Donald K. White
106th Infantry Division

Rutgers Oral History Archives
New Brunswick History Department

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Donald White on May 17, 2003, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and Jared Kosch.

SI: Mr. White, thank you very much for bearing with us today. It has been a very hectic day [Reunion Weekend 2003] and we have wanted to interview you for a long, long time.

Donald White: It's my pleasure.

SI: To begin, could you tell us a little bit about your father? What was his name? When was he born? What was his occupation?

DW: My father was William A. White, Jr., born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. He attended Cornell University, got his law degree from NYU and a MBA from St. Lawrence. His profession was professor of law at Pace University, which used to be, back in the old days, Pace Institute. My father died in … 1955 at the age of sixty. I thought, at that point, [that] my father was an old, elderly man and, now, I find I'm twenty-two years older than when he died.

SI: Did your father come from a family of college graduates or was he the first one from his family to go to college?

DW: No, my father was the first of his family to go to college. His father was born in Charleston, South Carolina, which is near where I live now, in retirement. His family moved up to Brooklyn, New York, after the Civil War, when things were pretty destitute in the Charleston area, because of the Civil War and we have enjoyed, recently, the genealogy pursuit and this may not be of interest to your interview, but my great-great-great-grandfather came over from Scotland in 1837 as a stonecutter.

Gloria White: 17[37]

DW: I'm sorry, 1737, as a stonecutter and the family business became marble and granite works in Charleston, South Carolina. One of the things they did, we have learned since, our introduction to this genealogy test was, they built the old Citadel Academy, which is now … the West Point of the South. They built the Hibernian Hall. They built St. Philip's Church, which is very famous in Charleston, and many of the stone markers in the famous Magnolia Cemetery that go back past the Civil War are made by my family's people. So, we have become very interested in seeing from where our family came.

SI: It was very rare in your father's day for someone to go to college and also earn a Masters degree and a law degree.

DW: Yes.

SI: Did that emanate from his family's work ethic or was he just an exception to the rule?

DW: He, I would say it as I know it now, was an exception to the rule. My father was an excellent student, much better than I ever was. It didn't rub off that much on me, … but he was quite a scholar and did very well … as a professor of law and I can remember attending some of his lectures as a youngster and being in complete awe of my father standing in front of a class of law students. … Well, my dad was a great person. Unfortunately, he died at an early age.

SI: Did he ever practice law?

DW: Oh, yes, practiced law as well and, basically, estate law. [On] the other side, my mother went to Erasmus Hall in Brooklyn, a high school, the same high school which I graduated from, and that was as far as she went educationally, another beautiful person, who, in her final years, lived with my deceased wife and me down in South Carolina, until she died in 1987, and I have very fond memories of two beautiful people.

SI: Did your father ever talk about his experiences in World War I?

DW: My father was in the Quartermaster Corps, World War I, never left this country, but was stationed up at Plattsburgh, New York, and I believe was in service for about two years. His eyesight was very poor, which, I guess, prohibited him from going into anything other than such as the Quartermaster Corps or something that did not require better eyesight, but, again, a wonderful and very patriotic individual until the day he died.

SI: Did he enlist or was he drafted?

DW: He enlisted.

SI: Do you remember any stories that he told you or did he not talk about the war?

DW: No, unfortunately, I never … got to share some of the experiences. Whether there were any unusual stories, I don't know.

SI: You grew up in Brooklyn.

DW: I was born and brought up in Brooklyn, New York.

SI: What was your neighborhood or block like?

DW: Well, back in the days when we lived in Flatbush, that was really suburbia, and it was a very wonderful situation. It was like living in the country. We had formerly lived in an apartment near Prospect Park, New York, and moved out of there when I was about four years old. So, I remember very little of any experiences there, but [I] lived in Flatbush until I went to Rutgers and had a very happy childhood, didn't think I

wanted to go to school. Most of my friends, upon graduation from high school, went immediately into a job and I thought, "Well, I should be doing some of the same." My father, being a lot smarter than I, said, "Son, you're going to college and, if after you're there, you feel you don't belong there, the decision is yours," and I'm forever grateful and he sent me to Rutgers. I wanted to become a teacher, so, I studied physical education and biology, thought I wanted to teach and, for a fellow who didn't want to go away to college, I got more out of the University than I think ninety-nine percent of any other student here. I became very active in campus activities. My fraternity was Beta Theta Pi. In my junior year, I was president of the fraternity. I was on Student Council. I was … elected to Cap and Skull. I was the captain of … Scabbard and Blade. I was the president of the Intra-Fraternity Council and I was a member of Cap and Skull, if I didn't mention that, and, for a young fellow who thought school wasn't for him, it became my life and I'm very proud of Rutgers, to this day.

SI: How did the Great Depression affect your family and your neighborhood in Flatbush?

DW: Well, we were not poor, but we certainly were not rich. Tuition, back in the days when I started, I believe, was around nineteen hundred dollars and it wasn't easy. My family made sure I was going, though, and my father had a teaching job, which, in those days, did not pay a great deal, but some might say that about today, also, but he was determined, as was my mother, that I should benefit by an education and we didn't have a great many material things in those days. We had a family automobile, finally, and that was back in the days when eight or nine hundred dollars would buy a very nice automobile and we didn't have much money to take vacations, things of that sort, but, in time, why, we got away from the economies of the big Depression and, well, I think I sum it up by saying I had a very … wholesome and a very happy childhood and I thank Rutgers for a lot of that.

SI: How did you and your parents feel about Franklin Roosevelt and his New Deal policies? You wrote on your survey that your family was Republican.

DW: Yes. My father was a very staunch Republican and did not think that Franklin Roosevelt was the right man for the job at the time. I'm sure that that was rather typical of some who were not a favorite of the Democratic administration. I must say, as most children follow their parents' instincts and feelings, [I believed that as well]. However, during the war, … I soon learned that Franklin Roosevelt was a great … head of our country and, along with many, many GIs that I knew and served with, [I] was very, very disappointed at Franklin Roosevelt's death, because it seemed as though he was the savior of our country and I guess that kind of sums up [my feelings]. I did not know much about Harry Truman when he took over, but I did have an experience, if this is the time for it. When the war was over, my division ended up in Czechoslovakia. I was with the 79th Infantry Division and I was assigned to the advanced party to represent our division in the Pacific, in Japan, and it was assumed that there would be an invasion of the island of Japan and we were put on a twenty-four hour alert and wondered why the twenty-four hour alert went on for two weeks. We didn't see how we could be hanging by the bootstraps for that time with no information, and then, the factor came out that solved the whole mystery. It was because of the use of the atomic bomb that ended the war and we were so thankful, because we had been briefed and oriented to realize that if the invasion took place, there would be up to an estimated one million casualties of the United States and Allied forces and, undoubtedly, that meant there would be as many Japanese casualties, so that the use

of the atomic bomb, drastic as it was, was, to me, personally, a savior that saved many, many, up to a million, lives. It was a very destructive device, but, to me, it became a very essential determination that the Japanese were brought to final surrender.

JK: I would like to back up a little bit.

DW: Sure.

JK: I would like to know more about your pre-war years at Rutgers. You started in September of 1939, correct?

DW: Right.

JK: What are your fondest memories of Rutgers? What is the shining image in your mind of those early years at Rutgers University?

DW: Well, I was, of course, very enthused with my fraternity. I was very occupied with the ROTC and did well in the ROTC. At the time of graduation, I was a company commander, and then, one of our battalion commanders was removed to go into service and I became a battalion commander of one of the two battalions in our ROTC unit and, upon graduation, I had one of two awards that permitted me, if I desired, to stay in the Army permanently, a choice of which I did not take when it came time for discharge, but my years at Rutgers were so full and so interesting that I think, as the old Rutgers song goes, "I became a man," [*On The Banks*], and I played lacrosse and loved the game and had the good fortune of being selected for the All-North Team and lacrosse meant a great deal to me. I played two years of football, until a knee mishap took me out of the football line-up. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

Of all of the things that led up to this knee incident, my roommate was Ken MacDonald, who was the center on the football team, the captain of the football team, in our final year. Ken played lacrosse, also, and was a great defenseman and, at practice one day, it was Ken who laid a block on me that tore the ligaments in my knee. So, my own roommate took me out of the football career, but that's neither here nor there. I played lacrosse from there on in, with a brace on my knee, but, in order to make up for the inadequacies of playing football in my final two years, I helped Mike Stang, who was the trainer for the football team, and I was Mike's unofficial assistant and he gave the 150-pound team over to me to take care of. So, I taped and traveled with the 150-pound team, as trainer, and, again, great experience. I still see and talk to some of the fellows who played on that 150-pound football team, one of them being Dick de Sante, whom you know, and so, I gave up playing football to be … part of it. …

Sandra Holyoak: What are some of the stories that you remember about traveling with the football team?

