RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH CLARENCE B. RIKER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY
AUGUST 17, 2010

TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Clarence B. Riker on August 17, 2010, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth. Mr. Riker, thank you very much for coming in today. I appreciate your coming down and bringing in all of your records. Thank you, also, to your son-in-law for bringing you here. To begin, can you tell us where and when you were born?

CR: August the 27th, 1919, in West Orange, New Jersey.

SI: About how old were you when you first entered military service?

CR: I was … twenty-one years old--twenty-one or twenty-two, I forget what. [laughter] That was on June the 17th, 1941.

SI: What led to your being inducted into the service?

CR: I was drafted.

SI: How did you feel about that? Had you wanted to go into the service?

CR: Yes, I did. I was very anxious to get into the service and fight for my country.

SI: At that point, it was before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

CR: Oh, yes, and, in fact, they were getting ready to let the men that are over twenty-seven years old out, but, then, Pearl Harbor came and that killed everything. [Editor's Note: The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 initiated the first peacetime draft in American history and initially required American men aged twenty-one to thirty-five to register and submit to one year of service in the US Army if conscripted. The December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor led to extensions in the length of service and age range.]

SI: Were most of the other men eager to serve, like yourself, or did they not want to be in the Army?

CR: Yes, most of them were pretty anxious. The only thing [was], … none of them had any military training and I had military training, really, in Boy Scouts. That's all it was. I just volunteered to become a leader. … Then, I became corporal, and then, later on, I became sergeant, and then, I went to Officer Candidate School, with two years of college.

SI: After you were inducted, where were you first sent?

CR: Fort Dix, New Jersey. Oh, after I was inducted? I went to Fort Dix. That's right.

SI: Okay. What was that initial period like? What did they have you do?

CR: Well, they'd give you basic training. They'd give you-- I forget how many weeks of basic training--two weeks or two months, I can't remember which.

SI: Was that at Fort Dix?

CR: Must have been two months.

SI: Was that at Fort Dix or down at Camp Wheeler, [Georgia]?

CR: I think I went to Camp Wheeler to get the training, yes, because they put a special order out that says, "These men go here." … They distributed all the men that were in the service, you know.

SI: Was it a shock for you to go into the military? Was it a big change from your civilian life, being under military orders, all the discipline?

CR: Oh, sure, yes, it was. … Well, you know, you just accepted it. I had no doubt in my mind about accepting it.

SI: At that time, did you think that the United States would get pulled into the war?

CR: I had no idea, but I'm sure something was going on, because they drafted all these people, all these men. Sure, they were going to do [something], something was going to happen. I don't know where, but we never knew. … I never realized what was going to [happen], what happened.

SI: Had you traveled much outside of New Jersey before you went into the service?

CR: No, not really.

SI: When you went to Camp Wheeler, that was your first time going to the South.

CR: Yes, yes.

SI: What was that experience like, traveling such a long distance?

CR: … I thought Georgia was a terrible state. … It was so hot down there in the summer. … That was right in the summer that I went in and it was very hot, so much more than New Jersey, but I had heard it would be … hotter because it's down South.

SI: What stands out about that initial training period? Was it very intense? Was it physically difficult?

CR: No, because I was in … good physical shape. So, I had no trouble getting around. No, it didn't bother me at all, even with the heat.

SI: How quickly did you start taking these leadership positions? Did they make you any kind of leader during training?

CR: Into basic training, the first week, they asked for volunteers that had military training, and the only military training I had had was with the Boy Scouts, so, I volunteered to [become a leader]. They made me leader of a crew, of a squad, and, you know, as a corporal, as an *acting* corporal. They put you in as acting first.

SI: What did that entail? What would you do with the squad?

CR: Well, you … were in charge, you're its leader, of about thirteen men. That's all. You were their leader. … You told them what to do, if you wanted to, if you knew what to tell them, but, in the beginning, you know, you didn't, but it developed that you get to know what to do, because they'll depend on you to do certain things.

SI: This first group of men you were with, were they from all over the country or mostly from the North?

CR: No, all over the country.

SI: What was that like, to meet and interact with people from across the country?

CR: Very good, easy. I got along with them very good. It was fun.

SI: We often hear about how the pre-Pearl Harbor Army was underequipped. The example that always comes up is that of soldiers using brooms instead of rifles on maneuvers.

CR: No, no. … We had all the equipment we needed--in our training. I don't know what went on in the country [as a whole].

SI: All right. You always had enough equipment.

CR: No, everything. They supplied you with clothing and everything.

SI: Okay. What did you think of the men training you, the NCOs and officers?

CR: They were good. … We had one guy that was a little bit ridiculous. He was a second lieutenant--you'd think he was God, you know. [laughter] … He was all right, but, other than that, it was good. You paid attention to the officers. … Whatever they said, you listened to. They were the law, really.

SI: Did they use much punishment as a means of keeping men disciplined?

CR: Yes, they did. Sometimes, you know, if you did certain things, they'd put you in KP [kitchen police] or something, and I never got that. I never got a KP assignment, never. I ran right up from corporal to sergeant. … After basic training, I joined the 88th. I volunteered to belong in the 88th Airborne. [Editor's Note: Created in October 1941, the 88th Infantry Airborne Battalion (later Regiment) was the US Army's first glider infantry unit. Initially stationed at the

Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, the 88th redeployed to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in May 1942.]

SI: What attracted you to the airborne service?

CR: Airplanes. I was thrilled at that. In fact, I tried to get into the Air Corps and, due to [the fact] that my eyes were not good, they rejected me. So, I went into OCS, Officer Candidate School, in Fort Benning.

SI: How did you find out about the opportunity to join the airborne?

CR: They asked. They asked if anybody wanted to volunteer.

SI: Did you get a chance to come home in-between Camp Wheeler and Camp Butner, [North Carolina]?

CR: I don't remember. I really don't. I know we got furloughs and, yes, we got a furlough. In fact, nobody was getting it. That's when Pearl Harbor happened, I think--in December, wasn't it?

SI: Yes.

CR: That's when Pearl Harbor happened. … Nobody got furloughs. They stopped them, but my girlfriend, or fiancée, was up in New Jersey and I was anxious. … So, I was the first one to get a furlough. I don't know what attracted them [to my plight]. [laughter] I told them, "I've got to get up there."

SI: However, you were not able to take the furlough.

CR: Oh, yes, I got the furlough. I got the furlough, went up there and come back again, right in due time.

SI: Once you joined the 88th Airborne Battalion …

CR: 88th Airborne Infantry, Airborne, 88th Airborne.

SI: Okay. At that point, did they give you the airborne training or did they send you somewhere else for airborne training?

