

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
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AN INTERVIEW WITH BEN FRANKLIN

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INTERVIEWED BY
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AND
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G. KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Ben Franklin on November 19, 2004 in and continues an interview that was done previously on October 20, 2004 at his home in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler ...

BRAUM DENTON: ... Braum Denton ...

JOHN ROMEISER: ... John Romeiser.

PIEHLER: And I'd like to begin—you talked about enlisting right after Pearl Harbor, and you talked about going to the basic training, and you talked about the shots ...the various shots in your arms and people's reactions to shots. Could ...

FRANKLIN: Of course that—that's been sixty-two years ago, but the memory is vivid. (Laughter) I still remember it ...

PIEHLER: No, No, No. I mean, you have very vivid memory.

FRANKLIN: But, I particularly remember the attitude of all the people in line trying to enlist after our country had just been attacked by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor. And it was the same attitude one would have if someone raped their sister or their mother, you know. We were really indignant in our illiterate uneducated way. We knew that a great crime had been committed against our country, although we were too dumb to understand the significance of it or what caused it. In geo-politics we were absolutely dumb, but we knew that you don't attack America. And everybody in the line at the recruiting office—and the line was quite long—was eager to kill some Japanese. Since they killed some of our people we wanted to kill them. Although we had no experience in killing they thought, the thought of killing someone was rather attractive.

PIEHLER: So did you think you'd be fighting the Japanese?

FRANKLIN: I thought I would be fighting the Japanese. So when it came my time—the line was long—now, I was probably twenty or thirty back. When I got to the recruiting sergeant and he looked up at me and he said, "How old are you?" and I said, "Eighteen." He just kindly shook his head, you know. (Laughter) But he took the information and he said, "You realize you've got to have this paper signed by your parents before we can accept you." And I said, "Okay, no problem." So I went through the procedure of signing—but they would not let me take my physical until I took the papers home and brought 'em back. So I went outside and old Market Square up at—in town—it used to be where the farmers—it was a large building, and the farmers would bring their produce in and they would put it in bins and sell it. It was in Market Square. And there was bums hanging around there, so I went up to this bum who was unshaven, and I'm sure he was an alcoholic, although I had no evidence of that fact, and I asked him if he would sign the paper and he said, "What is it?" And I told him that I was going to go kill Japanese. And he said, "Sure I'll sign it," said, "If you'll promise you'll kill one for me." Even the drunks were patriotic back in those days. (Laughter) So I promised him I would kill one for him and he asked me my father's name and I told him, and so—that's the only name I got—didn't get my mother's name. So he signed it and I went back and then they permitted me to go take a physical and the physical was ... if it was a physical, it was a very quick physical. You

open your mouth, and they made you cough as they held your testicles, and a couple other things and they said, “Okay, you’re alright.”

So the next day, or it might have even been the same day, I don’t remember, we had to report to the train station and I had never ridden a train except to throw coal off of the trains that were going off here where I stole coal to keep the family warm, which was a neighborhood event. Everybody did it, it was not stealing. That belonged to a coal company and they were rich and anything you stole from them it was not like stealing something from your neighbor, Doc. So I went down and we got—we were put in a compartment on the train—real good seats and everything, and it seemed like forever to get to Chattanooga [Tennessee]. It stopped at every little town, I guess because of sabotage they were afraid of or something. And there were a lot of people waiving at the train and girls giving their address to people on the train—they knew where the train was going.

So I got to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, and I went through the procedure of processing. We took our shots and I remember distinctly they had a thing like a refrigerator and you could sit down and put a quarter in and get your picture taken. You know, and I had my uniform and I wanted to take my picture, but I didn’t have a quarter. So I had to figure out how am I gonna get a quarter. They still hadn’t paid us, but they put us in uniform—it was very funny to ... I remember distinctly for shoes—at that time we had shoes, didn’t have boots—they put you on a flat surface and they give you sixty pounds in each hand and you lifted that up and they measured your feet—how wide and how long, with your feet spread out carrying sixty pounds on each side. And mine was ten double A and I thought to myself, “Hell, my feet aren’t that big,” but you don’t argue, you know, you just keep quiet. So I processed through this and got the shots and the shots did not effect me that much. I’ve always been fairly comfortable with minor pain. It’s hasn’t been that bad. But some people just passed out because we must have gotten thirty shots, just one right after another. You walk through a line and everybody’s popping it to you, you know, and some people just passed out. Well, it didn’t bother—although wait, I did feel a little oozy in the stomach—I did.

And then a couple of days later, I had a fight with a man ... and sometime after that they moved use to Middle Tennessee and I didn’t know why. They—somebody had spinal meningitis, and they moved us up to Camp Pickett in the north of Camp Forrest in Middle Tennessee, up near Murfreesboro. And there I met a black man, a black boy from my neighborhood by the name of Grisby. And they lived in my neighborhood for a hundred years, you know, as long as my family. So we knew each other well. But, they were—we were seperated. They were here and we were here, and I could not get close to him. He was on one side of the street and I was on the other side and we would holler at each other about the family and everything, but we were not allowed to associate because we had spinal meningitis and he was black and I don’t know why he was there, but they—there was not integration at that time. And we stayed there five or six weeks, I’m sure—yeah, doing nothing, absolutely nothing except eating, writing letters home, and this is why I got notified by my mother that she was gonna report how old I was and I wrote her back and told her it wouldn’t do any good because I would just run away and enlist again. So that was the end of that, but she did send me a quarter. (Laughter) That was a big event, she scrapped it up in the neighborhood someplace and I got a picture—I went to one of those machines, they had them there too. And you sat in front of it, you put the quarter in, and it takes

your picture and they'd come out. Oh boy, that was high-tech back in 1941, you know, or early '42. So I sent the picture home and then they took us back to Fort Oglethorpe and we stayed there again some days, and from there they assigned us to Camp Wheeler.

Now the boys that I was assigned to with in Camp Wheeler were all from New York. It seemed every one of them was from New York and there was only two or three of us from the South that joined it. We took normal infantry basic training for six weeks and it was fairly strenuous, fairly difficult. But for a young—see by then I'm seventeen years old. See, I turned seventeen in January—seventeen-year-old boy, good shape, everything, it wasn't—didn't bother me. The heat ... it wasn't that hot yet, it's still March or So February, March. And the training consisted of firing the '03 rifle [Springfield 1903 model], qualifying it on the range, normal squad tactics with the rifle squad, firing the Browning automatic rifle. But we did not get to fire machine guns. The last two weeks was specialized in machine guns and mortars and they broke us down in two groups. One group took mortars and one group took machine guns. And I was assigned to the machine gun section. So I took the training with a 1919 A-1 Browning 30 caliber water-cooled machine gun, belt fed, gas operated, blah blah blah, on and on, you know. And I had a very close relationship to machine guns, I like it. I like being a machine-gunner. It was something a little better than being a rifleman, you know, but at the time I didn't realize how much better it was than being a rifleman. And it was only later when we got into the war that I realized that a heavy ... 30 caliber machine gun is more of a defensive weapon than it is an offensive weapon. In offensive—normally, you can fire direct fire or you can fire indirect fire. Well, I was fascinated by indirect fire. I was fascinated by that, although I didn't have the mathematical education to comprehend the difficulty of it, I still liked it. So I kindly applied myself to learning that and I'm glad I did because later in life, when we didn't have an officer later in the war—we had a man named Jim Bottomley from the Bronx in New York, a forty-two year old Irishman with no teeth was our Platoon Sergeant—I impressed Jim Bottomley enough that we wasn't always in direct fire to fire at the enemy, we would get behind a hill and I would lead the guns into the quadrant elevation—they called it a QE—and we could fire indirect fire. Therefore, it might have saved my life many times and I'm sure that Jim thought, "Oh, that son-of-a-bitch knows what he's doing." (Laughter) And it's just that I had enough sense to realize this is something attractive and I'm attracted to it and I did it. I become very good at it. Almost all the time I was interested in improving the survivability—how to survive as a machine gun, as a machine gunner. Because, I remember my father telling me that in World War I, the life expectancy of a machine gunner was thirty minutes or something, you know. Of course back then in mass infantry combat I can understand why, but they weren't intelligent enough to know how to fire indirect fire, see? And I am ... although I had no scholastic evidence to improve my intelligence I had experience. (Laughs) Let me take a sip of wine.

So after that, a boy named Dickerson, a boy named Fantana, and Franklin, and a boy named Fitzgerald was all sent to the First Infantry Division, Sixteenth Infantry. Many more went to the First Infantry Division, and they were sent to Eighteenth Infantry or Twenty-Sixth Infantry, but we went to the Sixteenth Infantry. And at ... Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, we finally got assigned to our units. And that was—we were assigned, the three of us went to M company—we were all three machine gunners. We had taken basic together, the—Fitzgerald was a little smarter than me, or the rest of us, and they put him first as a company clerk and he kindly separated himself from us three gunners, you know. Fantana was a professional boxer, and in

our conversations with Fantana he was from lower Manhattan, a place called Mulberry Street, Mulberry and Delancy. I went home with him one weekend and he told me not to mess with the Italian or the Jewish girls because the Jewish girls would beat me up or the Italian boys would beat me up if I messed with his sister, so I was very careful about that ... association with any of those people. (Laughter) But Fantana had had eighteen professional fights and was very good, and he was a very good friend to have because nobody would mess with you. They knew Fantana would beat the hell out of them, you see? And he was older, much older, and he had gold teeth and they were quite separated. I remember that. He was killed in the Hurtgen Forest [Germany], Fantana was. Dickerson was killed in Aachen, Fitzgerald was killed on D-Day [France], and I wasn't killed, luckily I wasn't killed. But that's the story of our four people.

Even when Fantana went to another platoon—eventually he went to the Second Platoon, and only Dickerson and I stayed in the First Platoon. Eventually Dickerson became a section sergeant and I become a section sergeant and we were separated somewhat, but we were still in the same platoon. Now, the unique thing about a weapons platoon is that you are not with your parent company. You are never with—I was never with M Company. I was always—the First Platoon is always assigned to I Company, the Third Platoon is assigned to K Company, and the Third platoon is assigned to L Company. It's always that way. So when I Company did something, the First Platoon was part of it. So we were more of I Company than we were of anything. But, it had its good things, it had its drawbacks and it had its good things. Number one, generally in an assault, we were excluded. We were told to give indirect fire or fire on this target and that was about it. Well, the riflemen had to go out and they didn't have anything but their shirts to stop bullets, we had hill in front of us to stop it. So in the long run, we were fortunate to belong to the machine gun division. Number two, we did not go—there are three types of patrols. There is a reconnaissance patrol, there is a contact patrol, and there is a combat patrol. Well, on all three cases many men get killed. A contact patrol goes from your platoon to the next platoon, which is over on the next hill. Or from your I Company to K Company, and in the interim they run up against patrols of the enemy and they had firefights and they get killed. Well, heavy machine guns never go on that patrol. They never go on a contact patrol. And on a recon patrol, a heavy machine gunner would just be in the way, you know. Because what you do is go out as a rifle team, you attract fire—get people to shoot at you and you make a note that three machine guns are shooting at me, mortars are shooting at me, and it seems that so many riflemen are shooting. You come back and you give that information to your company commander and he calls battalion S-2 and some guy is sitting back at battalion with an education, he writes it down and the next morning he tells the colonel, “Well, we got so many of this and that.” So that's how he made his living by somebody going out and getting killed, see? But, he had an education—that's the difference between them. Of course, the combat patrol is where you go out to actually capture prisoners, destroy a position, take a little, take a point—an outpost, to eliminate an outpost or observation post, you go out and destroy an observation post. And of course, you suffer more casualties there than ever. Machine guns are not allowed to do that. So you see, out in I Company—in I Company, you had 1,872 casualties in World War II—one company. Now, a company has 182 men in it, so you know how much of a turnover I Company had. But, the great thing about I Company, and I'll never forget it, but they had a, we had a company commander by the name of [Kimball R.] Richmond. Probably the greatest soldier in the American Army, absolutely fearless. I only saw one thing I didn't like about him and that was in Mons, Belgium we captured a prisoner—and we had a Jewish boy who spoke

German, but he spoke Yiddish and they're talking, he's interrogating this German and the German laughed at him because he said a word incorrectly and Captain Richmond knocked the hell out of him. That's the only thing I've ever seen Captain Richmond do, otherwise an outstanding soldier. He had Distinguished Service Cross. When he ... I think he was from Boston. He was from New England. Anyway, he was a very fine company commander. And that of course, saved your life too, when you got a fine company commander, that helps. Now, that's general let's get back too—on line. And all of this ...

PIEHLER: I want to ask one—before you keep going on. Did you know all this when you decided, when you wanted the machine gun?

FRANKLIN: Beg your pardon?

PIEHLER: When you first signed up for the machine gun, did you know that all this would work out this way?

FRANKLIN: No, not at all. I had absolutely no idea. I was as innocent as a virgin. (Laughter) And you can imagine how innocent I was about life or war or anything because I had ... my experience in life consisted of riding a bicycle, delivering groceries, and going to school, you know. Neighborhood ballgames, neighborhood fist fights, little minor excursions, but never anything great or—my mentality could never have thought that I would be a soldier, although I hoped someday to be a soldier. I ... I realized in the very beginning that it was an escape in life—that I could escape from my environment to the army and become a soldier. And I had that hope, and of course the war fulfilled the opportunity for me to do that. And it worked out well. But I did not approach it with misgivings. I was confident enough to know—first I weighed a 192 lbs. and I was six foot three [inches] and I had a twenty-eight inch waist. Broad shoulders, strong, a good fighter, and Fantana polished me up, you know, showed me how to fight better. So I had a lot of self-confidence. I did not have education, I did not have a vocabulary, I did not have experience. There are many things I didn't have, but some things I did have. And the things I did have are those that are a prerequisite for a good machine gunner. I could carry a damn forty-two pound tripod and two boxes of ammunition without any problem, you know. Whereas some fella like you might have problems carrying a sixty-pound bag and a forty-two pound tripod and a sixty-pound—two cases of ammo. So in that was in that respect, I was quite qualified for what I did. And the intellectual demands upon the machine gunner is nil. You just do what they tell you to do, you know. (Laughs) You have a range card and you set down and you have an aiming stake—you're the only stake left, for firing, protective fire, you'd fire six, six, six, six, six, six, until you hits this thing, and then you fire six, three, six, three, six, three, you know, it didn't tell, you didn't have to be a damn mental giant to understand that, you know. And that's for firing a protective fire.

Indirect fire is a different thing. And I was—once I got involved into that, I was rather fascinated by it and I was eager to prove my abilities with it. And even on civilians, like in Aachen, I saw a whole group of civilians that come up in a defoliated road—we're in apartment houses and I had the machine gun set up behind, full machine gun set up behind the buildings to shoot over. Well, I zeroed the number one gun on the road that all—I couldn't see this road, but I could see the one going up a hill, here. So I figured there's a road coming here. I didn't even

have a map, but I figured there was a road coming here to this road and this one goes up a hill—eventually somebody will go up that. I took the number one gun and I fired over the hill and dropped my elevation until I was firing too short and increased ‘til I’m right on that road. Then I zeroed the other three guns in on it and looked out one morning and the whole damn road is covered with humans. I don’t know what they were. We just opened all four guns. They shot ten boxes each on that one road. They just, you could just see them coming down. And I thought—I was elated. I thought, “Damn you’re good,” you know. (Laughs) Now, on occasion, I think, “Hmm, I’m really not so good,” you know. There might have been women and children in there, you know, but that’s part of it. Anyway, at anytime that we ...

ROMESIER: I want to ask you, did you, you talked—I heard you did a lot of boxing.

FRANKLIN: Mm hmm.