DW: Well, one of the … great experiences, in our sophomore year, pre-season, pre-football season, we went to Annapolis for three days and scrimmaged against the Annapolis team and, during lacrosse season, we spent three days at West Point and I can still remember, to this day, facing off, I was a center for the lacrosse team, and I

was, I hate to say it, but I was better than adequate, I guess, and I had an exceptional day … the first day there, at the position of facing off, the center, and, suddenly, time was called and a big brute of a fellow was put in to face off against me. I was still able to get the center, the face off, and the game went on and we finished the day and, when we got into the locker room, Fred Fitch, who was the coach, said, "Don, do you know who that center was that went in, [that] you were facing off against?" and I said, "No, Coach, but he was one big son of a gun." He said, "Well, … that was Doc Blanchard," and I said, "Oh, now I know why he was so big and so strong," and, the next day, I think I was intimidated, because I didn't do as well.

SH: Who was Doc Blanchard?

DW: Doc Blanchard was one of the outstanding players of the 1943 era at West Point, made All-American and he and Glenn Davis were known as "Mr. Inside [and] Mr. Outside," … because of their abilities, and they were … top players and, back to the fond memories, well, being part of both of those schools gave me a feeling for the military school, [so] that I began to think, "Maybe that's somewhere I should have been," not that I think I would have been accepted when I applied for college, but I simply thought the atmosphere was wonderful. So, I guess those were a couple of my highlights.

SH: You may have already answered this question, but did you stay in the ROTC at Rutgers?

DW: Yes, I took the four years, the extra two years, and there were twenty-eight of us who went down to Benning together and that was quite a trip. … Just to backtrack for a moment, we had to enlist in January of 1943, in order to stay in school until graduation. We came back as privates and we were billeted in Pell Hall … and it was a dormitory setup. We marched to class. We marched to mess hall and we were privates in the Army and we stayed on about two weeks after graduation, because our turn had not come up to enter Fort Benning, Officer's Candidate School, and we learned how to take apart the .45 caliber handgun, the M-1 rifle, the light machine gun, and we learned how to do it blindfolded and we wondered, at first, whether we were just passing time and, of course, we all realized, when we got into actual combat, that we had learned something that was very essential, had we ever had to fumble, under combat conditions, for a part or to clean one of these weapons and it was not taken lightly at that point. One of the outstanding things that happened, when the group of us marched down to the train station to board a Pullman car to start us off to Fort Benning, Georgia, Dr. Robert Clothier, who was then the President of Rutgers, was there to greet us and I say with emotion, not really to greet us, but to bid us good-bye and farewell.

SH: I have read the speech that he gave the day after Pearl Harbor, when he asked the student body to stay in school and wait to be called up.

DW: Well, he was a remarkable man and I had the opportunity to present him with a flag for his office on behalf of the ROTC at graduation. Having been in the Scabbard and Blade organization, the military organization, I was the captain or the president of our group at that time, and, years later, in approximately 1965, when I had moved to Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, because of my job, out of church one day, the Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church, comes this very stately, good looking, recognizable, much older

Dr. Clothier and I introduced myself. I said, "Dr. Clothier." He said, "Yes?" and I said, "You won't remember me, but my name is Don White, Class of 1943, and you took us to the train station and bid us good-bye." He said, "Oh, I remember that," and tears streamed down his cheeks and I guess a few down mine as well, as they seem to be at the moment. … That's a memory I have of Dr. Clothier and a wonderful experience, again.

SI: How did you come to choose Rutgers?

DW: Well, when it was decided, both by my family and me, that college was the place to go, we began to wonder, "What is number-one-and-only son going to do?" and my father, being a professor, why, I guess I was thinking teaching was a normal trend and teaching what? Well, I was very athletically inclined. I played lacrosse in high school, so, I thought, "Gee, this is an opportunity to become a coach," and Rutgers had, then, one of the very fine physical education programs. I also loved biology and I thought I could teach biology, as well as physical education, and Rutgers was close enough so that it was still possible to get home, in the days before people flew around a great deal by air to travel long distances to get home, and my parents also had, by this time, a small home on the New Jersey Shore, in Allenhurst, New Jersey, and it was a great opportunity, then, to come to Rutgers, which I did.

SI: Did your father ever suggest Cornell, NYU or Pace?

DW: Yes, my father graduated from Cornell, so, religiously and dutifully, we made a trip to Cornell somewhere around my junior year in high school and I was overwhelmed with the beauty of Cornell in Ithaca, the town, and thought it was a pretty nice place, but they did not have the courses I wanted. So, Rutgers was my choice.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about your classes and your professors in biology and physical education? What stands out in your memory? Were the courses as good as you thought they would be?

DW: Yes. One of my very closest friends, finally, was a professor known as Doc Greenwood, Russell Greenwood, who taught anatomy, Kinesiology, and was also a fraternity brother and was a great influence over the Beta House and Doc Greenwood and all of us, I mean everyone in the fraternity, became very close. We, … several of us, I being one, attended a Beta Theta Pi reunion out in Mackinac Island back in 1940, I guess it was, and Doc took us all out there, brought us all back, and he became such a close friend that when I got married on a leave in 1944, came home, and all of my close friends, at that point, were in service, Doc Greenwood was my best man at my wedding. So, there's a friendship that carried over through that and I will never forget the fine person he was.

SI: It sounds as though the fraternity played a major role in your Rutgers experience.

DW: Yes.

SI: How were you rushed? What piqued your interest in Beta Theta Pi?

DW: … I was rushed the summer before I started school, on the Jersey Shore, by a neighbor, whom I did not know at the time, but was then a senior at Rutgers and the

president of the Beta House, and Doc Greenwood and one or two others and invited to come to the Beta House when school started. Well, there was a requirement period, which I believe there still is, that you cannot join a fraternity the first couple of weeks or whatever the period was. … I was rushed, along with others, by several other fraternities and I liked the people at the Beta House that I met and that was my choice for joining and I'm very pleased that they accepted me. We learned how to … become adults. We did not have a housemother at the time, but our rules were very strict. I can remember, at one point, on a house weekend, when one of our brothers brought a single can of beer into the house and was ostracized immediately and put out of the house for the weekend and things are a little different, of course, now and not just in Rutgers, but all fraternities [at] all universities, but that was our temple. We had to run our own expenses. We had our own dining room and a very wonderful cook named Cali, a black lady, who worked six days a week, cooking meals for the group, and she was like a mother to us and, if anyone ever had a sore pinky or a sore thumb, "Cali, have you got a Band-Aid for this?" "Oh, you just sit right there, Mr. So-and-So, and I'll take care of you," [laughter] and another wonderful relationship.

SI: I am always struck by how different things are today. Back then, you had to wear a jacket and tie to dinner.

DW: Yes, yes.

SI: Before the war, it seems as though fraternities almost ran the school. If you were not in a fraternity, you were almost an outsider.

DW: That's right, yes.

SI: Was Beta Theta Pi known then for anything in particular, such as athletics or school leadership?

DW: Well, I would say school leadership, because we had such wonderful students. I wasn't the best student, grade-wise, but we had one or two Phi Beta Kappa. … We were also known as the "Singing Fraternity." We had a beautiful choral group. I was not part of that, [laughter] but we learned how to judge our budgets, present a budget and live by a budget, and I can remember very well when, oh, about my junior year, we had to raise the price of meals at the Beta House from twenty-six dollars a month to twenty-eight dollars a month and we thought, "My God, where's the money going to come from?" but this was part of growing up and part of [the] beginning of inflation and we had to make ends meet. We had to pay fuel bills, telephone bills. … As well as the education I got from Rutgers, I received a very fine education from Beta Theta Pi.

SI: Where was the house located?

DW: It was located at 50 Union Street, which was torn down about three or four years ago.

SI: That was the same house?

DW: Yes, and, unfortunately, the place went to disrepair and was not in the best graces of the university at the time, because of an infraction that we were all quite

ashamed of, we of my generation, but, nevertheless, that was a fact and that was what happened.

SI: Do you have a Dean Metzger story?

DW: No, I don't have a story. Of course, [I] knew him, as all of us did, and greatly admired him, but I'm afraid I'm not one to give you a story there.

SI: You must have been a good student. [laughter] Do you remember having to attend mandatory chapel?

DW: Yes, and I thought today, as I sat in chapel, we sat up near the front, so [that] we could hear and it's closer than I've ever been to the front of the chapel in all the years I attended, [laughter] but it was mandatory. It was accepted and that was part of school.

SI: Do you remember hearing any speakers there?

DW: Yes, but I could not, at this point, remember who any of them were. One of the speakers, I remember quite well, at graduation was J. Edgar Hoover. He was our principal speaker and, graduating in May of 1943, why, everything was war oriented and he was quite a person to guide young people on what war and patriotism was all about and he was, even though a controversial person, he was very patriotic, an extremely patriotic person, and I still have the program at home from graduation.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor, what did you know about the situation in Europe and Asia? Had you followed the news at all?

DW: We followed it, but I can't say we were completely involved in it. It was something we heard about, read about, but … we were really not part of it. We had to learn how to blackout the house, because there were blackout drills, occasionally, and it was mandatory that we properly adhere to those measures and, at the time of being president of the house, I even felt as though I was the top policeman in that factor, [laughter] but, other than that, we didn't seem close enough, until Pearl Harbor.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor, did the student body tend to think that we should, say, send aid to Britain or that we should be isolationists, like the America First group?

