

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH EDWARD G. WILDANGER

FOR THE

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Interview Abstract

Edward G. Wildanger (b. Long Branch, NJ, 1925-2009) grew up in Red Bank, NJ. His parents, both "Danube Germans" born in Hungary, immigrated to the US in 1909. Trained as a carriage maker in Vienna, his father became an automobile body builder, first in NYC, then in Red Bank at J. H. Mount Company. His mother worked in the home as a homemaker. Wildanger discusses the impact of the Great Depression and early World War II periods on his family and community.

After graduating from Middletown Township High School in 1943, he volunteered for the draft, was inducted into the US Army, sent to Fort Benning, GA, for basic training, then an Army Specialized Training Corps (ASTP) engineering training class at the Citadel in Charleston, SC. After the ASTP was reduced in early 1944 due to manpower needs, the Army sent him to a heavy weapons company in the 100th Infantry Division at Fort Bragg, NC.

Deployed to Europe, Wildanger and his unit saw combat from October 1944 to V-E Day in France (Vosges Mountains/Bitche/Rimling) and Germany. He served primarily as a jeep driver for liaison officers, shuttling between his company and battalion headquarters amid air and artillery attacks. During the occupation, he served in a Military Police company in Kassel, Germany.

Utilizing the GI Bill after his discharge, he entered the Rutgers College of Engineering in 1946. He joined the ROTC and earned a US Army Signal Corps commission upon graduation from Rutgers in 1950. He served briefly at Fort Monmouth, NJ, afterwards.

After moving to California and studying at UC-Berkeley, he held mechanical engineering positions at several firms, including working on the Livermore Radiation Lab, before specializing in magnetic recorder development at companies such as Ampex and Memorex, including work in Europe. He then joined a computer memory company, Electronic Memories and Magnetics. He ended his career in furniture production, founding Eurodesign Modular Furniture and running that firm from the mid-1970s to the mid-2000s.

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Edward G. Wildanger on August 21, 2007, in Los Altos, California, with Shaun Illingworth. This interview is made possible in part by a grant from the Rutgers Alumni Association. Thank you very much for having me here today. To begin, could you tell me where and when you were born?

Edward G. Wildanger: I was born in Long Branch, New Jersey, 1925, the 23rd of March, in the Monmouth Memorial Hospital, yes.

SI: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents, beginning with your father?

EW: Okay, my father.

SI: What was his name?

EW: Father's name was Joseph and he and my mother were both born in Hungary. They immigrated to the United States in 1909. He was a carriage maker. He had done his apprenticeship in Vienna, learned how to build carriages, and, when he went back to his hometown, after, like, a seven-year apprenticeship, he found out that the people wanted wagons, rather than carriages. So, anyway, they got married. They were married and decided they would come to the United States, because my mother had a sister and brother who were living in New York City, who'd come over. They thought they'd visit them and see what the United States was like. So, they came over and planned to stay maybe a year, and then, go home. Well, her sister and brother went home, they stayed. That was 1910 then, and the carriage making skills became very useful in the new automobile business, because automobiles were built, usually, by someone who built the chassis and the engines and things, and then, they went to a body builder, who built the bodies for these cars. So, his skills were right in line with that. So, he immediately found a good paying job in New York City as an automobile body builder, and so, that was the family. He continued working that way until 1922, and then, he set up his own business in Red Bank, New Jersey, yes.

SI: Do you know the name of the company he worked for before then?

EW: Well, the only one I know of was J. H. Mount Company in Red Bank. I don't know the names of the companies in New York City, yes, but he was the shop superintendent for J. H. Mount which was an old company that had built and dealt with farm equipment and feed, hay, grain, feed and that sort of thing, and had a section that built wagons and built automobile bodies and things. So, well, while he was there, I think he designed and built a car for Charlie Chaplin, yes. So, anyway, he ran the business until the Crash, the [Great] Depression, in 1932. Well, the people that had money were not spending it. They were sitting on their wallets and the company went bankrupt in 1933 and his health failed and he died of cancer in 1936, yes. So, that was my father's story.

SI: What about your mother? What was her name?

EW: Her name was Katherine, maiden name Mohr, M-O-H-R. Her family was in the shoe manufacturing business in Hungary. After they came over here, she was purely a housewife and mother, yes. She lived until 1966. She died at the age of about eighty or eighty-one.

SI: Did either of your parents ever tell you any stories about what life was like in Hungary for them?

EW: No, but they did tell me [that] one reason they came to the United States was that Europe was in a turmoil and they were afraid that a war was coming and they knew, if there was a war, that they would become involved in it. So, that's one reason they left, because so many people were being sucked into these European armies, the German Army, Hungarian Army or whatever. So, it was not a good place to live in.

SI: Had your father had to do any forced conscription?

EW: No, no.

SI: Did you ever hear the story about how they met?

EW: Well, they grew up in the same town, small town, a town of maybe two thousand people, a farming village, yes. It's still there. It hasn't changed much, yes. I went there about the mid, I guess the late, '90s, paid a visit to the town, and the graveyard is well populated with Wildangers. So, they go back, the family goes back, probably to the 1680s in that area, a good many generations.

SI: Was the name changed at all?

EW: No, no.

SI: It is the same.

EW: It's the same, yes, but I'm sure they were part of what was known as the "Danube Germans." After the Thirty Years War, the Palatinate in Germany had been devastated by the French. They cut down the orchards, burned the barns and houses, ruined, burned the crops and everything else, and, when people came back, it was like a desert. Meanwhile, the Turkish armies had been chased out of Eastern Europe. They'd come up as close as Vienna, but, then, they were driven back and the land was wide open. It's like the prairies in the United States, and so, they figured, "If the land is unpopulated, the Turks will move back again." So, they had what is very similar to what we had, the homesteading plan, in this country, "Move out there. We'll give you land. You improve it, build on it and so on, and you get title to it. You own it." So, a lot of people then hopped on barges in Germany and floated down the Danube and, when they saw a place they wanted to get off, they unloaded, took their belongings and established towns and things like that. So, they were called the "Danube Germans," and a lot of them went from Western Germany down into Eastern Europe that way. So, that's probably the family history, how it got there in the first place.

SI: Do you know if they spoke Hungarian or German or both?

EW: Oh, let's see, they spoke both. It was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the official government language was English [German]. The local language was Hungarian, but, in the home, they generally spoke German. When they're out and about in the village and things like that, I don't know what they spoke. They could speak either language. When I went to Rutgers, I studied German and I thought, "My gosh, this professor doesn't know how to pronounce the words properly." Well, it turned out that my parents were speaking an archaic dialect of German, which originated in the 1600s in Germany, and so, the language had evolved in a different direction in Germany than it had in Hungary, but the professor soon corrected me, yes.

SI: Did they tell you any stories about their journey to the United States? Were there any stories about coming over on the ship?

EW: No, but we do have the manifest for the ship and we do have a copy of the customs papers. Well, the manifest had the names of all the individuals, and the children and wives and so on. They had to list the amount of their assets that they brought with them, their monies and so on, who their contacts were, who was responsible for them. It was not easy to get into the United States then. They had to be tested for illnesses and, if you had any communicable disease, you were put into quarantine in Ellis Island, yes, and, if you didn't have any money, "Whoosh," you went home. Preferably, too, you had to have some useful skill. You had to be, oh, a carpenter, a doctor, a plumber, something or other, a woodworker, whatever. You had to bring something of value that way, which I guess isn't true right now. We let in anybody, yes.

SI: It sounds like your father's skill got him in.

EW: Oh, yes, absolutely, yes. He had no trouble, yes.

SI: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

EW: I had two brothers and a sister, and they're all gone. My sister died at ninety-two, just last November, and I had another brother that died at ninety-two, about ten years ago, ten or fifteen years ago, and another brother who died at about seventy-six as a result of an illness that he picked up in the Philippines during World War II, had residual effects. Yes, so, he had all the problems.

SI: Were you the youngest?

EW: I was the youngest, yes.

SI: Were your older siblings born in New York?

EW: Oh, New York and Red Bank, yes.

SI: The main reason for coming to the Red Bank area was your father's work.

EW: It was the work, yes, J. H. Mount Company.

SI: What are some of your earliest memories of growing up in Red Bank?

EW: I remember playing in the shop, and, as soon as I was old enough to push a broom, [I worked there]. The shop was adjacent to the family home. It was one block over, but the two properties abutted each other, and my father's shop was there. It was a railroad siding there that brought in the chassis and things from wherever the cars were built, delivered [them] to the shop, and he built the bodies, and then, the customers picked them up there. I remember, it became my job to clean the shop every Saturday morning, sweep up all the shavings and things like that, wood shavings, sawdust and so on, clean the benches, haul the stuff out, burn it. In those days, we had no burning restrictions. We got rid of it that way, and so, I learned at an earlier age that I had to work. So, the family worked. My brothers worked in the business. I guess my brother, Art, never finished high school, because he worked so much in the business. My brother, Joe, the second brother, he finished high school and he went to Rider College in Trenton, which was a business school, and he had to quit after two years, because of the [Great] Depression. So, anyway, he came home and the business, as I mentioned, went bankrupt. I guess, my brother told me, in one month, they booked something like a hundred dollars worth of business, which is not enough to keep anything going. So, everything was tagged for auction, all the machinery and the things, the tools, everything else, and, of course, nobody came to bid. Nobody wanted to buy that stuff. My father was the sole bidder and he bought it back for, like, ten cents on the dollar, and then, he took that and reopened the business in a smaller shop that we rented, yes.

SI: Still in Red Bank?

EW: Still in Red Bank, yes, and so, anyway, the business stayed there until 1947 or '48, when there was a fire. They were transferring a moving van body from an older truck chassis to a new one and they had to burn off the bolts, the U-bolts that held things together. There was some oil and grease underneath this body and it caught fire, at about five minutes to twelve [noon]. Well, in Red Bank, they used to test the fire alarm system at five minutes to twelve. They blew the fire horn and things like that. The volunteer fire department, they thought it was the noon whistle, so, they didn't do anything. [laughter] Then, it finally dawned on them, "Hey, this is a fire," but, by the time they got there, it was too late to do anything. The things had collapsed. Yes, so, the business was out of business, basically, and the remarkable thing is, there were competitors in town and they offered my brothers space in their shops to take in customers and do work, on body repair, that sort of thing, which I thought was very nice. Those people that did that were good people. So, anyway, they wound up building a new building in Shrewsbury, and that was built by my brothers, myself, my brother's wife's family, [who] were farmers down in Delaware, and they were very, very practical people. They had their own sawmill. They had their own cement mill, for making cement blocks and things like that. They had four hundred acres of woodland, and so, they came and stayed there. Two of her brothers came and her father came, no, [only] two brothers came, and helped get the thing going and stayed until the building was finished. Yes, so, it's a family affair. It worked out very well. [The] building is still there, yes, still there, owned by, I guess, the Chevrolet agency, yes.

SI: Is it on Route 35?

EW: Shrewsbury Avenue. Yes, it's not 35. [Route] 35, I guess, runs out [from] Broad Street or something, yes.

SI: Where were the earlier shops in Red Bank?

EW: Oh, on Railroad Avenue, which was [where] the original shop was built.

SI: That is where the railroad siding was.

EW: Yes. Then, the other one was on Bergen Place, which was near, let's see, Maple Avenue and Bergen Street, across [from there]. The railroad was there, too. Jersey Central ran the line past there. The high school playing field was there, yes, and then, the third shop, after the fire, was out on Shrewsbury Avenue.

SI: Given that you had to do a lot of work around the shop, were you able to do any recreational activities or get involved in any organizations, like the Boy Scouts?

EW: Oh, I was a Boy Scout, yes, made it up through First Class, and then, I got interested in other things. I didn't do much woodworking. I'd done plenty of it when I was younger. So, I'd decided I wanted to be an engineer. Anyway, I did build a sailboat, a Lightning-class sailboat, nineteen feet, with a thirty-two-foot mast, and so on, and it was made to be able to sail that on the Navesink River. Yes, it's a great river to sail on, really, very wide, very good.

SI: Did you race it at all?

EW: Oh, just, yes, every Sunday, yes, yes, every Saturday or Sunday, during the summer, from the end of May to Labor Day or so, yes, had a lot of fun.

SI: That is interesting, because we interviewed some members of a group that used to sail on the Navesink in Red Bank.

EW: Yes.

SI: They called themselves the "Barefoot Yacht Club."

EW: Yes.

SI: Was there anything else that you were involved in, outside of those activities?

EW: Oh, let's see; well, we did a lot of, oh, pick-up sports. We played baseball in vacant fields, yes, that sort of thing. We played football with the neighborhood kids. We had a lot of outdoor activity, played a lot of chess, did that, too, played checkers. Family nights, we used to sit around and play games.

SI: It sounds like your older siblings stayed pretty close to home.

EW: Yes, yes.

SI: Did you all live in the same house?

EW: Oh, once they got married, they moved out, yes. As a matter-of-fact, my second brother, Joe, his wife's family built a house [for them]. They came down and built a house in three months' time. They'd cut the wood in their woodlot, made boards and planks and things out of it in their sawmill, pre-cut it, laid it out, pre-cut all the pieces, brought it down and reassembled it on site, and it's still there, out on Nut Swamp Road, yes, well-built. The studs and rafters were all made out of maple and oak and things like that.

SI: It is going to last.

EW: It's going to last.

SI: How did you put together the boat? Did you get plans and put it together yourself?

