

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Veteran's Name: Ernest Johannes

Interviewer: David Meyer (O'Shea)

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Transcriber: Carol Slezak

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Interviewer: What's your name, sir?

Ernest Johannes: Ernest Johannes. E-r-n-e-s-t. J-o-h-a-n-n-e-s.

Interviewer: And what company were you with?

Ernest Johannes: I was with Headquarters Company, Second Lieutenant, 379th Infantry.

Interviewer: That was my father's regiment, 2/379th. A few questions at the top. When you left, what was your highest rank?

Ernest Johannes: I was a staff sergeant, infantry.

Interviewer: What's your birth date?

Ernest Johannes: July 12, 1917.

Interviewer: What's your address?

Ernest Johannes: 1700 West Bender Road, Apt. 278, Glendale, Wisconsin, 53209. ...

Interviewer: Where were you born?

Ernest Johannes: I was born on the Horicon (CK) Marsh, which is in the vicinity of – it's in the southwest corner of the township of Chester, in Dodge County, which is a part of the Horicon Marsh.

Interviewer: What state is that?

Ernest Johannes: That's in Wisconsin.

Interviewer: What were your parents' names?

Ernest Johannes: Herbert and Sophie Johannes (PH).

Interviewer: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Ernest Johannes: Yes. I had two brothers and one sister. Daniel, Cyrus, and Alice (PH).

Interviewer: What did your father do for a living?

Ernest Johannes: There were several. It goes back a ways. Fundamentally he was in the navy as a boy apprentice during the Spanish-American War. Then later on he was discharged when he reached his 21st birthday. And he went into San Francisco where he served as a tug boat captain between San Francisco and Oakland, California. And after that he was always interested in flowers. He went back to Milwaukee and went in the florist business. It failed. And that was about the time he was married. So he did move — homesteaded on the Horicon Marsh, and that was a failure.

So, during World War I he went back to the navy yard in Bremerton, Washington, and he worked there as a rigger in the navy yard. I already had been born. And that failed, and he came back to Milwaukee, and he worked for International Harvester, saved together \$1,000, and bought a greenhouse establishment.

Interviewer: How did he do with that?

Ernest Johannes: He did fairly well. The business was labor intensive. First we worked – he had three small greenhouses, then we made what they call funeral designs. And I did the delivery after I reached age 16, and I continued until I was drafted into the army.

Interviewer: So that's what you were doing when you were drafted?

Ernest Johannes: Yes. Of course, I was going to college.

Interviewer: What college were you going to?

Ernest Johannes: Marquette University. I had already gotten my bachelor's degree. Business Administration. Then when I concluded with that my dad said, You always wanted to go to law school, why don't you go? So I went on to law school, where I graduated in 1942. Did quite well in the law school. I was admitted to practice the law June 1st, 1942.

Interviewer: And when did they call you into the service?

Ernest Johannes: July 18th, 1942. It was only about six days after [laughs] my 25th birthday.

[TIME 5:46]

Interviewer: Holy Cow. And where did you go?

Ernest Johannes: Well, I was drafted in Milwaukee. Immediately that day we got uniforms, and we were transmitted to Fort Sheridan. From Fort Sheridan we went by train to ... Austin, Texas, where I became a member of the 95th Infantry Division.

Interviewer: So was that near Fort Swift?

Ernest Johannes: Yes, Camp Swift. It's Fort Swift now, I guess.

Interviewer: So you were there pretty much when they started it.

Ernest Johannes: I actually was. And I took part in the first proceeding, which was the parade. I remember parading that I was in the center rank, and it smelled like we were in a horse barn. But that was the inaugural start as far as the division was concerned.

Interviewer: I heard from someone else about that parade, but they forgot to tell me how it smelled.

Ernest Johannes: So then we had the basic training. We were practically confined – the barracks were spanking new and we actually had beds, double deckers, and we were issued sheets, blankets. And we did have – we were asked to – let me get this straight. There were two things: they wanted us to hang up our clothes on the racks, but they didn't have any hangers.

