

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Veteran's Name: John Komp

Interviewer: David Meyer (O'Shea)

Date of Interview: June 8, 2012

Part 1 - Corresponds to VHP file called: File1KompJohn2012June8WWIIforVHP

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Interviewer: This is David Meyer, son of Earl D. Meyer, Co. H, 379th, 95th Infantry. Today is June 8, 2012. I pause because I've talked to this gentleman since 2004, in snippets. Today we're in the Marriott Hotel near the airport in Pittsburgh. It's probably a little after 11.. about 11:05 a.m. and I have the great privilege to finally sit down – not on a bus and not standing in the hallway, but actually sitting in a chair across from – sir, can you say your last name?

Komp: John Komp, K-o-m-p.

Interviewer: *And what is your birth date?*

Komp: 16 August, 1922

Interviewer: *So how old are you today?*

Komp: Short of 90... I'll be 90 in August, that's about two months away.

Interviewer: *When I first talked to Colonel Komp....*

Komp: ...John...

Interviewer: *John ... I'm allowed to call him "John" now. When I first talked to John in 2004 you were about 84 years old. It's time for the preliminary questions. What's your address now? And your telephone number.*

Komp: I live at 440 NW Elks Dr., Apt 318, Corvallis, Ore 97330. Telephone (541) 758 6702.

Interviewer: *Where were you born?*

Komp: Brooklyn, New York.

Interviewer: *Where in Brooklyn?*

Komp: Bay Ridge Section, where you see a lot of film on Bluebloods. That's my neighborhood.

Interviewer: What's that mean, "blueblood?"

Komp: It's a TV series. You haven't seen it? It's one of the few programs on TV that I enjoy, because it always has a moral story. It's about a Catholic family named Regan. [The father] is the police commissioner and he has two sons working on the force. So you see the family in their home in the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn. It's one of the most popular TV shows going.

Interviewer: Speaking of family, what's your father's name?

Komp: Herman Komp Jr. And my mother's name is Margaret Mary Komp.

Interviewer: And did you have brothers and sisters?

Komp: I had a brother who preceded me in death. He only lived for four days. I never knew that until I was 10 or 11 years old. My grandfather – he had been a veteran of the Spanish-American War, had died. And my father wanted to go to the cemetery to be sure they had put a marker on his grave which indicated he was a veteran. He had been an officer in the Navy. So when we went there we stood at the foot of this grave plot which was bought by my great-grandfather and his mother-in-law sometime in the late 1800s. It had been part of the battlefield of the Revolutionary War, Woodlawn Cemetery.

So when we were standing at the foot of this plot by father said, "There's grandpa and your brother is there." He never said another word. I'd never heard that before and we didn't speak about it after. We didn't speak about death in the families. Another thing they never spoke about was cancer. They never said that. No one would talk about that. So I didn't even know what my brother's name was until I talked to one of my aunts who was like a big sister to me. And she said oh yes, she remembered seeing her sister with this baby, and her mother holding the baby, and shaking her head. And the baby's name was John Edward Komp. My name is the same, except my middle name is Stanley.

Interviewer: How many years after him were you born, do you think?

Komp: I guess about a year later as far as I can tell.

Interviewer: Was your father or anyone else in the family in the service?

Komp: My father was in World War I. He was with the Quartermaster Corps. He actually didn't go into service until probably close to the end of the war. But he was in France. I have pictures of him with a friend who became my Godfather.

Interviewer: Did they ever talk about their experiences?

Komp: No, but my father had some old printed material and I remember looking at it. Probably stuff from Stars and Stripes. And also he had a collection of ... I believe it was cartoons ...where they talked about “cooties.” These were the bugs that you had in trench warfare.

Interviewer: *So that’s where the word cooties came from – WWI. What did you call them in WWII? You must have had bugs (etc.).*

Komp: Oh yeah. Well, I don’t recall ever having any problems, but a lot of times we were deloused.

You would be called into a formation and somebody would come by and pump DDT in your clothing just in case you had something. I never had any problem.

Interviewer: *I know you could go a long time without a shower.*

Komp: Whether we wanted to or not. [laughs]

Interviewer: *When they deloused you, were you in your clothing? What did they use?*

Komp: You had a regular... It was like a flit gun except it had powder in it – DDT. Sometimes if you look at old WWII documentaries you’ll see the people who were released from the death camps that the Nazis had, and they’re being deloused. They also deloused Russian prisoners of war when we liberated a Russian POW camp in Lippstadt, Germany.

Interviewer: *Were you there when they liberated that camp?*

Komp: Yes. It was outside of Lippstadt. I’m not sure that the camp was in Lippstadt, but I know that on V-E night, a lot of those Russian prisoners had gotten weapons somehow and they were shooting up and down the streets and we were locked down.

Maybe they were just celebrating their liberation, but you didn’t want to get hit by a stray bullet after you survived all this other stuff. [laughs]

Interviewer: *What was your final rank in WWII?*

Komp: I was **second lieutenant**, but after we came back from leave down in Camp Shelby, Miss., I was promoted to **first lieutenant**.

Interviewer: *What was your final **rank after Korea?***

Komp: **Captain**. I was promoted on DA – Department of the Army – orders. They were controlling all promotions in 1951.

So even though I had held a job from the first time I joined the 25th Division in Japan until I left it for Korea, I was a first lieutenant, because I couldn’t get promoted. I had been a company commander, a battalion intelligence officer and an assistant regimental officer...

Interviewer: *And you left after Vietnam?*

Komp: When I got out of the service?

Interviewer: *Yes.*

Komp: I left Vietnam in 1973....and then I went to the Defense Nuclear Agency and I was inspector General.

Then I retired in 1975.

Interviewer: What was your final rank then?

Komp: Colonel. [Time 10:20]

Interviewer: *(repeating)... Colonel. Now I think, the preliminary questions – now with most people I can get through in two minutes but with us.. it's 15 minutes later... [Laughter]*

Komp: You haven't asked me how I became a second lieutenant. [laughs]

Interviewer: *OK, we'll jump around. How did you become a second lieutenant?*

Komp: Well first I was a private.

I was working in New York City as a male file clerk for Babcock and Wilcox, a big international company that built boilers for the Navy and boilers for power plants. So I was working there because I hoped to become a draftsman. So.. I had some drafting experience in high school, and I started college with drafting experience.

So my uncle, who worked for the Brooklyn Navy Yard, had friends who had left government service to go into private contracting so they could make more money.

So one of the people who had worked for my uncle was heading a drafting room at Sullivan Dry Dock and Shipyard in Brooklyn. So my uncle got me a job there as a marine draftsman. So that automatically gave me a deferment because I was in the defense industry. My mother and father were very happy about that.

But all of my friends were going into the Air Corps, and I was still subject to the draft. So when my number did come up, I didn't ask for a deferment. I went. Yeah.

Interviewer: *And what did your parents think? How did your parents feel?*

Komp: Well [they thought], "Jack is leaving us," I guess. Because they called me Jack.

I went to be sworn in New York City. Ended up going to Fort Dix, N.J. We shipped out to Camp Carson, which is now Fort Carson, Colorado near Colorado Springs. And I took basic infantry training and advanced infantry training and became an intelligence-qualified enlisted man.

Komp (cont'd): I was assigned to a battalion intelligence section.

Interviewer: What would you do?

Komp: Observer. Most of what we did was observing. We would go out and observe traffic on the highways near Colorado Springs. And we would report on it. Actually you were playing like you were at war, observing what the enemy was doing. And part of my duties was to do panoramic sketches. So I could draw a profile of the area and compute the range and the azimuth to that so that future people could come and know what I was referring to if we were talking about some event.

Interviewer: So you could see a hill and you were able to compute how far away that hill was.

Komp: You could do that with field glasses. ... If you knew the size of the thing you were looking at ... there was some sort of device on the side of your binoculars that would tell you how far away it was.

Interviewer: Did that appeal to you?

Komp: Oh yeah, I was happy. I was happy. I had good friends. We came from all over the United States and even had a friend who was an Indian.. He was from one of the Northern Sioux tribes – one of my bunkmates at Camp Carson.

Interviewer: And you were a private then?

Komp: Yes I was a private, but I was promoted to PFC [private first class] fast, because I had shown I was qualified to do things. Then the non-commissioned officers [NCOs], who were all about the same age as I was, but had been in different units before. So they had come to form this new division.... [Time 15:10]

Interviewer: Before I forget, when did you join?

Komp: 15 October 1942.

Interviewer: So you're 21 years old (Corrected)... 20. Now when you're promoted to PFC that's about six months later?

Komp: No, quicker than that. Because while I was there, the NCOs lived in the barracks with us. They had a room at the end of the floor. And they told me they wanted me to try out for OCS [Officer Candidate School]. I said, "What's OCS?" [laughs]

They said you can be an infantry officer or you can be an officer in the army. I said I don't want to be an officer in the army, I'm happy with where I'm at.

Where we were, you seldom saw officers unless they were giving you a class. We had officers that were giving us training in intelligence courses. That was their specialty.

Komp (cont'd): That's when you saw them. You didn't see the company commander. If you ever saw the first sergeant you were in trouble. Or he was assigning you guard duty.

It was a very narrow life.

Interviewer: A narrow life... How many people would you see on a daily basis?

Komp: Well, you saw your platoon, about 40 people. And then you got to meet other people in the chow hall because you were eating in the company mess hall. So you got to meet other people.

Interviewer: What Company were you with?

Komp: At that time I was in 3rd battalion, 354th Infantry, 89th Infantry Division which went to Europe, also.

But anyway, after a while, they finally convinced me that I ought to apply [for OCS]. But in the meantime, when we were doing close order drill, they would ask me to drill the squad that I was in. So I had to know the field manual for close order drills.

Interviewer: For people who don't know what that is, what is close order drill?

Komp: Close order drill is forming a unit in a line - parallel to you or vertical to you or at an angle, and these are the basic movements you would use when you order troops to move into battle.

And then they give you a speed of march -- they would tell you how fast to go - movements. So you had to do a right face, left face (etc.).

So I was doing that as a PFC. What these NCOs were doing, they were pushing me to apply for OCS. So then after I do squad drill, they say, 'OK, drill the platoon.' So then you're drilling 40 men.

Because the squads at the time were 12 men. And there was no lieutenant around. This was all the NCOs. The platoon leader was .. uh.. Lieut. Hawes, a real nice guy, a University of Colorado graduate.

Interviewer: A little older than you?

Komp: "H" "A" "W" "E" "S" – Hawes.

Finally they got me to apply. So you write out this thing, the company commander approves it, and it goes forward.

And you have to be interviewed before they accept you. They look at your application and check your education qualifications – you had to be at least a high school graduate which I was... I started college at night.... [etc.].

Komp (cont'd): So anyway, I met those qualifications. Then you had to go for an interview. And before I went for the interview the NCOs called me in again and said, “There are going to be at least three people that are going to interview you, and you’re going to be in a small room, and they’re probably all going to ask you a question at the same time. Be sure you answer procedure You have to be able to recognize who is senior in that group, and answer the questions in the order of rank..” [Time 20:20]

So I did that.

Then they told me about what they call “the voice of command.” You have to be able to project your voice.

And that’s what they were doing with me when I was drilling the squad. Because they’re marching away from me, they’re not within normal earshot. You have to project your voice so they could hear you. Because they’re facing the opposite direction...

Interviewer:.... So they were training you?.....

Komp:They were training me. I look back on this now and I know now what they were doing. But they told me, “When you’re in the room they’re going to ask you to give some commands. Remember that you’re either going to be commanding a company, or larger outfit.

Don’t let the size of the room fool you. You have to project your voice. So what did they do, after I’m sitting there, they said, “OK, candidate, (you know) Stand up and call the company to attention behind you.”

So I had to stand up, at attention, do an about-face, and call the company to attention.

So I had to project my voice [laughs].

I did it full voice! [laugh]

So then I was through with that.

And I don’t know whether I passed or not until I get orders that I’m going to foot them in Georgia, uh... to be an officer candidate, and I’ve been promoted to corporal.

To shorten the story, I was commissioned on 11 August 1943. I hadn’t been in the army a year. And when I got to Fort Benning [in Georgia]...

Interviewer: So now you’re... How old are you now?

Komp: I’m just shy of 21.

Interviewer: Just shy of 21 and you’re commissioned as a....?

Komp: Second Lieutenant, Infantry.

But before I went to OCS, when I got to Fort Benning, I get another interview, with a NCO, and he's looking at my record...which I think at that time was called a "14 0 1" and he said, "How long have you been in the army?" And I said, "Well I got in in October – this must have been February or March, I guess." He said, "You're not dry behind the ears. Why don't you go to NCO school?" And I said, "OK, fine, I'll go to NCO school."

So I **went to NCO school**. That was part of the screening out process for officer candidates. If you ... you didn't have really much experience as a non-commissioned officer, you should go to that school.

So I went to Camp Wheeler, Ga., which is outside of Macon, Ga., close to Fort Benning, and took the NCO school.

***Interviewer:** What did they teach you?*

Komp: Taking that NCO school, I was trained with and qualified with every weapon that the infantry had, including.. uh... I believe it was [60-millimeter mortar?]. We did all of that.

And I passed that. There were a lot of people in that class who didn't make it. They were screening people out. Then you get to the next level – they screen people out. What the attrition rate was at OCS I don't recall, but it was pretty high.

***Interviewer:** What qualities did you have that you think made you successful?*

Komp: Well I guess I learned what a NCO was supposed to know, because we had small unit tactics, map reading, orientation during the day and during the night, firing of the different weapons, being able to assemble and disassemble all the weapons that the infantry had. It was quite extensive. Then you get to do the same...when I went to OCS you did the same thing again but you already knew how to do it. You would.. you would.. One of the things you had to do was assemble and disassemble an M1 in the darkness – have those pieces all spread out in front of you and put it all together. That's a challenge.

***Interviewer:** How many pieces are there?*

Komp: I don't remember, but you could feel them.. you could identify them [in the darkness]. [Time: 25:00]

***Interviewer:** Did they ever try to trick you or anything?*

Komp: I don't remember. I've seen... I think I've seen documentaries now where they would mix up weapons with other people that are probably in ranges, such as special forces. Maybe those guys.

Interviewer: For you.. they just want to get you to learn. At the end of OCS, did you know where you were going to go? Are there rumors?

Komp: After OCS, you get leave of a week or two weeks, and I went back to Brooklyn. And while I was there my father's National Guard unit had been federalized.

My father had already left the National Guard, so he wasn't federalized, he was working for the post office. But he had friends who were in the Army Air Corps. Because the airforce was part of the Army then.

So one of his friends, Frank Cassidy, was a captain, and he was at an airfield out on Long Island, and he wanted to talk to me. He was a veteran of WWI – infantry in WWI.

So I went out to see Captain Cassidy, and he convinced me to apply for the Air Corps for pilot training. And I have to emphasize "Pilot Training." I didn't want to be a gunner, or ... a navigator. I wanted to be a pilot. So here I am –

I forget about it. I report for duty at Fort McClellan in Alabama, and I'm assigned to a training center which was segregated.

This was my first . uh... contact with segregated units. So here we had a bunch of .. uh .. white officers who were Southerners. I was the Yankee.

So the first time they had a levee, that's where the Army puts out they need offices to fill a certain spot.

I got my orders to report to the 95th Infantry Division, which at that time had just come off maneuvers in Louisiana [Camp. Polk] which is now Fort Polk, La. Which is part of the national training system. And I was assigned to 2nd Battalion HQ and just about the time I got there we were getting on a train to go to California. So I never even got a chance to meet the people that I was going to be commanding, except on the train when we went through the chow lines. And I met my platoon Sergeant, who was Chuck Goodell, who was probably the best thing that ever happened, to have somebody who knew what he was doing. And he was just a great friend to have, a great NCO to have as your second in command.