EW: It was a one-class boat. You bought plans and that gave all of the critical dimensions for the hull, the profile, the fittings, everything else, and then, you had to build it. So, we had to buy the wood, everything else, to build it and, I remember, a friend of mine had a Studebaker Coupe and you could crank the windshield open and the rear window, you could crank down. We bought twenty-four-foot long planks of Sitka Spruce, twelve inches wide, absolutely clear, not a single knot in it. The price for delivery was too high, so, we took these planks and rammed them through the cab of this Studebaker car, [laughter] so that the planks went out, overhung the front, overhung the back. We had to drive about thirty miles that way [laughter] and we made it, yes. Money was tight in those days, yes. When I went to Rutgers, we used to dine in the dining hall and, I remember, butter was one cent a pat. I never bought butter, it was too expensive, and I never bought coffee. Coffee and milk were the same price. I always bought milk, never bought coffee. [I] did go down to the Corner Tavern, though, now and then. That's still there, I think, the CT? Yes, it's been there a long time.

SI: Yes, since Prohibition, I think.

EW: Yes.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about your schooling and your education in Red Bank?

EW: Yes. I went to Middletown Township High School. First of all, I went to the grammar school, the primary elementary school, which was River Plaza School, went up through the eighth grade. Two grades per teacher, two grades in a room, and so, the teachers would split their time between the two classes, and I was a dummy, an absolute dummy. I was held back in the third grade for a second year. I couldn't read, couldn't spell, do anything like that. I went home that summer, [for] summer vacation, I had my tonsils taken out. I had a lot of problems with tonsillitis, went back to school in September, learned to read and came up to grade within a month. My mother always said that it was the [fact that] my energy was being sapped by

infection or something. So, anyway, I learned to read very quickly, came up to speed, and so on, got to the point where, in those days, they used to give comprehensive reading tests. You'd have an assignment, a sheet to read. You had to read it, they were timed, and then, you had to fill out questions about what you read and understood, and so on. I don't know whether they still do that.

SI: Yes, they still do that.

EW: Yes, they do that. Well, I used to read through the stuff three or four times and raise the hand, always finished first and always did very well on it. Got to the point [where] I was always finishing the work assignments much faster than the other kids, so, the teacher put me in the rearmost desk, which was next to a table that had all of the little library books, the magazines and things. She said, "Ed, when you finish your assignment, go get a book or something and read until everybody else is finished." So, that's what I did, yes. So, anyway, I went to high school. I never had to really work. Homework was easy, breezed through, got to Rutgers; well, I went to the Army after high school. At Rutgers, it was quite a bit different. I had to work. Yes, they laid it on us.

SI: In high school, did you start developing an interest in the sciences and technical arts?

EW: Oh, yes. I took physics and chemistry and all the math they had to offer, didn't go up through calculus. You got calculus in college, yes, but through algebra, advanced algebra, and so on, trigonometry, geometry, and so on, and I took language. I did take German in high school. That's right. I guess that's where I first learned the pronunciation was different. That was it, yes, Professor (Mullen?). There were only about six guys in the physics class and about that many in the German class. German was not a popular language then, because of Hitler, with all the problems in Europe. Anyway, I figured, "If you're going to be fighting the Germans, you ought to know their language." Yes, so, I made a point of studying German.

SI: In the late 1930s and early 1940s, with Hitler and the events occurring in Europe, was that being discussed a lot in your family or among your friends?

EW: Yes. It was discussed, surely. It was in the paper all the time, about what was going [on]. That was before the war started and my mother and father had family friends; he was in charge of a large wholesale nursery that raised roses. He was a rose grower and he was a superintendent and, as I recall, he made sixty dollars a week. That was his pay, which was a lot of money in the mid-'30s. On sixty dollars a week, he was able to send his wife and two children to Germany every other summer, for, like, two months, to visit and be on vacation, and so on. The last time they went was, like, in 1938 and they cut their vacation short. They came back. They said they felt very uncomfortable. He said everybody motioned to him, told him to be quiet, "The walls have ears." You had to be very careful what you said. Otherwise, the police would be in to question you. So, they didn't like it. They came back, yes. So, it was really very miserable there. So, anyway, that's the story there.

SI: Did you have any inkling that there might be a war with Germany, or even Japan, before Pearl Harbor?

EW: We had no idea there'd be a war with Japan, but we saw what was happening in Europe. Europe was the main concern, since we're all Caucasians. The Orientals were few and far between in this country. There was maybe one or two Chinese families in Red Bank at that time, and there were some more on the West Coast, but, no, it wasn't considered very important, because the Japanese were busy in China, conquering China, yes, and we didn't have much interest in that, yes.

SI: You listed both of your parents as being Catholic.

EW: Yes.

SI: I am aware that, in the Shore area, in the 1920s, there was some anti-Catholic sentiment and even some Klan activity. Do you remember any of that affecting your family?

EW: No, no, none whatsoever. No, we were not involved in any of that.

SI: Nobody ever attacked your church.

EW: No, but I know there used to be a lot of talk about Catholics and Protestants. "Oh, she's going with a Protestant," terrible, like a fate worse than death. You're not supposed to marry outside the religion. People took it really to heart in those days. Nowadays, it doesn't seem to be that important anymore; well, thank God.

SI: Could you also see divisions between ethnicities, whether it was whites and African-Americans or Germans, English or Irish?

EW: Well, earlier, during World War I, my brothers and sister got a lot of flack in school, because they had German names, and so on. There, at that time, they were in elementary school and there was fights and things like that. Now, when I was going through elementary school, I did get harassment because of the name, again, from class bullies and things, yes. They used to call me a Nazi and things like that.

SI: Really?

EW: Yes, but they were stupid people. [laughter]

SI: Did your family keep up any of the Old World traditions in your household, such as holidays, language or food?

EW: Food, yes, Hungarian cooking, delicious. [laughter] So, we still carry on that tradition. I have my mother's recipes for some of the things and our grandchildren lap it up. They love it. Yes, it's really good.

SI: What about special holidays?

EW: Oh, no, American holidays, yes.

SI: Did your parents impress upon you and your siblings the importance of becoming American or did they retain some of the older identity?

EW: Oh, I think they became American, yes, that was the whole idea of the thing, but they kept some of the traditions. They did speak the language different, sometimes, in the house. As a matter-of-fact, I learned some German before I learned English, just listening to my parents, because that was the common language they spoke at home when we were small. After I went to school, I spoke English all the time, yes. So, I was bilingual even before I went to school, yes.

SI: You mentioned that the Great Depression had a big impact on your family.

EW: Yes.

SI: Did you see how it affected Red Bank as a whole? Did it really hurt the town?

EW: Yes, oh, of course, yes. The biggest industry there was the Eisner Company. You've heard of Michael Eisner? He was the head of Disney. He was from Red Bank. His family owned the factory that made uniforms. During World War I, they made uniforms for the Army. After the war, that business dried up, so, they became, yes, the official providers of uniforms for Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. [Editor's Note: Michael Eisner was born and raised in New York State. His great-grandfather founded the Sigmund Eisner Company in Red Bank, New Jersey, which produced the uniforms Mr. Wildanger described.] Okay, well, when the Depression came along, that business dried up, too. Yes, so, there was a lot of unemployment in town. Let's see; we had a man that used to work for my father who became ill, became divorced, I guess, had to go to a sanitarium, became ill with tuberculosis, stayed there, was cured, came back, had no place to stay or anything, no job, no nothing. So, he was welcomed into the household. He moved in with us, yes, and we took care of him, fed him, and so on. He used to read to me all the time. He'd go out and pick wild berries and bring them [in], that sort of thing. Then, he got a job working for Singer, the sewing machine company. So, he'd go around and service machines or sell them, things like that, but, anyway, in the house, we had a twenty-volume set of *Books of Knowledge*, which were kind of children's encyclopedias, not little children, high school age, middle school age children, very interesting books. I read those things, and he read to me from those things, practically cover-to-cover. So, I developed a broad base of general knowledge out of those things. Yes, that was very interesting reading, pitched at my level. You lived out in the country, [the] Depression was on, we had, like, a five-bedroom house, the only place there was heat was in the kitchen, with the kitchen stove, and there was a potbellied stove in what we now call a family room, right next to the kitchen, and there was a table in the kitchen and a table in the family room. At night, after dinner, the lamp would be moved from the kitchen into the family room, kerosene lamp, and we'd all crowd around the table. Somebody'd be reading, somebody'd be playing a crossword puzzle, somebody else would be writing, or something like that, or playing a game and it was nice and warm. You went up to the bedroom; the temperature was the same as outside. If it was below freezing outside, your blankets were below freezing. So, the usual thing to do was to take bricks, put them in the oven, in the kitchen, heat them up, wrap them in newspaper, and then, in a blanket or a towel or something, take them upstairs and stick

them in the bed, bed warmers, and that would warm the bed, so that you wouldn't crawl into sheets that were icy cold, yes, and we all had big feather comforters and that kept us warm, yes, once they were warmed up.

SI: Did you have to do a lot of chores around the house to help out, like chopping wood or fetching coal?

EW: I had to haul water. The water for the house came from a well. There was a pump run by electricity. The electricity was provided by a generator that was out in the barn. The generator ran on gasoline. There was no money to buy gasoline, so, you had to pump the water into a pail outside and bring it into the house, by the bucket. You could flush the toilets with it, that sort of thing, or you could fill the dishpan and heat it on the stove, and so on, primitive living, but we survived it, yes.

SI: Was there electricity in the house or just that generator?

EW: Oh, the generator was setup, when it was working, when you could put the gasoline in it, if you flicked the light switch in the house, the generator would automatically start, if it wasn't running, which, to kick over, there was a set of batteries the size of this table here, and that gave the thing a big kick, and it would start and run and that would provide the electricity. So, he could run, I think, maybe up to ten kilowatts, which wouldn't run an electric stove, but plenty of lights and things like that. The batteries froze. We had a very cold winter. [On] the Shadow Lake, the ice froze down to twenty-four inches thick on the lake, in New Jersey, and the batteries froze, so, it no longer would start when you flicked the switch. So, by that time, I was ten years old, it was my job to go out and start that generator. It had a gasoline engine, like you'd find in a small car, four-cylinder engine, like you'd find in, maybe, a small Fiat or something like that, had a crank on it. I learned how to kick the crank over with my foot, I learned how to choke it, learned how to say the appropriate curse words [laughter] to get the thing going. So, that was my job in the evening, to go out, when it started to get dark, to kick it over, and that did it. It lasted until we no longer could afford the gasoline and, since we lived two miles off the main highway, there was no plowing of snow. There's probably a couple of feet of snow on the ground. My father and brothers had to haul everything across the ice, across Shadow Lake. We lived out on the far side of the lake, away from the town. They hauled everything over by sled, the fuel for the stoves and the food and everything else.

SI: How isolated were you out there on the other side of the lake? Did you have neighbors?

EW: Well, no, the nearest neighbor was probably half a mile away, yes. Across the lake, probably not quite a half a mile, probably a quarter mile across the lake, was a place called River Plaza, which was a 1920s development, I think, and that's where all my friends lived. So, I used to go play with my friends and, if I walked around, that would be two miles, to go around the lake. I would go down to the lake, strip off all my clothes, bundle it up tightly, take my waist belt, put the clothes on top of my head, take the waist belt, put [it] over and tie it, buckle it under my chin and pull it down tight, and then, swim a couple of hundred yards across the lake to the town. Then, I'd get in the bushes, come out in the bushes, put my clothes on and go play until it was time to swim home, and I was all alone, of course, never thought it would be any danger,

yes. I was a pretty good swimmer, yes, and, when I was ten years old, my father gave me a car as a birthday present. It was a Model T Ford.

SI: How old were you?

EW: Ten.

SI: When you were ten?

EW: He gave me that and two gallons of gas a week, and we had twelve acres and it adjoined adjacent farms. I probably had, maybe, two hundred acres that I could drive on without going on a public road. So, I learned to drive in that Model T Ford.

SI: When you were ten years old.

EW: Yes. It was stripped down, no body in it, just bucket seats on the chassis, steering wheel, the engine out front, four wheels, and, yes, I learned to drive on that thing. When the ice froze in the winter, I took it down on the lake. It was like a huge skid pad and I'd go and put on the brakes and twist the wheel and spin it, yes, or start to put [it into] a spin and learn how to steer out of it, that sort of thing, yes, good training. Then, one Sunday, in the summer, I took some friends out. I took a friend out for a ride and I was driving and it was a dirt road. The farmer had scraped it with a scraper, to get rid of [the] washboard effect, turned up a rock about that big in the middle of the road. [My] left front wheel hit it, it was very touchy steering, tore the wheel out of my hands. The car turned ninety degrees, went out of the road, up over the; no curbing, but the road was down about a rise about that high, to go into the pasture, bounced me out from behind the driver's seat, behind the wheel, fell down. The left rear tire ran over my thighs. My friend was sitting in the passenger's seat. He reached over and he stopped the thing. I got back in, we drove home and I got a whipping, because I had on my good Sunday clothing and there were tire tracks. Kids wore white flannel trousers in those days; here were these tire tracks. They weren't concerned about me. [laughter] I ruined the pants.

SI: Were you hurt at all?

EW: No, I wasn't hurt. No, the car was so light, no body, just four wheels, engine way out front. No, it wasn't bad, yes. I suppose it could have broken my legs, if it were heavy, yes, but it's amazing that kids, boys particularly, survive to adulthood. We get involved in so many things that are crazy or dangerous, yes.

SI: That is pretty remarkable. I have never heard of anybody who learned to drive at age ten.

EW: Yes.

SI: Did your family raise any food?