Interviewer: So what did you do?

Ernest Johannes: I can't remember. But I remember that happened [laughs]. Then the second thing they wanted us to do was to take the casings (CK) on the windows off. We didn't have any equipment to do that [laughs].

I tell you – of course we were confined to that camp. We had to exercise every day. And also ran a couple of miles.

Interviewer: Was that hard on you?

Ernest Johannes: Well, I worked in the greenhouse. I was 25 years old, and I was in good physical condition. So it wasn't that hard on me. A lot of the men, they griped. So we got the training there. Actually it was very simple. We did go out on the rifle range, and I managed to bolo.

Interviewer: Does bolo mean you don't hit the target at all?

Ernest Johannes: You might hit it once [laughs].

Interviewer: My dad had a friend in the service who they called Bolo Davis, because he boloed too.

Ernest Johannes: Well, I was a bolo [laughs]. ...

Interviewer: My wife has a question I like to ask. What's it like that first night in the barracks? You're with all these strangers, from all parts of the country. Is it strange? Do you get along right away?

[TIME 10:00]

Ernest Johannes: Well, my age 25 had a lot to do with that. Because I was normal. I didn't gripe. I did what I was instructed to do. So it wasn't as hard on me. Although some of the men actually sat and cried. Others – there was a lot of grumbling. But I don't believe in grumbling. Let the other guys do it [laughs].

To tell you something else about it, we had men from everywhere, from every age. They brought anybody, I guess – anyone who had his heart beat. And we had one guy in my outfit who was from Green Bay, and he was in jail. And there was some kind of offer that prisoners in jail could be released if they agreed to join the army. We had several men that were WWI veterans, and others who were deserters from the regular army. This one man was a drunk, age 50 years old. And he came to my company and became the acting sergeant.

Eventually he got in with us – this was a little later – after we moved from Camp Swift where we got basic training we moved to Fort Sam Houston. He got drunk, went into town one day, and never, ever came back. And the first sergeant was saying to the men, Try to find him. They eventually found him in jail in San Antonio. And he was in such sloppy condition that the jailers didn't recognize that he was telling the truth when he said he was a soldier [laughs]. Eventually they brought him back.

Interviewer: Did he stay in charge?

Ernest Johannes: He was relieved of any responsibility. And they discharged him. But I remember seeing him the last day — the mattress pulled back and he was laying on top of the springs, the mattress folded, and they discharged him.

Interviewer: So that would be a dishonorable discharge?

Ernest Johannes: I don't know what it was. But he was over 50, in jail for drinking.

Interviewer: I never knew they took people that old.

Ernest Johannes: We had several men that were close to 50. And of course when we were at Swift they took men up to age 39. And while we were there they discharged all those 39 and older.

Interviewer: Do you have any other memories about Swift?

Ernest Johannes: Oh yes. Some of the men didn't keep themselves very clean. And we had what they called the GI bath.

Interviewer: What was that?

Ernest Johannes: Well, if the men weren't keeping themselves clean we had the right to take them into the shower and use a GI brush on them. And it was done on at least one or two occasions.

Interviewer: And I bet that's the last time they let themselves get that dirty.

Ernest Johannes: Yeah. The undesirables, most of them, were discharged at Swift. But we did have men up to 50. We had deserters who had to register for the draft and were taken back in the army.

Interviewer: So if you deserted, this was your second chance to make up for it.

Ernest Johannes: That's right.

Interviewer: Did you know who were the deserters? Did the word get around?

Ernest Johannes: I had them in my company. It seemed like my company was always the place where all the goof-offs were assigned [laughs]. I had all these foul balls in my company.

I was a private, and then I was promoted to corporal. Gas Corporal. Have you ever heard of a Gas Corporal?

Interviewer: No, what's that?

Ernest Johannes: There was fear that the enemy would use gas. So I had a – I don't know what you call this, with a banger on it.

