

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALEXANDER PHILLIPS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Alexander Phillips on August 3, 2007, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

Matthew Lawrence: Matt Lawrence.

SI: Okay, and thank you very much for having us here in your apartment.

Alexander Phillips: I'm glad to have you.

SI: To begin could you tell us when and where you were born?

AP: I was born in Buffalo, New York, 1912. My parents got married here in New Brunswick and they moved to Buffalo, New York. I grew up there; and when, I was born, the doctor that delivered me asked my parents if he could adopt me, [laughter] but my parents said, "No." So we were living up there for two years. From there we moved to Youngstown, Ohio and we were there another two years. From there, we moved to West Virginia and we were there about six years. Then we moved over to Pennsylvania. I know it was a small, little town, and we got snowed in. The snow was so bad, when they had the plows come through, they had to throw the snow in our front yard. The snow was so heavy. From there, we were there a couple of years, then we moved on into New Brunswick, moved here in 1920. My last brother was born in 1920, here in New Brunswick. When I was growing up I went to school, but I just sort of drifted away from school and then the war was coming on and, somehow, I got a job on the railroad, Pennsylvania Railroad. I worked there until I went into the army in 1941, in May.

ML: I was just going to ask how come you moved around so much as a child?

AP: Well, that's [a good question]. My father had relatives and he thought the pay was better somewhere else, so he moved, I guess. But we wound, I wound up, believe it or not, working in this spot, in this building in 1923 or '24.

ML: What was this building then?

AP: It was a cigar shop, General Cigar Shop, they made all kinds of cigars. I worked as a supply boy. Then I went into the army, and when I was being drafted, they were examining me, the post doctor. Then he turned me, he said, he says, "Go sit down." I went and sat down and another doctor came and got me. The day before I drank a bottle of Pepsi Cola and that sort of revved up my heart, I think. If I had drank another bottle I wouldn't have had to go in because this doctor told me, "Go take a chair, go sit down," that's the second doctor. So things are getting cured in there. The last doctor that had me he didn't know what to do with me. So, somehow, a sergeant comes out of one of the army doors there, walks across the hall, and my doctor's going up to him, to meet him. They're talking for quite a little spell there, so, finally, the sergeant says, "Oh, pass him, he'll get something easy to do." He was right. Got sent up to Pine Camp. Somehow, my room was screened pretty quick, so I went into a hall there, the building was B Company; I got my stuff all picked out, my cot and everything, and they're looking for me; out there hollering my name. So, somehow I happen to come out on the little porch, he says, "Your name Phillips?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Get out here." I says, "What,

am I going home?" "No, you ain't going." [laughter] Oh God, so, I got put into Headquarters Company. I didn't have to do any training early morning or during the night. We didn't have to get up 'till seven o'clock in the morning, went to breakfast, eight o'clock, so I would call that a pretty good break. ... So, then, the wintertime is coming. So they had, we had three barracks, A, B, and C, so I asked the sergeant if I could, they had potbellied stoves, little ones, I says, "Could I be a fireman in one of the buildings?" He says, "Yeah, you want the job, you can have it." So I became a fireman for that season. Didn't have to do nothing, and then there was training, you know, I didn't have to do. They had a little vegetable truck, and there was maybe about eight or ten of us, we just followed it around, wherever ... their route took us. The other trainees, crawling on their bellies and everything, I didn't have to do that. So, then, the bigger training came, we were like intelligence, you know, reconnaissance? So you had to ride a motorcycle. I told the sergeant, I says, "No, you're making a mistake, I need four wheels." "Ah," he says, "sorry." So I had to do it, had to get on the motorcycle. I got on the motorcycle, he says, "This is the brake. This is the [gas]." [laughter] He put me on there and I took off. There was three loop-the-loops, the third loop, I was flying. [laughter] I went about eighteen, twenty feet in the air and the sergeant is running there, and all. He says, "You're right, you need four wheels." Then when Pearl Harbor struck, I knew we were going, you know, because we got the longest division in training in the US, almost two years, so ... Walter Winchell even had us in his column. He says, "Where is the 4th Armored, Roosevelt's pets, at now?" He called us, our division, his pets, Roosevelt's pets. So we packed up and took off to California; Needles, California, and we stayed there. We were only ninety miles from Las Vegas; we were two hundred and eighty miles from Los Angeles and I used to go on passes and furloughs most of the time because the guys, they shuffled their money away, or they drank it away. They said, "Go get Phillips." So I said, "Okay, I'll go." So in Texas, we moved over into Texas, and in Texas, we were ninety miles from Fort Worth or Dallas. So, you had to go to Oklahoma City to catch the Chicago Northwestern so, he says, "You better go there," he says. So I did. So the train that pulled in before us unloaded a lot of people and when our train is pulling in, they're hollering, the conductor is hollering, from the train that I was going to take, the conductor was hollering, "No passengers accepted." "Uh oh," so I was right in the back. There was about a hundred and fifty people waiting already. So, somehow, a lady appears with a baby in her arm and two little ones, so I says to her, "Can I help you with your two little toddlers?" She says, "Yeah." "Here, hold my hand." I hollered down, "Ladies and gentlemen, sailors, soldiers, Marines, let the lady, baby, let the lady through with the baby." I got on the train. [laughter] I didn't lose no time. Now that only happened in the movies. Those guys were pulling their hair.

SI: Why were you getting on the train, were you on leave?

AP: I was coming on a furlough. Otherwise, that furlough was shot, if I had spent time there. Yeah, going back was easy, no trouble. ... So I came home and, too bad, I missed my brother. He was going overseas. He was in California and I missed him.