ROMEISER: Did you ever box for money or anything ...

FRANKLIN: Nope.

ROMEISER: ... within the Army?

FRANKLIN: Nope.

ROMEISER: So you just got into fights.

FRANKLIN: No, in Sicily I got onto a boxing team.

ROMEISER: There you go, that’s what I want. Okay. I thought ...

FRANKLIN: I have an incident I gotta tell you about that. Because that might have saved me from going to Italy. I’ll get to that in a minute ...

ROMEISER: Okay.

FRANKLIN: We’ve got to keep it in order. After Indiantown Gap, they put us on trains, took us to New York and we boarded the *Queen Mary* on one and two August 1942. We had eighteen—sixteen to eighteen thousand soldiers on the *Queen Mary*, and we sailed on the 2nd of August, but it took us two or three days to load up, you know.

PIEHLER: Actually, before we go, I had some more questions on basic training.

FRANKLIN: Oh, okay.

PIEHLER: But, you were still in the army that you—you had a different, you had the old helmet when you first started.

FRANKLIN: The what?

PIEHLER: Your old helmet. Did you have the old helmet?

FRANKLIN: No, they had issued the new helmet.

PIEHLER: They had issued it.

FRANKLIN: Some people trained with the old helmet, but I was fortunate enough to have the new helmet. But the other people had the new M-1 rifle, and we trained with the '03 rifle, see? So there was a trade off there I got.

PIEHLER: Since you would become a sergeant yourself, what do you remember about your drill instructor at basic training?

FRANKLIN: I would have liked to have been one because he didn't have to carry any equipment, he had a stick. (Laughter) He didn't have to wear a helmet. It's in the later part of the training ... we had to dig holes; he didn't have to do it. (Laughter) And actually, he was a corporal, the fella that trained us, and he was a little small fella, very agile. And very good I'm sure, because you've got to remember this influx of troops going into the military, they had to take anything they could get to be instructors, you know. And in my division—the First Division who was loaded with nothing but professional soldiers, they shipped all the sergeants—although not all of them, but many of the old sergeants out to form new divisions. Because they—in fact, they stripped some companies of half of their non-coms [Non-commissioned officers] to go to some National Guard division or something. Basic training to me, as I look back in retrospect ... of my army career, was quite uneventful because later I became a drill instructor for the Fifth Infantry Division over at Fort Jackson [South Carolina] on two occasions and I did the same thing that they did to me. (Laughter) I took that stick and hit them in the helmet and ...

PIEHLER: How much KP [Kitchen Police] did you have to do?

FRANKLIN: I was very lucky. I had one day of KP at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. I never had KP again until I got to M Company. And in M Company it was rotated about, you know, they had a roster and I probably had KP about every two months one day, but you had to get up at three o'clock in the morning. They'd take a towel and tie it on the bottom of your bed and that let the person who was looking for the KPs know who to wake up. So you find that towel there—if you did not tie that towel there, you got a week's KP. So I learned very quickly that you do that. But, if you cut that off I'll tell you one—yeah, I'll tell you a story.

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: The one thing I want to put on tape, it's a great story and I can see why you didn't want it on tape, but one thing you did say that was on tape, which ... I think it's probably so obvious to people that I interview—that bugle calls are very important. In basic training and in ...

FRANKLIN: Yes.

PIEHLER: Everything is done by bugle.

FRANKLIN: Yes. Everything's done by bugle. And we soldiers adapted our own words to each bugle call. For example, sick call is: (Hums sick call song). "Look at his ass, look at his asshole, see what's the matter with him. (Laughter) Look at his eyes, look at his asshole." That was sick call. Well, church call was—eventually they stopped church call because—probably in the middle of '42 they quit making soldiers go to church. Up until then, every Sunday we had to go to church.

PIEHLER: You had to go to church?

FRANKLIN: You had to go to church.

PIEHLER: You couldn't just like ...

FRANKLIN: No, no. Company formation, you fall out they blow church call and you go to church and that's it. So they had of course reveille and assembly and all of those. We all put words to them. But, you had to know a bugle call. And in reference to this, I've never heard the thing—we are asleep in a graveyard in Legrand, Africa near Oran, about ten kilometers out of Oran, and we had just taken Oran and then our company had fallen—I Company had fallen back to set up a position to protect us from if the Germans come from the East or the French come from the—to block the highway and we were at a little place called Legrand in the cemetery. And we didn't know it, but the German paratroopers, we heard, had landed at the airport south of Oran. Actually, it was American paratroopers, the 504th or the 584th or something. They missed the airport by thirty miles. So the ... our company bugler by the name of Bass was his name blew charge, which is getting ready to go fight, you know. And nobody knew what it meant. We'd never heard it before. (Laughter) You know, we didn't know what to do so of course the old soldiers—old sergeants told us what to do and we got ready and they moved us down to the airport and we took the airport and then we went down and had to pick up all the damned airborne, worthless paratroopers scattered around (Laughter) thirty miles from where they were supposed to land, you know. Unbelievable. And right then my opinion of paratroopers went way down. (Laughter) Okay, now you ready to go on?

PIEHLER: What—well, yeah. One other thing about basic training—what was the most useful thing you learned in basic training? And what, after you saw lots of combat said, "You know, they should have done that differently."

FRANKLIN: I think the biggest thing I learned in basic training was to keep my mouth shut, and not ask questions, and be as oblivious to the world as possible because you certainly don't want to attract attention to yourself, number one. Number two, I thought a lot of the stuff they told us was superfluous. But I didn't realize this until later. For example, they told us how, they showed us a film—I remember this film and it's called *Company B* and it's made in Hollywood and the man forgot his boot and it goes back to that old story where one of the male's shoe was lost and it goes through that whole combat and the Japanese finally overruns B Company because this one guy screwed up. (Laughter) And I remember that. And then they showed us

VD films you know with the dick—your dick falling off and your face rotted and all that other stuff. (Laughs) Hell, I wouldn't think about shaking hands with a woman unless she had on gloves. (Laughter) After I watched those films. Geez—terrible! The non-commissioned officers—the corporal we had, he was not a very talkative person, but he was very, rather demanding. If you weren't in step one time he'd put you on a pack and make you walk around at night, walk around everything. But with my somewhat-Christian upbringing, I was accustomed to reward and punishment, you know, this is Christianity, be good and we'll take you to heaven be bad and we'll put you in hell, you know, that. Well, that's the same thing with the army and all armies are based on this. Good, we promote you, bad we'll put you on KP. So I learned that very quick, very quick and I adapted to it fairly good. And I was a platoon guide from the very beginning. They made me a platoon guide, which I was interested in drill, you know, how to drill. I was interested in being a good soldier. I really was. I had no concept of war or the fear therein. But as far as the peacetime army soldier I was interested—very very interested in that.

PIEHLER: Did anyone in your company, uh, in your basic training company not make it that you remember?

FRANKLIN: I don't know.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: No. Because, when they shipped us out, they just put the list on the bulletin board, you know ... Franklin. But later I noticed it was alphabetically—Franklin, Fantana, Fitzgerald, Dickerson—we all went one place and the "E's" went another place. (Laughter) So I noticed it was alphabetical and I was glad that my name was Franklin because, at least I realized immediately when I got to the First Division that it was a regular Army unit. My platoon sergeant had about twenty-five years in the army, he had served in China and Panama, and he was an old tough soldier who I'm sure would take care of us and he knew the ropes and he only jumped on us when we did something bad, you know, when we were really stupid. He couldn't stand stupidity. And when we did something stupid then he—like one time we went on a hike and we carried our machine guns, but we didn't carry our ammunition. So he stopped the column and made us double-time with machine guns back to the damn barracks about ten miles and get the ammunition and catch up with them and then that night we had to do the same thing again. You know, because that was stupid to do that. You don't take a machine gun out unless you have ammunition. What good is a machine gun without ammunition? (Laughter) That was his thing and he told us that, and we never forgot it. So we were very fortunate. Plus, my first company commander at that time, of I company was a man named Denno. Brice F. Denno and he was light heavy weight champion of West Point. And he was the—he graduated 1938 from West Point. And he'd been in the division ever since then and he eventually by then, in '42, he was a captain from '38—took him from '38 to '42 to make captain. And he got up one day and made the statement that if anybody in the company thought they could whip him, step out. Fantana stepped right out. (Laughter) And they the damndest fight you've ever seen. I mean, they fought tooth and nail until finally the old sergeants went and broke it up. Heck yeah, they fought. But you know that a week after that, Fantana was made his dog robber [Sergeant Aide]. He come up and become the Captain's—then they were inseparable from then on until the

Captain got—run over a mine in Sicily and retired as a Colonel. In fact, he died last year. But Fantana was his favorite man, you know.

PIEHLER: And he sounds like quite a fighter.

FRANKLIN: Yeah. Fantana was a fighter. I could not hit him. He could stand still and move his head and I couldn't hit him.

PIEHLER: You really would try to do it?

FRANKLIN: I could not—he'd dare me to hit him. (Laughter) And we had another guy—back when I got on the boxing team in Sicily—his name was Collowitz—another New Yorker. And he was a middle weight fighter, [he] was the captain of the boxing team. And he would dare you to hit him, and I hit him and he started beating the hell out of me. (Laughter) He was a good fighter. I made the mistake of hitting him.

But we got on the *Queen Mary*, and it—I didn't know this until after the war—it took us four or five days to get to Scotland, and it took us a couple of days to unload, and then went by train down to Tidworth Barracks, which is located on the Salisbury Plain, and then we rod it up and week or two later and went up to Scotland and maneuvered. But, the next trip that the *Queen Mary* made, they brought over the Twenty-Ninth Infantry Division. The Twenty-Ninth, who landed with us on D-Day at Omaha Beach. And on the—every seven minutes, the *Queen Mary* would change direction like this (Makes a zigzag motion with his hand) and I—when I was on the *Queen Mary*, I had to stay up on top deck twenty-four hours, then under the deck twenty-four hours. That was, there wasn't enough room for everybody to be under the deck or there wasn't enough room for everybody to be on top. Well, all machine gunners had to get up on the top deck with their machine guns and we actually fired—practice firing, in case a sub came up, you know, we could shoot at it.

PIEHLER: So you were really—that was their thinking that you would actually fire at a sub.

FRANKLIN: Yeah. Mm hmm. Mm hmm. And it was a good thing, it kept our minds occupied, too. It gave something for us to do—we realized we were going to Well, the next trip that the *Queen Mary* made, about a day out of Ireland, a British war ship would come out and join us. It came out and joined us—I remember when it joined us, it joined us just before dark so we saw it. It looked like a destroyer to us, but we didn't know anything about ships. Well, the next trip, when the Twenty-Ninth Division came, a cruiser came up and joined 'em and the *Queen Mary* was changing courses and it run right through the cruiser—split it open and everybody died on that cruiser, but the *Queen Mary* could not stop. It would not stop. They told us, "You fall overboard, that's it. We will not stop to pick you up."

PIEHLER: They literally—that was the warning?

FRANKLIN: That was the warning, yeah. And they run and cut this cruiser right in two. It sunk with all hands and, of course, the *Queen Mary* kept going. It had to. And the Twenty-Ninth Division was on that ship, and when they got to Scotland they went—they landed in the

same place we did, the Firth of Clyde, and then they went by train down to Tidworth. They replaced us. We went up to Scotland and they went to Tidworth and later they went down to Devon, which is the Southwest coast of England, near Dorset. The next one is Devon. Anyway, we stayed in Scotland and we took invasion maneuvers against the Black Watch Regiment, the Scottish Black Watch. And we stayed in contact with the Black Watch for years. My regiment is now still right beside the Black Watch in Iraq. The Black Watch just moved up to be with my regiment, yeah. And in Berlin, they were part—they were in Berlin when we were in Berlin. Then after the war, in '61, '62 and '63, they were in the English sector and we were in the American sector. And we went up and visited them and they'd come down and visit us, so we kindly stayed with the Black Watch. It's a very famous regiment.

PIEHLER: Oh yeah, no, it's a very very famous um ...

FRANKLIN: Anyway we took maneuvers in Scotland. We lived on the boat, lived on the ship. We would get off, get on assault boats, go in and make an invasion, go up and take high ground and dig in. And British Black Watch would counter attack and run us back, then we would counter attack and play war games for a while. And then they brought us to, my ship came to—now I don't know what—you've got to understand—number one, a soldier only knows what is going on with what he can touch. My boat, the HMS *Lillian*, went to Glasgow and parked at a dock. And across from the dock was a gymnasium, and we could sleep in that gymnasium. And everyday we were free until twelve o'clock the next day. At twelve o'clock the next day, we had to report to the ship to find out what the orders were. So everyday I enjoyed Glasgow and I went to Edinburgh ... messed around in Scotland, had a lot of fun, a lot of stuff. So one day I came back to the HMS *Lillian*, they said you're restricted—that's it. So we sailed from there ...

PIEHLER: Before you leave Scotland and England ...

FRANKLIN: Hmm?

PIEHLER: It sounds like you enjoyed this interaction. You enjoyed getting to know the Black Watch very early ...

FRANKLIN: Oh, yes, yes, yes. I had heard about the Black Watch, and Captain Denno told us about it. He had studied the Black Watch in West Point, of course, you know, he had a good military history background and he told us we were honored to be even near that regiment.

PIEHLER: And how did they treat you ...

FRANKLIN: Huh?

PIEHLER: You—at this point you are new Americans to the war, untested in battle.

FRANKLIN: We thought, we actually—I remember our thoughts in my platoon that we should just—"What the hell are we doing? We're messing around here. Let's just go invade France and get the damn thing over with." (Laughter) We didn't realize how inept, how unqualified we were. And later, in Africa they realized what we were. We were the unwilling being led by the

unqualified to do the unnecessary, those three there. And everybody would say that, “We’re the God damned un-Army. Here we are down in Africa and we should be in France, by God.” (Laughter) But then we stayed on the HMS *Lillian*, which is a very small ship, and we went to Africa and they took us—I had ...

PIEHLER: What was the British ship like?

FRANKLIN: British ship was—food was absolutely terrible. We slept on the HMS *Lillian*, we had hammocks in the mess hall. That’s where we slept, in these hammocks, and below us was the table and we had a British sergeant major in charge of the men—the Americans, he was in charge. He’d come in, “Wakey, wakey, it’s time to wakey wakey, Yanks. Get up!” (Laughter) So we got up and breakfast consisted, so help me, with herring, with its eyes still looking at you. Herring laying on a plate with the damned eyes looking at you. And at super, we had ox tail stew. And we had that same meal everyday on that ship. It was absolutely terrible. And we complained about it, but, you know, what good does it do to complain? Of course, you always had this separation—particularly when you deal with English—of officers and enlisted men. They always had that distinct separation. The officers were up in the officer’s quarters with staterooms and steak dinners and all that stuff with the Captain. Enlisted men were in the hole. But that’s normal in English ranks. I remember very very distinctly on an afternoon—beautiful afternoon, we went through the Straits of Gibraltar. And in that evening, we found out where we were going. And they told us what we were gonna do. Until then, the rumors were we were going to Madagascar, we were going to South Africa, we were going to India ... all kinds of damn rumors ... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: This is on this one—on the ship.

