

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH EDWIN KOLODZIEJ

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Neal Hammerschlag: This begins an interview with Edwin Kolodziej on February 16, 2001, in Van Dyke Hall at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. My name is Neal Hammerschlag and with me today is Sandra Stewart Holyoak. I would like to thank you, Mr. Kolodziej, for coming in today to finish telling your story. So, briefly, do you want to give a chronology of your experiences?

Edwin Kolodziej: Why don't I recap for you. I was a student at Sayreville High School in 1943, and in the spring they announced that everybody was going into the military service one way or the other. Those of us who felt we were college bound could volunteer for the Army Specialized Program, Training Program, go to Princeton, take a test, and if we qualified, then when we went into the military service we would go to college in that program. We would get an engineering degree and become officers in the army. I went and I took that test and passed it. I was notified that I was available to go into the program. So, on July 20, 1943, I was inducted into the military service, and on August 10, '43, I left South Amboy, New Jersey, and was taken to Fort Dix where I actually started my military career. After several days at Fort Dix, I was assigned to Fort Benning in Georgia, where I was to take an infantry officer's basic. I did so. I went there on August the 10th of '43 and completed the basic training. After completing the basic training, I was assigned to the University of Pittsburgh. We were transported to the University of Pittsburgh and I became the cadet first sergeant for the cadet company that was formed at that time. While we were taking our engineering studies there (within three months) the Secretary of War announced they were curtailing the program and were assigning us directly to infantry divisions, since we had had infantry training. I was then transferred to Indiantown Gap, in Pennsylvania, where I became a member of the 95th Division's 379th Regiment, 1st Battalion, Company B. I was interviewed by Captain Paciotti and assigned to the weapons platoon to be a machine gunner. While I was there, I was assigned to West Virginia to take mountain climbing training because there was a theory that we served in Italy and we would need to be trained mountain climbers. I completed that course and came back to Indiantown Gap. We were then shipped to Camp Miles Standish in Boston, placed on a boat, and transported to Europe. We arrived at Liverpool. From Liverpool we were transferred to a Channel area; we crossed the Channel and I hit the beach on D + 100. The beach had already been established 100 days. We then went into a static position for a period of time, and then, on August 9, '44 we entered into combat on the Moselle River. The night before we entered into combat, I volunteered for the 379th Infantry Regimental Combat Scouts, which was a unit that would do behind-the-lines patrol work, mainly at night, to act as an armed force for the intelligence and reconnaissance platoon of the regiment. That platoon's function was to go and find out where the enemy was and what his strength was, but they would never fight. Our regiment felt that they should have an organization which could go out and, if necessary, actually capture a prisoner and bring him back. So most of our work was behind-the-lines work, at night, going out either to establish where the German position was by getting into a fire-fight and then disengaging, or else actually capturing a German and bringing him back for interrogation, so that they would know what was going on. I spent the rest of the war with that outfit and when the war ended, I returned to B Company and was made a staff sergeant. We then left from Camp Old Gold in Le Harve, came back to the United States, we were among the first divisions returned to the United States because we were still at war with Japan and they were going to send us down to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, to start training us to become the assault landing force on Japan. We were given a thirty-day furlough. During the course of that, I was ordered back to Hattiesburg. When I got

back to Hattiesburg, it was announced that the atom bomb had been dropped on Japan and that the war was, in effect, now over. I was given thirty-day furlough and sent back home. When I got home, I got a notice to report to Pine Camp, New York, because I was being discharged. So it ends, like everything does, rather ingloriously. All of a sudden I got a piece of paper saying, "Go up to Pine Camp, you're on your way home," and that was the beginning of the end of my military service.

NH: Would you mind retelling us the story of your first combat experience?

EK: The regimental combat scouts that I had joined the night before combat had been formed approximately six weeks before and had gone through intensive training. I was not a part of that training; I was with my rifle company while that was going on. I was brought in because I had experience with a .30-caliber machine gun. I was assigned two members of the group, to be supervised by me. We were given two .30-caliber machine guns. One of the first things I did after we put the machine guns together was to tell the people working with me what I wanted removed from the belts. A belt of ammunition for a .30-caliber machine gun has as every fifth shell a tracer bullet so that when you fire there's almost a straight line from you to where it's going. I had this changed to one every fifteen because I didn't like the idea that the enemy would know exactly where the fire was coming from. The Germans used a machine gun of the same type but of a much higher cyclic rate; it fired very, very fast and it used a green tracer. Because they fired faster, when, eventually, I got into combat I always knew where they were because there was a straight green line to them. But from me there was an intermittent red line. Shortly after I joined, we were given our first assignment. We were told that the I and R had established that, in a little town called Vezon, every night, the Germans created a command post there and a listening post where they could listen to what we were doing. Our responsibility was to go through our lines, go down to that little town, capture one of those Germans, and bring him back. So we put our black-face on. I think there were about fifteen of us. When we did this there was always what's called the "getaway man." Since we were through our lines and into no-man's-land, or in German territory, there was always someone who had to get back with information on what happened. So we always had a getaway man. We always had a point, which was the first two guys, who were going wherever they were going, and we also had with our organization, Captain Lewis, who had me with the machine gun so that we had a very high power base rifle fire available to us through the machine gun. That way, we would sort of leapfrog. The point would go out, and when they reached a certain point, then I'd move up and establish a position. Then they'd move again, then I'd move. Meanwhile, the getaway man kept following us. During the course of this, we got into the town. All those French towns had what were called village squares, except this one had a triangular one and we were in the right-hand corner of the triangle. We were set up there. Our point was down at the point of the triangle when all of a sudden two German machine guns opened fire on them. At that point in time, a big green flare that the Germans fired into the sky went off so that everything was illuminated. When that happened, you froze and didn't move and were quiet because if you froze they might not be able to see you in that light. While that was going on, a loud speaker sounded and it was a woman's voice saying, "We know you're there, 95th Infantry, and we think you should come over with us because we have nice, warm beds and there are very beautiful women here and if you come with us that will solve all your problems." At that point, I opened fire with my machine gun. Then the flare went out. While we were there, a lieutenant came over and said

that they have our point men pinned down, and said, "You're going to have to get them out of there somehow." I looked to my left and I saw a squad of Germans coming down the road towards me, so I unswiveled the gun and shot up the whole group and wiped them all out. In the meanwhile, while I was doing that, our getaway men left to go back. On their way back, they found a bunch of Germans under a tree getting orders and they threw hand grenades into them. In the meanwhile, I now am into a firefight with the two German machine guns. What I do, since I'm not sure what's going on - in this square there were buildings on either side - so as I fired I just went to every doorway and window all the way down the line and shot them all up. Eventually, I was told by one of the point men that I knocked out both of those machine guns in doing that. So, I won that firefight. Now, of the three men that were in that point, one of them was killed. At this time, I was given orders to disengage and to start to go back, so we did that. In the meanwhile, the two that were still alive down there eventually crawled back out and came back home. The touchy part was always, when you get back to your own lines, you have to make sure your own people don't shoot you so you can get back in there. So you have to know the password for that night. The passwords during the war were things like "Anthony Adverse"; if I said "Anthony," you had to say, "Adverse." Or they'd use baseball terms and things like that. So we got back and we thought we had lost three men. We eventually found out that we only lost one of the three. We were staying in a barn, I was in the loft of the barn sleeping, when Jumbo Curran (who was one of the point men that got saved when this was going on) ... picked me up straight into the air. It was Jumbo Curran and he said, "You saved my life!" and kissed me on the forehead. I went back to sleep and the next thing you know I got awakened again and there are two huge MPs standing there. They said, "Get up, soldier, and come down." I went down the ladder to the other part of the barn. There's the general, and the brigadier general for the division, newspaper reporters from the Chicago paper and the INS, International News Service, and other reporters, and we were then interviewed as to what happened. So my very first night in combat involved all of the things I just discussed with you. Then we went back to bed and the next day started and we started on our next duties. But the following day, since we worked at night, I took a walk out to where B Company, who I had served with, were stationed in a static position. They told me that they had watched the firefight that night. The next morning the Germans put up a white flag and our people tell us they took out thirty dead bodies from there. So that's how that all worked out. While I was walking along there, I'm now repeating some of what's already in the story I told previously [part one of Mr. Kolodziej's interview], I ran into General Patton, who was walking along this very front line of combat, and we had the conversation that I previously related to you, where he said, well, you know, "What's your name?" and I told him my name. He said, "You're the guy I'm here to decorate today." So all of us who were involved in that patrol went back to regiment and he presented each one of us with our Combat Infantry Badge. When he spoke to me, his words were, "Well," you know, "how many did you kill?" and I said, "Well, maybe thirty," and he said, "Well, that's that many of those bastards who won't reproduce again." And that's typical George Patton. He did look exactly like the guy that played him in the movie. And that's the story of Vezon.