So I commanded the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon?]. which was a special platoon in the infantry Battalion ..

It's like having your own engineers at hand, because you are trained to work with explosive mine clearance, barrier construction... uh... minor engineer tasks like building a corduroy road, or a foot bridge. The Battalion Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon can do that.

The "Pioneer" part is when you're doing engineering tasks.

Komp (cont'd): The “Ammunition” part is where you are responsible for distributing ammunition down to the four companies that comprise the fighting elements of a battalion at that time: the heavy weapons company and three infantry companies.

Interviewer: So the heavy weapons (which my father was in), and the three infantry regiments. So the Pioneer Division is something that's part of the battalion that's...?

Komp: The Pioneer Section is part of the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon. You had one section which was ammunition, and the other was pioneer.

Interviewer: So each battalion had a Pioneer section. And HQ was separate from that?

Komp: No, you were part of that Headquarters Company. And out of the HQ Co. you had a HQ element, which was your battalion commander, his battalion exec and the staff and the NCOs that make up the command post.

Interviewer: So the Pioneer section is part of Headquarters?

Komp: Nope. The Pioneer section is part of the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon. [30:00]

Interviewer: And those... that's associated with headquarters? I'm just trying to figure out – in terms of the structure.

Komp: OK. You had a Headquarters Company. And it has a headquarters element, a communications element, a supply element, and the Ammunitions and Pioneer.

And another platoon - an anti-tank platoon, because we had 37 mm. anti-tank guns in that which later became 57 mil.

Interviewer: When batteries get involved, are they attached to the Company? I can remember Jim Woolner was in a certain battery. How did they fit in to battalion structure?

Komp: OK. Your artillery is divided into headquarters battery and then firing batteries.

The headquarters battery is the one that has firing directions center – FDC.

They control the firing of the batteries.

An artillery battalion is usually given a mission of direct support to a regiment.

And those guns will support whatever the combat action is. And the...the firing batteries or the headquarters battery will send down forward (artillery) observers to the company, and they are the ones who will direct the fire.

And the artillery observer can go all the way down right next to the infantry commander and they coordinate where they want the fire to go.

Interviewer: *So.. thank you for that. I've been talking to people for eight years and now it's clear. In two hours it may not be clear again. But at this very minute it is clear, thanks to Col. John Komp. Now you're with the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon.*

Komp: Just call it A&P [laughs].

Interviewer: *Like the supermarket.*

Komp: That's right. [laughs]

Interviewer: *What was your job with them?*

Komp: I am the platoon leader. I have to supervise those elements of my platoon. About 40 men.

Interviewer: *So right now you're in Camp Coxcomb [in California], in the desert, and you're at this position of authority, and you just met these people. But you have a good...*

Komp: Chuck Goodell.

Interviewer: *And what is Mr. Goodell's rank?*

Komp: He was a Sergeant First Class. He later became the First Sgt. in Company L – for a while...

Interviewer: *Does he stay with you throughout the war?*

Komp: I didn't stay with him. I went to other units.

Interviewer: *Oh that's right, that's right. So..you're the second battalion and you're in Camp Coxcomb. So you're training for desert work, almost as if you think you're going to Africa...*

Komp: ... Yeah...

Interviewer: *... or places like that. I heard it's hot during the day, cold at night (in the desert) Is that true?*

Komp: Oh yeah, colder than a well digger's you-know-what.

Interviewer: *You know what...*

Komp: Posterior. [laughs]... in the Klondike. [laughs]

Interviewer: *In the Klondike (laughs). In the day it's hot. Do you have a metaphor for that?*

Komp: Hot as hell.

Because we had a water discipline, and we also had to take salt tablets.. uh.. so we wouldn't become dehydrated.

Komp (cont'd): But we were really restricted on the amount of water we were consuming. It's not like it is today in the Army where they want people to drink water. They carry little camel packs and are really very concerned about dehydration.

Interviewer: *Then they were concerned with you being able to survive...*

Komp: ... On the minimum of water.

Interviewer: *.. On the minimum of water. Did you every have any trouble in the heat, with fainting? For you?*

Komp: Not for me. But we did have people that suffered from heat exhaustion.

Interviewer: *When you're at Coxcomb, what sort of maneuvers were you doing?*

Komp: We started off with platoon exercises, but because I was in the A&P platoon, there wasn't too much for us to do in this phase. So Sgt. Goodell over pretty much .. training for them.

The battalion gave me the job of setting up a problem for an infantry platoon to operate in the desert and to survive in the desert with rations being delivered to them that they had to divide among themselves – prepare and you know .. consume.

And it was really.. uh ..following a route of attack – I had to lay out as a 2nd Lieutenant I had to lay out this platoon exercise - so I had to do that. I think I did it with all three companies, so there were nine infantry platoons. And I had to set up this course. And..

Interviewer: *So second battalion of which...?*

Komp: 377th

Interviewer: *377th, second battalion.*

Komp: They were all doing it. The whole division was following this protocol.

They had different sections of the desert allotted to them in order to set up these exercises. So you went from platoon to company and finally to battalion. So if we skip ahead, we'll go to the live fire battalion exercise.

Interviewer: *Great.*

Komp: This is where [Laughs] I gained notoriety.

Nobody knew Second Lt. Komp and the 377th until... [laughs] we had the battalion live fire exercise.

Komp (cont'd): This was where a battalion is given an attack problem. Attacking an enemy, dug-in position. And because we were not resupplying ammunition, we distributed ammunition and that was the end of it. Everybody had a full combat load to participate in the regimental exercise.

It was three line companies, the heavy weapons company, and we were playing that we had supporting artillery. They weren't firing. We were going to play "smoke."

We were going to smoke Fritzie's Hill but we didn't have a method of firing smoke, until the battalion executive officer called me up and said, "We want you to take a group of men out to Fritzie's hill, and smoke it."

So we had smoke canisters which had a little striker thing on top, but we also had a system where you could do that with an electrical charge.

So me being an innovative person, I said, "Let's see if we can't do this with the electric charge."

So the Battalion XO says, "Fritzie's Hill" – Where's Fritzie's Hill? - so he pointed at Fritzie's hill...

Interviewer: ... In the desert ...

Komp: ... In the desert which was a good distance away.. I don't know many 100s of yards it was away, over 500 yards away.

So I stood behind him and I took my compass out and I "shot" an azimuth on what he's and I'm looking at the hill he's pointing at and I took the azimuth.

And I said, "Okay, this is to take place at 6 o'clock – whatever the time was – dawn.

So in the cover of darkness I took about six or eight men, and we proceeded out to Fritzie's Hill, following the compass direction. And we get out to this hill, and it's light. I'm looking at this hill and it has barbed-wire all around it, and I can see dummies on the hill. So – Okay, this is the target. And we sent out six smoke bombs on this hill. And I'm looking at my watch, waiting for the time to explode the thing (the smoke canisters).

And I turn – and everybody has a match to strike the top of the smoke canisters – I hit the thing, and the charge doesn't take place.

So I say, "OK, hit your targets." [Time 40:00]

At about the time all my men are running up and they strike these things, the battalion starts their live fire exercise.

We're on the objective, we're not on the right hill. I didn't know it at the time, but in the meantime I had ... carbines, rifles, machine guns, everything is firing on "Fritzies' Hill.."

Komp (cont'd): I said, "Follow me." And I ran until I was at the hill, jumped over the barbed wire, ripped the back of my one-piece fatigues, and led my men up a ravine. And we came back up to the top of this hill, so I could look back and see where the hill was.

And here coming on the edge of what had been our battalion boundary is the regimental commander -- Fred E. Gaillard, a WWI veteran, standing up --- I guess later on he looked like he might have been Patton, but I didn't recognize him at the time.

And he's coming up, and as he gets up close to Fritzie's Hill, I holler down, "Helllooooo..."

He looks up the hill, and sees me with a couple others -- everybody hadn't come up the hill because they were coming up behind me -- and he said, "I want an immediate investigation, starting with that man." That's me.

So all I'm thinking is, "I'm going to be run out of the service. I never should have been there. What happened?" I still didn't realize what had happened.

So my friend, my bunkmate, Chuck Higgins, was communications officer. He came up and said, "John, what the hell happened?" And I said, "Major Cosby pointed out the hill for target." And he said, "Boy, you're in deep doo-doo."

So I got in the jeep with Chuck Higgins and went back to the battalion command post. By the time I got back there the division G-2, whose name was Major Van Zant - intelligence from the regimental headquarters - he was already there.

And he said -- we were in a little washout ravine - and he said, "Sit down, lieutenant, tell me what happened." So I gave him the whole story that I just gave you.

And my ammunition sergeant was right there at the time while I was being interviewed.

And he said, "Well, how did you get to Fritzie's Hill?"

"Well, Major Cosby ...Owens (*Owens must be the major's last name*) --

Major Owens pointed out the hill to me and I took an azimuth on it. And my ammunition sergeant, Squatty Freeman said, "That's right, Major, I saw the commander do that." Well, Squatty Freeman saved my butt, I have to say that. Because I had followed the directions of the exec. That night, we had a new battalion exe. Cosby Owens was thrown out of the battalion. And when I went to the shower that night, everybody wanted to know, "Where's Komp?"

And the heavy weapons company commander -- Bill Neill (PH?) who was a captain, knew my name and had seen me around headquarters. ... He said, "Hey John, just think, you're the first one in the division to get your baptism of fire."

So that's how I became famous. [laughs]

Interviewer: ... *That's an incredible story. Did you ever see the old exec again?*

Komp: No. No.. What happened was -- the fellow who took over for him was ... Major Albert "Dutch" Sobesta. And he was a graduate of Texas A&M, I found this out later on.

Dutch Sobesta had been probably in a uh. supply or logistics organization before he came to us. Still in the division somewhere and he was a graduate from Texas A&M – this I found out later:

He told his wife who I spoke to many years later, as recently as the last six or seven years – she was still alive, Dutch had died.. And she said, "You know John," she said, " I know that Dutch felt so inadequate and he became the battalion commander in Metz. He was the one who took us across the river into Metz was Dutch Sobesta Because our previous battalion commander – Robert Walton - had been severely wounded in the first night attack which we had, so Dutch took over

And then when we were in Metz ... uh... Dutch and my company commander – Boulet – were standing outside a German barracks getting ready to cross the street.

And I was going to break into a building, where we were getting fires from the Germans in the city of Metz ... "I" company was up away from us I didn't know that at the time but "I" company was in the Tobacco factory.

And we were going into this building so we could fire back at where the Germans were firing at in the building that Vince Geiger was in. And that's where [Staff Sergeant] Andy Miller, our Medal of Honor winner, had another one of his incidents ... He was in that building. And I knew Andy Miller. He'd been in my platoon.

But there's a little part we've missed in there. I ended up going to G Co. after the desert.

Interviewer: *And G Co. was a rifle company?*

Komp: Yep, 377th. I was the infantry platoon leader.

Interviewer: *So G Co. has three rifle platoons and a weapons platoon. Does the platoon have a number?*

Komp: Yes, first, second, third, weapons platoon or fourth platoon – "weapons platoon" or "fourth platoon"

Interviewer: *And which platoon were you the leader of?*

Komp: I was third platoon.

Interviewer: *So that's after Camp Coxcomb. But when you get to Indiantown Gap [in Pennsylvania]...*

Komp: But there's an interim in there.

Because I'm out in the desert and I've become famous, and I get orders to report to the Air Corps in California to become a pilot. [laughs]

So I went to.. a place – it's a Marine Corps air station now in California – I can't think of the name – it's near Knott's Berry Farm.

So anyway I went there, and had to go through another physical examination, psychological examination. And one of the questions they asked is, "Why do you want to be a pilot?" And I said, "Well after the war, I want to be a commercial pilot." I'm thinking ahead. So that was not the answer they wanted to hear. They wanted to hear that I wanted to become a hotshot pursuit pilot and go after whoever is pursuing [us]. So that was one mark.

But then I didn't have the manual dexterity to operate all the instruments that you had to be able to do. So they said, "Well, you know," they called me in for another Interviewer and they said, "You're not qualified for pilot training but we'd like to keep you." I said, "For What?" They said "bombardier navigator." I said I didn't want to be a bombardier navigator. They said, "OK report back to your outfit." So I reported back to the 95th Division, which at that time was at Indiantown Gap Military Reservation, and when I got back there I was assigned back to the battalion, to a line company.

I didn't go back to my old platoon [A&P]. I was assigned originally to F Co., but two of the officers who had been in Headquarters Co. had gone to G Co., so they said, "We'll get you transferred to us." So I was maybe not even on the books of F Co. until I was assigned to the third platoon of G Co.

Interviewer: ... (repeats)... platoon of the G company....Had the Army Specialized Training Program [ASTP] people started coming in yet?

Komp: No. I was one of the people who was given the job of greeting them to the battalion. As the second lieutenant you [take care of] details. So one of my duties when I first got there was they said, "You know, we're going to get new guys in from ASTP." [Time 50:00]

I didn't even know what ASTP was. – Army Specialized Training Program -- so here we had to receive these guys who had all kinds of other plans, and here they are, they're going to be trained in basic infantry. And We were on mountaineer training at Ft. Indiantown Gap.

My job was to welcome them and line them up so they could be assigned to the different companies.

Interviewer: And did they .. Were they all green? I know some of them had some training ...

Komp: ... Some of them had had training, but others not so much. To me, if I'd been in the same boat I'd be in shock mode: You know, What next?

Interviewer: *I remember Paul Madden saying that some of the other veterans that had been around called them "whiz kids" and hazed them. But they said that after a while people got used to them. Someone also said -- I don't know if this is fair -- that the average I.Q. level of the 95th Infantry went up 20 points.*

Komp: Yeah, Probably. [laughs]

Interviewer: *Were there... any special challenges placing them in or getting them integrated with everybody?*

Komp: No. Wherever there was a slot that they needed somebody, that's there they went. What they call the exigencies of the service.

Interviewer: *Exigencies of the service. So they're in there and you're in mountain training. So you're climbing [in W. Virginia].*

Komp: I didn't go on that because I had an appendectomy. [laughs]

Interviewer: *So you had an appendicitis attack? What happened?*

Komp: And I was one of the first people treated with penicillin.

(Remember we had some discussion about penicillin one time, I don't think that's true - John referring to a story that the service withheld penicillin stockpiling it for Venereal Disease when it could have saved lives.)

I was treated with penicillin for an appendectomy which was called a vest pocket incision. I have an incision in my stomach area that looks like a bayonet went in rather than the full exploratory. My roommate Chuck Higgins, who I mentioned before, he had an appendectomy the following weekend and he had a full exploratory incision and was treated with sulfa. I was in and out of the hospital pretty quick, and Chuck was still there.

Interviewer: *I heard Sulfa was tricky. So you're in and out of the hospital, your platoon comes back from mountain training, and this is before D-Day?*

Komp: Yeah, D-Day occurred while we were in Indiantown Gap, and we had a levee before D-Day for people with engineering qualifications.

And, I had already -- after I got back to the division, I put in an application to go airborne training. [laughs] Regimental commander turned it down - It went up the tide to the regiment, and the regimental commander turned it down.

Komp (cont'd): He said, “What the hell is the matter with this guy? He’s been in the Air Corps and now he wants to go airborne [the Army’s Airborne School]. I was only 21 years old at that point. ... I was full of p..

