

**Interview 2/6/02**  
**75-80 min.**

DB: February 6, 2002 at Seattle University. This is an interview with Bob Harmon by Daniel Burnstein. Bob, I wanted to ask you about a couple of remarks you made in your recent letter, well not too recent, but your letter from the year 2000 to Victor Davis Hansen. On page two in the top paragraph you said that “you all knew about the horrors of slave labor and from Kaiserslautern [*in the Bavarian Palatinate; ca. 40 miles west of Mannheim. Industrial city. Royal residence since Carolingian times. Frederick I built a castle there, circa 1152 AD*] on the concentration camps.” So could you clarify what you meant by that?

CRH: About the camps?

DB: Yeah, that you were well-informed about the horrors of slave labor and after Kaiserslautern on the concentration camps. [*March 1945, just before we crossed the Rhine*].

CRH: The slave labor we began to run into in France, and a lot of it was Polish and, because so many of our men spoke Polish, we had no trouble communicating with these people. So, it was interesting. You had a mixture of free Poles who had lived in France since before or, recently, after the first World War. In other words they had left Poland sometime, maybe when it was still occupied by Prussia, Russia, or Austria in the ancient RAP [*“RAP” = Russia-Austria-Prussia*] breakup of Poland from 1795. And they had come and found themselves a home, so to speak, in France, and had been there maybe 40 or 50 years. There were many, many who were slave laborers and had simply been brought and dumped on these French farmers and told, “You will work for them.” Which wasn’t a bad deal. It was far better than working in a city, better than working in a camp, and far better than working anywhere in Germany as far as the Poles were concerned. So they talked with us all the time. Kaiserslautern is an enormous French city, or, German city in the Rhine Valley. It’s on the western bank of the Rhine and it eventually became one of the great centers of American administration in the American forces in Germany after W.W.II.

DB: Western bank of the Rhine?

CRH: Yeah, it’s on the western bank of the Rhine and it’s below the Moselle river where the Moselle connects with the Rhine, which would be at Coblenz. There were some camps there; they weren’t killing camps but they were concentration camps and that’s the first place that I saw, that I can at all remember seeing, concentration camp people. These were the ones wearing the uniforms. They were the ones uniformly, no pun intended, thin because they had been starved and overworked and they were filthy dirty. And I may have told you, they showed up at the chow line one night. That’s the first time I can remember them, and remember them very clearly. But from that time on, as we talked to more of these people, we began to find out about all the different kinds of camps.

DB: What's the differentiation between a concentration and a killing camp?

CRH: Oh they can be both, Konzentration Lager: they are both concentration camps, but killing camps were designed as, Buchenwald was, I think, or Mauthausen, to simply dispose of people. The most famous one I think, unfortunately, is Auschwitz and those were camps that were designed simply to dispose of the Jewish Question. The other camps, in some cases, were camps where they put Germans who would be allowed to get out after a while, for instance. They wouldn't mind working them to death there. They did so habitually at Dachau, for instance. And there was even, I think, at least one gas chamber at Dachau. But there was certainly a shooting wall at Dachau where according to all the stories, apparently they shot so many people, from time to time, that literally there was a little trench there that would be full of blood from these execution victims. But they weren't designed primarily as execution camps. They were designed as work camps, punishment camps, etc...

DB: And this one at Kaiserslautern was like that.

CRH: Yeah the camp around Kaiserslautern, wherever it was, I couldn't tell you now, was one of those; hold them, punish them, torture them if you want to, but, it wasn't necessarily designed to kill people. None of them had any problem about killing people. But there were places, and this is the horror of it, that were actually machine designed, so to speak, on-line killing camps.

DB: Right.

CRH: Off the train, into the selection process, onto the gas chambers, take off the clothes, go into the gas chamber. Carried out of the gas chamber, get tossed into the graves or sent to the burning.

DB: And the one you saw like that, was that Mauthausen?

CRH: Mauthausen and Ebensee [both close to Bad Ischl and Altaussee, where stolen art was stored in a salt mine] were pretty much killing camps.

DB: Oh, Ebensee was also.

CRH: Yeah. They worked them to death there. They really worked them to death at Mauthausen. They were famous for that. But they had no objections to killing people at Ebensee.

DB: Did they have a gas chamber at Ebensee?

CRH: I don't recall. I do have some pictures, by the way, not only taken by a friend of mine, but, somebody else from the Division, that showed up in some of this culling of my files that I have done. There was an article in the Blue Ridge Division magazine about being at Ebensee. And then the best reference we have, is Max Garcia, whose book we

have. He is the architect down in San Francisco. I should phone Max and make sure (a.) is he ok and (b.) if he wouldn't mind talking to you . You should chat with him because he is fabulous. I mean a fabulous guy to know. Very peppy. But he is certainly essential to our story.

DB: So you are not sure if at Mauthausen if there were gas chambers or not?

CRH: No. I think the thing at Mauthausen was, it was a rock quarry. They killed them with overworking them on the quarry.

DB: So some of these guys would tell you stories about what they went through I guess.

CRH: Yes. You have to realize that for me, most of those stories were in translation. But I had no reason to think that my friends were mistranslating. And you could look at the physical evidence, the wreckage in front of you, of what used to be a man or a woman.

DB: Can you remember some of the stories that you heard?

CRH: No. Not off hand. And I have read so much of that, you know, I wouldn't even attempt.

DB: Now, you go on to say at the beginning of the second paragraph there that "you were right about the problems of soldiers dealing with the women in occupied areas. Because I had a couple of words of German, I spent several interesting moments telling some house frau to gather her children and some food and get out of her house because the war was being fought from her front room and attic."

CRH: Yeah. It was pretty interesting.

DB: What were you referring to there about it? That you were right about the problems of soldiers dealing with the women. Do you remember? Something to do with having to get them out of the houses?

CRH: Dr. Hansen had said something, I suppose in his book, about that. Just the notion that many women were, ordinarily, quite willing to follow your directions. You tell them to "grab your clothing and get out of the house" they'd do it. But for many of the women I think that we were stuck with the idea that they had no place to go and they had children with them to protect. Or, maybe, there was just sort of, "this is my house and I am the house frau and damned if I am leaving." But I remember, at least one particular incident where I practically had to physically throw a young lady out of her house and you know, there's bullets flying around and she still didn't believe me. I said, "you've got to get out of here and now." Anyway.

DB: And I wanted to ask you about this comment on the book, *Soul of Battle*, which was written by Victor Hansen. It says here (Hansen), "that Patton was the General most feared by his NAZI enemies." Hansen disputes the conventional notion that soldiers fight only

for their buddies rather than abstract ideals. He writes that quote, ‘Theban hoplites, Union troops, and American GI’s were ideological armies foremost. Composed of citizen soldiers who burst into their enemy’s heartland because they believed it was a just and necessary thing to do. The commanders encouraged that ethical zeal and made them believe that there was a real moral difference between what they and their opponents stood for.’” So, Bob, let me ask you, would you agree with that the ideological, the ideals of the GI’s, the abstract ethical concepts were the predominant motive for your buddies and you or was it more a concern for fighting for your buddies? Or was it both?

CRH: I think it is a combination of both and I think, at this remove, it’s definitely a very personal opinion. I have a hunch that each of us, who survived all of that, would have an opinion that has been colored by the years, Dan. There is a great deal of talk about the battle you fight for your friends, and the world is only as large as your Squad, really, and the rest of the world is somebody else and it is us against them; no matter, your side or the enemy. We were told over and over, but, I certainly didn’t have to be told, the ideas that were promulgated by both the Japanese and the Germans about racial superiority and we knew what sort of vicious things they were doing. So, yes, I think we were fighting for freedom and I am reminded of something I have talked about before, writing or, rather, talking with a friend of mine from the Company, Arthur Strempek, who was Polish, obviously, and he didn’t really understand the various racial differentiations that the NAZIs had set up. So I explained, sort of, about the Third Order of Being that the Nazis considered the Slavs and the Poles to be. And there was sort of a funny moment there when Arthur thought I was making these judgements myself and I had to explain to this giant Polish guy that “No, no Arthur...”

DB: And he was a giant Polish guy.

CRH: Yes, he was. He was a lot bigger than I am. Anyway, Arthur was dissuaded. We were in a tent in England, we on our way to France, on a lay-over, and I explained to him; “one of the reasons we are going over there is to put a stop to this thing.” But each of us knew this in one way or the other, I think, but I would certainly hesitate now to try to make a differentiation. I will, as I talk to my friends from the Company and the Regiment and the Division, ask about it from time to time. For us, a lot of it was just the idea that “we’re caught up in this thing.” The biggest thing, I think Dan, is that we were insulted by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor. And I think you can see that in your own reflections and own reactions as a young kid growing up, there are times when you have to fight and times you get insulted by the school bully and Americans were really just madder than hell about that. So you really didn’t need a lot of explanation but there was plenty of it. We got plenty of explanation.

DB: In the Army?

CRH: Yes, there was. Probably, just a lot of it went in one ear and out the other for people, depending on what they wanted to hear. What may have been their level of sophistication, I don’t know, now. Everybody was told, and in some cases obviously it didn’t get very far. That’s why I had to explain to Art Strempek, in England, why we

were going to Normandy. I certainly knew. I had no problem with that whatsoever. It was dinnertime conversation at our house.

DB: So Bob, last time we left off on a letter from September 10, 1945. And in that letter you said that you were studying physics, you are reading a book of physics to get quote, "Something more heavy than Dashiell Hammet [popular fiction author of the 1940s]."

CRH: Are you old enough to remember who he is?

DB: Oh yeah.

CRH: Ok.

DB: Bob, when did you get into studying history?

CRH: Oh, when I was very little.

DB: Ok, so you had already shown an interest.

CRH: Yes. The first books I had really loved were travel books and I learned to be a good reader at the age of six. Probably by eight and nine I was reading fairly sophisticated materials. I know I was way ahead of my reading level and all my teachers were really pleased with that. You know: "Bob, does 'A' work in reading." You know what those little grades looked like. But I really did. History became a story and for much of it, it became a very personal story. If you think about it, the west was full of people who settled - the later part of settling - the west when I grew up. Certainly all the generation that developed the big logging companies were running around or, at least, their sons were. My mother's parents knew and were friends with the Weyerhausers. They all logged together in Wisconsin before they came out here and they knew each other out here. So these were all real names. I had - I think I told you - I have a pistol at home that was under the desk of the man who was the son of the first sort of ticket steamship agent in Olympia. The Percival dock is named for him. John Percival. And I have, still, his pistol at home and some of his ammunition. He protected his office with it. Well this was history, and there was lots of it. So, anyway, I was always interested in history and I liked it. My other interest is in art and, so, I wanted some sort of travel. Needed some kind of confirmation in history I think. Or welcomed the confirmation in history. I sought background in it.

DB: And when you were studying, you started later in another letter in November, you wrote that you were studying a book of famous American speeches, lectures on democracy and stuff. So did this sort of reinforce the desire to teach history?

CRH: Maybe, but I think, at that time, Dan, remember my swing conversation with my mother on this took place many months, maybe a year or two after this when she told me I really ought to think about going into history. I was convinced that the way to go was through engineering and business. Particularly through engineering. You would use the

engineering degree then to make money in something that was adventurous and constructive and outdoors and all those kinds of things. I could probably see myself building bridges in South America or Renton or someplace. That's what I had in mind. But I knew enough to know that you needed some special skills in the business world because I grew up watching the people who didn't have those special skills. And of course, they also didn't have jobs. Especially in Olympia. Or they spent their lives in something that was plain damn dangerous, as well as being drudgework.

DB: Cutting timber and stuff like that.

CRH: Cutting timber but, at least that was adventurous. Working in the mills I think, and particularly putting together the bundles of shingles. That's dangerous. That's how you get your fingers sliced off. You could always tell the people who worked in the shingle mills because they had at least one finger gone. Pulling shingles off those slicers. [*The 'shingle-weavers' reached close to the saws cutting and shaping the shingles, took them as they came out of the saws, and made up 'squares of shingles' by interweaving the pointed ends. Touching the slicing blades was almost inevitable, sooner or later*]. Anyway, I didn't want to do that. I wanted to do something, and, having worked in grocery stores, I knew there was money there. But I didn't want to work in a grocery store. I knew there was money to be made in Puget Sound real estate. Apparently I didn't, at least in these letters, anyway, didn't concentrate on that. I often remarked to myself: I kept talking about professional work, probably in engineering.

DB: Yeah, you talked, in another letter on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, you talk about being interested in history but noting that there probably isn't enough money in it.

CRH: Well, we both know that.

DB: Now you mentioned the Great Depression a couple minutes ago. Now, eventually you did get into teaching history and had several years after the war of relative economic security, not just for yourself, but, for the country at large, that sort of, psychologically, allowed you to go into teaching after all. You know, sort of putting some of those harsh memories of the 30's that had conditioned your career choice before that, sort of putting them a little more on the back burner. I know this might be an interpretation Bob.