DW: Well, I think, like all young people of that era, we, at first, thought, "Gee, this is not our war. We helped people out in Europe in World War I; are we going to have to do it again? Is it going to be necessary to do it again and, if so, why is it necessary?" So, gradually, we began to get a little smarter and we realized … what opposition our country was up against when Hitler got into power and we read about some of the atrocities of his war machine, so that only gradually, … up until Pearl Harbor, did we, I feel, in my opinion, … get into it.

SI: What were you doing when you heard the news about Pearl Harbor?

DW: Well, Pearl Harbor was an awakening. I happened to be on my way home for a Sunday dinner when, on the radio, I heard the announcement that we had been attacked the night before at Pearl Harbor and, well, driving the car, I think I just had to

slow down and think. "What does this mean?" and realized that, "By gosh, nobody was going to do this to us," so that, suddenly, from not being very involved in foreign affairs, I, and many others, many, many others, felt, "Well, by gosh, we've got to show somebody who's boss around here. They can't mess with us," and, unfortunately, people dropped out of school so readily to enlist that, well, we went from a fraternity full of students, members, down to about half our roster. Fellows who were in their junior year, not even seniors yet, were saying, "Well, we just can't wait any longer," and they were enlisting in all kinds of service, whether it be Marines, Air Corps, Army, Navy, and I guess some of Dr. Clothier's appeal, at the time, was, "Don't be hasty," but, still, young people make up their own minds and it seemed to be the patriotic answer to what was going on. … They thought it was absolutely necessary to enlist and not wait any longer.

SI: What was your opinion on the matter?

DW: Well, I wanted to graduate, also, … being in the ROTC, wanted the opportunity to go down to Benning and at least come out as a second lieutenant, if I was successful, and, therefore, I was one of those who decided to enlist, as we had to, at Fort Dix in January of '43 in order to stay.

SI: Did the pace of the ROTC course become more intense after Pearl Harbor?

DW: Yes, yes, it did and we realized, being in the infantry, … or would be in the infantry, officially, in combat, some time, that we were in a very serious part of this world situation, that, suddenly, you realize that, "Gee, it wasn't just parading out behind the gym at Rutgers University, but we were going to put our lives on the line, because this was for real," and that, pretty much, was most of the feelings. There were twenty-eight of us who went down to Benning together and I believe only fourteen of them survived the war. So, our casualties were pretty high, being second lieutenants in the infantry, and many absolutely beautiful people … were hurt in that, which we honored today [at the Class of 1943 Grove of Remembrance].

SI: At the time, did you realize what the casualty rates were for second lieutenants in the infantry?

DW: Well, through our studies, we knew that we were pretty expendable, that you can't be in the infantry and lead a platoon in combat and … not have casualties. So, we knew what we were getting into.

SI: As you look back on your ROTC experience, how effective was it in making you a proficient infantry lieutenant and leader?

DW: That's a good question. … Our participation here at Rutgers led us more to leadership, discipline, drilling, parading. It took Fort Benning to go into the intricacies of how to go into combat, but I think the leadership that was bestowed upon us was … excellent for our background and excellent for what we were going to do and we realized that, if we did not do a good job, it might cost some lives, including our own. So, I think it was a very good opportunity to start the first step.

SI: How did the war change Rutgers? You mentioned that many students left to enlist in the military. Was there any rationing? Were programs cut or replaced with more military oriented courses?

DW: … Well, it was quite obvious that people who were on the home front, like moms and dads …

GW: And wives.

DW: [laughter] And wives, in some cases, they were being very restricted on gasoline, food, certainly meat, shoes, all kinds of commodities and, if you felt [that] you wanted to travel somewhere by automobile, it was pretty difficult and my mother, and I'm sure the mother of most everyone else away at school, would save her coupons until the family came back together and, in my case, came home for a Sunday dinner, and then, they splurged and used their food stamps and, fortunately, these days, we don't have those restrictions, but they were pretty stiff then.

SI: Were you aware of any black market activity?

DW: I was not. I'm sure there was, but I was not aware of it.

SI: During the war, were your parents involved in any volunteer activities, such as Civil Defense or the Red Cross?

DW: Yes, my mother was one of the typical volunteers who made up bandages and tried to knit socks, which, in her case, was never very successful, but, nevertheless, she tried to do all she could to see that things were shipped across to the boys who needed them. My father, on the other hand, was very involved in his teaching, so that he did not have much time at home.

SI: Did you graduate in May of 1943 or earlier?

DW: No, that was it.

SI: How soon after were you sent down to Benning? Was it the next day, the next week?

DW: We were here on campus for two weeks and we used to do various tours through Buccleuch Park, … but we had various projects that our ROTC instructors would set up for us and, as I say, … basically, we were privates in the Army, so that we had assignments and we had to do them, and it was practice and it was in good keeping for down at Benning, when it became a little more involved, but we did that for approximately two weeks, before the proper transportation and departure times were all arranged and we boarded … two Pullman Cars at the station here in New Brunswick. That was when Dr. Clothier bid us good-bye and it took us two days, in a sooty, dirty, old Pullman car, to get to Fort Benning, Georgia. We spent the first night in the railway station in, oh, gee, my memory, but, anyway, we sat on the railroad siding at Richmond, Virginia, collected more soot, [laughter] and we were pretty … grimy when we got to Fort Benning.

SI: One thing that I have heard a number of times in interviews is that summer is not the best time to go though OCS at Fort Benning.

DW: Fort Benning was the hottest place I can ever remember being. We dressed in fatigues and they were all caked with salt from perspiration and it was not uncommon, when exercising, which we did throughout the day, and marching throughout the day, … for someone to just drop over and you'd just had to walk over or around them, until some medic pulled them out of line and revived them and we were … pretty husky guys, though, pretty healthy, but I can remember being … billeted on the second floor of a Quonset hut, sitting on my footlocker, writing home to my fiancée, with perspiration dripping off the edge of my nose, onto the writing paper, and that was just, "Got to … sit still, without moving." So, it was hot and we were there from June until … September.

SI: When did you meet your first wife and decide to get engaged?

DW: My first wife I'd known since she was thirteen years old, the sister of one of my classmates in grammar school, and, then, she was just "John's sister," that's all, [laughter] but, later on, why, she came down to many fraternity weekends at Rutgers, when the girls took over the house and the fellows moved out, and my parents, bless them, could not be more appreciative than to be asked to be chaperones and they would come down at the drop of a hat, because it gave them a time to see me, to see Jean, my deceased wife, and they were just wonderful people who loved to do that. So, I've known her a long time.

SI: Do you think the war influenced your decision to get engaged and married?

DW: Yes. We had been engaged. Jean went to Wells College, up in Ithaca, … or above Ithaca, New York, and went there for two years, until I was able to arrange for a leave from, then, the **106th Infantry Division**, to come home and get married and Jean did not go back to school after that. She kept house for her father. Her mother was dead and it's unfortunate, which we can say after the war was over, because she was a very brainy person, very wonderful person, it was difficult to get into Wells College, and she gave up the final two years for me. … Jean died in 1988, after forty-four years of wonderful marriage, and then, I met Miss Gloria over here and we have now been married for thirteen years and the beauty of our marriage is that we can talk about the past with great love and pride and how one fellow could have had two wonderful women is beyond me, but I was so fortunate, I am so fortunate.

SI: You were in ROTC for four years. Did you have to complete the training course at Benning to receive your commission?

DW: Yes.

SI: Okay. Why were you not just given your commission after the four years were complete?

DW: Well, that was originally done, I think up until about two years before our graduating class, that if you attended four years, you were commissioned at graduation and it was soon very evident that you were not … smart enough, experienced enough, to lead any troops into combat. It was all right if you wanted to be on a drill field, at

which we all excelled, but that was not the art that was needed and it was very necessary to learn the fundamentals of combat.

SI: One story that I have heard before is about a man named "Mortar" Malone, who set off a mortar inside the College Avenue Gym. Were you there for that?

DW: I don't know that, or, if I did, I don't remember it. …

SI: Did the training at Fort Benning basically put you through your paces or was it a more advanced course?

DW: It was basic training and very concentrated and there were times when we wondered whether we were going to make it and, no, I guess there were three or four who did not make it and were taken back into the Army, but not as second lieutenants, but I was fortunate, being one of them that made it.

SI: Did you have drill instructors?

DW: Yes.

SI: Were they sergeants or lieutenants?

DW: … They were both and you learned … combat with a mortar, with a machine gun, with a rifle, with a pistol and, also, … how to use your knowledge, where to send troops, how to handle situations.

SI: Tactics?

DW: Tactics, thank you, and that was very important and we certainly realized, at that point, that we'd better know what we're doing, because, as I mentioned before, a lot of lives, including our own, depended upon that.

SI: Did it seem as though the training was compressed, to get you ready in a hurry?

DW: Yes, yes, it did, almost to the point where you wondered, "My gosh, … have I enough ability to absorb all this? There's so much of it and what happened yesterday already is definitely yesterday and gone and I better have knowledge of what I did yesterday … and remember it, or else," and there was no second chance.