NH: All right, about that, tell me about the makeup of your scout team. What type of men were they, what type of men volunteered?

EK: These were volunteers from throughout the regiment and most of them were young, aggressive, and people who, I guess, were not satisfied with their role in the rifle company they

were in. I think if you look through my story you'll see that I had some dissatisfaction with a fellow that was with me and when this came along, in a fit of pique, I said, "Well, I'm going to volunteer for the combat scouts," and that's how I got there. Most of the guys were at my age level. The officers were highly skilled men. Captain Lewis carried a tomahawk with him. He was from Alaska and he knew how to use the tomahawk, it was an axe that he could throw and use as a weapon. And we had a lieutenant who was a detective in the New York City Police Force and we had another lieutenant who was a school teacher. These were the three officers who commanded us. We were all volunteers and we were trained in what you would understand to be commandos.

NH: When you changed your tracers, was that your idea?

EK: Completely mine.

NH: Did other people do that also?

EK: I have no idea.

Sandra Holyoak: Neal was very curious, did you set a precedent with that which then was adopted by the rest?

EK: I don't know. I knew that when I was given, when they brought me into this outfit I was told that I would be in charge of the machine gun section, that I had two men with me who were skilled in a water-cooled machine gun, .50-caliber, but didn't know how to do the .30-caliber. They both were staff sergeants, I was a PFC. But they were under me and I just decided that's the way I wanted to do that and I did it. I don't know whether anybody else followed it or not.

SH: Had you heard stories about this, I mean ...

EK: No.

SH: We're just trying to figure out where this thought process came from.

EK: When we trained on the .30-caliber machine gun, I was always annoyed with the idea that there would be a straight line from me to the other guy. That always bothered me. I had a sergeant in B Company who was in charge of a section machine gun. He wasn't interested in doing anything but what the book said you were supposed to do. When you get into an outfit like the Scouts, you sort of throw the book away. If you notice in some of the pictures I showed you, I'm wearing a polkadot bandana and I let my hair grow long in what was Tarzan style in those days, and at the time that I was talking to General Patton I was wearing a rabbit skin vest that I had found somewhere. And I think I mentioned in the previous story when he asked why I said, "That's why I'm here, because I do things like that."

NH: You mentioned that you were wearing those types of clothes and I was wondering what was going on in your head after that first night?

EK: After the first night in combat I went to see the chaplain. I said to the chaplain I was deeply concerned because I knew I had killed a group of men and it never dawned on me that I would do that. And that since I'm Catholic, that I was unhappy with the fact that I had killed these men, and I wanted to know whether I'd committed a sin in the eyes of my church, or not. And he said, "No." In effect, what he said to me was I should continue to do what I do because I had God's blessing for what I was doing. Now, as a mature adult of seventy-six years, I might question that a little bit, but I accepted it at that point in time, and that was my initial response to that. When I spoke to you before, somebody said something about medals. I didn't even know there were medals when I got there. Remember, I was an eighteen-year-old kid, picked out of a town like Sayreville and put into somewhere or other.

NH: Take us through some of your experiences after that first night, perhaps in the taking of Metz.

EK: All right. Eventually, where we were located, one of the problems was that a major stumbling block to the advance of the United States Army would be the Fortress Metz. The fortress Metz isn't what you might expect, the childhood dream of a fort with three walls around it. This was a series of in-ground concrete vaults that were built, Maginot Line, Siegfried Line. In those days, countries in Europe built these lines to protect their borders and what they did is, they had heavy cannon that were in units that sunk into the ground and then came out of the ground, and fired at you, and disappeared again. General Patton's theory on attacking it was called "Walking Fire." He would line up a company, battalion, a regiment, a division, in line and everybody would start walking at once and everybody would start firing at once. You were firing at random, so that you had a line of walking fire. So that if the enemy was there, they had too many places - you sort of overwhelmed them with this. And that type of attack was used in what's called a frontal assault on the city of Metz. In the process of doing that, they ran into a fort near Fort Jeanne d'Ark where they were completely stopped. And in the history book that I brought along, and I gave you some parts of it, they explain that at that point in time this strongpoint which was a concrete bunker that was buried in the ground must have been at least seventy-five feet long and at least four feet thick of concrete. They'd attacked it but the other fort was firing right into them when they were there. So, the Germans in the fort wouldn't give up and they were being fired on and they were so decimated from the artillery fire which was coming in, six shells every thirty minutes, the whole assault was stopped right at that point. Because those people were in such difficult shape, we were given the assignment of carrying our own weapons, additional ammunition, food, and medical supplies up to them since they were stopped there. We went out at night as usual. The fort is built into the ground and they built a big trench all the way around it so that they could walk all the way around it. They also built a small bunker, to the side of it, to use as an outpost. Most of the troops that were there were shell-shocked by now in that bunker and crying and some asking for their mothers and stuff like that. When we got there, it was raining. Grondahl and I were told to set up at one end of the trench. We took the machine gun and set it on what we thought was a hump of ground, and we leaned against something that we thought was a pile of dirt. It turned out when it got to be daylight these were bodies of people that had been killed, that were covered by raincoats, that we were laying on. In the trench was all the water from the rain, the blood from the guys that had been shot up, and we were there. In the meanwhile, every thirty minutes, six more shells came pounding in and they were caving in the sides of the trench on you while you're laying there.

We were there throughout the whole next day, and when the next morning came, Grondahl and I thought it over and we said that we had enough of this shit, we're not going to have anymore. And Grondahl said, "You know what, when they're in there in that concrete thing they don't get much air in there, so they must open their little portholes at night to get air." And I said, "If the sun is in back of us, when the sun comes up, if we could take this machine gun and move it up another twenty feet and if we could catch them with their portholes open, we could fire through those portholes." And that's exactly what we did. We did it because, you know, if you didn't you're going to die. So we got out there and I carried the gun and I tripped over a body. When I did, Grondahl ended up behind the gun and I ended up feeding the belt into the gun and we started firing and, fortunately, we caught them with their portholes open. The portholes are only about four inches by two inches, or something like that. But when the bullets went in those portholes, when they got inside this concrete building, they ricocheted all the way around. All of a sudden a white flag went up and a voice shouted out that they surrender. The lieutenant said to me, "You go down there and check it out." And I said, "Well, you're the officer, why don't you go down there?" He said, "No, no, I'm telling you to go down there." So I took out my .45 and cocked it and I took a hand grenade and pulled the pin out and put it in my hand and walked down there. And there I met a young German officer and I asked him if he was going to surrender and he said, "Yes." I said, "Well, come over here," and I put my hand on his stomach with the hand grenade in it and I said, "Now don't fool around with me because if this is some sort of a trick, I'm going to let this hand grenade go and we'll both be dead." He happened to speak very good English. He was an SS officer and they were trained in English. He said, "You have no need to worry, sir," and out came thirty-some soldiers from inside. At this point in time, other people that were with me came down. In the meanwhile, our division had started the walking fire again. So that, as soon as they saw what had happened up there, all of a sudden came the walking fire, so our part of this enterprise ended. So the lieutenant says, "You captured them, you take them back." Well, to take them back to regiment was like a two-mile walk through these muddy fields, so I said to the German officer, "Pick up that machine gun." He said, "The Articles of War say that I can't be made to do that." I said, "This hand grenade says you can be made to do that. How would you like to do this?" He picked it up and put it on his shoulder, and I give the man credit, slogging through that mud was a real job, walking back took several hours. He had his head up high and carried that gun straight up and never bent once to prove to me that he was a superior German officer. But he carried the gun and, of course, we looked the opposite of them, I mean, we were all muddy and dirty with mud all the hell over us. So we got them back, we turned them over to the Intelligence and Reconnaissance people, and they immediately got examined by them. And then, I went back to another barn and because we worked at night, that assignment was done, the attack was going on. So that, you've now heard my version of what happened at the Battle of Metz, for me.