FRANKLIN: On the ship. (Laughter) It’s the enlisted men, you know. They’d tell me, “We’re goin’ so and so.” (Laughter) But the main one was Madagascar. And nobody understood—“Why the hell are we going to Madagascar? Number one, what is Madagascar?” (Laughter) Nobody knew there was an island off the coast of Africa. Nobody even thought about that. Then another fella cried, “Oh no, we’re gonna take the Horn of Africa.” And another one said, “No, we’re gonna invade Italy.” But all kinds of rumors going around because we knew we were going south, we knew all along that we’re going south. And from Scotland, to go south in the Atlantic Ocean you—and then particularly you get near the ... Gibraltar, Straits of Gibraltar, you know where you are. So then they told us what we were gonna do and the plan was—they briefed us, and when they briefed us they also taught us French, that was the big thing. They made us say a thousand times, « *Je suis américain, Je suis armie, Je suis américain.* » And we had to say that over and over again, and finally they told us why. We’re gonna invade against the French and they did not know if the French would resist or not. Because the British had deliberately attacked the Port of Oran and killed three or four thousand French sailors, and therefore the Vichy French considered the British their enemy. So we had this American flag and we had that knowledge of French, “*Je suis américain, Je suis armie,*” you know. (Laughter) So this was our weapon to invade Africa. It ended up tactically that the—my regiment was the extreme eastern regiment to take Oran. We landed at Arzu, and to the right of that was the little town called Saint Cloud and the Eighteenth Infantry landed there, and the Twenty-Sixth Infantry landed right of Oran. And the object was, that the Twenty-Sixth and Sixteenth would swing

around and pinch the city off and the Eighteenth would go right through it. Well, it didn't work out that way. It ended up that the Eighteenth got blocked and the Sixteenth overcame—did better than we thought we would do. But I remember distinctly that we landed about 1:30 in the morning, the seas were calm it was—it was not difficult, but we had little ...

----- END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE -----

(First section of Tape One, Side Two is edited and left out of this transcript. The tape was left running during a break.)

PIEHLER: Oh, I actually even left that on accidentally. (Laughs) But, you were saying the sea was very calm at 1:30 a.m. when you landed in North Africa, and then you were ready I think to tell us some more.

FRANKLIN: You want me to go over it from there?

PIEHLER: Yes, please do.

FRANKLIN: You got it turned on?

PIEHLER: It's on. It's on.

FRANKLIN: We had little two-wheeled carts that was supposed to carry the machine gun, ammunition, and stuff on it, and two men pulled those carts. Well, when we landed, the French had built up a firing line and were haphazardly firing but again it was *zip zip zip* would indicated that they were way high, you know. It wasn't the *crack thump* that you get when they are deliberately aiming at you. So I was not particularly impressed—I was not fearful and I wasn't particularly impressed. But we tried to pull these damn carts and they sunk in the sand. So I realized immediately that we can't wear—this is Africa. This is the land of the sand and we're gonna pull this damn cart everywhere? (Laughter) So the first thing we did was get rid of the cart. (Laughter) Then we got rid of our gas masks. We got rid of everything—you could tell the American Army just by following along with where our equipment was discarded, that we didn't need, you know. Gas masks and gas capes and stuff from the British Army—rain coats, everything come with it. We moved inland and suddenly—well, the French surrendered. But, I was not involved in capturing any. I was not involved in guarding any. That was taken care of by the ...

PIEHLER: Did you ever have to use the line you had been trained?

FRANKLIN: Ever have to what?

PIEHLER: The line in French you'd been trained—your French. Did you ever have to use the ...

FRANKLIN: The French I knew?

PIEHLER: Yes.

FRANKLIN: No. No. No.

PIEHLER: No. No. Never. Never actually got to use it. (Laughter)

FRANKLIN: We went into a whore house in Algiers and I told them there that, “*Je suis armie, Je suis américain,*” but they were not impressed. (Laughter) Anyway ...

ROMEISER: Ben, can I ask you something?

FRANKLIN: Yes.

ROMESIER: What did you—before you arrived in Africa, but once you knew you were going to Africa—what images of Africa did you ...

FRANKLIN: Oh gosh!

ROMESIER: ... have in your mind and did those—did you images of Africa live up to reality of ...

FRANKLIN: At first, the anticipation of just getting off the boat was the dominant emotion was at last we are gonna get off this damn boat. And the second thing was, we hope that the French don't fight, because in our briefing they explained that perhaps the French would not resist and that we could go in. So our hope was that they would not fight. But, the Eighteenth Infantry, and later the Sixteenth Infantry, engaged the French Foreign Legion and they fought, they absolutely fought. So my thoughts of Africa at that time was how to handle this machinegun and I was really interested in what I personally was gonna do. You know, I wasn't excited about getting killed or killing anybody. But, that night—well, first we come to a crossroad. And I'll tell you something. We came to a crossroad and the company commander and the sergeants all gathered up there and they were talking to an Arab. And word come back, “Does anybody speak French?” And in that whole I Company and one platoon of M Company, not one man could speak French. Well, we had a man who could speak Spanish so he went forward to talk. And I don't know what was said or anything, but in—at that time, a Spitfire came down the road and everybody started shooting at the Spitfire. We didn't know it was the—we had not been told that we would have any air cover. (Laughter) So we immediately figured it was French, the French Air Force, so we started shooting at it. Luckily, I don't think we hit it. At least it didn't go down. (Laughter)

Then we moved behind a stone wall for—people had gone in the field and picked up the stone and built a wall. And that's where we're gonna spend the night. So I got the machine gun set up and I—I'm only thinking of my machine gun, that's all. And the little village is out there in front, and the lights are on and they seem normal and everything and probably didn't even know we were there. And me and my friend Dickerson—it's time to go lay down and go to sleep—because we are against this stone wall and the rifle companies are staying awake. Nothing about machine guns staying awake, see? Again, it's good to be a machine gunner. So Dickerson and I decided to go to sleep. So we laid down our raincoats and we took a British gas cape and put

over us. And we're laying there—we're tired. We've been walking all day in the strain of maybe getting shot at, you know. It's stressful. So just as I had started dosing off I felt something crawl on my leg onto this gas cape. And then I said, said to myself, "Goddamn, you're in Africa. They've got lions, and tigers, and snakes. They've got everything and here you are laying down on the ground. That could be anything." Well [I] tried to lay motionless. I knew I shouldn't move because whatever it was might bite me, so I tried to lay absolutely motionless and not move and not go to sleep. Well, I'm exhausted, I'm completely exhausted. Plus, I'm young. You know, young people they, they like to go to ... anyway I went to sleep. Woke up the next morning at daylight, it's a little puppy about that big. (Cups his hands) (Laughter) He crawled between me and Dickerson where it's warm and he's sleeping. He come from the village down there looking for some warm spot. But, I remember that night thinking about lions, and tigers, and snakes, and all this. (Laughter)

ROMEISER: Yeah, that's interesting. One of the letters my dad wrote back to his parents was, it's not the Africa that, you know, we read about. You know, with monkeys and jungles and all that. You just, you expected a jungle ...

FRANKLIN: Yes.

ROMEISER: ... kind of a jungle setting.

FRANKLIN: It was not what I expected.

ROMESIER: But, you did have scorpions, though.

FRANKLIN: We had what?

ROMEISER: Scorpions.

FRANKLIN: I never saw one.

ROMEISER: Never saw a scorpion?

FRANKLIN: Never saw a scorpion. But I ... what I did see at the zoo—this is after the campaign. They had a zoo in Oran and we got to go in. In fact, I was in Oran when an American tanker was coming into Oran, and a German submarine hit it with a torpedo and blew up. And it couldn't have been more than 10,000 yards from where we were sitting. But, we had gone to the zoo and at the zoo, we didn't see anything. It looked like muddy, a muddy place and there's a big pit down there. I looked down there and saw a telephone pole start moving, and the mud on its back started cracking. And it was a damn snake that big around (Gestures with hands) and about twenty feet long laying out there. And they were gonna feed it a goat. So we stayed and watched them feed it a little goat. And that son-of-a-bitch hit that goat. (Laughs) And then he took and wrapped that up around that goat and then he started swallowing. Well, I said, "To hell with this let's go get drunk." (Laughter) Anything is better than this. (Laughter)

But anyway, we stayed there after the campaign. First, when we liberated Oran, I was struck by the beauty of the city, very beautiful city. And I was struck by the beauty of the women, very beautiful women. And I was not struck by the fact that the French treated the Arabs exactly like we in Tennessee treated the blacks. This is the similarity of the treatment of the two people. Because they were second class citizens, you know, and later of course in the revolution of the Algerians against the French I could understand why. Course this is later on in life and I was more mature. Well, we stayed there a while, then we moved to Tunisia and the movement up the—the Germans had put wire across the road and as you drove a jeep by it would catch you, so they put—first thing they did, they put up steel bars on the bumpers and then they said that German paratroopers would land and try to get you to go the wrong direction and all this stuff and it was, you know, it was B.S. We went up there without any problem. When we got to Tebessa—and we cut left and went north of Tebessa and the territory started getting more one-hill dominated, you know. Instead of rolling hills like you have from ... Constantine—from Constantine you had rolling hills almost all the way to Tunisia. But now we get one big hill and a big valley and another big hill. And being from Tennessee, I recognize the difference in hills, you know. But we're mounted, you know, we're in trucks. And we got up to a place called Ousseltia in—at that time, we were part of the French Nineteenth Corps, which is part—and also part of the British Eighteenth Division. My regiment was separated from the First Division and made part of the British Eighteenth Division, which is part of the French Nineteenth Corps, which is part of the British First Army. Now, how, you can't get more screwed up than that, you know. (Laughter) We—for rations, we got British rations, ten in one. They had little cans, very thin aluminum cans that would feed ten people one meal. They call them ten in one ration.

The French would build fires—they'd stand around fires at night and the Germans just across the valley there, you know. And the French, they were the real thing. But one thing that stuck out in my mind about the French. They had this Goon Battalion, which was right next to us made up of natives—Goons, which was a particular tribe I believe more or less toward Senegal, but I'm not sure. They, here come a beautiful white horse with a well decorated, well dressed French officer and walking behind him—it could have been a French sergeant, I don't know I didn't know the difference in them—he had a cape, in fact. Had a cape and he's on this beautiful—and walking behind him are these Goons and they are just, they are just raunchy looking people, you know. But, they're very dangerous on the front line because they get paid by the ears they bring back. That's how they make their money. They made \$14.00 a month plus bonuses so much for every ear. And they were very good at nighttime. And they'd go across the valley and raid the German lines, but hell, they could just as easily have come over and cut off some of our ears. (Laughs) But, we had to be careful about the Goons, you know. So we stayed in Ousseltia some time. I remember it was cold.

I remember that you—if you got out into the valley in daytime, the German airplane would getcha and they got me and a boy named Jack Wolf one time. Made that mistake one time, didn't make it again. Uh, but we stayed there through February, I'm sure. Then we moved down to Kasserine Pass, and in Kasserine Pass we moved into positions with the hill to our rear and a valley to our front. And some—I think the Second Battalion occupied the hills to our left, and the First Battalion had the hills to our right and we, the Third Battalion, was blocking here like this, (Gestures with hands) that's us. So one morning I woke up and it sounded like airplanes were over us, *woo woo*. (Makes sound of engine) The Germans had an unsynchronized motor,

two motors. They didn't ... they weren't synchronized. So they never—like the American—the roar of an American two engine plane would be *Ahhhhh*—would be constant, but the roar of a German two engine plane was unsynchronized. It'd go *Uhh uhh uhh uhh*. Oh, and this is the sound we got before daylight. So we all got up and got ready to shoot at airplanes and when the damn fog lifted, out in front was just nothing but dust and tanks, German tanks. So we could do little. We could do very little. Our artillery tried to engage them, but it was too late. And they just overran us. They run right over us. And course one run right over my hole and ...

PIEHLER: Literally, while you were in the ...

FRANKLIN: While I was there, yeah. And that was a very, very frightening event, yeah. And afterwards, I got up with everybody else that survived and made it to the hills. It was just getting away from them tanks, and the tanks that are down in the valley, and they'd see us in the hills and they'd shoot at you in the hills. So we had to be very careful even running. So somebody stopped us, and I don't know who it was. But the word got back to us that—not only I, it was hundreds of soldiers were running and they said, "Where you going?" and one of the soldiers said, "We're going to Tebessa." They said, "You don't want to go there, [Field Marshall Erwin] Rommel took that yesterday." (Laughter) So that kindly quieted us down. We didn't run anymore, we stayed where we were. And then we reorganized and the Battalion got back together, got reorganized, and we went back to our positions and had to retake them, had to retake. We didn't have any equipment fortunately we had the Air Force helps us. Those—had twelve Spitfires come up the valley and they strafe and shot, and artillery shot and we just walked in position with no problem. So from there, after Kasserine, we moved to an old Carthaginic ...

ROMEISER: ... Carthaginian.

FRANKLIN: Carthaginian fort there in the desert near a town called Gasfa. Now, Gasfa is a Jewish city. A little Jewish city that has a, has warm springs in it. And it was occupied by the Germans, and of course, they'd killed a lot of people in the town, and our regiment—after we stayed there. And this is the first time that we ever had a weapon that would shoot a tank. Now we had an anti-tank platoon in regimental headquarters that had 57 mm rifles to shoot at a tank, but a rifleman had nothing. So here they gave us a rifle grenade. Now, a rifle grenade—there's only one drawback. This rifle grenade would only work on an M-1 rifle or no, on a '03 rifle. It would not work on the M-1s. We now have the M-1s, see? So they had to issue one man per squad an M1—'03 rifle with a grenade launcher on it to fire this grenade. And at the same time, they come out with a 2.36 Bazooka. Now, now, we really got something that'll knock a tank out. And they had an old tank there. The damn thing—the Bazooka wouldn't penetrate the tank. (Laughs) So the demonstration was not very effective.

PIEHLER: He demonstrated it? (Laughter) He even did a demonstration.

FRANKLIN: But, if you got around to the rear of the tank—you know, it's an old German tank that'd been knocked out—if you got around to the rear and shot that Bazooka in the rear, it would hit the fuel tank. So at least we had something. Before then, we didn't even have a rifle or a machine gun. So we moved, from there we organized an attack and we took Gasfa. In

Gasfa—and I remember this very distinctly, we took a bath. We all got to go into that warm springs. It was absolutely—now, you’ve got to remember, I hadn’t had a bath since Oran, and this is back in November. Now, this is up in March, you know. So a bath’s something you remember.

PIEHLER: You hadn’t had a shower?

FRANKLIN: No. No.

PIEHLER: So this is like—this is it.

FRANKLIN: This is it. We all had scabies. And we scratching everywhere—where your legs rubbed, they’re all raw. We had lice. Everybody had lice.

ROMEISER: Did you have a lot of fleas?

FRANKLIN: Huh?

ROMESIER: Fleas.

FRANKLIN: Fleas. We had fleas. But, we found out how to do that. You could take your shirt—take it off, dip it in gas, ring it out, and leave it up in the air someplace where it could get out—‘cause people smoked. You didn’t want to put a shirt on with gas and somebody smoking. (Laughter) Had to let the fumes get away. And put it on and that would kill the fleas, but it wouldn’t kill scabies. It would not kill scabies. And then the flies, you’ve got this problem with flies. Anyway, after we got our bath, we moved out and we got in a wadi. Just east of Gasfa is a long wadi, and we got in—this is a dried up riverbed—we got down in that because now the Germans, even with tanks they can’t hit us, you know. They’ve got to fire direct, indirect fire perfect to hit us, you know. So we’re safe. And the only time I was in Africa it started raining. It rained so damn hard that jeeps flooded—went down that wadi. Jeeps and radios and everything. It flooded the whole regiment, knocked out almost all our vehicles out that somebody didn’t have enough sense to get out. But, I remember we had a flood there.

