VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Veteran's Name: Billy Olive
Meyer: David Meyer (O'Shea)
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Billy Olive: ...in fact had some effect on the way I dealt with my experiences in the army. So anyway, that was one thing that I saw. Then I tried to plot sort of my whole life history to date. Just the major places. And then I started sort of putting down some memories. I made some notes here about my attitude before I went into service.

David Meyer: Okay. Good.

Olive: And then something specific about my memories at Fort Jackson. This was my first specific encounter with the military. And then jotted down a few notes here about memories in Aberdeen, Maryland which was my second encounter. And then memories of ASTP, and memories of Indiantown Gap. And memories of the boat trip to England. And then some thoughts about my experiences in England before I went over to France. And then some memories of the experiences on the boat going from England to France. And landing on the beach over there. And then that's when I sort of stopped with these particular notes. That gives us a little bit of a start.

Meyer: It's a good start. And then I have notes from different, the National D-Day Museum notes. Some notes from an organization, StoryCorps on—

Olive: Well, you gave me something about, some guidelines or something.

Meyer: And some other guidelines. So we'll just start out. Let me—[pause] It is August 14th, 2004, about a quarter to three in the afternoon. We're in my hotel room in the Holiday Inn in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I'm David Meyer, son of Earl Meyer, Company H, 379th. And I'm with Mr. Billy B. Olive, Company L, 378th Infantry. Okay. And just to get a little background, when were you born?

Olive: I was born—well, that's not a simple question to answer. Because, I mean, I can tell you what my official birthdate is, which my father always asserted was wrong, and with some justification. Anyway, my official birthdate, as recorded by the state of North Carolina, is November 5, 1921.

Meyer: But your father—

Olive: But my father, it was a Doctor Cheek [PH]; I lived in a very small town called Fuquay Springs, North Carolina. And this Dr. Cheek had a nurse, and she apparently scribbled little notes about new babies that had been born. She'd scribble them on a piece of paper or something and throw them in a bag. And then once a month this Dr. Cheek would pay her fifty cents for

filling out the application forms for the birth certificate. And she was notoriously in error on many people's birthdays, including my own, according to my father. And I talked to one of my cousins about this, who was about the same age as myself. And he said it's absolutely true that she did make mistakes. So in any event, my birthday is recorded right now as November 5, 1921. And I celebrate my birthday as November 6, 1921. And have never celebrated on November 5, 1921 to my memory as a birthday. So anyway, you go ahead now. I didn't mean to give such a long-winded answer.

Meyer: No, that was a great answer. [adjusts setup, pause] What skills do you think, in your background, what helped you become prepared for the army?

[Time 5:02]

Olive: Well, that's an interesting question, because I think I did have a lot of experiences as a child and as a teenager. For example, I went camping many times with just one other person, a friend. We'd go out, we'd take a blanket, a can of pork and beans or something like that, and we'd go out and camp overnight, and with our parents' permission. So we were encouraged to do things on our own and perhaps take some risks. So we slept on top of rocks, we slept in the woods, so I had that experience.

Meyer: The small town you came from in North Carolina, is that in the mountains?

Olive: Well, it's in what's called the Piedmont section, it's in the middle of the state. But this camping experience was after I'd moved from my birthplace. My father moves the family from Fuquay Springs, North Carolina to Durham, North Carolina. And my camping experiences started maybe when I was 10 or 12 years old. And then I also learned to swim very early and I gained some confidence in swimming. I think the fact that I also spent a lot of my summers on one of my uncle's farms, and worked very, very hard at farm labor. Just chopping cotton, picking tobacco—they called it priming tobacco. And you know, we'd get up at 4 o'clock in the morning and go out and work several hours before we even had breakfast.

Meyer: Is that hot work, too?

Olive: Very hot when the sun comes up. That's why we'd go very early in the morning and try to get in several hours before breakfast and then—I guess all I'm saying here is that I had no fear of hard work. And of using my body physically. And then I had a lot of other experiences. I used to repair automobiles. I'd replace transmissions, rear ends, and motors in cars. I did that probably when I was fifteen, sixteen years old.

Meyer: What sort of cars?

Olive: Well, old A-model cars. A-models, and T-models. We had a Dodge, I think it was, Chevrolet. But I had no problems in repairing automobiles. Then I worked for a roofing company. And I got up on very steep roofs, and very high roofs, and put roofs down. And I worked in a machine shop when I was probably seventeen years old. A couple of machine shops. So I learned about metal work.

Meyer: About metal work. Making things.