CRH: It would be a good one. Actually, Dan, I think what I was looking for was independence. And if you think about it, in many ways we university teachers are highly privileged in our lives and as long as we meet our office hours and meet our classes on time, with one university or another, depending on various committee assignments or writing expectations, "publish or perish" and so on, we live in a very privileged world. And I could see that world would be a world in which I would like to function as long as I wasn't going to be in engineering. And I also thought I could see ways of making money beyond it. Again, the real estate gimmick was a possibility and two of my friends here, one of who you probably know, Dr. Bill Guppy, who used to be the academic vice president, Bill began investing in real estate almost immediately after he got his doctorate. At great strain sometimes, but I think he and Pauline are nicely fixed, to say

the least, because they invested in real estate here and on Vashon Island and a lot of us could see that that was something you could do.

DB: You could work on houses on weekends and stuff like that.

CRH: Exactly, right. And there's another thing I wanted to do, was travel. And I realized that I could put together the history business and the traveling and did so quite successfully.

DB: Did you get into real estate Bob?

CRH: Only in minor ways. We have two land investments. One is our home here in Seattle and the other in the vacation home, which, like many vacation homes, turned out not to really be an investment. That is, we have so much sentiment invested in it, and the kids do, that it's really just a luxury. There's no way we would sell it. So if you are thinking about that as an investment, it's not. It accrued in value. I did join in one venture with my brother, which is kind of funny because it's the only one in which, I think, he ever lost any money. Or maybe he didn't lose anything, I guess. We came out on it, let's put it that way. I don't know if Neil took the money out of his own pocket to make sure that I came out even, and he and the other partners, but that was a very interesting deal over in Bellevue. That should have been a winner and it turned out not to be. Everything else he has turned his hand to has turned to gold, it's kind of funny. But we have subsidized other investors in minor real estate deals of one kind or another and always, of course, made a return. It's, for anybody who's got an eye for property, it's impossible not to make money in Puget Sound. Or, people who manage to lose money, they obviously don't have much experience here. Anyway.

DB: Well in your September 28<sup>th</sup> letter you say that the work here in the APO goes pretty well. What was the APO?

CRH: Oh, the Army Post Office. I must have been up at Garmisch. G-A-R-M-I-S-C-H dash Partenkirchen. Garmisch-Partenkirchen is one of the great ski resorts, climbing resorts, in Germany. In the Bavarian Alps, on the *Zugspitz*. It's just beautiful country.

DB: Do you know how to spell Partenkirchen?

CRH: Yes. P-A-R-T-E-N-K-I-R-S-C-H-E-N. It's two towns and they have grown together. It's Belltown and Ballard if you will, to use a Seattle analogy. And, when they started out, they were, probably, infinitely far away from one another in the days of oxen, but, now they are about two minutes on your skateboard. It's a beautiful area and a very famous ski area. The 1936 Winter Olympics were held up there. It's that good, and there's a mountain there called the *Zugspitz*, which is a great climbing, skiing mountain. I don't know, it's perhaps 9,000 feet high. Anyway, they sent us up to Garmisch because there were a load of hotels up there. Ergo, places to put people. And they needed someplace to sort the Division's mail and Division may have been at Landsberg at the moment, I don't know. The headquarters may have been. Regiment was probably at Bad

Worishofen but I don't know where we were. Anyway, they simply came around and asked if anybody wanted to go, for a few days, up to throw mail up at the Division and I wanted to go up to Garmisch so I said, "Sure" and so we were up there for I don't know, four, five days or a week. Something like that. Just sorting the mail that came through. And it was worthwhile because of one of the great stories of my army career. We were sorting mail one day, and you got packages, all these letters, and we realized that one package was simply in no shape to be further use to anybody. It contained fried egg sandwiches. I kid you not. Some thoughtless mother in the States had, I don't know, she must have thought that we had instant airmail, a la 1999 or something, rather than 1945, and I have never forgotten the egg sandwiches. And there were some other interesting things that came out of that. Somebody knew that I had done that, so, when we were in Czechoslovakia there were a couple of questionable pieces of mail that came to us that were addressed to the States, but they obviously weren't from our people. So they were handed to me to sort, and one of them I still have, and it's a love letter from a Czech girl to somebody who had been in the Division in the Sudetenland, and then had gone home to somewhere in Los Angeles and I forget what his name was but we will make it 'Bill Smith' and she had written this touching little one-page letter to Bill saying, "what happened to you? This was the romance of the century and so on." But the touching thing is that - to give you an idea about how life used to be like in Europe - she thought she could easily identify Bill. On the envelope it gives his name and, then, wherever he lived, San Francisco or Los Angeles, and then the clincher, insured that they (the U.S. Postal Service) obviously would figure out who it was, "he drives a truck." I have never gotten over that.

DB: Ah. Not too many trucks.

CRH: Not too many trucks in Franzensbad, which is where that letter came from, but that was her idea of really nailing his identification. If I find that, I will show that to you. That's a touching thing and it's also sort of sad to think about. Who knows what sort of song and dance he led this girl. He probably took her bed more than once, maybe in his truck. Who knows?

DB: Bob, do you have one of those displays that you mentioned in this letter in which you say that "throughout Franzensbad there were these big atrocity pictures with accusations against the Germans printed on them?"

CRH: No I don't. That's an interesting thought Dan. I have never thought about that. It would probably be possible for us to get our hands on something like that. I will ask that lady I know, who is from Franzensbad. Well, it's Suzie Zischka's sister, Uli, (Ulrike) and she works in the city museum in Munich. I will put a note in to that effect immediately. Keep talking, I am going to scribble myself a letter. I am going to tell her we are working on this and see if, with her connections, they still keep connections in Franzensbad. Uli has gone back. Suzie won't go. I am glad you reminded me of that.

DB: So there's still some ethnic Germans in Franzensbad?

CRH: Oh yeah. It was more than half German.

DB: But now?

CRH: Oh there are probably a few. I will ask her about that.

DB: But she had friends among the Czechs I imagine.

CRH: She has friends among the Czechs and she probably knows the museum people. But I will scribble a note to myself right here saying, "Are there ethnic Germans in Franzensbad?"

DB: Now Bob...

CRH: Go ahead.

DB: Ok. You say here that you saw your high school buddy, Curt Johnson.

CRH: Oh yeah.

DB: "He's a lot more quiet," you say, "than he used to be and a little more serious." Bob, did your own old friends, would they have thought the same of you when you got back?

CRH: I really don't know. There was a camaraderie amongst all the men who had been in the service together. Particularly if it was reinforced by being within two, three, or four years of each other in high school. And there was a camaraderie amongst all the vets who were going to school at St. Martins College outside of Olympia. The only stranger admitted into that was someone you know, Joe Monda, who - later - taught English here. Joe was a boy in the high school but Joe was more than equal, intellectually equal to and better read than most of us. He participated in our classes and was a leader in our classes even though he was still a high school kid taking college courses. But otherwise there was sort of an association of vets there, and a very nicely done one, too. I suppose people thought I was more serious, I just really don't know, Dan. I remember one thing that really struck everyone. I think we had all changed a bit. Changed physically and for most of my friends who remembered me in high school before I put on 50 pounds and it was 50 pounds of muscle. They were surprised when I came back weighing 200 pounds.

DB: When you came home on leave?

CRH: No, when I got out of the Army. I built my weight back up to 190 after I had hepatitis and it wasn't long before I was at 200 again. And hard as nails. They were really surprised at that because all they remembered was a tall boy, I was 6'3 1/2" and weighed something like 148 pounds when I was competing in track my last year of high school. No wonder I could high jump. I didn't have anything to carry.

DB: So you were, as they say, lanky.

CRH: Lanky; “skinny” would be the thought.

DB: Why do you think that people thought Curt, and others like Curt, became more quiet and serious?

CRH: Oh, I think Curt began to realize just how tenuous life was. This is the kid who got wounded, laid out two or three days or nights, too, between the German and American lines, before somebody finally found him. He had begun to realize that life is serious as well as short. Possibly short. He was always fun. He, too, went to St. Martins when the war was over and he certainly wasn't depressed. I can't imagine he would ever get that way. But he had begun to realize how lucky we all were and he was especially lucky.

DB: Now you mention that Curt was at the Red Cross Club in Marienbad and he talked a lot about four old buddies, two of whom had been killed in action. I don't know if you remember that conversation or not Bob. *[as of June 2002, I doubt this Marienbad locale. Meeting Curt somewhere around Hanau, Germany, sounds more logical – CRH]*

CRH: No. Go ahead though. Does he name the names?

DB: Bob, when you would hear about your buddies having been killed in action, how did it feel to hear about that?

CRH: There was always the sense of loss, there was the sense of shock, and certainly, a sense of disappointment. Regret for them that it happened. It varies in so many ways. It depends on how much time you had to think about it. One thing or the other. But there were people whom you knew were real losses. They were people who had a great deal in front of them. And in some cases it was just simply shocking. E.g., when the first group of men in the Company to be killed, were all killed, by, I think it was a mortar round, I've got the story someplace, in September, or mines, maybe it was mines. Yeah, it was a Bouncing Betty mine. Sergeant Cole and a guy named Red Self were killed and this Milt McCormick, whose address I think I have given you, was there and watched that and survived it. There were, I think, two or three men killed that day and I know Sergeant Cole was killed and Red Self were killed, all by that same mine. There may have been some others hurt. It's a shock, it's disappointing, and, it's also a reminder to you, as a person, that this can, and, likely will, happen to you.

DB: Which is a terrible thought. Did it ever get to the point where so many men were dying around you that you sort of couldn't process it right away, you would have to keep going on?

CRH: No, that's one of the interesting things about that, really relatively cushy job I had with the 57 gun. We didn't have that many actual deaths around us unless they were Germans dying trying to attack us. That was reserved for the line companies. There's a great story from one of the men in, I think, the 318<sup>th</sup> Infantry, a sister Regiment, who talks about, usually 180 or 190 men in the Rifle Company, and he talks about a Company

coming back from some action, there are 20 people left and the Company Commander was a PFC. In other words, all the officers, all the non-coms, and so the sturdiest, I suppose, PFC who could still think straight after those losses was leading this Company out of someplace, Bastogne or something. The losses in the rifle and heavy-weapons companies were tremendous, just absolutely tremendous. *[Some Divisional statistics are revealing of the costs of combat in infantry outfits: "Blue Ridge" men received 4 Medals of Honor, 41 Distinguished Service Crosses, 671 Silver Stars, 3,557 Bronze Stars, and over 15,000 Purple Hearts. (One of those DSCs went to Father Benedict Henderson, the RC Chaplain, for rescuing wounded men under heavy machine gun fire). 80' the Blue Ridge, the Divisional history, 1991, edited by Robert T. Murrell ('M' Co., 318<sup>th</sup>) and Edgar E. Bredbenner, Jr. ('B' Co., 318<sup>th</sup>) lists these awards on p. 57. Plus the following casualty tolls: 3,038 KIA and 442 Died of Wounds; 12,484 WIA; 1,077 POW; and 448 MIA. Many of these Stars and Purple Hearts went twice – or more – to the same soldier. "Bob" Murrell won two Bronze Stars and made all four of our campaigns without a scratch. "Ed" Brenbenner made three campaigns, won a Bronze Star, and was thrice wounded. "Tony" Kudrna, serving as a S/Sgt. with 81mm mortars in 'H' Co. of the 319<sup>th</sup>, won a Bronze Star, was twice wounded, and made all four campaigns. Luther Weaver, a S/Sgt. with 'A' Co. of the 319<sup>th</sup>, received a battlefield commission for gallantry in the Siegfried Line fight, in February of '45, and, eventually, retired at a Lt. Colonel after serving in WWII and Korea. Luther ran up some 550 days of combat in his career, won two Silver Stars and a Bronze Star and was unhurt in Europe. I, a bit-player, made all four campaigns, scared but unscratched, in 274 days around the combat zones. CRH].*

DB: Speaking of which, you ran into a man at the Regimental headquarters who came there with you from Fort Benning and from Arkansas and there are six in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion headquarters of the 318<sup>th</sup> all wounded and decorated at least once, you said. Now, you were aware of all this. Did you ever feel that this is a phenomenon that some people talk about? Did you ever feel guilty for not being wounded?

CRH: No, no. Absolutely not. I realize that there were those who feel guilty because they didn't die and all that sort of thing. I am too selfish I think, Dan. I hope I am too sensible but I am too selfish. I know that. Thank God. Better you than me. Bad grammar, but, that's the way I felt.

DB: It's sensible, definitely.

CRH: These are things that happened. You have to realize that this was standard for the life we lived there. For us it was only nine months, for other people it was two, or three, or four years. For some Germans it was five and a half years. They went through the whole thing. Yeah, there is a regret, and I suppose there were people who felt guilty, but I didn't.

DB: Now in October, you mention that on the trip that you were taking to Switzerland, this was your wonderful leave that you talk about. You got accustomed to seeing the bombed out towns on the train rides that you took. What was your reaction when you saw these towns for the first time? I think you saw them originally when you were going

through Germany and seeing bombed out cities like Munich and Nuremburg and so on. What was your reaction to that?