EW: My mother always had, like, a hundred chickens, in the springtime, little baby chicks, and the house had what they called a brooder, up in the attic. That was a stove that had a big hood

over it, about six foot in diameter, that you could raise or lower the height, and the stove was in the middle and that kept the air warm under there. So, these little chicks that hadn't feathered out yet, they all huddled under there and kept warm, until they started to get feathers, and then, they were moved out into little coops out in the orchard, where they could be on grass, and so on, and outdoors, and so, she raised those and that provided the chickens for meals and things like that. She traded some chickens to people for other things she needed, and that lasted the year, and, of course, there was a lot of home canning done in those days, tomatoes, peaches, cherries, pears, all kinds of fruits and vegetables, maybe several hundred jars. The whole family would go out and pick wild strawberries or things like that, which grew in the fields in New Jersey, and the whole family picking, [would] bring these berries back, and they would be made into jams and things like that, and those little berries, they're like those European berries. They're about, oh, that big, [thumb-sized], yes, concentrated flavor, intense strawberry flavor, very good. So, that was a family activity. Another one, we had, like, three acres of apple orchard and we had a cider mill and press in the barn. So, in September, the entire family would go out and pick apples, bring them back, wash them, put them in the cider mill. My father'd run that. It would grind the apples up, put them down in a little hopper, a big press on top, press them out, the juice'd run out. The bees would come in swarms, because the apple juice was so sweet, and they'd make two hundred gallons of cider every fall. One gallon was for drinking; one barrel, like a fifty-gallon barrel. One barrel was allowed to go to vinegar and the two other barrels were allowed to go hard, and then, they were distilled off into "Jersey Lightning," which was pure alcohol, yes. So, that was another family activity, and my father and two other friends would buy a truckload of grapes every fall and he had a press and a grinder for the grapes and they would make a couple of hundred gallons of wine, grape wine, which they would allow to season, and then, they'd divide it up. So, there's a lot of family activities together, yes, not a bad way to live.

SI: It sounds like you were very self-sufficient.

EW: Yes. Well, a lot of people were in those days. You had to be. You couldn't run down to the store and buy it. Even if they had any, you didn't have the money to buy it, yes.

SI: You were in high school when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

EW: Yes. I remember, we were sitting, having a Sunday luncheon, Sunday dinner, and so, that was, like, one o'clock in the afternoon and the news came through on the radio that Pearl Harbor'd been attacked. We had a soldier as a guest for dinner, a fellow from Fort Monmouth, and we had planned to go roller-skating that afternoon at a roller-skating rink. So, I think he went back to the fort and we didn't go roller-skating. Yes, so, we had changed plans from then on, yes.

SI: Why did you have a soldier over for dinner?

EW: Well, my sister belonged to the USO [United Service Organization], and it was the USO club, and so, she liked him and invited him, yes.

SI: Would you have soldiers over often for dinner?

EW: Oh, quite often, yes, because these guys were far from home and everything, yes.

SI: How did you feel when you heard the news? Did you feel angry or afraid?

EW: Oh, angry, yes, yes, terrible, sneak attack. Nobody knew it was coming. Maybe the government knew, but nobody, none of the population, knew.

SI: Living near the shore, did you notice more of a Civil Defense atmosphere, such as blackout drills?

EW: Well, we had blackouts every night, for several miles in from the coast. My brothers had a "land office" [very brisk] business of painting out the upper half of headlight lenses, so as to cut down the glare that went up into the air, and I joined the Civil Air Defense organization. They had spotters all over, keeping track of any air traffic. We'd hear an airplane or see an airplane or something, we'd call in. They had a telephone there. We'd call in, identify ourselves and say what we saw or what we heard and what direction they seemed to be going, and so on, and I guess they must have had a big plotting room someplace, where they kept track of these things.

SI: Do you remember if the wartime policies affected your high school at all?

EW: Well, several guys immediately left school and enlisted and left. They didn't finish their senior year. So, they were gone. Then, they started giving us courses; God, what was it? Oh, I don't remember what the courses were, but they had to do with the war effort. I don't know whether it was in math, special math, or what, but they were regular classes, every week. It had to do with something with Civil Defense, and so on. Yes, I don't remember what it was.

SI: Was there any additional physical training?

EW: No. We always had the physical training in those days. It was called physical ed. They used to call it "physical training," but that sounded too militaristic, so, they changed it to physical education in the mid-'30s, and we used to salute the flag this way.

SI: Really?

EW: Yes.

SI: Like a Nazi salute.

EW: Of course, the Nazis saluted this way, so, then, they changed it to this.

SI: The hand over the heart.

EW: Yes, over the heart. Yes, that was probably about 1937 [that] they did that, yes.

SI: Did you have to cut out things at home or in high school? It sounds like you were pretty self-sufficient anyway. Most people talk about starting a "victory garden."

EW: Oh, we had a "victory garden," a big one, yes, and everybody got rationing cards, for meat and butter and sugar, things like that. You couldn't buy tires. You got something like three gallons of gasoline a week. That was all you could get and, of course, there was a black market for gas. If you wanted to pay an exorbitant price of forty cents a gallon, [laughter] you could get all the gas you wanted, but gasoline was, like, sixteen cents a gallon, normally, not a big expense, but, of course, the minimum wage at that time was, like, forty cents or so. So, you still had to work, like, twenty minutes to earn enough to get a gallon of gas. So, it was not considered cheap then.

SI: You knew about black market activity in the area.

EW: Yes, only when I came back on home leave. They told me where I could go to get gasoline, because I wanted to do some traveling around and three gallons wouldn't do it. The family needed that for the family business, and so on. My brother, Art, the older brother, he had left the business and gone to work for Republic Aviation. He was a highly skilled metal worker, since he could build automobile bodies. He could shape metal, flat panels, and hammer them all to different shapes and things. So, he went up to Farmington, I think it was, Farmington, [Farmingdale], anyway, Long Island, where Republic was based, and he worked for them. My brother, Joe, continued the business in Red Bank, the family business, but he got drafted, and so, rather than close the business down, they just locked it up, paid the rent and left it, left it in mothballs, kind of. That stayed that way for about two, two-and-a-half years, three years, and, when the war ended, Republic's business, of course, went off. They didn't have need for the airplanes anymore. So, he came back and reopened the business, put a big ad in the newspaper and he said [that] when he unlocked the doors that first day, there were about twenty cars lined up, people wanted work done, yes, because there hadn't been any work done in years. So, then, my brother, Joe, came back and they continued in the business until they retired in 1984 or '85, yes.

SI: How did your mother get by when her one son was working at Republic Aviation and the other was drafted?

EW: Oh, she became a companion to an elderly widow, a well-to-do widow, up in; no, not White Plains. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," what's the name of the town?

SI: I forget.

EW: It'll come to me.

SI: It is in New York.

EW: Yes, New York State, yes, on the mainline north, yes, just before White Plains, [Tarrytown, New York]. So, she worked for that lady until the lady died, probably ten, fifteen years, yes. Then, when the lady died, she left enough money to care for my mother, for all of her needs as long as she survived then. Yes, so, it worked out very well and she kept busy, was

needed, and so on. After her patron died, she moved to Pennsylvania to be near my sister. So, she lived there until she died, yes.

SI: How did she get involved with this woman? Did she answer an ad?

EW: I don't know, probably through word of mouth, yes. It was very good, and she was a good woman.

SI: After America entered the war, did you think that you would be involved in the military or did you think the war would be over by then?

EW: Oh, I couldn't wait to enlist. I finished high school, I wanted to enlist, but, by that time, they had gone away from enlistments. It was strictly a draft, no more voluntary enlistments. So, I told them I wanted to go with the next shipment, so, they pulled me in in August. I graduated in June. In August, I was pulled in and left, I guess, in early September, to go down to Fort Benning in Georgia and I was in what was known as the Army Specialized Training Corps, ASTP. The idea was that we would take basic training, and then, go to college. So, I did take basic training there, and then, was sent to the Citadel in Charleston, military college, spent one semester there in basic engineering. Meanwhile, they had such a rough time in Africa, the losses in Africa and Italy, the losses were much higher than expected and they decided they needed riflemen more than they needed engineers. So, that program was wiped out and we were all sucked back into the infantry or artillery, combat troops, and I wound up in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, as part of the 100th Infantry Division, in a heavy weapons company. They're the ones that have the mortars and heavy machine-guns and things.

SI: Why were you so eager to get into the military?

EW: Well, it was the thing to do, absolutely, country needed us. We thought that the people that we were fighting were evil, or their plans were evil. We wanted no part of it and thought they should be eliminated, yes. Everybody felt that way. It's not like Iraq or Vietnam, where there was so much divided opinion as to whether we should be there or not. No, it was pretty unanimous.

SI: Was there a stigma attached to not being in the military or being 4-F?

EW: No, I guess not really. People were either in the military or in some vital, vital job or something, or physically not capable, yes.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about the process of enlisting, where you were sent, how you got down to Georgia?

EW: Yes. When you were in high school, you took a series, a battery, of tests that qualified you or disqualified you for this special training program. So, the ones that qualified, they were pulled in, the same as everybody else, but, then, instead of being sent to active military units for training, we were sent down to the infantry school in Fort Benning, took our training there as a group. Then, as a group, we were dispersed, then, to different colleges, but we had regular

infantry training, the same as anybody else, thirteen weeks, with, oh, rifles and mortars and machine-guns and long marches and night bivouacs and simulated combat, things of that sort, mean, mean drill sergeants, a special breed. [laughter] Yes, boy, you toed the line or you were in trouble, yes.

SI: Were they the kind of drill sergeants that would get in your face?

EW: Yes, or they'd punish you. If somebody messed up, well, the whole platoon would be punished. So, then, the guys would be sure that nobody else screwed up, yes, because they'd all get punished, yes, and the favorite punishment was to load up somebody's pack with, like, about eighty pounds of bricks and have him march around the drill field for two hours, that sort of thing, or they'd line up the whole platoon in a circle and they'd take their rifles, which weighed, like, ten pounds, at arms length, pass them to the next man, keep them going around and around, and your arms would start to feel like they're going to drop off after awhile. If you screwed up, well, you got additional punishment. They extended the time. Well, this is a way, I guess, of getting you to obey regardless of pain or whatever.

SI: What kind of things would be considered a kind of "screw up" that would earn you this type of punishment?

EW: Well, there was one guy, from Mississippi, who was kind of a dunce and he thought he could get away with things. We'd have a pack where you make a blanket and you roll it up and they strap it in there. He took one of those big cans that food came in, wrapped the blanket around it and strapped it in there. So, instead of weighing [the same as] a heavy pack, most of it was air, and it was discovered when the Lieutenant made the inspection. Yes, here's this thing. So, the whole platoon got it. Another time, he couldn't tie it in properly and we're all in there for inspection and his pack fell out of the carrier on the back, fell down behind him on the ground. Well, the whole platoon caught it. We should have been after the guy to do it right. Another time, this is a funny thing, didn't result in any punishment, we wore leggings. You know what a legging is? They laced up on the outside. Well, he put them on wrong. He had the laces on the inside, there; hooks, hooks and eyes. We're on the second floor. They blew roll call and we all had to dash out and get in the company street. Well, he made a dash for the stairway and these things hooked together. So, instead of going down the stairs, he took a swan dive down the stairs [laughter] and wound up in the company street, went through the door, wound up on his nose, out in the company street. So, he's not very smart. He was from Mississippi; I don't think that had anything to do with it.

SI: Was this the first time you met people from all over the country?

EW: Oh, there was a real mix when we got into the 100th Infantry Division. When we were in ASTP, well, these guys were all with minimum IQs of 120 or more, and they all had good spatial conception and good mathematics. They were smart kids, yes.

SI: It sounds like there was a mixture of intelligences at Fort Benning.

EW: Fort Benning, yes. Let's see, wait a second; oh, no, I mixed [it] up. That guy was at Fort Bragg. No, the ones at Fort Benning, they were a select group.

SI: It was all ASTP guys at Fort Benning.

EW: Yes, right. When you got into the regular Army, that's when you got the guys from Georgia and Mississippi and Tennessee and Wyoming, a mix from all over, a lot of guys from Pennsylvania, from coal mining families, that sort of thing, West Virginia, Virginia, a lot from New York State, some of them educated, some of them not educated, pretty dumb, yes.

SI: What was your time at the Citadel like? Was it a quarter or a semester?

EW: Yes, from January through the end of March, yes, a quarter. Yes, we had regular classes. We always marched to class in formation. We had Saturday review, out on the parade grounds, that sort of thing. We had Saturday afternoon and Sunday off. Lights out was at ten o'clock, so, we used to take our blankets and put them over the windows and transom and stay up and study after ten o'clock, so [that] nobody would see that we were still up. It looked dark, but you had to do that to keep up, because they really threw it at you. It's hard work, yes.

SI: Did many men washout during that period? Would they have tests every week to wash men out?

EW: I didn't see anybody washout. Maybe some did, but I'm not aware of any. If it did happen, it wasn't very common.

SI: How did you feel when it was announced that the program was being shut down?