Then after that, we got our equipment and started up and we moved forward about fifteen miles into El-Ghetar. In El-Ghetar, we encountered the Fifteenth Herman Goering Panzer Division—no, it’s the Tenth Panzer. We encountered the Tenth Panzer there ... yeah. And we went through that. There was another goofed up affair. But I did see personally, with my eyes, General Patton. He was no more than fifty yards from me, standing up—he did not get in a hole—with his field glasses, was standing up and those tanks are coming up the valley and we’re sending in little halftracks or those little 75 mms, and they’re getting knocked out. Pathetic, you know. It’s like UT [University of Tennessee] football team going over down here and playing Park Junior football team. The Germans were so good. Their equipment was so much better, their tactics were so much better, their officers were so much better, their soldiers were so much better. You know, we were just in a—we were out of our class. But at least we were learning something, see?

And the British were a very good influence. Near the—when we were near the Eighteenth British troop, I went over—just a hundred yards over—they had a gun over there, and a couple days later they had knocked out a tank. And I wanted to find out what kind of gun it was, and it was a twenty-five pounder. Well, I said, “What the hell is a twenty-five pounder?” you know “a 120 mm?” [They said,] “No. No. No. We don’t go by millimeters. We go by the weight of the projector. A six pounder fires a six pound.” Which is common, this is good to know. But I, while I was over there, we had an artillery, couple of artillery rounds came in and I noticed nobody got upset. You know, particularly the officers, they’d just sit around drinking their tea and didn’t bother around—a couple of enlisted men jumped—I jumped in a hole, and a couple of British enlisted men—but the sergeants didn’t jump in a hole and the officers didn’t jump in a hole. I had an incident happen and it’s worthy of recording, in Ousseltia. We were very high. It’s in January, February—cold, and it snowed, but of course down in the valley it does not stick or did not, but the only way to get to the top of this hill was to walk—a little pathway up the hill. So the—Jim Bottomley called me, he said, “Ben, go down to company headquarters.” And then he showed me on the map it’s down there in a little patch of woods down there. And I said, “What do they want me for?” and he said, “Oh, don’t ask me. How the hell do I know? Get down there!” That was Jim Bottomley. So I went down there and the first sergeant said, “Go back to S-3 and get those three donkeys.” And I said, “I don’t know nothing about donkeys,” he said, “The hell you don’t. You’re from Tennessee aren’t you?” (Laughter) I had to go get three donkeys and for about a week and a half I was responsible for carrying the ammunition and the water to the top of that hill every night. But, you know, I walked all night going up and coming down, but I got to lay there beside the mess truck all day long in the warm weather and the sun shining on me, and had food and mayonnaise, mayonnaise! Imagine that in Africa! And had coffee anytime—course, I didn’t drink coffee but I had drinks and everything. So it made a good impression on me to stay at the mess hall and I enjoyed that. Of course, going up—feeling my way up that mountain there—now, I’d go back in the afternoon, and as soon as it got dark, I’d go to S-3 at battalion and they’d load up my donkey. I had a donkey—I had a saddle that came over with a slot here and a slot here and a case of C-rations or a five gallon can of gas would just slide down in there and it would buckle under his belly. And he had a little halter on—didn’t have on his feet just a little halter. Son-of-a-bitch bit me. And I hauled off and hit him and I broke my damn hand. (Laughter) But they’re mean, those little donkeys are. But they had an Arab man there who told us what to say to make them go. You say, “Hadawah!” and you twist his tail. “Hadawah! Hadawah! Hadawah! Hee!” and that means he’ll go, to make him go. So I go “Hadawah!” and these damn boneheads just looked at me. And they’d say, “You’re a stupid son-of-a-bitch.” But, I finally got ‘em trained after I broke my hand.

ROMEISER: Oh, wow. You told about, when you were in North Africa—and I don’t know if you were in Kasserine or someplace, where you were, but when you saw this German out there, you know that was—looked like he was ready to fire on you, and you started firing on him ...

FRANKLIN: No just to ...

ROMEISER: ... and you got up and you thought he was black. He was, he’d been dead for several days.

FRANKLIN: No. This was after the campaign.

ROMEISER: Okay.

FRANKLIN: After Kasserine. Kasserine is on the main road from Gasfa to a town on the coast named Gabes. The big plan was for us to go down that road and cut it because the British Eighth Army was pushing Rommel up through Tripoli and they would have to come to that, eventually, that road and we could block them from the rear. That was the big plan. ‘Course, I didn’t know the big plan, ah. (Laughter) But when they attacked us with that Tenth Panzer Division—pretty well knocked out all of our tanks and all of our tank destroyers and everything. Then we were squeezed out, First Armored Division squeezed out. They took us in and moved us up to Tunisian djebels which is up in the North of Tunisia to a hill called 609. And 523 is a hill just behind it, flanking it. And So we were going to take 523 and the Thirty-Fourth Division was going to take 609. It was a very difficult, very difficult operation. And the British had tried to take it for months and couldn’t take it because it’s nothing but solid rock. Well, after the campaign was over, they had called for a burial detail—somebody go out and identify—find, identify, and mark American bodies because we had a lot of dead. Well, I had a Tommy gun [Thompson submachine gun], and I always kept it—I had a special sling. I never carried it with a gun from the rear. I always had that gun hanging here (gestures by his side), with a sling over my shoulder. Plus I had a .45. Well, all I had to do was just reach down for that thing and start firing, you see? And I walked around the corner and in a crevice of the stone mountain, in a crevice, sat a German like this (gestures the fetal position) with a rifle with his helmet down. Well, I just started firing. I swept that Tommy gun and I fired back around that corner. I put about half a box of ammo—and the boys come up and they said, “What’s the matter?” And they went around and looked and the guy was black. You know, in Africa you get killed, in three days your face turns black and then you blow up and bust. That’s what happens to you. So when I had—they went out and knocked the helmet off and there his face was black. They said, “Son-of-a-bitch been dead for days, Ben.” They said, “That Franklin’s good at killing dead people.” (Laughter)

But I thought of that yesterday when I saw on the news this Marine walking into a room [in Iraq] and seeing a dead insurgent moving who was wounded and your normal reaction is you shoot him. You know, the combat soldier is taught two things. You don’t have time to make an estimate of the situation, you don’t have time for that. So you shoot now and ask questions later, very simple philosophy. That’s why you’ve got a weapon, you shoot and then you ask questions. Officers back in battalion headquarters can make an estimate of the situation, evaluate what’s around, but soldiers can’t do that. They’ll probably give that guy a discharge. So adding to my African campaign, we moved to Tunis, just outside of Tunis, and all these prisoners, German prisoners surrendered. They’d run a tour—anyone wanted to go to Carthage, which is just outside of, just a few miles outside of Tunis, and I said, “I could care less.” What the hell does Carthage mean to me, you know? I didn’t realize its significance in ancient history. I could have gone, I was in fifteen or twenty miles of it. And they was going to put us on a truck and take us over there, and I didn’t go. Shows you how smart I was.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you had some regret ...

FRANKLIN: Huh?

PIEHLER: You have some regret now, don't you?

FRANKLIN: Oh yeah. Mm hmm. So then they put us on trains. And typical soldiers—the train would go along on what they called 40 by 8, the old cattle, cow trains: forty men, eight horses. And they bumped like this and we were going to go to Algiers, which is about five hundred miles on the train. So our sport was to kill Arabs that were in the fields. And in that bumpy train and the weapon going like that (gestures up and down) it's hard to kill somebody, you know. So nine times out of ten the guy would escape. He would run, and we'd see him running. But, this is—combat soldiers are crazy. And I'd fire the machine gun and the bullets—you could see the tracers going every place from this bumpy railroad car, you know. We went to Algiers and we stayed in Algiers for a week. We got to rest in Algiers, and there we had fun. We went back at Oran and we took Oran from the—what we called the MBS. The Mediterranean Base Service, the soldiers in khaki. We beat 'em up and we took the town back, and then our division commander got in trouble over it—General Terry Allen ...

ROMEISER: Terry Allen.

FRANKLIN: And General Roosevelt both got in trouble over us taking the town again. But, General Allen told us, "You took it one time," he said, "take it again. I'll come get you out." And he did. (Laughter) But, he got in trouble. Then we moved to—up near Algiers. Well, first we went out near Arzu and took some invasion maneuvers again, and then moved up near Algiers, got on boats and went to Sicily. One battalion went to Malta because they'd had trouble with the motor on their ship. In fact, the Second Battalion went to Malta. We were scheduled—on the invasion of Africa, the First and Third Battalion were the assault battalions and the Second Battalion was the reserve battalion. Invasion of Sicily, the Second and First Battalion were supposed to be the assault battalion and the Third battalion, my battalion, going to be in reserve. Well, the Second Battalion went to Malta because they had boat trouble, engine trouble and the German airplanes attack them. They were too late, so we had to become an assault battalion again. Then on D-Day, we had the same damn luck, we had to do it again. Three times on the assault watch. But we went to Sicily, landed in Gela on the 10th of July [1943]. I don't know if you can understand me with me eating.

And we fought all the way across Sicily. It was extremely difficult. Very, very difficult. The terrain was such that the defense—every position was a perfect defensive position because of the hills and the way the hills were formed. In fact, we had, at one time, three battalions attacking in three different directions. One battalion attacking the east, one battalion attacking west, one battalion attacking north at the same time, and the Germans—all they had to do was put a few men on the top of each hill and hold up a whole company, you know. And I, the main thing I remember about Sicily is my feet rotted, how hot it was, we had no cigarettes. The Eighty-Second Airborne Division, the 504th jumped on top of us, the D plus two, they came over our battle—our ships and our ships started shooting at 'em. So they jumped off airplanes and landed on top of us so we thought they were the Germans so we started shooting at 'em and we tore 'em up. So another—two occasions I've been with the airborne or been associated with them, on both occasions they were completely worthless, you know. They caused more problems than they're worth. The third occasion was of course D-Day.

In D-Day, the reason the Fourth Division, they, the Fourth Division had a 128 landing at Utah. And from there, from Utah Beach to Cherbourg they had 3,000 killed, and why? Because the airborne was scattered out in front of them and our Navy couldn't fire inland because they didn't know where the goddamned airborne was, you know. They didn't know if the Eight-Second landed—took the wrong town. The 506th scattered sixty miles, sixty miles, one regiment. You know, the planes scattered them sixty miles. And the most heroic thing that regiment did—now remember a regiment has 3,200 men, and a hundred and twenty-eight of 'em got into a little town and held it for a couple days until the German SS run 'em out, and then they scattered again. So I have very little respect for the concept of airborne troops. Now, the airborne soldier is a good soldier. It's not his fault. It's just the concept of the whole thing is worthless. The British—the Germans found that out in Crete. Three years before the Germans showed them that airborne ain't worth a damn, you know. And Eisenhower wanted to disband it, but there was political pressure that made him keep them. So anyway, it's not a good—one of my best friends is airborne and we had some heated discussions over that. (Laughter) Then after Sicily, we pulled back to a little town where we initially had landed. You don't want me to go into detail about Sicily do you?

PIEHLER: Oh, no, no. Please do. No, please.

FRANKLIN: I remember in addition to the, my people we hadn't had, again, no bath, and you keep your shoes on all the time and you're constantly moving. And the First Division was going straight through the center of Sicily in the high—the mountainous part. And the British landed over at on the east coast over at ... what's the name of the New York City, in New York ...

ROMEISER: Syracuse?

FRANKLIN: What?

ROMEISER: Uh, Syracuse?

FRANKLIN: Syracuse, yeah. They landed over at Syracuse and went up the coast. And the Forty-Fifth Division and the Third Division went up and took, to take Palermo, and went on the northern coast and we were in the center, and it was extremely difficult. Very, very difficult fighting. And in fact, the division had forty-five percent casualties in Sicily. And forty-five percent casualties, that's quite high. Much of it was pocket fighting—isolated fighting, but I had—one thing I do remember is we were in a defoliated position, and a jeep came up and we could hear it from the rear—riflemen were out in front of us—and this jeep came up and stopped and it was "Rough Rider" General Roosevelt. No helmet, bald headed, no weapon, and he got out of the jeep and he come in—course we all stood up and saluted him and all and said, "Sit down boys. Sit down boys." And he got Jim Bottomley and he and Jim went off to the side and I saw him take a bottle out of his pocket and him and Jim stood over there drinking this bottle. So they come back and General Roosevelt said, "You know what boys," he said, "those Germans can't hurt you," he said, "Don't be afraid. You all go ahead. Do what you got to do." [He] said, "Don't do anything extra. Go do what you got to do," he said, "We'll all live through this war." And then he gave Jim the bottle again and Jim took another big drink. But he didn't offer it to

nobody else. So the next time I saw General Roosevelt, personally saw him, was in Beamister, England. He came to say goodbye—he was going to the Fourth Division. So he came specifically to see Jim Bottomley. He had that bottle again, and we're at the motor pool, doing something in the motor pool, and he come up there and he got Jim, went off and took out that bottle he had, and General Roosevelt came over and he cried. And he said goodbye to us, shook our hands and he just cried. And it was quite emotional. But he was extremely fond of soldiers and we were very fond of him, you know, extremely fond of him.

But we took Ganga. I remember Ganga because the night we took it, the next morning the ammunition dump blew up, and it was right at the foot of the hill—Ganga is—every town in Sicily is on top of a hill. There is no damn valley towns in Sicily, they're all on top of a hill. You've got to go up and up and up. So at Nicosia or Nicosia, the road goes along the side of the mountain and doubles back, and doubles back, and doubles back like that. (Motions with hands) We got a battalion in line. The Germans had run off for the town. All we got to do is get up there and occupy it because they had taken off. They got squeezed out or something. We're walking up this hill and up the valley comes P-51 planes. Of course, we—in Africa we shot at 'em of course, we thought they were ME-109s, but they were P—but they didn't call them P-51's, they called them A-36s. They were an "attack bomber" is what they call them then. Had an old motor in them, they were slow. They come up the valley and thirty-six of 'em did, and then they circled around up the hill got up above us and then twelve of 'em flew off and got in line and come back and attacked us. I mean they just tore us up, and there wasn't a damn thing we could do, you know. We're on the shore—there's no cover, there's a gully here and a bank here. You can get in this gully against the bank. I'd say we had quite a few casualties in the battalion. And nobody shot back at 'em because we knew better than to shoot back at 'em. So after they left I had never been so mad in my life. Laying right in the middle of the street was a 100 lb. bomb with two rings around it. And, you know, they have a fuse on the front. And the—I could see the red fuse and it's laying there, and it wasn't making any noise or anything. But everybody is so angry, so mad that when I got up and I walked out, I kicked that bomb and that son-of-a-bitch started rolling down the street, down the road. And you talking about soldiers getting' out of the road. (Laughter) You should have seen 'em. Well, I didn't think anything about it. I absolutely thought nothing about it, you know, I was just angry. I was so mad I could have killed myself. That's how mad I was.

And then England, half a year later, the First Sergeant said, "Report to Dorchester to Captain so and so." I said, "What for?" He said, "Hell, I don't know. Get in the jeep and go over there." So I went over there, and I went to Captain so and so and they told me where it was and I went in, and this is the truth. He had some papers there. And he said—at this time I'm a young sergeant, you know—he said, "Sergeant," he said, "How are you?" and I said, "Okay." He said, "I want to interview you," and I said, "Yes, Sir." What the hell do you—what do you say? The captain wants something and you just say, "Yes, Sir." So I sat down and then I noticed he had medical corps insignia—didn't have infantry or artillery, he had medical. I said, "Oh hell! What the—maybe they're gonna send me home or something." (Laughter) He said, "Can I ask you some questions?" I said, "Yes, Sir." He said, "What's the most profitable industry in America?" Here I'm a damn soldier, you know, I'm a machine gunner. I can tell him anything he wants to know about the 19, 19 A-1 .30 caliber, but I don't know nothing about private enterprise. And I said, "Sir, I don't know." He said, "You don't know?" And I said, "No, Sir. I don't. Banking, I

guess.” He said, “No, it is advertising.” And I thought, “Well, okay.” This guy is crazy, you know. This man is crazy. And he said, “By the way, do you always kick bombs?” And then I realized why I was there—he thought I was crazy.