SI: Which brother was that?

AP: There's a picture of him up there. He was in the Asian Air Battalion.

SI: Steven?

AP: Yeah, Steven. That picture was in the *New Brunswick Daily News* [*Home News?*].

SI: We're looking at a picture of Mr. Phillip's brother, PFC Steven Phillips on Okinawa, which is from the local paper. I'll leave that there. So how many brothers and sisters did you have?

AP: We're five brothers and one sister, and four of us were in the service. One of my brothers was in Italy, in the 45th General Hospital. When Patton was going through there, he slapped a guy.

SI: Oh, he was at that hospital?

AP: He was in that hospital.

SI: Which brother was that?

AP: Bert, Robert. They had to fly him home from there, he had a terrible headache; from Italy, flew him down to Florida. My older brother, Paul, he was a Marine. He forced his way into the Marines. He was turned down four times. He says, "I'll try once more." So, somehow, in Menlo Park, the doctor there said, "You want to go that bad?" He says, "Yeah." So he went in, and he made five landings in the Pacific. Okinawa and he made all of them big ones, Tarawa. I was in the big battle in France. If you see that movie, ever see the John Wayne picture where the guy was hanging in the steeple, church steeple?

SI: *The Longest Day*, yeah.

AP: Yeah, that's the area where we were. The 4th Armored Division had that area. We had to cut that guy down from the steeple, from the church steeple. That's where we took off from.

SI: Before we get into Normandy, we want to ask you about your training in the United States a little more. You were at Pine Camp when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

AP: Yeah, I was there before.

SI: You were there before, what do you remember about the day that Pearl Harbor was attacked?

AP: Just it was an ordinary day. We knew we were going to go to war. So, I was a nosy guy, all the time, so we were getting ready. That was after I came home from Texas. Oh, yeah, in Texas, we got on the train, we never got off that train 'till we hit Boston. We came down through the Southern Route and then in New Orleans, they stopped, and I was up, I was always walking around seeing what I could see and where we're at, so, we were there and we were getting ready to cross the Mississippi, down there in New Orleans, and then I heard the man say, "This train is for Boston," and I knew where we were going. I didn't want to go out to the Pacific. Then we came back East. We were up in Boston and there, too, I found out just about when we were going to be going over. We were the biggest armada ever assembled to cross an ocean. We had three hundred ships. We had the five South American cruise ships, each handled

about five thousand men, one ship, and we had thirty-three submarines. We had six submarines, thirty-three destroyers, and I got a job on the ship nobody else wanted it. I was the last one on the totem pole, so they gave it to me. I didn't get my food from downstairs, I got it from upstairs. I was in the, what do you call the service? Medics, I was a medic. The doctor had his office upstairs on promenade deck, so that's where we had our room up there, and everything. So I thanked the sergeant. [laughter] So about halfway across, we got attacked by some German submarine, I guess. He hit one of the ships. We didn't know until about six months later, after we landed in England. The ships broke up in three groups. Our group went to Swansea, South Wales, the other one went to London, and then the other one went to Scotland. Hitler could have taken over, walked over, had no trouble, there was no troops there. I could never figure that part out. I kept thinking about it all the time. What the heck did he do, fall asleep on the job? because there were no soldiers there. They had Italian prisoners, men, working there, you know, different types of work, because their soldiers were in that war there, where they didn't do too good. Anyhow, we landed there before mid-day, twelve o'clock, and the workers went home at twelve o'clock. They tied up the ship, that's all. We had to stay aboard till Sunday, midnight. That's when they came back to unload. Two days later, the place got raided. Two days earlier, they might have hit us. So we weren't too far from where we landed, a little town, (Danzig?). It was ninety miles south of England, London, and we bedded down there for a while until we got ready to go.

SI: Were you in barracks or were you housed with an English family?

AP: Barracks. We had straw mattresses. We had a big building, so I went in there, I looked around. I found a flat iron, the one that the handle turned down, so I picked that up. So I figured the boys, they like their shirts, those three lines in the back, you know, so I charged them twenty-five cents for the shirt, fifty cents for the jacket, and seventy-five cents for the overcoat, to iron it out. So after a while, I got tired; I sold the iron for three hundred dollars. Then, I used to walk about, over a mile, there was a nice little village there, and they had fish and chips, you know, so I like fish and chips, so I used to walk across there. Then, one night, I'm walking that way and I see a bunch of wagons, they were Hungarian gypsies. I didn't let them know I speak Hungarian, you know, they would never have let me go. In fact, I gave them twenty dollars. You know, oh, geez, they kept, those people, how they were. How I ran across those people there, I mean, it was strange. So after I had my fish and chips, I walked back to my little hut and when we were there, one day, they staged a raid, like, you know, to see what we'd do. We didn't do nothing; we just come out and looked. We know who they were.

SI: So it was the US forces staging a raid? It was the Americans faking a raid?

AP: Yeah, the Americans made the raid. I went to London a couple of times. They said it was destroyed, the news at home here, they didn't touch Piccadilly Circus. One building, the corner was hit, that's all, but it was there.

SI: Did you see other areas of London that were bombed out?

AP: Oh, yeah. They were pretty well, and then the worst thing was, it was after, see, they were throwing in buzz bombs. I was there for seven months with the buzz bombs, delivering

messages after I got in the message center. Eisenhower's SHAEF [Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force], I was in with his message center. Then, somehow, since I was speaking a different language, they were thinking ahead already, like Berlin, you know, Germany. So I got, I didn't even know it, I was put into the US Group Control Council for Germany after the war, after I delivered the messages. They, I delivered this at the end of April, and by May the 5th, before that, I was in Paris, waiting to go to Berlin, and, over there, I didn't salute a colonel. I'm trying to walk, he's coming towards me, I still had my 4th Armored Division suit on yet, I didn't get no new coat, so I pass him. He says to me, "Hey, soldier, what army are you in?" So I go like this, you know, "What army does it look like?" He wrote me up, he wrote me all up; I never heard nothing about it. Could go anywhere, they couldn't hold me out.