CRH: I think I can speak to that. I would hope so. Probably because I know I have seen other comments in my letters but just kind of a dull curiosity. Here's, obviously, where the bombs fell and there's where they are cleaning it up. There certainly wasn't any concern about the idea that Germans had gotten hurt or killed or real estate was damaged. Grim satisfaction on our part. Maybe a great wonder, I would think. Great wonder about how long it would take to clean all of this up again. We certainly were not at all regretful about the damage that had been done to Germany because we knew about the damage that the Germans had done elsewhere. But mostly it just, "you guys started this and this is what you get." And frankly – we have talked about this before – I think it worked very well that, that reminder, stuck around through the whole next two and a half generations or so. Certainly for two full generations. They were always rebuilding something. "Why did we need to rebuild? Because the last time we got naughty, people came and kicked the hell out of our house." I think they learned that lesson very well.

DB: And you mentioned that you have a ration card and other souvenirs from your trip to Switzerland that you were going to send home. Do you have those?

CRH: Yeah, I think that they are either in, pictures of them are in the letters home that you have, or I have got them in my own souvenirs. They should be, if Mother kept them, then I probably kept them too. I do have ration cards from Germany for clothing, that sort of thing but that wouldn't have been picked up on that Swiss trip.

DB: Now these are ration cards issued by the occupying government?

CRH: No, there's ration cards issued by the German government to the German people.

DB: Oh.

CRH: Yeah, I just picked them up as souvenirs in some house somewhere I suppose.

DB: Right. Oh yeah. You showed me those.

CRH: Yeah, I don't know how I got them. One for clothing, and I showed you how they used a lot of English words. "Pullover," for instance.

DB: Yeah. I was telling my wife about that. I quizzed her. "What do you think 'pullover' is called in German?"

CRH: Does she have German?

DB: Not really. Bob, you put, in brackets, a later comment that you were discharged from Fort Lewis on January 28, 1946. Did you get to see your folks before your discharge? Or, you told me about that. That's right.

CRH: I don't recall. But I don't think I did. It seems to me that I stayed at the camp. I may have gone home on a Pass but I just don't recall.

DB: What was it like when you saw them and when you saw your friends?

CRH: Oh, it was a big shock. It was great fun. I think I told you, I remember getting off the bus, duffel bag on my shoulder and walking down through Olympia, walking down to Percival dock and walking in on Dad. Whether or not that was the day I was finally discharged I don't know. I had I think gone to some trouble to let them know I was in Kilmer and was headed home. And they may have told us that "we'll get you out of here in 48 hours" and I may have put it off. I don't really know. I will see if I can find out.

DB: When you saw your friends?

CRH: Oh that was fun. You would run into them on the street or you would call them up and say, "I hear you are home. Let's get together." You would see them at Mass; if you were Catholic, of course, you saw them on Sunday. Or there were a lot of youth activities of one kind or another and you would go to dances and that kind of thing and you would see all these people.

DB: People were glad to see you, I'll bet.

CRH: Yes. Everybody was glad to see everybody who had made it home. And of course there was always the long list of people who hadn't.

DB: And you felt welcomed and appreciated.

CRH: Oh very much so. Particularly when you realized that every parent, particularly those who had been in the Army in 1917, really were very friendly indeed and glad to see you, especially if they had been in combat themselves; they had a good idea of what you had gone through. One of Dad's close friends was Mickey Lang who had been overseas in the First World War and Mick was always welcoming to all the GI's, I think. He had good-looking daughters and we were all chasing his daughters. I am sure that he was a big help to many of us. There was a guy, named Bill Guffy, who shows up in the letters and he was a druggist. He had never been in the military but he did everything he could to send little gifts and little letters overseas to people. Apparently he wrote to people, sent chocolate bars or whatever he could, all over the world. So I remember seeing Bill, especially.

DB: Did you receive chocolate bars from him?

CRH: I don't remember but I remember that we had corresponded and that I had letters from him. He was just very peppy, one of these kind of little cheerleader types who was also a very successful businessman. As I say, he ran a drugstore and he knew how to do it. And he had a partner named Gillette and the two of them together were really great.

They were good business people. And he just spent a lot of the war, writing. Which was nice.

DB: Very thoughtful of him. What's the clipping that you mentioned that you sent home about Delme Ridge? I don't know if that's it but that's how I am pronouncing it.

CRH: Oh it is. Just skip the "E", it's Delme. There's a letter there, isn't there, that says, "you've never heard of this place." I don't know what the clipping was. I haven't any idea. That's one of those places Caesar fought for.

DB: And you all were there?

CRH: Yeah, anybody who has ever gone through there has been on Delme Ridge.

DB: That was in Germany?

CRH: No, it's in France. It looks down on the river Seille which feeds into the Moselle. Not too far from the city of Nancy.

DB: Seille is spelled S-E-I...

CRH: L-L-E.

DB: Yeah. Nancy is N-A-N-C-Y.

CRH: Yep.

DB: Now you say there were...

CRH: The biggest square in town is named Place Stanislaus, named after an ex-Polish king. After the breakup in 1795, he had some relatives there and he went there and did a lot of the glorification. He brought, apparently, a chest full of Polish gold. And so this lovely French town has a really remarkable main square. Takes a bit of explaining.

DB: Now you say, "that we are losing our top sergeant. The best one I ever saw. This was back in November of '45, early November. What was his name and why was so good?"

CRH: Sorry, I could probably find his name somewhere. I have no idea. And I really, at this remove, haven't any notion why I said what I did, specifically. But I can tell you, first of all, he would be a person who was a good planner. Secondly he would be a person who got along well with the people who worked for him because I worked for him. I would have been typing for him. One of the things that would have been typed out was those rations requisitions and he was an expert at trying to figure out how many people he should draw rations for. And he was probably very clear to me. I can't even see his face at the moment. He's also the guy that I would have to type up the lists, for whom I would have to type up the list, when people were going on sick call and being sent to Divisional

aid station. We were at Regiment so, if they got to us and we couldn't handle them there, then they went to Division. And a lot of the people who came through there had venereal disease, at that time. He was always very careful about dealing with that and made sure that these people were dealt with correctly. The Army was not very pleased about the venereal disease rates.

DB: He would help see to it that they would get treatment?

CRH: Not only that but also that their records were absolutely clear because he didn't want to report anybody for VD who didn't have it. I think the brass kept scolding the Regimental commanders if they didn't keep an eye on the VD. It's amazing how many soldiers would go out and they would sleep with anything that came down the street and not take any precautions. And they would be somewhat amazed at the fact that they, they would usually get gonorrhea.

DB: Did the Army offer them condoms?

CRH: Oh yeah. Sure, every CO at every level from Company on up had a desk full of them somewhere. You know, just "here, go on pass. Don't come back here with seven days worth of 'no duty.'" [Seven days would have been the standard treatment period with penicillin.] That would be the big threat.

DB: Could you elaborate on the problem about the sergeant's replacement whom you called quote, "One of these guys who takes himself too seriously"?

CRH: No, sorry, can't do a thing. I must have obviously been ticked, but, the person I most remember there, of a rank like that, was a guy who had some rank and he was a staff sergeant and he was desperately afraid he was going to do something wrong. And he was always doing funny little fussy things, and I still have a piece of paper that showed up in my canteen cup: it says, "Hide this canteen cup for inspection". You know instead of just him throwing it out the window or something, and saying, "Harmon, I threw your damn canteen cup out the window, you dumb SOB. It shouldn't have been out there." He was nice enough. He was probably a very nice guy. He had these stripes and he didn't want to lose them. I have always treasured, "Hide this canteen cup." Instead of just throwing the note away, which most people would have done.

DB: Now, in advancing through the Seille river valley at Delme Ridge, did the mines and booby traps kill or wound a lot of men, because you mention the artillery there killing a lot of men. But were there mines and booby traps?

CRH: There were some. The river, the Seille, runs right at the foot of the ridge so it was a natural place. The Germans knew there were only so many places we could use to attack so they would set mines along the river. But the stuff that I remember there is the artillery and a lot of it. 20-millimeter anti-aircraft guns and they have shells for them. The bullets that fly away from them will explode on contact. So they were using those as anti-

personnel, instead of airplanes, so people who got hit with one of those were likely to have a tremendous hole blown in them.

DB: So they were like mini-cannon.

CRH: Yeah, and what's 20 millimeters? About this big I suppose.

DB: That's about an inch diameter.

CRH: Yeah, I guess. Pretty fearsome hole, and, usually, they were mounted in multiple gangs so you had two of them or four of them together. So they were hosing down the fields these poor GI's were attacking.

DB: Were these like rockets?

CRH: No, they were bullets. They were cannon rounds to be specific. That's why they could be used on airplanes. They would fire up these 20-millimeter cannon rounds. Anyway, they were deadly and so there were a lot of casualties.

DB: What were rockets?

CRH: Literally, self-propelled rockets. The same sort of things you played with when you were a kid, only they were more sophisticated. And the Germans – ordinarily - fired them out of tubes and I think they... of course, the Germans did a lot of really fine rocket work in the 1920' and 30's, at the same time that Goddard and the rest of the people here were doing rocket work. But I think the Germans took the Russian design for a multiple-barreled rocket launcher. And it would be a collection of stovepipes, actually hung together and then fired.

DB: Did it sort of look like one of those organs, stovepipes?

CRH: Yes. They would fire those. We made ours up in racks so that ours sat in racks like this and I think there were one, two, or three racks that sat on top of a tank and then the tank had a framework on it to hold these things and you would load these up and then the man who wanted to fire them, could either fire one or five or whatever he wanted. Or he could set it so you could fire them all at once.

DB: And would they explode on contact?

CRH: Yes. They exploded on contact.

DB: Sort of similar to these 20 millimeters.

CRH: Right. Only they were a lot bigger. I am holding my hands at about six inches across, I think.

## Rockets: World War II

Rockets as auxiliary, or, specialized Artillery.

The 1920s and 1930s saw a great deal of interest in rockets and experimental, developmental work.

Russia: 1930s: Leningrad Gas Dynamics laboratory developed an 82mm solid-fuel rocket carrying a 6.5-pound explosive charge. Launched off of a truck-bed carrying 36 tubes and the rocket ranged out to circa 6,000 yards. This "Kostikov gun" (named for one of its developers, was a secret until 1941. Germans termed them "Stalin's Organ." Soviet soldiers called them Katyusha. This 82mm model was enlarged to 132mm caliber, carrying a 40 lb charge out to circa 9,000 yards. Truck-mounted, 16 tubes.

Germany: Kummersdorf Experimental Station, near Berlin, built a 6-tube launcher, trailer-mounted, firing a 15cm rocket, electronically fired. Size increased, soon, to 21, 28, and 31 cms. These solid-fuel rockets were, later, shouldered aside by German interest in liquid-fueled rockets (see, e.g. A-4 and FZG-76 types).

Britain: Rockets viewed as anti-aircraft weapons. Circa 1936. 2-inch and 3-inch models tested, 1939. Many of these British models carried a parachute-and-trailing-wire which – it was hoped – would become entangled with invading aircraft.

British Army used some 3-inch models in 16-tube, trailer-launched type. The British **Typhoon** rocket-firing fighter was an effective "tank-killer" in 1944-1945.

U.S.A.: Robert Goddard did rocket research as far back as 1918. US Army did intensive rocket development as of 1940-1941. Ground forces (infantry) used the Bazooka, which fired a 2.35-inch round as an anti-tank weapon. These were good, but not so good as the German "Panzerfaust" and "Panzerschreck" AT rockets. AT rockets tended to fire a "hollow-charge" (a.k.a. "Shaped Charge"). The hollow charge was / is conical and – when fired – develops a stream of particles moving at extreme speed (20,000 feet per second) in a "liquid," high-heat particle charge, which penetrates armor.

[The Bazooka was a clumsy-looking length of pipe, imitating a wind instrument, used as a prop by a very popular comedian named Bob Burns. Anyone with access to a radio in the later 1930s would know the name Bob Burns and recognize the general shape of a Bazooka.]

Sources on "rockets" include the brief, but useful, *World War Two: A Visual Encyclopedia*, under the general editorship of Dr. John Keegan. London, 1999.

The German and Russian rockets howled, and were frightening as well as deadly.

The American rockets most familiar to me were 4.6-inch rockets, launched off of the frame on a tank. The frame was termed “the Rocket Launcher T34 (Calliope),” firing 60 missiles – either in any sort of sequence, or, all at once. We (the Americans) were delighted by them. – CRH June 4, 2002.

Letters 2002 re-write:

**Germany will fight:** see Toland *A. Hitler, Vol. 1*, pp 418 – 419. A Hitler continued to dream of an association (?) alliance (?) some sort of toleration (?) from Britain in the mid-1930s.

David Lloyd George visited September 4, 1936 (summer Olympics in Berlin).

D.L. George and A. Hitler agreed that (a.) German-British friendship was desirable, and (b.) Bolshevism was THE menace. P. 418.

p. 419: Apparently, DLG and AH agreed that Germany accepted an armistice (Toland says “surrendered,” on p. 419, but, that strikes me as an inaccurate term. – CRH)

**Too soon.** DLG may have told AH that England reached a point, in WW I, when she considered surrender, but held on. Germany **did** surrender, “at five minutes to midnight. . .”