Interviewer: ...Pee and vinegar... you wanted to be a paratrooper

Komp: I wanted to be a paratrooper, sure... because at Fort Benning I watched them. Watched them down there. Fort Benning [Ga.]was where they trained.

Interviewer: Did you ever get a chance during your career to make a jump?

Komp: A friend of mine was going to help me do a jump when I was in Korea in 1961, but I didn’t do it.

I’m glad I didn’t do it. [laughs] We were going to jump on the banks of the Han River outside of Seoul. Cause He had to maintain his airborne qualification, so he said, “There’s nothing to it, John.” But that’s another story. This guy Tom Rounsaville

Interviewer: Let’s jump there for a second. We’re in Korea? Tell me about that.

Komp: My second tour in Korea, 1961. I’m a major. I’m in the Army general staff. United Nations - Eighth Army, general staff - I’m a grounds operation officer for 8th Army. [55:00]

One of the ... one of the sections of the G-3 [planning and operations] sections was ... uh... exercise planning. ...

Interviewer: G-3 is supply...?

Komp: (correcting) .. is Operations. Planning and operations

First you have a plan and when you execute it, it becomes an operational plan – see you plan and then you execute.. so planning and operations -- is the way it’s done.

So I was in the operations section. I was the one who put plans into operation. I’m not doing it, my boss, is telling me what to do – he’s a a one-star general was over the Army G-3 section I’m just... way down a level. But one of the fellows who was in this ... exercise planning... which we would play nuclear battle fields.. or other exercises, following the invasion routes which are historical facts in Korea, they’d always come down ... (sounds like “Wee-John-boo”) - the Seoul corridor. That’s the main access to move troops and vehicles. So we would play these different exercises.

So Tom Rounsaville and I became pretty good friends. He was in a different section, he was also a major. We’d also been classmates at Command and General Staff College. He was a major, I was a junior captain – Jr. Capt at Command and General Staff College – another mark for me..

Komp (cont'd): I looked at Tom's patch. On the right sleeve you wear the one where you've been in combat. I said, "Tom, what's that patch, I've never seen that one before." It was an Indian head superimposed against the Alamo. He said, "Oh, that's the Alamo Scouts."

I'd never heard of the Alamo Scouts. I said, "What the hell are the Alamo Scouts?" He said, "Oh, they operated in the Pacific." Never said another word – wouldn't say a word about what he did.

OK. Remember seeing the movie called "The Greatest Escape" or something about POW camps during WWII?" They talk about the Ranger Co. that was coming in the front? Well, there were two guys that came in from the other side.

They were Alamo Scouts, who were there before the Rangers, who had been operating with guerilla forces.

That was Tom Rounsaville.

I never knew about that until I read the book. And so he couldn't talk about that operation because of secrets for 50 years. He died and I never knew. Tom Rounsaville was one of those guys.

So he wanted me he had jump qualification he was airborne-qualified, and he had to maintain his qualification by jumping. So he offered one time. He said he'll show me how to jump, we'd jump together. And I almost did it. [laughs]

Then I thought, "Hey you're a little too old for this to start doing this. Then I find out that George Bush jumps out of aircraft and he's 80-something. [laughs]. I should have done it!"

Interviewer: ... Should have done it...

Komp: That's another side story.

Interviewer: Now we're back at Indiantown Gap, you've integrated the ASTP, you're done with appendicitis. How did you hear about the invasion?

Komp: We heard it on the newscasts. But before the invasion they were asking for engineer-qualified officers, and I was on the levee, and Dutch Sobesta said, "No," that he didn't want me to go. So I was taken off the levee and they sent somebody else. Because they had so many people to send they had to send they had to meet a levee.

Interviewer: Was that a levee for the airborne?

Komp: That was the levee for the D-Day engineers, so I missed out on that.

Interviewer: When you look back, do you have any feeling about that?

Komp: God was watching over me.

Interviewer: *God was watching over..*

Komp: It's not luck... it's fortunate.

Interviewer: *In the whole time in your military career, did you feel there were times when God was watching over you? That you were lucky. That if you'd been one step to the right, for instance, something would have happened?*

Komp: Oh yeah. The first time that I knew I was being fired on by a sniper. [Time: 60:00]

You look back and think, "Boy, that was close."

When I rejoined G Co., I was excess. They had all of the platoons filled. The company command post was back to Maizierles les Metz and the unit was around Woippy..

Interviewer: *Yes.*

Komp: Boulet said, "I don't have a slot for you but stick around."

So what I did at night I would go up with the supply column we could take jeeps up at night to supply the battalion ...

Interviewer: *Yeah..*

Komp: or the Companies I was actually with G company. So I was with the supply jeep, going up to deliver food and ammunition to G company.

Interviewer: *Are they in Woippy?*

Komp: They're in Woippy.

And I saw Don Moore one time, he commanded 1st Platoon.. He had been the ... uh...

Let's see, he had a job in HQ I'm trying to think what job he had in HQ with us – he wasn't the motor officer – it's something else, I'll never forget what it was but

Anyway he had been in Headquarters Co. with me. I said, "How are you doing, Don." He said, "Ooh, they're coming close, they're coming close." He was shaking. Visibly - You could see him shaking. And within 24 hours I was assigned to first platoon.

Now, I always thought until very recently that I had relieved Don Moore. Because he cracked up ... he cracked up under fire. We never heard from him again. We tried to reach him, because we heard he was living in Texas. But you never know. The guy was embarrassed and ashamed. I can understand that. But we had no gripes. Having been in combat, we could understand what he was going through.

Komp (cont'd): But I always thought that I had relieved Don Moore, -- No, I hadn't. There was an interim lieutenant named Dan Colton who was killed, so I relieved ... became the Third commander of the first platoon. And I didn't know that until the last 10 years or so.

Interviewer: *How'd you find out?*

Komp: His name is in the regimental history. Dan Colton... and I put it together.

Interviewer: *You just were talking about the close call, the sniper? [1:02:50]*

Komp: Okay.. the close call. [laughs]

When I took over first platoon, they were in the basement of a burning building in Woippy. But before I took command of the platoon, in one of the missions going up to the front lines with the [unintelligible] I was in the battalion command post which was in some kind of bunker in Woippy – I don't - because it was all in the darkness and you didn't know where you were – you just follow the light, follow the door and I came out of the battalion command post and I heard this horrible screaming.

And two other fellows came with me. We went to where this guy was screaming and it was in a building that is pictured in our regimental history. It's like a tractor repair facility, I think.

We ended up finding this guy in the corner of the building. We had a blanket with us to go and pick him up.

And as soon as we found him the Germans started shelling us again. And I felt a little burning in my left..uh.. thigh, near my butt.

And we picked this guy up and uh..

Interviewer: *You just put him in the middle of the blanket..?*

Komp: We put him in the blanket –

Interviewer: *... each of you take an end..*

Komp: Take an end put him in there. There was Hendricks, Burton, McKeon and myself [holding the blanket as a cot], I remember them because we met and talked about this incident later on.

We got the guy to the aide station and we were up [carrying him on the blanket] almost at chest height, because I remember holding his hand and talking about his high school [ring]. And he had what we called a chest sucking room. And the surgeon, the battalion surgeon I think it was Atkins, just shook his head. And the guy died right there...

Interviewer: *While you were holding his hand...*

Komp: ...while I was holding his hand. I don't know what his name was. [Time 1:05:00]

So then, I went back with German prisoners. We had German prisoners there, and Dutch Sobesta said, "Take 'em back, and if you lose them along the way, don't worry." [laughs]

He was always telling me that -- indicating that *[that is was okay to kill them]*, but we didn't do that. We got them back to a collecting point. And then they go to an enclosure.

Interviewer: ... So.. so you take the prisoners ...

Komp: And this is at night.

Interviewer: ...At night... Is the collecting point just like a barbed wire place or did you ...

Komp: Didn't even have barbed wire. These Germans were happy to be out of it. After how long they'd been fighting a war.

Interviewer: Oh sure, I bet they are. Someone told me before when you run into a German soldier that's one thing. But the SS had a whole different mentality. Is that true?

Komp: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you run that at all - the mentality of the SS? or did you have to deal with them a different way?

Komp: I don't recall specifically SS. But ... uh... somewhere along the way, and it had to be around Saarlautern [Germany], I picked up an SS hat. And I still have it. An SS hat has the little skull on it, and the SS insignia on it. I even had one of those black leather coats that you see. I had one of those. But you carry all that stuff in an infantry outfit. You had so many other things other -- carry more important than souvenirs, or as we used to say, "Loot."

Interviewer: Loot. And..

Komp: "Saar-loot-en." [laughs]

Interviewer: "Saar-loot-en" [laughs] [01:07:00] Let me go back ... I wanted to ask you ... back to the U.S... The trip across from Miles Standish (Camp Miles Standish, Mass. near Boston) What ship were you on? The Mariposa or the America (USS Mariposa and the USS America were luxury ships converted to military use during the war.)?

Komp: The West Point.

Interviewer: USS West Point, it used to be called SS America. Did you have a cabin? And how did that overseas trip affect you? People will tell me different things.

Komp: I just recall it as a fast trip, and we were glad to get off the damn boat. [laughs] In Liverpool. On my birthday, August 16th.

I was on the train on my birthday, and my friends were teaching me how to play – what is it – Hearts?

Interviewer: Yeah, “Hearts” – Black Queen of Spades. When you pulled into Liverpool, any memories of the first time you talked to the Brits?

Komp: Yes, marching through the streets, and these kids were asking for [in British accent]: “Any gum, chum? Any gum, chum?” And the answer was, “Not a stick...”

Interviewer: (guessing)... “Dick?”

Komp: “prick.” [laughs]

Interviewer: “Not a stick, prick.” Hold on just a second I’m going to change this CD.

[01:08:45 – 01:10:37] Interviewer changes CD. Small talk and pauses.

[01:10:37]

Interviewer: Hello this is David Meyer, son of Earl D Meyer, Co. H/379th/95th Infantry. Today is still June 8th. This is the second CD an interview with Col. John Komp who has just said – we’re in Liverpool now.

So when you’re walking in Liverpool, the kids are saying again?

Komp: [in British accent] With all the profanity? (**Interviewer:** With all the profanity.) “Any gum, chum? Not a stick, prick.” [laughs]

Interviewer: And what would they do?

Komp: They just... we were giving them stuff and talking to them. You know, they were friendly.

Interviewer: Then you get on a train and go down ti.what did you do?

Komp: Got a train and went down to Winchester...

Interviewer: Camp Barton Stacey.

Komp: Camp Barton Stacey.

Interviewer: Did you sleep on straw mattresses?

Komp: As I recall we had straw mattresses. They would put straw in a bag and we slept on that.

Interviewer: And what were you doing in Barton Stacey?

Komp: Well, we continued small unit training. We'd do patrol exercises I remember we had a veteran of the war – a recent veteran - who had probably been wounded coming to speak to us and telling us about what we really needed to carry as infantrymen. "Throw that damn pack of stuff away with all that stuff, you're not going to need that. "

Interviewer: What kinds of things did you throw out?

Komp: uh... the whole pack. The whole pack [laughs]

Well, we didn't do it, but this guy said when you get there you're not going to need all this stuff because we still ended up carrying that big duffel bag with whatever else we had going with us.

When you really get into combat, you drop a lot of your stuff and you leave it with the company. And then you go with the lightest things that you need.

You need your immediate rations and your ammunition. The main thing you focus on is ammunition, and the cleaning equipment for your weapon, because you don't want your weapon to desert you when you need it. So that's a priority. Your weapon, then your survival gear.

[Then, after hearing a cell phone ring: "I'm reaching for my cell phone because I have it on vibrate and I've missed calls already. Let me look at my cell phone for a minute."]

01:13:33 – end of Part I aka the first wav file "File1KompJohn2012June8WWIIforVHP"

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Veteran's Name: John Komp

Interviewer: David Meyer (O'Shea)

Date of Interview: June 8, 2012

Part 2 - corresponds to VHP file named: File2KompJohn2012June8WWIIforVHP"(begins after the break)

Transcriber: Carol Slezak

Transcribed on: April 2, 2014

***Interviewer:** We're back from a short break for phone calls. [To resume], we're in Camp Barton Stacey [in England].*

Komp: And we're doing small unit training, maybe patrols – just to keep occupied. As I think I said, we also had a combat veteran with us. Whether he was with D-Day or not, I don't know, but he was an infantry officer, and he gave us little tips, and clues about what to expect.

***Interviewer:** So when you say combat maneuvers, you go on patrols. For people who don't know, what does it mean to go on a patrol?*

Komp: Well, when you set up a patrol with a platoon, included in that organization you have scouts. These are the people who precede the main element. They are responsible to locate the enemy, or be the first one shot, since you know you're near the enemy.

Also, whatever the combat formation is, you take that column, and you put people out to the sides so that you don't have anybody surprise you, or come up unannounced. You are also looking to the rear, so you have to be fully aware of everything – 360 degrees.

A security for the formation. That even applies to motorized vehicles. You always have your security around you.

***Interviewer:** ...Security. So the people that are looking at what's behind you, are they the rear echelon?*

Komp: No, you're only talking about a platoon now. So you have 40 men, and three squads. You can have the squads aligned one behind the other, or parallel to each other with one in the rear. Or you can have one up, two to the side and echelon them, right or left.

And this all goes back to close order drill. You're not as rigid, you're not marching to a cadence, you're marching to whatever terrain you're on.

***Interviewer:** So this is what you're doing at Camp Barton Stacey.*

Komp: Just keeping 'em going, instead of going to sit in the back and have a cigarette and tell dirty stories.

Interviewer: *Which I know you wouldn't have done..*

Komp: *We woudn't have done that at all.*

Interviewer: *While you were there did you get to go to London at all?*

Komp: Yes we did. We did go to London.

And we were there [laughs] standing with Dutch Sobesta and probably one of the other officers. Maybe there were three or four of us. But it was dark, and we were at Piccadilly Circus, which is known to people who have been to London.

And this woman came up to us in the dark. And whatever the conversation I don't know, but she shone a little light onto her ankle. I've been told (I don't know) she was letting us know that she was a prostitute. [laughs] Whether that's true or not, I don't know. I remember her flashing her light down on the ground, and Dutch Sobesta was horrified that a woman would come up and offer herself for the evening. We didn't do that.

Interviewer: *When you were in London, did you ever hear any of the buzz bombs?*

Komp: Yes. Yeah, they were not in the vicinity where we were, but we heard buzz bombs go off. And we saw evidence of the bombings.

Interviewer: *What did you think of the British people?*

Komp: I admired them for what they put up with, really. And while I was in England I was in an automobile accident. I ended up not going to France with the division. I ended going as a replacement.

Interviewer: *What happened?*

Komp: We had a group go to London for a pass, and I was with a truck and a driver. We went down to the railroad station to pick up these guys coming back. So while we were there we had a couple of beers and we ended up moving the truck and getting hit by a British seven-ton prime mover.

And I ended up almost going through the windshield. And when the car struck the windshield went out, and that little throw--out rod that's on the side of the windshield went in the side of my skull [right side of forehead] and ripped this whole piece of flesh off the side of my skull. If it had been a little farther it would have killed me. So here I am, fortunate John again. I have 26 stitches. Sometimes you can see it [the scar] more clearly. It goes right across the eyelid, up through the forehead.

Interviewer: *They did a good job.*

Komp: The guy who did it in the hospital in Winchester did an excellent job. He said that what helped him repair that was the first aid that the driver [a man named Furpas] had done.