SI: You were there with a number of your classmates from Rutgers.

DW: Yes.

SI: Did that make it easier to deal with the shock of going into the military and being far from home?

DW: Yes, it did and it was very reassuring to have a friend at your elbow. … I ended up on an assignment with one of my classmates, Eddie [Edwin] Arnolt, and we were both assigned to the **106th Infantry Division** in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and,

from there on, everyone else was separated and, eventually, Eddie and I were separated in assignments.

SI: Were the other men in your training unit at Fort Benning from all over the country or were they mostly from the Northeast?

DW: All over the country and some were, like ourselves, from school. Some were from the Army who were recommended for officer training and there were many wonderful persons that were in this group of ours and very capable and a lot of great associations, none of which I have today, unfortunately, other than my classmates.

SI: Were your instructors regular Army?

DW: At Benning? As far as I know, they were regular Army and they were of all ranks, lieutenants, captains, majors, depending on their responsibilities, and, I always felt, very capable. One of our classmates, Malcolm Schweiker, who was the cadet colonel here of our ROTC and a handsome, wonderful individual, with whom I played lacrosse, and Phi Beta Kappa and had the ability to do almost anything, in my opinion. Mal and I were very close friends and he had come here from Valley Forge Military Academy, where he already had a little foot up on military [life], but Malcolm was so good that he was kept at Benning for a while as an instructor and, after about a year, you may have heard this story, Malcolm said, "This isn't what I should be doing. I've come here to do my duty," and he was assigned to an infantry unit and ended up in Okinawa and was killed, and there but for the grace of God go many of us, but Mal was an individual who, in my opinion, could have been President of the United States.

SI: You are actually the second person to say that about him, that he could have been President of the United States.

DW: Really?

SI: Roy Brown spoke about him at length. Did you play lacrosse with Roy Brown?

DW: Yes, yes. In fact, Malcolm's younger brother [Richard S. Schweiker] went into politics in Pennsylvania, became a senator and was nominated to run with President Reagan as his running mate, but they were defeated [in the 1976 election]. … That was Mal's brother and Mal was of the same core and … could have been the same type [of] person.

SI: After Fort Benning, you were sent to the **106th Division**.

DW: Yes.

SI: One thing that I have heard from men who enlisted in the military, as opposed to being drafted, is that your military serial number indicates whether you enlisted or not and they claim that enlistees received better assignments, based on their number. Was that your experience?

DW: I am not aware of that. I can still remember my number, 0526263.

SI: What was your assignment in the **106th**?

DW: I was assigned as a heavy machine gun platoon leader and [was] with them through maneuvers in Tennessee. Then, we were shipped out to **Camp Atterbury**, Indiana, where I asked my fiancée to marry me. I received a ten-day leave to come home and took her out to Camp Atterbury. We rented an apartment and, two weeks later, I was chosen as one of the many junior officers to be sent overseas, not knowing why, but it became obvious, when we learned a little more, that we were all to be replacements for casualties on D-Day and I was terribly upset, having trained with these people and being very close to some. You would read to those who couldn't read their own mail, write for some of them, and it was like a family situation, to a degree, but I was broken-hearted when I had to leave the **106th**, but, then, I was assigned, on D-Day, to the 79th Infantry Division and … moved to Falmouth in southern England, on D-Day, and, because of that, I was not put … into an assignment as a heavy machine gun platoon leader, because all of the regiments were in movement and I was assigned, temporarily, as the defense platoon leader of the division headquarters and I thought, "This isn't what [I wanted]. I came to fight the war, [but not] from this area." I had to be up where I knew what I was doing. "Take your time, Lieutenant. We'll soon be over there and you'll get what you are trained for," but it never happened. I always stayed with the division headquarters and, as I realized after the war was over, someone was looking after me, because the **106th Infantry Division** was almost completely obliterated at the Battle of the Bulge. My old platoon was decimated. My old platoon sergeant, with whom I would correspond, wrote to me from prison camp. He was one of those still alive, one of those few, and he was a big 210-pounder. He said, "You won't believe it, Lieutenant, but I'm down to 150 pounds. We don't get much to eat." So, between that and not having been assigned to a forward echelon unit with the 79th Infantry Division, I came out of the war alive and my biggest problem was a piece of barbed wire through my leg, but so many of … the friends in both divisions were killed. The casualties for the … 79th Infantry Division, according to Stephen Ambrose, in one of his books, was 161 percent turnover and that doesn't leave much room for anyone to come out unscathed, but I did.

SI: When you joined the **106th**, had the division already been formed or was that part of your job, building the division?

DW: It was already formed, but it was in its infancy and Fort Jackson, South Carolina, was a sandy place that was hot and Quonset huts that were even hotter and, today, it's a beautiful camp, permanent camp.

SI: Were your assignments to Fort Benning and Camp Jackson your first experiences with traveling in general and traveling to the South in particular?

DW: Yes.

SI: What were your impressions of the South?

DW: Well, I guess the most noticeable was how hot it was and, having been brought up in New Jersey and Brooklyn, where we had seasons and snow, you couldn't believe a place could get so hot and people were willing to live there, but, so be it, that's what it was.

SI: You mentioned that you had to read and write for some of your men. Were you surprised that there was that level of illiteracy in the Army?

DW: Oh, yes, yes, very much, because I had assumed, I think, as most of us, in my position, did, that even though these [men were] from the back hills of … Tennessee, Alabama, and so forth, that they at least went through grammar school, but many of them never did, or, if they did, they certainly never learned how to read and write, not sufficiently to correspond with someone. So, it was an education for me, also.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about your men in that first unit? Where were they from? Were they mostly from the South or was it a mix of people from all over?

DW: It was a mix, but I would say the greatest number [were] from the South, from Tennessee, the Ozarks, Alabama, and I'll say one thing, they may not have had much ability to read and write, but they sure could fire a gun and hitting squirrels was a pastime and eating them was, equally, a pastime for them, [laughter] which I didn't partake in.

SI: Where was your first sergeant from? Was he regular Army?

DW: First sergeant was regular Army and very capable and, as so many of us feel about first sergeants, a pretty tough guy, but, at the same time, a very fatherly type of a person who took good care of his men, his platoon, his company, and no nonsense, but very fair and I found that in the 79th Infantry, also.

SI: Did you stay with this heavy weapons unit during the entire time you were with the **106th**?

DW: During all the time I was with the **106th**, yes.

SI: You mentioned that it grew into a very close-knit unit.

DW: Yes. I think it could have been either way. I'm sure there were young lieutenants, like me, who did not feel that way. I felt almost as though it was a fraternity, again, and I realized that we were all supporting each other and that we'd better do it and do it correctly or else somebody's going to get hurt. So, in my case, I felt very much a part of the family, so-to-speak.

SI: When you went to the 79th Infantry Division, you were sent over as a replacement.

DW: Yes, in England.

SI: Can you tell me about the process of sailing to England?

DW: Well, that was … a very unique experience. I was assigned, as were thousands of others, to the SS *Brasil*, which was a cruise ship, a Moore-McCormick cruise ship, and we had 13,500 troops on board. That was a lot of people and the first thing we all realized, or wondered about, was, with submarine warfare being almost at its height, but it was on the downslide, because the Germans were being pretty much taken care

of at this point, with their submarine warfare, but we thought, "My God, if this ship is ever struck and goes down, with 13,500 of us, plus the crew, there is some loss there," and this ship was, as I say, so packed that, in my case, I was assigned to a stateroom that was for two as a cruise chip; there were sixteen of us in it. We were stacked four high, in four sections of cots on pipe racks, and it was pretty tight. The convoy took a little over two weeks to get to Europe, because it had to travel at the speed of the slowest ship in the convoy and it was a large convoy, but it was so well protected that, to this day, I will never forget the destroyers that circled and circled and circled the convoy and at speeds that you just can't imagine. … When we got about halfway over, why, we were met by the British corvettes, a smaller ship than a destroyer, than our destroyers, and they [did] the same thing. They [went] around that convoy like a mother hen and we became very confident that things were going to be as well protected as possible, and then, another thing I remember from that troopship is, one day, walking down the deck and seeing Morty Cohen, with whom I went to grammar school. We stopped, shook each other's hand and said, "Gee, it's time for chow. I'll see you later." We never saw each other again, but chow lines were endless. There were two meals a day and it never stopped and, … depending on what hour you were assigned, you might have breakfast at eleven and dinner at four in the afternoon. … I don't know how they made so much food, put so much together, but they did and they fed us and, fortunately, it was a very calm sea all the way, unlike coming home, where we went through a North Atlantic storm, but that's another story. … We landed at Liverpool, England, was assigned to Fort Taunton, … as I recall, and immediate assignments were censoring mail and that lasted for about two weeks, until D-Day. I was assigned to the 79th Infantry Division.

SI: You were there during the immediate build-up for D-Day.

DW: Yes.

SI: Could you describe what was going on?