Olive: And I worked in a restaurant one time. They served beer. So that was a lot of conversation in my family because my mother and father were strict Baptists, and that's the way I was brought up. So it was a real question whether I should even be allowed to work in a place that sold beer. But eventually—

Meyer: How did you get to work there?

Olive: Well, I'd thumb a ride. In those days, it was very common for youngster to get out and use their thumb. And in fact, you got around that way. That's just the way it worked out. Then I also was fortunate before going into service to have about—yeah, I finished one year of college engineering training at Duke University before going into service. And I also came from a family that—

Meyer: What did your father do for a living?

Olive: Well, my father was a lawyer. He was one of a very large family of children. I think he had one sister that went to college, but he was one of few in the family that actually went to college. He got his law degree, and actually went to school in a horse and buggy. That's the way he got there. This would have been about 1917 or something like that. And, interestingly, he was in service himself in World War I. And he got the flu and he got discharged because of the flu. [Time 10:09]
But I had a family that believed in hard work and were willing to work hard. It was required to get through. And we lived through the Depression. I have vivid memories of the Depression. During the Depression I used to—

Meyer: Hold on just a second. [pause] Okay. What I'd like to do is just quickly go over, Indiantown Gap. Indiantown Gap. What do you remember about Indiantown Gap? I know you've talked about the basic training being--

Olive: Yeah. Well—

Meyer: The combat course.

Olive: You know, I realize it now—I guess I didn't fully realize at the time I first went to Indiantown Gap—that you were really throwing a bunch of college students in with a bunch of sort of almost professional soldiers. Soldiers that had been with the 95th a long, long time. It was sort of an interesting mix of some academically inclined young men and some that were not quite as academically inclined. (laughter)

The other thing, about the people in Pennsylvania, is that they were very, very hospitable. We went over to Hershey, Pennsylvania often for concerts, and other things, and entertainment of different kinds, and the people were most gracious. We would get tickets to this, and that, and the other. I really learned to appreciate the goodness of the people of Pennsylvania, at least in

that area at that time. It certainly left a very, very happy memory with me about the way I was treated outside of camp as well as the way I was treated inside camp.

I had no particular problems with being treated inside camp, except one day when we were out there practicing, this sergeant kept saying—we were practicing—left oblique [pronounced oblake] and right oblique [pronounced oblake]. And when we had a break. I said, "Sergeant, that word is pronounced 'oblique.'" Well, he almost turned red like a peach, you know? You don't tell a sergeant how to pronounce something [laughs]. So, anyway, I didn't do that anymore.

I kept up, I think, with all the challenges that were given to us. We'd have a forced march—five miles, or twenty miles, or something—with a full pack. And I was able to, I had the stamina to keep up and did keep up. I had no, I experienced no animosity with the people over me who were training me. I had no ambition whatsoever to be an officer. I was going to do a job and do what I could, but I had no ambition [laughs], you know, to be an officer. I thought I had all the qualities. I had held many leadership positions in high school and college. So I felt that if I'd wanted to go after that I could easily have done it, and achieved it. But it was of no particular interest to be an officer in the military. Because it was not my permanent occupation.

Meyer: What was the combat course like? I know you thought it was valuable. You had talked one time about starting out in a ditch or in a culvert that was seven feet deep, and then you climbed. The machine gun training.

[Time 15:06]

Olive: Oh. Yeah, now did they call that, let me see. I'm trying to remember whether they called it a combat course or called it something else. In any event, what it amounted to was to train you how to advance under fire. And so these machine guns were set up on one side of this big field out there. And on one end of the field you had one ditch, at the other end of the field you had another ditch. And you started out being in one ditch and you had to crawl out of that ditch. The first ditch. And crawl out onto this field out there and crawl to the next ditch. And you had to be flat on your tummy because machine gun bullets were up, coming right over your head.

Meyer: Right over your head.

Olive: And I mean, you know, inches above where you were crawling. So you had to keep going, and claw, and do everything you could to get yourself propelled across that ditch. And it was quite a relief to get into the other ditch. (laughter) So, I think that was really one of the best exercises I personally ever experienced in the army. And then along with it was also the exercise of learning how to use a bayonet.

Meyer: Which was?

Olive: That was hard for me to accept that I would have the guts, if I had to, to stick a bayonet in somebody. But I learned to do it. They taught us how to strike somebody on the back of the head. With sufficient force, you can almost break their neck. So we were taught to do some pretty brutal things. I guess I had a little bit of an adjustment to accommodate some of those things. But I went in and did it.

Meyer: I think you said one time before but I thought it was interesting, and the people I've talked to so far, you're one of two who said you had no fear.

