them that Red Huels, you met [him] at Rutgers, and he was your best friend at Rutgers.

FK: All right, but, as I say, I met her coming down that ramp, slowly. ...

SSH: Where was this?

FK: ... It was a dance hall.

SSH: In Newark?

FK: ... No, it was in a dance hall, somewhere. ... You know where the dances were? ... You'd gone out before there, I'm sure.

SSH: You were with your best friend.

FK: Yes.

SSH: He had Helen as his date.

HK: That's right.

FK: That's right.

SSH: What happened to your date?

FK: I don't think I had a date, did I? No, but, I didn't say too much to Red about it. ...

HK: He asked for my phone number.

FK: ... I just put in my line ... and I asked for her phone number.

SSH: Were you still at Rutgers when you met Mrs. Kerr?

FK: Yes.

SSH: Was Mrs. Kerr working or going to school at that time?

FK: Yeah.

HK: I was working.

FK: You weren't going to school.

HK: No.

SSH: Was this right after the war?

FK: Yes, after the war.

HK: 1950, yeah, because you were just finishing school, finishing Rutgers. You were in your last year at Rutgers.

SSH: When you came back to Rutgers-Newark, were you working to help pay for school or were you able to use your GI Bill alone?

FK: I directly used my GI benefits.

SSH: What was your reunion with your parents like? Had they been able to keep in close touch with you?

FK: Well, they couldn't communicate too much, but, they were glad I was back. I had to be careful. When I spoke in the Army, every other word was a swear word and this my parents wouldn't understand.

HK: I just want to put my two cents in here and say that I never heard Fred swear in forty-six years and he is a wonderful husband and father.

SSH: What about those little sisters?

FK: Yes, the same way. They were all glad to see me, in one piece, [laughter] but, as I say, I ... became a loner and I didn't have many [friends]. I had a couple of friends there, but, we didn't go anywhere [or] anything like that. ... Whenever I met Red, we went to, most of the time, any of the activities over in Jersey City.

SSH: Red was going to school at Rutgers, too.

FK: Yeah.

SSH: Was he also from Belleville?

FK: No. He was from Jersey City.

HK: That's where I come from.

SSH: Okay. Where did you live while you were going to college?

FK: At home.

SSH: You commuted from Belleville to Newark.

FK: Yeah.

SSH: Okay. How long did it take you, after you met Mrs. Kerr, to propose?

FK: Was it about a year-and-a-half, Helen, or less?

HK: About a year.

FK: About a year, yeah, and I remember where I asked her to marry me.

SSH: Well, tell us.

FK: ... We were driving a car. It was up in the woods. ...

HK: No, in a park.

FK: Park, ... and I sat there, and I said, "I'm going to ask her. I'm going to ask her," and then, [laughter] I just come out and said, "Helen, will you marry me?" and she seemed ... to be a little startled, weren't you?

HK: No.

FK: No?

HK: No.

FK: Well, you acted a little startled, [laughter] and then, she said, "Yes," and that was it.

SSH: Had you brought the ring?

FK: No, we went, and did we buy it together?

HK: Together, yeah.

SSH: Which park is this, the one in Newark?

HK: No, Jersey City, West Side Park, I believe it was, West Side Park. It was a big park.

SSH: Were you married in Jersey City?

FK: Yes.

HK: Yes.

SSH: Please tell us about your children.

FK: She can tell you about them. There's five of them.

HK: You're the one they're interviewing. [laughter]

FK: No, but, you know more about them, what they'd like to know.

SSH: Did you work together? Did you both work?

HK: I worked. I had had a miscarriage, and, after that, we wanted to have a family, so, I stopped working and I stayed home. I was at home ... most of my marriage.

FK: ... We didn't work together hardly at all. ...

HK: We didn't work in the same place, no.

SSH: Which companies did you work for?

FK: Oh, boy, a lot of them. Arrow Group Industries was one of them. I remember, that was one of the latter ones. Do you remember any of them?

[Tape Paused]

SI: What kind of field conditions did you live under during the winter of the Battle of the Bulge?

FK: Well, as I say, we didn't have any tent equipment, and so, we slept in our sleeping bags. We had to go and stay in the weather that we went in with and there was no auxiliary groups that

brought food up. ... We ate whatever we had in the back of our pack, and, once in a while, the truck would come up with some more, but, that's about all. It was isolated. ...