CR: No, they gave us training, parachute training. We were up in planes. You see, … what they do in airborne was glide. They'd glide. They'd put [soldiers] in these gliders and they'd glide into a place and land. You're not supposed to jump, but we got jumping training and we learned how to fold parachutes and everything, go off the tower, went off the tower. … That's where they put you way up in the air and let you go and they'd drift down on your parachute, but we never had to jump until, one day, we went up in the airplane. … They had these two buzzers. The first buzzer, … you put on your static line and, the second buzzer, you jump. … When they

put the first buzzer [on], I was starting to get a little nervous, because I had never jumped. So, when I landed, I said, "Let me get out of this outfit." [laughter]

SI: Did you actually go out of the airplane?

CR: Oh, yes. We were up in the planes, yes, but no gliders. It was planes.

SI: What was that experience like, to parachute out of a plane?

CR: Oh, scared the heck out of you, if you're going to get this second buzzer, but they never rang the second buzzer for the jump.

SI: You landed with the plane.

CR: Landed, yes. I landed, never jumped.

SI: How did that unit operate? Were you still under somebody who was a training officer or instructor?

CR: No, I wasn't an officer then.

SI: No, I meant the people who were training you--was it like the relationship you had in basic training with the drill instructors?

CR: No, they trained you. In fact, I was put into Battalion Headquarters then, did a lot of paperwork, because I had taken paperwork in … administration. I was aiming for an administration degree.

SI: Before you went into the service?

CR: Yes.

SI: Had you been in a college?

CR: Yes, two years.

SI: Where did you go?

CR: I went to Drake Business College and, also, … I had some contacts with Columbia University.

SI: They took advantage of that in the Battalion Headquarters.

CR: Yes, I guess they did, yes. That's why they sent me there.

SI: What would a typical day be like when you were in that unit?

CR: You'd be in there and you'd have to do some [paperwork], … fill out these forms--not on this [referring to his military records], but on something else--making sure everything was [accurate] by the different men. That's what it amounted to.

SI: At what point did you make the decision to try to get out of the airborne?

CR: When they … took us up in the plane and they rang the first buzzer. [laughter]

SI: When was that, approximately?

CR: I don't know that, honest to God. Well, let's see, when did I go into officers' school? Wait a minute, let's see--that was approximately March. … I guess it was March, yes. [Editor's Note: Mr. Riker served in the 88th Airborne Infantry Battalion from November 1941 to March 1942 and entered OCS at Fort Benning on April 9, 1942.]

SI: You were with the airborne unit when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

CR: When was Pearl Harbor? I don't remember.

SI: December 7th.

CR: Oh, yes, that's right; … December the 7th, 1941?

SI: I think you were.

CR: Yes, yes, I was in there. … That's when they decided the men … twenty-eight years old, they'll let go [prior to that], and then, they stopped it.

SI: What do you remember about that day? How did you get the news?

CR: Oh, my God, it was drastic. You had a terrible thing, what happened. It was terrible. … I can't describe it. … I knew I'd be in the war, … in the service, for quite a few years after that. You knew it. So, I decided to go to Officer Candidate School.

SI: Were you on the base at that time?

CR: Yes, there at Fort Benning. I was right on Fort Benning, yes. Camp Wheeler was in Fort Benning. [Editor's Note: Camp Wheeler was located near Macon, Georgia, approximately a hundred miles northeast of Fort Benning.]

SI: Okay. Everything was in Fort Benning, and then, you went to OCS that March. Was it also at Fort Benning?

CR: Yes.

SI: What was that like?

CR: That was very, very intensified. … What I remember of it, … you had about two hundred men in this unit and they all got their basic training--not basic training, all advanced training--on compasses and rifles and how to take care of guns, everything.

SI: We actually interviewed somebody who was training OCS candidates at Fort Benning at roughly the same time. He said that they would break the cadets up into teams, where you would spend an entire week learning about the rifle or the mortars, and so on.

CR: Yes, yes.

SI: You went through all those steps.

CR: All through it. Then, when we graduated, … the way I understand it, one quarter of the men were graduated. The others were let go. That's what they told me.

SI: Would you notice men disappearing or washing out as the weeks went by?

CR: No, no. Well, no, they let them go through the two months' training, but, then, at the end of the three months, they just were not commissioned.

SI: It was about two months of training.

CR: Yes, I think it was two months. I really forget, a little bit, some of this stuff. It was so long ago, you know. [Editor's Note: Mr. Riker entered OCS on April 9th and received his commission on July 10th.]

SI: That is understandable, and it is in your records as well. You described it as intense--can you give me some examples of what would be intense?

CR: Well, they'd give you a map and they'd give you a compass and they'd stick your group out in the woods someplace and you'd have to find different points, had to go to this point by a certain compass reading and stuff like that. … Then, the guns were all [used]. You know, you had to take them apart and show how to clean them, how to work them, and how to shoot mortars, what to do with hand grenades. [laughter] That's about it. It was very intensified. That's all I know. You've got to be a little bit intelligent to understand some of this stuff they did.

SI: How did you feel once you were commissioned? What was that day like?

CR: Well, I was happy. I was glad, because everybody didn't make it, and what happened with my wife--my girlfriend and I decided we'd get married. So, I got a furlough for ten days. I had to go up and get married and … I [had to] go on a honeymoon and, from there, I had to get back to camp in ten days. No fooling around--they put the lid on you.

SI: Even traveling could take a few days to get to where you were going.

CR: Yes, one day [to] travel down South, because they didn't assign me to the 78th Division [yet], I don't think. Well, they had me assigned to the 78th Division. [Editor's Note: Mr. Riker reported to the 78th Infantry Division at Camp Butner on July 20, 1941.]

SI: Okay. Was that in North Carolina?

CR: Yes.

SI: What was it like to join this unit as an officer?

CR: … I can't think of the word--very, you know, enlightening. … I don't know. That's not the right word--very nice to be an officer, and, you know, trained the men, and they were real good. It was good training. … We had an obstacle course, which we had to take them on and train them to get physically fit, to get over [the obstacles] in the obstacle courses. … Then, we trained them on all the guns, mortars, how to do everything with all those, how to rip them apart. That was for, like, two years [that] I did that, [from July 1942 to April 1944].

SI: Was the 78th a preexisting unit?

CR: Oh, yes.

SI: Okay. Had it been National Guard?

CR: … I think that was New Jersey, from New Jersey, I think. I don't know.

SI: It is the unit here now, I believe. Had all those officers been working with each other prior to your arrival?

CR: They're all different. You know, everybody was split up.

SI: Okay. It was kind of like a new unit.

CR: Oh, yes. … I never even knew [the other officers], you know--one guy that I knew, that came with us. We had to learn all new people and I was with them for, like, two years, I think.

SI: What was your job with them? You said you were training men, but more specifically.

CR: Well, I was training men for overseas duty, went on training missions. Then, we went on maneuvers. We went to maneuvers in Nashville, Tennessee, a couple of months. … The whole camp went. We had training, even there, how to maneuver, you know, in the field, had combat teams and how to get to where and everything.