ML: So, from England, where did you go next?

AP: From England, oh, you think I need water? I think you're right.

SI: You want to take a break for a couple of minutes?

[TAPE PAUSED]

AP: Like my partner, oh geez, oh, my God. My partner, I hardly ever saw him, only when we were passing out the mail, our messages. We had fifty-five buildings to deliver to in London and there was like a Macy's here, a department store over there, that's the building we had.

SI: Is that the Harrods?

AP: (Trumpers?), the department store. We had that building. This is a great one here. We had buildings, billets, the other side of Hyde Park, and we hardly ever went there, you know. So the building we took over, the back part, we had part of that building, too, and the Navy was in there and a couple of other intelligence units. We saw some empty space there, so we asked the Navy people and they said, "No, take it, do what you want." Well, we had our billets, but instead of going over there, we moved our stuff over here and the sergeant over there was looking for us. Finally, one night we see one of the guys go over there, the sergeant, he says, "Where were you? Where are you guys at, you know, you have to share the duties here, too." So, my buddy looks at me, I look at him, I says, "Yeah, that's the way it should be." Soon as we got done talking with him, we packed up our duffle bags, took off, he never saw us. [laughter] I don't know whether he ever looked for us, if he did, they couldn't touch us, they couldn't take us out. So, I often wonder how that sergeant looked when he found out he couldn't touch us, and my buddy, he was always on a go. Like in London, soon as he got there, he went to Piccadilly Circus, all he had was a phone number. He got there before me, and after, when I was coming by, the sergeant calls me over. He says, "You're new here." I said, "Yeah, I just got in." He said, "Don't tell me, you've got a phone number." I says, "Yeah." He says, "Go ahead." We could go anywhere. I got pulled in one night, the MPs took me down, and a lieutenant over there, after I told him, "U.S.G.C.C. [United States Group Control Council]," he says, "Yeah, give me five minutes," he says. I'm only a PFC, or a whatever, you know, and he's a lieutenant. He asked me to give him five minutes. I said, "What's going on?" He said, "I got to take care of these people, here." He had drunks all over the place, you know. So, [after] a couple of guys, he

comes to me, he asked me just a couple of things, "So and So?" "Yeah," and he told the MP, you know, "Take him where he wants to go, or take him anywhere." It was too late to go back where I was. He got up before the MP got to the top of the escalator, you know, I looked up there and it was the MP waiting for me. I had a lot of all kinds [of experiences], when I was about to leave, you know, we were getting ready to leave. Our building was here, diagonally, there was a pub, there, in the building on the bottom floor. So, a couple of days later, it was raining. I was up about five blocks in the Red Cross building and it was raining. Good thing it was raining. I might have turned the corner when a rocket hit the building across the street. The whole building just disappeared. But [the rocket] was better than a buzz bomb. See, the rockets, they were not cone shaped. You could be right next to it and not be hit; you were okay. With the buzz bomb, they told you to lie flat on the ground, four feet below the air. The air travels four feet above the ground. It would pick you up, bounce you around. It took the roofs off the buildings. They had to put a tarpaulin on top of that roof. Seven months, after I stayed off the battlefields, I spent seven months in London.

SI: That was a V-2 rocket that hit that building?

AP: Yeah, a V-2.

SI: Was it loud, do you remember, was your head ringing?

AP: Oh, yeah. It made a, well, it went up, see, it disappeared quicker than a buzz bomb. Some of the masonry they found about two blocks away. The whole building disappeared and those people, we had some people working upstairs that night, I think, a couple of guys over there who passed away, when I probably would have turned the corner. Had a lot of close ones, but I never worried about it. I've never thought about the, what do you call them? You know, in the buzz bombs, when the fire went out in the rear, that's when it took a nose dive.

SI: You had to listen for the buzz to stop?

AP: When the fire went out in the tail, "Zoom," okay.

Abigail Njemanze: Can you please tell them how you ended up in the hospital?

AP: How long?

AN: How you ended up being in the hospital.

AP: Oh, the hospital.

AN: Yes, can you tell them the incident?

AP: Oh, yeah, but that's not the hospital. Oh, yeah, the hospital, too, yeah. See, there was two of us to a room. I don't know what we were doing in there. We were just laying in the bed, I think, recuperating, and my partner, he really was bombed. You know, he was hurt because he was fidgeting and everything else. So this time, somehow, he went under the bed, you know. I

came in the room, I didn't see him. Then, somehow, I looked around a little bit, I saw something, I says, "Oh." I looked, he's under the bed. So I got under the bed, too. The nurse comes in, she don't know what, she runs out. She comes back, about three nurses come looking. Then they looked under the bed. Then I went into the rehab, you know. Funny thing, I met a buddy of mine from the medics in there. He had a piece of shrapnel still left in him. They had to operate on him, again. He was my buddy. He liked to take my shift, dispensary duty, because he liked to drink and there was alcohol there, you know, he makes it. Boy, when I came in, he was red as a beet. So, in there, they start to evaluate you there. So they had a small room about this size, and there was a window, and there was a chair on one side, table, a chair, so the examiner was on that side, I was on this side, and I'm looking out the window and they were training there, airplanes.