AH, apparently, told DLG that – should there be a war, again – he, AH, would hold on until **five minutes after midnight**. (p. 419) which is, of course, what they tried to do. All of their efforts were complicated by the Hitlerian / Wagnerian **Goetterdammerung** concept of total, chaotic collapse.

Toland: *Adolf Hitler, Vol 1*, p. 428. the SS / “armed forces” (says Toland) **enjoyed “far more camaraderie than formerly between officers and enlisted men in the regular service and the elite SS units were models of democracy”** p. 428.

Consider this in terms of – e.g., the SAS of England: see *Who Dares Wins*, Virginia Cowles, Ballantine Books, NY 1958. *Who Dares* tells the story of Major David Stirling and his North African adventures and adventurers. . . forerunners of the Special Air Service (SAS). Amongst my own war souvenirs is a little (4.5”) statue of a **Parachute Regiment** trooper, from the SAS. This was given to me by Major Baker – former Exec of the Para Rgt/SAS – when we met at West Point (NY) in 1984. Baker was a New Zealand native who had served all over the dangerous parts of the globe with the SAS – including seven tours in Ireland. He spoke at Seattle U., under my sponsorship (together with InterCollegiate Studies and the R.O.T.C. Offices) for the SU History Forum: October 29, 1984. Topic: Terrorism. One of his major conclusions: Terrorism cannot be prevented in any country determined to be as protective of individual rights/freedoms/movement (internal and abroad) as – for instance – England and the United States. Ergo, **terrorism may be fought, fended off, frustrated, but it cannot be stopped without sacrificing the very liberties which make our lives as heirs to**

**England's law and the west's constitutional concepts as seen in democratic and representative parliamentary government.**

When I met Major Baker, he was serving at the US Military Academy. – CRH

DB: Could you differentiate when you would hear these things coming, which were which?

CRH: Oh yeah. I think that's one of the things that they called "screaming Mimis" because they had such an odd configuration that I imagine that they displaced the air in a special pattern. They were probably slower than a shell, so the sound of the shell would be different. Very distinctive sounds.

CRH: You were asking about rockets. The German word for "throw" is W-E-R-F-E-N. And then you make a noun out of it, a thrower becomes a W-E-R-F and then put E-R on the end of it. A Nebel Werfer was a rocket thrower. Well most of our GI's tended to shorten all of those German words so we always referred to them as Werfers. And I have a hunch that there are plenty of Americans who don't know what the proper term was. They always just heard Werfer and that's a thrower. As I say, I wouldn't swear to it but I think they were probably Russian models. I am going to have to do some work for us on both American and German weapons and get some specifics on some of this stuff. We are going to want it.

DB: What was the scariest sound to hear? The artillery or the rockets or what... the .88's?

CRH: Artillery fire landing close, and that was rivaled by machine gun fire coming close to you. Machine gun fire far away, you didn't worry about too much, I suppose. But when you heard that ripping sound, then that was scary. You paid attention.

DB: The ripping sound of the bullets (or cracking when they were really close).

CRH: Yeah, right. I have told you it sounded like you would take a piece of paper and poke a pencil through it. When you heard that cracking sound going by you, then you knew that that was a problem. But I think incoming artillery, with the notion that you knew what it would do, after you'd seen what it would do, then, after that, every shell that came in offered infinite possibilities to the imagination.

DB: The night before you attacked Delme Ridge you mention that you slept on a piano. But you didn't sleep very well.

CRH: But I slept better than the folks on the floor.

DB: Were you all kept up by anticipation, worrying and so on?

CRH: No. We'd just go to sleep. You were just exhausted, tired all the time. And it was rainy. If we woke up to think about anything you would wonder if it was possible that the attack would be canceled. That one's famous as one of the few attacks Patton ever thought of canceling.

DB: Because it was raining so hard?

CRH: Yeah. That was either the night of, or, the night after the Presidential election of 1944.

DB: Yeah. You said here it's the night before, on election night.

CRH: That was a terrible storm.

DB: Before an attack, you all didn't get nervous about it?

CRH: Oh sure you did. Because you knew that, well, once you left the security of whatever seems secure, your foxhole or your house or whatever...

DB: Relative security.

CRH: Yeah, you didn't know where you were going. It's a familiarity thing. You didn't know where you were going. You didn't know what could happen and it's like that old wisecrack about passing a football. There's three things that can happen and two of them are bad. Same thing was true in an attack.

DB: You took three days to cross flooded land to take Delme.

CRH: Yeah, I think it was a three day fight to get to the top of that ridge.

DB: That's what you say here. Were foxholes impossible in this flooded land?

CRH: No, as a matter of fact they weren't. I spent a good share of the morning, that first morning of the attack, digging because we were in a crossroad, we were in front of a crossroads. The Germans were shelling the crossroads behind us but we didn't know that. The shells were going literally right over our heads, not much higher than the top of your sign, the top of your Steiglitz. Steiglitz, that would be in real German.

*[In reference to Delme Ridge: 319<sup>th</sup> Regimental history shows us in the attack there November 8, 1944; November 9; November 10, and a few more days for objectives in the immediate vicinity].*

DB: About nine feet or so.

CRH: Yeah at the most because they were headed for this crossroads right behind us. So each one sounded like it was looking for you. So we dug like crazy and I have got a

comment that I dug partly just to keep warm but partly out of sheer nervousness and also the idea that “well, it can’t hurt the way those shells are going by.” One of them is liable to drop down because they could see our gun. There wasn’t any question, they knew where the gun was; they just weren’t going to bother with it. So they had zeroed that crossroads and the artillery guys probably didn’t care about our gun. Maybe they knew they weren’t going to put any tanks out where we were. They weren’t attacking us, so they probably said, “well, the hell with it.” But they didn’t want us to use the crossroads to bring up tanks, troops, anything, artillery pieces of our own. So they were shelling that thing. It was right behind us. It was about as far as from here to the crossroads at Broadway and Madison. It’s just about 75 yards. And each one sounded like it was going to land in your pocket. And we did have a Lieutenant hurt there that morning. That’s also the morning, in my letters I don’t know if I mention it, there was a wild fox that ran right through the position. All these country guys and a city boy me, and, suddenly, there goes a fox. You know, “what the hell’s he doing.” And he looked just like he was supposed to. Like French foxes are supposed to look; like the illustrations in children’s books.

DB: Red.

CRH: Yeah. Red foxes. Little Walt Disney smile on his face I suppose. Scared by the shelling, obviously. I don’t know what happened to him.

DB: Were you wet and cold during those three days a lot?

CRH: Yeah, you were wet all the time. You were always wet and you were always cold. You figured your feet were wet so the rest of you is cold all the time. If your feet are cold, you are cold.

DB: Are we talking about just at Delme or a lot of times throughout the war?

CRH: Oh most of the time. The main thing was not to avoid being cold, the main thing was to keep dry, keep your feet dry so that you were cold inside your clothes but that your clothes weren’t wet all the way through. And those raincoats we had were certainly not, this wasn’t London Fog, they were just really sort of thick cloth with some kind of plastic covering on them.

DB: Like a poncho?

CRH: No, they were cut regularly as raincoats. They were big enough and cut full enough that you could, literally, roll up in one and sleep if you wanted to. I’ve done it. You just roll up in a tiny little ball and lie down on one side and pull the other over you and tell yourself not to move all night long.

DB: So that probably came in very handy.

CRH: Yeah. So it worked like a poncho. Good analogy. The water fell off of your tin helmet. With any luck at all it fell beyond the reaches of the raincoat’s collar and so on.

And some of your outer clothes. Your knees were probably filthy and wet all the time. The main thing was to keep your feet dry. And then you had long johns if you were lucky and you had another pair of pants on over, you had camouflage pants on over your khakis ordinarily. So the cammies were probably wet all the time and the khakis, the woolen pants, the OD's as they were called, olive drabs, were probably wet in places like the knees.

DB: They were pants, the OD's. They were woolen.

CRH :They were wool. They were so thick that my first pair of ski pants I ever had were made out of my old army pants.

DB: So they were like worsted wool? So that would help to keep you warm.

CRH: Yeah, I will bring the jacket down, or the shirt down, someday, for you.

DB: In 1980 you talk about the prayer of thanks, you were writing a letter in 1980...

CRH: Oh yeah, November 11<sup>th</sup>.

DB: Yeah it was in November on Armistice Day. And you talk about a song from (?) that you solemnly recollected your buddies who were killed in battle and that you try to make each Armistice Day special in that way. Would you guys pray in the foxholes?

CRH: Sure, oh yeah. Especially if you were, as they say, a cradle Catholic, where you said your night prayers and probably your morning prayers, but, you always said your night prayers anyway. But then if there was what the first World War Brits used to call, "hate" [artillery fire] coming in. That's a great word. Then you would pray too. All the time. And most of them did and most of us were Catholic you have to realize. Theoretically there should have all southern Baptists or Woodrow Wilson Presbyterians, but because of the high mixture of Polish there were many of them Catholic. And then Sgt. Desgrosiliers was a French-Canadian Catholic and then one of my corporals was an Italian Catholic.

DB: Would you sometimes...

CRH: Never prayed together. Went to mass together. [*Once in a great while: Bamberg, Germany, for instance. April 21-22, 1945, Rgt. Headquarters was in Bamberg and most of the Catholics in the Rgt. went to a Mass in the "Dom" (Cathedral)*].

DB: So you would do it silently?

CRH: Oh yeah, right. Maybe out loud for all I know. You know, I never thought about that. As I got older I suppose I would have, if I had been forty when I was there, I maybe would have organized a little prayer ring from foxhole to foxhole in hard times. I might have, when I was forty, with the Catholicism I had when I was forty, or that I have now.

Realizing this would be a good re-enforcer and all that stuff, but I was 19 years old. I was praying for myself and that was it.

DB: To whom did you write that letter that you wrote in 1980 in which you write the poem that you had seen on a plaque in Verdun? The poem goes, now I am translating it...

CRH: "Since your eyes closed mine have not ceased to weep."

DB: Right. "Since your eyes closed mine have not ceased to weep." And it is in French and English. From a small private memorial to his son from a French father. Do you remember to whom you wrote that letter? It was unclear.

CRH: No, I have no idea. If I were to go back and look at it I might be able to figure it out. I have no idea.

DB: Now I have a couple of questions about that poem but they are sort of technical so let me turn this off for a second.

DB: In your November 19<sup>th</sup> letter you say you "are enclosing some letters of Czech refugees forced out of Franzensbad." You have that photo don't you?

CRH: No, that would be interesting. I can still see them lined up in the streets outside of the old Doerfler [the "oe" stands in for an "o-umlaut"] hotel. If I sent those pictures home it would be great if we had them but I can't tell you that we do. I did find, last night, the original negatives of some of the pictures that I took. I am going to ask Anil, the school photographer, if there is any benefit at all in trying to use those in terms of modern development skills and techniques.

DB: It was probably a Kodak, like you said. I think you told me. They are probably good negatives.

CRH: And one of the pictures I know we have got because you and I have looked at it, is Sergeant Bowles sitting with his feet up in some place in (name of town) Austria or something. And you could see it in the negative even. Anyway, go ahead.

DB: You did a hand-written, later, you did a hand-written note in the margin that you wanted to add something about, "poker and London and English Navy" and then I couldn't read the next word.

CRH: I have no idea what that would be.

DB: It was in the margin where you had added about the truck convoy trip home into Germany, France, Camp Lucky Strike and then into England. [*Possibly a reference to the following: I loaned Sgt. Gorna \$100.00 in a poker game in Southampton. He won about \$1,000.00, and took me to London on a 48-hour or, maybe, 3-day pass. I met Laura*

*(can't recall her last name), who was in the British Navy, at the American Servicemen's Club in Piccadilly Circus. Saw her a couple of times, after that. Wrote to her from the States, at least once. – CRH June 4, 2002].*

CRH: Oh, that's easy to do. That's a reminder to myself that I should have told that story if I didn't some place, I don't know if I was writing that to my mother in '45, I have no idea. When we were in England on the way home, we were down near Southampton somewhere as I recall. There was a Sergeant Gorna and despite the rank difference, he and I were good friends and Gorna was interested in learning German, as I was, so I suppose that's one of the things. But Gorna was one of the people who helped pack up my famous dishes that I brought home from Czechoslovakia.

DB: That you showed me.

CRH: Yes, right. That's right. You've seen those. With the Pirkenhammer. Anyway, we were that close. Well Gorna was a good poker player and he was almost broke in a poker game, and I had been watching the game and he came to me and said "I can't stay in this thing, I need some money."

DB: This is in London?

CRH: No, we were in Southampton on our way home. And I was reluctant. I knew enough not to loan any card-player money but I thought, "well, this is Gorna and I know he is good." And I also thought, probably, you know "what the hell, he's done me lots of favors." So I forget what I loaned him but I have a hunch it wasn't anything more than \$100. Pretty soon he had all the money in the poker game and because of his rank there were no problems. Off we went. He got me a pass and he got himself a pass and we were off to London for two or three days. And we spent the money Gorna made and he paid me back mine.

DB: Very nice.

CRH: So we went to London on somebody else's money and we ended up at the very famous club for GI's just off of whatever the famous square is. The most famous...