SI: Were you training the same men for those two years or would they keep moving men out?

CR: No, they'd keep training, … bringing in new men.

SI: Okay. They would take men out and send them overseas as replacements.

CR: I guess you might have said that some of them were given, like, basic training with us, for a while. I mean, sometimes, we kept them longer, but, then, they were sent overseas when they left us, I'm pretty sure. That's what they were trained for, combat, you know.

SI: Was your wife able to join you down in North Carolina?

CR: Absolutely. She was with me all the time. That's one of my biggest problems. I had a colonel--he was a louse. He made me stay in camp, tried to make me stay in camp, every night, and I wouldn't stay. I'd go back to the town. We rented a house there and, naturally, it put me on the skids with him, you know. That's why I didn't get promoted right away, took awhile. When I won that championship, basketball championship, they realized that I did have some talent. [laughter]

SI: How quickly did you get involved with the basketball team?

CR: What's that?

SI: When did you get involved with the basketball team?

CR: Oh, God, I guess it was a little bit before I went to Camp Blackburn, up in Virginia, when I was sent overseas myself. [Editor's Note: The facility Mr. Riker refers to as Camp Blackburn is actually Fort Pickett, near Blackstone, Virginia.] I don't know. I forget when that was.

SI: Okay, not long before you left the 78th.

CR: Yes. Oh, yes, no, I was in the 78th Division two-and-a-half years, and my wife came with me up to Blackburn. Then, we had a son. … He was taken up with us all the time, because he was a little guy, just a year old. When we went on maneuvers, my wife came with us, too, and we rented a house, in that area.

SI: Was it difficult to get your family settled in all these different areas? I know housing was in short supply.

CR: No, no. My wife didn't mind it at all. She enjoyed it.

SI: Was there a lot of social activity among the officers in the division?

CR: Yes. We had our own club, you know. … There wasn't any problems. It was just dances we went to, and stuff like that. They treated us good, had a special mess, you know, special mess, but we had to pay so much for mess. I forget what it was, twenty-one cents a day, or something like that. [laughter]

SI: Do any challenges in training the men stand out in your memory, things you tried to get across, problems?

CR: Just the obstacle course. That was the problem. Many, again, they'd get up--try to get up--the wall, over the wall. That's where the biggest problem [was], that wall. When that hit them, they couldn't make it.

SI: Were you working directly with the men or were you working through NCOs?

CR: No, directly with the men, yes, and NCOs, too.

SI: Do you remember any particular way that you tried to motivate these men?

CR: … Every morning, we used to do exercise in the morning. I'd have about five, six hundred men out in front of me and I would get up on this platform and you'd give them exercise, what to do. Then, you'd take them on marches, for fifteen-mile marches, with packs on their back, see if they could [make it], you know, get them in shape, get them physically fit. That was a big job, and the training, mostly, [was to] get them physically fit. That's what it is. That's what it's all about.

SI: How do you think the maneuvers went overall? Were they executed well? Did you see any problems?

CR: Yes, no, they were interesting and, also, executed very well, yes.

SI: You said that the problem with the Colonel led to your leaving the division.

CR: No, had nothing to do with it. No, he finally gave me a promotion, but it took a long time. [laughter]

SI: At that point, were you promoted to first lieutenant?

CR: Yes, I made first lieutenant. That's when I made my … first promotion. Then, I went overseas. … Up to Blackburn, Virginia, then, they put them on a boat and [sailed over] to England.

SI: Okay. Do you know why you were transferred to Blackburn? Was there any particular reason?

CR: No. It's just [that] they had to keep moving, get men in there, get officers and get leaders into place, to train, to keep the men physically fit and [to get them] acclimated to warfare.

SI: Were you the only officer sent from that division?

CR: No, no, there were others.

SI: You were no longer part of that division.

CR: No. … I became a member of the [First Infantry Division]. I don't know when they appointed me into [the] First--I guess it was from Blackburn. The papers are in here someplace.

SI: Okay, in-between, though, you were a replacement officer. Then, you filled a slot in the First Infantry Division.

CR: Then, I went into the [First Infantry Division], over in England. I was liaison officer, over in England, between the battalion and the regiment.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about the process of going overseas?

CR: Well, we got on a boat in, I don't know, Blackburn--I don't know where we left out of, what port.

SI: Is it by Norfolk?

CR: It would be down around … Blackburn, Virginia. So, it would be around there, yes, and we got on a boat. … Officers were put in the first [quarters], a certain quarter, and the men were put in other quarters, and we had our officers' mess, and what I remember about that is, we had, like, maybe twenty officers. … I don't know if there was that many of them, maybe fifteen, and we got along good. We had fun going over, but … the first day out of the United States, we all put in--I forget, was it ten or twenty dollars?--in a kitty, and whoever got sick, they were out. They lost their money, and, believe it, I got sick. I get seasick. Johnny knows it, [laughter] … but that only lasted a couple of days, and then, we went over to England and were in an armada of boats.

SI: A convoy.

CR: A convoy.

SI: Do you remember the name of the ship you were on?

CR: The big English ship. I don't remember the name, no.

SI: Was it the *Queen Mary* or the *Queen Elizabeth*?

CR: Oh, it was nothing like that, but it was a nice, very nice, English ship that we went over on. … We were protected by a couple of the cruisers, you know, not the Coast Guard, the Navy, but it was a fourteen-day trip, fourteen days going over. I guess we were zigzagging like this, to keep away from the enemy submarines.

SI: Do you know if there were any attacks on the convoy?

CR: We never saw any. No, we never saw any. We got into England very safe.

SI: Where did you land in England?

CR: Don't remember; oh, wait a minute, Liverpool, yes.

SI: Were you sent to a replacement depot?

CR: No. I was already in the infantry, so, they sent me right to the First Infantry Division and, from there, I became, as I told you, a liaison officer between [the two units].

SI: Where was the division at that point, when you joined them?

CR: Down the bottom, the lower part of England, because we left, I think, from Plymouth when we went on the invasion. I told you, that's where it starts over there.

SI: You were only in the division for a few weeks before D-Day.

CR: Absolutely, yes.

SI: What did being the liaison officer entail? What would you do in an average day?

CR: I'd have to take some messages from the companies and take them up to battalion, then, go to division, just riding around in a jeep. … What happened is, I got trouble with my spine. They put me in a hospital and operated--still sent me.

SI: Wow.

CR: [laughter] It was just no delay. … You had to be dying to get … out of it, and I wasn't trying to get out of it anyway.

SI: How long were you in the hospital?

CR: Just a couple of days, wasn't a serious operation.

SI: Had you hurt yourself?

CR: No, see, riding in a jeep, you get this bouncing all the time and I got a cyst on the base of my spine. So, they lanced it. It wasn't anything serious. … What was lanced in it, that was good.