SSH: Did anybody suffer from frostbite?

FK: If we did, it wasn't too bad. We just lived with it, you know. Sometimes, your toes would get numb or you could hardly feel them, but, well, [if] you walked a while, why, it was all right. ... You just accepted those sort of things. I remember, once, I had to go back and warm my toes for a while. The officer asked where my boots were. When I said I had none, he asked my size and gave me his. We had to move in so quickly, they didn't have time to issue all the gear we needed.

SSH: Did you have to dig foxholes?

FK: Only if we were going to stay there for a while, because it's not easy to dig a foxhole with spades, you know, and we primarily just dug mounds of dirt, and just ... stayed behind them, and all that. ... We weren't in a static situation for very long. We went through places and kept going, and going, and going, and then, the other troops came in back of us, you know, auxiliary troops. ... We were attack forces, more than any of them.

SSH: What did the Dutch tell you about the Germans and how they had been treated while they were occupying their country?

FK: You mean in Berlin, and so forth?

SSH: No, in Holland. Did they tell you what life was like under the German occupation?

FK: ... I know there was an old fellow ... who just held out his arms to us. He was so glad to see somebody that was friendly with him and would protect him, that their families had not been protected. ... He just couldn't say enough for us, and they shared their food with us, and they let us sleep in their houses, and ... we were heroes to 'em, and we didn't ... have that opportunity to see people very often, 'cause we were on these forty-and-eights and traveling on the railways, or we were walking on the roads, you know, and in formation, and we didn't stop in any of those places.

SSH: How did the German Air Force affect your maneuvers?

FK: ... We dispersed whenever we heard them and you could hear this [Mr. Kerr imitates the roar of a airplane engine]. We knew the engine, and so, we just dove for the ditches ... and trees and got out of the way. We didn't have a tremendous amount of strafing because of that.

SI: Were these planes mostly piston engine planes or were the Germans using jets at this point in the war?

FK: The jets, and it was mostly jets, and they'd come in quick, you know. You wouldn't hear them until then. You'd just hear them [suddenly], and you'd better move fast, but, ... I don't think that they had too much success doing it. So, we weren't bothered too much by it. ... The only thing we had was machine guns and we had ... no anti-aircraft stuff with us. We dispersed.

SI: Where would you say the biggest threat posed by the enemy came from, artillery, direct fire, etc.?

FK: The Bulge.

SI: The Bulge?

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO-----

SSH: This continues an interview with Mr. Fred Kerr on April 21, 1999, in Long Valley, New Jersey with Sandra Stewart Holyoak and ...

SI: Shaun Illingworth.

SI: Before the tape stopped, we were asking you about what effect the weather had on you during the Bulge.

FK: We froze. We were very tough, and we had been used to a lot of weather, and we were ... in very good condition, but, we were shivering and shaking, and there was nothing we could do about it. [We] just had to endure it. ...

SSH: Did the weather take a toll on your equipment?

FK: Not the weather, no, because we kept ... our rifle, or machine gun, or Tommy gun ... covered. That was ... our livelihood, you know, so, we took care of that and [kept them] well oiled. ... At night, we had it in the sleeping bag with us, if we had to. ...

SSH: You told us that a sniper killed your friend while he was sitting back to back with you.

FK: Yes.

SSH: Did snipers inflict any other casualties?

FK: They didn't take too many from us, because, as I say, we smashed through them, and it wasn't a question of us just staying static. We were moving all the time and doing things all the time. ... There's only two times I saw a sniper kill somebody in our company. One was a captain. ...

SSH: Can you tell us about that?

FK: ... We were going into that same area, and he was standing out in the middle, directing things that are happening, you know, and there's a sniper, evidently, in the tree. We heard the crack, and he got the captain right through the heart, and he went down, and so, we dispersed and tried to look ... for him, and about three hundred yards away, I spotted a guy running up the hill, and I knew there was no other Germans around, so, I knew it, and I took a shot at him, and he went down. So, I assumed that I had badly wounded him ... or killed him, but, ... we just went off into our area. So, we didn't go up and look around [for] the guy. It wasn't that important.

SI: Did you encounter any other forms of harassment attacks, mines, tripwires, that sort of thing?

FK: No, because ... we were used to that and you could tell. If you hit a tripwire, you were done. There wasn't a question ... of jumping aside or anything like that. It had you. So, we were very careful and, if it's a night thing, ... through an [uncleared] area, ... we just ... didn't move, didn't do it until the daytime. ...