We went into a British house and these two women were there and they gave us towels and he (Furpas) just pulled that skin back over that thing and tied it up. And there was blood all over the place. I was sitting there, I had on what they called an “alligator slicker,” it was an oilskin slicker, and there was a pool of blood on it. When I stood up the blood was all over the floor. I felt sorry for the women that they had to do that. It was the first aid that got me to the hospital and got me through that. And I ended up in a ward with D-Day survivors. Eighty-second airborne....and that was in Winchester.

Interviewer: *Did they talk about it at all?*

Komp: No. They weren't going to talk about it. They were going to talk about girls.

So after I recovered there they sent me up to the midlands – I think it was Manchester. It was near Mitch Field Barracks. It was a disciplinary barracks outside of ... Manchester I think it was.

And we were living in a housing community. We had individual houses but there was no furniture. So we were sleeping on our bedrolls or whatever it was we had to sleep on. So we stayed there until they formed a packet. That's a replacement packet.

A replacement packet has a number of officers. The senior officer is the packet commander. He has custody of all of our records, our military records. And you're full of people who have been injured or people who were going as replacements. And some of them didn't want to go back.

And you are shipped out by a boat to France. And when we got to France we were up on the beaches overlooking Omaha. And ...

Interviewer: What did Omaha look like?

Komp: Well, we got there during daylight.

I remember going down on a British ship, and we had to do down the ropes, thenets. And you always had to remember to put your hands vertical, not horizontal, so nobody is going to step on your hand as you go down. You don't go like this (shows).

These are things they teach you in basic training, so you remember those things. And then we went down to a launch and got off on the mulberries. They still had the Mulberries [floating docks], they hadn't been destroyed yet. Then we went up that ravine.

... And we got to this area that was open air, and by this time it was dark, and we bedded down for the night and it's raining. And being the junior officer I had the last shift. So they woke me up at three or four o'clock in the morning and said, “You're on.” So I had to get up and walk around, and this is complete darkness in this area, and you don't want to kick anybody who's in a pup tent.

Some put tents up, others just slept in their clothing.

Komp (cont'd): And about four o'clock in the morning I see this little light in the distance. And I walk to the light and it's the cook setting up a mess line so they could feed the replacements. And when I walked into the area one of the cooks saw me and said, "Hey, lieutenant, do you want a cup of coffee?"

I had never had coffee. I never drank coffee. My father was a big coffee drinker, but I never drank coffee. So I said, "Yeah, okay." And I had to get my cup out of my canteen, and he pours me the cup, puts condensed or evaporated milk in, and I put it to my lips and I didn't realize the heat that was there! [Owww....] So that was my first cup of coffee. And I was hooked on coffee.

So then we proceeded by truck and train all the way across France. And we get up to ...

Interviewer: *Are you still with the packet?*

Komp: We're still with the packet. They hadn't broken us up yet. We were going up where .. uh. third army was. We were heading to 3rd Army.

Interviewer: *Did you know if you were going back to 95th Infantry?*

Komp: No, I was just a military occupational and number. I wasn't even a name. I was a number. Because that's how they requisition, by number, for military occupation specialty.

So here I was with these guys, and all of them had been veterans on D-Day. And one of them was Max D. Manifold, who climbed on the hook. Max D. Manifold, I remember that name. Never forget a name like "Max D." So we became very good friends.

There was another fellow who had been in a tank battalion. The other two officers were infantry combat veterans.

All of us had been wounded or in my case injured and we were trying to get back to our outfits.

But there was no assurance you were going to get back to your outfits. So when we went through all of the system we got up to a place called Conflans-Jarny And that was the last stop that we had as a packet. Now we're at the disposition of third army, down at corps level.

Interviewer: *And are you in mid-France, are you close to Alsace-Lorraine?*

Komp: We were close to Lorraine. Not Alsace. Alsace was in the South. We were in Lorraine, north of Nancy... of course west of Metz .. we didn't know what Metz was...

So I was...So we had a show by Marlene Dietrich. We had Marlene Dietrch come; she came we all crowded into this theater in Conflans-Jarny, and she comes out and she's dressed just like us. G.I. outfit, G.I. boots – and guess what she did? She played a musical saw. [laughs] And we're all hollering, "We want to see your legs! We want to see your legs!" And we never did get to see your legs.

Bwinng uh bwinng –uh (imitating the saw).

All she did was play that musical saw. That was it.

Interviewer: *That's all she did? What a joke...*

Komp: That was it. Here's this hot sex star and all we wanted to do was look at this woman and see her legs but she won't let us see then.

... But the rest of the show was great. They had a great show. People came out and danced and told jokes and played instruments. But Marlene Dietrich was a flop. [Time 15:00]

So the next day, I think it was Armistice Day, the 11th of November 1944, I think it was: I was standing on this street watching this truck go through. And you can always identify a vehicle by the bumper number.

Interviewer: *I didn't know that.*

Komp: Oh yeah.. All the vehicles have bumper numbers and the numbers are even broken down so you know which company or platoon or activity it belongs to.

So you have a 95, and then on the other side you had the company and the other number.

So here I am, I'm looking at these vehicles coming and I look down at the bumper sticker on these two-and-a-half-ton trucks, they were ammunition trucks, and it's my old ammunition section... delivering ammunition.

And I had on what they call a driver's coat. It was like a canvas coat that comes down just above my knees. It was a distinctive coat.

I step out on the road and I'm waving to these guys. And they come out and said, "Hey, Komp!" Because they never called you by your rank, because you'd get shot. The Germans were always, "Who's your leader?"

If the guys didn't like you, they'd call you lieutenant. [laughs] So it was "Komp." And I said, "Hey, where are you going?" They said, "We're going up to regiment." I said, "Hey, give me a lift." So I got on there.

Interviewer: *And you didn't have to tell anyone?*

Komp: Well, I should have. Because from that moment, I was AWOL.

Interviewer: *You were AWOL.*

Komp: So I get up to service company, which all these vehicles go to – that's where the ammunition supply point is. And I meet Captain Davis, who is the motor officer, because I had fame from the desert [incident]. And having been an A&P officer, he knew me and he said, "Where the hell did you come from?" I said, "From the replacement company."

He said, "You're AWOL!"

Komp (cont'd): I said, “Well I want to get back to the outfit.” He said, I’d better go talk to Crocker.

Crocker was adjutant - our personnel officer. So I go over to see Roy Crocker – he was from Texas, a good Texas boy – and again I get this, “Where the hell did you come from?” I tell him from the replacement packet back at Conflans-Jarny. I wanted to get back to the outfit.

And he said, “We don’t requisition by name, we requisition by infantry platoon leader numbers.” He said, “I got no guarantee. But we got to get you back to Conflans-Jarny.”

So they gave me a jeep, and drove me back to the replacement depot. They didn’t even know I’d been gone.

So I go back there and two days later, I had just coming back from a pass, and was just coming back to the compound, it was French cavalry barracks that we were using, and they’re calling my name.

I’m getting on a truck, and when I go to get on the truck who do I run into? My platoon sergeant from the third platoon, and my platoon guide, both of who had been wounded or something else. They told me about the company having been in a night attack. Crocker told me, too. My company commander was gone and Boulet had taken over.

Interviewer: *Is this after Maizières-lès-Metz or before?*

Komp: No, this was at Maizières-lès-Metz. [He was coming in, and they’d already had the night attack.] They’d already had the casualties, and they’re getting replacements, and I’m part of the replacements.

So I... the officers got a liquor ration. A bottle of bourbon and a couple of bottles of wine. So I gave most of my liquor rations to my old sergeants. I never saw them again.

They never got back to Co. G. Neither one of them. That was a big disappointment. Because I thought they were real good guys. But..

Interviewer: *But they took the way out?*

Komp: Yeah. Yeah. [The platoon sergeant] later on became an alcoholic, I heard. He worked in a steel mill, but he was an alcoholic. He was probably ashamed of himself too, for what he’d done.

But when I got back to regiment, I was assigned down back to battalion, then back to G Co. And that’s the end of that loop.

Interviewer: *So did someone pull some strings since they were supposed to get you by number, or was that ...?*

Komp: No, when I got back to regiment they had requisitioned infantry replacements, and I was in that group. However I got back to regiment, having been passed by division all the way down, I don’t know. But I was assigned back to 377th Infantry.

Interviewer: *So someone ... some force is working.. Whether it's human force or something else. Somewhere you get back where you wanted to be. Out of everything – out of the whole war – you get back to your company. So now ... And people must be glad to see you.*

Komp: I guess so. [laughs]

Interviewer: *I guess so. People talk about how loud things are. Someone said there's noise all the time. Are you hearing shelling all the time?*

Komp: Pretty much. Intermittent shelling. Because they were fighting around the fort at Metz. You've heard that story.

Interviewer: *So that's where you go from Maizières-lès-Metz to Woippy.*

Komp: Then you're in front line combat.

Interviewer: *Now you're on the front line, and you're in Woippy. So that's probably about Nov. 13, 14, somewhere around there?*

Komp: Yes, somewhere around there. And I got wounded. When I went out to pick up that guy? I was wounded and so was Jim McKeon.

Interviewer: *By shrapnel?*

Komp: From shrapnel from artillery. The Germans were firing artillery at us.

Interviewer: *Where were you wounded?*

Komp: I thought I just said that.

Interviewer: *Oh yes, that's where you felt the hot thing.*

Komp: So when I was in the aide station with Atkins [the soldier who died while he was holding his hand], the surgeon said, "Are you OK?" Because he was referring to how I felt about this guy dying in front of me, I think.

And I said, "Well, I have this burning sensation in my butt." And he said, "Well drop your pants, let's see what that is." He said, "You've got shrapnel in there, we'll put a bandage on it but I'm not going to try to get it out." I didn't have that removed until 1946.

Interviewer: *Did you keep the piece?*

Komp: There was nothing left of it. It was a cyst. It had completely When I sat down I had to move my leg around so I wouldn't feel it.

Interviewer: *So you're coming down from the north of Metz. So what happens after Woippy?*

Komp: From Woippy we went into ... [thinking] it was across the [Moselle]River from Metz proper. And that took us about ... Let me tell you about the coat.

Interviewer: *Sure tell me about the coat.*

Komp: When I rejoined the platoon, and my platoon sergeant is Don Conkrite. He said, “Hey lieutenant, you’ve got to get rid of that coat,” because I’m the only one who has a coat like that, and you stand out like a sore thumb.” I had no means of getting rid of that coat, because it was kind of cold.

Interviewer: *Did you have a replacement coat?*

Komp: No I didn’t have anything and the 1st Sgt didn’t have anything -- so I wore the coat.

The first time I led my platoon – we were in a column, and I was maybe third or fourth man back – and behind me was a fellow by the name of Ricketts. A

And we’re walking around this area, and our flank is open to the left, and there’s a wall going down one side. A wall. And I hear Ricketts behind me say, “I’ve been hit.” And I turn around, and here he is, the tip of his nose had been cut across, so this whole thing is hanging down over his lip. And he’s bleeding.

And I don’t have first aid, so you holler for medic.

And the medic who’s assigned to your platoon comes to the aid. You don’t stop for wounded on the battlefield. You call for medics. So I left. I left Ricketts behind.

He came back later on, he rejoined the platoon and ..you could see where they stitched it (pointing to his own nose) – right across here.

He rejoined us when we were in Germany (*with stitches on his nose.*) But anyway, Ricketts got hit. I didn’t think of it at the time, but the one they were aiming at was me.

So anyway, then we get to Metz, and I was standing with Huet J. Bulais, and Sebesta. So Sebesta is – {*here Mr. Komp demonstrates visually for Interviewer where the three men are in relation to each other, and there also is a gate to Mr. Komp’s left.*}

So they tell me to go through the gate to get into the building to get a machine gun that’s firing off to the right. Which I didn’t know.

That was the tobacco factory, that was I Co. was fighting. That’s where Kittel [German General Heinrich Kittel – CO of Metz] was. We didn’t know it at the time. The Germans were really defending that whole area pretty much.

And the area that we had come through was the Officer Candidate School [in Metz].

We went through there. We took that.

That’s where Miller did his first ... bit ..where he captured..

Interviewer: *Is that where he climbed...*

Komp: That's where he climbed into the window and captured the Gestapo and a couple others and captured them. He spoke fluent German.

Interviewer: *Was he in your platoon?*

Komp: He was in my platoon, when I first ...that third platoon. He was the one we got because (*a name that sounds "Bayshore"*) the platoon sergeant] came to me and said, "A bazooka class just closed, and it's a guy by the name of Andy Miller, who's the leading bazooka man. Do you want me to get him?" And I said, "Yeah, let's get him in the platoon." So he was in... I forget which squad but he was a member of a squad as a bazookaman.

Interviewer: *Was this Co. G?*

Komp: Co. G, 3rd platoon.

Interviewer: *What was Miller like?*

Komp: He was kind of heavy set, looked older than some of the other men. I don't know exactly how old he was. Obviously he was of German descent, and a good soldier. And that's about it. That's what I remember of him.

Interviewer: *When you look back, do you see what made him singlehandedly capture Germans? Was he like the "Incredible Hulk?" He just gets angry and ...*

Komp: No. Not at all.

The other thing I remember about Andy Miller is that when we were at Indiantown Gap we had people go on pass, and they had family in the local area, and we weren't going anyplace.

All the officers were on the base we were going to Boston but we didn't know it. We were restricted because we were getting ready to move and we didn't know where we were going. Some people were still out on pass, but they were due back. So we had one man on AWOL. And Jake Thompson came and said, "Do we know where he is?" And the first sergeant said, "Yeah, we know where he is." So he says, "Well, go get him."

So they sent three guys to get him, and one of them was Andy Miller. [laughs]

They brought him back. Where they went to get him, I don't know. But we were still there .. in the.. in the mess hall. Then we went to the orderly room and the company commander was seated at his desk and they let this guy in and we smelled this horrible odor – he had crapped in his pants. [laughs] So one of the people who helped bring him was Andy Miller. So you ask if he was a threatening influence. I don't know but this guy did crap his pants.

We didn't have to report the man AWOL.

Interviewer: You didn't?

Komp: No. Because we had a certain time period. And that's what the company commander wanted. He wanted that guy back. Before we had to report him. The status report in the morning we'd have to report him. He wanted that guy back. Whatever that guy's name was, he came back.

Interviewer: With brown underwear.

Komp: He just overstayed his leave. He wasn't trying to get out of anything.

Interviewer: So was Andy Miller a good bazooka man?

Komp: He was the best one. Outstanding in his class.

Interviewer: What would you use a bazooka against?

Komp: It has a charge .. (shows) about this big around.

You would use it against fixed enemy positions.

So you'd fire it into a building, or a machine gun pit. Anything that was a sizeable target. So that's what Andy Miller did. When the first platoon got into that building, and we cleared it, we were up on the different floors. And Andy Miller came back in, and I look out of the corner of my eye and see Andy Miller with his bazooka. He's going up to either the roof or the top of this building. And he's the one who fired the bazooka back at the tobacco factory, and knocked out the German's gun.

Interviewer: He's the one.

Komp: Yes.

Interviewer: So does he take his own initiative? Or..

Komp: No, he was given the target and told to go get that target.

Interviewer: So he figured out a way to get it.

Komp: Yeah.. But I never saw his platoon leader. I didn't know who the third platoon leader was.

It was Herb Hardy, who became the company commander after Boulet was. But I didn't even know Boulet and Sebesta had been hit until after the next day. You know, things happen in combat. Everybody looks at something a little different, sees something different.

So I didn't know we had a new company commander until we moved out of Metz and went to ... uh... it's a little town out of Metz. We celebrated Thanksgiving there, in this little town. And I remember the mess sergeant given me a turkey leg .. a whole turkey leg. Eldon Matson.