SI: Do you remember any special preparations that you had to make for the invasion, or were you mostly just delivering the messages?

CR: None. I told you how we got on a ship and they gave us, I told you, got a steak dinner, and nobody knew what was going on, not even the leaders. They didn't, because it all depended upon weather and everything.

SI: What were those days before the invasion like, when they locked down the camp?

CR: No, they didn't. They just kept you where you were … and assigned you to companies. … I didn't even know I was assigned to B Company, but, evidently, I was. [Editor's Note: Mr. Riker was assigned to B Company, 16th Infantry Regiment, within the First Division.]

SI: Did you know where you would be going, in terms of landing on the beach?

CR: Oh, no, no, you never knew where you were going. We went into Easy Red.

SI: Did the other officers, who had been with the unit longer, know a bit more?

CR: Nobody knew anything. We tried to get information when we were on the boat. We left from Plymouth. That was another big English liner. They wouldn't tell us nothing. "Nobody knows," they said. … "The top men don't even know," he said--depended so much on the surprise, really, I guess, and the weather.

SI: Did you have any men under you at that point?

CR: Oh, yes. I was a company officer, a company leader. I was leading the B Company for a while.

SI: You were the company commander.

CR: Yes, basically, I was, yes.

SI: Had you interacted with the men in the unit who had been in combat before, in Sicily or North Africa?

CR: … Oh, yes.

SI: Did they tell you anything about what to expect?

CR: I didn't know any[thing about that]. They didn't say nothing [about] where they were, were from, but some of them had been. In fact, later on, I got a sergeant that was all the way through the South, Africa and the whole bit, Sicily. He was good, a terrific sergeant. … Let's see, after we got on the [boat]--well, … I put it in writing here, mostly.

SI: Okay. Can you try to remember for the tape? What was it like when you loaded on to the ship?

CR: Well, what you do, you did, was, … they let us know--they gave us a steak dinner that night. The next morning, real early, we had to climb down this big rope ladder; not a ladder, it's a net, just hold on to the [net] and climb down into the little LCVP. It's a landing craft, personnel and vehicle. … The English Channel was very rough. It was terrible. This little, tiny boat held about thirty, forty men, bobbed up and down like a cork. That was only one of, I don't know,

hundreds. I might even say thousands--I don't know. They had tanks in them and they had men in them and they had artillery, I guess, in them, and everything, trying to get in. So, they all circled around and, when the order was given, all of them, everything at once, … took away for the beach.

SI: How far out were you when you were loading up? Could you see the beach from where you were loading?

CR: No, no, we were out a ways yet, quite a ways. I guess you could see land, yes.

SI: Could you see the bombardment, that sort of thing?

CR: Oh, yes. They had pillboxes. The Germans had pillboxes on the beach, all along. They were cross firing, mortars, everything, and we went into the beach and jumped into [the water]. They let the gate down in the front of the LCVP, let the gate down, and you jumped out, hit the water up to about your waist, with your rifles held high and your [pack]. You had a pack for clothing and food on your back, for a couple of [days], a short stay. It's about thirty days--never took a bath for thirty days. [laughter]

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: One thing that always stands out in the accounts that I have read is the noise and the chaos.

CR: Oh, God.

SI: Can you talk a little bit about that, what you remember of it?

CR: Yes, it was all very noisy and guns going off every place, was terrible. It was terrible. I never went back, because I had such memories of that, all the people getting killed and everything right on the beach, but we went into the beach. The beach went up a little ways, then, it went down for another, I don't know, three hundred yards or a hundred yards. So, that little incline gave us a little bit of protection, because the guns couldn't shoot at us straight in, but they lobbed mortars into us. … Then, an engineer outfit--well, first of all, one of the Navy boats pulled up close, not real close, but maybe a hundred feet or something, three hundred feet--I've got it in here--and they shot directly into the embankments. [Editor's Note: In a written account of the landing, Mr. Riker noted that a destroyer fired on the German positions from five hundred yards out.] … One of them must have hit right in the hole of the entrenchment and it blew the thing--not that it blew the fort apart, just the men got all killed, probably. … The engineer outfit went in there right away on Easy Red and they blew the landmines. They put the pipe [Bangalore torpedoes?] in there and blew landmines up all around, so [that] we could go through, and, once that happened, we poured through. Anybody that was alive, they said, "Get to the top of the hill, because, if you don't, you're dead."

SI: About how long was it between actually hitting the beach and getting up the embankment?

CR: I'd say about--I'll bet you it was under an hour.

SI: Do you know if you actually landed where you were supposed to or if you were off?

CR: We landed where we were supposed to, because it was Easy Red. … There was none of these--what do they call these things? …

SI: Beach obstacles?

CR: Yes. They didn't have any of them in the water, never saw one. We just went in and went right into a clear beach, with this embankment like it was. …

SI: Can you tell me about the process of organizing your men on the beach? Do you remember any of that?

CR: There was so much confusion. Nobody knew anything, what was going on. Everybody just poured into this [gap], as fast as they could, no matter who they were, into this clearing. … They went up to the top of the hill and we captured the little town of Sur-Mer-Colleville, or something like that.

SI: Colleville-sur-Mer?

CR: Yes, and then, that was really the beginning of the end for the Germans, because … we established a beachhead. The 16th Infantry did a beautiful job, but they were only one of many men, but they established a beachhead there. … Boy, more of this stuff poured in after that--trucks, guns, tanks, everything. They must have had these big LSTs carry them in.

SI: The night of the landing, where did you wind up?

CR: Oh, on top of the hill. Yes, I was up on the top of the hill. You had to get up there or you were dead. If you stayed on the beach, you were gone. There were so many men killed. … Some of them, even when they dropped it, on the LCVP, dropped the thing [ramp], … a shell hit right in the front of it, killed them all.

SI: In your boat?

CR: No, not my boat. We didn't get hit that way. We got into the water, but I didn't know any of the men I was with. It was complete confusion. I think we were more confused than the Germans, [laughter] but we established a beachhead there. …

SI: Did you take any prisoners once you started getting into the German lines?

CR: Not right away, but, in a short time, we did. We took--I remember, … a place we went to--a crossroad, and … Germans were all there. It was about twenty of them. They all put their hands up and they were ready to quit, because they figured it'd be better back in the United States than this. [laughter]

SI: Was that back in the hedgerow country?

CR: Yes, the hedgerow country. Oh, yes, we went through the hedgerow country. It was tough. … Some of the tanks would come up and push a hole right through the hedge. … It's trees and bushes and dirt where all the hedges were, hedgerows, and they'd push it, tear right through, make a passage for us to get through.

SI: Out of all this confusion on the beach and getting off the beachhead, how soon were you able to get your men together and get B Company pulled together? How did you do it?