SI: Did you encounter any anti-paratrooper devices in any of your drop zones?

FK: No. You mean things that ... would hurt us when we landed?

SI: Yes.

FK: We didn't land on those kind of things. We had a clearing area where we could go down. We went down fast, and sometimes the area was fairly small, and we had to slip and get down fast, but, we wouldn't go into an area where there was a lot of debris or some traps. ... We did [this] from the airplane, just before we went in, because, a lot of times, we didn't even know which area we were going to jump in. We had the maps and stuff like that, and knew where there were some areas there, but, we picked the best ... location to go in, and that was it.

SI: How often did you land in your designated drop zone? Did you ever overshoot or undershoot the target area?

[Tape Paused]

FK: ... Yeah, very, very close.

SSH: We have heard stories about guys who had to walk five miles back to get with their groups.

FK: No way. Whenever we got out of that plane, we got out as a unit, because we ran, and, as soon as the parachute opened, ... we slipped it in towards the middle of the group, you know, so that we were very close when we got down, maybe ten yards away from each other.

SSH: You gave us the name of one the bridges.

FK: The Nijmegen bridge? That's in Holland. That was a big, big, long bridge, though. ...

SI: I have another question. The image I have of the airborne is formed mainly by movies like *A Bridge Too Far* and *The Longest Day*. Have you ever seen any of these movies? Do you think they accurately represent what you went through?

FK: I think I've seen a couple of them and, no, they're not accurate, not like they actually are.

SI: In what ways?

FK: Well, number one, the other ones always win, usually, and they go in in planes, and, you know, they get out very easily, and all that stuff. We were in the old, commercial aircraft. ... We were jammed in, because they didn't have that many of us, and the only thing you wanted to [do was] get out of there, 'cause, if there was any machine gun fire, you didn't want any part of it. You wanted to get out. ... As soon as you stood up, you're pushing against each other. You just popped out like peas in a pod.

SI: On a jump into a combat zone, would you typically encounter enemy resistance right away?

FK: Well, they tried ... to get us down in area where we would be able to assemble before we went, but, there was some shooting, once in a while, but, we slipped away from it, and the few times we went in at night, we had no problem at all. We just planned and assembled with [no] difficulty ... and got all of our equipment ready. See, we had to carry our equipment mostly on our bodies, and I usually had a machine gun, and maybe a mortar tied with straps around my legs, and, if I got hurt and wasn't able to get them, they had lost a machine gun and a mortar. So, we were careful about it, and it didn't happen too often, and, if you were hurt, ... you had to try to get to ... wherever they could take care of you, anyway.

SI: Did you ever see gliders used in any of operations you took part in?

FK: No, no gliders. They were used for different types of activity. We took them from the people there and got them from the areas, but, we ... climbed, more or less, if we had to, but, we didn't have too much activity, say, in a city or something like that. We had Berlin, but, that was leveled anyway. ... They didn't use that type of troops for it. They used regular infantry troops for that. Now, maybe, ... if they got stalled, we had to go in, and then, attack and ... break the enemy up, you know. That was that type of thing, but, then, you didn't have to have anything. You just went in shooting, and broke them up, and then, the others took care of it.

SI: Have you been back to Europe since the war ended?

FK: Back to Europe? No, not as far as I know, no. I don't remember being back. I have no desire to do that.

SSH: You spent the rest of your career as an accountant.

FK: Yes, I went to school. I went to Rutgers, got the GI Bill, and I graduated with an accounting degree ... in business, and had a very good experience after that.

SSH: How long have you been retired?

FK: How long have I been retired, Helen?

HK: Fourteen years, I guess.

SSH: You retired at sixty-two.

FK: Yeah, sixty-two, whenever I was eligible for [retirement]. ... I'm seventy-six, now.

SI: Was the student body at Rutgers-Newark comprised mostly of veterans at the time you attended? Was it a mix of veterans and non-veterans, teenagers?

FK: No, it was just a mix, really.

SI: How did the veterans and teenagers interact in class?

FK: We, more or less, stayed with ... the type of guy we knew. There wasn't too much [intermingling] and they stayed with theirs. You know, we were ... a different people.

SSH: Where else in New Jersey have you lived?

FK: She's better off with that.