NH: When the whole series of forts finally got taken, how did most of the people in the regiment and division react? Did you get a little break?

EK: War, war, no, no, because from there we went into Saarlautern. That's when we took the bridge at Saarlautern. Then we fought in Saarlautern and Saarlautern was a question of house to house fighting, an entirely different type of fighting.

NH: Street fighting.

EK: Street fighting. House to house, blowing holes through walls, throwing hand grenades in rooms before you go in. Which is where one of the comical things happened to me during the war, that amused me very much ... After a town was captured, and since during the day we didn't do much because we did all of our stuff at night, we would sort of wander around. I was wandering down this street and I walked into this building to see what was in there. We looked for eggs, chickens, things like that, and I didn't see anything and I walked upstairs to see what was upstairs and as I was coming down I heard a noise. I thought, "There's somebody in that closet there." So I say, "*Komen Sie hier mitten hand en kopf*," which is German for "Come here with your hands on your head." Nothing happens. I say, "Come out," and nothing comes out. So I took the .45 out and I put a whole clip into that door. The door then swung open and what came out was a goat. Somebody had locked their goat in there; the goat came out bleating at me. So I put a whole clip in there and didn't hit anything and the poor goat came out. That's my humorous story; those things do happen.

SH: You had talked earlier about a bridge that you tried to take before, the infamous Remagen bridge. Can you tell us about that?

EK: Yes, eventually we were making the drive to the Rhine, and that turned into another type of warfare, again, because once we broke through the Metz and were headed toward the Rhine, the troops were moving very, very fast, and you have pockets of resistance here and there. So, actually, line company troops would wipe out that resistance and our job was, basically, to keep up with them and at night, if they got separated, to fill in the gaps, so it turned into a different type of warfare for us. (Incidentally, there were sixty of us when we started and at one point in time we were down to ten, and the officers were all gone. I ended up, without being an officer, in charge for a period of time. But now we were built back up and we were assigned new officers.) One of the nights when we were getting close to the Rhine, we got a call that they think they have a bridge at Erdingen and they want us to be the point going across the bridge. The lieutenant decided that Curran and I, being the two most experienced guys that were left, should be the point on this. So no longer now am I the machine gun guy; all of a sudden, I became a point man. When they took us, they had already assembled several battalions of infantry: there were tanks and anti-tank guns lined up all along the roads, quietly, with no lights at all, because they were going to try and spring this bridge. They brought us up, I think twenty-some of us, and put us in front, and we started across. We started walking, and the further we got, we started crawling. Jumbo and I were crawling along the bridge, and, of course, we were talking by radio back to our commanding officers who were following us. The big sweat there was that if the bridge was mined you had to be careful because if you touched the mines you'd blow yourself to bits. All of a sudden we reached a point where, as we were crawling along, there was no concrete under hand, and so he and I were hanging over the edge and we said, "Damn bridge has been blown already." So whatever intelligence that said the bridge was there was wrong. I think it was the next day that they took the bridge at Remagen. Very often in a war the enemy loses contact with you and you lose contact with them so it's important, intelligence-wise, to know where are they. When that would happen, that's when we would be told to go out, make contact, get into a firefight so they could triangulate on where that firefight was taking place. And now the tracers are serving a different purpose, to locate you for someone else. So they decided this particular day that they couldn't locate where the Germans were in

this forested area, so they decided to send us out to find them. This is one of the times we worked in daylight. So we go and we're going along. We were told that the engineers had been there before us and that any mines that the Germans had put out had already been tagged; so we didn't have to worry about mines, we just had to look for silver tags. And we reached a certain point where the path branched off so the lieutenant sent me about one hundred yards to the right with our machine gun to sort of protect the flank while he went the other way. When we got there I decided that it was unfair for it to be just John and I because we were quite a distance away. So I walked back to where the lieutenant was, which was maybe one hundred yards, and said, "You have to give me another man." So he said, "All right, I'll give you another man," and I started walking back. It was characteristic of me, I always walked direct, and I didn't do what you see in the movies where they hold the rifle at bortarms and they're running bent over, that was just the way it was for me. So I looked back and I saw the guy that was coming. All of a sudden there was this huge explosion. Apparently there was an anti-tank mine there and when he put his foot down, he stepped on it and it blew him up into the sky and he landed about five feet away from me. When I looked over my shoulder, his head was gone, his arms were gone, and his legs were gone, and you could see the steam coming from where his neck had been. And I then realized that I had walked over there, I had walked out there, walked back there, came back again, and walked over that thing three times and hadn't done anything to it. He had the misfortune of stepping on it. And it was one of the most devastating experiences of all because, forever and a day, I have to know that if I didn't go back and ask for him that maybe he'd still be alive. On the other hand, that's what war is all about. From there on, when we found out that the engineers didn't have them all tagged, we then gave up and went back except everybody walked taking great big steps on tippy-toes until we got out of that forest.

NH: Did you ever think about how you were able to cross that mine so many times without ...

EK: I believe it's because I was walking straight up. An anti-tank mine takes a certain amount of pressure to push that plunger down when you step on it. So if you're sort of trotting you'll put more pressure on it than if you're just walking.

NH: So you very well could have stepped on it and not set it off.

EK: I may have. I went over it. A lot of mines were rigged up with wire from one tree to the other and you trip it and that's what does it. Anti-tank mines have a plunger on them and when they put them in the ground, they put a light cover on the top so that you don't see that it's there. When a tank drives over it, it blows it right the hell up. You have to step right on that plunger to do it.

NH: Can you tell me a little about taking and/or defending the bridge at Saarlautern?

EK: I was not there for that.

NH: You weren't?

EK: I was not there for that. That was B Company; the first company I started out with, 1st Battalion, B Company, took that bridge. I have heard many versions of how that was done.

They went across in boats, in rubber boats. Rubber boats reminds me of ... one of the big attacks we had. The way our combat scout unit was used, in one of the big attacks, back at division they decided to create a diversion to make it look like there was an attack going on at one place when, actually, it was going to happen somewhere else. So what they did was, they put us in trucks and drove us to this river and put us in rubber boats. We went across this river and we got into a big firefight. The place was loaded with Germans. After we fought for a while, we were given the signal to disengage, so we went back to the boats, went back across the river, they put us back in the trucks, drove us five miles up the road, put us back in the boats, put us across the river again, had us get into another fight. In this fight we captured a half a dozen, so we brought them back with us, and got back in the truck and went to another place. So we went three different places in the course of the night, and created fights and left, so the Germans would think there was a large thing happening. Meanwhile, the main fight was going on somewhere else. But they had diverted forces here for this.

SH: The communication, while you're doing things like this, sounds like it needed to be pretty precise. How reliable was it?

EK: The communication between who and who?

SH: Between your unit, your little patrol, your scout patrol and who's telling you to withdraw.

EK: Well, we always carried with us a man with a radio on his back who, I wouldn't see this because the officer would be with them and they would be doing that. The word of mouth was the way all instructions were passed.

SH: Did this always work? I mean, were you ever without communication?