CR: You know, it's vague in my mind. I can't begin to tell you what went on. … I guess, well, we got up on top of the hill, because, I remember, we come into a farm and there was chickens running around. I guess we had our company established then, must have been that way, but that was a couple of days … after we came in, because we had to push in as far as we could. … We finally got up to St. Lo and we were stopped. St. Lo is a tough town. [Editor's Note: The First Infantry took part in Operation: COBRA over July 25 to July 31, 1944, with the goal of breaking out of the Normandy hedgerow country at St. Lo.]

SI: Before that, were you in Caumont?

CR: What?

SI: I might not be pronouncing it correctly, but were you in Caumont before that?

CR: Yes, yes, but I don't remember that. I remember, it's called (Lo St. Mere?), or something like that.

SI: Did you have to fight your way into that town or had it already fallen by the time you got there?

CR: Oh, we fought our way into every place we'd go in. … Then, when we got up to St. Lo, we stopped. They stopped us dead. I don't know, and then, that's when the planes came over, that day. … The Germans used to send out a plane every night. We used to call them "bed-check Charlie." I mean, they dropped [anti]personnel bombs all over place. That's when I got wounded the first time, but, before that happened--see, I'm getting my things mixed up here now. … The combined nations must have sent, I don't know, two thousand, three thousand airplanes. [Editor's Note: Operation: COBRA commenced with a massive strike by nearly three thousand fighter-bombers, medium and heavy bombers. Miscommunication between the ground and air forces led to some US Eighth Air Force aircraft bombing Allied positions, resulting in hundreds of casualties, including US Army Ground Forces commander Lieutenant General Lesley J. McNair.]

SI: Thousands of bombers, B-17s.

CR: Oh, my God. … You could look at one horizon to the other--you didn't see the [sky]. The sky was full of airplanes, and they just demolished St. Lo. Oh, they flattened that right to the ground. It was just a mess.

SI: Did they have any short drops where you were? Did the planes drop the bombs in the wrong place?

CR: Yes, they had these banners you put out. The banners, they put a colored banner out. One of our generals got killed in that. He got killed. They dropped it in the wrong place and he got killed.

SI: Were there any friendly-fire casualties where you were or did the banners work?

CR: Where I was?

SI: In the bombing, did any bombs hit your troops or was it just elsewhere that they got hit?

CR: We were lucky. We were trying to dig in. … See, I'm getting them mixed up again. That's when the plane, "bed-check Charlie," come over. I was trying to dig in and the ground was so hard. I got … a trench about that deep.

SI: A couple inches.

CR: … Just wouldn't dig any further. Everybody else was having the same problem. So, they figured, I guess, they're trying to make as many casualties as they could with these antipersonnel bombs.

SI: Between D-Day, June 6th, and the St. Lo breakout, July 25th, around then, that was about two months, a month-and-a-half. What stands out about that period, fighting in the hedgerows?

CR: … Hedgerows, was a deal getting through them. You never knew, and then, you went out on [foot]. A couple of men would get in a jeep or they'd go by foot and they'd go out. What did they call them things?

SI: Patrols?

CR: Make patrols, … too see if there's anybody around that's going to [attack], you know, and, boy, they were scary, those things were. You never knew when you were going to get hit.

SI: In that period, did you come under artillery fire often? Did the Germans use their eighty-eight-millimeter guns?

CR: We did, yes. In fact, I remember walking up; … our whole unit was spread on both sides of the road, spread out, and they start bombing us and everybody disappeared, you know. That's the way you do [it]. You just run and hide, duck, run and fall. … Then, as soon as it was done,

they'd all come back together again. You walk, you keep going. Artillery shells is what did that--no airplanes. We had air superiority, no doubt about it.

SI: What about booby traps? Did they cause a problem for you and your unit?

CR: No, I didn't [experience that], no. The only things we ran [into] was on the beach, and that was taken care of by the engineers, [the] engineering group that was attached to us.

SI: In the month-and-a-half between D-Day and St. Lo, how did your unit fare in terms of casualties? Also, were you able to get new men?

CR: Not bad, not bad. We were pretty good at casualties. We didn't get [too many casualties]--I don't know [if] we're fortunate or very cautious--but they had a lot of snipers, that the Germans did. … In fact, we accused the French of sniping, too, but … it was never proven.

SI: Do you remember personally coming under sniper attack?

CR: Oh, yes. I remember one place we went up to; there was a couple of buildings ahead of us and I saw one of my [men advancing], my sergeant that was down in Sicily and all that. He was good. He went out and pulled the guy in, and he wanted me to write him up for a Silver Star and I didn't. I should have, now, but, then, we had another sergeant, … oh, what a nice guy he was, but this one building, he's looking at [it]. This sniper was coming from the big building. He [the sergeant] went around one corner of the building and I went around the other. He [the sergeant] got a bullet right through his head, right through the helmet, right into his head, killed him. I was--another luck, because [you] either take this side or that side. You're not supposed to do that.

SI: Were you able to draw on other forces for support, like the artillery? Did you have adequate artillery or air support?

CR: Oh, yes, artillery support and air support. The Germans never came over during the day. They were afraid to attack us because the planes would knock them out. Our Air Force was good--thank God for the Air Force. [laughter]

SI: Did you have any encounters with German armored units?

CR: … Yes, but that was up in Germany.

SI: Okay. They did not use that as much in the hedgerow country.

CR: We didn't see too many German tanks--more or less, just men shooting at us, machine-gun.

SI: In terms of getting the replacements you needed, did you get men in as replacements in good order?

CR: Well, that was during the invasion. I was, oh, way overstaffed. You have so many men in a company; I forget what it was. Your company was two-and-a-half times overstaffed. In other words, if you had--how many men are in a company, I forget now, three hundred?--they had 750 to go in on an invasion. That's how many were killed in that--terrible.

SI: You told me a little bit about when you were wounded. Do you know, roughly, how long it was after the St. Lo operation?

CR: No, it was during that operation, yes, and then, when I went back to the hospital, they broke out of St. Lo and I was … put back in my [company. I was] taken to the hospital for a couple of weeks, or I forget what it was, a week or two weeks, and they brought me back into the same company. … We traveled into Paris and it looked like we were liberating Paris, but we didn't. There was … outfits ahead of us, but, … of course, they gave us wine and the girls come up and [were] kissing us. It's crazy. [laughter] By truck, we went in, not on foot. [Editor's Note: The liberation of Paris, between August 19th and August 25, 1944, was followed by victory parades through the city along the Champs-Elysees on August 26th and 29th.]

SI: When you were wounded, how quickly were you able to get medical attention and get sent back to an aid station?

CR: Pretty damned fast, very, very good medical attention. They were watching out for everybody.

SI: How had you been …

CR: In fact, I'd fought them in the hospital. … I said, "Let me go. I'm going to go back to my guys." They wouldn't let me go. They said, "You're staying here until we take care of you."