EW: Well, I was very disappointed. The last thing I wanted to do was to be a rifleman. I went to the 100th Division, not in a rifle company, I wound up in heavy weapons, but the 100th Division was in combat, solid combat, for a straight five months. They had eighty-nine percent casualties, which is a lot. That's, like, nine out of ten, basically, that were wounded or shot, killed. It's not a healthy profession. So, I wound up in this heavy weapons company and the Captain said, "Ed, what do you want to do?" I said, "Well, I'd like mortars. I've had experience with black powder, shooting heavy weapons at home, and that sort of thing." He said, "How about machine-guns?" "No, I don't want to do that." So, anyway, he put me in the mortar platoon and, machine-gunners, they had a history of lasting just a few minutes in combat. They were always [targets]. If you had a machine-gun firing, everybody'd try to see where they were and they aimed all their fire in that direction. So, it's not a healthy thing to do. Mortars were [a case where] you're kind of behind something, because you could fire up over. You couldn't see the target. You had a spotter out in front who told you, and, also, the mortar platoon had vehicles. They had jeeps. So, I said, "I want to be a jeep driver." So, when a vacancy came up, I got a jeep, which was very, very lucky, yes, very lucky.

SI: Were you assigned to that position when you were still at Fort Bragg?

EW: No, no, that was overseas. We were in Europe. Yes, we were in Europe. We landed in Marseilles and went up the Rhone River Valley, up to where the fighting was, in the Vosges, Vosges Forest, and that's where we went into the line, but I remember that trip very well.

SI: Please, tell me about that trip.

EW: Okay. We left Fort Bragg, went by train to Fort Dix, New Jersey, which was an embarkation point. We stayed there a few days, I guess, or a week or something like that, and then, got onboard trains and that took us over to the Port of New York, Port of, I guess, Jersey City, because we didn't go across. See, well, they had ferry boats there. We got aboard ferry boats and went out and got aboard the ships that were going to take us across the ocean, and we went on a liner called the *George Washington*, which was the biggest US troop transport. While we're at Fort Dix, they said, "Don't tell anybody what unit you are or anything." They gave us passes to go into town or go home. So, you'd get in a cab in New York and the guy would say, the driver'd say, "What outfit you in?" "I can't tell you." "Oh," he said, "oh, you're with the 100th." [laughter] So, anyway, we boarded that ship, held, I think, eight thousand troops on that one ship, two meals a day. You got in line in the morning for breakfast, finished breakfast, got back in the line for dinner. Yes, dinner was served, like, late in the afternoon. We went the southerly route. We went down the coast, then across the South Atlantic, and then, up to Gibraltar and into the Mediterranean. Well, this was October and that's hurricane season. We got caught in a hurricane, in the middle of the ocean, South Atlantic hurricane, in a convoy. The thing was so violent that it damaged, it broke, the ship's steering mechanism. You've got eight thousand troops without any control of the ship. We came within a hundred feet of ramming an adjacent ship that had a couple of thousand guys on it, out in the middle of the Atlantic. The wind was blowing so high, I was like three decks above water, and I'd look up to the crest of the waves coming and they were another fifty feet above us. The ship was down in a trough and here's something coming sixty or seventy feet high at you and the ship would lurch, and then, ride up and over and come down the other side. Oh, well, I never did go below, because, down below, you got seasick immediately and, every bunk area, they had a fifty-gallon drum [with] the top cut out and, if you felt seasick, you barfed into that, yes. A lot of guys were too sick to go up, but I would stay the entire journey, basically, at the rail, watching the water, wandering around, and so on. Things did get more calm. We did come in through Gibraltar. By that time, things were quiet, but, then, they had a storm in the Mediterranean that we had [to contend with]. We wanted to go into Marseilles. We had to lay off a day, until things quieted down. Went into the harbor at Marseilles, the harbor was filled with sunken ships that the Germans had sunk to impede the use of the harbor, and so, we went down rope ladders into lighters that ferried us into shore. We got off the ship about midnight, because there was an aircraft, air raid warning, as we were starting to get off earlier, like six o'clock in the afternoon. Well, they locked everything down and we didn't move and it turned out to be a false alarm, and maybe it was just a reconnaissance plane and didn't drop anything. So, by the time we got off, it was after midnight, and then, it was drizzly, wet, rainy, and we had to hike about ten miles to the area where we were going to bivouac. We bivouacked in a big, plowed field, in a ravine, had high hills on either side, pitched our tents, pitched them in a parade ground; oh, we didn't pitch our tents. We just threw our shelter halves down in the mud, rolled up in a blanket and went to sleep. In the morning, they got us all up and we had to pitch our tents parade ground-style in this plowed field, and then, we waited to see what was going to happen and most of us went back into our

tents and got some more sleep, but it started to rain. All the water drained down off these hills, down into this valley. [We] woke up and there's, like, six inches of water in the valley. Everything was floating. Guys were running around, pulling up their tents, salvaging their belongings and running up the hillsides. The officers lost complete control of the troops. Everybody went up and they just pitched their tents wherever they could. So, the officers wanted them to come back down or they wanted to group them by companies and things. The guys refused and the officers can only do so much. They're vastly outnumbered; they'd better go with the tide. So, that's what they did, yes. So, we stayed there while the ships were unloaded with all of our hardware and we were detailed to go down to the port and unpack these things. Even the jeeps were in crates and things, with the wheels taken off, and so on. The trucks were all dismantled, the tops down and the wheels off, and so on, so [that] they took less volume. So, they'd set up a work line to put these things back together again and they'd bring these big boxes out that you could put a minivan in. You get enough guys around it, you can pick it up and walk with it, and inside is an artillery piece, probably two tons of weight. You get about twenty guys around it and you can move it, yes. So, we spent about a week or so, or ten days, getting our equipment out, and then, they'd pile us in trucks, driven by French soldiers, and we drove up the Rhone River Valley and the main highway, north and south, in France follows that valley, follows the river, all the way up. Well, when we landed, or were coming in, the Germans decided to give up Southern France and they all retreated up that road and there was, probably bumper-to-bumper, for a hundred miles, a tremendous traffic jam, and the US Air Force had a field day. Here are all these things, they couldn't move, stationary targets, on this narrow road. So, they just napalmed and bombed and strafed and everything; so, a hundred miles of wreckage. So, the only way the American troops could get through is, they brought in huge bulldozers and just bulldozed the stuff off to the side, and we rode past all this stuff. I'll never forget it, like a hundred-mile junkyard.

SI: How did you feel as you were headed towards combat, passing all these scenes of war?

EW: Yes. Well, thank God you're with your friends, yes. Your loyalty is towards your friends and your buddies. They're the ones you look out for and they look out for you. Nobody else does it. The government doesn't. You're really on your own, and we're apprehensive. We didn't know what was going to happen. So, we didn't get strafed. Fortunately, the Americans controlled the air. Germans didn't come and get us or anything like that, and we stopped in Lyon, overnight, and slept in a park there and, the second day, we stopped in Dijon, slept in a park and, the next day, we were up right at the front, and we were replacing a division that had been in line a long time. So, the next day, they started moving into their positions and relieving them.

SI: Do you remember where exactly you were in the line?

EW: Oh, yes, near a town called Raon-l'Etape. Yes, it's still there, and it was the rainy season. God, it rained.

SI: Was this September of 1944?

EW: This was the middle of October, late October, yes, and, well, we brought the fresh troops in, the 398th; no, the 397th. Our colonel, the regimental commander, was killed, like, the first day, first few days we were there. He went out on reconnaissance with his jeep driver and they went in front of the lines. They didn't know where they were, ran into the Germans. They were machine-gunned and he was killed. The driver escaped with the jeep, but the Colonel was gone. So, we got a new colonel and started getting casualties then. The Germans were dug in, had to dig them out, bad weather, dense forest, like the Black Forest.

SI: People who have analyzed the Vosges Mountains battles point out that the things that gave the Americans advantages, like airpower, could not really be used.

EW: Yes, couldn't use it there, no.

SI: What was that like?

EW: It was man against man, could scarcely use tanks, either. The roads weren't suitable, the bridges were too small, all those things. So, it was like old-fashioned warfare, man against man. That's the worst kind. Well, it's all bad. So, now, meanwhile, a bit of luck; after we moved up to the front, regimental headquarters sent down a requisition. They said, "We have to borrow a jeep and a driver, one from each battalion," and this was for what they called a liaison officer. We could not rely on telephone or radio communications. You had to have somebody on the ground that could verbally carry messages back and forth, or assess the situation and come back and report to the regimental commander. So, they needed a jeep for him. So, I was picked, because Company H had the jeeps. So, I was lucky. They picked me and they said it was going to be a short assignment, just a few days or a week or so. Well, it wound up [that] I spent the rest of the war in that particular function, and I think that saved my life, basically, yes. I was not popular with the foot soldiers, because we'd drive up to the front and they would all yell, "Get that goddamned thing out of here," because the Germans would hear the noise of the engines. It would always draw fire and they didn't like that, because they were there, nearby. [laughter] They didn't want the jeep nearby. So, there were five of us in this particular function, three guys from the infantry regiments and two guys from artillery. Of the five, three of them got Purple Hearts. They got wounded in the process of doing their jobs. One other fellow and me, we never got wounded. We had close calls. I had seventy-six holes in my jeep when I turned it in after the war, but none in me. All the others had driven over mines or been strafed from the air, that sort of thing. So, anyway, I was born lucky, I guess, yes.

SI: You got this job when you first went into the line.

EW: Yes.

SI: What do you remember about your first few days of doing this liaison work?

EW: Oh, driving blackout, absolute blackout, through back, back country, farm country, with no maps that you could read or anything, trying to find where you're going and couldn't see anything; found out that we're getting a fine spray of mud off the road, which had covered the windshield. Here, we had to look around this way, around the edges, yes, but it's like trying to

find the needle in a haystack while you're blindfolded, yes. So, I remember that. After awhile, we got things down to a system, we knew where things were, but the first few trips at night, they were really something.

SI: You said there were five jeep drivers.

EW: Yes.

SI: Would you take turns driving the officer back?

EW: No, no. There were five different officers; oh, let's see, four officers, yes. The artillery guys, they had the officer, a driver and a radioman, yes, a radioman. The two artillery guys are the ones that ran over the mine. The other guy was the one that got strafed with a fifty-caliber plane [machine-gun]. It was an American plane, but the Army said it was captured by the Germans, manned by the Germans, but the only times we were strafed were by American planes. So, any plane that came near us, regardless of its markings, we all shot at it, to discourage them, and, of course, a fighter pilot, he has really no way of knowing where the line is. There's no dotted line on the ground. All he sees is land. He figures he's over the front, he wants to get home, he's going to dump his load, empty the guns and flee, yes. So, that was their motivation, yes, and, if they saw something move, they shot that, yes. Yes, that was not a healthy job, either, flying one of those planes. Yes, that was an adventure. So, anyway, the Vosges Mountains have never been passed, particularly in the winter. We went all the way up to the Rhine River. We could have crossed the Rhine River back in December, before the Battle of the Bulge. Eisenhower said, "No, pull back. The action's going to be someplace else." Stay where you are," but we could have crossed and rolled up the German Army from the south. So, I think it was a blunder on the part of the Supreme Command. General [Alexander M.] Patch was the commander of the Seventh Army and he and Patton didn't get along. Patton had a thing against him. So, I guess we were lucky that way, because he left us alone. We did capture a citadel in Bitche, in France, which had never been captured, never been taken, except by the Americans. I'm an official "Son of Bitche," got a membership card, yes.

SI: Is that the battle where the Germans were in the hills around the city?

EW: Let's see, they were in various places. The place that I remember; well, they did a lot of shooting at that Bitche, yes, but they started a drive on the New Year's Eve, New Year's Eve. The Battle of the Bulge started before Christmas, okay. There was another major invasion planned, which was going to come through the Seventh Army, south of Patton and the others, south of the Battle of the Bulge. [It] was going to come in and roll around behind them, and they struck the 100th Division, [which] was right at the point where they struck on New Year's Eve, and so, a tremendous battle went on there. We got up New Year's morning and I heard fighting to the front of us. I heard machine-guns and everything, left rear, behind us, and right rear, behind us. We're on a salient. The outfit on the right was a cavalry division. They retreated about three miles. The one on the other side was the 45th Division, I think. They pulled back a couple of miles. So, the 100th was stuck out like a sore thumb. I was having trouble with the jeep. I went over to the motor pool and the motor pool sergeant. I said, "Sarge, there's something wrong with the jeep. It's not running right." He was busy throwing everything into

his van, saying, "Take care of it yourself. I'm getting out of here." So, he left and we did tune it up. We figured [out] what to do. We got it running okay, but we were dive-bombed in that place. It was a clear winter day. Our headquarters were in what had been, it was called a casern, was an Army barracks, French Army camp, just behind the Maginot Line, and the Americans had taken over and the headquarters was in a bunker in the bottom of one of these buildings. Well, all the staff officers and the regimental commander and everybody'd come out about noontime to stretch their legs and I was watching, we were watching, two planes dive-bombing a town about five miles away. You could see the planes go into a dive, you could see these little black specks peeling off, the bombs being dropped. Well, for some reason, I looked up and here are two planes coming straight at us. I saw the bombs peel off and I let out a yell. We all ran back into the bunker and just got in as they landed. Well, they missed the bunker, but they hit the house to the one side, blew the roof off. They hit one of the other buildings and blew in the wall and killed about ten guys. Another one landed on a shed; we'd concealed our vehicles in there. There was a six-by-six truck in there, loaded with ammunition, and the building, this shed, was burning. Well, the guys rushed in there and they heaved these timbers off and got it out of there. My jeep was pretty badly damaged, too. The windshield was blown in, the top was wrecked and everything else, had some burning timbers across it. We heaved those things off and started it, backed it out, saved it. I was able to get another windshield from the junkyard and a new top, fixed it up, and I drove it the rest of the war. That was really a thrill, to see those five-hundred-pound bombs coming down, straight at you. So, anyway, we stayed there. We finally moved the headquarters back, yes, stabilized the line for the winter, and we're in a little village, oh, about five miles back from where we were, and we used to get strafed in there. Usually, American planes'd fly up this valley and empty their machine-guns. I don't know who they were. They were the American planes, yes, that were piloted by somebody.