Interviewer: Like a gong?

Ernest Johannes: Yeah. A gong. I carried it around my neck. And that was to notify the troops that gas was being used. So I got that job for a while.

Interviewer: So when you would go on hikes and things, you always had a gong?

Ernest Johannes: Yeah, I'd carry it over my [neck].

Interviewer: How big was the gong?

Ernest Johannes: It went around my neck, then I held it with a – mallet. It was inserted in the bottom of the "u."

Interviewer: When did they give up so you no longer had to carry it?

Ernest Johannes: They never did.

Interviewer: You carried that the entire time?

Ernest Johannes: No, I was promoted. But we had a gas corporal all through World War II.

Interviewer: Really! You never hear about that.

Ernest Johannes: At training we had a tent where they used laughing gas. We had to go through that training. And we assembled the company if there was a simulated gas attack.

Interviewer: And what did they tell you to do?

Ernest Johannes: Well, they just went in and had the experience putting on and off the gas mask. That ended so we didn't do much of that.

But we started with hikes, and physical training, which for me was easy, because working in the green house.

-end first download-

Second download

Ernest Johannes: In other words ... I was in exceptional physical condition at age 25.

Interviewer: But at Fort Sam Houston they start doing those long hikes, don't they?

Ernest Johannes: Yeah. Fort Sam. It was just basic training. They did some minor problems, and they had instructions. Originally I was in what they called the anti-tank platoon. But that was before I became the gas corporal. So that was the training. I didn't fall off any of those hikes, all the way through.

Interviewer: I heard those are hard hikes, too. Twenty-five miles?

Ernest Johannes: Twenty-five, yeah. Well that all started when we moved to San Antonio. That was nothing more than a mailing address.

Interviewer: I've heard from some veterans that they'd get time off and go into San Antonio.

Ernest Johannes: They went into Austin, too. Yeah, and that's where the terrible event occurred. Bastrop was close to Camp Swift, and then Austin was further on. And one of the — I think it was signal company, men — was a jeep jockey, and he picked up a little girl in Bastrop, and apparently raped her and murdered her. Did you hear about that?

Interviewer: Just in passing. I didn't know.

Ernest Johannes: Apparently — I don't know all of what happened — but they found the girl, they found the man, and they court-martialed him at — I think it was at Swift — and then he was found guilty of first degree murder. And the engineers in the division put up a gallows, and an executioner was brought in, and he was disposed of. At Leon Springs — that was the big reservation [near San Antonio].

Interviewer: That is a terrible event.

Ernest Johannes: Also I remember one thing about Camp Swift. See that was such a new place. We had a grass fire there. And there weren't enough fire engines. One officer got the idea, Well why don't we just send the men out to try and put it down?

So the whole regiment went out where the grass fire was, and they ordered us to stomp on it.

Interviewer: You couldn't do it, could you?

Ernest Johannes: It was part of it. The GI shoes.

Interviewer: You just kept stamping on this fire.

Ernest Johannes: That was unusual [laughs], but it was a solution. Well, the nice thing about Camp Swift was that you slept in the building. You slept on cots. You had kitchens. The food was lousy but it was [edible]. In my company the food wasn't much good.

Interviewer: What was the food?

Ernest Johannes: Well, we generally had a meat at noon, and then I'm trying to think of the vegetable. It was a green vegetable that isn't proper – it's here occasionally.

Interviewer: Like asparagus? Spinach?

Ernest Johannes: No, no. It was grown locally. I'll have to think about that one and tell you.

[TIME 4:59]

Well, we did move finally to Fort Sam. ... Christmas we actually had a day off. But New Year's Day '43, there was no day off. It was seven days a week. And of course the start of the whole thing was, we didn't know this, we were to go and train at Leon Springs Military Reservation. And we continued to have barracks with cots and sheets and pillows when we were at Fort Sam.

Interviewer: And then do you go to Polk?