DW: Well, at the camp where we were billeted, we did not interface with much of the activity, but, it was obvious, there was a lot going on and, as I mentioned, the division was en route to boarding on D-Day, but you could see the streams of miles and miles of vehicles, guns, tanks, every bit of combat material, on the move and why the island of England didn't sink with all that was on there, [laughter] I'll never know, but the English people, I guess, had to put up with a lot, a lot of Americans, a lot of equipment, and I never had any contact with them. I never got out of camp, but it was an experience to get on that. It took us a couple of days to get down to where we were going, because you only moved a couple of miles at a time. Then, we boarded, I guess it was a Liberty ship and on the smokestack of this ship was a big brass plaque. It said, "Built by Henry J. Kaiser in four days, eleven hours and forty-four minutes," and we thought, "My God, what are we getting on to?" and they tied a decoy balloon on the stern with a steel cable, so that the Germans could not come down and strafe it at low altitudes and every one of the vessels that went over towed one of these balloons and it took us about two days to cross the Channel, because the traffic was so intense, and I can remember well when the time came to load onto an LST, go over the side on a cargo net, and you began to wonder whether you were going to be able to hold on to get down to that last step, because, at one minute, you were clinging to the side of the vessel, the next minute, you were out over the side, over the open water, and had you fallen in with your pack and steel helmet and your rifle, I'm sure the only place [you] would have ended up for many would have been at the bottom and, of course, that did

happen, but not in our particular group and we got ashore and the worst of the invasion was already accomplished and we landed on D-plus-eight. … We spent the first night on the beach and the orders were to dig in, dig a foxhole, which was relatively easy in the sand, and, since we thought the war was over at that point, that we'd missed the whole thing, well, the foxholes were probably about six inches deep, just to go through the perfunctory part, until about two o'clock in the morning, there was a call for strafing and several German Stukas came down the beach and you could see the blinking of the machine guns and, in about two hours, there were … five-foot deep foxholes [laughter] where those others existed, but, fortunately, there were no casualties in our group and, the next day, the next morning, we moved out.

SI: Can you describe what the beach was like at that point, eight days after the invasion?

DW: Well, the beach was just loaded with equipment, mostly ammunition that we could see, in their wooden containers, and, of course, the beach was strewn with burned out tanks and LST landing craft and paths had been cleared and you knew darn well you had to stay to those paths, because everything was mined, and the engineers were working on that as quickly as they could, but, at that point, we were well protected, but the feeling was, "Gosh, we've missed it. It's all over." Well, we soon learned that that wasn't true.

SI: I assume that the attack by the German Stukas was the first time you were ever exposed to any direct danger.

DW: That's correct.

SI: What went through your mind at the time?

DW: Well, I guess the thing that went through our minds was, number one, we were very stupid in not insisting that the foxholes be dug and I, in particular, as a junior officer, thought I had not done my duty, because, at Fort Benning, we learned that you never take anything for granted. You do what you're supposed to do, because there's a reason, and … I thought, "Well, how stupid we've all been," but nobody checked me and I didn't check them. So, we also realized that this thing is for real. … Well, it turned out that we had a very busy program ahead of us.

SI: A few days later, you joined the 79th.

DW: I was with the 79th at this point.

SI: Okay, I am sorry. What were your initial activities in setting up your defense?

DW: Well, we moved into an area in a forest, where it had been designated as being clear of mines, and we set up a company headquarters and my equipment was three .50-caliber machine guns and three .37-mm antitank guns and we set those up in a perimeter around the division headquarters and it was manned for twenty-four hours a day while we were there. Our first assignment was, the division was to take … the Port of Cherbourg, because it was greatly necessary that we have a port to debark ammunition, equipment, food, petrol and other supplies that were needed so badly, that were just stacking up on the beach. So, that was our assignment and it became a

successful one. It took, as I recall, about ten days and there were casualties along the way and I had my first casualty, I believe it was at Sainte-Mere-Eglise, which is very famous, where one of my young riflemen, riding in a truck, open truck, was hit by a sniper and killed instantly and he was a nineteen-year-old boy from Hackensack, New Jersey. … Well, we were introduced to the hedgerows and everyone knows the story of the hedgerows and how difficult it was to exist and get anywhere through those hedgerows. The US Army was so unique in being able to develop equipment; they would weld onto the front of tanks almost like a snowplow, to go through some of these hedgerows, to get equipment and men and other tanks through, because if a tank ran over a hedgerow, it was exposed, its underbelly was exposed, and the Germans were pretty good at setting up their .88 howitzers. … It was a murderous weapon and they accounted for many, many casualties and many destroyed tanks, armored vehicles.

SI: During the fighting in the hedgerow country, what was the biggest threat to your unit? Was it harassment attacks, like snipers and mines, or was it artillery or infantry?

DW: I would say, for the division headquarters, it was artillery. For the regiments up ahead, it was rifle, machine gun, whatever, but the headquarters was exposed mostly to artillery. Occasionally, there'd be a breakthrough, … as there was one night. A group of three Germans were able to infiltrate and one of my outposts with a .50-caliber machine gun killed two of them and captured one and I was on the scene within seconds after hearing the machine gun go off and I was awarded a Bronze Star at the time, which I thought the fellows who did the work should have had, but … that's the way it came out. I was also promoted to first lieutenant.

SI: What was it like to have the enemy come so close?

DW: Well, I'll tell you another experience. It was maybe two months later, … I can't remember exactly where it was, but it was in one of forest areas. It might have been just outside of Germany, before we crossed the Rhine, that we were warned that German paratroopers could possibly be dropped in American uniforms and we had to be very cautious about passwords and, also, we had a very brief, couple of hours, instruction on how to use a knife, rather than a gun, to keep it silent and the night of this warning, some planes flew over. I was making the rounds of my outposts and I could hear things coming down through the trees. … Of course, the thought was, "They weren't kidding, this is it," and it turned out to be leaflets that were being dropped to the Germans, to try and convince them to give up, and they were just off their drop, but, I'll tell you, the knife came out of the sheath [laughter] and I thought, "Could I do it if it was necessary?" and we had been warned, "You do it because, if you don't, they'll do it to you and, being a paratrooper, they would use a knife as well," so, a simple lesson, but kind of an electrifying one.

SI: As a replacement officer, how quickly were you able to form a working relationship and a bond with your new unit?

DW: It took a while, particularly being known as coming right out of college, reasonably, and these people, having been training for a year or more, wondering, "This kid's going to take care of us?" attitude, until, well, we just tried to be as smart as they were, and maybe one step ahead, and, gradually, it worked. … I don't know what happened to the defense platoon leader they had originally. Where he was and

what happened to him, I don't know, but I suppose they resented someone replacing him. So, that was an experience that had to be dealt with. I hope I did it well.

SI: Were you there for the capture of Cherbourg?

DW: Yes. We captured a German general who was one of the commanders of the Cherbourg [garrison], which was a submarine base, and I still have, at home, notes that were printed up … to be circulated throughout the division, where this German general, a professional soldier, stated that, "He and others like him could not believe how these Americans, who were school teachers, shoemakers, salesmen, car salesmen, people of that sort, could be in an army that is standing up to us."

SI: This continues an interview with Mr. Donald K. White on May 17, 2003, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth. Please, continue; you were talking about the German general that your division captured.

DW: Well, this German general, who was a professional soldier, did not believe that an army made up of the individuals I mentioned, such as non-professional [soldiers], school teachers, students, shoe salesmen, *et cetera*, could ever stand up against the great German Army and he soon found out that the United States Army was a pretty industrious, capable set of individuals, determined that they didn't want to be over there, but, while they were there, they were going to make sure that they did the job and he also said that, "We cannot believe how the industrial might of the United States has produced what it has produced in such a short time, where we have been working on it for years and years and years, but they have been able to build thousands of boats, thousands of jeeps, thousands of guns and all sorts of equipment and how they were able to get fuel over here. They built a pipeline for the fuel. … We're just amazed at what has happened and it looks as though we are not doing so well in this war." That was the general gist of his message.

SI: How did you view the Germans as the enemy?

DW: Well, I come from a German background, but I'll tell you, I disliked the Germans intensely, because, first of all, I didn't want to be there to begin with and we've heard of the atrocities that had been committed, not the atrocities of the camps, I was not aware of those at the time, but the atrocities against the Russians and, at Dunkirk, against the British and the Scots and the Irish and those all affected, so that they were certainly not my favorite people, but I had an experience, later on, in the time of occupation, which I'll mention later, if you wish, that is very amusing.

SI: You can talk about it now.

DW: All right. During the occupation, … after the war was over, I was in the Army of Occupation, with the remnants of the 79th Infantry Division that had not already been shipped home and … three of the officers, junior officers, were billeted with a German family. We occupied the upper floor of their home and it was a husband, wife and two very young daughters, oh, around seven, eight, nine, ten, in those age brackets. When we moved in with them, we thought, "Well, by gosh, they're going to know who they're dealing with. They started this war; we finished it. If we want our laundry done, they're going to do our laundry. If we want this, they're going to do that," and, I guess, after being with them for about six months and through a Christmas of which

they set up a Christmas tree for us and we sang Christmas carols in German, when it came time to leave that family, we had our arms around their necks and they around ours and we said to each other, they spoke reasonable English, "What was this war all about? Here, look at us, we almost love each other, but we hated each other in the beginning," and, … in their opinion, "What did Hitler get us into?" and I don't think it was a farce, because I think they were … too sincere. … The daughters even made me little wooden trivets out of wooden beads, which my deceased wife and I used for twenty, twenty-five years, and, there, from somewhere to having hated the Germans to begin with, here, I befriended them and they befriended me and we realized it was because of a maniac like Adolph Hitler that we got into this. Of course, they must have had their eyes closed to some of this when it all began, so, I won't profess to know the reasons.