SI: There were airplanes flying around.

AP: Yeah, training. So he says to me, he says, "(Dear heart?), don't be afraid." "Oh, I don't mind all that," I said, "I want you to pick out a good one, and if you're going to send me up, send him after me." He folded up the [book] and took off. [laughter] I never heard nothing. Then, I got back to England, after that.

SI: Where was that? Where was the hospital?

AP: In France.

SI: In France, and that was after you were wounded on the battlefield?

AP: Yeah. I was just numb. The last thing I remember, an airplane flew overhead, it was a dive bomber, a small one. I knew what it was and everything, you know. But I was like numb from the blast, to rushing here and rushing there, you know. Yeah, it's terrible. On that ship, they loaded five men, they must have been hit, the (types?) must have been hit and got burned. They were bandaged head to top. "Boy," I said, "I'm lucky I'm not like that."

SI: Did you have any broken bones or a concussion or anything?

AP: No. ... As I said before, I was never hit, just from the boom.

SI: The blast.

AP: There was a big, that was a big, one of the biggest battles. We took eighty-thousand Germans there. That practically, I think, that broke their backs, too, I think.

SI: That was Falaise Gap?

AP: Of course, Rommel, he just about got through, almost caught him.

SI: Well, why don't we go back and talk a little bit about your preparations before the invasion, what you were doing before the invasion?

AP: Before the invasion? Yeah, we were there, too. See, we see, it's a hard name to remember, but, anyhow ... see the ships. It was raining, it wasn't a heavy rain, but it was enough to, it was rain. Anyhow, England had all kinds of balloons, army machinery, you know, all kinds of tanks and different things. That was one reason why Hitler never came across, I guess, because they had that old boom, the frigate, that was too much for him to take. Anyhow, we got loaded on, I think it was in the woods, like, and over there, too, somehow, I was seeing some girl there and I don't know how she found out. Well, anyhow, she worked in the intelligence there. She worked the office, I think, in London. So, but anyhow, the intelligence picked me up. They came, they questioned me there for about a half a day. She sent me a letter. I don't know how she got all that stuff, and they weren't going to let me go. All of a sudden, the guy says, "Ah, we're going to." So, otherwise, I don't know what, they would have locked me up, maybe? I wouldn't have gone overseas. So anyhow, we got loaded and we were in the, out in the Channel. I think, we might have been out there about a day. Wherever you could look, whatever way you looked, it's all you saw was ships, ships, ships, ships. We had tanks; we had everything on our boat too. But, we were half track; we rode half tracks, so I didn't have to even get my toes wet. Finally, they broke through and we took over (Deboises?) and St. Lo. We were lucky, we were really lucky. Somehow, somebody found a hole in the ground, the Germans were there before. It was a ladder, you had to walk down a ladder and it was quite high, maybe about ten feet high. You could stand up and everything. Anyhow, they bombed that whole place all day. Over five hundred airplanes came across there and we were in the frontlines there. How we got missed, I don't know. Different places after we came off, different holes there, then we were there for about maybe a month. Then we moved around to different, what do you call, hedgerows. They had an opening on one side and then, like on this side here, and then that side. Then, that one day I was, I said, "You know, it's been quiet so long, why get up and move?" I says, "Just sit tight." About five minutes later, the trees, the leaves were falling off the trees. The Germans opened up, just testing, you know, and the opening, some guy was running, he got a bullet hole right through. Didn't hurt him. But I went in the foxhole, I was the last guy on it. I was the top man. I never dug a foxhole before and, over there, too, I got away with it pretty easy. So after that, then we started to get organized and then, after the big saturating bombing, we got lined up and we took off, we made our first move and Coutances was the first stop. That was like a farming market, farmer's market. Funny thing, too, I wrote my general while I was a medic. So I rode by to check out Coutances, the little village there, nobody was there, everybody was safe. So we took off, went back to our group. Then we took off from there. The next stop was, it was a funny thing, the hill rose up so fast, the road was down there. There was a bunch of German soldiers laying all over there, yet, and the smell, you know, you could get the smell from there during the night. Above me, I got up early, I'm walking around and my lieutenant hollers over across to me. He said, "Hey, Phillips, where do you think you're at, Broadway?" He said, "Take cover." I'm walking around, I didn't care. So I turned around, the sun was pretty bright, so that I moved a little bit, got a little shade, and I looked up, would you believe, there was a tree about three hundred feet high, a beautiful tree, a peaked, beautiful tree, a cow was blown up to the peak. It was blown up like a balloon. We had meetings in New York, nobody ever brought it up. But one day, "Yeah, I saw it, I saw it." Nobody wanted to say anything, who would believe that? A cow blown up to the peak of the tree. That happened before we got there.

SI: Was the cow hit with artillery, do you know what happened to it?

AP: No. We took off and that's where I was lost. Somehow, I got separated from my unit and it was getting dark. So, I was walking, so, finally, I see a little shack. There was two people in there. They weren't, they were dressed sort of leisurely. I know they were our guys, you know. They didn't say a word to me; I didn't say nothing to them. They were on one side of the head, a door and two windows. They were on one side, I was on the other side. I fell asleep. They were gone by the time I got up and I spent three days looking for my unit. I was lost for three days. I saw nobody. I didn't hear nothing. Finally, I was getting closer, ah, I heard a little something, a little crackling, you know, and, finally, I met up with my outfit after three days, no water, no nothing. I didn't know what direction to go.

SI: Lost guys don't make it back to their unit.

AP: I finally got back and they were being raided that day. Air raid, bombs flying around, so some guy grabbed me and pulled me down. I didn't mind, I never paid no attention.