DB: Trafalgar?

CRH: No.

DB: Leicester?

CRH: No, I can't do it. I will think about it. It was one of the places you had to go. Piccadilly Circus, of course, was a place to go but there was one that was famous because it had a big club there for the American soldiers. And there was always a string of British and other girls waiting outside of that club to be invited to go in with GI's. And somewhere, I think it was there, I met a girl who was really a very nice girl. She was a

German [correction: British] Wren. Royal Navy and she was stationed in London. And I saw her at least twice, maybe three times.

DB: You said she was German?

CRH: Or English, excuse me. English girl in the Royal Navy. She had a funny story because she had joined the Navy to get away from somebody. Some GI, some British GI came home in '45 figuring that they had had a romance before the war and she just couldn't handle it, and she decided she didn't want to marry him. And she couldn't stay in wherever she was, so, she joined the Navy. So many people join the Navy to run away from something. Laura, her name was, joined the Navy to get away from being home. And she was stationed right there in London and she was very, very nice. I really liked her. I wrote to her a few times after the war. She was a nice lady.

DB: Do you want to tell more about that trip or about Camp Lucky Strike or about England and the ship home and what it was?

CRH: Details on that really fade away. The trip was like most long GI train trips and the most vivid I remember is getting off the train, probably in Le Havre where you would get on trucks and go out to Camp Lucky Strike.

DB: In Le Havre did you say?

CRH: Lahauv. Yeah. And I remember that that's where I lost, by not being careful enough about it, that box I had carefully made and put Sergeant Mitchell's .45 in it and I think a little target pistol I had too. I had so much stuff as the Company clerk and I had to make sure that I had the Company's typewriter and gosh knows what else. And I left my own typewriter sitting there and there wasn't any shot at helping that. I remember that very vividly. The other thing I remember from Lucky Strike, and it's not a memory at all. It's because I have photographs of some of my friends. Replacements, all of them in the chow lines. And so there's pictures there. And then we went walking and there's pictures of the hedgerows with these people and all of us looked like what we were. 19 or 20 years old. Pretty funny.

DB: And that was near Le Havre, Camp Lucky Strike?

CRH: Yes, right. Very close.

DB: What was it like when you got back to the US when you first got back? Was that...?

CRH: We had the easy break-in because you were still cradled in the Army and you went to Camp Kilmer, which we'd seen before and knew before, and you knew were getting out. So it was nice being home in the sense of being back in the States. I don't recall if we got pass to go up to New York from there. We may have I just don't remember. I have a hunch that they got us out of Kilmer as fast as they could and I told you that I got to stand behind the pilots when we flew home in the DC-3's. And then all I remember at Lewis is,

vague memories, most of it. But two vivid memories are that they did a whole bunch of fillings in my teeth and they also gave me a talk about joining the reserves. I didn't have enough sense to refuse the fillings because they didn't use Novocain. I had a bunch of fillings and the Army was determined, you know, "your teeth are going to be in good shape when you get out of here." I had quit brushing for almost two years. I had gotten very sloppy about that.

DB: Well it must have been very difficult to do at the front I imagine.

CRH: It was difficult but people with common sense did it. I just didn't. And it was stupid. And the reason I didn't was I saw a German who got killed while he was brushing his teeth, and, psychologically, that turned me off of brushing teeth. And I got sloppy and lazy about it. And of course, my teeth are really great. I mean they are hard as rocks but even they couldn't stand that, so there was a lot of filling to be done, and the damned Army dentist filled them all. Drill them and fill them. All in one morning, no Novocain. God, I will never forget that. And then I remember this sort of grim humor when the recruiting officers trying to get everybody to join the reserves. Of course, if you signed that card you went to Korea. Nobody knew that then but that's what happened. Several people in Olympia signed that card thinking "oh well, there's never going to be another war" and the next thing you know they were on Heartbreak Ridge or someplace.

DB: Were you disappointed when you realized that you wouldn't be home for Christmas?

CRH: Probably. I think the big, if there was a big disappointment, was there was always the rumor, and it must have been in every ragtag outfit in Europe, that you were going to go home and march in New York. You can imagine what that would have been like. So that is what we had hoped to do. And of course all rumors in the Army are hot. You know, everyone of them was just always, absolutely, true, and so, you spent a lot of time sorting out the good from the bad. You get pretty good at it. But you wanted to believe that you were definitely going to go home and that you definitely were going to march in the parade in New York. And I think, I hope this is true, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, I think was sent home.\* God knows they deserved it. They were in North Africa in May of 1943. Jumped into Sicily and Italy; into Normandy and Holland in 1944. They deserved to march down Broadway, and I am glad they did. But, anyway, we didn't. And after that I suppose it was just a matter of saying "oh well, what the hell. I don't care." As long as we are going home. The trip home was on the USS Champlain. It was an aircraft carrier. And we were stacked there five or six bunks high and they were simply canvas stretchers on metal frames. So the big thing there was to be on the top. In case somebody did get seasick you wanted them to be below you. And I did get seasick. I had eaten something that made me sick the first day or two out and then after that I was fine. As a matter of fact I enjoyed it. We had an enormous storm, really horrendous storm, and I was able to enjoy the storm. You were on this carrier that was as big as a football field. There wasn't any feeling of danger but, apparently, it was dangerous. It drove us way out of our way. We sailed from England and we saw the lights of the Azores, that will tell you what that

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\* The 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne did march on Broadway, New York, in January of 1945. See Major General James Gavin's *On to Berlin*, NY, 1978, p. 296.

storm was like. We were that far south trying to find some way to get out of there. I don't know how long it took us to get home. Ten days or something. It was a long trip. Ordinarily she would make that in, I suppose, four days.

DB: Was it more pleasant than the trip over?

CRH: Yes, right. Much more pleasant. First of all, it was American chow. Much more roomy. They simply put out these multi-level decks of bunks in the ready spaces underneath the flight deck. The elevator would come down. There's a basketball floor in there really. All kinds of room, so you weren't crowded.

DB: So each person had a bed then.

CRH: Yeah, you had a bunk.

DB: Not like the way over.

CRH: Probably just about as big as your desktop Dan. Maybe a little bit longer. And it was canvas stretched on pipe frames. Yeah, on the way over, only half the people on the boat could have bunks because there were almost 20,000 people on the Queen Mary. And you didn't want to stay in the sleeping space anyway. It was summer weather, and I think you looked it up, but, it seems to me that we sailed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July or something. The weather was nice. And so you just stayed out in the air.

DB: So it must have been cold when you came back in December.

CRH: It was, but we had plenty of clothes you know, and they were warm clothes. Army clothing was plenty warm. And on the ship, of course, especially if the ship is moving at all, there's always all sorts of dead spaces for the air. You can see that standing around the ferry boats down there that go 20 miles an hour and you can stand in the breeze going by out there that the seagulls can fly on without moving their wings and we are standing there in dead air. So we had the same situation. I remember standing in the gun tubs [*“gun tubs” formed a protective armor-wall, about 5' high, in a circle around the carrier's anti-aircraft guns – which were, probably 40mm Bofors guns*] watching these big waves come up and down.

DB: Did they give you Army blankets?

CRH: Oh yeah. Or maybe they were Navy blankets. I don't know. But it would have been comfortable. Of course, you would sleep in your clothes if you were at all cold.

DB: I got a green blanket from my mother who said it was her brother's from the Army. It's wool.

CRH: I remember that for a long time after the war, for some reason or another, you would get Australian Army blankets made out of the finest Aussie wool that lasts forever.

DB: What did you mean when you said that they were cutting down the Company to “TO strength”?

CRH: T-O is short for “table of organization.” And it’s just as though, for instance here at the school, the College rather, of Arts and Sciences we have a Dean and assistant deans and so many secretarial support staff of one kind or another and so many department heads and so many people teaching in each department. And the treasurer and John Eshelman, the Provost, knows that, within the College of Arts and Sciences, if he picks up a piece of paper, there’s everybody from the Dean’s name right on down to Mrs. Lawrence, our secretary. All by rank or whatever they would be. By department. Maybe by alpha order as they are in the phone book. So the Table of Organization tells you how many people and what they do. Who is the First Sergeant, who is the Captain. Then you have a TOE, that’s Table of Equipment and that tells you how many 50 caliber machine guns, or how many knives and forks the cook has, or, whatever. And most companies in combat were under strength all the time because they kept losing people. If they got over strength at all they held on to everybody they could because they knew the next time they turned around they would lose them again. Killed, or wounded, or something.

DB: So when you say that you are at TO strength that means that you are at full complement of men?

CRH: Full complement and for us it would have meant that we were cutting down because during the war Regimental headquarters had so many responsibilities that it really had a lot more men on its TO, Table of Organization, than it was supposed to have. But in order to do all the things they were told to do, they held on to everybody that they could get their hands on. Because they knew that there would be a lot of little crazy jobs. I was part of the extraneous material, you might say. When I was in that Ranger Platoon, we were attached to Regimental headquarters. Well, when the war was over, there wasn’t any need for the Ranger Platoon except to pull guard. Run around and play military government. Which is why I got switched to actually being in the Regimental headquarters and being a typist.

DB: OK Bob, you say that in a letter of November 26, 1945, you started to talk about this story about helping two ethnic German/Czech women to get out of a dangerous, what could have been a dangerous or unpleasant situation in Czechoslovakia. You mention “Susie Zischka had a sense of humor along American lines. She is a lot of fun. She is outstanding to anyone familiar with the ways of the average German Maedchen...”

CRH: “Maedchen”. Excuse me, I shouldn’t have corrected you but that is Maedchen.

DB: No, no. Thank you.

CRH: It’s where the word “maid” comes from.

DB: Or Frau. So what did you mean by the ways of the average German Maedchen or Frau?

CRH: That's probably a very unkind and very unjustified comment. Both Susie and Edith were very much aware of themselves as persons and the story I have told over and over is that they were both famous as being amongst the few virgins known to exist in that valley. They are ethnic Germans. They are Sudeten Germans whose parents had been there, and grandparents, and so on, there in the valley, I don't know how long. But anyway they were determined, to literally in the best old-fashioned sense of the word, retain their virtue. They had no intention of just sleeping around with the American soldiers. And they didn't, and they both worked for the Americans. They were both switchboard operators. As far as the sense of humor, I am not quite sure except Susie is still great fun to be with and she laughs and jokes and she teases and she can do anything from, I suppose making silly imitations, to doing double-entendre jokes. I don't know why I thought it was particularly American. Maybe the Germans I had spoken with were somewhat somber but Susie was a 16 year old girl having a lot of fun with young men. And enjoying herself or whatever it was. And she is still very much that way today.

DB: Now you note in a later remark that Susie's dad was forced to serve as a physician in a refugee camp or camps. It's unclear.

CRH: Yes. Right.

DB: Was this because Susie left without permission of the Czech authorities?

CRH: No, no. This was long before she left. When the war was over and the Germans had lost, then the Sudeten German – Dr. Zischka was one such – was told “You will look after this camp full of Czech refugees.”

DB: I see. Near Franzensbad.

CRH: Right near Franzensbad, right. But he wasn't in the camp as a prisoner or anything. I met him at their home but that's where he had to work. Instead of having his own office and working out of his own surgery, as they would always call it, he had to work at that camp.

DB: For a couple of years or?

CRH: I don't know. Probably at least two years. I remember being surprised when he finally got permission to leave, but, it was long after 1945.

DB: Because there were so many displaced people.

CRH: Right. And they needed doctoring and the Czechs just figured “well these damned Germans. They imposed on us; we will impose on them.” And Dr. Zischka was a good doctor.

DB: Bob, you write hear quote, “We heard the Czechs plan to round up all the women who had worked for the Americans.” So I wanted to ask if they feared that this meant that the girls might be raped.

CRH: Yes, or mistreated. The women who worked for the Americans would be the German, the Sudeten German girls who worked on our switchboards and worked in our kitchens or worked as maids, say in the Hotel Doerfler, where Regimental headquarters was. And the thought was that everybody was jealous, Czechs and Germans, of anybody who worked for us because they knew that they were not only getting paid but they were also getting food. And so the Czechs were particularly concerned about that and angry that German, rather than Czech girls had those jobs. We may have had a bunch of Czechs working for us also I just don’t recall, off hand, but I do remember that there were numerous Germans. Certainly Susie and Edith were German. Anyway, there was the thought that they would be taken, the minute we left, and assigned to work on the farms. And assigned, literally, as farm girls. We just assumed that, and I think we also heard stories that the Czechs intended to revenge themselves on these girls anyway they could. And certainly we were willing to believe that that was going to happen. As you may know from reading my, I guess it’s in my letters, John and I were prepared to shoot some Czech policemen if they stopped us. That’s how fierce the rumors were. Whether or not they were true, I don’t know. But you should realize that that was the judgement that John and I made and both of us were very calm about the judgment. We did no intend to be interfered with. We certainly did not intend to be stopped. And heaven knew we were not about to surrender to any Czech police. If Czech policemen had stopped us, if we could have stopped them physically without killing them, we would have, but, if necessary, we would have shot them.

DB: What was the clinching argument in convincing Susie’s dad to let her go?