EK: For example, Jumbo Curran, who was in point that first night in Vezon, after we were all back he was all by himself. He had to crawl back; there was nobody there to ask. That happens to be a very scary thing because when you're coming back to your own lines, if you don't know the password, or if you forget the password, you've got a problem. One time a group of us were assigned to go up and relieve a rifle company who had this small bunker it had captured and the guys were pretty beat up. They sent us up for one night to stay in the bunker so those guys could get a rest. There were six or seven of us who went up there and we got there and relieved them and they went back. That night the password was the "Anthony Adverse" that I used before. When we got there, we were supposed to be relieved the next day; nobody showed up. Another day, nobody showed up; three days, nobody showed up. And we were trying to figure out, there were like seven or eight of us there, I don't know, trying to figure out what the hell we should do next. When all of a sudden, there's a noise outside. So I say, "Who are you?" The noise says, "What's the password?" I said, "I don't know what the goddamn password is." I said, "I've been here for three days." I said, "Are you a German talking American or an American?" He said, "We're with the 5th Division." I said, "Well, you're not even here." So it becomes a very tense moment. What had happened, that we didn't know, was our division had been pulled out of there. They forgot to tell us - they left us there. When the new replacement came in, they were doing something else, when they were going to come into this place. So then, a long conversation between us and them until we were satisfied that they were really American

soldiers because it was dark. And then we got out of there and we went back and got out. We didn't have a radio with us. The odd thing that happened was, we had one guy with us who, there's something called psychological blindness, where if you're afraid enough of something you go blind. This guy, whenever there was artillery fire, he couldn't see anything. And he was carrying my ammunition for me. So I said, "No, come here." So we take him in the basement of this house and I light a match and I say, "What's the matter with you?" He says, "I can't see when I'm out there." I said, "Can you see me now?" "Yes." So I took him outside again and then artillery is blasting all the hell over the place and he can't see.

SH: Could he function?

EK: He couldn't function at all. You had to take him by the hand and lead him everywhere. So we sent him back. The next day, when I went back to regiment, when I talked to the medics, they said that he had night blindness and that he really did, and that whenever these things would happen he would just go blind, but if there was no threat to him, then he was ... You know what they did with him? They put him in the artillery. I mean this is the old story, you could be in the front with a small gun or in the back with a big gun. Which seems sort of odd, but they put him in the back with a big gun instead of in the front with a small gun.

NH: Did you ever have an experience with other soldiers with self-inflicted wounds or catatonics?

EK: I heard stories of self-inflicted wounds. The standard self-inflicted wound was a shot into the calf of the leg, usually. The only one that I heard, that I put any credence in ... Bathroom facilities were a slit trench, you'd dig a slit trench and you'd straddle a slit trench if you had a bowel movement. Now, a very obvious way if you were going to the slit trench and you had your carbine in your hand and, by mistake you pulled the trigger, you would shoot yourself in the calf of the leg. So some enterprising guy worked out that sequence as his excuse for what happened when actually what he did was just shot himself in the calf of the leg. It was called the "million dollar wound," because it got you home. So some people did that.

SH: I was just going to ask, did you, other than the night, not night blindness, but from the artillery, the stress of all of this, were there any other incidents of battle fatigue that you saw?

EK: The most startling one, the guy with the blindness, I didn't know whether he was blind or not. I didn't know whether he was putting me on or not. The most startling one that I saw, when we were taking the fort at Metz, in the story I told you about Metz, we were up in those trenches, and there's the bunker in front of us, and we had a lieutenant who all of a sudden says to Grondahl and me, "Take your carbines and attack the fort," and we said, "What, are you crazy?" I mean, we're sitting here with a machine gun and this is all concrete. If we run down there, you know what's going to happen to us, they just kill you. And we'd already seen that happen because the previous day they sent an engineer down with what's called a beehive, which is like thirty pounds of TNT, which has a snap-pull on it, if you put it down, pull the snap, and run, so many seconds later it explodes, so they told this engineer to take that down and - there was this door there - put it in front of this door and blow the door off. When he got down there, he looks up and we're the closest ones to him, Grondahl and I, and he says, "There's no door here." So

Grundel hollers, "Snap it and run!" I said, "Jesus Christ, pull the snap and get out of there or else get out of there!" And one second later, they shot him right between the eyes. Later on after we captured it, he was laying there with the hole between his eyes and the TNT was laying there and it had never been exploded. Because he wanted to do what he was told, there was no door there, despite the fact that we were saying do it anyway, because you're trained to do what you're told. Very often your life depends on doing what you're told; that's one place where it worked wrong. But, in the meanwhile, the lieutenant is telling Grondahl and me to attack this thing with carbines, which is absolutely ridiculous. So we say, "No." So then I call for the other lieutenant. The other lieutenant comes over and says to this guy, "Why are you saying that?" And he breaks into tears. So he says, "Kolodziej don't want to let me see my mother," and he starts to cry that he wants his mother, and he's crying and sobbing and calling for his mother. Okay?

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

NH: This is side two, tape one. You were telling us about the lieutenant who was sobbing.

EK: Right. Then they took ... He was disengaged from our outfit and sent back. I saw him after the war and talked to him. He had had extensive psychiatric help after that and he seemed to be all right again, but he didn't go back to being a detective with the New York Police. But that was an example of complete loss of it in battle. There was another one, we had a fellow with us who was one of our point men. And it takes a different kind of guy to be the point because you're right out there and you don't know what it is there. And right after we captured this bunker, some mail caught up with us and he had a letter from his wife which had a picture in it of his newborn son. Once he saw that, he did a complete three-sixty, he was not about to do anything. He wouldn't fight anymore. All he wanted to do was go home.

SH: How were people like that dealt with? Compassionately, or ...

EK: Where we were, our only job was to get him away from us and back somewhere else. So somebody would take him back to the medics and let the medics take over. You have your hands full with what you're doing ...

SH: Right.

EK: You feel bad about it. You feel sorry about it, but you know, there's somebody in front of you that wants to kill you, I can't worry about what's happening to him.

SH: I was just going to ask, does it affect the morale then of those ...

EK: No. I never saw it affect the morale anywhere. It made you sad. He was a great guy. He played a great jazz piano, too.

SH: Well, tell us a little about the mail calls. How often did you get that? And you also shared some photographs here that were very descriptive of what you guys had gone through after many, many days in combat, and I know that was one of the questions that Neal has there on his list of questions. They really want to hear what it was like to go days and days without showers and all of that. In this day and age, that's the first thing they do in the morning.

EK: Let's take the mail call. Mail was a sporadic thing. You have to remember an infantry soldier only has with him what he can carry and if you carry stuff long enough, you don't need a lot of stuff because it's all heavy. So that, every once in a while, there would be enough and the mail would be brought up to you. To keep your morale up they'd bring you the mail, and of course, everybody read everybody else's mail.

SH: Really?

EK: Oh, yes. I mean, if I got a letter and you guys didn't, then we all read my letter. But if I didn't get one, then we all read yours, and in addition to the mail, you know, if you were fortunate, most mothers in those days mailed the one thing that would stand the trip, which was a fruitcake. Somebody was always getting a fruitcake, because you could make a fruitcake, load it up with alcohol, put it in a box, and send it. When-the hell-ever it gets there, it may be a little green, but that's all right. But it tasted very, very good with the fruits and nuts. Fruitcakes were a big item. You always shared your fruitcake with everybody else. Every once in a while, you'd have an Italian fellow whose mother would send him a pizza pie that she wrapped up in tin foil and stuff, and you'd get to eat that, and, of course, a lot of guys had girlfriends that sent them cookies and stuff like that, which you either got or you didn't. But you would write back to people but there was never a relationship with what you wrote back and what they wrote, because your stuff was crazy in getting theirs and theirs was crazy in getting to you. And like one time, I got a "Dear John" letter from a girl who apparently thought that I was serious. [Laughs] So I read it to all of the guys and they said, "Well, why don't we answer her?" So we made up an answer. All of us composed an answer to this "Dear John" letter in which we explained how heartbroken I was and this, that, and the other thing, and we mailed it to her. And about two months later I got a letter saying she broke the engagement with the other guy. [Laughs] So then I write another one saying I didn't really mean it. So, you know, life goes on and your amusements come in different ways then.

SH: That's another question we have is battlefield humor. You had talked about shooting the goat.