SI: Do you remember the first time you were in battle?

AP: No. That was the second time.

SI: No, I mean, do you remember the first time you were in battle? What happened then?

AP: Oh, the hedgerows, yeah. Over there, too, I was in the, the hedgerows were dug out on the inside, you know. See, like this, the center is considered the outside, and the hedgerow's all the way around, and they had opening in two corners. So half the day, you know, I says, "Why should I move?" So I just stayed put there. All of a sudden, they opened up where the corners were and, wherever, you know, top of the hedgerows. I just stayed put, that's all. I was safe, except that one guy, he got trapped.

SI: That was the first time you were in a situation where the Germans were shooting at you?

AP: First time, we were in an encounter with the Germans.

SI: Do you remember the first time you had to go out and get somebody who was wounded?

AP: Yeah, that was the very first time and this lieutenant was pretty smart. We were at a site, and it was a big field. We had a clump of woods, and there was a big field and on that side there was a clump of woods and there were Germans over there. So they fired a couple of shots and one of our guys got hit. I took care of him, had to send him back, that was the very first guy and our lieutenant says, "No movement," he says, "Stay put," and it was lucky because there was Germans over there. So they went their way, we went our way. That was lucky.

SI: Yes, very lucky.

AP: They had a better [position]. We just got there, see, they were probably positioned already, so that lieutenant was smart.

SI: Did you feel like the Germans would respect the Red Cross? That they wouldn't shoot at you? Did you feel that way or were you afraid that they would shoot you?

AP: No. I don't know, I lost all my fear. I had no fear. I didn't know what, I just would, you know, whatever had to be done was done. In the papers, when I came home, I don't remember it too well. I remember I told Schroeder, "Throw the guns in," and he said, "Why would you throw it away?" or don't come, you know, thirty-three Germans. It was in the New York, *Daily Home News*, the early paper, the early *Daily Home News*, yeah.

SI: So you took thirty-three prisoners, is that what you're saying?

AP: Yeah. I told them, "Follow my ambulance."

SI: How did you take these prisoners? Did they just come up to you or ...

AP: They come up to me. I say, "Sure," I say, "You know it's lost. Your deal is lost," I'd say. Sure enough, the guy, the lieutenant, says, "This is where we say good-bye." That was the closest I got, then. After, I found myself in the ambulance.

SI: That incident was close to when the Falaise Gap battle happened?

AP: Yeah. Well, Falaise Gap, the other side. That was the big battle. Everything was fine. Funny how it can happen and you don't say nothing about it. Then I came back home and, oh, yeah, the voyage home was something. *Henry W. Longfellow* was the ship I come back home with. We left Le Havre and they said that a storm will catch us in three days, which it did, and followed us through for a day and a half, or so. I was in the captain's quarters and the ship made a forty-five degree, the railing was in the water. Somehow it came back. The captain said, "Boy, that's something," he said. "Once it hits the railing," he said, "You don't have much chance." Sure enough, it came back, and the last day on that ship. [laughter] I'm sorry I'm laughing, but this is a good one. I didn't like what they, what we were having, so I was a medic, so I went down where the ship's kitchen was so, I told them I had a job I had to do and I missed my lunch, you know, my food. I sat down, they were having steak. I ain't leaving. I said, "They told me to come down here," I said, "I got to have something to eat." So, finally, I got my steak. When I told the guys I had steak, "How did you get steak?" That was a good one, too. That ship, this is no lie, the wave was so strong and so big, it picked up the ship. We were on the top of the wave, and then, when it went down, the sides were going like that. It's a wonder the ship didn't burst. I always think about that. It was making its, it was the thirteenth ship built, it was making its thirteenth voyage, and, to top it all, in Staten Island, it docked at Pier Thirteen.

SI: Turned out to be lucky, I guess.

AP: If you don't think that ain't luck. I went through all of where Hitler's last few minutes that he spent on this earth. I went through all his, they were downstairs. You ever see a picture? They have a side door, and, it's a cliff, if you take about five steps, you fall right down. There was an air conditioner outside. It was broke down, the air conditioner, a civilian was there trying

to fix it, couldn't do nothing. I was in that doorway, and I went all through where they spent their last few minutes. Then the strangest thing, you won't believe this. When I got there, I was upstairs. There was a motion picture made one time about where they were trying to sort of break him, you know, and the little guy had an office up there that was familiar, and very close looking to him, you know, but they, it fell apart, it didn't go through. When I came back down, on this side here, at the entrance, I look over there; there was about ten bushels of the Iron Cross. You know I didn't take a one? I could have filled my chest up. I didn't take a one. I don't know whatever happened to it. But it was there to take. I could, you know, that thing there meant something to me, you know what I mean? That cross, when I looked at it, I could see the suffering. Some of those people, we could say on both sides, was mean, you know. I figured with that thing, they got orders to do it and do it.

SI: So you were one of the first Americans in Berlin after the war?

AP: Yeah, I think so, yeah. See, we took, we were in Paris waiting. We had three cancels. They wanted to be sure when we got there that it would okay. We didn't go into Berlin; we went into St. Helene, that's about ten, eleven miles from Berlin. They never bombed that place, never touched it. You wouldn't think there was a war going on. That was Hermann Göring's Luftwaffe headquarters; we took over that, red, beautiful building, swimming pool, tennis courts, and everything. So one day we're going late to breakfast, there was three of us, so I'm nosy, you know, I'm always looking around. So when I looked into the breakfast room, I see something hanging on one of the chairs. I couldn't tell exactly what it was. It was a Kodak camera. I took a lot of pictures. I lost a lot of them. I was able to take pictures, like that Berlin picture there, that building, I took it with that camera. So I told the fellas, you know, they were going to go, and I said, "Hey, come on over here, let's go here." So I sat on the chair that had the camera hanging. So when I got up and we go, "Hey, don't forget your camera." So that's how I was able to take all kinds of pictures. That's a good one, too. I still have it, I gave it to my nephew, you know, I got it in cellophane, wrapped in cellophane. I gave it to him, I don't know if he still has it.