Olive: Well, I'll qualify that by saying I attempted to be very aware of where I was, who I was facing, and the dangers. But I never found myself shaking or nervous. I sort of accepted conditions as they were, whatever they were. And when I went across that field the first time and the second time, even though the shells were falling, I could have thought, Hell I'm going to be killed, that's my destiny. Well, I didn't. I mean, I just said, well, the shells are falling, to myself. I'll fall when I have to fall, and I'll get up when I can. And keep going. But I didn't break apart. I never, as far as I can recall, I never broke up.

Meyer: Well, I think, you see me later on, you know, we've covered almost everything that was missed except for, so when you loop through it again- [break in tape] I'm going to loop you around just for a second and then again, what is your, what was your number?

Olive: My dog tag number, which I happen to remember, 14124344.

Meyer: 14124344. 14124344.

Olive: 14124344

Meyer: Okay. Now we're looping around a little bit because there was an error on the CD. Right now, talk about the trip over.

Olive: Oh, the trip over to England.

Meyer: On the Mariposa.

[Time: 20:17]

Olive: Well we left, I think we were temporarily stationed at Camp Myles Standish, I think. In Massachusetts. And whatever port is near there. I don't recall it as being Boston. It was some other little port. But in any event, we left from Massachusetts, a Massachusetts port, on the Mariposa. And my recollection is we had about 15,000 men on that boat. And there was hardly, literally hardly, difficult to find a place to lie down. I remember walking around the boat just trying to find a place to lie down, or even sit, because it was so crowded. And then the food situation was just absolutely atrocious. The Mariposa was formerly a rather, I guess a romantic-type tourist boat, with all kinds of mahogany stairs and stuff. Well, the mess hall was down on the lowest deck and you had to go down these stairs to get down to the mess hall to eat. And then all these fumes from the food would come up through the stairwell. I'd sometimes get down one set of steps but that was as much as I could take. I could not stand that odor. The smell coming from the mess hall down there. So I survived—somehow I found a source of chocolate bars and pickles. That's the only thing that I could eat, that I could hold down.

Because everybody was seasick. I mean, these were 40-foot waves out there. I mean, they were monster waves. And I saw, at one time I saw a tanker sitting on the crest of a wave. And I

saw water spinning off its propeller. With its bow out of the water, its propeller out of the water. And sitting on the crest of the wave. And then it went boom—down. Down it went. Then up again. Then down again. All of this, if you can imagine, is in the midst of—we had a lot of escort vessels out there that were dropping depth bombs. So then every ten or fifteen minutes or so you'd hear BOOM. Some depth bomb exploding down there. In anticipation, I guess somebody picked up a sound they thought was a German submarine. But anyway, we were dropping depth bombs, we were zigzagging, and we were encountering 40-foot waves. And it was a horrible trip. [laughs]

So we eventually got up to Liverpool. And we unloaded at Liverpool, in England. Then there were some nice ladies there that served us tea, English tea. Which nobody could stand. I mean, it was awful tea. [laughs] I really appreciated the English giving us tea, and everybody was reluctant to show any displeasure while we were in the station. But as soon as we got out of the station, I remember sticking my head out the window, and looking up and down the length of the train, and all these guys were dumping their tea out of their cups on the railroad track.

Anyway, we got down to some camp there. I did get leave one weekend to go to London. And was actually in London at the time the buzz bombs were coming over. And I guess that was my first real contact with the reality of the war being on. That was my first experience of seeing some missile, in effect.

Meyer: How high above your head?

Olive: Oh, I don't know. You could see them. They had sort of an orange glow. You'd see them come over, and then they'd cut their engines off. And you knew that as soon as the engine cut off the thing was falling. And then you'd eventually hear some VROOM, you'd hear the thing explode whenever it hit. But then all these English people that were driving wagons, horse-drawn wagons and things, they kept going. That was something that impressed me. All during this thing the wagons and the horses just kept plodding down the street as if nothing was happening. I mean, they were very stoic, is that the word?

[Time 25:10]

Meyer: Stoic. Did you feel welcomed by the British?

Olive: Oh yeah. They were fun, actually.

Meyer: Were they?

Olive: Oh, yeah. One of the British soldiers showed me, I think it was about twelve, I used to remember, twelve, fifteen ways. They had these telephone systems, you had, what was it, button one, button two, or something. You had to go through a sequence of pushing these buttons. He showed me how to push them in such a way that you didn't have to use coins, you know? [laughter]

Meyer: That's good.

Olive: Another thing I did when I was in England before I went to France, I built a radio with a razor blade. Used a razor blade as a crystal, as a tuning crystal. I scrounged a pair of earphones from somewhere. And I made this little radio with a razor blade. I tuned it and used a safety pin. I could take the safety pin, point of the safety pin, put it in different places on the razor blade and tune the radio. And pick up these British stations. So I just remember that as something I did while I was waiting to go to France.