Ernest Johannes: No, we went into the field at Leon Springs. And in the field we – I'd been in the 379th, there were three regiments – we probably hiked out to Leon Springs. I'm trying to think of the name of the camp we had. It's one of the three camps, I think, we had. And it was built by the engineers on Leon Springs. The men slept on the ground with a blanket, and shelter-half [laughs].

Interviewer: Ah, the shelter-half. You had half and someone else had half?

Ernest Johannes: That's right. Tube packs – there was one blanket that was packed, then there was a tube ... which was actually the pack they used in combat. But the light pack was used in training.

Interviewer: Are the packs made out of canvas?

Ernest Johannes: Just a half of a shelter-half. You had your basic pack, and then you had one blanket, and two or three pieces, half of a tent. There was a tent, so you had to share.

Interviewer: So you were teamed up with the person who had the other half.

Ernest Johannes: Yeah, it had to be now that I was a supply sergeant. And we used the tents all the way through WWII.

Interviewer: Did you have the same partner for a while?

Ernest Johannes: I had an enormously talented man who was 10 years older than I was.

Interviewer: What was his name?

Ernest Johannes: Herman Bates (PH). Herman when we were at Swift did a lot of carpentry work, and he built the facilities at Camp Swift. There was another supply sergeant that had those abilities. These buildings were almost barren inside, and they stole the lumber from the [inaudible; laughs].

Interviewer: And then they built the insides?

Ernest Johannes: Yeah [laughs].

Interviewer: Now at this time you're a sergeant too?

Ernest Johannes: Yeah. I was promoted to sergeant.

Interviewer: And what were your duties as a sergeant?

Ernest Johannes: Well to keep the record so the company – withdrawal, supplies for the army – keep the records. ... Some of the property was classified as company property, others was individuals – the uniforms [etc.] was a personal responsibility also, but that was not being supervised.

Interviewer: Okay, so you kept records.

Ernest Johannes: What they called the company property. And we had everything in company property. You can't imagine what we had.

Interviewer: What, for example?

Ernest Johannes: Oh, we had a [inaudible] tent, which was for the officers to use. And we had signal equipment which included radios.

Interviewer: Would you have wire to lay, too?

[TIME 10:18]

Ernest Johannes: Yes, there was wire. Two of those men were killed in combat, the wire layers. And then of course we had the radio operators.

Interviewer: Like my father.

Ernest Johannes: The biggest problem was – well, this invention was socks. Did you hear that before?

Interviewer: I heard Patton said something about socks. About how he wanted every man to have clean socks. But what were you going to tell me about socks?

Ernest Johannes: Well, each man was provided with two pair of socks. And eventually, when we were in combat that was the biggest problem for the supply center. To see that the men had their socks. And some of these men were very careless. And that was the source of trench feet. We had these what they called the division maneuvers at Leon Springs. They originally built the camp, there were the three regiments, and then the engineers and field artillery had their own facilities. But infantry was alone.

Interviewer: And that's at Field Springs?

Ernest Johannes: Leon Springs. That is the military reservation. But there is another camp on those grounds which is called Camp Bullis. And then each regiment built a separate camp on Leon Springs, where the kind of headquarters of each regiment — the engineers and the other units had the same — I'm trying to think of the name of the camp, but I forget that one. Maybe it will come through before [we're done talking].

Interviewer: Well, a woman who's currently in the 95th lived in Camp Bullis for a while.

Ernest Johannes: Oh, that is all different now. I stopped by there after the war. We were in Texas, my wife and I. That's a real nice camp now.

Interviewer: But then?

Ernest Johannes: Well, the way that worked was, I think the original trip was by bus, and that's when we built the camps. And all the training came away from those camps. But, eventually we were what they called in the field 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Interviewer: Ah, so you don't even go back to the camps.