HK: Belleville, that's where we first lived, for thirteen years. Then, we moved up to Montville Township, actually, it was Pine Brook, for, I guess, about twelve years or so. Then, we wanted to get out further, and moved up to Vernon, and we lived in Vernon, and then, he retired, and we decided, "Well, let's try South Jersey," and we were down there for thirteen years, and that's what we're in the process of doing now. ... It was great down there. We liked it very much, but, too far away from the family. I have problems with my eyes. I can't drive anymore, so, we decided ... to come back up here. So, we're in transit now. We're going to be located in Belvidere, hopefully in the next month or two, in an adult community.

FK: Yeah, it's a very nice home ... [that] we're building.

HK: Hopefully.

SSH: Where do your children live? Where did they go to school?

FK: ... Okay, Barbara is here.

HK: In Long Valley.

FK: Long Valley, this is her home. ... What's her business now?

HK: She's in commercial real-estate.

FK: ... She graduated from Iowa State University, right, in 1976? Lois graduated from Montville High School and she's up in Idaho, way in the boondocks, more or less, and we don't have too much contact with her, of course.

HK: We speak on the phone. We see her, maybe, once every two years. It's beautiful up there.

FK: ... Donald, he went to Rutgers four years, but, he's non-grad, right?

HK: Yeah. He met a girl, and quit school, and married her.

FK: Yeah, and didn't graduate.

HK: But, he's doing very well. He's working as a sales recruiter. ... He lives in New Paltz, New York.

FK: ... Nancy, Vernon High School grad, 1985, and tell them about Nancy.

HK: She's doing very well. She's in personnel. Richard is the youngest. He attended Keystone Junior College for a year and attended Morris County College. He works as a warehouse manager. They are all doing well.

SSH: There was one story that you told us, when the tape was paused, about getting into a fight with a Russian soldier in Berlin.

FK: Yeah.

SSH: Do you want to retell that story for the tape?

FK: Okay. Let's see, ... we're in Berlin, and the soldier came up, and ... he looked me over, and he saw my rifle, and he saw the other stolen equipment. He decided he's going to take them. Well, I didn't want him to take them, and so, we had quite a battle, and I beat the heck out of him, eventually, and that was the end of it.

SI: Did you draw blood in the fight?

FK: Yes, and also with my boots. [laughter] No, it was rough and tumble, 'cause he was that type of guy, too. ... I just got angry, really angry, and I was pretty tough myself, so, he took a beating.

HK: Didn't you wind up with blood poisoning?

FK: Yeah.

HK: You hit him with your wrist?

FK: Yeah, yeah. I hit it with my wrist. I thought it was my fist. ... I got blood poisoning. I hit him in the teeth. That's a bad place to hit anybody. ...

SSH: How long did it take you to recover from the blood poisoning?

FK: Normal time. I took medicine, medication. ... It wasn't a tremendously long time. right, Mrs. Kerr?

HK: ... You said they were trying to get an injection in your hand, but, ... your skin was so tough from being out in the weather so long that they couldn't get the needle in. ...

FK: ... It hurt, especially whenever it was infected, but, they finally cut it and got the injection in.

SSH: Are there any other questions that we forgot to ask?

FK: Have I any other questions? I think you've covered my whole life pretty well. ... It's funny that, going through all these things, your mind tends to forget the worst part of it and the things that you don't want to remember. ... I had quite a time trying to put ... this stuff together, and I may have missed some stuff, but, I did the best I could, and it's bringing back memories, too, of all the time, and that's why I never went to the reunions, and they ... haven't been sending them to me for some time now, but, ... it's just that ... it wasn't anything for me. I just didn't want to remember things, and boast about things we'd done, and all that type of stuff. [It] just wasn't me.

SI: Did you have any problems, such as nightmares, after the war concerning your wartime experiences?

FK: No, no, not at all. ... Sometimes, I guess I'd wake up with a sweat, but, it's only an incidental thing. ... The thing was handled very well. I didn't have to get medication or anything like that, or ... be counseled, or whatever. [laughter] No, as I say, I was glad to get out, and I wanted to get on with my life, and so, ... that was the main thing.

SSH: We thank you very much for your time. When you get your transcript back, you can add as much material as you wish.

FK: Very good, thank you.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 5/30/00

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 6/1/00

Reviewed by Fredrick Kerr 7/00