EK: Yes. Battlefield humor was - you know, every group has with it somebody that has some talents. Like in B Company we had a bunch of southern guys and they would get together and if there was a two-by-four somewhere they'd bang the two-by-four, another guy would play the comb, they'd find a bottle and play the bottle, and any kind of stringed instrument, and they'd make music. So I got to be an aficionado of that kind of music because of what they did. So that you always amuse yourself. There were always crap games. Dice games went on all the time. In fact, I think I sent home almost three thousand dollars that I won because if you won it, what could you do with it? So you'd put it in an envelope and send it home to your mother and she'd put it in the bank. I paid for part of my - it helped finance my education here at Rutgers. So

there were always dice games and sharing of the mail. Let's see, we had been on line for one hundred days or something like that, which was, one hundred and twenty days, was almost sort of a record or something to be that long on line without coming off. And we were pulled out and sent to this little town in Belgium, where we supposedly were going to have a few weeks rest, and the first night we were there, I was designated as MP for the night, and so I was patrolling the streets. The war goes on, all right. All of a sudden, a young man came to me speaking in Belgian, or whatever they speak, to go into that tavern. So I went into that tavern where black Army truck drivers were on one side of the room and white infantrymen were on the other side. In Belgium they were family taverns like in England, everybody sits at a table together. And some of the southern white guys had gone in there and an argument started with the black guys because the black guys were sitting with white girls, and these southern guys didn't like that. I walked into the middle of this and I said, "Now, you leave," and, no, they weren't going to leave because they weren't going to put up with that. And I spoke to these truck drivers and I said, "You leave." No, they weren't going to leave because they weren't going to put up with that. I suddenly realized that I was in a situation that could be a really harmful situation. So I said to the kid that found me, I said, "You tell all these people to leave." Well, the people didn't want to leave either. So, now, the people don't want to leave, these guys don't want to leave, these guys don't want to leave. So I said, "Well there's one way to do this." This is my favorite, the thing I did with the German officer, I took out the hand grenade, pulled the pin, and put it in my hand. I said, "Now, if I let go of this, we blow up this place." I said, "In the meanwhile, let me show you what I mean." I took out the .45 and I put about four of them in the floor. Then I turned around and said, "Now who's leaving?" Everybody left. I put the pin back in the grenade.

NH: What were some of your thoughts and maybe some of your friends' thoughts about the Red Ball Express and some integration of the front lines?

EK: The Red Ball Express was an extremely important thing. As a matter-of-fact, after we crossed the Channel, we didn't go directly into combat. We stopped because - they went through the whole division and pulled out everybody who knew how to drive a heavy truck, because what they were doing was delivering the gas by truck up to General Patton. And all I know is war stories about all of that, I mean, huge crap games in that. Because what some of the soldiers would do was sell their truck and gas to the French and that way get money, or else sell them a couple of cans of gas, because the French people had been through a very hard time until we got there. I know one of the first things that happened to me was I went to the slit trench and I was doing what you do and a French lady comes over to us and wants to buy my boots. I thought, "Leave me alone, I'm doing what I doing." But they wanted to buy my boots. So, the people would buy gas or whatever they had. So some of the soldiers are selling this stuff to them and that led to big crap games among them. But they did a hell of a job transporting all that gas.

NH: What does a soldier do if he sold his truck and the gas? How does he explain that? He doesn't get court-martialed, or anything like that?

EK: They said the truck blew up or broke down. This is not, you have to think of this in terms of - there's this big war going on and all these things are moving and a million things are happening at once and there's really not a lot of correlation between everybody on anything.

NH: I see.

EK: Then what the problem was, how do they get the money home? That was a problem because if you send a package home, an officer would review the package to okay it or not. All I can imagine is that there must have been some officers that sent some money home, too. The Red Ball Express was a very important thing that happened and is a big factor in winning that war. It's an example of American ingenuity.

SH: You had talked about one incident of the integration, or the inability to integrate the troops in Belgium. Were there other incidents that you saw or remember?

EK: No, because you're a self-contained little unit. You're fighting here. I'm fighting there. During combat nobody tells you anything. You don't even know if you're winning or losing. All you know is you have to go that way. It's just the way it is. So that I didn't, I wasn't conscious of black troops, white troops, or anything like that.

SH: You had talked about needing and being thankful that there was a chaplain when you came out of that first encounter. Were there other times? How often were there services or chaplains available for your people?

EK: The Catholics had communion on a more or less regular basis depending on where you were. It was the chaplain, the chaplain was in an army uniform and was right where you were. If you wanted to go to communion, you go to communion. You know, it's, confession is where they get a hundred guys together and he says, "All right, confess in your head and I'll give you the communion." That's how that went.

NH: Tell me about some of the supply problems. I read about a gasoline shortage. I read about a couple of food shortages.

EK: From where I was, I wouldn't really see them. I never didn't have enough, I always had enough ammunition. I always had food to eat, C-rations and K-rations. I mean, you get awful tired of eating that stuff but it does fill you up. Plus, you live off the land. I mean, the French houses didn't have any food in them but the German houses had all kinds of food in them. So that we ate very well once we got into Germany. I'm always surprised when you run into a turkey in Europe. I never, never think there are going to be turkeys in Europe. One night we, in Saarlautern, Germany, we found a turkey in this guy's yard. So we killed it, dressed it, and cooked it and ate it. What we did was, we fried it in butter.

NH: The weather, I wanted to ask you about the weather. I read that ...

EK: Well, we started in October, November, December, January. So we go right through the winter months. In the extreme, in our behind-the-line patrol work, when there was snow, we wore reversible jackets that had white on the outside and were very long. So that when we showed up, you kept your weapon inside, so that you were a white thing moving in the white. Other than that, if you had to stand guard duty somewhere - everybody did guard duty everywhere - to stand in one place for two hours, without moving, when it's really cold, is very

hard on your feet. But the Germans were very smart because they had these big straw boots, about two feet long by a foot wide and you just slide your feet right in. So you just stand there in the straw boots. So we always were looking for where they were, so we could get their straw boots to stand in.

NH: What about the mud? Was that a problem?

EK: It was always a problem. I mean, running across a rain-soaked field carrying a machine gun when some other guy is shooting at you, that mud gets real heavy caked on your feet.

SH: What about frostbite and things like that? Did you ever have to ...

EK: We were fighting in farms and cities and stuff like that so there were always buildings so you didn't have that problem, and you tried to, it's amazing how you, so you wear Belgian underwear, German underwear, French underwear, what the hell is the difference, as long as you get a change of underwear. Socks were the big thing. Socks were a very, very important item. To an infantryman, your feet are what it's all about, and the more dry socks you have, the better off you are. So you always carried a lot of socks. If you ran out of them you'd take them out of whatever house you went into, whatever socks were available, and put them on. Clean was never a question. I mean, clean is not a question at all, it has nothing to do with this.

SH: I was going to ask about personal hygiene. Did you ever have hot showers or hot food?

EK: No, well, hot food, like Thanksgiving you had hot food. The United States Army made a big thing about Thanksgiving and giving you a Thanksgiving. They set up these, they have these pots that are about that big around, by about that high, with the vacuum thing in them, so they would somewhere cook all the stuff and some jeep would come running up and give you a couple of these and you'd have a hot meal. But really, not of real relative importance. I mean, the problem was to stay alive and to stay warm and you'd always find enough. I don't know what the guys did that were in the Pacific, in the jungles and all of that. I can't imagine what that was like. That must have been horrible.

SH: From Saarlautern then, I think we need to move forward.

EK: From Saarlautern, we then, you get across the Rhine and now the war is being fought in big leaps, big leaps. We're driving in jeeps most of the time, filling in gaps here and there. I guess one of the saddest things that happened ... The day the war in Europe ended, I was in some German town that I don't recall the name of, and I was standing there talking to another guy because the war is over and what's going to happen to us now because there's still the war in Japan, etc. When all of a sudden an .88 went off. An .88 was a piece of German artillery that was very effective. There was a guy about a block away sitting in a jeep. Whoever fired that, the German that fired that .88, it came and hit that jeep and blew that guy to bits and blew that jeep to pieces, which I thought was very unfair and sad and whatever. The war was over for him and, all of a sudden, some German shoots off a last shot somewhere and it just, by sheer chance it just happens to hit him.

NH: Where did you earn your Silver Star?

EK: Metz.

NH: Metz.

EK: Yes. Bronze Star was at Vezon in France. The Silver Star was at Metz.

NH: Those are your three battle stars?

EK: No, the three battle stars, they're different. The Silver Star is an award for gallantry in action. The Bronze Star is an award for bravery in action. The battle stars you're talking about, if you fought in a fight in the European Theater, was one battle scene, was one battle area. In that area, there were distinct battles. If you fought in one of those battles you got a little star that you put on there, which has nothing to do with the other star. The battle stars are the little things, about that big, that you put on that ribbon to show that you, when you were in that area, you fought in three different battles. And if you're going to ask me the names of them, I can't remember.