Ernest Johannes: Occasionally. And I being in the battalion headquarters company, there's one event I never forget. We had a man by the name of Martin (PH), who was the commander of the 379th. He was an old WWI veteran, very tough officer. And these tent cities were set up in a line. And one morning he took reveille – and it was a long one, you can imagine how 3,000 men in tents and [inaudible] companies, all the units of an infantry regiment. So he calls the roll. First he called out the company's 1st battalion. Somebody responded. He ordered to report. The company commander was to report. The 1st battalion officers were accounted for. Then the colonel ... he called out 2nd battalion, and the report was similar. But apparently the colonel knew something wasn't right with the 2nd battalion. So he called out, Who's reporting for the 2nd battalion?

Captain So-and-so.

[TIME 15:02]

And the colonel called out, Well where is Colonel – I think it was Lewis (PH)?

He's in the sack, sir.

He says, You get him out him out of the sack and tell him he is relieved of his command.

Interviewer: Holy cow!

Ernest Johannes: So that was one incident. But you could hear them – there's 3,000 troops lined up [laughs] and you could hear them all over the... So he was busted.

Interviewer: So this guy was tough.

Ernest Johannes: Yeah. Now, that was the first, WWI.

Interviewer: That was the WWI guy.

Ernest Johannes: Yeah. We had a battalion commander, WWII that was a drunk. Took the men out to the firing range in the rain, and the regimental commander relieved him of command, too. Had them out on the range with rifles and —.

Interviewer: So that was something very irregular?

Ernest Johannes: Yeah. Well, he was a drunk, too. So let's go on.

Interviewer: Okay. So now do you go into Coxcomb, or Camp Polk, or where do you go? Do you have any memories of the desert, or the swamp training, the Louisiana maneuvers?

Ernest Johannes: Yes, I do. We got through training at Leon Springs around June of the next year. June of '43. And there are mailing addresses from Shreveport. And we went around June, I think it was June, we moved from Fort Sam to Louisiana. I think their mailing address was Shreveport.

Interviewer: Okay. What did you do in Louisiana?

Ernest Johannes: Well, these were called division maneuvers. And we simulated fighting. We were in one division and we trained to fight another division. IN other words, it was the height of the training.

Interviewer: So it was war games.

Ernest Johannes: Yeah.

Interviewer: So you would fight the 5th division or —.

Ernest Johannes: Yeah, that's right.

Interviewer: Did you like that? Was that fun at all?

Ernest Johannes: There's some funny things [laughing].

Interviewer: Like what?

Ernest Johannes: I don't know if you're aware. Pigs run wild in Louisiana. They have what they call an open range. So the cooks had problems with their sump holes, and the pigs would fall into the sump holes. It rained quite a bit in Louisiana. They had to fish them out.

But there was one experience that I had with the pigs. Our meals were, we'd get two sandwiches for each meal, it's marmalade and it was to last the entire — you got two in the morning, then I think it was two at night, marmalade. Then there'd be a little break in the maneuvers.

And I could remember we were bedded down; this is all cut over timberland. And the cooks were preparing more sandwiches, and the cook was — there was a big stump behind him and he was picking up the bags, and he set it on the stump. He did one or two of them. And lo and behold the pigs were lined up in line, each one of them [inaudible; laughing].

Interviewer: That's a very funny image.

Ernest Johannes: And then another problem that I had with the pigs is kitchen sump holes the pigs would fall in.

Interviewer: Did you ever have to pull one out?

Ernest Johannes: No, I did not have anything to do with them.

Interviewer: Now at Camp Polk are you still supply sergeant?

Ernest Johannes: Yeah, I'm supply sergeant from 1942 through 1945. I was actually an original member, and I was with the last ones that were discharged; there was a deactivation of the division at Shelby.

Interviewer: I've only talked to a few people who went the whole time. There's a battery commander named Jim Wolner (PH) who was there

for the activation and deactivation. And one other person. No, you two might be the only two I've talked to so far.

So, at Camp Polk do your jobs change at all during Louisiana maneuvers?

[TIME 20:45]

Ernest Johannes: Same job, same job. ... I remember one incident, what happened to me is I had a problem with poison oak. The medic – I think it was a doctor, we did have doctors believe it or not – he looked at it and he and says, You got poison oak.