AN: Which one of the nephews?

AP: The other nephew, not Barry, my other nephew.

AN: Albert

AP: Yeah, Albert. He has the camera. That's worth money.

ML: Yeah, antique.

AP: That's way back in 1945.

ML: So I wanted to ask when you were assigned into the Control Council.

AP: To the Control Council? I think I was assigned to them right after I got my job in London with the Staff Message Control. See, they didn't even tell me until one day I was to report to,

that I'm in the US Control Council for Germany. I was with the, what do you call, I had a colonel for a boss and, after that, like June, when Congress has a lot of new orders, you know, there was piles and piles of that stuff coming in. I'd have to put all that in books. So, luckily, there was a guy ahead of me and he was in a hurry to get home, so I was next in line. So when he went home, I took over his job. I was the postmaster. I had to go, I picked up mail twice a day.

ML: Was this after the war had ended?

AP: Yeah, that was after the war. I had a German driver, drove my wagon for me, nice guy.

ML: Do you remember where you were when the war ended?

AP: Yeah. I was in France. See, I delivered the message, it was around the last week in April. So they moved us right away. In a couple of days, they moved us to Paris. They had our flights, but they won't move us unless we were safe, so we were cancelled about three times. Then they moved us into, oh, we went to Frankfurt first, then we were in Frankfurt until everything was cleared in Berlin. You know, the German people are very workable people. Ladies that didn't have to bother with the broken down bricks, you know, and all that, and there were ladies picking up bricks. If they looked good, they were piling them up, so they'd be able to rework them again. They're real hard workers.

SI: What did you think of the German soldiers when you were on the battlefield?

AP: I never met up with one.

SI: But did you and your buddies talk about the enemy and what you thought of them?

AP: Only the prisoners, they walked, but otherwise, I never come to face to face with any. It was moving so fast. General Patton don't stand still unless he runs out of gas. I don't know more of what, now, it's where we started at the beginning of the war, where the guy was hanging from the church?

SI: St. Mere Eglise?

AP: St. Mere Eglise or St. Lo, they're pretty close together, and there was a statue there with a horse on a round pole, concrete pillar, and that statue, with all that bombing and everything, the man never fell off his horse, or the horse. The statue stayed, you couldn't believe it. I was looking up there all the time, and they really peppered that place, and I always think about it, too. We were in the ground there, somewhere in St. Lo, in between St. Mere Eglise, and I said, "With all that bombing, the ground was shaking," really shaking like, what do you call? Before long, when we started going, the homes, the guys went in there; they emptied their water jug out, they filled it up with wine. [laughter] The lieutenant says, "What am I going to do?" These guys were higher than a kite. Nobody cares about anything. Then in Bastogne, you know, we have a monument there, one of our tanks took it, the 1st Armored Infantry Tank, A Company, A 51st. This guy, he had two tanks blown out from under him, he still wanted to go back up. Now they

told him, “Stay back.” They wouldn’t let him go no more, would have been to stop the Germans at Bastogne. I wasn’t there, I was in England already, by then.

SI: So when you were in combat, were you treating men everyday for wounds, or how frequently would you have to go out?

AP: Well, what I remember, is the first man. The others you don’t remember because you’re, there’s so much to do, so much going on and so much noise, you don’t know where you’re at or what you’re doing; you’re doing what you can do.

SI: Does it all blur together for you?

AP: Yeah, whatever you could do, you do.

SI: Do you think you blocked out some of what you saw?

AP: Yeah. What I’ve done, you know, I hardly remember, even after. Everything is so tight, so interwoven, that you don’t know who is who.

SI: After you came out of combat, did you ever have trouble with nightmares or anything like that?

AP: No, the funny thing, see, I’m a deep thinker, see. See, like, when I was going, you know, I said, “It has to be done, that’s all there is to it.” I set my mind that it has to be done, that’s it. My first sergeant, you know, after I went into the medics, he didn’t come with us, he was too old. But he says, “Oh, don’t I treat you good? What do you want to be a pill roller for?” I told him, “I don’t know myself, but I can’t say, ‘I don’t want to go.’” So I said, “This is the next best thing,” so I told him.

SI: When did you make the switch from reconnaissance to medics?

AP: It was in Pine Camp, yet.

SI: Okay, it was back in Pine Camp.

AP: When we moved to California.

ML: Did you volunteer or did they assign you?

AP: No, I switched. I volunteered to be a medic, yeah.

AN: Any reason for switching? Any reason for wanting to be a medic?

AP: Well, I didn’t want to shoot a gun. You know, believe it or not, I hardly shot a gun in the army while I was in. Yeah, I had the fellows, you know, let me shoot their guns.

AN: Did you see dead bodies?

SI: Were there a lot of casualties around?

AP: Oh, yeah. That's what really gets you, is the casualties. A lot of people, they really, it was the casualties that was making them feel bad, or sick, or whatever. You know, put them in a state of mind, you know. But me, I didn't care what I was looking at, or where I was looking, or what. What had to be done, you have to do it.

AN: Did you receive any sort of therapy after the war? You know, did anybody come to counsel the people that went to war about what they experienced and how they're going to sort of manage their affairs?