NH: I have a ...

EK: I'm sure Metz was one of them.

SH: You had talked about how Patton gave you your Bronze Star in the field, how were you ...

EK: Patton gave me my Combat Infantryman Badge.

SH: Oh, okay.

EK: The Bronze Star, I was called to wherever I was, I was told to go to Battalion. I went to Battalion and the Battalion Commander said, "You earned a Bronze Star, here it is," and he gave me this little piece of paper that said what it was about. And when I went back I said, "Now what the hell do I do with this?" I mean, it's not, I said to you before for an infantryman, you have to carry everything on your back that you have. Well, now I have to carry this thing around for the rest of the war. So I did. Meanwhile, the Silver Star came the same way. I was sleeping in some, I slept in a lot of barns, I headed for barns and straw all the time, and I was told, "They want you at regiment, now." So I couldn't find one of my boots so I took another guy's boot and put it on. So I walked up there, I think with two wrong feet boots on, to see what it was they wanted. And the Regimental Commander is there, reads this thing and pins it on me, and gives me that thing, and there they are right there. That's not a very exciting thing.

NH: Not very glamorous.

EK: I was kind of annoyed that they called me over there.

SH: And woke you up. Tell us what you typically carried in your pack. If we were to have met you on the field and you were to unload everything that you were carrying, what would there be?

EK: There would always be a blanket. There would always be a, I can't think of what you call it, it was a shelter half but it was also a raincoat.

NH: A poncho?

EK: A poncho. A poncho, that, a mess kit, a metal thing, that flips open, in which you kept an aluminum type of spoon/fork combination thing. You had your own bayonet so you didn't carry a knife. You carried a leather thing in which you kept toothpaste and a toothbrush, if you had any toothpaste, and some sort of shaving equipment which you never used anyway. A razor blade of some kind. And what else, a writing kit that you tried to lug around, and souvenirs you picked up as you were going along, which you kept throwing away because you didn't want to carry them. Ammunition belt, hand grenades, extra clothing whatever kind you had. Most of the time you were hoping, really the way this functioned is every company has a supply sergeant. So that if you needed another pair of pants you went back to him. We didn't carry six pairs of pants. You always went back to him because they had them and if they weren't there, then you didn't have them, that's all.

SH: What would have been unique in that pack ...

EK: You also had long underwear.

SH: What would have been unique in that pack to you, to Edwin Kolodziej? How would we have known that was yours?

EK: My dogtags were on it, that way, they know who you are, and there's two of them. The reason why there's two of them is because one is on one chain and the other is on the other chain. So if you get killed, the quartermaster people take off one of them so that they know whose body it was and they leave the other one on you so that they know who you are when they find you. Okay?

SH: Did you have ...

EK: That's why there are two dogtags that way. Personal identification, we didn't, I mean we didn't, the lieutenants didn't wear bars and we didn't wear strips or anything. They didn't carry anything like that. The only things that would tell you who I was were the dogtags and whatever would be in my writing kit.

SH: Did you have any good luck charms or medals that you carried?

EK: I carried a picture of a girl from high school, who was not my girlfriend, but it was the only picture I had and everybody else had a girlfriend. So I would show this one. But it wasn't my girlfriend.

NH: With the amount of carnage that happened, were there any moments when men would question Patton's leadership style?

EK: Every outfit has a chronic complainer in it. So there would always be some guy bitching about something. But you never got - combat troops, you don't go very far with that. I mean, you have enough to do, to do what you're doing. If you go bonkers like some of them did and you have to send them back, that's it. I didn't see any real instances. You have to understand that in my head, this was a war that had to be fought, and this was a war that had to be won. I'm not distinguishing from other wars that you're conscious of, this one had to be fought; this one had to be won. And at that time, you couldn't keep the young guys out of the military service. They were all crazy to go, including the Sullivan brothers, five of them had to go. They all ended up drowned on a warship or whatever. So that people wanted to be there; people wanted to do this. Now there were always malcontents, but the spirit was the other way.

SH: When you're moving as quickly as you were, what were, basically, your orders at that point? Is this still a leap frog type of operation or, what is your job at this point?

EK: For me, the war amounted to doing what I was told to do. The officers talked to Battalion, Battalion talked to Regiment, and all of a sudden, the lieutenant would say, "Eddie, this is what you're going to do." I had no idea how it fit tactically, strategically, or anything else. I knew that we had to go through tonight. We had to go out and we had to get in a fight. We had to come back and go back. What that meant, I had no idea. So that I don't ...

SH: So that's how you made your way across Germany, then?

EK: Yes. You could tell when you're winning. When they start running the other way pretty fast, you could tell you're winning. But even then, every so often, they stop and it's like that shell that killed the guy the day the war ended. I mean, there's always some guy on the other side that wants to fight, no matter what. That's true in a bar, too. You always have some guy in a bar that wants to fight, no matter what.

SH: What about the German people that you were starting to encounter towards the end of the war? Was there any change in those that you'd first encountered when you first went into Germany?

EK: Remember now, you're talking about front line infantry combat troops. If we came into a town and there were people there, we called for trucks to take the people out of there.

SH: Okay, that's what I wanted to know.

EK: Take the people out of there. When the Bulge broke, I was on the banks of the Saar River, and I was assigned with ten guys to hold a mile of frontage. When I got there, I found there were a bunch of old people there who refused to leave their homes. One of the hardest things I had to do was bring the trucks in to have those people carried out and get them out of there. You just can't, where the combat is, you have to get the civilians out of there, or else they're going to get killed. Because, I don't know whether they're sick, old people, or if they have radios telling the

Germans where the hell I am, and I don't want to take that chance. So that they have to go back where they're safe. So you don't see too much of the - I never saw the people. When the war came to you, you'd run, too. So they just weren't there, or, maybe that's the answer to your question.

SH: Yes. That's what I wanted to hear.

NH: What did you think about the point system?

EK: I was not impressed with the point system. Did I say something about that before, is that it? The point system was something that was made up when the war ended. They had to decide who they would discharge first, and they did it on what was called a point system. I had a Bronze Star, a Silver Star, and three Battle Stars so I had that many points right off the top. They had - if you had a Purple Heart, some more. Okay? So all of a sudden the war is over and a lot of people want to get out so there are meetings where people are saying, "Well, what did you do, Neal? Oh, you did this, Neal, don't you remember, Neal, you did this, this ... Take this over to sergeant and tell him to sign it, get yourself a Bronze Star. You get yourself a Bronze Star, you get yourself three more points." There was a bunch of that stuff going on, which I didn't think was very fair. But you know what you could do about it, nothing. Same thing you do with the chads in Florida, nothing. [Mr. Kolodziej is referring to the controversy surrounding the 2000 Presidential Election.] Next question.

NH: How did you feel about the possibility of fighting on the Pacific front?

EK: When I came home, my mother said, "What's next?" I said, "Well, I'm home for thirty days. Why don't we worry about that at the end of the thirty days." So when I was leaving, I said goodbye to my mother, and my father pulled me aside and said, "What's happening?" I said, "We're being transferred to beachhead assault on Japan." I said, "With all the things I lived through in Europe, the odds are kind of long on me living through that frontal assault, too." I said, "So, this may be goodbye." We were going to be trained to be the actual assault troops for the landing, the beachhead landing in Japan. That's what we were going to do. So I didn't really, really think I was going to come back. But then the war ended.

SH: You were part of the ASTP program and then you were withdrawn from that. At that point did you - when did you know that you'd be going to Europe and not to Japan, or to the Pacific, I should say?

EK: It didn't work that way.

SH: Did you know ...

EK: We were told we were being shipped over to the 95th Infantry. When we got to the 95th Infantry, after we established who we were, identity with them, then came to question the mountain climbing training. That led us to believe we were going to Italy, because there are mountains in the middle of Italy and somebody has to handle the mules and somebody has to cross, to ford the streams and stuff like that. So we were sent to train for all of that. So I thought

we were going to Italy. Obviously, we weren't going to desert warfare, because that was over already in North Africa. But it - we weren't being trained to fight in the Pacific. It's an entirely different training if you're going to fight in the Pacific and in that area. And if you're going to be fighting in Europe, that's different. I was very happy that I fought in Europe rather than the Pacific.