He gave me something to treat it. He says, Now stay out of the poison oak.

Then I asked him a question: Would you tell me how when I bed down at night how I can avoid laying in the poison oak [laughs]?

Interviewer: And what was his answer?

Ernest Johannes: He shook his head [laughs].

Interviewer: So when you had poison oak —?

Ernest Johannes: There was no treatment.

Interviewer: You just put calamine lotion on it?

Ernest Johannes: Calamine was frequently used, yes.

Interviewer: And you just grit your teeth and scratch?

Ernest Johannes: Yeah. Well, I don't think we even washed it. You know, that's the thing that most people don't understand. The only time the men were able to brush their teeth was when they were in camp. Because you didn't carry any toothpaste, or toothbrushes.

Interviewer: So you didn't carry any of that?

Ernest Johannes: No. You had to buy your own toilet articles. Toothpaste [etc.].

Interviewer: So when you're out in the field or out in combat, is everyone growing a beard?

Ernest Johannes: Yes. My company had big beards. And there was one set of pictures that appeared in "Stars and Stripes" later on. And there were men from my company with their long beards [laughs]. It made the national news.

Well anyways, Louisiana was – we were getting late into June, July, and we were laying on the ground and at the end of it, it was getting cold. And we were in our pup tents. As a matter of fact we slept on the ground all the period of time except when they wanted to move us to California.

Interviewer: And then they moved you to California?

Ernest Johannes: Yeah. We first went into Camp Polk. And I have plenty of stories to tell you about. Being the company supply sergeant I had quite a few drunks in my company. And we had a situation where they turned in certain items that could be repaired. And one of my soldiers got drunk and he had what they call a pair of shoes in salvage – they had to put new soles on them.

Well, one Monday morning he came into my supply room. He says, Jo, look at my feet!

I says, Rusty, where are your shoes?

And he says, Joe, he says, I went into town last night. I was out I came back. And I apparently got into the wrong barracks.

Interviewer: No!

Ernest Johannes: He says, I crawled in bed. The other guy came in and kicked me out. And I got out barefooted and found my own barracks.

Interviewer: And he lost his shoes!

Ernest Johannes: Yeah [laughing], but the funny thing about the shoes was – I don't know if you've ever heard of this salvage, you've heard that term?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Ernest Johannes: Well, he had one pair in salvage. I had to find him a pair of shoes.

[TIME 25:11]

Interviewer: So he had a pair in salvage that were being repaired?

Ernest Johannes: Yeah. He had the other pair he was wearing, and then he lost them because he left them in his drunkenness.

Interviewer: Now in a case like that do you try to find them, or is he out of luck?

Ernest Johannes: I think I got him another pair of shoes.

Interviewer: So men must have liked you in part because you would help them.

Ernest Johannes: Well that was my job.

Interviewer: But I imagine that some people doing your job weren't —.

Ernest Johannes: You had some men that didn't like you. Some of them were just ornery 90 percent of the time.

Interviewer: You can't do anything about it. So from Polk, you go to Coxcomb?

Ernest Johannes: We went from the field into Camp Polk. And from Camp Polk we went to California. And we went by train. And it took almost a day to cross Texas on that troop train. We went over the broadest part of Texas [laughs]. ... I don't know how long we were on the train, but I remember they stopped and ran us around the line. We'd have to run.

Interviewer: So they'd stop the train and then they'd move the train and you'd run?

Ernest Johannes: No, we apparently had free range for the stops. Got the men off the train, exercising. So I think it happened at least two or three times.

Interviewer: So everyone must be sweating, then getting back on the train with body odor.

Ernest Johannes: What was that [laughs]? Everybody [had it]!

Interviewer: Everybody has it.

Ernest Johannes: I've give you such small pieces. I didn't keep a diary. I should have. But it took a long time to get to California. It was flat most of the way from Polk to a city called Desert Center. Desert Center was kind of the address of the maneuver area at Camp Coxcomb.