SI: You were not sure if they were Americans or Germans.

EW: American [planes], didn't know whether they were German pilots. They claimed they captured a bunch of these in the Battle of the Bulge and they were short of airplanes, so, I guess, anything that would fly, they could fly, yes. So, anyway, they left the markings on. Maybe they figured it made it safer for them. So, anyway, then, we got ready to advance into Germany, when the spring got better, the weather got better.

SI: How do you think the division reacted to the counterattack? Do you think they did a good job of responding?

EW: Oh, they held, oh, they held. Yes, they were pretty tough. Yes, they did not retreat. They pulled back here or there to straighten things out. I remember going up to the battalion headquarters for the Second Battalion in the town called Rimling, which was a small farming village, maybe six or seven hundred people. I got up there about midnight and all of the people were out milling around in the street and we pulled in there and they told us the Americans had pulled out and the Germans were coming in and we could hear them down the other end of the street, the Germans coming in. So, we were well ahead of the American line at that time. So, guess what we did? We turned tail and got out of there, and so, they had a tremendous battle at Rimling. That lasted a couple of weeks, back and forth, there. Then, things kind of settled down for the winter. Oh, during this invasion now, down south, on New Year's Eve, my friends that

were still in the heavy weapons platoon, they were back, they saw these ghostly figures coming through the snow. They're German soldiers all dressed in white. Everything was white, so, they didn't show very well. So, they figured they were Germans. Finally, they heard some talking, so, they opened up on them and the Germans pulled back; started to come again; they opened up and they got closer. They got so close that they could no longer aim the mortars with the normal sights and things, because you couldn't get any closer than maybe a hundred yards. So, they disregarded it. They pulled the tube back at a higher angle, fired it. So, they dropped maybe fifty feet in front of themselves and that discouraged them. They pulled back. Later on that morning, the Germans surrendered, and was the guy mad, pissed off. He thought he was facing a battalion and here it was, a platoon, thirty or forty guys. I think they killed something like twenty and took something like forty prisoners, including a SS lieutenant. Now, he was fit to be tied. [laughter] I don't think it looked good on his record. [laughter] So, anyway, they got a Meritorious Unit Commendation for that, Presidential Citation, yes. That was an exciting time. So, then, after the weather got better, we were going to go into Germany, start the big push. So, we went up to a town called Hottviller, that was in front of the Maginot Line and between the Maginot Line and the Siegfried Line. The Germans had built a line, too, on the other side. All of these villages between the two lines had been evacuated in 1939, because that was going to be the combat zone. They got rid of all the people. So, these towns were kind of flattened and we stayed in the town there, but the Germans held the hills around it, so, they could see everything that moved down there and they were up there with their mortars. So, they kept dropping in shells all the time made it very uncomfortable. It was a nice day, sunny day, just like this; well, not as warm, of course, because it was, like, yes, March. So, I went out for a stroll and they started dropping in these rounds and I didn't have a helmet on and it's not healthy not to wear a helmet. My helmet was back where I was bunking, but there was a German helmet lying there in the street, and I debated, "Do I put that helmet on and save myself that way or will my buddies shoot me, thinking I'm a German?" [laughter] So, I hightailed it back to where the helmet was. We also found out, this house was built back into the hillside, the stable was down below ground level and the living level was even with the back of the house, in the hill. We walked around behind it and there was a five-hundred-pound dud bomb wedged up against the back of the house. A five-hundred-pound bomb is the size of a fifty-gallon hot water heater, [it would] take out a whole block. So, we moved out of that house, because, if one of those rounds had landed near there, it would have set it off, would have finished it. So, then, we went into Germany from there, got into Germany, very little resistance. The Germans were pulling back, a bunch of them were surrendering. There were a lot of displaced persons that had been taken into Germany to run the factories and mines, the slave laborers and things like that, all needing food and all wanting to join us. German soldiers came up and surrendered and said, "Where do we go enlist?" They were ready to enlist with us to go fight the Russians, because they thought the Russians were the main enemy, not the United States. So, anyway, we kept going, wound up in a town on the Rhine, basically near the Rhine, which had been the Nazi Party headquarters for the district, a very imposing building, very nice architecture, spacious rooms, had a wine cellar that must have had ten thousand bottles in it. So, I had a jeep with a trailer. The trailer was used to haul camouflage nets and things like that, which we had never used. So, I unloaded those and we loaded the trailer with wine, schnapps, brandy and champagne and [laughter] took that with us from then on. I remember an incident. That building was used as the regimental headquarters and the regimental headquarters always had a guard posted out front that had a beat, back and front, across the entrance. Well, the guard had a bottle of wine down at that end and a bottle of

wine down at that end. So, he'd march his beat, take a sip, about face, march his beat the other way, take a sip, about [face], back and forth. Well, he'd been doing that quite awhile when the Colonel drove up in his jeep. By that time, the soldier was carrying the bottle, instead of leaving it. He carried it, and instead of saluting the Colonel, he said, "Colonel," he says, "have a drink," and the Colonel says, "I don't mind if I do." [laughter] He took a big swig and went in. [laughter] Also, that place was a warehouse for German Nazi uniforms. These were brand-new, [had not been] given out, I guess. It was a warehouse with new stuff. The lieutenant I was driving, his family owned a theatrical costuming business in Chicago, so, we spent a couple of days packing up big crates of these things and shipping them off as war booty to his father. His father put them in stock and they were used in the movie, they made a movie called *Stalag 17*, or something like that. It was a play in New York [first]. Those uniforms were the ones they used. Yes, they were authentic, yes.

SI: Were there other cases of soldiers hunting for souvenirs?

EW: Oh, guys helped themselves. If they saw a camera they wanted, they took it. They saw something they wanted, they took it. They figured it was the booty of war, yes. So, they tried to make themselves comfortable. Now, the Germans, they had big signs that said, "*Wer plündert wird geschossen?*," says, "Whoever loots will be shot." Now, those were instructions for the German Army, but our guys couldn't read German, so, they did what they did, what they had to.

SI: Were you ever able to use your German language skills?

EW: Oh, absolutely. I became kind of an unofficial translator for the group. Yes, I remember one incident. Oh, let's see, we had a German prisoner dig a latrine, a slit trench, which is about six feet long, this wide and about that deep. He was terrified. He thought he was digging his own grave, and I had to explain to him what it was for. "Not a grave; it was for relieving yourself," yes. I remember that. Another time I remember, they had a German prisoner that they thought had useful information, but he wasn't talking. So, they told him, "You can either talk to us or we can give you to the French, and they will probably be able to get you to talk." So, he wouldn't talk. So, they put him in the jeep, I drove, and an officer came with him. So, we drove over to the line between the French troops and the American troops. A French soldier was there. The officer, I guess, spoke some French, talked to him, told him the situation and he said, "We want to give this prisoner to you, because he won't tell us anything. He's just kept his mouth shut." The French soldier said, "I'll take care of him." [laughter]

SI: He brought up his gun.

EW: He was going to shoot him, yes, so that, then, the guy started talking, yes. He didn't want to go to the French. So, that's the only psychological torture I ever saw. I never saw any prisoners mistreated. They were treated as human beings, I'm glad to say, but I guess we don't do that anymore, which really angers me. So, anyway, yes, I was unofficial translator. After the war, we settled in a town and there was an Italian ice cream maker in town and they had me work out a deal with him where they provided dehydrated milk and canned fruits and things and he would make ice cream for the troops. He could keep, like, twenty-five percent for himself

and seventy-five percent would be given to us. So, he had all the machinery and everything to do it, so, that worked out very well, yes.

SI: I want to go back to the German soldier that you got to talk by bringing him to the French.

EW: Yes.

SI: What was happening that you wanted the information so badly?

EW: Well, we wanted to know what the Germans were doing, who was there, what troops, how many troops, how far, any tanks, any heavy artillery, anything. "What can you tell us about the group?"

SI: Was he an officer?

EW: Oh, I'd guess he was just like a sergeant or something like that, yes. Yes, I had one SS officer that I sat with in the jeep. I still don't know why he didn't grab the gun and shoot me. This was right like a week before the end of the war. The German Army had collapsed. This guy was a prisoner, an SS officer. I had him in my jeep. We're going to drive him over to a prison compound. I must have sat with him for twenty minutes, talking, and he still thought Germany was going to win the war. He was so much immersed in ideology, propaganda, he thought that they still were going to win. They had the secret weapon that's going to win the war for them. Now, why he didn't grab the rifle that was on the right there and hold me up or shoot me or something, I don't know.

SI: Did you carry a rifle with you or a carbine?

EW: Oh, yes, a rifle, yes. Now, I had some friends that were captured by the Germans, and this is a story I heard secondhand, but I knew some of the individuals. There were three or four of them, where Germans came out of the woods and happened to capture them. Their arms weren't handy or anything. The Germans came up with their rifles and this American soldier said, "*Nicht Scheizen?*," which means, "Don't shit." [laughter] "*Nicht Schiessen*," means, "Don't shoot," *Scheizen* and *Schiessen*. Well, the Germans laughed their heads off and they let them go. Yes, that was really something, yes. So, there was some humanity, even then, even in those days.

SI: Were you ever in a situation where you wound up ahead of the line?

EW: Oh, yes, yes. I was in front once in Rimling and I drove across many times. I had the road that was on the ridgeline, and the Germans were over there on the hills and we were here. The only road was that road, so, you had to vary your speed. It was like a shooting gallery. The Germans would try and shoot an artillery piece and pick you off. So, you had to keep varying speeds, so [that] they couldn't get a good fix on you, yes, and there were trucks that they'd hit alongside the road, blown up, burning, and so on. So, it was no fun, but we did it. It was a job, yes.

SI: Aside from the air attacks around the time of the New Year's Eve offensive, was the German *Luftwaffe* much of a threat to you?

EW: Not really, no, no, not really. America had, pretty much, command of the skies, but I did see my first jet airplane. It flew over Heidelberg and it had done some firing, but it didn't fire where I was, but it went so fast. We'd never heard of jets or anything like that, and we used to say, "They go so fast, it takes two people to see it. One to say, 'Here it comes,' and the other one to yell, 'There it goes,'" and they were probably flying, like, four hundred, five hundred miles an hour, yes. There were a lot of those jets parked in the woods alongside the *Autobahns*. The airframes were there; they were all missing the engines. They didn't have enough engines to fly them, but they must have had a big fleet. If they had engines for those things, they would have wiped out the American Air Force. The Air Force wouldn't have had a [chance] because those planes were so much faster and could climb higher and dive faster and everything. Yes, it would be like a kiddie car against a Porsche, yes. So, anyway, we were lucky there.

SI: When you first got into the line, in the Vosges Mountains battles, do you remember the first time that you came under fire or felt like you were in danger?

EW: Yes. Well, they were shelling the town where we were, Raon, [they] were shelling that. We were frequently [targeted]. Regimental headquarters was within easy artillery range and, sometimes, within mortar range, within a mile or so. So, they used to like to drop mortar rounds in, never close enough for machine-gun fire, except from airplanes, yes. [I] didn't see too many dead Germans, I don't know if they were picked up pretty fast, never saw very many dead Americans. I remember when we got bombed in that Army camp, where the guys were killed. There were guys there from reconnaissance, from the Second French Armored Division, and, of course, they'd been in the war for years. It was noontime. They were eating their lunch and here were these guys, steaming, bodies lying there, steaming, because it was December, cold out, hot body steam, the blood. So, it didn't bother them at all. So, they're used to that sort of thing. Now, I didn't particularly like it, but those French guys did us a favor. They brought us wine. They knew where the wine was [laughter] and they had a reconnaissance car. So, they filled it up and brought it back for us, yes.

SI: Were you ever in a situation where you had to fire your rifle?

EW: No, I never shot at anybody, never. I was too busy driving the jeep. I've been fired at. I remember, we went into one town where there's street-to-street fighting and we had to find the headquarters. We had to leave the jeep, it was too hot, and the Lieutenant leaped out and said, "Follow me," and we ran up the street, with all the sounds of firing, and so on. Funny thing is, you have a leader like that, you don't think about yourself. I had no fear; I just went. If I had to go out there by myself, I probably would have been scared to death. That shows the importance of leadership, and that's why they needed so many infantry lieutenants, because they didn't last long. They were always picked off and, of course, the officers did not want to be saluted. They didn't wear any symbol of their rank, because they were sure targets. They dressed just the way the common soldier did, so [that] they couldn't be picked off.

SI: I imagine they would be looking for your officer in particular, because he carried messages back and forth.

EW: Yes, right, sure, but he looked like anybody else.

SI: Would you usually be with the same officer?

EW: I had two different officers over that period of time, Lieutenant (Lester) Essig, who was a Mormon, who sold me his liquor ration; he's the one that made me a chronic alcoholic. [laughter] No, he sold me a bottle of scotch or something, which I shared with my buddies. All of us were novices. We hadn't really tasted that stuff. We were, like, eighteen or nineteen years old. It wasn't fashionable, in those days, for teenagers to get drunk and, let's see, the other one was a guy, yes, who had been raised from [the ranks]. He'd got a battlefield commission and he was kind of arrogant. I didn't really like him, arrogant, as though he were really something great, but he wasn't as good as the other guy, yes, and I think he's still around. I see his name on the membership roster, yes.

SI: How would a typical mission go, in doing this liaison work?