AP: Well, I haven't talked about it myself, you know. You sort of leave it behind. You leave it behind, see, even today, I like to tell you good things. Like I delivered the message that ended the war, that's a good message, makes everybody happy.

AN: We also learned that during the war, you know, people left their loved ones behind, like their girl friends and ...

AP: Oh yeah.

AN: Fiancées and so, how about your own experience?

AP: That, too. You sort of, you know, because you're opening up others, you know, like it's not only you but others that you might have gotten close with, you know and everything. So you don't do too much talking about that. See, you, there's others, like you might have made, you know, "I'll see you later," you know, or something. Now, you just do, what has to be done will be done, and hope for the best, that's all. That's what I did, hope for the best.

SI: Did you feel like you always had good supplies and everything you needed to do your job, like medicine and bandages and equipment?

AP: In the war? Oh, you had your, yeah, you had it. Only, when it moved so fast, then you did, like I did, my duffle bag wound up in Kansas City, or somewhere, I never went after it.

SI: While you were in Europe it wound up in Kansas City?

AP: Yeah, well, whatever I left over on the battlefield, they shipped that back here. But I never went after it. I wanted to forget it, so I could, I got other little itsy bitsies,

SI: Yes. Is there anything else you remember about your time in Europe?

AP: Oh, yeah. This other fella, ... in that little town we settled in, in England, where we came off the ship, we used to go together to the little village there and go into the town. There were

houses, and their pennies is like a half a dollar here. So we would take the pennies and throw them over the rooftops. I hope we never broke any windows. We liked to do that.

SI: What did you think of the English people?

AP: The English people?

SI: Yes, were they friendly?

AP: Oh, yeah. They were friendly. They were very nice people. They had lots from Ireland, people were coming into England to work, because they were short of workers. They were short of men, for sure, so they put Italian prisoners in there to do all the heavy work and everything, yeah.

SI: Did you get to know any English families or date English girls or anything?

AP: Yeah, I used to go over to these people there. I used to go over to their home. Yeah, but it's funny that I used to like to walk from my little place to where the, what do you call them? The frankfurters, I mean, the French fries and the fish, [fish and chips]. I used to go there two, three times a week, make that little walk. I used to like that.

SI: Do you want to take a break?

AP: Yeah, oh, this is another one. Every morning, we were going to breakfast, by the time I had my breakfast till the next morning, I forgot that they have, what do you call, the eggs, you know, they had marked stages, or what they called them?

SI: Powdered eggs.

AP: Powdered eggs, every morning. I didn't remember till I got to the breakfast table that it is powdered eggs, and I liked scrambled eggs.

AN: Scrambled eggs and toast, and tea.

AP: Yeah. So I couldn't eat the eggs. Even today, I went to a restaurant with my friend, that was maybe about ten years ago, you know, they took me to where he goes, plays golf, and I ordered scrambled eggs, and I say, "Geez, can't be. Scrambled eggs can't be that fast." I ordered it; she went in, and she's coming out with scrambled eggs. It was powdered eggs; I couldn't eat it. I can't. It's got to be scrambled eggs. Yeah, that was a nice place. You could wash up, they had a big room, you could, I had my little tailor shop there, you know, while I was there, I was making money.

SI: Where was that?

AP: What do you call, sometimes it's so easy, starts with a D? I don't know if I'll remember now.

SI: Was this after the war when you were home or ...

AP: Yeah, no, that was before the war.

SI: Before the war?

AP: When we went over and landed in Swansea, South Wales. That was ninety miles from London. Went to London a couple of times. That's a surprise, Piccadilly Circus, it was still there and, then, when I was leaving home, you know, I saw pictures of it, it was all busted up.

SI: All right, why don't we take a quick break.

AP: Yeah.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Go ahead, we're recording again.

AP: You're recording now? When we were crossing over, we followed the Gulf Stream, it was warm all the way across, and then, about halfway across, there was some action. They came and got me, took me above, on the top deck, and the pom-poms [antiaircraft guns] are going off. I was shaking like a leaf. I couldn't help anybody, the way they, and then they let the tail gun go, you know, cannon, and that pushed the ship ahead. I fell over, [laughter] because the way that it shoved that ship. Going across, it was a real quiet trip across for us, and we had good eats, and we had extra milk. ... The major said, "Fellas, let's slow it down a little bit. We won't have milk left the time we get across." We could make ourselves a little snack anytime, they had little stuff there, so the guy done me a favor. Yeah, because downstairs, they had a big kitchen. They had a big vat, you know, they cook the soup in there and like stew and other things. I was down there one time; I said, "I don't know if I can eat that day." I'm a funny eater.

SI: Why? Were they shooting the guns? Was it just practice?

AP: Because that's when the ship got hit, that was the raid, the German raid.

SI: When was that?

AP: They attacked our armada. That was in January.

SI: January of '44? This is before the invasion?

AP: Yeah, that was in forty, I think it's, I think it was '42. No, it was more or less like you say, '44, yeah, because that's when England and Scotland had troops. Before then, I don't know what they were doing. Why Hitler did, he could have walked over, they had nothing there. We were all over the place. Devizes, that's the name of that little place. I had to do dispensary duty there, too, while I was there.

SI: Was that what you did everyday or did you do other training?

AP: Just every so often, we took turns.

SI: What else would you do during that period?

AP: Well, I used to go to Piccadilly Circus a lot. I used to go walking around there.

SI: What kind of duties would they give you? Did you go on maneuvers?