SI: Going back to Cherbourg, do you remember going into the city during the battle?

DW: No. We were all pretty much on the outskirts. Cherbourg was taken and I remember one incident … where our assistant division commander, General Thomas Greer, and his driver, a sergeant, were driving up towards the … forward combat areas and they passed a pillbox that had been bypassed and it was still active and the General and his sergeant got out with a bangalore torpedo and shoved it into this pillbox, from over the top, and blew the thing apart and killed the Germans inside and, when they got back to headquarters that night, he was highly reprimanded for risking his life and doing such, in their opinion, "their" being the high echelon, a stupid thing that could have taken a general out of the picture, but, of course, he became a hero and one of those few things I remember.

SI: What was a typical day like for you?

DW: Well, a typical day was, when we were on the move, which was pretty constant, and we were always moved by vehicle, rather than marching, was to set up my perimeter around the division and my duties always came at night. I was the officer in charge of the outpost, so, right after dinner, I would start my rounds of the outposts, to make sure they were in operation, had no problems, and, breakfast time, I was relieved and, if possible, if we were not moving that day, I would sleep. If not, I'd sleep in the jeep that I was moving in. So, it was a busy day.

SI: How many men were in your unit?

DW: The platoon was a normal platoon of about thirty men.

SI: Your task was to defend the headquarters.

DW: Right.

SI: Did you have any other relationship with headquarters? Did you have, perhaps, more insight into what was going on in battle?

DW: Yes, I think I was exposed to more than [the average soldier], except I did not have free access to the headquarters tent, where the mechanics of … fighting the battle were going on, but I had an idea of where regiments were going and so forth.

SI: You also mentioned a big meeting that July.

DW: Oh, okay. On the 4th of July, 1944, General Eisenhower had great difficulty in getting General Montgomery to move. Montgomery was very reluctant to move, unless he had great overpowering odds, which was not the way our favorite General Ike wanted this thing … to go. So, he called for a meeting that was held at our division headquarters, where a hole was dug and roofed over by logs and soil, logs and soil, about six feet high, for protection and down the road one morning, when we were all set, comes General Patton, General Bradley, General Montgomery, oh, I don't remember all the other names, but there was so much brass around that we realized we had a real protection job, should anything happen. An aircraft was circling overhead, in case of any news that might have leaked out that there was a meeting of this type going on, and then, down the road came a little jeep and out of it stepped General Eisenhower and Ike walked down to the fellows along the line, these infantrymen, who were dirty, grimy, tired, and he put his arm around one, shook the hands of another and endeared himself … to everyone and I think from that moment on, all up through his presidency, I'd have laid down my life for him, because we realized he was a very human being, very concerned about our safety.

SI: It sounds as though you had a very high opinion of all of the leaders that you served under.

DW: Yes, yes, I did.

SI: Were there any exceptions to that rule?

DW: Yes, there was an exception here and there, where you felt someone was along just because they were drafted and would do anything to get out or shirk, but very few. I honestly say that, very few.

SI: Your unit was not on the frontlines, but you were not far from the frontlines.

DW: Right.

SI: You were still exposed to enemy fire and there was the constant threat of a breakthrough. How did that translate in terms of stress on your men and yourself?

DW: … Well, I think, being young, eager and determined that we had a job to do, I think, personally, I felt that nothing could happen to me and I began to realize at times, when artillery shells were coming in nearby, that it wasn't foolproof, but I always felt very confident that I was okay and going to do the right job. I certainly wasn't going to shirk anything. I still, to this day, am very patriotic and I was then. So, I felt confident that we were doing the right thing, but, … every time I wrote a letter home, I wondered, "Well, will there be a time when they won't hear from me?" and I suppose everyone in service felt that way.

SI: How important was the mail for morale?

DW: The mail was one of the most important things, that every once in a while, where somebody did not receive mail or a guy might get a "Dear John" letter, you only realized … how important it was and, for me, in particular, having a brand-new wife, it

meant so much to me to know that she was okay and thinking about me, the same with my parents, and knew they were concerned for my safety. So, not only I, but everyone looked eagerly towards the mail and how the Army did what they did about getting that little letter to us, I'll never know. [laughter] They were phenomenal, but, even the packages from home, I had so much night duty that it was an easy thing for me, when I had a break for five minutes, after making my rounds, I could boil a little tin of soup and have some crackers and peanut butter and it was a ritual, almost, at two or three o'clock in the morning, to have that to sit down to, and then, go out and make the rounds again and how those packages got where they're supposed to, as they did, I suppose, being at division headquarters had some effect, but I know of no problems down through the lines where mail did not get where it was supposed to, sometimes delayed.

SI: What about creature comforts, like rations, getting hot showers or clean uniforms?

DW: Well, that brings a story. We went 127 days until we got to Luneville, France, when we were pulled out of combat into reserve for a week and we had our first hot showers, hot or cold, first showers, and the clothes were peeled off, thrown in a pile. From there, they were taken to a dump and burned, we had the shower and we were issued new clothing and I often joke, when my wife says, "Have you had a shower yet?" "No, I've still got 125 days to go," [laughter] but, strangely enough, after about three weeks, you didn't realize it. When able, we got a steel helmet full of water and, sometimes, it was hot and you started by shaving or, rather, brushing your teeth, washing your face, then, shaving, if you were able to take the time, rinse out a pair of socks, even, sometimes, there was enough for a pair of underwear shorts, throw the rest over your head and you had your hair washed, but I don't know, after a while, it just seemed normal routine to do without, but what a glorious feeling when it came.

SI: What about your rations?

DW: Rations, I felt, were always good. We had a portable kitchen and, again, being a division headquarters, I'm sure we did better than the frontline troops, but, … when the kitchen could not setup, we had K rations and not that they were the most tasty, but they were food. If you were hungry, you ate them. I remember one incident when it was Thanksgiving time and how in the world the quartermaster ever was able to do it, but we had a ration of frozen turkeys and they set up the field kitchens in this little town and the turkeys were about half done and you can imagine the delight that everyone saw coming, to have a turkey and mashed potatoes, after regular Army chow. Well, the Germans chose that time to counterattack and the immediate order went out to pack up the kitchens, get the heck out of there, and they packed up hot stoves on the back of trucks and took off and, a day later, we had Thanksgiving dinner about twenty-five miles behind where we were, but it was still, like, the best gourmet food anyone had ever tasted. [laughter]

SI: You were involved in the St.-Lo breakout.

DW: Yes.

DW: What do you remember about that operation?

DW: I remember that there was the Falaise Gap, as it was called, that was formed and the Germans had, oh, I forget how many divisions, numerous divisions, in this area and they encircled by the American forces and the Germans were spilling out as they could, for their very existence, abandoning equipment, tanks, guns and they were a pretty ragged bunch, at that point, and the encirclement finally came through and I think there were sixty or seventy thousand prisoners taken. I think I'm near correct on that and it has been said, that I read recently, that had we been a little faster, Patton being one of them who insisted on being able to move his tanks, … he said he could have destroyed so many more German divisions and I think he's right, but that was the order of the day. … It's like a chess game.

SI: Military historians often discuss the relationship between air power and ground operations in this period of the war. Did you witness any combined operations?

DW: Yes. We had assigned to us a fighter pilot who was the contact liaison between air power that was assigned in our area at a particular time, but he was … the one to convey the position of our troops that our commanding general would feed him and it was also quite a sight, on occasion, to see B-17s fly over during the day, after we had practically taken over the skies, and the sky was just black with, I would say, over a thousand airplanes at a time and it was such a sight to see and for the little grunts on the ground to think that, "My gosh, somebody's going to catch hell before we get there and give it to him, but give it to him good," and it was a beautiful sight to see all those aircraft.

SI: It was a real morale boost.

DW: Oh, yes, and, of course, we knew that [on] the return, there were going to be many of them missing and the casualties for B-17 bombers were exceptionally high and I remember the time we saw the first German jet fly over. They were the buzz bombs that were sent over to England and, when they first came screaming over, everybody wondered what was happening. … We had no knowledge of it. We, in my position, had no knowledge of what was going on and those buzz bombs were attacked as they were able to; some of them were shot down by fighter aircraft. Most of that happened over in England, though, but they were very destructive and the poor English and what they suffered in bombing of their cities was terrible and, of course, what we did to the Germans in retribution was terrible and it was decided by both powers-to-be, starting with Hitler, that one of the best ways to fight a war is to demoralize the civilian population. So, we were part of that, also.

SI: As you were moving through France and into Germany, during the combat phase, did you have any opportunity to interact with civilians?