SI: What had happened?

CR: Well, it was just the shrapnel, antipersonnel bombs.

SI: Had it wounded your legs or your arms?

CR: No, no, my back. I was laying flat on my stomach when it hit. … It didn't hit me direct--shrapnel hit me. … I was in there for, I told you, a week or so.

SI: It was good that you were able to get back to your unit.

CR: Oh, yes. Oh, I wanted to. I didn't want to stay; I just wanted to go back.

SI: How long were you in Paris?

CR: I think we went through Paris, like, [in] no time at all. [laughter] … We got up to the Maginot Line, which is a joke. That was pillboxes on each hill, cross firing. Once you got through that one thing, it was done. That was a joke, but the Siegfried Line, that was a different

story. That, the Siegfried Line, … they told us it was twenty, thirty miles thick. Now, when I say thick, I mean it had tank barriers here that you couldn't get over. Then, maybe a mile later, now, there's more tank barriers. It was very thick, very well-developed … for trying to keep people away. … [Editor's Note: Elements of the 16th Infantry Regiment penetrated the Siegfried Line on September 12, 1944.]

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Do you remember approximately where you were when you got into the Maginot Line and made contact with the Germans again?

CR: All I know is, we got through the Maginot Line, … had no trouble. … They said we were the first company there. I don't know. That's just--they said it, you know. There's rumors and that. … What they did was, on the barriers, the tanks would come and fill it, fill all the things full of dirt, and then, they'd go up, climb right up over top of it. … There were no problems after you filled the dirt in there, but … I'm confused [on] what happened after that. I really am. I remember being in Germany and we went up to Aachen. … The First Division controlled the City of Aachen. We were up on top of the hill, looking down … into Aachen, and they wouldn't--the civilians wouldn't--move out. So, what we did [was]--I didn't, had nothing to do with it, but our division did--they shut the water off. … People couldn't live without water, so, they moved out. … We were holding there for quite a while, in Aachen. [Editor's Note: Aachen fell to the First Infantry Division on October 21, 1944, after waging a bitter campaign to take the city that began on October 8th.]

SI: Does anything stand out about the battle to get into Aachen?

CR: Wasn't much resistance, that I know of. I think they were worrying about Patton in the south. They were trying to stop him. [laughter] [Editor's Note: US Army General George S. Patton commanded the US Third Army.]

SI: From what I read, at that point, fewer supplies were going to your area than to other areas. Do you recall if you were facing shortages of anything at that point?

CR: No. What shortages? none.

SI: Of ammo, of food?

CR: … No, we had enough ammo. Food, we got fed every day. Kitchens used to come up, or we'd go back a little bit, you know. They fed us good in the Army.

SI: Do you remember what you would do in a typical day at this point, when you were going into the Siegfried Line or going toward Aachen?

CR: Just make sure [we had an] observer, make sure we keep our eye on our area that we were covering, that nobody showed up. … The only people that I saw in that area was an old man

walking down the street and we let him walk, let him go where he wanted to go. … He was no problem. When you get [to] my age, you're no problem anymore. [laughter]

SI: Was enemy artillery a problem?

CR: Not in our section, no.

SI: After Aachen was taken, then, your unit was sent to the Hurtgen Forest.

CR: Yes, went into the Hurtgen Forest. That's where I encountered tanks. We had a [German] tank with an eighty-eight-millimeter cannon right on the front of it. He wasn't more than a hundred yards away and … he keeps shooting. We were in a valley, like this. He was up on the ridge there. He was shooting overhead and making bursts into the trees, shrapnel all over the place. That's when I got hit.

SI: Okay, that was the second time you were hit.

CR: That was bad. Then, they sent me back to Cherbourg. I was there for a couple of months, but I wasn't in the breakthrough. Remember the breakthrough they had there?

SI: The Battle of the Bulge. [Editor's Note: The Germans launched the Ardennes Offensive, later known as the Battle of the Bulge, on December 16, 1944.]

CR: The Battle of the Bulge. I was back in Cherbourg. They were worried--they always worried--about paratroopers coming in Cherbourg, dropping the Germans in there. That never happened. In the hospital, they just took good care of you.

SI: Did you have to go through a lot of therapy or surgery, anything like that?

CR: Well, yes, yes, surgery and therapy, but we sat around playing cards and playing games. That's all we did.

SI: Were you able to move well after your wounds healed?

CR: Oh, yes, got to get moving around. I went back to the company. See, I'm confused about that area.

SI: That is okay.

CR: I know I went back to the company and, just as I got there, the officer that had taken my place was killed. I don't remember what happened. I really don't. …

SI: That is all right. We have the written account that you put together. Do you think he was killed after Paris?

CR: No, he was killed up in Germany. You mean the officer that was with me, that took my place?

SI: The one you said took your place.

CR: He was killed up in Germany. … I was lucky in a lot of cases. I was very fortunate. I don't know how I got all through this thing alive, and I'll never know, [laughter] any of it.

SI: Did you ever have men that you personally saw who could not handle being in combat and had to be sent back?

CR: Yes, a couple of times. Then, I ended up with arthritis in my legs. I couldn't walk anymore. So, I went back to a replacement depot. That's where I was [a training] officer, get the men ready to go up front again. … The colonel there promised to [promote me]. He put a voucher through to make me captain and he put it through, never caught up with me, but I had a chance to go home, … given my points. I got the number of points already, was over a hundred. If you had over a hundred points, you were put on a boat and sent home. … I forget what port we went out of--was it Holland or something? I don't know if it's Holland. Anyway, we got home. About a hundred miles off of the Jersey Shore--we were on an LST, a little, tiny LST, compared to the big ocean liners--and Japan happened. That was the end of the war. [Editor's Note: V-J Day, the day the Japanese surrender was announced, took place on August 14, 1945.] They took me into Fort Dix and discharged me with a commission, a field commission, just … to see what happens. … That was in [the years prior to] 1954, and then, … they told me I'd have to become active in the Reserve if I wanted to keep my commission. … So, I said, "Give me my discharge." So, they gave me my discharge.

SI: Okay. You were in the Reserves from the end of World War II to 1954.

CR: To '53; I think it was '53.

SI: Yes, I think that discharge says 1953.

CR: I forget. There it is, right here.

SI: Yes, August 21, 1953.

CR: Yes, but it didn't make [a difference]. When I was on [inactive status], not in the Reserve, … they didn't count that, really, towards your longevity.

SI: Were you concerned that you could be recalled for Korea?

CR: Never. I was too old, wasn't I? …

SI: I am not sure, if you were a Reserve officer.

CR: I was older.

SI: If you were a Reserve officer, I thought they could just call you up.

CR: Gee, I never thought of that. They could have called me, yes.

SI: You were not concerned about it then.

CR: I know I wasn't concerned at all, but I never realized. Is that when Korea was, in '53?