CRH: I am sure it was the fact that she had a home, the Sankt Anna Heim, promised to her. “You get to Munich, you can come to the convent at Sankt Anna Heim. To the convent school there, and there will be a place to stay and this will be an immediate step forward into your university work for an MD.”

DB: Had she arranged that ahead of time?

CRH: The family had been able to arrange this somehow. I have forgotten the details about why but there was a note that everyone knew that if Susie got to Munich she had a place. And everybody knew that if Edith got to Hanau she had a place. She had an uncle there.

DB: So you “sped through the dark streets taking Susie and Edith to the hotel in Franzensbad”. So did you leave the lights off on the jeep? Is that what that means?

CRH: I have no idea. The streets would have been darkened anyway. Nobody had any lights on. California power outages. There wasn’t any luxury like electricity for street

lights. So it would have been dark. The lights were probably on in the jeep but actually, you'd get so used to driving with the lights off and only using what they call, "cat eyes," these tiny little lights and tiny little reflector caps, cat eye reflectors that most people drove fairly well at night with no lights.

DB: That was so that the enemy...

CRH: Wouldn't see you. Anyway, I don't remember. I suppose that we were driving around with the lights off to dodge the Czech cops. I don't recall. I just know that they didn't follow us and they didn't get to the hotel. And they had no idea where we went.

DB: I don't know if you know this or not Bob, but did the US hold onto some Czech districts or was all of it eventually occupied by the Russian?

CRH: Oh, it was all occupied by the Soviets from 1948 to 1989.

DB: Eventually.

CRH: Oh yeah.

DB: So you guys were getting out.

CRH: We were leaving and then, eventually, the Sovs came in, primarily in '48, and, then, they repressed the Hungarian Revolution of course, in '56.

DB: Did you all smuggle, it says here that you "smuggled" the girls in a six-by truck.

CRH: Oh that's just a big, regular Army truck that you see with two sets of four big wheels in the back and then one set of steering wheels in front. And you can put, if you jam them, you can put 90 German prisoners of war on one of those because I have done it. So that will give you an idea of the size. The bed of the truck must be almost as big as your office, Dan. Not as wide, of course, because it has got to be on a road, so, what's the maximum, 8'3" or something for a truck bed? You can jam 90 people in one of those trucks.

DB: Now Bob, an unrelated question here but I noticed that from that Sun magazine article, on the cover both you and Nick Grossi both had sunglasses, uh, not sunglasses, eyeglasses.

CRH: Yes we both wear glasses. We both did then.

DB: So you had eyeglasses throughout the whole combat experience?

CRH: No, no. I didn't have mine during the war. I lost them either at Dix or, they never got replaced. The Army would never replace them. I remember a very embarrassing incident on a firing range with the Army. I had been picked out as one of the marksmen

to do a special demonstration and I couldn't see the targets and I did very badly. And my sergeant and, of course, the Company officers were deeply shocked that I did not do well and I had, apparently, lost my glasses by then. And that was, I think that was at Dix. It may have been at Kilmer but I don't know if anybody did any firing at Kilmer. You would know better than I if there is a place you could even have a range. We were probably firing at Dix. [*Or, perhaps, at Fort Benning*].

DB: You were near-sighted?

CRH: Yes. Even near-sighted I could still shoot pretty well but not at a distance on a target. [I did OK on a regular, square, "bull's eye" target.]

DB: So they never gave you back glasses.

CRH: No, they told me I didn't need glasses, so I went through the war halfway blind I think. It was really very funny.

DB: It must not have caused you too much trouble.

CRH: Well it caused problems at one time or another and then, of course, there were probably a lot of problems I never realized. But the worst problem, I think I told you, one time I was shooting at some woman several hundred yards away from me and somebody said "Hey, wait a minute. That's a woman. That's not a German GI." She was coming out of fire escape in a building. I kept missing. Thank heavens. Without my glasses, I may have been missing the building, for all I know.

DB: Well Bob about the Susie Zischka story, is there anything I didn't think to ask that you might want to add about that?

CRH: You know that, subsequently, after the war that we wrote back and forth constantly and that Mom and Dad helped support that convent in Munich and the Catholic Daughters of America, the whole state organization, helped support that convent with contributions and food and clothes and money and so on for years after the war. Susie and I remain good friends. Her husband and her daughter have visited us here in Seattle. We always see them when we go to Munich, go to Germany. Last year may have been the first time in years I had been in Germany when I didn't get to go see Susie.

DB: She must be about 70 now.

CRH: Yes. I think I was 20 and Susie was 16 or 15 ½ so she'd be 72. I'll be 77 here in a few weeks. That's how old she is.

DB: Oh you will be 77.

CRH: I'll be 77 in April. With any luck at all.

DB: Well, Bob, this looks like a good place to stop here. Thank you.

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**Interview 3/25/02**  
**70 min.**

Daniel Burnstein: Today is March 25, 2002. This is Daniel Burnstein interviewing Bob Harmon here at Seattle University. Now Bob, I was looking over some books that talk about narratives of World War II and I had some questions that arose from those.

C. Robert Harmon: Please.

DB: Okay. Bob, the firing of anti-tank weapons, was that often something that was done from an impersonal distance or could you see the effects of what you did?

CRH: The range on the guns that we had was short enough that you could always see the effects because the tank had to be fairly close, preferably just a few hundred yards or even less if you could rig an ambush. There are records. I can think of one British paratroop unit, for instance, which fired on a tank at less than 50 yards. There were plenty of attacks on tanks at six, seven, or eight hundred yards, but you have to remember that that shell was so inadequate to the task that at more than say 1000 yard range or so you wouldn't use it anyway because it wouldn't accomplish anything. As I said before, it wasn't much good for tanks. They did destroy some tanks – the 57s destroyed a lot of tanks – but the 57 gun and crew were then, often, destroyed by somebody right afterwards.

DB: Did you destroy many tanks?

CRH: No, we didn't. My gun did not fire on one single tank, as far as I can recall. We fired on towns, a lot of that.

DB: So it would be used more as a sort of light artillery?

CRH: It could be, and we used it for that because it had a solid shell that you could fire rather than an explosive shell, and that solid shell would be used to shoot at French towns because the shell would hit those stone walls, and then the stone walls would become shrapnel. By the way, I have asked other anti-tankers if they ever willingly fired at a German tank. I have never seen anybody or talked to anybody who did. I have talked to people who fired at tanks, but they didn't like it.

DB: Because they knew it would bring retribution.

CRH: They knew what could happen. The first thing that we knew about this, really, and how bad it was was, when I think most or all of the anti-tank guns from one platoon,

maybe all three guns were lost from the 317th Infantry in the Moselle Valley. And the word came to us very quickly through our Sergeant Mitchell that, "I want you people to realize what happened to our buddies in the 317th, and that the gun has to be placed very carefully because it is not up to the job." I have a number of references. I've got a file on things wrong with the 57 and I will just write a little note on that. You might use it as one of those long footnotes if you want. But Cole, whose book you have seen, *The Ardennes* –

DB: That's C-O-L-E.

CRH: . . . comments on the fact that the 57 wasn't really all that good. And my usual comment was that sure a lot of people fired it and fired it successfully, but that there were plenty who didn't survive.

DB: And that was partly because the German tanks were so good.

CRH: They were getting better in some ways all the time. There is a progression in every weapon of offense and defense and at any one time the offense or defense carries the day. And with tanks, the thing to do is not only to have adequate armor, but to slant it. And it took a long time for the tank designers to get around to moving away from a square cookie-box kind of design to slanting the armor so that the shell that hit it not only had a lot of armor to penetrate, but tended to ricochet off unless it hit perfectly. The Russians eventually ended up with a tank that you should take a look at. There are plenty of models that you can see in books on World War II, and that's the T-34. Very good gun on it. Very fast tank and very nicely slanted armor. And the Germans were doing the same thing. Well, the 57 was no longer adequate which is why we (the U.S. Army) ended up, eventually with the 90 millimeter anti-tank gun.

DB: Did you have the 90 millimeter?

CRH: No, never had it. The tank destroyer people did, and there were some gun carriers that were specifically set up: armored gun carriers, tanks really, to carry that 90 millimeter. [QUESTION: Did the tank destroyers, sometimes, have a high-velocity 76 or 75 mm gun?]

DB: They were called tank destroyers.

CRH: Yes. Right. The TDs.

DB: But, for the Sherman tank, they never did get around to slanting it right.

CRH: No, not very much, and the weaponry on it was inadequate.

DB: They depended on numbers of them.

CRH: Numbers and speed. The Sherman was relatively low profile and very speedy. So the thought was that they would fly around the battlefield, find some coign of advantage and fire from there at the flank or side of the German tanks and hope; and that's another big thing, the big hope was to hit the treads. If you hit the treads, the tank was effectually slowed down. It wouldn't necessarily be out of action because the gun could swing all the way around. The gun traversed 360 degrees.

DB: At least it wouldn't be as serious.

CRH: At least it would be sitting still. It wouldn't be chasing.

DB: So you all mostly used your anti-tank weapons to do things like slow down the infantry advance of the Germans?

CRH: No, we never used it against infantry. Always would use them against some solid target. For us it was always buildings. It should have been tanks, but fortunately for us, no tank ever came up and invited us to shoot at him. There were plenty of people who had that opportunity, but my particular squad just never had that happen to them. And again, as a part of that, fate picked me out all the way through. I had an easy war compared to everyone else.

DB: I guess everything is relative.

CRH: Yeah, it sure is.

DB: Because I know it wasn't easy for you. What does Bob the person think now of the young man who wrote the letters back then?

CRH: Frankly, I am pleased with them. I think they are perceptive. I think they are considerate of my parents in that I didn't try to scare them in any way. There is nothing weepy in those letters. There is a good deal of common-sense advice to Neil about the realities of war. I think that my letters to my mother and father were usually good on one personal level or another. The letter to my father when my grandmother died will always please me. I don't think most sons are sensible enough to write as honestly and as openly in sympathy as I did to Dad. I am pleased I wrote that. I think my perceptions of what was going on in Germany, in some ways, are very good. In others, they are sometimes jejeune. When you look at my hatred for the Germans, and my inability (then) to see that – maybe – Germany or even all of Europe could recover from its mutual antipathies, I think one can understand why I would feel as I did. But, I wish I had been smart enough to foresee something like – for instance – the work of people such as Jean Monnet.

DB: The 'architect' of the European Union.

CRH: Yes. Right. Well, he was one of them. There were three: Paul Henri Spaak, and an important German. Very important German. Anyway, yes, I am pretty pleased with them. I certainly think my notion that we should have been prepared to start teaching

German grade-school kids right away was a pretty perceptive one. And, in a way, we didn't do that, but the first serious German 'prime minister' – Chancellor—

DB: Konrad Adenauer? [“Der Alte” (The Old Man)]

CRH: Yes. Mr. Adenauer did.

DB: Adenauer.

CRH: “Der Alte” he was called. “The Old Man.” You know how he got to be Chancellor or the head of his political party?

DB: Christian Democrats.

CRH: Yes. Do you know that story?

DB: No.

CRH: Well, the story goes that – after the first real post-war organizational meeting – he walked in, looked around, and announced, “I am the oldest one here. I will take the chair.” He did. But he had an agenda, obviously, and that was how he got at it.

DB: He must have been what they call an alpha-male.

CRH: He probably was. He certainly was a survivor.

DB: Well, you suggested in one of your letters that you wrote to me that you could comment on the question about why the Bulge was a surprise to Eisenhower. So if you could elaborate a bit on that, Bob.

CRH: Oh, that will probably get written on also in terms of the Battle of the Bulge presentation I make for you and for us. First of all, there were many, many reports in the summer and fall of 1944 about the imminent end of the war. That the war would end, the war would end by Christmas, or it won't last long. The way in which Ike spoke, “These fellows won't have much left” or that they won't be able to do this or that.

DB: And this was being reported in the press in the United States.

CRH: It was reported in the press. It was repeated over and over again by very high-level intelligence officers, the people who were the intelligence officers for Eisenhower and others. There was a thought that the enemy was rocked back on his heels and nobody knew just exactly how much resilience there was in the Germans, so there was a great deal of confidence in that. And I don't know when I wrote that. I thought I said something about “everybody is ending the war in the newspapers,” but I think it was about this time of the year [March] in 1945 that we had just gotten out of the Battle of the Bulge and the Germans had managed to pull a real rabbit out of their hat there, and then

everybody was talking about, “well, the war is virtually over.” But on my level, we couldn’t see that at all.

DB: This is by early spring.

CRH: Yeah, spring of ’45. About this time of year, I think, I wrote that.

DB: Yeah, you did.

CRH: But anyway, none of us saw the war as slowing down in any way. We realized that we were going to win. We were all smart enough to realize that we were going to win, but there wasn’t any hope that we were going to win right away, in the way we did. But that, of course, that just reflects the level of information at the higher levels and the people on the top just assumed that, based on what they knew, that the Germans should pretty well be through, which was an error.