SH: That's what I wanted to ask.

EK: Yes. You had no control over it, but it's just the way it went. I ended up going left instead of right.

SH: What was your perception of the enemy as a young man, coming out of high school, after Pearl Harbor, but before that having heard about the war in Europe? How did you perceive the European enemy, or as some say the German or Axis forces, in the European Theater as compared to the Pacific Theater? As a young man, what were your thoughts?

EK: Well, it was obvious that Hitler was some sort of a madman and he - you have to understand that he invaded my mother's and father's home country and devastated it. I saw my father in tears over the fact that he didn't know what was happening to his relatives there, and then the *Blitzkrieg* through the lowlands and the Netherlands and all of that. It was obvious that this man was going to conquer the world, and we were all convinced that wasn't going to happen. As far as the Japanese go, and Pearl Harbor, at eighteen or nineteen, I didn't give in-depth analysis to a lot of things. I just felt there was something very treacherous and very horrible about somebody that would do that. So that on one hand, here's Mussolini, goes into Ethiopia and shoots up all these poor people that didn't have any way to defend themselves, and you have the Japanese hitting Pearl Harbor, and you have this guy Hitler doing all these things, there were things he was doing that we didn't even know. No, they were the enemy, that was it. That was it. There was no thought other than that. As a matter-of-fact, one of the problems people of my generation have is, there are still guys that were in World War II that won't buy a Japanese-made car, and even I, myself, Irene will tell you, once in a while I make a joke that I shouldn't make. I run into somebody that's German that doesn't treat me quite nice, I feel like saying to him, "Well, I might have knocked off your grandfather, you know."

SH: That front line humor.

EK: Yes, well, it's, you know, you can't hate somebody for a long time, enough to kill them, and then, all of a sudden, you like them. I mean, nature isn't that way I don't think. Now I'm a mature adult, a mature, aged adult and I understand a lot more than I ever understood before. It's sad that it has to be that way. Even sadder, you'll notice, I drew the distinction on a war that had to be fought and a war that had to be won. What I'm talking to you about is that there are some wars that we fought that don't have to be fought, and I don't even know if they don't have to be fought, why do they have to be won? Okay? I don't know. Deep, philosophical, social questions there.

NH: Were you aware of what was going on in Germany, with the camps and all of that?

EK: No.

NH: You had no idea.

EK: No, no.

NH: Were there rumors or anything?

EK: With the Jewish people?

NH: Yes.

EK: No, no idea. If you're talking about the experiments on the bodies, no. If you're talking about the lampshades made out of human skin, no. You learn all that later on.

NH: How did you, when you came back from Europe, how did you make the transition from, actually, not even when you came back, when you were eventually discharged ...

EK: I got to Pine Camp, New York, which I had never heard of in my life, and I thought it was kind of ... I was this very important guy, doing all this stuff and all this ... they're saying, "Go up to Pine Camp, New York, we're done with you." I got to Pine Camp, New York, and they said we want to fix your teeth, we want to do this, we want to do that. I said, "You don't have to do that, my teeth are fine." He said, "You want to keep your GI Insurance?" "No." I said, "I don't want anything. Just give me the piece of paper and the money to get back home." And that was typical of me. I did not take the GI Insurance. I did not take any of the things they wanted to give me. I just - as long as they didn't want me anymore, I didn't want to be there. I went back to Sayreville.

NH: When you got back to Sayreville, did you have trouble making the transition from being in combat one week and then being in your parent's house the next week? Was that hard at all?

EK: Well, the way that worked out was, there were, you know, there were like eleven million men under arms and they all sort came, went at once and came back at once. So when you came back, there were all sorts of guys. I didn't bring those pictures, I have pictures of the half a dozen guys that I hung around with in high school. When we all came home, we all got together and, I don't know. When I came to Rutgers I was going to play football for Rutgers, but then I busted a ligament in my ankle so I played semi-professional football with a bunch of guys that had been in the service and it just ... I had never experienced what the Vietnam people talk about all the time, all that. I never had that problem. It may have been that there were so many that went and so many that came back and it was a successful venture besides. I didn't really have those problems. Now I look back and I sort of begrudge the fact that there were two years there in my life where my life would have been a lot different if I would have been able to enjoy them. You know, what it is. That's a Chinese proverb.

NH: I wanted to ask you a little bit about after the war. What was Rutgers like after the war, the campus life ...

EK: When I came home, I had a decision to make as to what I was going to do. I knew that I was going to go to college. I wasn't sure what direction I was going to go in. I sort of decided that I wanted to be a lawyer and I had a choice, since I was one of the first guys discharged, because we were brought back for that training to go to Japan, we were here. I was out before other guys even got home, and at that time, there was a big shortage of men, everywhere. There were a lot of women and there weren't very many men, and there were a lot of schools and not many kids in the schools. So that any college you wanted to go to was ready to take you. I could have gone to Princeton or Rutgers; I came to Rutgers. I'm not sure I made the right move, but that's all right.

NH: You used your GI Bill, correct?

EK: I used my GI Bill. And then I went and when I indicated on the GI Bill that I wanted to be a pre-law student, they sent me over to the veteran's center and they did a day's psychological analysis of me and tested me and thought I would make a good lawyer. So, I enrolled at Rutgers and studied political science. I got a degree from here and then went to Rutgers in Newark and got a degree from there. Then I passed the bar and I have been practicing here ever since.

NH: You said in your first interview that you went through Rutgers in two and a half years.

EK: Yes.

NH: Were you in a rush to graduate?

EK: Yes. I met, when I came home from the army I went up to what was NJC in those days, I went over to NJC to talk to a classmate of mine named Jean Lang. And when I got there I met her roommate, Barbara Washburn, and that was my first wife, who died of cancer a few years ago. Irene is my second wife. Barbara and I fell in love and we wanted to get married, and so, I decided we were going to get married and the only way we could do that was to speed everything up. So I did. So I overloaded every semester and I went summers over the overload. I took all my majors in one year, at once. It wasn't that much fun.

NH: I can imagine that it wasn't.

EK: It wasn't fun at all. Plus, I had to have a job, in the meanwhile, so I used to work for a plumber every now and then. All the majors at once was difficult.

NH: Do you want to tell me a little bit about your children?

EK: Barbara and I had four children. The oldest child is Christine, who's married to a lawyer in Pueblo, Colorado. My oldest granddaughter is pregnant. We just got that word the other day. My second child is my son, David, who works for a computer science corporation. He has a very high position with them. He's in charge of DuPont's engineering computers worldwide. He's married and has two children. Third child is my daughter, Kathryn, who lives next door to

me and has a son, Jonathon Pinto. Kathryn is an editor, freelance editor, freelance proofreader, and all of that field, and she writes a certain amount so she has her own sort of business.

Irene Kolodziej: She's an artist.

EK: She's also an artist. She's a graduate of Georgian Court and she has a Masters in oils so that she also dabbles in art. She's our free spirit. I have a son, Larry, who is a computer expert. He was formerly in charge of all of the computers for the Utilities Authority. He has a wife and two sons. So that's what came out of all of this, and they have a very wonderful stepmother in Irene, and they will tell you that they like her more than they like me. We have four children, eight grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

IK: [Laughs]

NH: I wanted to ask you about some of your experiences as an assistant prosecutor. You were in Middlesex County?

EK: Right. After I passed the bar, I worked for a lawyer named Joe Karcher for a couple of years. Then I opened my own office. When I opened my own office, I had started to become active in politics, and the Democrats had won the gubernatorial election, remember, and needed new prosecutors, and I became one of the county assistant prosecutors in Middlesex County. At that time there were only four prosecutors, Warren Wilentz, Bill Danbury, Ed Kolodziej, and Ed Dolan.

SH: Who was the Governor then?

EK: Bob Meyner. In those days we had maybe a half a dozen detectives and four prosecutors. So, one week you'd do trials, another week you'd handle the Grand Jury, another week you'd handle the Municipal Court work, and the last week was to get ready for those three weeks. And this was a part-time job, which was a very full-time part-time job. I teamed with Prosecutor Dolan, who eventually became the Prosecutor, I teamed with him on a group of murder cases that we tried. By that time, we had, I think, the four children already and the six thousand a year just wasn't doing it. So I left the Prosecutor's Office and built my own practice.