Meyer: So you were stationed outside, how far outside of London—

Olive: I don't remember where I was. My brother, if he were alive now, he's dead now—my older brother—he would have known. I think it was sort of in the middle of England, but I'm not sure.

Meyer: You mentioned British wagons?

Olive: Well, when I say wagons I'm talking about regular horse-drawn wagons for carrying goods or groceries or something, you know. And they would just sort of go down the street, along with such traffic as there was.

Meyer: So you're in the camp in England, did you get notice to move out and go to the coast, or what?

Olive: I don't remember how the notice as such came to us. But anyway, I was just part of a large company there. We just received orders to pack up and move out. Next thing I knew we were down to Southampton and [break in tape] to France, to Omaha Beach there. And there were quite a few waves, and the boat was bouncing up and down, the transport boat that we came on. And then this landing craft came alongside. And they had the ladder that went down the side of the boat. The idea is you walk down the ladder here—this is in full gear now, with all your backpack on, your rifle, and everything else. And you had to jump. You sort of watched when the landing craft and the boat were more or less at the same level, because they were bouncing at a different rate. And then you'd have to sort of judge when you could jump from the step into the landing craft. And so it was a little tricky. I managed to do that. Got into the landing craft. And I remember there was one, there was a lieutenant there that really was not liked by many people at all. I remember all these soldiers who disliked him intensely. I didn't have any strong feelings one way or the other about the guy, because I didn't have a close relation with him. But anyway, I knew that beneath the surface there, they were just hoping he would break his neck or something. [laughs]

Meyer: Did he?

Olive: No, he managed to do it. He fell, but they helped him up.

Meyer: I just wanted to ask you again because I'm not sure whether I got this. So the crew of the ship is Algerian.

Olive: That's my recollection, North Africa. That's North African, right?

Meyer: North African. So—

Olive: And it was a Belgian boat as I remember. So you had Belgian officers and black Algerian crew speaking French. That was an unusual experience for me.

[Time 30:12]

Anyway, we landed over there on Omaha Beach. Everybody had sort of accumulated all their internal waste matter. So we went up to the top of the, crawled up on the cliff there and got up on the hill—the big, flat surface at the top of the beach there—and everybody had to relieve themselves in both ways. We used to think of it as number one and number two. Well, everybody dropped their pants down and they were urinating and defecating—all these, enormous number of soldiers out there. And comes along this French family—mother, father, and little children. And they just—nobody says anything. Everybody takes everything in stride, see. [laughs] We're out there crapping, you know—taking a crap. [laughs]

Meyer: From the Belgian boat coming in, did you transfer to a Higgins?

Olive: It was a landing craft. Now whether it was a Higgins or some other make I don't know. But it did have a ramp that came down. But it came down in relatively shallow water, so we got wet. We sort of waded through some shallow water, as I recall. We didn't go up on dry land.

Meyer: And when you first saw the beach, what did it look like?

Olive: Well, there was still quite a bit of debris out there. There were no bodies. All the bodies had been removed. But the allies built these sort of artificial harbors out there. They had these great, big, sort of cubicle containers that had been used to build platforms in the water, sort of floating platforms. And some of those, remains of some of those were there as I recall. And then there was a lot of other just junk. I guess some of it was German, some of it was put in there by the allies, I suppose. But there was a fair amount of debris.

And then just as soon as we started walking in France itself, and get into these villages, it was very apparent that they were—there was a lot of destruction there. And it began to sink home what war was really like. When I began to see all these houses that had been blown up. And then cows sometimes. One of the sites that impressed me was, I saw a tree there, or about six or eight cattle right beneath a tree that had been blown up. A shell apparently came in and killed all these cattle. They just happened to be grazing beneath this tree. And I was impressed by that.

Meyer: Was it cold? What was the weather like?

Olive: I think it was really comfortable at that stage. This would have been in August, I guess, of '44. I think we got the cold weather later. Because I was wounded in December.

Meyer: And I know you talked to me about the wound, about the incident. But I want to make sure, because we had the bad disk. I want you to leap in and talk to me about when you were

wounded again, because I want to make sure I've got it here. Because I can always add it in on top.

Olive: Okay. Well, after we'd gone through Metz, we were sort of assigned to capture a town by the name of Ensdorf, in Germany. And in order to get to the town, the part of the town that we were going to attack first, we had to cross a little river. I don't think it was more than, I don't know, maybe 1,000, 2,000 feet across. It was not very large.