Interviewer: Somebody said that .. uh... I think Dick Schoen said you got turkey and you got mashed potatoes

Komp: and gravy..

Interviewer: And I think he said he didn't have any place to eat it, so he put it in his helmet. Is that the sort of things that happened.

Komp: [laughs] It might have been, it might have been. I won't tell you what I did in a helmet one time. That's another story.

Interviewer: Well cut to that story, just quickly.

Komp: When we were in that barracks in Conflans-Jarny, I was up in the top of the barracks with a fellow who'd been in the 90th division recon troop.

He had been wounded and he was returning to the 90th division. and we shared this room. In the middle of the night I get an attack of the GI's [gastro-intestinal]. I have to go.

So the helmet has a liner, so I separated the thing, dropped my pants, and I'm skittering myself in the da... this is in the dark. And when I get through with that, this guy wakes up and he goes, "What the hell is that smell?" [laughs] He was a 1st Lieut from the recon.

I take that helmet full of crap and go down two or three flights of stairs in the dark, and I go out to where they had a garbage pile. And I took the whole helmet and threw it away. [laughs] So all I had left was the helmet liner.

And the next day when I get up and I get down to the chow line, I told the mess sergeant, "Boy, I got the GI's." He said, "We'll take care of that, Lieutenant." He gave me a No. 10 can, it was cheese. He gave me a Number 10 can of cheese. And that's how I cleared that up. The cheese binds.

[Time 35:00]

Interviewer: Did you get a new helmet that day?

Komp: Oh yeah, I got a new helmet. Every time you left a replacement outfit, you had to have all your equipment check, so you didn't leave short of anything you were authorized to have. They didn't ask you "What happened to your helmet?" they just gave it to you.

So somewhere in France, there's a deposit made by me.

Interviewer: There's a big rose bush that's 10 feet tall.

Komp: And smells beautiful. [laughs]

Interviewer: I always wondered, you're in places where WWI was fought. Did you see evidence of that?

Komp: No. No.

Oh, yes. Yes.

After we had... uh.. crossed the German border... I remember when we crossed the German border, because we all stopped to take a leak on that “1870.” They have little stakes in the ground

Interviewer: ... Yeah?

Komp: ...stakes in the ground...

Interviewer: Stakes on the ground – what about 2 feet high?

Komp: Oh no no no As I recall they were [motions about 10 inches high] about that deep. And they had “1870” on them.

Interviewer: *What’s 1870 mean?*

Komp: That’s the Franco-Prussian War.

Interviewer: *So that’s the border.*

Komp: That’s the border. So when G Co. crossed that, I was with Jim McKeon, and both of us whipped out and peed on “1870. “[laughs] Jim McKeon and I were really good friends. We knew each other before we got to ... France, because I knew who was in the weapons platoon back in Indiantown Gap. And I knew he was from New York [Manhattan] and I was from Brooklyn.

Interviewer: *So you’re going across and you p*ssed on the “1870” and now you’re into Germany.*

Komp: And later on, I had gotten foot immersion because when Conkrite was killed we were in the same trench together. That was the Maginot Line. That was in Bois de Ottenville. We had come out of Boulay after we left Metz, and we were on a route march where we just spread out and march. You’re not going by vehicle.

Maybe a truck would catch up to you and take you the rest of the way, but we were on a route march Marching with a certain cadence, stopping at a certain time to take a rest.

So we were on a route march, we went from Bousinville and then to Boulay, we were right... close to the Maginot Line... heading towards Saarlautern, and Hardy was the company commander and he told me to take my platoon in and go up on this this hill to Bois de Ottenville ... because one of our objectives was the town of Ottenville, which was on the other side.

So we went across that in a broad front, we just spread out the three platoons.

So mine was the lead platoon was leading going up the hill. The Germans were firing long-range machine gun fire at us.

So you could hear the bullets hitting the ground (makes sound “pwap, pwap”)– spent bullets.

Komp (cont'd): They were falling. So we go into the wood, and we spread the platoon around. But we were in the woods.

That's the worst place you can be if artillery or mortar fire with a point-detonating fuse is on it.

That means that anything it hits is going to explode. So if it hits a tree, it hits a branch it explodes. So that burst is going 360 degrees.

Interviewer: ... and you have red-hot shrapnel raining..

Komp: ... raining down on you.

So we got down in this shallow Maginto trench deep as this, I guess (shows). and they started shelling us, and Conkrite was on my left side, and another fellow was across from me, I think it was Bob Burton, and the platoon medic was down the trench a little way.

The shelling came in on us.

I had taken my wet belt off so my trench knife and canteen were up on the bank.

But I had my helmet on, and I was crouching down.

Interviewer: *Crouching down making yourself as small as you can..*

Komp: Yeah.. Now the shelling is over, and Conkrite says, "I've been hit."

It's pitch black, and you can't see anything. So we're trying to find out what's wrong with Conkrite.. So we call medic, and Johnson came down... my medic Clarence Johnson came, and he came down.

[Interruption – man looking for rest room]

Interviewer: (resuming) So Conkrite says, "I'm hit."

Komp: But as we're trying to find out where he's hit, he said, "I'm going out on you." And he died right there.

And the sad thing about that was ... in the morning ... by that time the trench had water in it, and we'd been in water all night long. So in the morning we took his rifle, he had an M-1 rifle... we took his rifle put it on the bank of that trench. And all of my gear was gone. I didn't have a web belt. The shell had hit right on that embankment and destroyed it. So I didn't have a web belt, my canteen was gone and my trench knife. That was part of the debris that went off that bank. That's how close they were to getting all of us. But the only one that was hit was Conkrite.

So we marked his grave... his site with the upended rifle and his helmet on top.

Interviewer: *Do you put his dog tags on it, too?*

Komp: No, no, no, you leave the dog tags on him.

... And we left the battlefield. I remember we went from that position to a French bunker, and then down to the road... There was a little delay in the morning.. .because he went to a French pillbox and we stayed there for a while and then we were called back to the road to continue our march toward Saarlautern. ...

And.. but we had crossed a fence.. but the names of the towns?

And so that's when Hardy saw me limping and said.. "Take a break and go to the aide station and get it taken care of."

We finally get into Saarlautern, and it must have been at least two weeks later, and the supply sergeant, Smith, came to me and said, "Hey, John," he said, "you reported Conkrite as KIA [Killed in Action]. "He said, "We don't have his body. It hasn't been picked up by Graves Registration." Those are the people who come through and pick up the dead.

He said, "We don't have it."

He said, "Do you remember where it was?" I said, "Oh yeah, I remember where it was." He said, "Would you go with us to see if we can find him?"

So we got into two jeeps, one had a trailer on it. And we went back to the site, went into the woods on foot we didn't have the vehicle with us.. and Smith – I got him right to the foot of the trench. He said, "OK, you go back to the vehicle." He didn't want me to see.

So they got Conkrite, in the shelter-half , put him in the trailer, and then we went to Graves Registration point. I'd never seen a Graves Registration Point. What they do, they put up a barrier, like a maze, that goes around this area. So that in order to go in you go in behind a screen, then there is another screen ... That's as far as I got. I didn't go in. But they went in... to that Graves Registration Point.

***Interviewer:** One of the first people to talk to me was a man named Alan Watson. He surprised me, I think he was in HQ and sometimes he was sent to Graves Registration and he said to me, "We don't touch the bodies. We would put down the blanket, roll them over." Is that true?*

Komp: Yeah..

***Interviewer:** So was that out of a certain sense of ceremony and respect?*

Komp: Also worried about getting any disease that they might have. You didn't want to get blood on you, and you didn't want to get any guts on you, that's for sure..

***Interviewer:** So you'd put down the blanket and roll him over...*

Komp: Or a shelter half.

Interviewer: *Or a shelter half.*

Komp: Shelter half was preferred because it would repel liquids. Your shelter half repels rain.. if you touch it it's going to leak but you know...

Interviewer: *So now you're on the way to Saarlautern and what did 377th do at Saarlautern?*

Komp: At Saarlautern....,some of the area had already been cleared before us by 379th. So you crossed that bridge, and then you went down to the right, and by doing that we had already bypassed the pillboxes that were on (lining) the river.

So we were behind the pillboxes, and between the big bunkers. So the building that company headquarters was in, some of the platoon, we could look out our back window and see the pillboxes. And you looked the other way and you see a great big bunker that came up out of the ground, and then would bop itself down again. We're in the Siegfried.

Interviewer: *So you're like the roast beef and they're the bread. You're the middle of the sandwich.*

Komp: That's right. But the people that we were behind, the pillboxes, they weren't looking our way. They were facing towards the river.

So we could watch some of them coming out of the bunkers ... or the pillboxes.

And that was another shot at me.

When we were going into Metz we were going down to a canal bridge.

And we came into this area that was like a courtyard, and a wall of billies across this courtyard. And there's a bullet that goes by me, and it was behind me. And I turned around and look up and I saw this window, and I said, "Fire at that window." So Jim McKeon was coming behind there and he steps out into the courtyard and takes a grenade and "fwap" - pops it right into the window, and whambo, no more sniper. [laughs]

And then we continued from there down to the canal, and got across there after I had a tank come out and knock out a 20-mm. gun that was at the river's edge.

That was a very clever operation by the Germans. This was an anti-aircraft gun, but they were using it as ground fire. What these Germans were doing, we were coming down the street and making the turn towards where they were, and they had this gun pointed this way. They weren't firing at us, they were firing at the cornice.. the stone cornice above us to try and collapse it on us. We had concrete raining down from that fire.

And about that time a tank came up behind us and I'm trying to get the tank commander's attention. And they have a telephone on the back which you use to communicate with the tank when they're buttoned up.

Komp (cont'd): So I'm banging on the tank, and they had fired on something before because they threw out their shell.

So the guy opens up the turret, and I said, "There's a 20-mm. gun around the corner." So the guy closes the hatch and starts to back up. I thought, "Where the hell are you going? You know?" He guns the motor, comes up to that point, swivels and knocks out that gun just like that."

I mean, he wasn't leaving, ee was getting momentum to make that turn, and he knocked out that gun. So then the Germans surrendered and we had these guys – these German prisoners going by us, laughing at my German because I'm hollering, "Macht schnell, macht schnell." And they were like, "Who's that guy?" [laughs]

So then we crossed the canal, and got on this island that's in the middle of the Moselle, and about that time we got finished checking through an Nazi barracks there an SS barracks there – that's where I picked up a little Nazi flag – we get word, "Hey, come back, come back, we're going to cross the river."

It was that quick. They had brought up the engineer boats, so we had to come back across the canal. We went down to where they were bringing the boats. [Two clergymen were there, Shofer a Protestant, and Father Baker was in the middle and Father O'Neill on the other side]. Shofer and Baker were on the banks of that river, consoling us as we got ready to cross.

There was only one battalion that crossed in boats. That was the 2nd battalion, 377th.

Now our first battalion had crossed farther up. They were already across the river and were coming down, and they got hit at Fort Belacroix. They blew that up on them.

So there were two battalions that crossed by boat. ... We were the second ones, and we were sitting ducks, crossing the river like that. But they did have smoke generator units that put smoke on the river, so there was some concealment, but not what you'd call cover. Cover is when you have something that will hide you -- Concealment is like, "Try to find me."

Interviewer: *So when the French woman in Metz, 2004, said she was 13 or 14 and she saw the men crossing the Moselle in boats, and she said, "Those poor boys I saw." Would that have been you?*

Komp: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: *Were they plywood boats?*

Komp: No, they were canvas boats. With wooden structure to keep them together. As I recall they were canvas. I'm not sure, they could have been wooden or canvas.

Interviewer: *Had they flooded the river, was it wide?*

Komp: Oh yes. It was a flooded.

Interviewer: *Was it on the way to Saarlautern that Andy Miller gets killed by a sniper?*

Komp: He was killed at uh... he was killed right about on the German border

He was on a flank of the He was out on the left and he was going across the field leading his squad, and by that time he'd been promoted, and he was shot and killed instantly.

And the fellow who was in the squad behind him was Ed Cappella, and he saw that happen. (A think there is a description of that.)

Ed Cappella had been a schoolteacher, and the platoon sergeant and [another platoon leader] looked down at him. They thought he was a weak sister to be a squad leader. And he was probably the best one we had.

He stuck it out. The other two didn't. He saw Andy Miller killed.

***Interviewer:** I didn't realize the significance of something. My father is injured before Metz. He's a radio man. So a plane strafes and someone behind him yells, "Jump!" so he jumps into a ditch or culvert and the radio is 45 pounds and it crushes him. He's paralyzed and they send him back to the hospital. The American doctor says you'll never walk again. But the German doctors they captured, who are used to patching up their own med, putting them back on the Russian Front, said, "Your last name is Meyer, it's a good German name. We will cure you." So they did all these new techniques and he was able to walk again in two weeks. And I guess they told him "Earl, you can go back home. "*

And I guess he told them, "I prefer to go back to my friends." And I remember telling someone that story, and they went, "Hmm," and I thought, "Oh that meant something. Oh, he had a chance to go out, but he went back." So when I think of one of the things I've learned, from you and everybody else, I learned what it means to go back and stick it out.

[Back to a question] *So now - Saarlautern. your regiment is getting depleted. Are you getting replacements all the time?*

Komp : Yeah, we're getting replacements.

***Interviewer:** Somebody said when replacements came, sometimes you didn't want to get to know them well because...*

Komp: Sometimes you didn't get the opportunity to know them because they got hit. And you never knew their name.

***Interviewer:** So they just got it, they got hit and that's it.*

Komp: Yeah.

***Interviewer:** So you take Saarlautern?*

Komp: We didn't take it. We were in part of it.

Interviewer: *So you're in the sandwich between the pillboxes and the bunker. If you take the bunker, what happens?*

Komp: This is another Part 2 story. Part 1:

The artillery observer comes up to G Co., because it's an opportunity to see what's ahead of us. His name was Thompson. And when we were behind those pillboxes I leaned out the window one time to take a left-handed shot at a German who was coming out of that little pillbox to take a dump or something, and a bullet went into the frame of the window.

So that's the third time I've been shot at by a sniper. [laughs] So we didn't look out windows anymore.

So when Thompson came up we went up into the attic, and the attics were framed but you could see the shingles – the slate shingles. So we lifted up a slate shingle and put a little shim in there to hold it open so we could observe this big bunker.

The house is like this (showing) – here's the street, here's the house behind it. And up here, we're looking at a bunker down here -- a bridge down further, [etc.], so there were reference points for the forward observer to describe the target and the range and his azimuth.

So Thompson does this, and he said, "We've got hideway."

I said, "What's hideaway?" He said that's core artillery. And about that time, he's telling me "core artillery is an 8-inch naval gun," this express train goes over our heads.

We're on what they call the gun-target line, right underneath the arc of that shell.

And he hit it [a bunker]. And the Germans were running around outside of it from the shock of this thing. And he's hollering into the receiver, "Fire for effect."

And that means every time the artillery refocuses on something, if one gun is firing the other guns are moving with it. So there's a concentration of fire on that target. So the one gun fires, hits the target, and the fire for effect is they all fire. So when he's hollering, "Fire for effect" we lose our priority of fire.

That means that core artillery is not firing at it, because it's not a threat to us. There's another place more important as a threat. So we lost priority. They never fired another round.

Shift... to Korea, Pusan Perimeter,

Part 2:

Our regimental command post is about to be overrun. We're in a place called Haman in the Pusan Perimeter.

We'd already had battalions overrun, and lost people. But we had reformed the line, but we're still hanging on by our fingernails.