NH: And you were an Assemblyman for two years.

EK: Yes, I was active in politics and along the line I decided to run for the Legislature. I ran for the Legislature and got defeated the first time I ran. Two years later, I ran again and did it my way. The first time I did it the party's way and I got beat. I wanted to debate my opponents, and the powers that be didn't feel I should do that. So the second time I decided to run, I saved up my own campaign funds and ran my own campaign and did what I wanted to do, and I think I had the highest vote total ever in the history of the county. But in between, Republican Governor, Cahill, Bill Cahill, appointed me to the State Lottery Commission. So that five other guys and I designed the lottery which is now in effect in New Jersey. One of my functions there, I went around the state speaking in favor of the lottery and why we should have one and how it would work and this, that, and the other thing. The editor of a local New Brunswick newspaper

sort of liked the way I handled it and supported me. And so the second time I ran I had an immensely large outpouring of votes. I did very well. When I got to Trenton I was put on the Appropriations Committee and got a lot of publicity in that. I was all ready to become Senator or Governor when my father came down with cancer of the face. Which means first they cut off the right side of his face, then they cut off the left side of his face, then they cut out his tongue, etc., and somebody had to be there with him. That somebody was me, and I don't begrudge any minute of it. But that sort of ended my political career. Later on, when I tried to go back, the winds had changed and it wasn't there.

NH: I was going to ask you if you'd had aspirations because I also read that you ran Edward Patton's Congressional campaign.

EK: I think I ran, I ran two Assembly campaigns, I ran two Congressional campaigns ...

NH: All successful?

EK: I ran two, yes, well, no, one of the Assembly campaigns wasn't ... Dave Foley, who's a lawyer here in New Brunswick and Martin Spitzer; I managed their Assembly campaigns. They didn't win. The Congressional campaigns I managed did win. That was a very interesting experience, managing a Congressional campaign, because it takes you actually into Washington and you get to see everything that's going on, very interesting.

NH: It's not even the war itself that I'm asking you about. I was wondering if you had any thoughts about the state of the veterans from those wars and the fact that they're disenfranchised from World War II veterans.

EK: I don't believe they are.

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

NH: This continues an interview with Edwin Kolodziej. This is the second tape, side A. What organizations are you involved with?

EK: I belong to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Sayreville, an inactive member of the Catholic War Veterans. I do not belong to the American Legion. They're the only military outfits. I belong to the 95th Infantry Division Association. I'm very active in the Infantry Division Association. That's about it, I guess, for the military.

SH: Did you go back for the reunions in Normandy and those kinds of organizational trips and things like that?

EK: Irene and I went back a few years ago to Metz, where they were having a ceremony to dedicate the monument to our division. I had photographs, an extensive set of photographs; we were given an extremely fine welcome. And I have to say this to you, if you walk down the

street in Metz and you have anything on that indicates that you were 95th Infantry person, people will stop you and say thank-you to you. Believe it or not, stop you, and say, "Thank-you." Right, Irene?

IK: Yes.

EK: Say, "Thank-you," to you, "I appreciate what you did," and the same way, that happened in Reims when we were there. People in Europe really appreciate what you did. In fact, I just got a letter the other day that the French government is issuing to every veteran who served in France, between this date and that date, a letter of appreciation of what we did, and one is coming to me somewhere along the line. I - we went back and went to the place where I got the Silver Star, and we went to the place where I got the Bronze Star, and we traveled throughout all there. In Metz, they have a 95th Division Association of people that actively meet and preserve the places where we fought and everything else. It's a big thing over there, and if you go there, they guide you to every place and show you everything.

SH: My question to you before we end the interview is a bit of a philosophical one. What impact do you think your service in World War II made the man we see today?

EK: What impact did it have on me?

SH: Yes.

EK: That's relatively easy for me to answer.

SH: I thought it might be.

EK: I learned from World War II that when you get up in the morning and you see the sun shining, that you say, "Thank God I'm still here today." That's what the war taught me, because you live day to day and you learn to appreciate life. I don't think I'm as angry at some things that I would be. I think I'm more understanding about other things. I mean, I spent, I don't know, about six months or so looking God in the eye every day, and you get some idea of what the relative importance of things are. Some things aren't quite as important to me as they are to a lot of other people.

SH: Do you think Edwin Kolodziej would have been as active politically if he had not gone to World War II?

EK: I would think so.

SH: Really?

EK: I would think so. I was president of my grammar school graduating class; I was president of my high school graduating class. Here at the University I was on the debating team because my ankle went for football. I won the Monsenieur O'Grady Extemporaneous Speech prize here at the University when I graduated. I'm inclined that way. Irene will tell you, some things are just

the way it is with me. I don't sit down and reason them, they're just things that I do. And also, I guess, when I entered Rutgers Law School, the first day you were there they gave a form they wanted you to fill out. There was only one question on it: Why do you want to be a lawyer? You had to fill it out and sign it. I was the first one done. Because all I wrote was because I want to help other people and signed my name and handed it in. And that's the way it has been ever since. Irene has been with me through, how long of practice, Irene? Forty?

IK: I would say forty-five years.

EK: Irene has been with me for that long and, really, that's typical of our office. We've had a very successful practice. Basically, we're interested in people, and we really pay attention to people and their problems.

SH: What was your most interesting case?

EK: Oh, Lord. Do you have another tape? Most interesting case ... Are you talking about trial?

SH: Whatever, for you.

EK: I can't answer the question the way you asked it. What I have to say is that I have a five-year span of interest. I spent, what, five years in the Prosecutor's Office. I loved it. I tried all the murder cases. I did all of that, everything a young lawyer wants to do, I did. I thought, well, I don't know, things get repetitive. So then I opened up my own office. Then I got interested in municipal law. So I became Municipal Magistrate. I became the Assistant Borough Attorney. I became council for the Board of Adjustment, council for the Planning Board, council to the Board of Education, built five new schools ... on and on and on with things like that. I don't know, I did that sort of thing. Then I ran for political office. But sooner or later, I talked to one of my advisors and he said, "You know, you're an excellent lawyer. You have to decide what you want to do. Do you want to be an excellent lawyer or do you want to be in politics?" And because of what was going on with my dad, I decided to buy the excellent lawyer bit. But, in the meanwhile, I got interested in financial law and I did a lot of work for - I represented a group of different banks. I'm still involved with banks. Then I got interested in investment real estate, so I started doing some of my own projects. So that for me, every five years or so I seemed headed in some other direction. Right now, we're about finished except for the fact that, for example, this morning when I was trying to prepare myself to come here, I got a call from a lady who said her brother has gone completely senile and would I please talk to her, okay. Where last week, or two weeks ago, it was a father that died and left three sons. One of them was a very bright guy who was a complete alcoholic. It's that type of thing that I have a lot of difficulty saying no to.

SH: That personal line that you wrote.

EK: Right.

SH: In pre-law.

EK: I'm going to help this lady with her ... The week before that it was, a girl called me in Florida and said, "I have to talk to you because my mother is now senile and my father can't walk anymore. My brother is a complete alcoholic and he was trying to get into the house. My mother wants to let him in, my father doesn't want to let him in. They've got some money. What do we do? Eddie, you have to ... And my father will only listen to you." I sort of became a tribal chief of my area and it's still sort ... You know, if we just went through the dozen things we have right now, all of them fit into those categories. None of them are with me because I wish to make a living off them. I've already made my living. I'm doing them because, I guess, it's what we do.

SH: Do you have any hobbies or passions in that ...

EK: Gardening. Gardening, Irene and I garden. We have, we love all kinds of things. But, you know, if you lead the type of life that I lead where you're either behind the desk or doing something else, you need something to put your hands into where you see positive results from it. You know, you till the soil, you plant, you put the seed in, it grows, you pick the fruit, you know you did something.

SH: Before we end the interview I'd like to ask you again that when you get your transcript back you would feel free to tell us where we've left holes and fill those in and I thank you very much.

EK: Thank you very much. It was nice meeting you.

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

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