EW: Well, usually, make a couple runs out to the battalion headquarters a couple times a day, bring the situation map up-to-date, and so on, find out what's going on, and so on, and then, there was a run at night, where you took all of these reports back to the division headquarters. That was usually after dark, after all the reports were in from all over. Every company had to write up reports for casualties and the situation, and so on, effective men available, and so on, ammunition situation, and, of course, they were all rosy, [laughter] the reports, not necessarily real, which is the Army for you.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: When you were not heading up to the front with the liaison officer, where did you spend most of your time?

EW: Where I was billeted, headquarters, yes.

SI: You were at headquarters most of the time.

EW: Yes.

SI: What were your living conditions like?

EW: Well, we always moved into houses that were requisitioned. So, I was only out under the stars the very first night in the line, and then, the headquarters moved into a building and the support troops moved with it and were close by, in houses, yes, and the houses were generally vacant, because the people had moved out. They didn't want to be involved in shooting, and so on. Yes, so, the houses were there.

SI: Was there ever a case where you had to ask somebody to leave because they refused to leave their homes?

EW: No, I had nothing to do with that. Maybe the quartermaster did or something.

SI: Did you ever have occasion to interact with either French or German civilians?

EW: Oh, yes, sure, a lot of times. The French were very glad to see us, very, extremely happy, yes, because they'd been under the Germans' thumb for so long, and so, they welcomed us, were very friendly, and so on, and we shared rations with them. We gave them things to eat, and so on, because we had very good supply. They'd been on tight rations for years. I remember giving an old man some bread, white bread. He said he hadn't had any white bread in five years. It was terrible bread that they had to eat. As a matter-of-fact, the Germans learned how to make bread using sawdust as a filler, somehow chemically treated, so that you could get something out of it. It must have tasted terrible, yes.

SI: What about in Germany?

EW: In Germany? Well, the Germans were all over the place. Yes, sure, you ran into them every day, sure. Yes, I had more contact, of course, with Americans than with the Germans, but we started dating some of the girls after the war, which they didn't want us to do, but you can't stop nature. The Germans were generally; they didn't act as enemies, they didn't act quite as friends, but they just kind of accepted it as it went and I think a lot of them were glad to get rid of Hitler. Of course, they were all glad the war was over, because they lost practically a whole generation of young men in the war.

SI: You mentioned that your jeep was pretty shot up when you turned it in.

EW: Yes.

SI: Was it mostly from artillery or were there other kinds of enemy fire?

EW: Artillery, yes, shrapnel, yes. The little pieces fly off at the speed of sound or more, go through anything, yes. Thank God I wasn't in it at the time.

SI: What would happen when you came under artillery attack while you were driving the jeep? Would you stop the jeep and get into a trench?

EW: Well, if you're out in the open near a house, you'd go in the house, go into the cellar, if it had a cellar, and they all had cellars, and the way the things were built, they could blow the roof off and the cellar'd still be sound, yes. They're built like a fortress.

SI: Was it more sporadic fire that you would come under? Were you ever under sustained shelling?

EW: Sporadic. Yes, the Germans didn't like to waste ammunition. We had a lot more ammunition than they had. I think we were harder on them than they were on us. Well, the hottest artillery I ever felt was crossing the Neckar River. The town was in a bowl. The Neckar River went across one end of it and there was a horseshoe-shaped set of hills around it, and then, the town down in here. [In] the town, there was house-to-house fighting, but the Germans were up in the hills and they saw everything going on, so, they could direct their fire any place. Also, the river was there and we'd had to build a bridge or get troops across, so, the engineers were trying to build these pontoon bridges and, of course, the Germans watched. When the bridge was about ninety percent finished, they'd blow it up, and then, the engineers would start building another bridge, yes, and I just happened to be, our post was right down within half a block of where the bridge was, so, that was a pretty hot spot. Yes, pretty hot spot, and it was the only time I ever experienced TOT. TOT means "time over target." Say you have twenty-five cannons all aiming at the same target; they're all fired in such a sequence that all of the shells arrive at the same time. So, twenty-five of them explode at the same time, over your heads. Yes, so, each gun is fired slightly differently, depending on the range and the velocity of the [gun]. It's all calculated and that was very unpleasant, yes.

SI: It was all aimed at the bridge.

EW: Yes; well, that bridge area. So, finally, they brought up a smoke battalion. These were people that used to have these smoke generators at the ports. They brought them up to make a screen, to cover the bridge building, and it was a company, or battalion, of blacks. They'd never been in combat. They didn't like it one bit, and, I remember, the Captain, one of the captains, going around, yelling, "Sergeant, where are you, Sergeant? Let's get these troops up there," and I guess they finally did, but they never got the wind to cooperate. The wind always went the wrong way.

SI: What would you do during a river crossing operation?

EW: Well, we waited until it was built, and then, we crossed, yes. I had no part in the building or anything like that.

SI: You would usually go over on a pontoon bridge.

EW: Yes.

SI: You would not go over in a small boat or anything like that.

EW: No, no, a bridge, yes, with a vehicle. The engineers were pretty good at building these bridges. They had so-called Bailey bridges, a British design. It was a readymade set of trusses and roadway that they could pick up, it was on a trailer, put it across a stream maybe thirty feet wide, yes, and they were strong enough to carry heavy tanks and things like that, and then, the wider rivers, they built pontoon bridges, and the Germans always tried to blow those things up. Yes, we crossed the Rhine River at Mannheim on a pontoon bridge, because the Germans had blown all of the other bridges. We got to Heidelberg and Heidelberg was virtually unscathed, except one bridge was blown by the Germans. The rumor was that there's a lot of property

owned by the British Royal Family, or relatives of theirs, because they stem from Germany, from Hanover, yes. The Windsor line came from Hanover, back in, like, [the eighteenth century]. King George III, I think, was Hanoverian. So, they said that the city was spared because of all the property owned by the royals, yes. It was a nice city, university town, just great.

SI: Did you ever have occasion to interact with other Allied forces?

EW: The French, right, yes. That's it.

SI: You mentioned the French. What about the English?

EW: Yes. After the war was over, after the European War was over, the division was slated to go to Japan, and so, we had spent about a month getting everything packed up, ready to put on a ship, ready to go to the port, and so on, when the war ended, and so, immediately, the plans were scrapped. We didn't go. So, they then deactivated the division and some people that had enough seniority went home, others had to stay on active duty, and I went to a military police company out of Kassel, in Germany, and that was right up near the northern end of the American Zone. The British had the zone north of that. So, our job, my job, was to, with another MP, patrol the *Autobahn* from Hanover up to the port at Bremen, go back and forth, look for Americans in trouble, that sort of thing. Well, we found a truckload of tires, big Army truck, with maybe a hundred tires in it, brand-new tires, that had gone off the road and into an orchard. It came down a hill and there was a bend. It didn't make the bend. It went off. So, we went into town, went to the city hall, got the *Bürgermeister*, the mayor, to put a guard on the truck, so [that] nobody could loot it. Next morning, we got American troops, they brought what they called a "Dragon Wagon," which was like a big tank recovery thing, and it had a big winch on it. They pulled the thing back up on the road. So, we're going to drive it back to the American Zone. So, we took off. I was driving the jeep, my buddy was driving the truck. We were doing fine until we came to the first town and he found out why it went off the road; there were no brakes. [laughter] So, he went through this town at about fifty miles an hour, scattering people and everything. After a couple of hours, we stopped at a roadside rest. The Army ran, like, restaurants along the road for troops, stopped there, parked the truck, went in and were having lunch or something, and this guy came running in, looking for his truck. People had his truck. He was the driver. He'd gone back to get help, left the truck there. We found the truck, thought it was abandoned. So, anyway, we gladly gave it back to him, but we had to stay overnight with the British troops. We stayed with them. They served us "a spot of tea." I've always thought the spot was unusual. The cups were about that big, yes. We had a typical English meal, which was not too good, actually, for supper, slept there overnight. They gave us blankets and things, very, very gracious. Yes, that was my brush with the British.

SI: What would you say was your most terrifying moment or closest call?

EW: I'd say almost running ahead of the American lines and into the Germans in Rimling. I was no further than maybe a hundred yards away from them and they were coming in. You could hear the vehicles, the noise and the clicking of boots. The Germans had hobnailed boots and they made a distinctive sound. You could hear them for quite a distance, yes. Yes, that was terrifying. That bombing run was pretty terrifying, too.

SI: On New Year's?

EW: Yes. Let's see, what else, during the war? It's pretty scary doing that. We made a run once. The sergeant major who was in charge of the map, situation map, he told us how to get up to the place we wanted to go, the battalion headquarters. There'd been some shifting in the line, so, he pointed out the road we were to take. Well, the road we were to take was about a half a mile in front of where the line had pulled back to. So, we were way out in no-man's land, driving across. [The] Americans are several hundred yards that way and the Germans a couple hundred yards that way. So, we didn't feel comfortable there, but we got through. Nobody fired a shot at us. I don't know why. Sometimes, you just can't account for these things, like those prisoners that said, "*Scheizen*" instead of... [laughter]

SI: You mentioned that your division uncovered some displaced persons that had been put to slave labor.

EW: Yes.

SI: Did you see or interact with any of them?

EW: Oh, yes. They wanted to join the Army, fight the Germans. They hated the Germans, and they had a USO club in Heidelberg and they had a Russian balalaika orchestra. They must have had, like, twenty people playing different sizes and shapes of balalaika, never heard any music like it [before]. It was great. [I] wish I could buy a disc or something with that music, but they made some money that way, so [that] they could make a living. Then, there were lot of ones, there were quite a few, that did not want to go back, because they figured, if they went back, they would be executed, would be shot for having collaborated with the enemy and worked in their factory or so on. So, they did not want to go. They had to be rammed into these cars to take them back and I thought that was pretty bad.

SI: Was that after the war was over, that you had to send them back?

EW: Yes.

SI: What condition were they in when you first saw them?

EW: Well, the ones I saw; I didn't see any concentration camp people. The ones I saw were poorly dressed, shabbily dressed, but they seemed to have had enough food. They weren't emaciated or anything like that.

SI: They were mostly Russian.

EW: Yes, Russian. A lot of the soldiers in the latter part of the war, they were not German, they were Bulgarians, Romanians, Hungarians, and so on, and they were the first to surrender, say, "I'm not German," "*Non-soldat*," yes, "Bulgaria," "Hungary." So, I guess we took it easier on them, because they had been drafted in. They didn't want to be in it.

SI: Do you remember where you were when you heard of the surrender and V-E Day?

EW: Yes. I was in the third floor room of an apartment house overlooking the Rhine River, but on this side of the river, haven't crossed yet, and I had my jeep full of wine and things and we celebrated. We had a big party that night, in that room up there, and the only time I ever threw bottles out of a window to crash down below, yes. No, I remember that very well. We had a great time. We all breathed a sigh of relief that we'd made it this far.

SI: When you talk about your buddies at this phase, are you talking about your fellow drivers in the liaison work or were you still in touch with the people in the mortar group?

EW: Oh, some of them. Let's see, I was in touch with two of the drivers. One of them died about three years ago. The other one lives in the Grand Tetons. He's retired, been retired since he was about fifty-five. He's been retired for thirty years up there, delightful place, and he's okay, and I'm in touch with one, two, three people from the company. They're still alive and doing fairly well, and they're all in their early or mid-eighties, generally, early eighties, because we were the students that were brought in. We were young, just wet-behind-the-ears. So, they're in their early eighties now. A lot of the other veterans that [were] regular Army, they're in the mid to late eighties now, if they survived this long. Yes, so, we were the young bunch, the kids.

SI: During the combat campaigns, who were you friendly with?

EW: Oh, the guys I drove with all the time, because we went as a bunch, we bunked together.

SI: Did you ever get a chance to go on leave or any kind of furlough?

EW: I went once, in the United States, before we went overseas. I had, like, a week off. I went home to New Jersey. Then, overseas, in Europe, the major I was driving after the war; no, the war was still going on. That's right, it was April. He got assigned to go to a special command school in Paris and he said, "Ed, why don't you drive me?" So, I drove him from, like, Heidelberg, or something like that, all the way over to Paris. He went to school and I had the week off, and so, I explored Paris on my own. It was really great, no sign of the war there, yes.

SI: What did you do in Paris?

EW: Oh, I rode the Metro, went to the museums, things like that, had a portrait taken, bought souvenirs, things like that, went out to some of the night clubs that were running, yes, had a great time. Then, I had another leave after the war was over. I went to what had been the German Army ski school, down in the Alps, had been taken over by the US Army, and I had a week's furlough there, learned to ski there, as a matter-of-fact. Yes, it was pretty neat. It was up in the Alps, plenty of snow. They had the (head?) tows, some tows, and things like that, had all the equipment and clothing, and so on, drove the jeep down with a couple of other guys and we had a ball, had a great time, yes. While I was in Germany then, I liked skiing so much, I bought a pair of skis and poles and the equipment and sent it all home, because that was a good place to buy skis in those days, yes.

SI: What was the winter of 1944-1945 like for you?

EW: The winter? Oh, that was the coldest winter on record in about a hundred years. I got frostbitten feet, because the shoes were too tight. We took a bath, took a shower. I went, like, sixty days without a shower. Then, they brought in these shower units where they had these big boilers that heated water, brought in tons of fresh clothing. You threw your old clothing in the dirty pile and got clean stuff, took a shower, came out, put on the clean clothes. Somebody'd taken my boots, and so, I don't know whether he took them by mistake or what, but I grabbed another pair and they were too tight and, when it got so cold, sitting in a jeep you have poor circulation in the feet, I woke up in the middle of the night and my feet were killing me. I had frostbite. So, the regimental doctor wanted to send me back to the hospital and I refused to go, because I knew what would happen if I went to the hospital. If I went to the hospital, then, I'd stay there a couple of weeks, maybe, then, they'd send me into a replacement depot, no guarantee that you'd go to your original unit. I might have wound up a rifleman in some strange unit, cannon fodder. So, I said I'd stay with my friends and see it through, and I did and I got over it, but I lost all the skin off of both feet and they itched like crazy, yes, but that was better than the alternative.