So the liaison officer from artillery, 159, and this is another black outfit, we're sitting on the floor of this schoolhouse where our regimental command post is. We can't go anywhere because the North Koreans are shelling us with 120-mm. mortars. And you don't hear them coming. They hit [bangs his hand on table].

[Time 1:00:00]

***Interviewer:** Part 2, we're on the Pusan perimeter, this is CD 3. CD 2 was interrupted when John Komp very emphatically made a gesture [laughter from Komp].*

Komp: [Continuing story] Okay.

We were under shelling at our regimental command post at night, and we were going to have to evacuate. And uh.. I had uh... someone had stolen my carbine, so I didn't have an issued weapon.

I had my pistol that I took off the German prisoner that we captured outside of Saarlautern.

***Interviewer:** So you're in Korea now? But you still have the pistol you got in Saarlautern?*

Komp: Yes. And I still have it [today].

***Interviewer:** I won't rob your house (joking).*

Komp: So anyway, this liaison looks over says, "Where did you get the pistol." I said, "WWII, I got it off a German officer."

He says, "Oh, what outfit were you in?" I said, "95th division." He said, "So was I."

And we look at each other – and this was Thompson.

He's the artillery liaison officer from the 159, the guy who fired the 8-inch core artillery at that bunker in Germany. Okay.

We end up getting evacuated, and had to move our command post.

So we moved it to over another hill mass to the rear, and we're trying to set up again, and the North Koreans are about I'd say.. three to five hundred yards on ridge line in front of us, running back and forth. They're firing small arms into our command post, they've already wounded my boss – the S-3 they got him through both elbows. The security platoon leader was also already wounded, and they were trying to evacuate them.

We were in a state of confusion, to say the least. But the only people I guess who were ... in communication ... were that liaison officer Thompson and myself.

And he's describing the target to the spotter plane above us -- an artillery spotter plane. And he said, "We've got pickle barrel."

Komp (cont'd): *{Pickle Barrel is the call sign for air support – J komp explanation -2014}* This guy is an artillery observer, not an air observer.” And I said, “What is pickle barrel?” He said, “That’s marine air. And we’re going to get marine air support”

So by the time he gets through there’s a little lapse in time, and here come these two planes, and they go right across our front, and make a big looping turn off to the left and they come way back and make another turn around and they’re coming back again, and I’d say they’re at tree-top level, and they’re going right over this body of I’d say at least 200 or 300 North Koreans.

And you see this great big pod of napalm come out “and “fweeerwh, toast. Completely wiped out the target. So when anyone says, “What do you think of air support?” I said, “God bless the marine corps. They saved our butt that day.”

And I always like to tell that story to a marine, because they saved our butts.

So then ..we had a counter-attacking force come back to our area from sister regiment, and they gave us very poor marks for the state of confusion that was going on.

And I get ticked off at that, because they weren’t there.

Interviewer: *They don’t know.*

Komp: And they were always pointing their finger down at black soldiers. And there’s nothing wrong with a black soldier.

So anyway, we got out of that, and we ended up going off to the Yalu River (corrects himself) We went out to the Chongchon, the Yalu River went off further to the east. We were on the western side of the Korean Peninsula, so our border, our boundary up there was the Chongchon.

Interviewer: *The Chongchon. So you’re going up there and you don’t know the Chinese are around?*

Komp: They had reported that, some people had reported that, but they ignored it.

They couldn’t believe that the Chinese were there. They were told there was a different people up there with padded uniforms. They said, “The Chinese? No, no, that couldn’t be true.”

So we got hit.

And when the Chinese hit us, they hit it on a boundary between.. uh.. the 2nd division and the 25th division. They had us right in that boundary so you don’t have a lot of force in there. And the place where they hit us is a place called Kunuri.

Interviewer: *What?*

Komp: Kunuri. You heard of that?

Komp (cont'd): We were in Kunuri. And one of my fellow officers, a black officer ended up using a bayonet against the Chinese – defending himself.

So we evacuated from there, we pulled to the rear, and God help us, the North Koreans and the Chinese did not use air. Because if they had ever gotten over us they would have found us bumper to bumper. All in bottleneck

Interviewer: *Was that in the Big Retreat*

Komp: Yes, that's the big retreat.

Interviewer: *So you were in the Big Retreat?*

Komp: All the way back across the Han River. All the way back south of Seoul.

Interviewer: *Are you in the ravine?*

Komp: No it was fairly open on our side. We had mountains, but they were farther to the east. The Diamond Mountains.

Interviewer: *So are the Chinese coming up from behind you?*

Komp: Right behind us. They followed us right there.

Interviewer: *Followed you all the way down. When did you finally feel safe again?*

Komp: After we got across the Han River. Because that was the major barrier. It's winter.

Interviewer: *And it's incredibly cold. Somebody told me that ten degrees below zero is common.*

Komp: Oh... I've never been as cold as I was in North Korea. And I slept in a.. what we used to call a "fart sack,"

Interviewer: A fart sack?

Komp: Yeah, I slept in it , it was a sleeping bag. I slept on the ground just below the Chongchon River.

Interviewer: *My God... Let me go back to Saarlautern – so they they ... hit the bunker. Was it destroyed?*

Komp: No, it was just hit. Whatever damage was done to it, we couldn't see, but it was enough to make the people run out.

Interviewer: *Sure. Did you stay there in the building? What's the next thing you do?*

Komp: We stayed there. And then we waited to be relieved by another division. And because I was like an acting exec officer, I was the last person from G Co. to leave that house – with another man, and we were on our own to get back across that bridge and rejoin the company.

Interviewer: *Before I forget, for people who don't know... what is an executive officer?*

Komp: He's the second in command. He's usually the guy who helps with the logistics of the unit that he's with.

Interviewer: *So the officer in command, the commanding officer...*

Komp: And then has an exec, who assumes command in his absence or who helps bring up the rear. But we already had an exec.

Interviewer: *And where was he?*

Komp: [laughs] Away in the rear. So Hardy he had me acting like an exec in the front with him.

Interviewer: *In the front with him...so you're able to cross the river. How long are you there in Saarlautern? A couple days?*

Komp: Oh gee, I don't know. ... you know, I'm not sure if we came back and went to the town on the otherside and then to Hargarten. But I remember going back to Hargarten, which we had been in a couple times. They brought in straw to put in two-and-a-half-ton trucks, because we were going to drive up to Bastogne.

And that's where we went, up to the Bastogne area. Our particular company went into a town called Bixry. And I was still in G Co., they had.. sent me to H company – No I was still with G Company. And we were in a barn and there was snow on the ground. East of Bastogne, more towards the German side.

And the word came out that they wanted to police the battlefield.

Now this is a combat infantry unit.

You do not do that - to put infantry to clear a battlefield [of the dead].

Interviewer: *To clear a battlefield, is that of the wounded and.*

Komp: The Dead. We didn't have any wounded to pick up we were going to pick up Dead.

Interviewer: *So they wanted you guys to come out of cover and police the battlefield.*

Komp: Yeah. So we were in this barn. We had been walking from the barn to the mess hall for you know for a good number of days. And.. uh.. we were climbing over these lumps and bumps in the snow.

When the snow started to thaw, these were bodies of Germans and the 1st Airborne Division and you could tell which regiment they were from because in the 101st Airborne Division on the sides of their helmets they had the suits of the cards. Diamonds, spades, black jack, and Diamonds, you know. You could tell what regiment they were from.

And we were picking.. we were picking those guys up there.

Komp (cont'd): Then they asked us to go out into these open fields, where they had tanks... burned out tanks, and German wounded. So that's what we did.

And uh... they asked for volunteers to do this. Now Frank Paganilla said he didn't volunteer – he was told to do it.

But as I recall they asked for volunteers.

They gave the guys big rubber gloves (long] this far up your arm., and I was volunteered.

And I was in charge of that group. I didn't pick up bodies, though I viewed bodies, for sure.

So we stacked the Germans like cordwood – we actually stacked them up about as high as this table

Interviewer: About three three feet high..

Komp: ...maybe a little lower. Put the Americans in trucks. And we took the the Americans out in trucks to wherever they were being evacuated to and the Germans... (unintelligible) After a while we were relieved from there, and went up to Holland to get ready...

Interviewer: for the Ruhr Pocket?

Komp: No - to cross the Rhine... We had to cross the Rhine River first,

Interviewer: So.. Just to changing topics for just a second. I talked to someone who was part of Operation Market Garden, which is happening before you go on to Metz. Do you hear anything about that?

Komp: No.

Interviewer: You hear nothing about that whole thing? When you hear about the Bulge, do you know what you're going into?

Komp: Just that we knew we had suffered a lot of casualties. What the German objective was at that time, I don't know. They were after Antwerp. But I don't recall anybody at our level talking about that. You know, you're down at Grunt Level.

Interviewer: So when you go into Holland...

Komp: We went to Belgium first, to kinda regroup and get ready to move up to Holland.

Interviewer: Are you still with Company G?

Komp: No... I think this time I'm with Regimental Scouts.

Interviewer: When did they move you? What happened.

Komp: I had two jobs after G company. The regimental commander, he was a good commander. We didn't know how good at the time.

Interviewer: *What's his name?*

Komp: His name was Fred E. Gaillard, from Georgia. We called him gander neck, and all that sort of stuff. He was a good regimental commander He was down with us in the front. When we were en route he was up with us, walking along with us.

So we went up to ...Belgium and went into a town called Millen. Then we had passes we could go to Liege. That was the pass city, and that's as far as you could go was Liege.

That's when we found out that the British had ... uh... houses of prostitution following them.

Interviewer: *What!??*

Komp: [laughs] They knew where they were.... The British MPs (*in a British accent*), "They could tell you were a good place was."

But anyway, that's another story.

Interviewer: *That's another story. I guess we won't go back..*

Komp: After our fighting in Saarlautern, I became a mortar section leader because the regimental commander wanted experienced infantry platoon leaders to be section leaders, because they were the ones who directed the fire on the mortars in support of the infantry. The 81-mm. mortars.

So you had the 60-mm. at company level, the 81-mm. were in heavy weapons company.

So I was assigned to H Co. .. that's why you see "H" on there. So I was with "H" for a while. I never got to shoot any missions that I recall.

Then the regimental commander reformed the Regimental Scouts, so I was volunteered again, to be the 2nd battalion section leader of the Regimental scouts.

Interviewer: *What does section leader mean?*

Komp: Okay. To form the regimental scouts they took volunteers from the three battalions under an officer. So we had the first, second, third battalion sections of the regimental scout team. ... And the the senior in that was Dave Bisset who was with I company, 377th. Tomb Boyd from A company, 377th, and John Komp from 2nd Battalion, 377th. So we formed the regimental scouts.

And.. uh..our mission was to make a reconnaissance.

In regiment you have an intelligence and reconnaissance platoon that's supposed to do that. Reconnaissance goes out and looks; Intelligence does interrogation. So all we were doing was reconnaissance.

Komp (cont'd): We never really got to do much. To me we seemed like we were like a supplement to the security forces at regiment. What we call the palace guard.

But we did have one mission that was given to us with Dave Bisset told the regimental S-2 to forget it. If you want to lead it, we'll follow.

He (the S-2) wanted us... when we were up .. at... on the Rhine preparing to cross... they had found a communications tunnel that went underneath the Rhine... and they wanted the regimental scout team to go into that tunnel. That's... that's volunteering to get yourself killed.

And so Dave Bisset told the... the Regimental S-2 – can't think of his name – but anyway he told him "We're not going. I'm not sending my men to do that, if you want to lead them, you lead them." And it was forgotten. I'm sure when the regimental commander heard about it, he would have said, "Hey, I'm not getting guys killed."

So they kept the regimental scouts together until we got into the Ruhr Pocket.

When we got into the Ruhr Pocket we went to a place called [in German accent] "Wihelm's Ruhl" or William's Rest.

And it was a German officer's rest house where they had all these prostitutes working. And ...uhmm. we had overtaken that area.

When we were down there, there were other people with us, not just the regimental scouts by themselves we had other people with us ..

..and we picked up a German touring sedan – like the one you see with Hitler in the back. So when we got this vehicle we drove through town. There were three of us and I stood up in the middle and gave them the Hitler salute as we went through town. [laughs] And that was the end of the regimental scouts. They disbanded us. [more laughter]

Interviewer: So you.... [laughing]

Komp: I'm just a funny guy. [laughing]

Interviewer: You can't help yourself [laughing.] How did you cross the Rhine? You come up to the bridge and the bridge is blown. Isn't it?

Komp: We went across in boats.

Where we crossed is where the 11th .. no not the 11th .. the 13th... a another odd-numbered outfit had secured the bridge head. And they formed a perimeter. Then you go into that and you branch out of it. Where we crossed was right close to Julich.

Because I remember going down to Julich, and there was an MP at this road junction directing travel. And he was in a hole in the ground, he was down below.. because the Germans were shelling Julich, you know, to try to keep us from reinforcing our uh...

Interviewer: *So your whole experience going into the Ruhr Pocket crossing , it's not Metz.. But (still) you have .. you have constant shelling. There's no day when you can relax.*

Komp: We were in constant movement.

Interviewer: *You had constant movement ...*

Komp: And the Germans started to surrender, there were so many of them, and we just told them to keep going to the rear. We just pointed pointed "Keep going"

We drove by them on one side and they were going to the rear on the other.

Interviewer: *When did that start happening?*

Komp: Pretty soon after we... got beyond.... Dusseldorf and Krefeld. Krefeld.. there was another town Soest. Another big one was Soest.

When we looked at the map it looked like a spider's web. We had excellent maps. Of course being in the scout team, you were relying on maps to know where the hell you were going. You don't trust the road sign. [laughs] You had to be able to read a map, know where you were going.

So we got beyond Soest, and we get up to a dam in the Ruhr (*sounds like "Le Moony Town Schmeer"*)... and there I remember going into one of the towers.. across.. on the dam, and some German had written a story. It was [called] "For Whom is the Little Fur Cap."

And the gist of the story is "Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house not a creature was stirring not even a mouse..." And this guy looks in (in the story) and he sees his mother and father and he wants to know for whom is the little fur cap? Because he is stark naked. [laughs] That was the punch line. But it was written in a dialect.

Interviewer: *Did you read German?*

Komp: No, it was written in English, but it was a joke that this German had left behind for us.

Interviewer: *The Germans that you start seeing, you said some of them are relieved that their war is over. I know people in the Pacific looked at the Japanese in a different way... How did you look at them – that they were just doing their jobs like you were doing?*

Komp: Yeah, pretty much so, unless you ran into the SS. Then, no no. These were dyed in the wool "we're going to die for the Fuhrer."

Voice from the crowd: Are you guys writing a book there?

Komp: We're on disc three. [laughter] And I'm serious!

Interviewer: *Up to this time who do you think is the most important person to you during the war?*

Komp: Your buddy, for one. The guy who's going to mark your back. And your family, who's keeping in contact with you and giving you moral support.

Interviewer: *Are you getting letters all the time?*

Komp: Pretty much, yes. I got some from my fiancé. I was engaged already.

Interviewer: *Would you write?*

Komp: My wife? My future wife wrote me all the time and my mother and father wrote me and I heard from my aunts – not my cousins so much because they were younger than me.

Going back to that picture of those chaplains [in media the **Interviewer** has]. The one in the middle, Father Baker?

He's the one that married my wife and I.

And Jim McKeon was the best man. And the squad leader, John Sturbis, was one of the ushers. And Tom Boyd was the other one. [laughs] And Bob Burton, who was in that shell ... in that trench with me, was married on the same day that we were married. And his wife's name was Jayne, and my oldest daughter was Betty Jayne. You met Jennifer... that was her mother, she died.