[Time 35:03]

And I remember one thing. The morning that we were going to go into Ensdorf, we had to cross a big field. First we had to cross this river. Then we had to cross a big field, a huge field. I don't know, that was probably two or three thousand feet between the river and the town of Ensdorf. It was a huge field. Then we would get to Ensdorf itself.

And I remember the first thing that morning there was a Black, this is an all-Black African American, I think an engineering group, that laid down a smokescreen at the edge of this field. And what sticks in my memory and impresses me is the fact that these are Blacks that went ahead of the whites to lay down a smokescreen to protect the whites. So the Germans couldn't see them when they were going across the field.

Anyway, they laid down the smokescreen. And we started going across this field. And then the shells started coming in because the Germans had obviously predicted this was where we were going to cross and had it zeroed in. So the shells started falling. I was carrying—the whole group of us was, the machine gun crew—we were each assigned to carry a box of ammunition and it was very heavy. I don't know, I would just estimate maybe it was fifty pounds weight. Extremely heavy.

Meyer: One person would carry—

Olive: Yeah, one person would carry one of these containers. That was all you could possibly handle. You were trying to carry this heavy load. Now I might be exaggerating. Maybe it was twenty-five pounds. But that's the way it felt to me as I relate the story.

Anyway, we started going across the field and then the shells started coming. We'd have to drop down on the ground to try to minimize our exposure to the shells when we heard them coming. We could actually hear them just before they hit. Just a split second before they hit. We'd hear the shells, we'd drop on the ground. And this was muddy, really muddy field out there. In any event, we managed to get across the field.

And then this group, I don't know whether it was ten or twelve, or whatever, who had been assigned to each bring a box of ammunition, sort of gathered together in this basement of this house over there that we captured. And we were sort of counting up our boxes of ammunition and we realized we were three short. There were three men there, that I remember very vividly, were just standing there crying. And they were just completely broken up. They were nervous wrecks, is as best I can describe it. And they had had all the war they could take at that moment. They really were classic examples of shell shock as I understand what that means.

Meyer: What did their eyes look like?

Olive: I don't remember. I remember them crying. That sticks in my memory. These are three grown men, young men, really broken apart. And I don't remember any animosity being expressed by the sergeant or anybody else against these men. I think everybody realized that something had happened to them. Which they perhaps had no control of.

In any event we quickly assembled and decided we were going to go back on another trip to get the three boxes of ammunition that we had to leave back there. So I volunteered along with two others to go back and pick up the three boxes. So it was on the second trip over to pick up the missing box that I was supposed to bring back that I got hit.

Meyer: Where did it hit you?

Olive: Sir?

[Time 40:00]

Meyer: Where did it hit you?

Olive: Well I had a piece of shrapnel. I still have the shrapnel. The doctor saved it and gave it to me. I still has a piece of shrapnel. It's about, you know, big as my thumb or something. Anyway, it went through my foot and into my shoe. The shoe sole stopped it. It hit the top of my foot. I've always been thankful that it hit my foot and not my head.
[phone rings, interruption]
...purposely cut up, I mean, the shape of it is formed so it breaks into all these metal particles. The more you have, the more chance you have of hitting somebody. So they have these shells, also, that break up into fragments and go in every direction to increase your coverage of who you incapacitate.

Meyer: So while you're out in the field and you're hit, what's it sound like? What are the sounds of battle like?

Olive: All I recall hearing is you sort of hear a whistling sound and then VOOM [hand clap]. A microsecond, almost. But then, you know, there are other guns going on almost all the time. Our own, as well as the Germans'.

Meyer: Is it loud like the stereo's on?

Olive: It varies up and down, I guess.

Meyer: I remember you saying when you were taken away that you—

Olive: Yeah. Well, you know. It's not a constant at all because there's so many variables. Who's shooting and what they shooting, and how loud the gun is that's being shot. Those kind of things.

Meyer: So you were hit in the foot, and you said that you, your first thought was—

Olive: I did not want to leave my fellow soldiers. That's a very strong recollection I have. Then I tried to stand and I found I couldn't walk. So that made it clear that I wasn't going to stay, and I'd better get myself out of there. And so I guess I started, at that point I started crawling toward the river. I don't know that, I'm not sure whether anyone assisted me in getting to the boat or not. But anyway, somebody had a boat down there on the side of the river, and somehow I got into that boat.

Meyer: Was there snow on the ground, or mud?