PIEHLER: This was really a ...

FRANKLIN: This is really the truth that I said ...

PIEHLER: ... that he thought that this might have been a sign of battle fatigue.

FRANKLIN: Yeah, uh huh. And he said, “Do you always kick bombs?” and I said, “Uh, yes Sir. When my own planes drop ‘em on me, I get so damn mad I could kick ...” and he said, “Don’t you realize that bomb could go off and kill you and hundreds of other soldiers?” I said, “Just between me and you Captain, I don’t give a fuck.” He said, “You mean you’re that angry?” I said, “Every time my own men shoot at me, I get angry.” He said, “Well, don’t you think that’s a little overboard?” and I said, “No Sir.” I said, “All through Africa and Sicily, my own artillery shot at me, my own airplanes shot at me, and I don’t like to be shot at. So I get mad when people shoot at me.” And he said, “Well,” [he] said, “what do you think about this operation ahead of us?” (Laughter) I thought, “I don’t even know where the hell I am, much less what this operation is.” I said, “Sir, whatever it is I’ll go along with it.” He said, “You want to go to France on the invasion?” And I said, “Is that where my company’s going?” And he said, “Well, yes, yes were all slated to go eventually.” I said, “Yes Sir, that’s where I wanna go.” He said, “Okay, that’s all.” So the—somebody in the battalion wrote up a report about me kicking that bomb, and some way it made it up to division headquarters and this captain who had absolutely nothing to do figured I’ll interview that son-of-a-bitch to find out why, you know.

ROMEISER: Now you said—going back to Sicily, you said that you boxed there in Sicily and that may have saved you from going to Italy.

FRANKLIN: Okay. Yeah. When we moved from—when the campaign ended we were right at the bottom of Mount Etna. We’re right at the bottom of the volcano itself. And we had—we’d all take off our shoes, and we stayed there a week or so and everyday the medics and battalion would come and put purple stuff on our feet and we’d set there for a couple hours in the sun and let the sun take care of our feet ‘cause our toes had grown together. We hadn’t taken our shoes off for thirty days. Our feet were rotten, there’s no doubt about it. So that treatment we took—well, the mess sergeant wanted to go buy a cow. So he said, “Ben, you want to go with me?” and I said, “Yeah, I’ll go,” although we had boys in the platoon that spoke Italian. So I says, “Well, maybe we can get Fantana to go with us,” and he said, “Okay,” because Fantana did speak Italian.

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Ben Franklin on November 19, 2004, at his home in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler ...

DENTON: ... Braum Denton ...

ROMEISER: ... John Romeiser.

PIEHLER: And you were just—you were just saying about your ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah. We drove up to this little farmhouse and Fantana, speaking Italian, talked to them. And he made a deal that we would give them something, and I don't even remember what it was, it might have been C-rations we had with us, for a cow. And out of the house come two very attractive, extremely attractive young Italian girls in their middle teens, fourteen, fifteen. Although, it's difficult to say about young Italian girls because they're so well developed that it's—they all look mature even though they're just twelve or thirteen. But, anyway I was very impressed with their beauty and I was shocked just to look at them. And so the deal was made and the guy brought the cow up and one girl held one horn and the other one held the other horn and the man took a knife and a hammer and drove the hammer—the knife down through, behind that hump there were the little, down in and that cow go *Brrrrr Brrrrr*. Those girls were there ... I said, "Damn! I don't want to mess with these girls." (Laughs) They're cruel enough to kill a cow, what would they do with a man if you didn't treat 'em right? But we killed the cow and we cut its throat and then we ... took its guts out of it and we put it on the thing and went back to the company and had steak. Then, after a few days we moved back to Licata, which is close to Gela where we landed. And we're moving along and someplace on the road the MP's stop us. And they want to know why we don't have neckties and helmets on.

PIEHLER: They, this is ...

FRANKLIN: This is true. General Patton had put out the words that all troops will wear neckties and steel helmets, and this is in September in Sicily. And the temperature was probably 120, 130 [degrees] and we got on OD clothing and we're gonna put on a necktie and a steel helmet. And so the MP was unhappy because we didn't have it on and he started taking people's name in the truck. So when he got to me, you know, he says, "What is your name?" I said, "Benjamin Franklin." He said, "Oh! Another Goddamned wise guy, huh?" And he jerked me off. And so they took me to the jail, the Captain's jail again. The Captain—and I showed him my dog tag. I was Benjamin Franklin, but I wouldn't show that sergeant. I waited 'til we got there, you know. (Laughter) And that put me late, but I did catch up with convoy.

We went back to Licata and we pitched tents in a little olive grove, my company, in a little olive grove. And we started taking—going back through training again. You know, rifle training and marksmanship and all this stuff. And to get away from that I joined the boxing team. Well, after ... Kasserine in Tunisia we had so many casualties that we needed replacements. The Third Infantry Division, which was sitting back at Casablanca and had been sitting back at Casablanca the whole war, they were delegated by the responsibility of sending replacements to the First Infantry Division. So the Fifteenth Infantry of the Third Division sent replacements to the Sixteenth Infantry. So when we got replacements there in ... after Kasserine from the Fifteenth Infantry. Well, now we're in Licata in Sicily and the Third Division is getting the hell beat out of it in Italy. Now, it's our time to furnish them replacements and they picked me because of this MP incident as one of the guys to go. Well I'm on the boxing team. I told Gus, the captain of the boxing team, to see what he could do. So a lot of politics in the First Infantry Division. So

he used all his politics but it didn't work. (Laughter) But, he did get me permission to go see Colonel Taylor, Colonel George Taylor. So I went to see Colonel Taylor and I said, "Sir, I'm on this roster to go to the Third Division." He said, "Well, why shouldn't you go?" and I said, "Sir, I love this regiment. This is the only regiment I've ever been in." He said, "You what?" (Laughter) I said, "I love this regiment." He said, "Goddamnit, your actions don't indicate it!" (Laughter) "Gettin' smart with MP's, and gettin' drunk, and gettin' in trouble, and shootin' at people." And I said, "Well, sir I do the best I can do, but I don't wanna leave the regiment." He said, "Get the hell out of here. I'll think about it." So I left, and they didn't send me. Obviously, that made an impression on him. (Laughter) So I stayed with the regiment. Otherwise, I would have been with the Third Division in Italy, probably not a machine gunner, probably with a rifle company and getting killed so it worked out pretty good, and that's the incident you're talking about.

Then we, they took us up to Messina. And we loaded on a boat coming out of India. It was called the HMS *Maloja*. And again, the officers up on A deck—and there was a major on there who had fought with the British Sixth Indian Division all through Africa. And he had commanded a Gurkha Battalion, a battalion of the Gurkhas, and they're very famous warriors in the British Army. So he gave us a lecture on it, and he had married an Indian woman. Now, he's an officer, a gentleman-type officer, which served in India for years and years, blonde, blue eyed, and he married an Indian woman, dark and ... they had the most gorgeous girl you've ever seen—sixteen-year-old daughter with blonde hair, big brown eyes, dark ... absolutely a striking beauty. And, of course, troops were not allowed above D deck.

PIEHLER: She was on the war—his daughter was on the war ...

FRANKLIN: She was on the ship.

PIEHLER: She was on the ship?

FRANKLIN: The wife ... the husband, the wife, and the daughter were going back to England.

PIEHLER: That never happens on the American ...

FRANKLIN: Oh, no well, on the British Army it does.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but in American ...

FRANKLIN: In the American Army it doesn't, no. But, they ...

PIEHLER: They were ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah. In fact, there were some old British sergeants and sergeant majors who were taking their wives with them from India on the same boat, on the [HMS] *Maloja*. And they were going back for re-assignment to someplace. He had been in India for years and fought through Africa with the Sixth Indian Division. By the way, the Victoria Cross, which is the

highest decoration in the British Army, the Sixth Indian Division has more Victoria Crosses than the entire English Army combined.

ROMEISER: Whew.

FRANKLIN: That's how brave they are, very courageous. Anyway, we get on the *Maloja* and every day she would come up—beautiful weather—everyday she would come out and stand against the railing, and the wind blowing the dress through her legs, and beautiful hair and 18,000, not 18,000, but a whole regiment of infantry were in love with her and dreaming about her. (Laughter) Officers up walking around, you know, smoking and all they do—we hated the damned officers there. They could get close ... some of them even spoke to her, you know. We couldn't. She was two decks above us. We could see her, but we can't do anything ... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So was she ... she and the mother were the only ...

FRANKLIN: Oh yes. Her and the mother and some other old English ladies.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but this is the only young woman on the ...

FRANKLIN: Yes, she's the only young woman. Of course they had staterooms up on the—the [HMS] *Maloja* was quite a big ship it had a whole regiment on it. So we landed in Liverpool and then ... because of my interest in—and this is one of those funny things in the Army—because I had demonstrated already some ability at firing indirect fire with a machine gun, they attached me to Cannon Company to their fire direction section to further my education along this line. For the next seven months I'm in Cannon Company over at a place called Beamister. Now, my battalion is down at a place near Bradport, my M Company, but I'm up here in Beamister, you know. Little village, quiet, nobody, just one company in the town. Really a nice good setup, and I enjoyed it. And there's a boy named Grimes, Staff Sergeant named Grimes, very, very intelligent boy who absolutely was amazing with the aiming circle and the quadrant and elevation, and he and I worked together, until I became very proficient. I could lay in the battery of Cannon Company, on the needles, he would let me do it sometime. So I become pretty good, course I've forgotten a lot of it now, I couldn't do it now, but then I could. One problem we had when I got with Cannon Company—and this is just a little side thing—over on a firing problem one day and the—I had always dealt with the target gun line. Your gun is here, the target is here, there's a straight line in between. So when you deal with artillery, the target gun line may be here, and your observation post maybe from here. So when ...

PIEHLER: Off to the side ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah. When you look at the target, short to you, or left to you is short for this. And you've gotta figure this out all by map, and it requires good mathematical skills, which I did not have. Well, we're in one problem one time, at a place called Sonnybridge in Wales, and Grimes has me lay the battery in and then—we had a man named Brown was a company commander and he said, "Franklin, fire the battery." So I fired seventeen rounds at a church. We ain't found one damn round yet. We don't know where—of course, they knew where they

were going. But, I never found one round because I'm over here, the target's there, and the guns are here, you see. (Gestures a triangle position) And I don't have the education to figure out mathematically the declination, the difference between all, So he said, "Franklin, get the hell out of here. Let Grimes fire." So Grimes took over. But I enjoyed that tour there in Bemister. Then—within ...

ROMEISER: Before you leave there, isn't that where you had your first romance of the, real serious romance of the war?

FRANKLIN: The what?

ROMEISER: The lady, the lady that you met there at the dances.

FRANKLIN: Nearby was a town called Crewkerne. By now I'm eighteen years old. I've been fighting for two years, never been in bed with a woman. I've seen women that I'd like to get in bed with ...

PIEHLER: But, didn't you have an incident in Sicily?

FRANKLIN: Hmm?

PIEHLER: Didn't you have an incident in Sicily?

FRANKLIN: Well, I had an incident, but it was not a romantic type incident.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. (Laughs)

FRANKLIN: It was more of a, "I gave you this and you give me that." (Laughter) I had never had a real romantic ... connection with a woman. All the boys had girls except me, I didn't have a girlfriend. So the little town next to us, which was about six miles away, was named Crewkerne. And they had a defense factory over at Crewkerne and 18,000 young girls worked in that defense factory. So all of us said, "Well we can go over there and get a girl. Even as ugly as you are Ben, you can get a girl over there." (Laughter) So I went over and I met this young lady, and it was quite strange. It ... in fact, I was so impressed with her, that I got to thinking, perhaps I was a lady's man. They had a big gymnasium, and the band would play here and the girls would sit on one side and the boys would sit on the other side. And we would come to dance the boys would go across and ask the girl to dance, and the girls would get and they'd go dancing. And when the boys didn't dance with the girls, the girls would dance with each other. You know, they didn't—this was normal in the war. So I saw this one very attractive girl, and I saw two different people ask her to dance and she didn't dance. So one of the guys said, "Ben, you go try." And I said, "Oh, there's no use in me trying to do that. She's ..." He said, "Aw, go ahead! We dare you!" You know, I said, "Okay." And I tell you it took more courage for me to go up over there to ask that girl to dance than it did for me to fire a machine gun on the frontline. I absolutely was quivering when I walked over. (Laughter) And I walked over and I said—she said, "Sure." She just stood up and we started dancing.

So for seven months we were—one, sometimes two nights a week together. Friday, I'd go over and sometimes on Saturday. And then every time I would leave—they'd already told us we were the assault regiment for D-Day and we would be moving at their discretion. So every time I would leave I would say goodbye forever, you know, this is the end. And she—her father was a physician in the Midlands and she had graduated from high school and immediately got drafted into the British labor force. They had a choice, they could go to labor force or they could go into the, what they call the ATS [Auxiliary Territorial Service], which by the way Queen Elizabeth went into the ATS. [George W.] Bush's two daughters haven't gone into the Army. Now, could you think what a great fighting squad we would have in Iraq if we had Bush's two daughters and Jeb Bush's, both of his daughters are free to go, and ... Vice-President Cheney's lesbian daughter to keep them sexually active while they're on the frontlines—can you imagine that combination? I would volunteer to lead that squad all through Iraq. (Laughter) But the Queen Elizabeth had joined.

PIEHLER: Now, did you know at the time that Princess Elizabeth was in the ATS?

FRANKLIN: Yes, it was ...

PIEHLER: It was widely ...

FRANKLIN: It was very popular. Everybody—when she enlisted, everybody thought it was their obligation to join in the war, and this girl did. And she told me from the beginning, she definitely did not want to get pregnant and have an American kid and ruin her life and blah blah, and I agreed with her. But we would go up to a certain point—I'll tell you, I walked home with a damn stone ache that six miles, I'll tell you. (Laughter) Absolutely ... absolutely miserable. Course, I cussed her, I hated her sometimes more than I did the Germans. (Laughter) But, the next Friday I would go back to see her. When I left it was goodbye. I never saw her again.

PIEHLER: You didn't try—you didn't plan to write.

FRANKLIN: No, I don't ...

ROMEISER: But, you were back in that town. You've been back ...

FRANKLIN: I've been back to that town ...

ROMEISER: ... to... you've not looked her up?

FRANKLIN: Well, she wasn't from there, she was from the Midlands.

ROMEISER: That's true.

FRANKLIN: See?

ROMEISER: That's true.