DW: Some of the French, none of the Germans, in my case, until the war was over, but some of the French were still in their homes when we were in their area. They invited us to come in and sleep in the barns or, in some cases, even in the house, on the floor, for overnight and I found them very supportive of us and, my gosh, what happened to their properties, through bombing and combat in their backyards, where the houses were torn apart, you had to feel for them.

SI: Did you see a lot of destruction?

DW: Yes, oh, yes, and, in the cities, of course, the destruction was just rubble. That's all that was left and, in the case of the French, the rubble was still there when we moved out. In the case of Germany, when we went through towns like Nuremberg to go home, every fallen brick was placed in a pile, the pile orderly, as though they were ready to rebuild and it was a completely different atmosphere in the two countries, but they both suffered terribly.

SI: After the St.-Lo breakout and the Falaise Gap, you were part of the sweep across France.

DW: Yes. We went on up to Belgium, and then, came down through Aachen into Germany, went through the Hurtgen Forest in the wintertime, had a heck of a snowstorm, and I remember repainting the equipment with white stripes and camouflaging it, particularly the antitank guns, and it was a tough winter, and then, … when the melting time came, it was an, oh, God awful mess of trying to get heavy equipment through the mud that was created. It was worse than snow. Well, we soon came to the crossing of the Seine, Seine River, and the 79th Infantry Division was the first division to cross the Seine. We did it on pontoon bridges and, every once in a while, a lone German aircraft that was able to get through would strafe the area. … However, they were so outnumbered that I don't think they got very far after they made their initial run and, soon, down the line, we came to the Rhine River and it was decided, at one point, we were going to cross in assault boats and we had an artillery barrage that started about three o'clock in the morning and it was dead blackness. There was no moon and the place was so lighted from artillery that you could read; you could read a map. I've never witnessed any fireworks like that and we eventually crossed the river in these little assault boats, so loaded down that there was about six inches of freeboard, but we very carefully paddled across. Then, someone took them back for the next group and we could see, by the artillery that had been fired previous to that, that there was nothing left that hadn't been demolished, [in] the way of homes. [The] people had all left; what people did not leave were casualties. These are civilians and it was a mighty effort, but very successful on our part.

SI: I wanted to ask you about Aachen and the Hurtgen Forest. Aachen, I have read, since it was the first German city to come under attack, was heavily contested and was taken through street-to-street, house-to-house fighting. What did you see of that battle? What did you know about the battle?

DW: … I saw, personally, very little of it. … Our troops had pretty much cleaned the area when the division headquarters went through. I can remember one area, and I think this was at the outskirts of the forest, where we came upon an area that had just recently been evacuated by American troops, not our own, but other troops that we were relieving, with so many dead American soldiers in the foxholes, because the Germans were using artillery shells that exploded above ground or, if they hit a tree, would explode in the air and it just rained all kinds of havoc, … killing personnel, and to see our own American guys there, good, clean-cut people like ourselves, just humped over in the foxholes, dead, it was a heartbreaking scene, but I guess that's war.

SI: Was it difficult to maintain morale?

DW: It was. Yes, very difficult, because, then, you began to realize that, through artillery in particular, no matter how far back we were, it could happen to any one of us and there was more than one scare, of course.

SI: After moving into Germany, there was a period where things were fairly static in the winter of 1944.

DW: Yes. After we crossed the Rhine, General Patton, of course, wanted to be turned loose, wanted to be the first into Berlin, but, politically, it was decided, as everyone knows, that the Russians should go in first and Patton never did live that down and I'm sure, given the opportunity; he would have been the first in, but we had to kind of tread water until the Russians got in there.

SI: Is there anything else that you would like to say about the period between Aachen and the Hurtgen Forest and the Battle of the Bulge?

DW: I don't think so. … It was a long time before individuals and myself … realized how serious the Battle of the Bulge was. When we first heard it as being a last attempt of Hitler's, we thought, "Well, the guy's off his rocker, always has been, but he'll never get anywhere." Well, they had thrown so much material into that that he was darn near very successful and, of course, the weather was against everything. We had no support for a while and General McAuliffe, who made the famous remark, when he was asked to surrender, … sent his message back, "Nuts," he was then assigned to our division, temporarily, and quite a hero. … We were not that much affected by the Battle of the Bulge. We were in a different area.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: At the time of the Battle of the Bulge, the 79th Division was further south.

DW: Yes.

SI: However, it was attacked in the northern offensive.

DW: Right.

SI: Can you tell me about that situation?

DW: Well, it was a daily routine, pushing and pushing as we could. Some days, the division would move fifteen, twenty miles, because things were moving rapidly then. Other times, we were pinned down, but things began to come apart, pretty much at the seams, I would say, on the part of the Germans at that point. That's about all I can really add to that part.

SI: Before the Battle of the Bulge, was there a feeling that the war would be over by Christmas or that the war was almost over?

DW: In spite of moving pretty fast, I did not gather that from where I was at division headquarters, that it was going to be over easily, because I knew the abilities of the Germans to counterattack and the fact that they were counterattacking as often as

possible. Casualties were horrible, but, nevertheless, … I saw a great deal of clean up, almost, I guess, like [what is] necessary today over the Far East, but it wasn't going to happen by itself.

SI: In the spring of 1945, rapid penetration into Germany began again. Which cities and areas did you advance through? How did that part of the war progress?

DW: … Well, we were diverted around Berlin. We did not go into Berlin and we went on to Czechoslovakia and were billeted for a while in a beautiful spa and resort town called Franzensbad, a beautiful little town. Things were very quiet at that point, because most hostilities in that area had pretty much been finished, but, still, it was a mop-up and an occasional sniper problem in an area, because there were some zealots that figured, "Well, we may have lost the war, but we're going to get our due desserts before we leave here," and there were some very dedicated German individuals who felt, for the Fatherland, they had to do what they had to do and kill them. … So, there was a lot of that sort of mop-up.

SI: There were also many prisoners taken.

DW: Oh, yes, yes.

SI: Did you see crowds of prisoners? Did you have any interaction with them?

DW: I had no interaction with them. It was a sorry sight, to see what was left and the ages of some. Some were boys, some were old men, almost as old as I am now, or it seemed, but you began to realize that they were at the bottom of the barrel, so that they couldn't do much more, I guess, if they kept going.

SI: At any time during the war, were you detached for some rest and relaxation?

DW: Back in, I think it was September of '44, I was, because of being junior lieutenant of the outfit and in division headquarters.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: By that point, it was apparent that …

DW: It was obvious that there was … going to be no victory for Adolph.

SI: Did you ever encounter anything related to the Holocaust, any concentration camps or death camps?

DW: No, and I am amazed, to this day, that being at division headquarters, that I never knew they existed until after the war was over and … I learned then, but, obviously, people in some areas of authority must have know what was going on, but I never knew it and I certainly could not believe it when I learned it and the German family that I mentioned that I was billeted with in the Army of Occupation claim they never knew it. Now, I can't tell you whether that's the truth or not, because I just

don't know, but they were very decent people. They may not have known it, but I find that hard to believe, really.

SI: American forces and the Russians were meeting in Czechoslovakia and other places towards the end. Did you ever actually see or encounter a Russian unit?

DW: Yes, and the one amusing thing I can bring into the picture [is], when the war did end and we were in this area in Czechoslovakia, that we were meeting with, when I say "we," not I, but the general officers and other high brass were meeting with some of the Russian officers, determining who was going to do what in each town, as was our responsibility, and they would have breakfast together and the Russians had to have vodka for breakfast and, by eleven o'clock, some of those fellows, when they came back to the units, they didn't know whether it was eleven o'clock in the morning or eleven o'clock at night, [laughter] but they could not disappoint the Russians. It was an insult and, apparently, the Russians can throw that vodka down like we do orange juice and we, … during all the combat time, didn't have that much access to any of that sort [of thing], so, I guess they were pretty much out of practice, but the amusement was to see them stagger back from breakfast. [laughter] Oh, you had asked me a question before and I think we were interrupted. Did we have any sort of a break? Being a junior officer, I was sent to Citi University in Paris, which was a trip of about seventy-five miles, and we were to be taught how to get information to the troops and, of course, being a typical, young guy, as some of the others in the crowd were, we thought, "This is what we have to do to learn how to put a notice on the bulletin board that we gained twenty miles today on this front. We did this or we did that," but the idea was to get information to the troops who did not know what was going on and were saying, "What's happening? Where are we? Why are we here?" but we had our afternoons free and, walking down the street, the Champs-Élysées, one afternoon, Fred Baser yells out, "Hey, Don White, what are you doing here?" Fred Baser is a classmate and he was with another Rutgers grad and I think the three of us went to the *Folies-Bergere* that night; so, strange as it … seems, being this far away from home and under those circumstances, to have someone yell out your name and continue for the rest of the evening. [laughter]

SI: Did you ever get to see an USO show or anything like that?