SI: Yes, from 1950 to 1953. I know many Reservists from World War II were called back in.

CR: Isn't that something? I never thought of that.

SI: Maybe that was why they wanted you to go active. Can you tell me about V-E Day? What do you remember about that day, the end of the war in Europe?

CR: Yes, I remember, … we just celebrated. That's all--happy that it was over. That's all. We really didn't do anything. We knew the Germans were going downhill, you know, from Patton coming in in the south, but I wasn't with the division after the Hurtgen Forest. I was out.

SI: Can you describe what happened in the Hurtgen Forest a little bit more? What do you remember about that time?

CR: Well, we were in the woods. Naturally, it's in a forest, and this German tank, … with this eighty-eight-millimeter--that's how we knew, they all had eighty-eight-millimeters on them--and it was right there, up about a hundred yards. … They couldn't hit us directly, because we were in a ravine. … All they did was shoot things up in the trees, and then, the explosion, you know.

SI: That was when you were injured the second time. Do you know if they were able to take out the tank?

CR: [No]. I went back.

SI: What did you think of the medical care that you received?

CR: Excellent, excellent, very good care. I wouldn't complain about them at all. I never saw anything of the Red Cross, though. … [laughter] I never saw one Red Cross thing or anything. They had the donut places. You know, you get donuts and coffee--never saw that.

SI: You said that the Army fed you well. Were you able to get hot meals every so often?

CR: What do you mean every so often? all the time.

SI: All the time, okay.

CR: It's amazing the way they kept the meals [coming]. Well, you know, the Army runs on its stomach, you know. You've got to be fed. So, the hot meals, we had good meals. I remember, one time, … on Christmas it was, we were in the forty-[and]-eight boxcars traveling someplace, I don't remember what date, and they gave us a peanut butter sandwich, dried bread and peanut butter, with a canteen of water. That was our Christmas dinner, but, when we got to our destination, my God, they had a big spread for us, full of turkey and everything, amazing. As I said, they must have had so many things in England, it's a wonder the island didn't sink. [laughter]

SI: Did you have much interaction with either the French or German civilians when you would go into these areas, or were they mostly cleared out by the time you got there?

CR: … We swore the French were sniping at us. I don't know, I can't say for sure, but that's what it looked like to me and a lot of the guys. … I guess the Germans had sympathizers there. … Even though they were French, they were sympathizers of the Germans--either that or they were scared of them, afraid not to. The only other thing I could say is, … this colonel from West Point went over on the fiftieth anniversary. I think he brought that back. That's one of the stones [from] Easy Red Beach, and these are pictures that he took, from the beach. These are the pictures he took of the beach. Here's where we went in, Easy Red. …

SI: After you came home, was it difficult for you to think or talk about the war?

CR: Yes. I was bothered, … believe it or not, by airplanes. … If I heard an airplane, I'd get a little nervous. I don't know why. … They're just pictures. It's not too much. He got it on the fiftieth anniversary, sent it to us. That was very nice of him, though. I should have went over myself, … but all the memories I had of that place was--God, it's terrible.

SI: Was the colonel in your unit with you at that time?

CR: No, just a friend. …

SI: Did you stay in contact with anyone from your unit after the war?

CR: No, even though … I'm in the First Division [Association]. I'm a life member. I mean, that's about all, but I don't bother with them. I just give a hundred bucks and I was a life member. [laughter]

SI: When you were in combat, were you able to get mail, things from home, that sort of thing?

CR: Yes, I was. I was able to get mail, once in a while, not too often, though, and we had another officer that was in the …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: When you were training men to go up to the line, after you had been wounded the second time, was that in the Cherbourg area or had you moved?

CR: No, no; … the first time I was moved away?

SI: No, after you were done with combat. You were training the men who were going up to the line.

CR: I never trained any men.

SI: I am sorry. I thought you had said that.

CR: No. … I didn't train any men going overseas, until I got [hurt] the second time. I came back to a replacement depot. I had arthritis of the left leg. I couldn't walk. … Snow was about this deep, up in Germany. That's why I get confused, what happened here. I don't remember exactly what happened, the sequence of events, but the only time I started training men is when I came back to the replacement depot. I think it was the 2998. I think it was.

SI: Do you remember where the replacement depot was?

CR: I really don't know. It seemed to me like it was up in Holland, but I couldn't have been up there, because I think I left from a port up in Holland, when I left for home.

SI: At that time, after you were done with your day's duty, were you able to go out on leave or go into town?

CR: Yes, oh, yes. … Oh, that's right, I had to be in France, because I did go into Paris, saw all the sights, all the girls. [laughter]

SI: What was that like, being in wartime Paris? Was there a lot of entertainment for GIs?

CR: I never saw any entertainment, but there were times when we took the guys out in the replacement depot and we played baseball, softball, or something like that, just to try and entertain them, plus, train them. It was all part of the training.

SI: Did you get back into basketball?

CR: No, never got back into it. No, I ended up, … I had a partner in the company, Hudson Blueprint Company. We did all the [blueprint printing for the] first Giants Stadium, we did all the printing on that, all the printing on the [Meadowlands] Racetrack. That was only during all the years I was back, yes.

SI: Did you use the GI Bill at all?

CR: … No. Wait a minute, I did. Yes, I did. I think I used the GI Bill for a loan to get a house, our first house. … I think I did, yes. That was a mortgage, though, small mortgage.

SI: Had you already been in the printing business when you went into the service?

CR: [No]. I looked around for a job. … When I first came back, my brother-in-law, … he was personnel manager over the whole United States for Westinghouse. So, he got me a job over in New York. So, I went to New York and worked there for NOMA Electric, for a while, Polarized Products, which eventually folded up. It ran into trouble and I was let go. … The guy that made the decisions on what to put in glasses, he put the wrong stuff in and we ended up with a whole fifty thousand things that are all with a ring around it. I've got a ring around it. So, we had to throw them all out. That was the beginning of the end of it. So, then, I went with a company, as an office manager for (Sunburst?) Corporation. … They made these little hair barrettes for girls [that] they sell in the five-and-ten. That was all right for a while. Then, they finally … decided to close down that part of their [business], (Arbin?) Products. They decided to close that part of it down. So, I left there and went into Hudson Blueprint. … After a while, I became an office manager right away, and then, I ended up being a partner.

SI: Do you think that your experiences during the war and your experiences as an officer influenced you later in your career?

CR: Helped me, sure, made me realize I do have some talents, [laughter] but you had to find it, see. Everybody's got some talents for something and, when they find it, they should be happy. If they're not happy, get out--you've got to be happy with your job. I believe in that.

SI: Do you think the war had any other lasting effect on you?