Interviewer: *I'm sorry.*

Komp: She died of cancer ...

Interviewer: *I'm sorry. And how long after the war was over did you get married?*

Komp: Oh, we were married before the war was over.

We were married on 14 July -- Bastille Day -- in New York, in 1945. I was still in the army. ...

Interviewer: *And you think you'll be going to Japan*

Komp: That's right. And all of the officers ... most of the officers' wives – at this time I was back in "H" company?

Interviewer: *...Yes...*

Komp: They came down to Shelby, Mississippi. The machine gun platoon leader, Phil Bianni (?) – no Bianna – who had been with me in Ottenville, he's the guy the came with machine guns said, "Where do you want me to put your gun?" And I said, "Perimeter." And I never saw him again but we came back on the troop ship together and I held the money for him that he won and he won a hell of a lot of money and he asked me to be best man at his wedding when he got married in Shelby, Miss. [laughs]

Interviewer: *Speaking of which, you're busy all the time, but what did you do for relaxation. Did you take part in any crap games or any....*

Komp: No, I never gambled. The only time I played cards was on my birthday when we were on the train going down from Liverpool down to Winchester. They were trying to get me to learn how to play hearts. I never...

***Interviewer:** I know some people will talk about ... I remember Jim Woolner one time talked about running across a brandy place...and even Buster Jefferson would talk about ... feeling like they had a stroke of luck. Do you have any stories like that?*

Komp: Yes. When I was in the replacement depot..., with Max D. Manifold, the supply sergeant had been a ranger. So the Ranger Sergeant said, "Why don't we go to Paris. I can get passes, and if one of you signs the pass, we can get a pass to Paris."

So who signs the passes? John Komp.

So we leave Conflans-Jarny and get on this charcoal-powered truck. We were up [sitting] on top of some sort of produce, we're way up on top and rolling down the highway. And the truck stops and we look over the edge and here's this MP. We said, "We're going to Paris."

And he said, "Let me see your passes." We handed him down our passes. He said, "You guys are going to get in trouble."

He didn't care we were officers - we were two second lieutenants and a sergeant, and I don't know what the MP was - but he says.., "You guys are just going to get in trouble if you try to go to Paris. This is an Air Force town, and they're flying today. Why don't you go in and stay out of trouble."

So we get off the truck and walk into this town.

The name of the town is Arpajon. And what is Arpajon?

It's the three-star Hennessy distillery town.

And what do you think these three guys did? We bought four bottles of brandy, and we went into a bar and gave one to the bartender and said, "We're going to drink these."

By that time we're surrounded. The only three Americans in town, because everyone's flying I guess, the only three Americans and The place is crowded and we're giving geography lessons.

We're giving b.s. lessons, of course.

I fell in love with the bartender's daughter, whose name was Giselle. I remember that. She was pretty. Her name was Giselle and she was pretty. Nothing every happened.

We ended up drunk in a barn loft, and I woke up in the morning and couldn't find my wallet. I had moved it up to my chest.

Komp (cont'd): But when we went into this barn, you could smell Germans. They had a distinctive body order based on what they were eating. ... and they could smell a Korean miles away and you could smell us too. I woke up thinking I'd been robbed. I'm going around swearing at everything. And I was hung-over like you wouldn't believe.

I get back to the camp, and that's where they were calling my name out.

I'm suffering from a hangover – what 21 years old and I'm suffering from a hangover. And uh..

Interviewer: A whole bottle of that...

Komp: A whole bottle of that or whatever I drank. 'Cause after we had finished the three bottles we asked for the other one back. [laughs] We were sharing it. But it didn't take much to get three young men drunk.

So when we got through with that we're walking around the town, thinking how are we going to get back to Conflans? Here... the French are lined up for bread. And they tell us, "Go to the head of the line." So we ended up with two or three loaves of this long French bread, then we're out in the middle of the street, playing like baseball with the bread.

Interviewer: Playing like you are playing baseball with the bread. [laughter] You are very playful.

Komp: We were all playing.

Interviewer: How did you get back? You just found a truck?

Komp: We found a truck that that took us back. And then we're just about walking into the yard where they're forming the truck column ... They're calling out my name and I said, "Hey, I got to go get my gear." And I had to go up into the barracks because every time you left something, you rolled it up, ready to go, you didn't leave anything – come back and fix it later. You were ready to go. I really didn't have that much stuff anyway. I'd unloaded stuff along the way.

Interviewer: And you'd picked up souvenirs by that time?

Komp: By that time, No, No. We weren't in combat. We didn't start picking up souvenirs until we were in Germany.

I wanted to tell you about evidence of WWI.

When I was on that rest time, when I went back to my outfit I went through a town called Ihn, I-h-n. So when I got back up to up [my outfit] to Saarlautern area .. no before. When I rejoined the outfit, I saw an artillery man and I said, "Boy you really wrecked the hell out of That town back there." He said, "What town?" I said, "Ihn." He said, "Oh no, no, no" He said, "We didn't hit that. That's WWI." The damage to that village had never been repaired. So there were these pockmarked shell holes. And they were... nothing had been done with it. This is a poor farming village.

Interviewer: *Tells story about visiting Naples in 1964 on a highway looking at areas that are still rubble and out of rubble television antennae poking out.*

So.. in the Ruhr Pocket, are you still with the regimental scouts?

Komp: In the Ruhr Pocket, yes.

Interviewer: *Will you tell the story about near the end of the war – the story about the sergeant coming in with the Wolf Packs? Will you tell that now. You know.. coming up upon the young Germans...*

Komp: So... this is a story that someone else should tell... but I'll tell you what it is....

But it was G Co....

Interviewer: *... (was it) Your company then?*

Komp: No, I was with in regimental scouts, but because I was in Regimental Scouts, you would know what was going on because I would go to command post briefings as part of regimental. So the regimental would be talking about what the battalions were doing and they would get right down to Companies (e.g. "Hey, so-and-so got some ...")

and they were counting prisoners.

And what had happened ... was probably Burton told me this, probably Burton by that time was probably the platoon sergeant of the third platoon, he'd later become 1st Sgt.

But anyway, he told me that they were in route march and one of the platoon sergeants was leading the 3rd platoon – my original platoon – and I can't remember this kid's name – and he was at then head rather than having someone else out in front he was leading.

And this Hitler Jugen kid, probably a Wolf Pack Type popped up out of a hole and shot and killed him. ...And then he put (down) his rifle... now, now this is what I was told ... Put up his hands up to surrender –and the platoon went up and shot him.

And when they were reporting numbers of prisoners taken, the regimental commander – probably the commander said, "We're not getting prisoners from G Co." They weren't taking prisoners. So, I don't know how many people – how long it took to realize this, but Hardy was told, "Get your men under control." Probably the 3rd platoon, my old platoon.

Interviewer: *Do you end the war with the regimental sc... do you end your time in Europe with the Reg ...*

Komp: No.. After the regimental scouts, then I went back to H Co. Then I became the food administrator for the district of Lippstadt. [laughs] Second lieutenant.

Interviewer: *Second Lieutenant. So you have all these refuges?*

Komp: [laughing] We were distributing food mainly to... Russian PW camps. Because there were ...I think there were two. We had Russian camp One and Russian Camp Two .

So.. we were trying to keep them controlled, but you couldn't control them. They were loose, and they were out on V-E night, shooting weapons into the air. So we were locked down

Nobody could go out. Except for Bill Neal... you remember Bill Neal, company commander, said, "You got the baptism of fire."

Interviewer: Yes..

Komp: I was invited because I was food administrator, I was invited by a Yugoslavian doctor who was taking care of the Russian prisoners and had a hospital in Lippstadt. So he invited me to go me [to the hospital, to celebrate V-E Day].

I asked the rest of the guys, "You want to go to the hospital," but no one wanted to do that. But the commander, Bill Neal, said, "I'll go." So the two of us went to this party and it was like cold cuts, slaws, you know and potato salad. A real feast for us. Plus, German nurses. [laughs]

Interviewer: German nurses.

Komp: German nurses, yes. So here we are. I slept on the floor in the gymnasium in the middle of the basketball court, in my clothes. We couldn't leave that building because of the shooting that was going on. ...

Interviewer: *But you have German nurses to keep you war...*

Komp: No. They didn't come out on the basketball floor. They weren't playing. I was going to say, "We didn't have any balls." [Laughing]

Interviewer: *Do you remember hearing about Roosevelt dying?*

Komp: Yes, that was a big blow to everybody. That he had died.

Interviewer: *Did you hear anything about Truman?*

Komp: No. No. The only thing I know about Truman is he saved my butt when he dropped that bomb. Because we were going to be in Operation Olympic.

Interviewer: *So at the end, in that whole Ruhr Pocket time, you're back in Co. H. Are you running into resistance at all or pretty much surrendering?*

Komp: ... When I was back in "H" company.. I have a photograph with all of H company. I think the name of the town is (sounds like "Drurh- Norg") I'm not sure. Anyway there's a picture of all of us, we had a picture taken .

.... The main problem we had there was that a nun... a Catholic nun came to us.

Komp (cont'd): And we were in an orphanage. We were up there in that orphanage. And then while we were there the nun said she had a German farm woman who had come... the woman knew the Americans were in this orphanage so this German women had came saying she wanted help, because the Russians were (sounds like "UPGESHLAGEN") - killing her cows. Whether she was a widow or not I don't know but anyway..

We got a fellow from H Co. named Ralph Gedowski, to go and stay at that barnyard... that barn.. that farm with that woman, so the Russians wouldn't come. But here, we just sent one guy out.

But the Russians were going around killing these animals, and eating them.

Interviewer: *Sure... because they were prisoners of war and they hadn't had.. ...*

Komp: And that kinda settled down. Then just about that time we got word that we were leaving.

And who gets the job to be the lead heading back to France and Camp Old Gold? Me. They gave me a special map to reconnoiter the way with the regimental ...uhmm ...what they call the quartering party.

You are responsible to go out and find the places to stay overnight.

So we were going to make this stop.

So I was the part... I was the battalion representative to go with the regimental quartering party.. I had my own map. And we proceeded all the way to the....Camp Old Gold... Camp Lucky Strike or Camp Old Gold [in France].

Interviewer: *How many days' march was that?*

Komp: Two or three,.

Interviewer: *And that was still marching? (you were still marching?)*

Komp: Oh no, no.. We were in trucks. We all knew we weren't marching.

Interviewer: *Speaking of which, what's the longest you think you went without a shower?*

Komp: Let's see.. Take ... from Conflans.. I don't remember taking a shower in Conflans. I don't remember taking a shower in Maizieres. I don't remember taking a shower in Woippy. I don't remember taking a shower until we got to Hargarten. And when we got to Hargarten this must be over two weeks.. over two weeks. They said, "Hey, we got showers for you guys."

"Hey" we said, "You know. Where's the shower point." And they say, "No... it was a French coal mine."

So we went to the .. Hargarten is Hargarten-aux-Mines - Hargarten Mines. There were coal mines around there, that whole area.. that's the reason it was so important the coal in that district.

So we went there, and had showers that the miners used. That's where we got our shower. So every time we were in Hargarten, and we went there two or three times, we got showers.

Interviewer: *What about your uniforms? Were they as stiff as anything?*

Komp: No they would replace them. You'd get a complete change of underwear. They didn't replace the outer garments ... If something was worn -like if you wore out a field or something - they'd replace that, otherwise, you kept the same thing all the way through.

Interviewer: *I was going to ask about underwear...*

Komp: The only they changed was underwear. You'd throw all your clothes down. Get clean underwear coming out, and then pick up all your clothes.

When we did the shower in Hargarten, we were using our own underwear, because it wasn't an (official) shower point. It wasn't set up by the quartermaster it was set up by the regiment. ...

Interviewer: *Did you carry clean underwear?*

Komp: The main thing in 3rd Army was Socks. You had to .. the rule was one pair of socks in your helmet, one pair drying under your armpits in your shirt and one on your feet. You had to have three pairs.

That's it. That's Patton's rule.

Interviewer: *What did you think of Patton?*

Komp: He didn't bother me. Some people would say ["my blood his guts"].

I never saw him but I heard about him. He came down to the River.

He also came down to Franz von Papen's country home in Wallerfangen. He went in and said, "How come this place didn't get damaged?" And the next thing is there was a blow out in that building and hell hit the fan because that was Franz von Papen's house. And they wanted to find out who did it, but nobody found out. The story was Patton said how come this place didn't get hit, so they hit it. [laughs]

I've been in Wallerfangen.

I'll tell you what my men did for me.

You know, there's a certain comradeship you have with people. But when we found that the Germans who tried to infiltrate our lives were completely camouflaged. We never would have seen them except we stumbled on them.

My men went down to Wallerfangen and got some sheeting, and this hombre who was the interpreter made a hooded jacket for me out of the sheeting from Franz von Papen's house in Wallerfanger. And it had a little floral design. You couldn't see it from a distance. If you look at the regimental history of 377th, you'll see a photograph of me standing on one of those piles in Bixry, and I've got a scarf that's turned inside out so it looks like a hat, folded over, and it says, "What the well-dressed officer wore in Belgium." And I'm wearing that smock. To this day I don't know who took the picture.

Interviewer: And what happened to the smock?

Komp: I don't know, I lost it somewhere along the way. I probably got heavier clothing to wear when I moved out of there.

Interviewer: Did you have anything special you wore for luck, or to remind you of home?

Komp: Did I carry? I had a silver ring that had a little raised portion on it. It was a rosary. Instead of having a string of beads, I could say a rosary on that ring. Still have it.. I think I gave it to my granddaughter.

Interviewer: And did you say the rosary every day?

Komp: Oh yeah, anytime you had a moment you were always praying. [laughs]

Interviewer: So when you get the men back to Camp Lucky Strike or Camp Old Gold..how many days.. then you're go out from Le Havre?... you go to England..., then what happens?

Komp: We left from Le Havre.

Interviewer: How far from Le Havre are the camps?

Komp: They're right above that area where they had the invasion. All that high ground up there. We weren't far. I don't remember being driven there. I remember marching there.

Then the job I got on the ship, I became the mess officer.

Interviewer: The mess officer?

Komp: The mess officer. My job was to go around to the enlisted men and ask if they'd help serve the officers. And I did that. And I had these guys come and volunteer, and they did, because they were getting extra food. So then at the end, I'm still second lieutenant, and I get up in front of the officers one day.

And I said, "You know, you've had all these men serving you and they all volunteered to do this. Would you like to make a silent collection?" So Colonel Gale said, "What do you mean, a silent collection?" I said, "No coins, sir." [laughter]

Interviewer: You have a lot of guts.

Komp: I'm only a second lieutenant what could they do to me.

Interviewer" Plus you're very funny. Did they laugh?

Komp: I don't know. I don't think there was any collection made. [laughs] I don't remember (anyone) divvying up money.

Interviewer: From Le Havre you go back to England, and then....

Komp: No we didn't go to England. We went all the way back.

And then our ship didn't go into New York City.

We had no great big welcoming. We went into Virginia..., Norfolk. Then we got on our train and headed home.

We had 30 days leave. So I headed up to Fort Dix, N.J., to be processed, and then go on leave from there. Everyone went to different setting to get leave. You got your pay, you got your uniform ..and anything else you'd need. So my mother and father drove down from Brooklyn to pick me up, with my fiancé.

Interviewer: Soon to be wife.

Komp: Yes.

Interviewer: When is this? Is this June? July?