DB: Now on page 2 of your September 26 letter to the editor of the Blue Ridge, 2001, Bob, you relate that when you realized that you weren’t keeping up in physics and chemistry that you would soon be busted out of the ASTP (Army Specialized Training Program) and then you sent a personal letter to the commander of the jump school at Benning asking to be a paratrooper. And then you write in the Blue Ridge, you said, “Naïve? Yes, extremely. At the board of academic review I faced, ‘Army channels’ were brought to my astonished attention and, shortly after, I and several other men found ourselves with the 80th Division.”

CRH: Yes. About six or seven of us went out all at once.

DB: So I want to ask you, does this mean that the board of academic review or other people there were angry at you for not going through. . .

CRH: No, no. They were highly amused. They didn’t care about channels. What was happening, Dan, was that from the moment that the ASTP was activated, from 1942 on, people began to think about destroying it, primarily because of the casualty rates and they needed infantry. So for all of us who had infantry, fine, but they also realized that they had seized, or gathered up in their net an awful lot of people such as myself and again my good friend Bob Dinsmore, who were bright enough to pass what was essentially the examination for officer’s school. We all passed high, about the basic level for officers, but that didn’t mean we were capable of doing engineering studies. In other words, maybe we should have been assigned to languages, although not in my case, but we didn’t belong in engineering school because, as you probably know, math is the key. If you can’t do math, you are out.

DB: If you can’t do math really well.

CRH: Yes, and I, of course, had never had any basic chemistry either, and they were trying to get into 12 weeks far more than just a regular college semester’s work. So it

was pretty much a 'survival of the fittest' kind of thing and there were an awful lot of very bright people who busted out of the ASTP and I was not necessarily very bright, but I certainly was busted out of the ASTP, and well worth it, too, because there was no reason for me to be thinking about going to engineering school. But they did not have, obviously, they had no intent of trying to say, "If we get you some coaching in chemistry," which I was failing, "maybe you could make it." Instead of [saying] that, they knew I really didn't have my heart in school and that I realized that I wasn't going to make it and therefore I was looking for the next thing I wanted to do, which was go to jump school.

DB: So they could tell you didn't have your heart in it because you had applied to jump school.

CRH: Yeah. Right. If I had been running around looking for extra help in chemistry, why they might have felt better about keeping me, but they had been told to start cutting down the program, so that is what they were doing. And pretty soon, there was almost no one left. In '44 there were a few people who were finishing up in the sciences, people who were finishing up at medical school, for instance, dental school, that kind of thing. They stayed in. There are a lot of them who, by the time they took their mandatory year's residency at the end of medical school, it was 1946, and they were discharged. I know of at least one man who felt kind of guilty about this and so he volunteered to go to Korea as a battalion surgeon and he went over and he saw service in the MASH units in Korea because he felt, "Well, they gave me six years of school," so he kept his reserve commission and he activated it on his own.

DB: Quite a dedicated young man.

CRH: Well, honest young man to say the least.

DB: So they were going to send you to the 80th Division anyway, probably.

CRH: Well, somebody's division, and I am just damn lucky that it was the 80th. What a choice that turned out to be for me. It was really fine. There are divisions, like there are people, which are just simply bad luck units. We were not only a good luck unit, I was in the best-luck regiment. There is no question about it. The 319 was far and away the luckiest. Maybe not the best, but we were the luckiest regiment in the division.

DB: And you were in squads in which people cared for each other.

CRH: And we were. I had a tremendous squad. They were great people.

DB: Bob, remind me. You were talking about in one of your letters, on of your comments from the early 90s about Jim Crosby's attitude toward the Germans in the war and the post-war period. Remind me who Jim Crosby is.

CRH: Oh, he was a former military government employee in Germany. Ex-infantry in the Second World War. Spent several years with the army of occupation working as an intelligence officer in the American zone in Europe after the war was over. He came back here and was a very successful businessman on Mercer Island, and his wife became the executive secretary to Father President.

DB: To whom?

CRH: Father President. Father Sullivan. She was Joyce Crosby, whom you may remember. You may have met her. She was here when you came. Little. Blonde. Very attractive, very intelligent lady. That's Joyce Crosby. Well, Jim was her very bright husband. Jim, in a nice long letter, several pages, wrote to me about how he really didn't have these feelings. He understood how nasty some of the things the Germans had done were, but. . .

DB: It was a very interesting letter. I appreciated you letting me have a copy of that. It was very interesting. Now did you and your buddies – this is something I am taking from a book by Gerald Linderman called, *The World Within War: America's Combat Experience of World War II*.

CRH: Not a book I know, so far as I recall.

DB: He suggests, and I am wondering what you think of this, that, at first, before the GIs got over to Europe they tended to minimize their adversary's capabilities to oppose them, and relatedly, they had a faith in their own personal survival. You know, it was sort of, in effect, people would be saying to themselves, "I feel bad about these other guys who might get killed, but I am not going to get hit."

CRH: I really can't speak very well to the first part of that, but the second part, yes I would agree with him that your thought was that, "I will make it." And I think that is one of the things that was hard on people later on when they began to realize, after they'd been around the lines awhile that they probably wouldn't make it. Not a question of "Will I get through this unhurt?" The question was "Will I get through unhurt in any really serious way, or, will I get killed?" And you see that particularly in the writing of some of the Marines with whom you are familiar. Certainly Dr. Sledge [E.B. Sledge, USMC].

DB: Yes.

CRH: As far as the first part, you are always taught that you can do this. So I am not exactly sure how to approach the solution to that. You are taught that this is going to be rough and dangerous, but this is something you can do. And then you also get all that kind of variation of "we're number one" in sports. It would leave a common-sense person wondering, "Well, if the Germans are going to be, or the Japanese are going to be that easy, how come they have done as well as they have?" If you had any sense at all, you would think about that.

DB: So they would try to pump you guys up psychologically.

CRH: The same way you do sports teams.

DB: As in sports.

CRH: Exactly the same way you do sports teams. And it has a certain effect, I think, especially in the units that really work on that, and that's why the paratroopers were so effective and why the Marine Corps is so respected, why these Rangers you see are so magnificent. SEAL teams. They are given a number of things to do. They are shown what constitutes excellence in them and then they are told, "Look. You just did this and it is excellent. Ergo, you are excellent at this or that." And that gives you that certain confidence that, yes, you can do that, but there is always that first time and that is the critical time. That first experiment, and if you come out of that, you can say, "Yeah, I can do this."

DB: You remember that?

CRH: Oh sure.

DB: What was that like?

CRH: Oh, there was a "first-time" experience every time you turned around. One of the things I had to do was connect our squad with the next squads over, and the platoon, with wire. Telephone wire. First time you go crawling out under shellfire to repair a broken line and get back safely and the line is repaired and the phone working, you think, "Well, yes. It can be done."

DB: That was your baptism of fire that time?

CRH: No. My baptism of fire is probably something I can't remember Dan. I have no idea.

DB: But that's an early example.

CRH: That's an example of something I can think about. The first time you move under enemy artillery and realize, "Well, you could have gotten hurt, but I did that and got away with it, just like they said you could." And the first time that you realize, also, that you can gauge where it is probably falling. If it's falling behind you then your danger is minimized. If it is falling in front of you, it's maximized because the pieces fly toward you. Few of the pieces fly backward. Very few of them.

DB: Is that right?

CRH: A shell goes into the earth at an angle and so everything that is facing towards you is slanting upward at you like this and flies out that way.

DB: Bounces back.

CRH: It doesn't bounce back. It explodes forward. As an illustration, stick your finger in the sand some time. When a shell explodes, for instance, everything here goes forward and stuff that's in front goes into the sand and the stuff that's underneath goes into the sand. It's the fan out in front of you that's going to kill you. You could really see the 'killing zone' pattern when they would fire shells, which would explode, by proximity fuses or timed fuses, over snow. You would see this sudden black fan, 50 yards across, and realize that it was full of thousands of flying little pieces of steel, each of which could kill you, or a big one that could sever legs or cut you in two. Then you get the impression of what artillery fire does. But I have had our artillery fire land behind me when I was walking forward, and it's scary because you never know what will happen. But if it lands in front of you, you can walk fairly confidently right close to it, which is what artillery barrages were, for instance, in the First World War. You read about the great waves of English, American, and German soldiers marching forward with the artillery dropping 50 yards in front of them and some of them getting hit once in a while by backward flying pieces, but most of them had the nerve to keep right behind that artillery. Arrive there at the enemy trenches or foxhole while he was still ducking down because the stuff was coming to him and you were behind the fan of flying shrapnel, but it takes a while to realize that you can do that. ['Barrage', in French, is a dam or weir. A 'curtain of fire'].

DB: You mentioned a minute ago that it was tough sometimes when the GIs would lose that faith in personal survival. That assumption of personal survival, do you remember when that happened to you?

CRH: The idea that you knew that you could possibly, very likely, were going to get hit must have been no later than mid-October / November. I would think October in the woods in eastern France and Lorraine, near Nomeny.

DB: That's NOMENY.

CRH: NOMENY. When, there's a story in there somewhere and I think we have already corrected it. I am not sure. There were tree bursts over the shell hole where I was and pieces of shell came down and hit things I had. We talked about this last week when I was talking about stationery. Pieces of shell came down and pierced stuff right on the edge of my foxhole. Here's the edge of my foxhole as far away as your desk and there would be shell fragments, which could have killed me, and beaten up my envelopes or whatever I had up there. So that would make you think. You realize that this stuff is not only deadly, but it's completely impersonal. There is no personal interest at all. Neither is there any with the artilleryman. He just throws the shell into the breach and yanks the lanyard and off the shell goes 8000 yards away and somebody dies. He doesn't even see the shell explode, probably. That gets on your nerves after a while. It's worse than machine gun fire, I think.

DB: The shells.

CRH: Yeah.

DB: Is it real noisy?

CRH: Yeah, they are, and they crack. Go down in the basement of your house some time and take a big paper box and smack it with a flat board and you'll get an idea of what that can sound like. Or a lot of times they go "crump." Further out, you get the various effects of physics. I suppose some odd variation of the Doppler effect. They are noisy.

DB: Were you in situations sometimes where you were in a foxhole and there was artillery fire going on for hours around you.

CRH: Yeah.

DB: And that would. . .

CRH: That would get your attention, too, because your first thought is, "How long will this go on?" And then after awhile, "Will I be here when it ends, if it does end?" I told you that story about refusing to go up on the gun one time when Bill Carolus was on the gun. I know we corrected that tape. So anyway. . .

DB: That must have been very nerve-wracking to be there for hours.

CRH: Well, it was at first for me, or maybe it wasn't that day. I remember that very clearly. It got worse and worse as time went on and of course we knew what tree bursts were and we knew how bad they were and we knew we were right on the edge of the tree line. If we had been deep in the forest it wouldn't have scared us so much, but we knew that the Germans knew exactly where the tree line was and we were in it. That's why they were putting shells, very accurately, right on us. Fortunately, nobody in our squad got hurt that day.

DB: Were there people, yourself or others who became fatalistic after a while saying to themselves, "Well, my number is up?"

CRH: The only one I know – that's a good question. I think everyone gets it, Dan – the only one I know is one of the men. I can't recall his name, but a friend who was in the mine platoon, and one of his jobs was sweeping mines. And I have seen him – I have talked to others and maybe you about this – I have seen him out in the middle of an open field where the Germans could easily see him, in the Siegfried Line fight. Just walking back and forth out there, and he was sustained by his Christian faith. I asked him about that very specifically. He said, "If I am going to get it, I am going to get it." And I could never feel that way, but he did. So he would be out there with his little detector going

back and forth, cutting six foot swabs or whatever they cut, making sure that the mines were gone, or, if they were there, he would find one and disarm it.

DB: So he thinks to himself, "If God means for me to. . ."

CRH: That's what he told me. I don't know. Heaven knows what he thought. I believed him.

DB: You didn't think that way?

CRH: No. There is a certain faith that I suppose all religious people have that God is, hopefully, looking out for you, and certainly there was this thought, "Well, if this happens then I know that this is just something that was going to happen to me." It's not that God ordained it or anything like that, but that it would happen. But there would always be this prayer that it wouldn't happen. But that guy, he was able to accept that right to the 10th power, and he lived that way. He cleared all those fields.

DB: May I ask what was the nature of your prayers Bob?

CRH: That's an interesting question. I couldn't tell you. I probably – if I said any formal prayers – I probably said the three formal prayers which most Catholics would say under those circumstances, but certainly the Our Father and Hail Mary. Funny: I think that I had a rosary. If you have done this from the time you were a little kid, you know how to say the rosary. I really don't know what they would have been, and I certainly never made any promises that, "If you get me out of this I will be a good boy forever." Homer Lee, the professional soldier of fortune in American history, has a wonderful comment about people feeling that "God stalks, patiently, at their footsteps, noting down all their good deeds and ignoring the bad deeds." And I never felt that way, but God does know what you are doing, obviously.

DB: You don't remember sort of gearing your prayers in a personal sort of way toward God?

CRH: Yeah. Oddly enough, though, I don't remember praying for my fellow soldiers.

DB: You do?

CRH: I do not. I probably did. I would hope I did. I certainly don't remember.

DB: What do you think about this, Bob? Linderman says that, "combat pared away the emotional sensitivity of some soldiers," that there was a dulling process.