Interviewer: My dad would talk about Desert Center, and other people talked about Camp Coxcomb. Now you helped me understand – Desert Center was sort of the —.

Ernest Johannes: That was the town where the bus decided that if you had a pass you would go to Los Angeles. If you had a three-day pass, you could go to Desert Center, take the bus in. I went [to Los Angeles] two or three times. I had an aunt who lived in Van Nuys. The weather

wasn't bad at Coxcomb, although we slept on the ground. I slept on the ground most of the time [laughs].

Interviewer: You did, in the shelter half, you'd put it together?

Ernest Johannes: Oh that – we had tents, permanent tents, at Camp Coxcomb. That was a set-up community.

Interviewer: Oh, so it's a tent city?

Ernest Johannes: Yeah, and you slept on the ground. Desert.

Interviewer: Now when you sleep on the ground, you put down your bedroll?

Ernest Johannes: Generally was that you slept individually. What I'm trying to say is they weren't sharing shelter. You had two blankets, and your shelter half, and you slept on the ground. You used your field jacket as a pillow.

[TIME 30:00]

Interviewer: Oh, that's what you used as a pillow. You rolled it up and used that as a pillow. Do you have any stories from Camp Coxcomb or Los Angeles?

Ernest Johannes: Yes. Thanksgiving Day, 1943 I guess it was, we had the normal dinner. And they really put out wonderful Thanksgiving Day dinners.

Interviewer: Where were you?

Ernest Johannes: Camp Coxcomb. And they had a nice dinner. But they wouldn't permit us to leave camp until we had eaten the dinner. Apparently, they would have lost all the food, spoiled, but they didn't say that. Someone made the crack that the people had to have their meals [laughs] in L.A.

So we got through with the dinners, went by two-and-a-half-ton truck from Desert Center to L.A. This was our leave. And I was fortunate to get what they called a three-day pass. So, got into downtown L.A. about midnight. And the first thing to do – my gosh you can't visit a member of your family at this hour – so I was going into hotels, trying to find a place to sleep. Didn't have blankets or anything. Just in my sun tans. So I got the hotel. So you could sleep with another soldier, so I found a soldier who I didn't know at all. So we get the room. The bed was loaded with bed bugs [laughs]. But my body had taken so much as of that time, I slept through. Then I got up in the morning. And I had transportation to Van Nuys. They had a train. I think it was an electric. And I got up and I did visit my aunt. And I stayed with her for two days, and I came back to camp.

And that was where another experience occurred. See, having the three days, there weren't any trucks to take me back to Camp Coxcomb. I am going to mix something up, but I'll just tell you the experience – I had several trips to and from L.A.

Interviewer: Okay.

Ernest Johannes: On this particular trip I got back to Desert Center and it was midnight. There was a store and a filling station. Everything was pitch black. But not that it was dark, but we had a beautiful sky, you know, the light with the moon and stars? And I got off the bus, and there's nobody around. And I looked down that road which is about 20 miles to the camp. So I started walking that 20 miles. And lo and behold a jeep drove up and said, Where are you going soldier?

So, I beat reveille [laughs].

Interviewer: You beat reveille! But you hadn't slept all night.

Ernest Johannes: No.

Interviewer: So that day must have been a rough one.

Ernest Johannes: Yeah, a lot of rough ones [laughs].

Interviewer: What time do you leave today?

Ernest Johannes: About 2 o'clock.

Interviewer: You mean you leave the hotel at 2 o'clock?

Ernest Johannes: Let me look. I lost my suitcase, you know. [Talking about travel itinerary.]

Interviewer: Are you going to attend the Metz Hour?

Ernest Johannes: Oh, I should go to that.

Interviewer: So we'll go there, and we'll continue after.