DW: Yes. I'm glad you mentioned that. It was around Thanksgiving time in 1944. Sections of the division were pulled out of combat and we were entertained by Bing Crosby and Bing Crosby asked, … "What do you want to hear fellows?" and, here, these GIs, pretty grimy, as you can imagine, and beards, because they hadn't shaved, and hair that hadn't been washed and uniforms that hadn't been cleaned and someone would say, "Hey, Bing, how about *White Christmas*?" Well, if you've ever seen those same GIs cry their hearts out for *I'll Be Home For Christmas*, *White Christmas*, and a couple of those, it was something I will never forget and, of course, a couple of hours later, everybody was back where they were supposed to be, but that was so much of a morale booster and … someone we all knew so well, that it did … wonders.

SI: What is your most vivid memory of your time in the war?

DW: Well, I'll tell you … one that may seem strange that it's so vivid. In France, this had to be about August, late August, so, we hadn't been there too long, '44, as, again, a junior officer, second lieutenant, one of my duties was, when we were eating, the

kitchen was set up in the field, was to see that the fellows would dip their mess kits in the boiling water, so that dysentery and everything else was prevented, I see a strange uniform, a GI uniform, but no shoulder patches or anything, on the chow line and wondering who's broken into our chow line for a free meal, not that it mattered, but who, why? and I yelled at this fellow. He turns around, it's Irving Pape, and Irving was, as you may know, a reporter, a journalist. Well, Irv and I, I guess, cried on each other's shoulder for a full half minute. Then, I made him dip his mess kit in the boiling water [laughter] and we fed him and, after the mess was over, we went over to my little pup tent and we sat down and somehow found a bottle of scotch. … Every time I see Irv, he tells me about that bottle of scotch.

----------END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE----------

SI: Are there any other memories that you would like to share?

DW: Well, I also remember, one time, and this had to be in August also, early in the war, … our division being on the move and we were in the back of two-and-a-half ton trucks, being transported, and we came to an intersection and, all of a sudden, we could hear the incoming artillery shells and it was everyone over the side, into the ditch. … After the artillery barrage was over, I look up and the fellow in front of me turns around and it was a neighbor of mine when I was in grammar school, back in Brooklyn, never saw each other again, hadn't seen each other in fifteen years to begin with, but, here, we recognized each other, steel helmets and dirty faces and all and, like meeting Fred Baser and Irving Pape, you're amazed at how far away from home you can be and meet someone you knew.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add about your World War II experience?

DW: I guess the only other thing I remember is, a very close friend of mine that I grew up with, through grammar school, was with the 83rd Division and, one day, when I had access to look at a map at the division headquarters, I saw that they were alongside of us and I asked permission to take my jeep and a driver to see if I could find my friend and, crazy as it was, I was permitted to go and … his division headquarters found where his regiment and his company was and … they were under combat conditions and I asked someone at their company headquarters where Lieutenant Bob Packer was. "You mean Captain Packer?" His captain had been killed a few days before, so, he suddenly became company commander. He says, "He's up in that foxhole up there." I went up and we got in the foxhole and I almost surprised the devil out of him. For him to see me, an old friend, pop in alongside and we had about fifteen, twenty beautiful minutes together. I said, "How you been, Bob?" and he said, "Well, our company commander," and I heard that story then, "was just killed and I was made company commander, promoted to captain," and I said, "Nothing happened to you?" He said, "Yes, well, I had my wife's letters here," and he had a packet of letters about that thick and there was a piece of shrapnel that went about three-quarters of the way through and knocked him over backwards, but only bruised him and he said, "I'm still here," but, when I got back to my jeep and driver, we found a mortar shell, unexploded, about ten feet off [to] the side of it, or we'd have had to walk back [laughter] and I realized, now, it was a very stupid thing to do, to go up there,

but you do stupid things sometimes and I got my dose of frontline experience right there.

SI: Had you given any thought to staying in the military?

DW: Yes. Mal Schweiker and I were awarded, oh, what's the proper way to say it, the ability to stay in permanently?

SI: A regular commission?

DW: Regular commission, and I chose not to stay in, though, because I'd recently been married and I would have liked it and I think I would have enjoyed it, but we talked it over, my then wife, and we realized we'd be moving around too much. We were living with her father, because her mother was deceased, so, it would upset our home program and, shortly after that, our first youngster came along, the one who is here today, and I always wonder, if I'd stayed in, what my accomplishments might have been, because I enjoyed the service. Furthermore, I was now a captain.

SI: Can you briefly talk about what it was like to be a returning veteran, fitting back into society, finding your first job?

DW: Okay. Like everyone after discharge, after the usual time allotted to ease out completely, which I think was thirty days, I began to realize I needed a job and where I had a teaching degree, it was March of 1945, no one seemed to be hiring teachers at that point and I wasn't sure that I wanted to be a teacher and I started pounding the pavement and ended up on the training program of Abraham and Strauss, a department store in Brooklyn, and stayed with them for five years, and then, found an opening at Lord and Taylor and joined them in 1951. I spent thirty years with them and finished up as managing director of their store in Pennsylvania, in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania, but an experience I had as a trainee in Abraham and Strauss, I was assigned to the budget dress department and I thought, "My God, after what I've lived [through] for the last four years, to end up in a dress department. [laughter] Is this what I want?" and, anyway, it was a training job and I was assigned as the section manager in this department and we had a sale and, back in those days, when things went on sale, there were no stockings, there were no nylons, things were just beginning to be manufactured again. Well, this was an absolute madhouse in the dress department and a woman … had a complaint about a dress, that it was running, the dye was running under the arms, and I said, "Madam, that's from perspiration and these fabrics, these dyes, are not fast against perspiration." Well, … she got into the most heated argument with me and I said, "I'm sorry, but there's nothing I can do for you." She took that dress and wrapped it around my neck with one swing, walked off and I right then and there said, "This is what I spent four years in the Army for, two of them overseas? I'm not sure this is meant for me," [laughter] but I stayed in the retail business.

SI: Did you ever consider using the GI Bill?

DW: No, I had … my degree and I felt I had to work, rather than to go on.

SI: Did you use the GI Mortgage or the 52/20 Club?

DW: No, no.

SI: You have three children, one of whom is waiting for you. [laughter]

DW: Yes.

SI: Is he the one that went into the Army?

DW: Yes. He was an MP at Fort Hood during the … Vietnam War and was just about getting his shipping out orders for Vietnam when things quieted down there and finished and am I ever thankful for that.

SI: How did you feel about Korea and Vietnam?

DW: Well, I always felt that we did not belong in the Vietnam War, but, being a veteran and a patriotic person, I thought, "Well, we've got a job to do, we've got to do it," and, when I learned then, as happened in this present situation, [the 2003 War in Iraq], that there are so many protestors and the disrespect that was shown to those Vietnam troops when they came home, I was sick over it, because I knew what the fellows, or reasonably knew, … had gone through and for them to be scorned the way they were, I thought it was a crime, absolute crime. … For the present situation, I understand why people protest the war, but, to have that information go over to the troops, via today's communications, whether it be TV, e-mail, regular mail, whatever, and have them aware that, back here, people are saying, "Down with Bush, down with the military, down with this, down with that," that too makes me sick. I can appreciate their views, but I do not appreciate their sending that message over to, they don't mean to send it, I guess, … the boys over there and the girls over there, but it happens. They know it. So, again, you've got an old fuddy-duddy here who's very patriotic and thinks differently than some people do.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to put on the tape?

DW: No. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss this. I don't think I began to talk about [these] experiences until, well, roughly the time the first forms were sent out on this [1994]. It seemed like a finished issue, a finished part of my life, and I guess there's one more thing I should add to back that up. Two-and-a-half years ago, Gloria, my present wife, who I married after my other wife died, [and I] went over to Europe on a cruise. The first day, we stopped at Le Havre and spent … an entire day at Normandy and [when] people on the bus that we were on, as well as local French people where we stopped, the beaches, the museums, learned that I had landed on Utah Beach, they fell over me as though I was heaven sent to the French people and Normandy people, and they thanked me profusely and nobody had ever thanked me before and it wasn't necessary. I was in the service, did a job for my country and that was it. It was over, it was over and, here, suddenly, I felt that, my gosh, people do remember, and a year ago, there was a ceremony aboard the *Yorktown* aircraft carrier in Charleston Harbor and all of those who fought in Normandy were invited to participate in a ceremony and we had to produce our discharge papers, or a copy of them, because an award was being given by the French Government and I answered all the information and it turned out that my granddaughter decided to get married on the same day, Upstate New York, so, I didn't attend the ceremony, but I was sent, through Congressman [Henry] Brown of the Charleston area, who arranged all this, … the gold

medal from the Government of France and a Bronze Star, which makes two Bronze Stars that I have now, and a Combat [Infantryman's] Badge, which I already had, but I was very impressed that the ceremony took place and that, again, … somebody remembered. With the reaction of the French in this last couple of months, I wasn't sure I didn't want to send it back, [laughter] but I understand how things work and I'm appreciative of what they've done.

SI: Thank you very much. You have been very generous with your time.

DW: Well, I thank you fellows and I'll be glad to hear how all of this comes together at some point.

SI: Oh, yes. I will explain that. This concludes our interview with Mr. Donald K. White on May 17, 2003, in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

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