AP: Well, like my duties was to deliver the mail, messages, and that was after midnight. See, then the things were calm. They didn't bother anybody, nobody. It was like six-thirty to about maybe eight-thirty, nine o'clock, then they start eleven-thirty till about two o'clock, then in the afternoon, four-thirty till about six o'clock. Then they started. Then they ordered you to, like in London, the pubs were open till ten-thirty, they closed at ten-thirty, so they [Germans] bothered you about that time. Whenever they talked to us, boom, see? What they really blew, the roofs used to be lifted right off.

ML: Did you ever see the buzz bombs?

AP: Oh, yeah. Yeah, this is a good one. I was in a calm are; no, I was in, it's right next to London, it's a pretty popular place, Bushy Park. That's close enough. That's where we had our general, we had our offices there, too. ... Yeah, we had the building next to Eisenhower's building. I never saw Eisenhower but one of those people there saw him. So, I was in a pub in that little area, it's a pretty popular place, and a buzz bomb happened to be coming by. I was in the bathroom looking out, looking up, and there it's going overhead. By the time I turned around, coming out, everybody was out of the pub. I don't know where they were. So the door opened, and there was the steps and the railing like that, I come running out and I hit the railing. I'm hanging on the railing. [laughter] The guy says, "Hey, what are you doing there?" "I'm knocked out," I told him. I ran into the railing. I was hanging there while the buzz bomb went overhead. It went down somewhere.

SI: That's a pretty close call.

AP: A lot of funny things happen, and I never, like a buzz bomb, I saw some, way over there. I never was bothered.

SI: You could figure out when they're going to hit after a while?

AP: Yeah, you get an idea of where it was going to hit, because you could see it go down, if you're close enough, because the fire goes out. Once the fire goes out, take cover, lay down, because the blast runs about forty feet above ground. They told you to lay down.

SI: So when you were in Berlin, were you still delivering messages and mail, or did you have a different job?

AP: No, that was in Berlin. I was in adjutant general's section. I became a mailman and the train that I was on, we were supposed to be taken out of Berlin, they stole the engine. The Russians stole the engine, so we had to wait until the next day and we came by truck from Berlin to Helmstead, Germany. Then we got on the train there and didn't get off till we hit La Havre. We got off the train in La Havre and that's where we came aboard a ship, at La Havre. We stopped along our route, they had garbage cans, you know, and German people were waiting around. Because the garbage wasn't exactly thrown away, it was put in, and the garbage can was sort of cleaned, like you know, not just everything, only the food, so that the Germans used to dip in there. That's all they had. ... The Germans gave us license, German license. I had it, I don't know whatever I did with it. I brought it home with me when I came. We all had driver's licenses and I was picked to be a driver for two people, a major and a captain, to go see their friends, somewhere, a little town there. They never touched it. The German air force was there; then the 8th Air Force took over, so they went there. I was supposed to be their driver, but there were people along the road, you know, trying to get home, and they became friendly and everything, and I couldn't drive, you know, and I didn't want to hit anybody. So the captain drove. He took over to go to that little village. He took over. And, no, they never touched that little place. But to the west and to the front of it, from this little village, there was big field and there's a big German and American tank battle there. ... It was like a dozen tanks knocked out there, because to the west of that village, they had sort of a machinery shop, so they were protecting that. But they, where the 8th Air Force was, that was clean and nobody there. They had a nice place and everything. That's about it.

SI: You mentioned that you spoke Hungarian, did you ever get a chance to use that when you were in Europe?

AP: No. Not, well, see, they were pretty well busted up and everything. They had, I think the Russians were there, had a little control over that.

SI: Yes. You never had to translate?

AP: We didn't have too much bothering with that. But that's about it.

ML: When you were in Berlin did you have any contact with Russian soldiers?

AP: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, good thing you mentioned it, black market. They came with the money and we came with the merchandise. I had two wristwatches, one ran and the other one didn't. I sold them for two hundred dollars. Shoes, they'd buy the shoes off you, hundred dollars. They had nothing, they had some money, but they had nothing. The Brandenburg Gates, the statue, that monument there, was between us, we were, Russians were on that side, and we were on this side. Then the French were in another section, and that's where the Tiergarten, where the black market went on. That's why they, what's his name, General Patton, he was going to reveal the black market operation and he got hit the first time. They said, "No, he's still alive." This I heard from Hungarian people that was where it happened, you know, and he, they took him to the hospital and on the way to the hospital, they hit the ambulance, so that's why he never recovered, you know, that's why he passed on. They wanted to get him out of the

way. Some guy from Wisconsin, some officer, he brought a lot of stuff home and the guy's working for him, packaging. Like, I was in the building, you know, there was two of us, it was large, because ours was a two-family house like, so they put two people in there. The building was yours, you do what you want with it. I hardly stayed there. I found another place. And, you know that, in Berlin, the subways were running? They had subways running in Berlin, not too much, but they had subways running.

SI: So who were these Hungarians who told you about Patton?

AP: Well, I don't know. By chance we were talking, you know, but I didn't want to listen, or be thinking too much about that. I didn't want to go into it anyhow. That's too much for me. But, there was a heck of a ... what do you call, that, you could send money by airmail or something? Well, that line has never, that was there, from daytime to nighttime. It was a steady line, people sending money home. I didn't come home with much, but people made a lot of money. Like, if I had stayed, I could have made a lot of money. But I wanted to get home. Yeah, so, we'll call it quits?

SI: Okay. This concludes our first session with Mr. Phillips on August 3, 2007, and thank you very much for having us here today.

AP: You're welcome. I'm happy to have you all.

SI: We're happy to be here.

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Reviewed by Matt Lawrence 9/14/07

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 9/20/07

Approved by Alexander Phillips 11/28/07