Olive: I'm pretty sure it was muddy and wet. Now this would have been, I don't know, I think I was wounded December fourteenth? Something like that. But in any event, I'm sure it was wet and muddy. Whether it was snowing, I don't remember that. I don't think it was. It was certainly snowing up in the mountains when we'd been up in the mountains. But I don't think it was snowing there at that time. You know, the Battle of the Bulge started just about the same, almost the same day. Almost. Of course, that was up north of where I was. But they certainly had lots of snow. But I don't know. I think it was just mud.

I crawled over to the boat, and somehow got in the boat. And somehow somebody rowed the boat across the river. I do remember sort of crawling through the brush up a bank there, and somebody showed me where the medic station was. And I crawled in there. And they started working on me. Cut the shoe off. I remember they took a knife or something and cut the shoe off. And then they gave me a shot of morphine. They had these little plastic bag things that had a needle on them. All you had to do was uncover the needle and stick it in. Squeeze the bag, and that would stick the morphine in.

And then in a short while, very short while, I think, after I got to the medic station they loaded me up on an ambulance. And as I said before, we started out, and a shell came in and blew the ambulance over the ditch. Then an American tank came along and pulled us out. Then we went to one field hospital. I think they did not operate there. I think it was the second field hospital where they actually operated and removed the piece of shrapnel.

[Time 45:28]

Meyer: And the doctor gave you the shrapnel?

Olive: Yeah. I watched the operation, actually. With a mirror. And I wasn't nervous about it, you know? I was very calm about it. I was very interested in seeing it. And then, I'm pretty sure they had a train running by that time. And I think wherever the field hospital was, it was down there near Metz somewhere, I guess. I think we got to Paris by train, and then we unloaded. I know we got, we went by train, I think, to Paris. Then they put us on an ambulance. Then we drove through the streets of Paris to this old hospital. That's where—I remember getting on the elevator; I don't remember getting off the elevator. But I do remember waking up the next morning being in a bed with white sheets and all these French nurses around. I literally thought I was in heaven. [Meyer laughs] Well, you know, that was a pretty fast transition from the front line to a place where they had sheets and these nurses were all going around saying ooh-la-la. [laughs] They certainly were a pleasant, a very pleasant change for a soldier who'd been out there in the boondocks. I don't know how long I stayed in France, but then--

Meyer: One thing because I want to make sure we got it, too, repeated, when you said when you were in the hospital, your skin peeled off. Because of—

Olive: Yeah. I think, I'm trying to remember whether that was, that was probably in England, I'd imagine. But in any event, after I got out of the cold—this would have been after I got wounded—I guess the cold weather must have been keeping the skin sort of intact. But at some phase there, after I was wounded and while I was in one of the hospitals, I remember the skin just coming off in layers, off my legs and my feet.

Meyer: Okay. I'm going to stop for a second right now. [pause in tape]

Olive: At one point, and I don't know exactly where this was—it was probably somewhere between Metz and Ensdorf, I suppose, and it was in a very thick forest. My recollection is the trees were very much like cedar trees that had grown very closely together. In any event this little, short, stocky German fellow came out of the trees. I was in there searching for German soldiers, as were many other American soldiers. So he came out. I brought my gun up. I was going to shoot him, thinking in fear that he was going to shoot me. In any event, I had a carbine at that time. I had carried a regular rifle at various times but this time I had a carbine, which was more appropriate for a machine gun crew. So the carbine had two locks on it. One was a safety lock you had to maneuver to, had to slide so you could shoot the gun. You had another lock right next to, in front of, I think it was in front of, the safety lock. And that would release the magazine so you could replace the magazine, or reload the magazine. And in any event, I pushed the magazine release instead of the safety lock. The next thing I knew the magazine is in the snow and there I am facing the German.

Well, for his own reasons he chose to turn around. He could have shot me. Because I was helpless at that point as far as having a gun that wouldn't work. [laughs] So he just simply turned and went away. I quickly retrieved my magazine, shoved it into the carbine, and—but then in a relatively short while I learned that he had actually surrendered. What he really wanted to do was surrender. I guess he spoke no English and didn't know how to tell me that. So anyway, he actually surrendered and became a prisoner. And what sticks in my mind is the fact that by the good lord's will I didn't get hit and he didn't get hit, so we're both alive. I don't know whether he's still living or not.

[Time 51:16]

Meyer: Are there any other times when you look over your whole experience where you think, where you felt very lucky like that?

Olive: Oh, yeah. I remember one time I was in Metz. We had experienced a lot of snipers. Usually, they would easily get in high buildings or in a chimney or a church steeple or something like that. A typical action that we took almost every time we went into a town, if we saw a church steeple or a chimney, the tanks would shoot it down. Down it would come. No matter what. Because that's where the snipers would always hang out.