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[Metz]

Ernest Johannes: ...They ordered the supply sergeants to go out and pick up all the gas masks. And any American equipment. So I went out and I was picking up gas masks. And I looked to the side and here are three soldiers from my outfit, fixed in space on the side of a rise in the ground. It was a corporal wearing plastic glasses, and two or three men frozen into space. Dead.

And I remember I had to call out for someone to pick them up. I don't know if you've heard of that. There's a term for it when you're killed from concussion.

Interviewer: Three men killed by concussion.

Ernest Johannes: And there was a rise, and they were down like this.

Interviewer: So they're sort of squatting?

Ernest Johannes: Yeah.

Interviewer: And are their backs up against the rise?

Ernest Johannes: Yeah they're up against the rise.

Interviewer: They're up against the rise and they're squatting. So they weren't killed by shrapnel, they're killed by the concussion.

Ernest Johannes: Yeah.

Interviewer: So the force of the concussion killed them.

Ernest Johannes: And the men who were doing the grave registration didn't notice them there. My job was just to [pick up the stuff]. So I called out to pick them up. But one of the men was wearing our shoulder patch. I don't know where they got them from, but they issued those plastic glasses, and there was a corporal that was leading them, and he had these plastic glasses, apparently some attempt to avoid eye injuries.

Interviewer: I didn't know about people dying from concussion. I'm sorry.

Ernest Johannes: Well, I called right out to the grave registration, We've got bodies here. So that was the first day of Metz. Well, the second, or the third, it could be longer because we didn't go into combat right away. So that was our introduction into fighting.

And one day there was an area, there was a road between, I don't know where it was, it was leading ... it was in front of Metz, our position.

Interviewer: Woippy?

Ernest Johannes: Yeah, Patton visited our battalion headquarters. That's the only time I saw a general in Europe. He came into the 2nd battalion, and the road had been loaded with shrapnel, and I was going up to company to bring certain things, driving in the center of the road because the shrapnel kind of went to the sides. And lo and behold I look up and here's the chief coming up with Patton.

[TIME 3:52]

It was Patton. And his jeep was olive, lustrous. That was prohibited in the army, that it was ... how that driver could handle a machine gun loaded on the top of the jeep.

And of course I know I called attention. I think I was in a jeep. Pulled it to the side so he wouldn't hit the guy. That's the only time I saw a general in combat.

Interviewer: So the jeep had a roof on it.

Ernest Johannes: No, it didn't have any roof. He was just an open jeep.

Interviewer: Open jeep, but the machine gun is mounted on the back.

Ernest Johannes: Yeah. So there was something – I don't know if they told you about this. I don't remember if you've seen jeeps with the steel rod in front of them?

Interviewer: Yes.

Ernest Johannes: One of our regimental officers was riding in his jeep with the hood down. And the Germans had stretched piano wire across the road. The jeep, windshield down, it killed him. Took his neck off. That's why they started to construct these posts ...

And driving those vehicles. At night we were driving all the time with the windshields down. I remember the one night there, I took up a

load. It actually was at the beginning of the actual fighting. I took over from another company's supply sergeant to haul ammunition and supplies ...

I had a jeep jockey who was very scary in his driving, but I don't blame him for that. We got up to the company, Company G, and I got there, I had a load of ammunition. Got there. The company was in disarray. And I was in there a while, and there was a lieutenant had taken over command of the company. And we got there, and the medics were there, and they had a litter squad, and they had a call of a man wounded. The litter squad go out. One of those men refused to go. You never volunteer, but I did.

So with my rifle on my shoulder I went out there and retrieved the man. It was cold, in the rain. Then brought him back. We had a jeep with a what you called an ... you carried ... those that were in the company should have unloaded the ammunition from the truck, and my jeep jockey was so nervous he didn't do anything. And they only had three men on the other squad, so I went out. Even when I was through the chief was sitting out there in the dark with the trailer with the ammunition in it. So I unloaded the whole thing myself. Ammunition is heavy.

Then we went back, and we were getting shelled on that road. Because it didn't come close, but it feels like you're gonna get hit. We outran it.

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