SI: Did you ever have to bring replacements into your unit? You mentioned that three of your fellow drivers were hit.

EW: Yes, but they were still able to move, yes. One of them had a fifty-caliber machine-gun bullet come down through the side of the jeep, through his seat cushion, hit the tubular frame of the seat and the top of the gas tank he was sitting on. By that time, it had spent its force. All he did was get shrapnel, some of the copper jacket off the bullets, in his thigh, but, if it had gone into the gas tank, he would have gone up in flames. That would have been the end. I saw that happen, saw the attack. I was maybe a half mile behind him and I saw this plane, up in the air, all of a sudden, go into a strafing run. It was my friend up front and, well, he was able to drive the thing back, didn't kill the engine. It went through some of the sheet metal, and so on, but didn't hit any vital parts.

SI: Nobody stopped. He did not have to stop to get treatment.

EW: Oh, I guess he went to the medics, soon as he got back to the unit, yes.

SI: However, you did not deviate from your path.

EW: No, no, there was only one road. You had to go that way.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: In general, how well do you think you were supplied, in terms of food, gasoline, spare parts, anything you needed?

EW: Oh, we had basically what we needed, yes. We didn't have warm enough winter clothing to begin with and we didn't get the kind of boots we needed for the slushy, snowy conditions until halfway through the winter. They were shoepacks. L.L. Bean sells them now, rubber bottoms with the leather tops sewed on, so [that] you could walk through slush and mud and all that sort of stuff, yes, and then, we got reversible, down-filled jackets towards the end of winter, which was pretty late, but they were nice and warm. They were well-made, beautiful, but too late. We never hurt for gasoline and never hurt for food, never went hungry.

SI: Is there anything that I skipped over that you would like to talk about in the combat phase?

EW: Yes. No, I don't think so.

SI: I noticed on your survey that you received a Bronze Star. Was that for an action in combat?

EW: That's called, "For meritorious action in combat," yes. I was under fire frequently, yes, so, they gave it to me.

SI: Once you were in the Army of Occupation, how did your job change?

EW: Let's see, first of all, we went to Ulm, and then, south of Ulm, which was down almost to the Alps, southern Bavaria, and we had a very pleasant time over in that little town, had a big swimming pool and we swam. We didn't have drilling to do. The Army figured they had to keep us busy, so, they brought in some textbooks and things, gave classes, things of that sort, and we got to know the local people, and so on, yes.

SI: What kind of classes did you take?

EW: Oh, they had classes in math and English and things like that, sort of basic, fundamental [subjects], arithmetic, for a lot of guys who didn't know. By that time, it was a mixed bag. Some guys were pretty uneducated or illiterate, others were [educated]. My good friend, Bob Kruedner, when they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, he thought, he said, "They must have figured out how to concentrate U-235 into fissionable mass." So, that tells you he knew something. He was no dummy, yes. He knew what they did.

SI: Were you expecting that you would have to go to the Pacific?

EW: Oh, absolutely. We were packed up, ready to leave for the port. Yes, we would have gone straight on around, not through the States, would have gone all the way to Japan.

SI: How did you and your friends react to, first, the bomb, then, V-J Day?

EW: We rejoiced mightily, I'll tell you. Yes, we still had stuff in the trailer, [laughter] and the Army set up nightclubs. They hired magicians and dancers and entertainers and all that sort of thing, comedians, and they had regular shows and they had snack foods and things like that, and that was fun, and they sent people out skiing and they sent them back to Paris and they sent them to London, on leave, and things like that, try and break the monotony.

SI: You really did not have any daily duties related to military activity.

EW: No, that had pretty well quieted down, yes.

SI: You did that for about a year.

EW: Oh, from; let's see, the war ended in June, June 8th, I think it was, or something like that.

SI: May.

EW: May?

SI: May 8th.

EW: May 8th, yes.

SI: To the following April?

EW: Yes.

SI: About eleven months.

EW: Yes. I left to go home, when was it? Yes, I think it was April, yes, April, to come home in '45, [1946], yes. Yes, they had some tremendous shows in Heidelberg. Heidelberg was a kind of a resort town and they had a big casino and a huge dance pavilion, and so on. They could hold hundreds of people and they'd get top-notch entertainment there and the entrance fee was like nothing, fifty cents or something like that, and they served drinks, not hard booze, but they'd get wine and beer and things like that, and that was fun, or they had some concerts and things. In Heidelberg, there was a huge amphitheater on top of one of the mountains outside the city, oh, I don't know, probably held a few thousand people and it had a stage and the kind of right shaped thing to project the sound and everything, and they'd have concerts up there, in the summer, pretty nice, and we dated these German girls. They were pretty nice girls, too. Yes, they were friendly and "mama" was always chaperoning those. She didn't trust soldiers. She didn't want their daughters going out. It's okay to entertain in the home, come over, that sort of thing. So, they kept a close watch on them. I often wonder what happened to those girls there.

SI: It must have been difficult, even with all these distractions, to maintain the unit discipline for eleven months.

EW: Well, we had regular duty we had to do, yes. Sure, we still did patrolling and all that and, oh, yes, we had regular duties. It was when you didn't have duties [that] you had to be kept busy, yes.

SI: How much time a day would the regular duties take?

EW: Oh, probably six hours or something like that, yes.

SI: What were you patrolling for?

EW: Well, soldiers that are fighting, civilians with problems with the military, or anything like that, black marketeers, people like that.

SI: Was the black market a big problem?

EW: Oh, well, that's the way the Germans existed. Their currency was no good any more, so, they'd go down, they'd trade off their cameras and everything, all jewelry, whatever they had, trade it off, and the medium of exchange was usually cigarettes, yes. Cigarettes had real value and Americans had a lot of cigarettes. We got a carton a week, or something like that, to make sure we got lung cancer, yes. So, I did take one man in who I thought was fairly old. He's probably in his fifties. I took him into headquarters, like I was supposed to, and these two sergeants took him in the backroom and beat him up, and I decided, "I'm never going to bring in another one again." It was uncalled for. This guy was trying to live and he should not have been touched. He should have maybe been read the riot act and sent on his way, and, maybe, the next day, he'd be there trading something else because he needed it.

SI: Did you see any mistreatments of Germans by GIs, other than that?

EW: Only one redneck from Georgia, like, his passion was beating up little boys. The boys would come and delve in the garbage cans to try and get food and he'd beat them up, tell them to leave, but they were just trying to find something to eat. Yes, we had very, very rich garbage cans, as you can imagine, the Americans, yes.

SI: When you say you were looking for soldiers fighting, were they afraid of holdouts or the "werewolves" [insurgents from the German Army, SS and Hitler Youth]?

EW: Oh, we didn't worry about "werewolves." I think that was more fiction than fact, yes. We did have to take guys in. If there was a curfew and, if you found a soldier out after curfew, you're supposed to bring him in to headquarters. I wasn't a very good policeman. I'd find one after curfew, I'd say, "Soldier, where's your barracks?" I'd get him in the jeep and I'd drive him back to his barracks and say, "Go on in." So, I would not make a good policeman. I thought the guys that beat up this man probably were the type that make better policemen. They were tougher on people, yes. Maybe it's their characteristic, yes.

SI: Was it strange, after being in combat against the Germans for five months, to, all of a sudden, be interacting with them every day and to form friendships?

EW: No. They were very much like us, common culture, probably ninety percent the same, language that has common roots, and so on. A lot of the cultural aspects are identical to here, slightly different. We fit together very well, yes, and, of course, none of them were Nazis, [laughter] and probably like here, we have a lot of people that are Democrats and Republicans who never have any party activities or anything, they're just registered, and they were all drafted

in the Army, except the SS. So, basically, they were like us. They were pulled into a war. Maybe they didn't want it. They probably thought they were right to begin with. God, the thing that was really bad, I was once sent to guard a German family. He had been some sort of a supervisor in a factory and there were some people who'd worked in the factory who had vowed to kill him and his family.

SI: Really?

EW: Yes. So, I was sent there with a submachine-gun. I stayed there forty-eight hours, guarding that family. So, I lived with them, basically, and one of them was, well, the father, who was the superintendent in the factory, his wife, a son who had been in the German Army and had been released as a prisoner and come home, and I guess there was a daughter there. Well, fortunately, the DP, the displaced person, never showed up. I don't know what I would have done if they'd really made an issue of it, probably would have had to shoot over their heads or something, to try and scare them away.

SI: The person who made the threat was one of the slave laborers.

EW: Slave laborers, yes. Yes, he was going to get that family, kill the whole bunch. He knew where they lived, was going to get them, and, of course, a lot of German soldiers wanted to enlist in the American Army. They thought we were foolish to stop. We should have just kept going against the Russians. Yes, they couldn't figure out why we didn't think Communism was such a threat to us, yes.

SI: Was that discussed at all among the troops, whether the Russians were a threat or not?

EW: No, no. I always thought, "Well, the Russians are friends now, because we've got a common enemy, but it's not going to stay that way," and I said, "Within twenty years, Russia is going to be our enemy and the Germans are going to be our friends. It's going to work its way around that way," and that's the way it worked, yes.

SI: When you were overseas, did you give any thought to what you would do after the war?

EW: Yes. I wanted to be an engineer, yes.

SI: Were you able to start looking into where you would go to school while you were in Europe or was that after you came back?

EW: Oh, after I came back. I applied to maybe four different universities, Temple, Rutgers, Brown and, oh, Rensselaer. Yes, there's one in Pennsylvania. What the hell's that called?

SI: Drexel?

EW: Not Drexel, no, no. It's up further north, near the Hudson River, where you cross near the Delaware Water Gap. What's the name of that town there?

SI: Scranton?

EW: Not Scranton. It's practically on the river. Anyway, it's a well-known school, [Lehigh?]. Anyway, I got accepted at; well, the people at Temple said I'd have to wait until the winter semester. Let's see; Brown wrote back and said, "Why did I list them as number two?" I'd listed Rutgers as number one. So, I wrote back to them, I said, "Well, I put Rutgers number one because I thought I had a better chance of being accepted in the New Jersey State University." I was so naïve. I should have written number one on all of the applications, yes, but dumb me, I told the truth, yes. So, anyway, meanwhile, Rutgers came in with an acceptance. A couple of days later, an acceptance came from Brown. By that time, I had already signed up with Rutgers and wrote back to Brown, said, "Sorry, too late," yes, and that probably changed my whole life. I met a whole different group of people and everything, probably wouldn't be here, be some place else.

SI: When did you first learn about the GI Bill?

EW: When we were overseas, yes. They publicized it, yes. It was a good deal. I think the GI Bill allowed the education of a lot of people who normally would not have developed their talents and intelligence a lot, and I think that the "golden age" of the '50s, '60s, the '70s, and so on, that was the result of this massive education program. I think it really paid off for the country. A lot of people became educated, were doing things they never would have done. They would have been driving a tractor or a backhoe or something. Anyway, they learned professions and higher skills, and so on, yes, very good.

SI: Do you think you would have gone to college if not for the GI Bill?

EW: Well, my sister went to college. She graduated from, [what was] known as NJC then, New Jersey College for Women. It's now part of Rutgers. What's it called now?

SI: It is becoming a residential campus, [now named Douglass Residential College].

EW: Yes. Well, it was then, too. She lived on campus. They had individual houses, yes.

SI: Like Gibbons and Jameson.

EW: Yes, and each house had a name, yes, and she graduated. She went through on full scholarships all the way. I probably would have gone to college, but it would have been tough, because the family, my mother was not college-oriented, my brothers, my brother, Art, hadn't gone to college, my sister had, of course, but I didn't have any money. I had the little bit that I saved while I was in the Army, but she didn't have any resources and my brothers were tied up with families and things. So, I don't know, probably fifty-fifty. I might have stayed in the family business or gone out and done something else.

SI: Did you come to Rutgers right away in the fall?

EW: Yes, sure.

SI: You lived on campus.

EW: Yes. Well, the first year, I commuted and I decided that's no way to do it. So, then, I lived in Ford Hall. Is Ford Hall still there?

SI: Yes.

EW: It was nice and convenient. The engineering building was there and all of the sciences and everything were close by. The dining hall was down the road apiece. Is that dining hall still there?

SI: Was the dining hall in Winants or the other direction?

EW: Well, you went down towards where the gym, gymnasium, had been, and then, across the street and down between there and the road that ran along the river.

SI: It is in the same general area. I think it is in a different building now.

EW: Yes, yes, it was pretty big.

SI: In that area, they have closed off all the streets and made it all a big complex.

EW: Yes. Oh, that's good, yes.

SI: For your first year, you commuted from Red Bank.

EW: Red Bank, yes. Yes, there were three of us, commuted together. We shared driving, and so on. So, that worked out pretty well, but I was missing out on a lot, not being on campus, yes.

SI: You enrolled in the College of Engineering right away.

EW: Right away, yes, and I enrolled in ROTC, too, because I had enough of being in the Army as an enlisted man. So, they had the Signal Corps ROTC, so, I got a lieutenancy in the Signal Corps, yes, which was good.

SI: What was the Signal Corps ROTC training like?