CR: Just the remembrance of what happened on D-Day. That was bad. That was bad, guys laying all around, screaming. It was just, you know, a terrible thing. That's the only remembrance. … That's the only thing. I didn't want to go back there, try to bring that up anymore, but I guess I should have, you know, just to show respect to all the guys that died.

SI: You are in the First Infantry Division Association. Are you involved in any other veterans' activities or organizations?

CR: VFW; no, no, not in the VFW. I tried to join that and I never did. …

SI: The DAV, the Disabled American Veterans.

CR: Yes, DAV, Disabled American Veterans. … I'm in that. I'm a life member there. I was in all the time. Of course, I was in the Masons, you know. I'm a thirty-second-degree, (MCMSA?). That's a little bit just below thirty-third, which is the top. You can't go any higher, but that's an appointment, the thirty-third. I'm a Shriner, but … that's not a veterans' organization.

SI: Were you active in the veterans' groups? Did you go to meetings, or was it just a matter of belonging?

CR: Just belonging. I was too busy with my career, you know.

SI: When you were in the Reserves, did you have to go to meetings?

CR: No, inactive. I was Inactive Reserve, but that's why they made me make a decision. … I guess if I had said, "Okay, I'll become active," that's when they would have picked [me] up for the Korean War, probably.

SI: Possibly.

CR: I don't know.

SI: I think the war was still on at the time. They may have just signed the ceasefire at the time you were discharged.

CR: Yes.

SI: Is there anything else that I skipped over or anything you would like to add to the record?

CR: Not that I can think of.

SI: Are there any stories that you have heard that you think should be a part of this session?

John: No.

CR: He's a good son-in-law. That's all I know. [laughter]

John: Tell him about the souvenirs you brought back. …

CR: Oh, yes. I brought back a German helmet--I'd stuck it in my duffle bag--and a forty-five-caliber pistol and a bayonet. One of the Germans, they put [it] on the end of their rifle.

John: You had an armband.

CR: I had a couple of armbands, *swastikas*, you know, armbands, and then, I had a Luger, a German Luger, but some Air Corps guy comes up to me and says, "I'll tell you what--I'll give you a hundred bucks for the Luger, plus, an Air Corps jacket, leather Air Corps jacket." So, like a dumbbell, I agreed. I should have kept that German Luger. That, beyond a doubt, is the best pistol there is.

SI: The Luger was *the* prized souvenir of the war.

CR: Oh, yes. Not only that, that Luger had such action. … Oh, my God, you could hit--the action took away the shock when you pull the trigger, you squeeze the trigger. No, that's all I could think of, German. Did I bring back anything else, John?

John: No, not that I know of.

CR: I lost some of this stuff. I didn't give it to John and it disappeared.

SI: Did you find these things or did you trade for them?

CR: Well, yes, I just picked them up as I went along. I don't know where I found them.

SI: Do you know if, at any point, you were facing an *SS* unit, as opposed to a regular German Army unit?

CR: I have no idea. All I remember is, we went up--it was just at this crossroads, where we captured these twenty, twenty or thirty, Germans. We brought a tank up to make sure they didn't get away from us. [laughter] … They laughed at us, "Why do you got the tank for?" … Some of them could speak English. They were glad to surrender, I'm telling you. I never saw anybody so happy to surrender.

SI: Did you encounter other large groups of Germans who wanted to surrender, at any point?

CR: No, no. I'm sure that our division did, but … we never did in my company.

SI: Aside from these few incidents that you described, like the tank in the Hurtgen Forest, was the enemy usually further away, where you would not be able to see them personally?

CR: Yes.

SI: Artillery would be the main threat.

CR: Artillery, snipers. That's all, and I never had any hand-to-hand combat, no--that what you mean?

SI: Just where you could definitely see that the Germans were in an area and you were firing into them.

CE: Oh, yes, we came at the Germans like that. When we first got up before St. Lo, we went into that building … that had a sniper in it. … What I did--I did something that day--I realized that when I looked around the corner and he looked, the sergeant looked, this way, he killed this [sergeant]. Now, I told you, he killed the sergeant, but I saw where his fire was coming up. So, I … had a tank brought up and I showed him where to shoot it and he knocked the corner of the building out. [laughter] I don't know that it did it. … We didn't have any more sniper, … but there must have been more than one. That's about it.

SI: Okay. I want to make copies of some of these documents, but I also want to read your awards on the record.

CR: Okay. …

SI: We are referring to the entry on you in the history of the First Infantry Division in World War II.

CR: I think there was everything in there.

SI: You received an Arrowhead for the invasion of Normandy, June 6, 1944.

CR: Yes, a Bronze Arrowhead.

SI: Assault Wave D-Day, H-Hour; two Purple Hearts; four Battle Stars, for Normandy, St. Lo, Aachen and the Hurtgen Forest; the Combat Infantryman's Badge; the New Jersey Distinguished Service Medal; the Combat Action Ribbon; Unit Presidential Citation; the ETO Ribbon; the American Defense Ribbon; the American Campaign Ribbon; the French Citation for participating in the invasion of Normandy; the Unit French *Fourragere* Award; and the Bronze Star.

CR: … That's it. The *Fourragere* was that braided band that goes around your shoulder, like this.

SI: A lanyard?

CR: Is that what that is?

SI: I think so.

CR: I don't know. I'm not sure, but I know it was braided, like, not braided, but it was twisted around all different ways. That was the Presidential Citation.

SI: Did you receive that after the war?

CR: … No. That was given to the division, not to me.

SI: That entitled you to wear it.

CR: Oh, yes. I threw out most of my uniforms and everything. My wife didn't want me to keep it, so, I got rid of them.

SI: Do you want to say anything about your family, such as how many children you had?

CR: Well, we've got our two children, Barbara and Glenn, and then, we got, naturally, a son-in-law and a daughter-in-law, John and my daughter-in-law is Bobbie, and then, we got, let's see, four grandchildren, Christian, (Kara?), Becky and Timmy, and then, they had children. Our great-grandchildren are Olivia …

John: Sean.

CR: … No, Sean's after, like Shaun here--Maggie, that's our little sweetheart. She's a real doll--Olivia, Maggie, and then, Sean, S-E-A-N, he spells it. …

SI: That is the Irish way.

CR: I say that's "Seen." My wife said, "No, no, that's Shaun." What's that, the Irish way to say it?

SI: Yes, the Gaelic way.

CR: They're not Irish. [laughter]

SI: Thank you very much for all the time you spent preparing all these documents.

CR: Well, it was very nice [of you] to interview me.

SI: It was my pleasure.

CR: I guess you know Bob Archibald, yes.

SI: Yes, we interviewed him as well.

CR: I like Bob. He's my friend. He lives in the same unit I live in, back in Cedar Grove.

SI: Thank you very much, and thank you for your service.

CR: Okay. …

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

Reviewed by Michael Hano 7/20/11
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 8/10/11
Reviewed by Clarence Riker 3/23/2012