So this particular time we'd had a sniper, I guess he was in the apartment building right somewhere there in the edge of Metz. I was standing at a, there was sort of a, it looked like a boat rental place in Metz. And it was right next to a river. Now I can't remember what river it

was that flows through Metz. But anyway, there was a river there. And then there was a whole bunch of boats, canoes I think, that were stacked up in there. So it looked like it was a place where, either a public facility that gave out boats or rented boats or something of this kind.

But anyway, I was standing there at that boat place. I had about two or three shots that came about six inches from my right foot. Well, if this guy—I was standing in such a position that I was exposed. I didn't realize how exposed I was. But I came that close to being hit by a sniper. And I'm very thankful for that. Very, very thankful. Of course I'm also thankful, I may have mentioned this, that this piece of shrapnel hit me in the foot rather than in the head. Because I wouldn't be here talking to you if it hadn't. [laughs] So, no, I had experiences. I'm very thankful to be alive.

Meyer: I want you to tell me again-- [pause in tape] Here we go. Again, the experience of the frostbite. Again, just loop through it again.

Olive: Well, at one point we were in very hilly country. I think it was in Germany but I'm not sure whether it was in France or Germany. Because we had no way of knowing where we were. And it was very, very cold. In any event, we had walked, and walked, and walked this particular day, and we were all extremely tired. And when we got to where we were going to camp for the night, we didn't even bother to dig a slit trench. We just simply threw our sleeping bags on the ground and jumped into our sleeping bags, and in seconds we were asleep because we were so tired. And during the night it snowed—maybe six or eight inches of snow. And I found myself in the morning in a sleeping bag covered with snow. And I was absolutely stiff, just as stiff as a board. I could not move my hands, my fingers, or anything. I gradually started moving a little finger, then another finger, and so forth. I got my fingers so they would work. Then I got one hand so it would work, and then forearm so it would work, on one arm, maybe the right arm. And then I did the same thing with the left arm. And finally I got so I could actually sit up and eventually stand up.

In any event, it was after this experience of being frozen that I got hit with the shrapnel and was in the hospital. And in one of the hospitals, and I think it was probably in England, I remember the skin coming off my feet and legs in layers, and that was apparently due to this frostbite, or having been frozen.

[Time 56:05]

Meyer: When you were in England, you mentioned that your brother worked in the finance corps.

Olive: Yeah, he was in the finance corps of the army. And I don't know where he was stationed right at this moment. I'm sure he told me but I don't. Anyway, he had a lot of contacts with a lot of buddies of his. So in some way, well, before I went over to, when I first went to England, before I shipped out to France, he found out where I was and actually came to see me before I went over to France. And then he also found out, once I'd gotten back to England after I'd been wounded, he found out where I was and came to visit me. That was quite a thrill and joy. I think in most cases it was somewhat of a surprise, but it was great.

Meyer: Now you're back in England and you've been wounded. Do you ship back to the United States, or what happens to you?

Olive: Yeah. After I stayed there in England, I was in England I think maybe for a month or two months or something. It was a fairly extended period. In any event, someone made the decision that I would go back on a hospital ship. So I ended up on this hospital ship. I still had on a cast, I think, on my right leg. And then I remember there were some of the patients there that were on the hospital ship that must have got in a fight or something because they printed a list of all of the people on board the ship. When we arrived, they gave us this list. And they had three men listed as being in the brig. [laughs] So apparently they'd gotten in trouble on the voyage from England to New York. A gambling fight or something. [laughs] They were in the brig.

Meyer: Was the voyage back, was that a lot—

Olive: It was much more pleasant. Of course, I also was in much more pleasant sleeping conditions because I had a bed. I was treated as a disabled veteran—with a lot of care.

Meyer: Where did you land in the United States?

Olive: I'm not sure where we landed. In Staten Island, I believe. We ended up in a hospital in Staten Island. I had a sister who—still have that same sister, she's living—but anyway, she was working in New York at the time. And so she found out some way where I was and so forth. I remember she came to see me at the hospital on Staten Island, as I recall. I think it was Staten Island.

Meyer: How long did you stay there?

Olive: I really don't remember. It wasn't long. Then I moved from there to a VA hospital in western North Carolina, in what's called Black Mountain. It was a VA hospital there. Then I stayed there for an extended period, and then I was shipped to Camp Butler, which was another medical VA facility, or was at that time. And that's where I was discharged. Which is very close to my home.

[Time 1:00:07]

Meyer: Do you remember the date you were discharged?

Olive: No sir, I don't. It would have been sometime in '45.

Meyer: When you look back, how—big question, whatever answer you have, comes to mind--how did the war change you?