EW: Well, you had regular classes every week, just a regular class, and you had days for drilling, out in the field, and then, you had summer camp. You had to go to Fort Monmouth and work in the labs, learn the equipment there, and then, have field training, field exercises, and so on, which was all very good, yes, and then, you got your bars, your lieutenant bars. So, I was on active duty, taking a summer course, when I graduated, and the week after I appeared at Fort Monmouth, the Korean War broke out. So, the Army was short of Signal officers and they were beating the bushes to find enough Signal officers. They had a whole bunch of us there at school and, [when] they came [to] the end of the course, they gave us our walking papers and we took

off. Yet, the other side of the Army was looking for officers and we were being turned loose. I can only figure out the Army is such that the right hand never knows what the left hand is doing, yes. So, anyway, I stayed in the Reserve then for about ten years, never got called up to active duty, yes.

SI: Did you go to weekly meetings, once a month?

EW: No, this was the Inactive Reserve, yes.

SI: You mentioned that, academically, Rutgers was a bit more of a challenge than high school.

EW: Oh, absolutely, yes.

SI: Why did you settle on mechanical engineering?

EW: Because I had an aptitude for it, yes. I thought I had an aptitude, yes.

SI: Do any of your professors or classes stand out in your memory?

EW: Professor Slade. He taught calculus and advanced math and we always called his class "Slade's Mystery Hour," because he would start at the left-hand side of the blackboard, start writing formulas and things, lecturing over his shoulder as he wrote. When he got to the other end of the board, class was over and he walked out. So, calculus was tough. It took awhile to really catch on, but he knew what he was doing. I think he was just not good at teaching, but I learned it, finally, yes. I caught on. One day, it just dawned on me. Well, I'd have to look at the yearbook to resurrect the names. Yes, the German professor was very good, yes, German professor. Chemistry prof was good. Thermodynamics was a course I didn't like. That was a tough one. Electrical engineering, we took courses in that. That was pretty good. Yes, all-and-all, I thought I had a good education there, I think as good as anybody I've worked with over the years that had gone to other schools.

SI: I have also been told that it was a very demanding curriculum, with a much heavier course load than, say, a liberal arts education, with labs on the weekends.

EW: Yes. Well, I was busy having a good time the first two years. Junior year, the Dean called me in and he says, "You're on my list. Shape up or ship out." So, I took it to heart. Senior year, I made the other dean's list, of outstanding students, yes. I figured it's time for me to buckle down and start working. So, I did, yes.

SI: What were you doing for fun in college?

EW: For fun? Oh, skiing and golfing and swimming and sail boating and things like that, drinking beer, going out with the boys, dating, things of that sort, yes, had a good time, never could stand economics, though. I never thought it was a science. They're trying to make a science out of something that can't be done, with their formulas and things, too many variables that you can't predict. So, that was a Monday morning, eight o'clock class. I usually missed it

and, about halfway through the course, the prof looked at me and he said, "There's a certain person in this course, if he doesn't shape up and show up to class regularly, on time, he's going to be flunked." [laughter] He was looking straight at me. So, I took it to heart, but I never enjoyed it. I thought it was a waste of time.

SI: So, you're not an econ major.

EW: Actually, it was my minor, but I did economic history, which is different.

SI: Were you involved in any organizations or organized activities?

EW: Scabbard and Blade, which was the ROTC fraternity, yes, and, let's see, I was invited to join a fraternity, but, after living off campus and in Ford Hall for a year, I'd made too many friends that were not in the fraternity. I had a lot of friends that were in the fraternity, but they wanted me to join and I decided I just couldn't do it and get away from these other friends I'd made. So, I respectfully turned down the invitation, yes.

SI: Before the war, the fraternities were very important to social life at Rutgers.

EW: Yes.

SI: In that postwar period, were they important?

EW: Well, prewar, the people in the fraternities were basically eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one-year-olds. We veterans, we were twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, we've seen horrible things all over the world, we'd traveled, and so on; we had matured beyond that point. We were more interested in getting an education than partying. We'd done that, been there, done that.

SI: Would you say most of your friends were veterans or did you have a mix of veterans and traditional students?

EW: Oh, most of them were veterans, yes.

SI: Was it just because you were the same age or did you relate to each other more?

EW: Same age group, yes, just right to go to college and they'd been held back three or four years because of the war. They're ready to resume their lives, a normal living.

SI: Was there any friction ever between the veterans and the younger kids?

EW: No. Now, there may have been; I never noticed any, no.

SI: I have been told, you graduated in 1950, that in 1949, 1950, 1951, it was a very difficult time to get a job, because there were so many people pouring into the market.

EW: Right, exactly, yes.

SI: Did that compel you to go on for graduate school?

EW: Well, after finishing getting the bachelor's degree at Rutgers, I went to UC in Berkeley [for] a master's in engineering, and I stayed there one quarter and I decided that's not for me. I figured I was learning more and more about less and less, narrow specialization, and I didn't like that. I'm more a generalist. So, I took a leave of absence, which I'm still on. I suppose I could go back if I flashed that little postcard. [laughter] Anyway, I left the university and started looking for a job and, within a short period of time, I found a job with a Standard Oil subsidiary that was working for the Atomic Energy Commission. They were the ones that were architect engineers for the Livermore Radiation Lab, working in collaboration with the University of California at Berkeley, the rad [radiation] lab, and so, I worked there for about two years, and then, uranium, we'd been getting all the uranium from Africa and places [like that], they discovered uranium in Colorado. We had domestic sources now. So, the principal project at Livermore was to build a system to manufacture fissionable material. They built a model, a scale model, a shortened model, of a linear accelerator that was to have been a mile long, fifty feet in diameter, and fire this stuff down the length of that tube and convert it into, I guess, not plutonium, but uranium, enriched uranium, and, also, tritium, and this was a trial run. The overall plan was, once it was proved feasible, they were going to build this monster in Missouri and use the Missouri River to cool it, the whole river, yes, but, when they discovered uranium here, they no longer had to do that, and so, the project folded up. As soon as it folded, I started getting bored and everybody was complaining about not having enough to do, and so on, feeling unhappy. So, I resigned and went to work for a company that did steel manufacture of bridges, tunnels, tunnel liners, fractionating columns for refineries, pressure vessels, fired, unfired pressure vessels, all that sort of thing, and that was pretty interesting, yes, but it still wasn't right for me. So, I went to Stanford University. They had a special program at Stanford for vocational guidance, extensive testing, and then, they evaluated the tests, to try and locate your interests and your strengths, and so on, and they told me, "Your interests don't lie with big, heavy, coarse equipment. It's more precision, refined sorts of things, precision," and I had the strength of interest for engineering, for manufacturing and for sales and entrepreneurship. So, they recommended I come down the [San Francisco Bay Area] Peninsula here, where there was Hewlett-Packard, had already started business, there was a company that made klystrons, there was Ampex, who made magnetic recorders, that was a very early time for magnetic recorders, and several other companies here that did precision work. So, I interviewed and, finally, went to work for Ampex, as a mechanical engineer, designing recorders, specialized recorders. They built recorders for professional recording of sound. That was the opening of the business. Then, they built specialized recorders for instrumentation, for recording the output of instruments for airplanes. They'd fly an airplane and have all these transducers and things, bring it back to a recorder and record it, the stresses, strains, temperatures, whatever, and so, I stayed there from '63 to 1965, three years, and became chief mechanical engineer for that department, and then, I decided I wanted to move on and I went to work for a company called Memorex. They made magnetic tape discs, disc recorders and all that sort of thing, and became product manager for their instrumentation products and stayed there five years, including three years overseas in Europe, in England and Belgium. [I] took the whole family across, bought a house in England, lived in a small village. [We] were accepted by the locals, because we bought a house. We were

property owners, taxpayers, and so on. If we had rented a house, they would have cold-shouldered us, because they'd figure you're just a transient person. You're going to be here today, gone tomorrow, so, they wouldn't waste the effort to become friends and acquainted and involved. So, anyway, they opened up to us and we had a very, very nice time there. [We] came back for a year, didn't like what was happening here, thought we might emigrate to Australia, went to the consulate up in San Francisco, got the necessary papers, everything else, because, at that time, they had Kent State, the shootings up there, they had the riots in Watts, they had the riots in Chicago and all over. The country was really going to hell. So, we wanted no part of it, but, then, we decided we didn't want to leave all of our friends. They were all here. So, I started looking around some more. I found a company called Electronic Memories and Magnetics. They made computer memories and I went to work for them and we went back to Europe, to Belgium, for two years. [We] were based just outside of Brussels, had an office in Brussels and had agents in principal European countries, yes, and so, I ran that for two years, and then, came back and started a company here. Anyway, they were very interesting, because I did a lot of traveling, all over Western Europe, into Eastern Europe, things like that, traveled with my family, on vacations. They all traveled. English school vacations run from, oh, I guess the 1st of July up until about the middle of August, and so, the family would all pile in the car and they'd go someplace and I'd catch up with them. I'd schedule my business trips to touch base with them here and there. So, we had a great time, went to Eastern Europe with them, visited relatives there, noticed the difference between the system that was in place in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, versus Austria and Germany, and so on, and the Western Europe [bloc]. Even the kids, the young kids, noticed a difference, the presence of policemen, armed soldiers, on the streets, the checkpoints at the borders, the mirrors under the cars, the unloading of all the luggage, the counting of your money. You had to account for what you spent in the country. They counted it when you went in, they counted it when you came out and you had to have receipts covering the difference, to make sure you weren't feeding money to somebody that was anti-government or something, and then, you drove out and they had these huge concrete blocks in the lane, about six foot cubes, you'd have to steer around, then, there was another one, you'd have to steer around that, go through a zigzag course, and there were machine-gun towers overlooking these things and everything. We got into Austria and there was this elderly man, looked like he was probably in his sixties or seventies, with a green Austrian uniform, with the black lapels and the gold trim, and so on. We rolled down the window. He had a little guardhouse there, just him there. He said, "Passports, please." We gave him the passports. He looked at it, looked at us, he said, "Welcome to Austria," [laughter] and that was it. That made an impression on the kids, took us a half hour to get out of Czechoslovakia and five minutes to get into Austria, yes, and they saw ladies shoveling coal. The coal trucks would dump the load out in the street and the ladies that lived in the houses had to have a wheelbarrow or something and they'd shovel the coal in and move it in. The People's Republic was a great place to live. So, [oldest son] Ward said, when he came to high school here, went to school here, people were saying how good the Communist system was, he said, "You don't know. You've never seen it. You've never been there. Let me tell you what I saw," yes. So, anyway, that was interesting, part of their education.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Is there anything that we skipped over that you would like to add?

EW: Well, we came back after Belgium and, while we were in Belgium, we saw a lot of European-type wall system furniture. This is furniture that stands up against the wall, with a lot of drawers and shelves and things like that and things you pull out, like television sets and desks and tables and things of that sort, and beds, and we decided, "Let's start a factory to make those." So, we came back, left EM&M, rented a place that had been a cabinet shop and started building that European-type furniture, had a little showroom in front, and that was back in 1974, and kept the business up until three years ago [Eurodesign Modular Furniture]. It was sold to a competitor, yes, but we probably built, starting from scratch, like, the equivalent of maybe forty million dollars worth of furniture. That's located primarily here in the Bay Area, but we have furniture in Hawaii and Puerto Rico, back on the East Coast, in England. People saw it here and had it shipped to England. We were invited to build furniture for the Deputy Prime Minister of Indonesia, because his daughter went to Stanford. We built some stuff for her and they liked what they saw. They wanted us to come and we declined. We said, "It's too far away. You can't get it there." Well, he says, "We'll send a plane over, a freighter. We'll haul it back and we'll haul your installers back and we'll pay you, all that, and get them to install it," and so on, but I decided not to do it. These people, they're nice people, but their ethics are such, or their principles are such, that they don't feel a contract with an infidel is binding. We had to fight to get paid for the house up in Hillsborough, which is a posh area. It's like White Plains. The superintendent of the job was the girl's boyfriend. He was a Muslim and he felt he didn't have to pay us. Finally, after fighting for months, we talked to her. Well, she laid down the law to him. We finally got paid, but those people, especially at that level, they look at working people as dirt. We have no value, yes, completely different atmosphere than here. At least people that are basically moneyed, and so on, they're basically real people. They don't have the attitude of being several cuts above the people that make the country run. So, we turned it down, but it was a lot of fun. It was a great business. We enjoyed it. I met a lot of people, outfitted, remember Carl Djerassi? Does that name mean anything? He invented "the Pill," [birth control], Carl Djerassi. We outfitted his home. We outfitted his office overseas. He was a nice person. We did work for the Gettys. They're well-known in the oil business, yes, and a lot of people like that. We had a lot of people that were well-known in the country, but we built a product that they could identify with, because it was really top-rated. Nobody built anything better.

SI: It sounds pretty remarkable. Your career has taken many different twists.

EW: Yes. Well, I told you, I was a generalist. Yes, I was interested, and I'm still interested, in so many things, I can't keep up with it. I get such a flood of literature and stuff in. I'll read about three or four books at the same time, depending on where they are in the house, and I'm interested in just about everything, a lot of fun.

SI: I appreciate your time. Thank you very much for speaking with me today. You have really added a lot to our archives. This will conclude our interview. Thank you very much.

EW: Okay. If I had to go back and choose a university again, it would be Rutgers. [laughter]

SI: That is good to hear.

EW: Yes, right. Rutgers was good to me.

SI: You would not go with Brown.

EW: No, no.

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Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 8/28/08

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 9/14/08

Reviewed by Richard Wildanger 10/5/2022