Komp: This is the latter part of June. I was married on the 14th of July, and we had a little honeymoon up in Lake Stockholm, New Jersey.

It was a beautiful lake, and all the houses around it were really well done cottages. My mother and father had had a place built there. The only house they ever owned was there. All the other times they were renting. And then the house became my house when my parents died.

Interviewer: So when you went back to Brooklyn, are they still in Bay Ridge? What was their address, do you remember? The cross-streets.

Komp: They were living on Ft. Hamilton ... no They were living in an apartment on... I can't remember. It was a one-bedroom apartment, and I slept on the couch.

Interviewer: So when you got married.....

Komp: I got off the couch. [laughs]

We went to the Hotel Biltmore in Manhattan for the wedding night, and I think the room number was 618 or 816.

And then my father had given me his car to use, and he'd gotten extra gas coupons somehow, so we were able to drive from Manhattan up to New Jersey. And then we drove back to Brooklyn, and I think we stayed maybe with her mother before I was shipped down to Camp Shelby, and my wife, Betty, followed me.

So she was down there. All the H Co. officers got together and we rented a house in Shelby, Miss. The name of the street the house was on was Bay St.

Interviewer: *Bay St.. So you're back in Shelby, Miss.. Now that you're back, what sort of training did you do to help you get ready for...*

Komp: We didn't do much that I can recall.

I was still in H Co., and ...we weren't doing any firing exercises. That's where we had a lot of trouble, you know. We had almost a mutiny down there.

The rest of us got pissed off, because these are guys who hadn't been there with us in combat - they were replacements after the war, most of them - and I always think back, that was some sort of subversive operation that was going on against the morale of the U.S. forces.

Interviewer: *So what actually happened?*

Komp: These guys had all kinds of signs about "They didn't want to go to war, and all this kind of stuff." And General Twaddle had the whole police with MPs. But I don't remember anyone being arrested. They just broke up the line and we went back. To the barracks.

Interviewer: *So it was a protest.*

Komp: And they had the sympathy of the U.S. press, because they came down to cover it. You know.

Interviewer: *So if you get to Brooklyn in June and you get married in July 145h, how long after you got married did you get to Shelby?*

Komp: We got back to Camp Shelby which was Hattiesburg, Miss.

Interviewer: *I know Hattiesburg, Miss.*

Komp: Hattiesburg, Miss. And the street was was Bay Street. Probably got back before the end of July.

Because when they had V-J Day, it was Aug. 8 that the bomb dropped ... I remember Bob Schueller brought a car down. He was one of the officers in H Co. He had an open car. So all of the officers and their wives got in the car, and we drove down the main street in Hattiesburg [Miss.] in a V-J parade.

Interviewer: *VJ parade.... Are people just shouting are you..*

Komp: Oh yeah.. celebrating, horns blowing, and all that kind of stuff.

Interviewer: *Do you remember hearing about when the bomb dropped?*

Komp: Oh yes, we heard about it. We were in Shelby. We just heard about it. We didn't get any newspapers, we just heard about it.

Interviewer: *Did you know the significance, how big the bomb was?*

Komp: No.

Interviewer: *You just knew that. Something had happened. Does the disturbance happen before or after the bomb blast?*

Komp: I don't know. I can't fix that date. Before or after.

Interviewer: *So you have these replacements come in, and make signs that say "we don't want to go."*

Komp: Yeah, yeah - and vocal stuff.

The guys who had been in combat are saying, "Who the hell are these guys?" And I don't know if it was in one particular unit or not, I don't know if that's ever been revealed.

Interviewer: *So when the war is ended, do you ever think about leaving the service?*

Komp: Oh yeah. I did.

Interviewer: *You did. When did you get discharged? What happened?*

Komp: After Camp Shelby I didn't have enough points, I was transferred to 4th Division -- I was transferred to A Co., 8th Infantry, 4th Division.

That was a D-Day outfit, but up on a different beach. And I really got ticked off at the army, because they had a company guy going around saying, "Think of something and we'll write you up a reward."

Because it was a regular army division but they were not regular army. But this guy was going around, and that just made a bad impression on me.

But then when I was finally separated from service I went to Fort Dix again, and you have an exit interview. So the fellow looking at your record wants to make sure they get everything right, well there was one thing wrong and they didn't pick it up until years later.

Interviewer: *What was that?*

Komp: The number of battle stars the 95th division had. We have four. Northern France, Lorraine...I can't remember the rest, but there were four stars.

Interviewer: *Did the whole European theater did that give you a star?*

Komp: No, you had to be in a battle. Those are bat-tle starts

Interviewer: *What about Saarlautern?*

Komp: Yes, that's another one. And then the final battle in Ruhr would be the fourth one, but I don't recall what the names are. They're in the regimental history.

So when I finally got to the [guy] who was clearing me out, he asked if I'd consider being in the reserves. I asked, "What's the reserves?" He said, "Well, if you join the reserves, then at age 60 you can retire and get retirement benefits."

Komp (cont'd): I said, “OK, sign me up.” So he signed me up.

And I was assigned to the Silk Stocking regiment in Manhattan. [It was named that] because it's up in snob territory, up in Park Ave., or some place like that. It was the 7th infantry of the New York reserves, which has a Statue of Liberty on their patch. That's is. I was assigned to that.

We didn't do much. You didn't get paid in the reserves then.

So the way they made it... something to look forward to, they would send you on weekend duty for command post exercises. You'd play like you were in battle with no troops. You did everything on the map with telephones. It's a communications exercise. Command Post Exercise.

One regimental is talking to this... So they would pay you for that, plus your benefits, plus your travel – one day per diem and a meal allowance. Since I was making \$1 an hour as a draftsman, that was pretty good.

Interviewer: *So you went back and became a draftsman?*

Komp: I went back and worked for an engineering company as a draftsman.

Interviewer: *After what you'd been through what you'd seen, were you glad to be back as a draftsman?*

Komp: I was happy. I had a good job. Construction. The outfit I was in was the subcontractor for the building of Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village.

Interviewer: *Really!!*

Komp: Our office was in the Metropolitan Life Insurance building.

Interviewer: *What were those areas like before ...*

Komp: I don't know.. You probably drove your taxi through them.

Interviewer: *(Talks about his impression of Stuyvesant town from the time the Interviewer had driven a taxi in NYC.)*

[Switching gears], so you're in the reserves, and your final rank leaving is ...

Komp: First lieutenant. I was promoted when I got back to Camp Shelby. They cleared up my records and said you should be a first lieutenant.

Interviewer: *After all you went through, how did you manage not to have enough points? It seems like after everything you'd done.*

Komp: I don't know. Not enough medals, or something. Because when we captured that patrol...

Interviewer: *Talk to me about that. We may have skipped over that.*

Komp: Well we captured a German patrol

And none of my men nor myself ever got a medal for that.

And the platoon leader name of Credecose (?) said, "How come your outfit never got a medal for capturing a German patrol?" Because this German patrol had infiltrated our lines when we were overlooking the Saar. We were up on a plateau that dropped down into the Saar River.

(Remembering: "Oh, Where Andy Miller was killed was KuperCamelsDorf – That's a mouthful.)

Anyway when I told you about getting Franz van Pappen's stuff –

Interviewer: Yes?

Komp: That's the same place.

I'm trying to think how this first happened...

There was a lot of snow on the ground, and there was a forested area. And down in the forest area was went down to Wallerfangen, which was the approach to Saarlautern.

So we were up above that ... on a plateau...and the nearest town was Guisingen of any size. And then over here (pointing to the top of a table) was the town we were in – mainly a farming village.

Hardy calls over and says, "Hey..w e want you to send out a patrol. One of our listening posts thinks there are Germans operating in the area." You know what a listening post is?

Interviewer: A listening post?

Komp: ... A listening post ... Two men at a post in the ground, or somewhere, listening to see if there's somebody coming, or movement and then they report that.

Interviewer: So it's not like radio or...

Komp: Oh no, no they're listening. And then yhey report what's going on in the area. So the guy on patrol in the area in the listening post was Starsesky. I knew him, he was in the third platoon, my old platoon. I knew all the guys in my platoons.

So I get a patrol from the first platoon and I go rushing out. And everybody's telling me, "Hey, slow down Komp, you're going to get us killed."

Interviewer: How many people in your patrol?

Komp: I guess about Eight.. maybe eight guys.

So we rush out and we find Starsesky and it's in the dark.

And we say, "Star' – (It's) John Komp." We go up and see him and he said, "We heard movement."

Komp (cont'd): They didn't know whether it was an animal or a human being, but "we heard movement. "

So the next day, that night, I'm in my platoon CP with about three other guys. and we're awake and shots were fired. What the hell's going on?

We go down to Jake Pasha's squad – Jake Pasha was from somewhere up in the Midwest - and he's got an outpost that is overlooking an apple orchard. And this is December. And he says, "What the hell happened." And the guard said that he was looking at the trees in the apple orchard and one of them went black. I didn't see so he figured something is going in front of that tree. So he took his M1 and aimed at the next tree, and when it disappeared he fired. And he heard some sound and then movement.

So then when I came down we went out to that site and were looking around. About that time Hardy shows up and he wants to know what the hell are you doing out there shooting out here because we were shooting back toward Guisingen – the guy had shot back toward Guisingen.

And we had a good argument about... you know - who should have been - where the outpost should have been.

So then the next day, we get light, and my platoon sergeant takes a patrol out to [the orchard] to try and find what that movement was. He goes out to the trees looks at the tracks and everything.

Nothing happens. So he comes back in. In the afternoon I say, I'll take a patrol out. I got about eight people together, including Leahy and O'Keefe from Boston, they were a BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle] team. And go out looking and you just keep going wider and wider. [*Aside from John "How long have we been at this?:"*]

So we go out and find yellow snow, and the steam is still rising. Someone has just taken a piss. So we follow the track into the woods back where that listening post was.

Now this patrol as far as we know has been in our lines at least two days. At least two days: because we heard them the night before and we shot at them this night so – at least two days.

And I don't know whether it's a reconnaissance patrol or a combat patrol. There's a difference between.

Interviewer: Which is?

Komp: A combat patrol will engage in a firefight. A reconnaissance patrol has to get the information back to the headquarters.

This was a recon patrol.

So we... we tracked them into the woods and there was a big brush pile in a clearing. And about the time we're looking at this, Roy Parmele hits me and says, "Wait a minute." And here's a German boot right in front of us.

Komp (cont'd): They were completely camouflaged in the snow. We couldn't see this guy. So we stand them up – three of us – Walt DeSombre, Parmele (Roy Parmele) and myself - and we're looking at this – and about that time everyone starts firing into the brush pile. And I hear the voice, "For the love of God stop shooting at us... Cease fire, cease fire!"

I thought maybe we'd fired into our own men, after the confrontation with Hardy the night before.

So we cease fire and this German officer stands up. And he's all in white except for a soft cap. And then some of the other of his men show up. So we go up to them and Walt DeSombre says, "Where are the others?"

And they point down the hill. So we ended up capturing about I'd say -- six or seven Germans because we had to chase them down the hill.

In the meantime, while all this shooting is going on Leahy and O'Keefe spot a deer across this ravine. They're thinking, "Deer." You know how big deer is .

So they start shooting because of the size of that thing. And they're overshooting their target – they think it's farther away – it isn't it's a chamois. A chamois is only about that tall - a little deer, about the size of a dog with antlers on. So they're firing the BAR and they hit it.

And I don't know what's going on because we're chasing the other Germans down the slope. And we get them all together so we head back to the platoon command post [a farmhouse], and O'Keefe and Leahy take the deer back to the platoon CP and then they take it out to the barn to slaughter it -- carve it up.

About the time they clear that room out, we arrive. And Hardy shows up with his bodyguard, a great big guy, name escapes me right now (Leo Stephany) but anyway, we end up in the hall . We separate the prisoners as much as we could, putting the officer and the noncom apart. As much as we could because it's just a little house – farmhouse.

And we bring the officer out, and they're questioning him and all he's giving is name, rank and serial number just like we were told to do. So ... uh...so (John remembers: Stephany is Hardy's bodyguard – :Stephany – a great big guy").

Hardy gets frustrated and says, "Shoot the son of a bitch." So Stephany starts to bring his rifle down. Hardy hollers, "No!" and the rifle goes off. And we're just in this narrow hallway – this wide - and the damn rifle goes off.

So they move the officer into where my office had been.

Interviewer: *He didn't hit him..*

Komp: He never hit him, he just fired the thing — and then we bring the noncom out.

So then the story is, - picture this:

They know the officer has been taken out to be interrogated.

Komp (cont'd): They've heard the conversation going,

They hear "Shoot the son of a bitch,"

Then they hear "NO," then the shot goes off.

And the guy walks out of the room, the sergeant walks out and here's the blood from the deer on the floor. [laughs]

Interviewer: *So he talks*

Komp: He talks. He talks.

He told us what their light signals were, because they used light signals to communicate when to come up, and whatever else they got out of him. I don't remember.

So when we put the sergeant in the same room as the officer, we heard him say, "Dumb azel" -

Interviewer: *(translating) "Dumb ass." [laughs]*

Komp: "Dumb ass." [laughs]

Interviewer: *That's a wonderful story. As you said.*

Komp: Januszkiewicz has that already written up.

Interviewer: *As you've said, we've been talking a long time.*

Komp: Yeah, how long has it been, it's a quarter to three?

Interviewer: Probably

Komp: It's time to go home.

Interviewer: *We have four minutes before this one (this CD) ends... so I'll say - looking back on the time you get called back into the Korean War....*

Komp: No. I had already.. I had ... uh. While I was still in the reserve an opportunity came up for me to be a regular army officer. So I signed up for a year's tour. It's called a competitive tour. You had to sign up for a year. You had to meet certain physical qualifications and educational qualifications which I met.

Reported to Fort Dix on a hurry-up call. I had 24 hours in which to report for duty. Had to quit my job, pack up my stuff and get down to Fort Dix - within 24 hours. And I did it.

I was assigned to H Co., 60th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division, Fort Dix, N.J., which was a training center it was not strictly military operational unit. It was a training center. All we do was basic training.

So I was there for the year and made the cut and got a regular commission as a second lieutenant, regular Army. Which meant all the time I had served before was erased. I had no ---

Interviewer: --- Nooooo

Komp: -- no credit for the years I'd been in before.

So I ended up competing with the West Point class of 1948, because I had the five-digit serial number, which was the same as the West Pointers. Later they went to social security numbers. But having a 5-digit serial number set you as a regular army officer.

Interviewer: Do you remember your serial number?

Komp: 058947. [laughs]

I'm not going to give you my social security number. Then ... I was ... after I got through with that tour they assigned me to the Armed Forces Information School at Carlisle Barracks [in New York], and I became an information and educational officer.

Which means that I am the assistant operations officer at regimental level. Because that's the lowest level you have information and education. You were responsible for an information program and the army's education program. You were providing instructions or you were counseling people on how they should proceed to get an education. That's while you are on active duty. That's while you're on active duty. They want you to improve yourself for your future life.

Interviewer: Speaking of improving yourself for your future life, I would like to continue this, but we can do it later. I have part of Korea, and some closing questions to ask. Fifty seconds left in this CD. This is David Meyer, son of Earl D. Meyer, Co. H, 379th, 95th Infantry. Today I've had the great pleasure of talking to, John, can you say your name again?

Komp: John Komp.

Interviewer: ... who in WWII was with what companies?

Komp: G Co., H Co., and 2nd Battalion Headquarters Co., and the Regimental Scouts...

02:16:00 – end of Part II aka the second wav file “File2KompJohn2012June8WWIIforVHP”

Total interview – 3 hours 34 minutes