Olive: How did it change me?

Meyer: Yeah.

Olive: Well, how did it change me? I guess it, I suppose it caused me to maybe have a deeper and greater love for my country. I guess it caused me also to have a deeper respect for what the military has done to protect our values in this country. I suppose it, maybe it also taught me to have confidence, or greater confidence, in myself. Those are the things that sort of immediately pop in mind. But I'm sure there were many other values that came out of it. But that's all I can recall right at this moment.

Meyer: Okay. And there are portions, like you said, this will be a starting point for you. I think by going through it one time, there are sections—the Indiantown Gap section— maybe in the portion that's not recovered, but by saying it one time, going through it one time, if you have a tape recorder, it will be easy for you to go through it again. And your notes are excellent, excellent prompts for you. Because the images are very strong and you just take off. If you find any time that you have enough energy, you can catch me and bring the paper and we can go through some of the sections again. Or anything else that—but right now when you think about it, is there something you feel like you haven't covered that you'd like to bring up?

Olive: Well, let me see. Hmm. Well, I guess the other thing, you asked me what I've learned from this experience, and I'd have to add as a fourth item to that list, would be perhaps an appreciation, a sense of being alive. Of being able to enjoy life. You know. So many of my mates are dead and gone, were killed in the war. This is my second time of going to a 95th Division reunion, and I have yet to meet anybody that I actually served with. I met some man, yesterday, I think it was. He was telling me that six or eight of his buddies who come to these conventions that he actually served with. Well, that's beyond my comprehension. Because so many of my friends got killed. And I was just lucky not to be among them. And I mean, they're gone.

Meyer: What are some of their names?

Olive: I mean, I don't think there was a, I don't know how many people we started out with in my company. But I'll bet you that 80% of them were killed. You know? And I'm just a happy individual that I'm here to talk to you. [laughs] And I'm not among them, among the deceased.

[Time 1:05:11]

Meyer: I know you're thankful for things. Did you ever feel like the presence of God, or something, protecting you? Anything like that? Does that mean anything?

Olive: No, I don't know. I couldn't say I had a spiritual experience or anything of that kind that I could point to. I think I just have a basic belief there's a higher being. And I think that higher being is the same whether you're a Muslim, an Arab, an Indian, or Black, or whatever you are. I think there's one god in this world. And I can't personally put much stock in all of the different religious beliefs that go on in this country, and the religious practices. I just think there's too much attention given to the form that we practice our religion, you know. Whether you're Baptist or Catholic whatever you are. As distinct from the substance of simply having someone out there that is more powerful than you are, in some way that we can't quite fathom and understand.

Meyer: The last questions I guess also were, the D-Day Museum would like to know do you remember where you were on V-E Day?

Olive: I'm sorry.

Meyer: Do you remember where you were on Victory in Europe Day?

Olive: I think actually I was in, think that was when I came back through—I think I was probably up there on Staten Island somewhere. I think so. Wasn't that in April or something?

Meyer: In April. Do you remember where you were on V-J Day?

Olive: I remember where I was on Pearl Harbor Day.

Meyer: Where were you on Pearl Harbor?

Olive: I was working in a machine shop in Durham. And I'd just finished my shift there. This was early afternoon when I first heard it—it came out on the radio. I remember that, the announcement about Pearl Harbor. I don't know whether it was Franklin Roosevelt speaking, or who. Anyway.

Meyer: Well, I think this plus your notes will be a fine—

Olive: I wonder if they could make some copies. I'd like to keep—

Meyer: I'll tell you what. [pause in tape] You can think about going, probably your notes just take you through the early days, ASTP. We have, I think, your volunteer time. Part of page one is gone. But we looped around and got most of the rest of it. So it will be a good, good blueprint to follow. It's very simple, as you can see. Even with good equipment, things go wrong. But it's very simple. You can even, if you'd like, if you have a cassette and you make a cassette, duplicate a copy, send me a copy, and I'll make a disc. I'll try to put it on order on a disc and give it to you. What I'll do right now is take a few minutes, put everything in a file. It will take ten minutes, put everything in a file, probably twenty minutes, half an hour it will take me. And put it in whatever order I can put it in. And then I'll make you a copy of it. So you should have one in time for dinner.

Olive: Wait a minute, you mean a copy of what we've dictated today?

Meyer: Yeah. Either I'll have a little time today, I'll see when this other gentleman—

Olive: Wait a minute, you've got a scanner or something? How does it get converted from voice to print?

Meyer: Oh, I don't mean a print copy, an audio copy. What I have right here—

Olive: Oh, is this—

[Time: 1:10:04]
End Session.