FRANKLIN: She was just working there. But Margaret—the lady there in that town, her and Mark got together and they were gonna find out if they could find her and I wouldn't let them. I told them—I wouldn't give them her name. Her name was Marie Daily, was her name, but I didn't tell either one of them. Anyway that was my romance. Then we moved to a marshland, but we had a certain maneuver we—from company headquarters to the platoons, we had EE-8 telephones. Two rings on the EE-8 telephone meant don't answer the phone, get your equipment, get out of town to the assembly area, and we'll tell you what to do when you get there. And if the police catch you it costs you twenty-five dollars. (Laughter) So we had to do it very quietly, very easy. And one night—of course we practiced that forty or fifty times, I'm sure, and one night it did it and went ... next thing I know, I'm on a damn truck moving to the south of England. (Laughter) We put in marshland areas and there I went back to M Company out there. And Cannon Company I did something else; I don't know what all they did. And I went back to M Company and again they—in M Company they broke us up into forty men assault teams consisting of a bangalore torpedo team, a machine gun team, a target marking team, a rifle team, an assault team, and a maneuvering element. So we practiced that thirty-nine deal and that's what we're supposed to do in Omaha. But the—it didn't work, we got sunk. So now I'm on Omaha beach—I got on a boat. Got on a boat, I go to France, get on a little assault boat at ... in the dark and we had to lower machine guns into the boat by rope, then we had to climb down the net to get in and the boat coming up and down, ten feet down and ten feet up, which is twenty feet, you know, and it's dark and you still gotta time when to step off the net onto this boat. You got to get it at this height. You get it when the boats falling, well you're falling too, you know. Well, we did that, then we circled around until we got organized, and by daylight we lined up and started going in. And, of course, the big battleships started firing and the cruisers and everything. And we got in and it was ... we either hit a mine or a shell hit us, I don't know which one. We had to swim in to shore. Got behind a cliff where the Germans couldn't shoot me, I finally made it to that cliff. And then later, when the two destroyers came into the shore and they German silenced—quit firing. At first, they didn't quit firing, they continued firing and some brave Americans went up with purple smoke grenades and threw the grenade at the target to let the ships know where it was and once the two boats started shooting, things quieted down. And then we organized and went up the draw and went up on top of the hill and went down to that little town to left [Port En Bessin, France], down to there.

ROMEISER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: That—we were so decimated, the regiment was, the ... if you think in a battalion of infantry you had about nine hundred and forty men and we had two battalions that were in the assault wave and the assault wave is the one who takes the blunt of the casualties, the majority of them. And we had 972 in the first couple hours, first morning of D-Day. So my battalion was decimated, the Second Battalion was decimated, and the First Battalion, which was the reserve battalion, it was cut up pretty bad, too. But it got cut up trying to take Colleyville and the land up on top. Because, we had—my battalion with Captain Richmond under him—he became battalion commander that day because our battalion commander got wounded, and Captain Richmond became battalion commander, but our battalion consisted of just a few hundred troops. We didn't have a full battalion. But he led us ... on the Twenty-Sixth Infantry and the Eighteenth Infantry came in and we were more or less in a reserve. Uh, all the way to Chaumont [France]. We were the reserve regiment because we had been cut pretty well to pieces, and that

was fortunate for me because I didn't have to go on the patrols and—then we started getting replacements. We stayed at Chaumont for about a month. And it was the—we were the most, we had deepest penetration of any allied unit on D-Day. We were stick out about ten miles by ourself. The British to our left could not keep up with us and the Second Division to our right could not keep up with us, because the First Division had so much experience that we knew the best time to fight is at night. We had learned that in Africa. We had fought all through Africa at night, we fought all through Sicily at night, and the normal attack time for the First Infantry Division is 0300, three o'clock in the morning. You get to the assembly point and the LD and in order to attack at 0300. And So because we used the benefit of darkness the whole war, we become much more proficient with this method of fighting, and the Germans, of course, knew how good we were and they always put their best in front of us. But in spite of that, we still managed to ... penetrate their lines and take our objectives and get to Chaumont. When we got to Chaumont, what—Chaumont is a, cuts the main road from Saint Lo to Caen. Chaumont cuts it, and it's a hilltop. Well by now my regiment is getting replacements and we're getting pretty well back in shape, and I was moved, our—Third Battalion was moved onto a little place called Vierville.

ROMEISER: Vierville, which we, we visited.

FRANKLIN: Yeah.

ROMEISER: And you told about how terrible the fighting was there.

FRANKLIN: We stayed down there and the German paratroopers, the Third German parachute division continually tried to break through us to cut, liberate—free that road that led to Caen, so they could get replacements to Caen. So we fought quite bitterly there for maybe a month. Then we were relieved, we were relieved by the Fifth Division, and all the booby traps that I left out in front of my section—I didn't tell the Fifth Division about it. I hope that nobody stepped on 'em. Uh, but we become very good—you take a grenade, and you take a piece of tape and tie that grenade around a tree and you take the pin and pull the pin out, and you bend the pin where it's back together and you just barely slip it in, just enough to hold it. Tie a string to it and take it over and tie it to a tree. And anybody walk along and hit that string, pulls that pin, the grenade goes off and kills 'em. It's was that simple. We were very good at that.

PIEHLER: And this isn't something in the manual.

FRANKLIN: Huh?

PIEHLER: This is something you improvised.

FRANKLIN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah. This isn't something you ...

FRANKLIN: No. It's just something you learn and you do. So we did it and our whole front was covered with those because this is the best way to avoid getting surprised, you know. If somebody approaches you, they trip on one of those tripwires, off they go.

PIEHLER: Who came up with the idea first?

FRANKLIN: I don't know. It just ...

PIEHLER: ... just ...

FRANKLIN: It just spread through the division.

PIEHLER: It just ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah, just like me, I learned in Africa—that we attacked a position and took it. And in front of a German machine gun—normally when a machine gun fires, it kicks up dust. So you don't see the firing because they use smokeless powder. Well, we use smokeless powder, too, but you can see that dust kick up. So you can spot where that gun is. Well, in front of that gun was a towel that was wet. And I thought, “Well, them sons-of-bitches. That's how—that's why they're so good,” you know. So from then on, we had a 30 caliber 19-19 A1 machine gun, it's water-cooled and you have a jacket that is full of water. My gun had two jackets: one for water for the machine gun, and one for the water for a towel. So we got us ... I took it and I wetted that towel and I laid it down in front of the gun. Then when you fire the gun, they can't see where you're firing from, see? So you live longer and you learn little tricks like this. The longer you're on the frontline, the better you become, the more efficient you become, and the more concerned you are about self-preservation. Yeah. Now, you take an elite unit ... like the—one of the first airborne who never been on the frontline, stayed in England for a year drawing fifty dollars a month ... hazardous duty pay, and us in Africa and Sicily fighting and not drawing a damn penny for hazardous duty. They were elite, but nobody called us elite, you know. And they'd never been on the frontline. But Ambrose, Ambrose called 'em elite. Yeah.

ROMEISER: Yeah. There's a lot of exaggeration there with Ambrose. Now, there's that picture of you that was in the paper a few years ago that Joe Howell did of you a day or so before your D-Day departure, the invasion, and you're looking real nervous and worried. What were your thoughts? I mean, you had already been to North Africa and Sicily, and here you still had yet another ... landing to make. I mean, how did—did you think this was it? Your number was up or ... I mean ...

FRANKLIN: I had just adapted the philosophy. That it would be impossible to make it, you know. First, even in M Company ... when I joined M Company and McCarthy was a Corporal in the mortar platoon. He's now First Lieutenant executive officer. Uh, the officers we've already lost eight or ten officers, you know. Uh, our platoon sergeant, he got wounded in Africa, he got wounded in Sicily, and pretty bad wounds, too. But he insisted on coming back, see? So we know he's not gonna make it. And you know, eventually your numbers gonna come up. And it's hard for me to accept this that ... but when I went to see that captain, that psychiatrist, and he

said, “Do you want to go with your unit to France?” I figured well, this is gonna be one of those testing times, you know.

ROMEISER: Right.

FRANKLIN: Uh, so I might as well accept the fact that things aren’t going to go good. I might as well accept that.

ROMEISER: You had an option not to go?

FRANKLIN: Hmm?

ROMEISER: You could have stayed?

FRANKLIN: If I’d had an option, I still would have gone. I would not have left because what would I have done? You know, you’re ... I had Dickerson, my best friend ...

ROMEISER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: ... Fantana was still alive, Fitzgerald was alive, I was alive, and we could talk to each other occasionally, although we weren’t that close—Dickerson and I were. Uh, I had this girl in Crewkerne, and I’m—and when that picture was made ... I could have been thinking about her, too because I was, well, very emotionally attached to her. She was a lovely girl, very, very English, very reserved. Uh, probably ended up with the kind that ends up as an official wife, you know, that hollers at you ... and stuff. (Laughter) At the time, she’s vibrant and attractive and I could just imagine having sex with her, you know. It would have been, really fantastic, but she had this saying and I’ll never forget it, she said, “You’re making me uncomfortable.” But you know, men are born with an impulse, with a desire to have two hands explore the female anatomy. (Laughter) And the moment I would start exploring, she enjoyed it and I could tell she enjoyed it until a certain point and then she would say, “You’re making me uncomfortable.” And that was time too back off. And so I could have been thinking about that ... in any case the picture turned out pretty good. And I still don’t know who made it.

ROMEISER: Really?

FRANKLIN: I have no idea. Uh, Ed Parsons sent it to me, but Ed Parsons wasn’t with me.

ROMEISER: Ah.

FRANKLIN: Mm hmm.

ROMEISER: Have you seen that picture?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

DENTON: Oh, it’s great.

ROMEISER: Yeah.

FRAKLIN: I think I got it—you can cut that thing now ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. Yeah.

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: You were just saying, while we took a break that you did have that feeling of invincibility, initially.

FRANKLIN: Oh yes.

PIEHLER: But then—and then as you just were saying, when people you knew had similar feelings of invincibility were dying, that ...

FRANKLIN: The problem with staying with the same unit is that you get to know too many people. And this—all young people have this invincible feeling that nothing can happen to him—they, that it's going to happen to Pete, or Joe, or John. And then you stay in the same unit and you stay in a combat situation after some while ... eventually Carl, and Pete, and Joe, something does happen to them and you realize, "Well I am not invincible, it's gonna happen to me." In fact, Dickerson and I—he had the Second Section, I had the First Section, we had a discussion one time about it and he asked me—and I knew Dickerson's family, I had visited his family in Long Island. And he was a very good person. And he said, "Do you think we are going to make it?" Just a casual remark. And I thought, well, you know, how many hills are there between here and Berlin, Germany? And how many hills between here and Oran, Africa? Now, we've gone over so damn many hills, we've taken so many little towns, eventually some town or some hill is gonna be our resting place. I can't see us making it. And Dickerson said, "Well, I don't know. I've got the feeling I'm gonna make it." And I said, "Well, I wish I had that feeling." Because by then, after Normandy, particularly after the massive bomb attack at Saint Lo, this may have done more damage to my war attitude than anything because we are lined up getting ready to attack and we have tanks. We're gonna be on tanks, Third Armored Division.

See, after we left our holding position over where the Fifth Division replaced us and we moved over to Saint Lo, we moved there to lead or break through the Saint Lo ... defenses and break out of Normandy. And, of course, the most experienced division they had was the First Division and it is stuck way up here on the left flank. So they pulled us off of there and brought us over where we can be part of this break through. And from general's point of view, I can understand this. From a sergeant's point of view, I think it is all bullshit because it entailed me breaking through. But anyway, we get ready to break through and we got tanks from the Third Division and my particular unit had light tanks. Little ... we call 'em Stuart tanks after [General] Jeb Stuart. We called 'em Stuart tanks because they were so quick. They were very fast. But then we had little 37mm guns, those are worthless. So we're up on a hill getting ready to break through Saint Lo, and I don't remember the name of the little town [of] our initial objective, but 3,000 airplanes

were supposed to come over and bomb along in front of us; 3,000 fighter-bombers, medium bombers, and heavy bombers. Now, that's a lot of damned airplanes, and that's a lot of bombs.

And I know from experience that pilots, particularly pilots that are married, don't like to come down too close to ground. (Laughter) They like to stay up high and bomb the smoke from another bomber's—where the smoke is. They like to drop their bomb there. So the planes come across and it's supposed to parallel the frontlines. Well, of course the wind was coming from the east and the smoke from previous bombers, the smoke started coming over us, and they started dropping bombs on us, our own airplanes, again, you know. I used to have ... a sergeant that had this method of describing everything. He said, "There's three very dangerous things in the American Army: a new second lieutenant, your own artillery, and a dose of bullheaded clap." Said those are the three most dangerous things in the American Army, and all three of 'em will eventually get you, and they do. (Laughter) What happened was the bombers came and they—it took all day for them to bomb, and about two o'clock in the afternoon they started dropping on us and they were so close that you could not lay down on the ground. Well, I held on to a tank and the tank, every time the bombs would land, and the smoke's covering it. The Thirtieth Division took a lot of casualties, the First Division took some casualties, not as bad as the Thirtieth, but General McNair was killed there because of that. Well, there again, we were upset about that. Any time your own people screw up you're upset. But what the hell—they were the Air Corps. What should the riflemen do about the Air Corps?

PIEHLER: When did you, when did you learn that McNair was killed? How quickly ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah, we learned it very quickly. Yeah. Yeah.

PIEHLER: Within a day ...

FRANKLIN: Oh yeah. Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: It spread that quickly across the line?

FRANKLIN: Oh yeah. We knew it before the attack started that Thirtieth Division had hundreds of casualties, First Division had some casualties, they didn't say how many and that General McNair was one of them. He was a Lieutenant General.

PIEHLER: Yeah, no, I mean, it ...

FRANKLIN: There aren't many Lieutenant Generals that are in the field, yeah.

PIEHLER: (Laughs) No, I mean. Well, I mean the irony with him was that he was at the Army Ground Command in the states and he was sort of coming up for, to observe and ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah. Mm hmm. We had ... one Colonel Rose of the Third Armored Division, extremely aggressive, a good division commander, he [was] always on the frontline. He really was a frontline General. But eventually he got killed, you know. He got captured and he reached to get his pistol to surrender his pistol and the German sergeant saw him pull the pistol

and shot him. Well, that's what sergeants are supposed to do. Son-of-a-bitch pulls a pistol, you kill 'em. (Laughs) That's what you do, you know. I wish I was a defense attorney for this Marine that they're gonna try.

ROMEISER: That—by the way, there's a Don Whitehead story about that thing that you described.

FRANKLIN: Yup.

ROMEISER: The General being killed as he turned in his arms.

FRANKLIN: There is?

ROMEISER: Yeah. One of the stories in the *Volume* about that.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

ROMEISER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: And then after Saint Lo ... we eventually we down through Mortain [France], and we got hit real hard with tanks. Right where the Normandy Peninsula and the Brittany Peninsula are together, there is a town called Mortain there, and the Germans counter-attacked with the intent of cutting us in two, separating the troops that had gone into Brittany from the troops that were trying to come out of Normandy. And we were in the middle of that—again the First and Thirtieth Division was right in the middle of that. And we had ... anytime—it's amazing, anytime the Germans really made a concerted effort to bloody your nose, they used tanks, always. And when I think back, every time my regiment's got a good bloody nose it was because of tanks, yeah. And we got our nose bloodied there ... but not too bad, again, not too bad, not like D-Day, it wasn't that devastating. Then when we went up and closed the Falaise Gap, which was ... from my part we did very little. I fired an indirect fire machine gun into an unknown area. I had no idea what happened, I don't know what—I maybe killed some cows, I don't know. (Laughter) Then we went to Paris and my regiment went around the south of Paris and went around to the east in case the Germans counterattacked and tried to retake Paris. We pulled the old Oran operation of going around and facing to east with our back toward Paris, and along in the end of August when Paris was being liberated, I was fortunate enough to have a truck come by when I had a case of C-rations on my shoulder and I jumped aboard the truck and went into Paris. There is no worth, and I have tried, I have tried, to describe the liberation of Paris. No human being that was not there can ever comprehend the wildness of the occasion. Sexually, emotionally, gratefuly, if there is such a word, I don't know if there is such a word as that. But there was nothing the French people would not or did not do to show their appreciation. And, of course, the French being the best in the world at sex—using the weapon as a good bouquet of flowers. (Laughs) I left Paris after eight days without a weapon, I sold my weapon. (Laughter) Without a ...

PIEHLER: I'd have to say that was one of the most startling things you've told me 'cause I was aware of black market activity, I've heard that before, but you're the first vet to confess that they sold their weapon. So I—it has left an impression on me. (Laughter)

FRANKLIN: The French were weapon crazy. They wanted weapons, you know. And So after a few days we didn't have any wine, we didn't have any food, didn't have nothing. So I said take my weapon and sell it. And she said the girl and the other girl took Dickerson's weapon, hell, they come back with loads of chow and food. We're good—the only problem was we couldn't get cigarettes. And that's the one thing that got us in trouble was when we went out to get cigarettes. (Laughter) We knew the girls couldn't get it. So Dickerson and I went out to get cigarettes. That's when they caught us. Anyway, we caught the regiment up at Soissons. And the thing about Soissons is my regiment liberated Soissons in World War I, and we liberated Soissons in World War II. So again there was a big reception for the regiment, but my reception was by the battalion commander and it was not so good. (Laughter) He raised hell, I tell you. He threatened to shoot us and then ... it was it. He got us for desertion in the face of the enemy and everything. And he busted us to private, but we had to do the same job. We were still section sergeants.

PIEHLER: Even though now you were—private ...

FRANKLIN: Well, then a company commander could bust you or promote you. The battalion commander could say, "You're busted!" and that's it. Or, a company commander or battalion commander say, "Okay, you're a corporal or a sergeant," you know.

PIEHLER: How long did it take you to get back your rank?

FRANKLIN: How did I get it back?

PIEHLER: Yeah. How long was it?

ROMEISER: How long?

FRANKLIN: I think it was in the Hurtgen Forest.

ROMEISER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: No, no it wasn't in the Hurtgen Forest.

ROMEISER: Mons, Belgium maybe?

FRANKLIN: It was, yeah, yeah. The Battle of the Ruhr, the Ruhr Valley.

PIEHLER: Oh, that long?

FRANKLIN: Yeah. Yeah.

PIEHLER: Before you went into ...

FRANKLIN: Now I'm still a section sergeant ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. Yeah.

FRANKLIN: I still had the First Section and I was still firing indirect fire, Jim was still there to protect me.

ROMEISER: Ben could you—one of the things you've talked about over the years with the Normandy students is you're obviously a self-taught person. You had, you know, no, not much formal education.

FRANKLIN: Mm hmm.

ROMEISER: But, you know, when you're in the military, a lot of your time is just waiting. You're not doing anything really. And that's when you started reading.

FRANKLIN: Yes.

ROMEISER: You became an omnivorous reader.

FRANKLIN: Yes.

ROMEISER: And can you tell us about that experience—how you got your books, what kinds of books you read, what the impact of those books were on you?

FRANKLIN: Well, there was two ways of getting books. One, when we were in Africa they had what they—the USO—the show people also had a little mobile library and if someone got a book, they would pass it through a whole platoon, and a whole platoon would read the same book. This is mainly how I got them until my trip back to England, and we they got to England I went and bought my own books. I went to London and I went to a bookstore and I remember this, very distinctly I remember this, and this isn't even worth recording ...

PIEHLER: Oh, no, no, it is. 'Cause actually a historian has just written about this.

FRANKLIN: When I went to the bookstore, a little bookstore in London, and I went and I remember the man as though it was yesterday. He's a typical little Englishman, small of stature with a kind of bald head and a necktie and a tweed jacket and everything, and his pipe in his mouth and I asked him if, I said, "Sir, do you have anything here by D.H. Lawrence?" And he said, "Oh, so you like D.H. Lawrence?" and I said, "Yes, sir, I do." He said, "I bet you like *Lady Chatterley's Lover*." (Laughter) And I said, "That's what I want." I said, "I've heard a lot about it." He said, "All you young people like *Lady Chatterley's Lover*." (Laughter) Did you know it was ... what did he call it? It was not permitted in the United States.

PIEHLER: Banned. Banned.

FRANKLIN: Yeah. I said, “Yes, sir, I know. That’s why I haven’t read it.” So he says, “I tell you what. If you really like D.H. Lawrence, I will get you something that you will always remember.” And I said, “I really like it sir. What is it?” He said, “Come back in a couple hours and I’ll have something for you.” I said, “Well, I have no place to go. Can I just stay here and look at your books?” He said, “Sure! Go ahead.” So he went away and left me in the little bookstore. Of course, he had a little young woman there too, you know. And, but I wasn’t interested in her, I was really interested in books. And he come back and he had *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, *All Things Flesh*, and what was the other one?

ROMEISER: Did he have Somerset Maugham did he have that?

FRANKLIN: No, he didn’t have Somerset Maugham. I didn’t get it on that trip, I got that Somerset Maugham. But anyway that’s when I started collecting books myself. Course, I would carry ‘em in my pack. Instead of carrying C-rations or something, I’d carry a book. And I become an incessant reader, and I tell you why I did. Number one, there was a, and there is still a feeling of inferiority about me. I’ve always, always had it. But the feeling has never been a physical feeling, it’s been an emotional feeling. One, because of lack of education, I was made sharply aware of this when I joined the Army and I was sleeping next to a man, perhaps, who had a high school education or he might have gone to a year of college, or an officer who had gone to college or someone with a master’s degree, you know, and I met those people in there. And So I’ve always been aware that because of my education, there is something lacking with my whole development. Not the physical, because physically I could whip their ass, but mentally I couldn’t play in the same ballpark, see? So I started reading one, to educate myself, but then I got interested in the stories that I was reading, you know. And then I realized that there’s more to be found in a book than there is to be found in a bar. If I had my choice, I’d rather read a good book as to go to a bar and have a drink. And if I can stay home and read a good book and have a drink, then I am killing two birds with one stone, see? (Laughter) But you can travel the world by reading—particularly if you read if you read Somerset Maugham or Fitzgerald or my favorite man, D.H. Lawrence. And in reading D.H. Lawrence I discovered one thing, he was exactly as I was. He started out in an inferior position due to the English caste system and his writing ...

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

FRANKLIN: ... So this developed with me and, you know, I’m facetious in some things. And every opportunity I have to demonstrate my intellectual superiority I take it, you know. And I do this because I’m facetious. And to be facetious is not a nice thing. You understand that, son. But, we’ve got to have some weapon that propels us along, that motivates us to do something. So I become—and also I could sit in a hole and read a book, and artillery would come and it wouldn’t bother. It really didn’t, I was not bothered one bit. (Laughs) In fact, this one fellow, he pretended that he was directing German artillery, he said, “Franz, go left ten meters. Put one in Ben’s hole.” (Laughter) You know, and I’d still read and I’d laugh at him. But all during the war I’d read and Dickerson would read, too. We ...

PIEHLER: And some—D.H. Lawrence really did, as they would say, spoke to you. You really could understand—he was saying something that really related to your life.

FRANKLIN: Yes, mm hmm. You mean D.H. Lawrence?

ROMEISER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: Yes, and you find this when you read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, that him ... he had gone to France as a fighter and—not in the book but ...

PIEHLER: Right.

FRANKLIN: ... and because of the death rate, he was somewhat smarter than some of the people, they made him an officer. And when the war was over they kicked him out because he was not good enough to be an English officer.

ROMEISER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: Not in their caste system. So he went and got a job as a gardener, working as a humble gardener on an estate. And he made Lady Chatterley give him blowjobs. That's the way to strike back at the superior people, is to degrade them through the use of sexually, the use of the women. A black man who has been held down in the south, he wants to screw a white woman because that's the only way that he could get back at the superior white male. We put ourselves—so this is his method of intellectually at striking back at the power system and the caste system of England. Well, I adapted that philosophy. I said, "I may not be educated enough, but I can become more intelligent." And this is why I learned indirect fire, this is why I learned books and music and art and ... I became—when I met my wife, she really thought I was a brilliant son-of-a-bitch. (Laughter) She thought I was a smart boy. (Laughter) She had no idea how dumb I was.

PIEHLER: Well your one observation you make now is because a few years earlier when you were in North Africa, it didn't even dawn on you that you should go to Carthage when you had the ...

FRANKLIN: No, no. No.

PIEHLER: Whereas ...

FRANKLIN: Because I had never read Greek mythology, see?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: I had never read anything about Rome, the Romans and ... I had only heard about that later, but when I heard about it and realized that here I am—I was only fifteen miles from Carthage and I didn't go to it, you know. Then I had a regret, but this is not only in that incident. There's been many incidents where I realized I could have took advantage of a particular thing

and didn't. For example, it took me a second trip to England before I ever went to the ... Stonehenge. But, the first time I was in England I was within ten miles of Stonehenge, see? (Laughter) But I didn't go, I had no knowledge of Stonehenge, and after—I must have read about it in Africa or Sicily when I came back to England one of the first things I did was go to Stonehenge, you know.

PIEHLER: During World War II, did you take any Army correspondence courses?

FRANKLIN: In the war?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: No.

PIEHLER: No.

FANKLIN: No. No. Mm hmm. After the war ... and then I cheated. I had an honor guard platoon. I was the drill sergeant of an honor guard platoon, and I was General Clay's personal guard for all military functions. You know, where the Russian had a personal guard and he was the allied high general—the British had a sergeant. So I worked with him at the allied control authority building. Well, we—my platoon about once a week had to pull guard at that allied control authority building which more of a ceremonial guard than a security guard. So I wrote a letter to the University of Maryland. And asked them about their correspondence courses because it was being published in the army for young officers who wanted to compete in a, what they called a competitive tour. And I'll have to explain that to you. As a sergeant in the war, if I would have become a lieutenant, took a commission, at the end of the war they would have kicked me back to sergeant unless I would take a competitive tour. That means that I would increase my education and that I would stay a lieutenant and compete with all the other lieutenants for maybe two or three slots, and they called it competitive tour. So the University of Maryland came out with a program where they would give credits to these young officers who wished to participate in a competitive tour. So I asked them about it and they sent me the stuff, the first semester course. And, of course, in mathematics I'm stupid, you know, and I'm good in English, and I'm good in pattern analysis and some psychology, but I'm stupid in mathematics. So we'd all get together, fifteen or twenty of us in the guard room and say, "Okay the problem is this," and read the problem and everybody would sit and figure it out and they'd say, "Oh! The answer!" And I'd take the most answers they'd come up with and I'd put that answer down and send it back to Maryland and they'd send me another one. But, I gave up because I didn't feel right cheating, you know. For what purpose? I had no desire to ... get a formal education, because I was contented with what I had. There becomes a certain stage in a young man's life when he's sexually satisfied that his ambition no longer goes wild. (Laughter) He's contented to stay at that level in his life and enjoy the physical aspect of life. And, of course, I enjoyed ... I enjoyed many things in Berlin. Berlin's a fine city, but in the end I thought—here's a young boy from Knoxville, Tennessee who didn't finish high school, who has had the privilege of being in Oran, Algiers ... Tunis, I have been to Sicily, all of Sicily, and I've been in London, I have been in Glasgow, I've been in ... Edinburgh, I've traveled over the world. I've been in Paris, I've been in Budapest, I've been in Warsaw, I've been in Rome, I've seen all of this, and I've

screwed women in almost every place there, you know. (Laughs) So I've had that ... feeling that in ... the education of life, that I was quite educated. I had that feeling.

PIEHLER: And you thought that while you were in Berlin?

FRANKLIN: Yeah. Yeah.

PIEHLER: And that ...

FRANKLIN: In fact, when I got to be twenty-two, twenty-three years old at that time in my life, I thought that ... due to your experience, you're fairly well-educated. Yeah. So I didn't think that I needed to ... go ahead and get more education. Although, you gotta, in order to be a higher enlisted grade, you gotta have a GED [General Educational Development], you know, now, but that was no problem, you know. That's more formality than anything. You go to a room and it's nothing. But, that was the extent of it. Now, do I regret that? On occasion, yes, yes. Mm hmm. Do I feel uncomfortable in the presence of PhDs? No. No. I really don't. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, you're much more widely read than our average undergrad, I mean, by far. And even some of our colleagues. (Laughter)

FRANKLIN: I might, I might ...

PIEHLER: John ...

ROMEISER: We, we're almost to Belgium—we're in Soissons. How—do we wanna go up to—what do you want to do? Do you want to go up—how far do you want to take this today? You wanna ...

PIEHLER: Um.

ROMEISER: ... do another ... final interview or do you want to ...

PIEHLER: I think we should maybe do a little bit more today, but I think we are going to need another, if it's okay with you, we'd love to come back.

FRANKLIN: That's good, yeah.

PIEHLER: I mean—this is ...

FRANKLIN: I enjoy it.

PIEHLER: Whenever ...

FRANKLIN: I feel, I have this innate feeling that eventually, my mental faculty will not be as sharp as it is now and my memory will not be as good, and perhaps someday in the course of

human events, somebody will be able to take this bullshit and do something with it to educate our children, you know, our grandchildren or somebody. There will be someone who gets some benefit out of this. Yeah.

PIEHLER: Well, one thing—it may even be more of an observation than a question, but I always sort of because I've heard you've come to the Normandy class and talked about, in-depth of what happened at Normandy. But it sort of—listening to today, going through North Africa and particularly Sicily ... was Normandy the closest call? I mean, being run over by a tank in Kasserine Pass ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah. Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... seems pretty—and you mentioned this incident where you're caught out in the valley with the German aircraft strafing you ...

FRANKLIN: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: ... and friendly fire was not just at Saint Lo, you had plenty of it.

FRANKLIN: I felt in Normandy that I could get through it. I was not encumbered by any machine gun weight or tripod or anything, and I knew that if I could get beyond that particular cliff that I would be out of the line of fire of the people who were shooting at us. And I knew nothing was coming from that direction, and I knew if—in my mind and if I could get there the only way they could get to me is dropping a mortar off of the top of a cliff and I thought that was highly unlikely. So that was not it, but when I was laying in Ousseltia and this ME-109 went around and came down and gave me a burst, gave the Jeep a burst, and gave Jack Wolf and burst, and then went back up and circled, and the other one come down and did the same thing and he's shooting 20mm. He's not shooting a bullet. In other words, every one that hits is exploding and I'm—and the ground is shaking like this, and I knew that the only thing I could do was pretend I was dead. So I just laid on the ground and pretended I was dead. And then they did this a couple of times. That's probably the closest I ever come to death because the bullets were all around me, 20mm.

PIEHLER: So they just simply missed.

FRANKLIN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: There's nothing you could do ...

FRANKLIN: They just didn't hit me and why, I don't know, because I'm sure they hit within two or three yards of me.

ROMEISER: And Jack, Jack was killed, you say, or wounded?

FRANKLIN: I didn't hear you.

ROMEISER: Jack was killed?

FRANKLIN: No. No. No. He had—20mm hit him right in the ankle, right in the ankle, and blew his ankle out. Well, when the planes left, I'm afraid that they're gonna come back, but still I knew I had to get Jack away from there. And about a mile across the valley was a house with a big wall around it, and I figured if I could get Jack to that house that we could get cover from there, from the air. And that was a big danger and so I struggled getting Jack there because he could not put any weight on his foot, although he could skip and hop, you know. And I got him—the Jeep was burned up, it didn't ... that was the closest up until the tank ran over me. Now, when the tank ran over me it was perhaps—now, the difference is the airplane was a thirty minute deal. They absolutely took their time. You know, they circled two or three times and then come back and give us a burst. Then they'd go up and circle two or three times. And I can just imagine some German sergeant out there with a machine gun saying, "Let's kill these bastards," you know. But, with the tank I had no time to think.

ROMEISER: Right.

FRANKLIN: No time, it was just *bleep brrrr*, and that was it. Sand coming down on me, dirt coming down on me, and I was afraid I was gonna be covered, but I wasn't. The machine gun was tore up. Those were the two very closest things. Later, after Aachen, we with I Company occupied a position when the Germans threw 1700 rounds or artillery into our position, but I was in a pillbox. I slept the whole time. I was in a captured German pillbox. I Company was out in holes and they were throwing these artillery and I'm asleep in a damn pillbox. So the next day everybody is talking about, "What a terrible barrage! Oh, how did you live through it?" I didn't tell them that, I didn't tell them I spent the night in that German pillbox, you know. (Laughter) I didn't—at first I didn't have to ... I just tried to get along that's all, and tried to live. But that airplane was the—and to this day, I can think of nothing worse than an Arab or a Jew or ... a Vietnamese or somebody being strafed by an airplane. You are absolutely helpless. You cannot do anything, and they are moving at three or four hundred miles an hour and they have eight machine guns and you have nothing. So ... it's a bad situation.

PIEHLER: You have to say—I was sort of struck—I mean, this is—you're not the first veteran to talk this, about the lessons you learned like grenades in the trees. Really a great, it's a great idea, actually. Um, and then the observation about how not to kick up dust with your machine gun, with the wet towel.

FRANKLIN: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: You also mentioned, for example, the time they took you back to show you how the bazooka worked and it wouldn't even work. You know, it was bouncing off the tank.

FRANKLIN: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: Umm, how—when you were sort of pulled off the line, particularly in England and also in North Africa for re-training, how much of that was useful and how much of it was, "I'd rather just sleep," you know, "I'd rather read a book" or "I'd rather ...

FRANKLIN: Probably the most educational event of my entire Army training was under the supervision of British commandos. And two of them had participated in the Dieppe Raids and we, my assault section, was invited to participate under their direction in taking a pillbox. A simple operation and it was so efficient the way we did it. First, my group, the machine guns, crawled up within about three hundred yards of the pillbox where we were defoliated, we were behind a little hill. And the hill was just—could put the barrel of the gun over the hill where we could fire directly at the pillbox. Well, we got up and we got in position and we're firing light fire, and we fire at this. Meantime, the bangalore torpedo team is working its way around to the right. The flame thrower team is working around to the left, and of course we could see what was going on, and this is under the direction of this commando sergeant. We assaulted this pillbox and I guarantee it was the most perfect assault you have ever seen in your life. The Bangalore torpedo men—first they had a bangalore torpedo blow up and blow the wire, you know. Then the pole charge men crawled up, put the pole charge, which is a ten-pound block of TNT, up at the ... aperture of the pillbox, pull the thing, and it blew up. Meantime, we're throwing constant fire right into the pillbox and these people are crawling within inches of our bullets, they're crawling up there within inches of our ... then the flame thrower team comes up, and squirts and we stop firing and then they stood up and he just filled it full of fire, you know ... from the flame thrower. Absolutely beautiful. But going through the Seigfried line, we never executed anything even similar to that. (Laughter) It never happened again.

PIEHLER: Never even close to it.

FRANKLIN: Never come close. (Laughter) But, that was a greater good. At least we knew how to do it, you know.

PIEHLER: I'm curious ... this sort of—you've talked a lot about friendly fire.

FRANKLIN: About what?

PIEHLER: Friendly fire.

FRANKLIN: Friendly fire, it was very dangerous.

PIEHLER: Did the air-ground, from your perspective, did the air-ground cooperation get better over time? Particularly in France?

FRANKLIN: This is one of the amazing things about—even today I cannot believe it. The German Army—behind every German tank was a telephone where the man on the back on the ground could talk to the commander of the tank. So he's got a squad and he's behind a tank and he's going along and he sees a machine gun over here, he picks up the phone and he tells the tank commander, "There's a machine gun to your right beside of that tree over there. Give him a burst." And they'd knock it out. To this day, we do not have a telephone to that tank. To this damn day, sixty years later, we don't have that. So this is amazing to me how the communications between tank and infantry and air corps—we finally got some communication between infantry and air corps, you know, the fighter planes in November of 1944. The

Germans had it when they invaded Poland in '39. (Laughter) And we had direct communication, but in '44 they sent a fighter pilot down to a rifle battalion with the necessary ... communication system where he could contact those P-47s, and we did. We had beautiful P-47 support.

PIEHLER: So after November, it really made a difference?

FRANKLIN: Oh, it was unbelievable. Hell, they did—ninety percent of the fighting was done by the P-47s. We mopped up.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

FRANKLIN: That's the truth of the matter. Infantry mopped—up until then, we did all the fighting, we took all the casualties, but once we got the air corps involved in the war and they came out with a 40, C-47 and that damn thing would come right down at tree top level and do what that young lieutenant or young captain told it to do, the war was a complete different thing, absolutely a different thing. But the problem is it took us four years to learn it. Four years and this, I believe, blame the educational system. Today, right today, I blame—I don't know if I should blame the educational system or the ... feeling that every officer in the American Army must say, "Yes, sir," and "I can do that." When they teach that at West Point, you know ... God, Country, and so on ... they're teaching the wrong thing. Because, we know longer have—it's like Secretary [of State] Powell. You know, he was a fine, obviously a fine general. And there, they sent him before the United Nations to lie before the whole world about weapons of mass destruction. Before—if I would have been a sergeant and they would have told me to go tell that lie I would have said, "Fuck you. I resign," you know, "I refuse to degrade the rank of sergeant to that of a liar." And yet that General did it without any ... thoughts of it, you know. Although, now he's gonna pay for it. He's going to pay—instead of getting to be CEO of Halliburton, he's gonna have to step down to Bechtel Corporation. One of the smaller corporations, you know. (Laughter) But our generals, when they told them to go in Iraq, that a sergeant would know what to do, you know. You, first you confiscate all the weapons and ammunition. And right today they're shooting ammunition that we left laying on the ground, they're shooting it back at us. There—I'm afraid that I've educated myself to such a point that I'm just now beginning to realize how stupid we are.

PIEHLER: I might make—you mentioned about confiscating the guns. The one—I've thought of actually writing op-ed piece. What striking to me also about Iraq is—the argument is often made—and I'm a moderate on gun control, but the argument of often made about guns is that the Second Amendment is crucial to a free society. But when you look at the number of guns that Iraqis have, you would think it would be a much freer society. (Laughter) I mean, in sort of thinking of guns, I mean, Iraq should be more free than the United States.

ROMEISER: Sure.

PIEHLER: I mean Saddam required every household to have a gun.

FRANKLIN: I have a friend—I hope you have that off. I have a friend ...

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: Well, let's maybe just do a little more, go through a little but more of the war and then ... or Braum, did you ...

DENTON: Yeah, I'm curious if you came upon or had any contact with German POWs.

FRANKLIN: Well, yeah. Mm hmm.

DENTON: Uh, can you tell me some instances where you came in—what conversation you had or what—how you interacted with those people?

FRAKLIN: There were two places, son. Number one, in Africa, my introduction to fighting, one could not help, as a soldier, one could not help but admire how brilliant the German soldier was and how professional he was. And the Africa Corps consisting of the Tenth Panzer, the Fifteenth Panzer, the Twenty-First Panzer, and the Ninetieth Light Division, were all regular army German soldiers. So they treated Americans as professional soldiers and we treated them as professional soldiers. And when we captured them, it was, we took them with dignity and we treated them with dignity and they saluted our officers, and I'm sure when—we had one battalion, the First Battalion, Sixteenth Infantry was captured at 523, and the whole battalion was captured and put on a boat and went toward Italy and they revolted, took over the boat and the battalion commander brought the boat back to Tunis and landed, and the war ended, and saved the whole battalion. But they were treated with dignity and they were treated like soldiers. Now, later, and later in the war, when they got the SS involved ... now you're not dealing with a professional German soldier. You're dealing with a right-wing religious Republican fanatic. (Laughter) That's what you're dealing with. You're dealing with someone who takes ideology beyond employment, you know. They believed in a cause rather than a duty. And because of this stupid cause they believed in to eliminate the world of everybody that was not Germanic—which is a hell of a task to try to perform, but anyway that was their goal—they believed that and they—we never took and SS prisoner until he was out of ammunition and out of food. Then he would surrender. But as long as they had ammunition, they fought. They were fanatics. And of course we did not treat them with dignity. It was not uncommon to take them in the woods and shoot them. We had a special boy in our platoon named Shiptock. Shiptock was from ... Czechoslovakia, his family was from Czechoslovakia, and his family had suffered tremendously under the German occupation. And somehow he escaped it and got to New Jersey and got drafted in the American Army and ended up in my platoon. And So when we had prisoners we didn't like we'd say, "Shiptock! Take them back to regiment." Fifteen minutes later, Shiptock would be back although regiment, two miles, three miles behind the line. That was our way of treating SS troopers. Yeah. But some Germans—when you ran up against a Volksturm unit—one of those people who would ... go out and get older men—and I would right now, if we got in a war I would be in a Volksturm and fifteen year old children would be in it, too. We treated them with sympathy. But ... you want to stop?

DENTON: Those were all the conscripted people that you would run ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah. And let's not forget that we are not without dirty hands. Because when the war ended—and I can give you a book to read to prove this, when the war ended, we had 1.9 million German prisoners in the Rhineland. We had 1 million of them camped along the Rhine River with no water, no food, no bedding, no tents, no protection from the weather, no medical care, nothing. Now, I am not exaggerating. A half a million of them died. The Swiss, having heard about the condition of these German prisoners, sent three trainloads of food to Germany. And Eisenhower said, "We don't want it. Take it back to France." The Swiss Red Cross brought it, said, "We'll take care of it." We gave the French 700,000 German prisoners—they were taken to France. I later lived in France and knew about it. They were taken to France. The only way they could get freedom was by joining the French Foreign Legion. And when you hear about the French who died in Indo-China, you're hearing about German prisoners of war who were enlisted in the Foreign Legion in order to get out of prison camps. In fact, I had schooled a girl whose husband was a German prisoner and he went to Indo-China with the French, but he made it back. He was at Dien Bin Fu. Look at them, next time you see a picture of the prisoners of Dien Bien Fu ... well, even better than that read General Christian's article "The Gentlemen Command," Christian was his name, Brigadier General Christian of the French Army—they had five fortresses at Dien Bien Fu. They all had French women names. One was named Isabelle. Isabelle was commanded by a former German SS sergeant, he commanded Isabelle. The other four French fortresses fell, and Isabelle still fought for two weeks 'til they ran out of ammunition. The old SS tradition. (Laughter) So we are not without some dirt on our hands. When I went back to my regiment—you're not ... anyway, when I went back to my regiment ...

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: One thing I want—because you've mentioned it. Could you talk a little bit about the Hungarian Forest? The forest campaign, the Hungarian Forest.

FRANKLIN: The Hurtgen Forest?

PIEHLER: Hurtgen Forest. Excuse me.

FRANKLIN: Oh yeah. Mm hmm. We're talking late October, November of '44. And the memory is still fresh in my mind. We have a lot of rain, a lot of mud, a lot of, and it's turning very cold. It's getting to be very cold. And the Hurtgen Forest is a thirty mile area of forest, and it, we are—without me knowing what we're doing, I later found out. We were trying to get in a position to jump across the Ruhr River to cut off the German industry that is located in the Ruhr, the Ruhr. What is preventing us is that we have a line here, and a line here, that the Germans control the Hurtgen Forest. So there's a ... town called Hamich that is the key town at the eastern end of the Hurtgen Forest. The trees are unlike most German forests. The trees are very close together, sometimes only a couple of yards. Most German forests are like a battalion of soldiers. They're in line, they're lined up. They're so many feet apart. They have a trail, a fire trail here and a fire, that's—they're very organized, but this Hurtgen Forest was not. It was almost like a Smokey Mountain Forest.

DENTON: Extremely dense.

FRANKLIN: Very disorganized, very close together. Made up of trees, and I don't even know ... the elm, I guess, is the name of the tree. But you cannot use tanks, which is our best weapon, you can not use air corps, because they can't see what they're doing. So it ends up the infantry has to do the fighting. The woods themselves are superfluous. They're worthless. Why we wanted them I don't know other than to straighten out the line to give us a jump off so we can cross the Ruhr. They didn't want the area the Germans controlled behind us, this is why. So the First Infantry Division, the Fourth Infantry Division, the Ninth Infantry Division, and I'm sure a couple other infantry divisions, all had to go in and try to clear out the Hurtgen Forest. We suffered 33,000 in the Hurtgen Forest in a battle the lasted about five weeks. I remember distinctly you could not—the Germans would put shell after shell on us, but they knew any place a shell hit in the tree, you could be way over there and shrapnel would hit you and you can't lay down because ... so you stand up against the tree and just hope that they don't hit your tree. Then our own artillery coming through and occasionally we'd send a tank down the tank trail, down the fire trail, they'd knock the tank out. It was terrible, terrible fighting. We fought there probably the whole month of November, probably up to the 9 of December because on the 9 of December we come back off the frontline and moved back to dress camp in Belgium. And we were there on the 14, we started getting passes to go to Paris on the 15, and the Bulge broke out on the 16. So we come off the line—we'd been on the line every day from D-Day until the 9 of December, we come off the line and we work our way back to our dress camp and get a couple days of rest, and the damn war starts again and we got to go back to fight. But the Hurtgen Forest was very difficult ... very useless, very worthless. There wasn't a damn thing there, and I know—I had a friend, I have a friend, he was a lieutenant. When I first met him, and I first met him ... Hi, honey.

UTE FRANKLIN: About finished?

FRANKLIN: No. Just about.

PIEHLER: Just about for today.

UTE FRANKLIN: Okay. (Laughs)

FRANKLIN: But this man replaced Captain ... Richmond in I Company. He was a lieutenant in F, K Company and his name was Wolf, Karl E. Wolf was his name. Typical damn German except he was Jewish. Karl Wolf was Jewish. He had graduated from West Point, joined the regiment just before D-Day and had fought D-Day, from D-Day all the way up to the Hurtgen Forest with K Company. Captain Richmond went to Second Battalion as Executive Officer. So they took Wolf out of K Company and brought him over to I Company. Now, he's my company commander and he's a lieutenant. Well, we—M Company and I Company take the castle. There's a castle—when the little town of Hamich sets in a little depression, and up on a hill right behind it is a castle. And the SS, German SS was in that castle. First the First Battalion tried to take it in a flanking maneuver and got the hell kicked out of them. Finally, we had to make a frontal assault and took it. And the man who led the assault was Lieutenant Wolf with I Company, a very determined young officer. Later, he made Captain and he was our company commander for the rest of the war. I'm at a reunion in Nashville fifty years later (Laughs) and somebody comes up—I'm sitting having a drink with the old buddies and somebody comes up

and puts his arm around me from behind and he says, “How are you Ben?” And I looked at him, and I had no idea who it is, and he said, “You don’t remember me?” And I said, “No, I don’t.” He says, “I’m Colonel Wolf.” I said, “I’ve never heard of a damned Colonel Wolf.” He said, “How about a Captain?” I said, “Oh! A Captain Wolf!” (Laughter) “Karl Wolf!” Well, so this not all, but he’s a great man, he’s retired, of course. He married and had children. Well, later for his eightieth birthday they were gonna present him a plaque, the family was. And his daughter from Colorado—well, and his son from California sent me a letter wanting to know if I would write a letter outlining my association with him during the war, and I did—about meeting him at the castle there at so on, and what a son-of-a-bitch he was because I don’t care where we were he made us dig in every night. We could move ten feet and you’d have to dig in again. We called him “The son-of-a-bitch.” And I told them in the letter that’s what we called him. So they did it. They presented him the plaque with that letter in it and, of course, some other people, too. But, I’ve got his letter back and he said, “Ben, you tell a damn lie.” (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I think that might be a good place to stop for today.

FRANKLIN: Okay.

PIEHLER: Your memory is quite good. Yeah, it ... (Laughs)

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Stephanie Crump 10/07/05

Reviewed by Cinnamon Brown 10/20/05

Reviewed by Kurt Piehler 1/9/06