CRH: Oh, I'm sure it did. I have seen too many written comments from people like Sledge. I can hardly argue against it and there are a number of very well done professional studies about what happened in that regard, and it either meant that they turned toward cruelty or indifference. Either one, I suppose. They simply became, not

unaware of, but indifferent to, whatever the normal standards of life and conduct would be toward the enemy soldiers or toward the dead enemy civilians.

DB: And sometimes he says that “we were numb.” He quotes people saying, “We were numb, we tried to confine our mental images so that our imaginations would not run wild.”

CRH: Oh yeah. I think there is probably a great deal to that, Dan. You get that also, particularly in the poetry from the First World War. These soldiers face much the same thing. And you have a very articulate group of people in, say, French, Italian, German, certainly in English, who have talked about that. The numbness of it. They just sort of shut off the realities of what could happen. I think the chief case I can think of as an illustration of that is something that I have talked about before and that’s the night in Germany where several people in my unit discussed machine-gunning a bunch of German prisoners in a German courtyard. They obviously had to be removed from, or numb to, the ordinary decency of life.

DB: Brutalized, so to speak.

CRH: I think so, yeah. That’s exactly a good term for it. Just plain brutalized, and I have a hunch that that happened more than once. It’s just that that’s the most vivid case, for me.

DB: Do you remember feeling numb, where you are just trying not to think about what might happen and that kind of thing?

CRH: No, I don’t. It may have happened. I just don’t remember, off hand, at this remove.

DB: Were the GIs fearful that if they were caught by the Germans they might be shot or mistreated, and was there a common belief among the GIs that “if we are caught with German souvenirs they will kill us because souvenirs were considered to have been taken off of a German soldier?” He [Linderman] claims that that was a German cultural thing, that the Germans really hated that.

CRH: I don’t know if it’s German culture. I have a hunch that we would have done the same thing and probably had very much the same attitude. If you take those questions in reverse, no one wanted to be caught with a Luger, for instance. If you have taken a German Luger pistol or a German souvenir of some kind, and you happen to be taken prisoner, it was the assumption that that was an invitation for mistreatment or death. Particularly the Luger. There are a lot of stories about that. I have no idea if any of them were true at all, but there were lots of latrine rumors to the effect.

DB: Is a latrine – latrine, by the way, is the same thing as a slit trench?

CRH: No. Latrine is just simply a bathroom, toilet, and shower room, combination of all of those.

DB: So that has a housing over it.

CRH: It has a housing over it. A slit trench is just a place to get rid of the old bodily function.

DB: In the open.

CRH: In the open. You just literally dig a three-foot trench, six or eight inches in width, two or three feet deep.

DB: Sorry to interrupt your train of thought.

CRH: No. No problem. The thought was that you didn't want to get caught with German souvenirs. Whether or not the Germans had some national prejudice against that, I can't believe, but I am sure that Americans killed Germans when they were found to have, say, American cigarettes on them.

DB: Because they would assume that "he took that off my buddy?"

CRH: That's right, and there would be an instant anger process involved in that.

DB: In general were there rumors that we might. . .

CRH: Oh, by the way, let me go back to finish the rumors. We may not have wondered what the Germans would do to captured people, but after the Battle of the Bulge, nobody had any faith in the Germans. When they shot all those people at Malmedy [Belgium] and then [Lt. Col. Jochen Peiper, 1st S.S. Panzer Division. Eastern front veteran] shot some others in other places, and the rumors, and they were really rumors, that went around were really substantiated. [Although only a Lt. Col., Peiper led a "reinforced Regiment" which was, in fact, far larger than a regular Division: i.e., he had ca. 22,000 men, 250 tanks (some of them Tigers), self-propelled artillery, and combat engineers. See, e.g., pp 188-189 of Stephen Ambrose's Citizen Soldier, NY 1997, Simon & Schuster].

DB: About Malmedy.

CRH: Yeah, and the other places where they did that. Then after that, we had no faith whatsoever, so I imagine there was a great deal of trepidation on the part of everybody who ever surrendered any time after the 16th of December. I can't imagine that they did so confidently, figuring, "Oh well," because you never knew what they would do. And, of course, you are dealing, also, with a bunch of kids. I don't think you would worry so much about the older men, but there is nothing more frightening than some 16 or 17 year old with a sub-machine gun. Last time I faced that, by the way, wasn't very long ago. I

certainly kept my fingers crossed and my big mouth shut. I ran an errand for Seattle University, in Nicaragua, and when I went through the airport in Managua and saw all these youngsters standing around with their fingers on the triggers of those Kalishnikovs, I was very careful and very polite in my answers. Very polite. That was seven or eight years ago. You don't want a kid with a sub-machine gun getting excited.

DB: So before the Battle of the Bulge, there was not a general fear that "we are going to get mistreated as a POW?"

CRH: No, I don't think there was, but that's probably one reason they publicized that as much as they did. They didn't want it to happen again. There was a thought that "Well, you better fight because you could get murdered anyway," and of course that would have improved the morale. But mostly, we were just really angry about it, but we were very apprehensive. We knew that it could happen and it obviously had just happened [in December of 1944]. [Long after 1945, I found out that the Germans had a special POW (Prisoner of War) camp for American soldiers who were Jewish: Stalag IX-C, at Berga. David Barlow – a 28th Division Medic who was captured in Clervaux – told me of this and I have, now, several citations indicating that conditions there were bad, indeed. David is a fellow Puget Sounder, living in Port Ludlow, Washington. His story is told (PP 251 ff) in *Mir Soe Merci*, published in Luxembourg, by the U.S. Veterans Friends Association, 2002].

DB: Speaking of what we were talking about before. I imagine that could help to brutalize some people.

CRH: Oh sure. They did it to us. We will do it to them.

DB: I mean that's basically what happened in the Pacific.

CRH: Oh absolutely. I think there again, Sledge. . .

DB: Is the authority on that.

CRH: That reminds me, did I give you a copy of the book of Chesty Puller to read?

DB: No. Is he in the. . .

CRH: No, he is Marine Corps, in the Pacific. One of the great combat soldiers of all time. Chesty Puller is recognized as, probably, the Marine's Marine in the Corps' 228 years.

DB: Yeah. I remember Sledge mentioning him.

CRH: Yeah. He was something special. Anyway. I have my cover at home, so that I know I loaned that to somebody and it's a dedicated copy, by the author. It's some friend

and I told him, “Go ahead and read it.” I have no idea who it is, and of course Gina has said, “Write down their names.”

DB: That’s frustrating.

CRH: As with any other \$40 book, but mostly, I just wanted it back in my library.

DB: In the Ardennes, were there stories of German infiltrators passing themselves off as GIs?

CRH: Oh yeah, that wasn’t a story. It was a fact. There were several units that were specifically designed to do that. Most of them were under the direction of one particularly capable German commando if you will. Colonel (Oberst) Otto Skorzeny (1908 – 1976), he is famous. You probably know the story. He is the one who pulled Mussolini off his mountaintop. That’s Skorzeny, so yeah, he did that and he had a bunch of people. And as fast as we caught those people, we executed them. I don’t think any of them were allowed to live.

DB: Did you catch any?

CRH: No. Never, so far as we know, we never saw one. We may have and not known. You didn’t know if they were the guy standing there in the perfect MP uniform, speaking broken English. It could be.

DB: Did it make you wary of talking to other Americans?

CRH: Oh yeah, sure. And I have told you a story about one of the units, maybe 10th Armored. We ran into them and they wouldn’t talk much to us at all.

DB: They wouldn’t talk to you?

CRH: No.

Colonel (Oberst) Friedrich a., Freiherr von der Heydte

Oberst von der Heydte was an experienced “jumper,” commanding the Fallschirm Armeewaffen when Operation Hohes Venn – a part of Lt. Col. Otto Skorzeny’s Operation Grief – was set up.

General Model, Wehrmacht, wanted a jump on Krinkelt (defended by the American 2nd and 99th Divisions). Hitler “intuited” (as he so often did) that a jump into the Malmedy, Belgium area would be the right choice. See Cole, Ardennes, pp 269-271.

When General Sepp Dietrich gave his orders to Col. Heydte, Dietrich was “in his cups.” Heydte was ordered to raise a 1,000 fallschirmjaeger and drop on the Hohes Venn, which would lead the Germans out of the Elsenborn-Malmedy area toward Eupen. Many of von der Heydte’s troopers had never jumped. 112 old Junkers planes did the ferrying. Three hundred dummy figures were dropped near “Camp Elsenborn” (p271) and that was fairly

successful. The jump took place on December 17, 1944. High cross-winds, lack of good, experienced pilots led to a scattered drop across a 50 km area. One hundred fallschirmjaeger did make it to the rally-point at the Eupen road, near Mt. Rigi (p. 271). December 21, 1944: this disaster was aborted and survivors told to make their way back to German territory. Operation Hohes Venn did succeed in drawing many American soldiers into “wild goose chases,” which netted a few parachutes and some dummies (p. 271).

Grief (Condor) Operation Grief was part of an attempt to emulate the 1940 success: swift movement, armored spearheads, parachutists.

Grief and Skorzeny were attached to the 1st S.S. Panzer:

Designed to seize two Meuse bridges and reinforce success at the bridges as quickly as possible (p. 269).

Kommandos dressed in American uniforms and riding in jeeps were used, leading to confusion, suspicion (General Bradley was detained for a bit by American MPs).

For references to Otto Skorzeny, see *Secret Forces of World War II*, Philip Warner, Scarborough House. Chelsea, MI: 1985.

DB: Because they were afraid you guys were. . .

CRH: They had been told. I remember walking up and I had asked probably exactly the wrong question about, “who are you people?” They weren’t about to answer.

DB: That made them suspicious.

CRH: Exactly. Those stories were true, and most of those men were captured. And every one of them who was captured, I think, was executed. You also had a bunch of German soldiers who had been dropped as paratroopers behind the lines. The famous Colonel von der Heydte, he was literally a very important knight. A Freiherr, he was a free man of the old empire. Colonel (Oberst) von der Heydte walked out of the Bulge. He was dropped away beyond the German lines, he and his fellows.

DB: But he had a German uniform on.

CRH: He was wearing a German uniform so he wasn’t a spy, as were some of those who were running around behind our lines.

DB: Now during the battle, according to my readings, I don’t know if this is true or not, often times officers would drop the hierarchical stuff. They would fraternize with the privates and corporals more on a level playing field as if they were social equals and so on. Then when the unit withdrew from the field there was a complaint that “they would treat us, the officers would treat us as complete strangers.”

CRH: I think that would depend on what unit you were in, Dan. That's the same sort of thing – who is your fellow Rutgers faculty member who did the famous book on fighting, did four or five books, English teacher at Rutgers – anyway, he was always complaining about that sort of thing and he was an officer.

DB: Is that Fussell?

CRH: Yes. Paul Fussell, and Fussell, apparently, was a very effective officer. He talks about that. With our unit I don't think it was that way, but, there was a barrier, probably left over from old Army traditions, between officers and enlisted people. You have to realize that the officers themselves, in many cases, were new. We lost a lot of these people and the men with whom they were dealing were replacements, over and over again, too. So you didn't have that camaraderie. I think an example of camaraderie, where it really existed for me, for just a moment, was in a story I have told you about already. I was one of the few people who stayed with an American captain in some German town that was surrounded. And I stayed, probably because I knew the town was surrounded. Anyway, we stuck with him and he was very pleased about that. I remember a very professional, very close association with him. "This is the way this is going to be and we can do this sort of thing and this is what is going to happen," and we trusted his leadership. I couldn't tell you his name. I just know that that worked very well that afternoon. I think it all depends on what unit you are talking about.

DB: Now, there is a, let's see. Hold on one sec. . . Now, Linderman talks about this special Marine battalion in the Pacific that was based on egalitarian principles. . .

CRH: Oh, that's the Raiders. The Marine Raiders.

DB: I believe so.

CRH: Yeah. Colonel Carlson. [Evans F. Carlson]

DB: Colonel Carlson.

CRH: Yes. He had done a lot of work in China with the Chinese communists and studied them.

DB: That's where he got some of the ideas from.

CRH: Yeah.

DB: And he would discuss the political issues underlying the war. For example, at one Friday night forum, four marines debated the kind of social order we want after the war, and he would debate the unit's weaknesses in their combat performance with his men. Now he says that very few, relatively, of the privates actually wished or needed to comprehend the political issues undergirding the war. I want to ask you though, Bob, what do you think of that and the related issue of – Sledge talks about this. He says that

they were rarely, if ever, informed about the broad tactical or strategic issues. In other words, they didn't really know what the plan was. They just knew "today you are here and you are supposed to fire on this."

CRH: I would take those questions in reverse. The latter part where you mention Sledge I think is true. In part, maybe the officers didn't have time to tell us or they didn't know themselves, had no idea what was going on, but at all levels, we ordinarily had no idea what the great strategies were. And I am not sure that it was necessary that we did have. Maybe we would not have cared, even. We were deeply concerned about the immediate assignment. "Do this. Do that. Take this town so you can take that river crossing and hold that bridge." That sort of thing.

DB: That was enough to deal with in itself.

CRH: That's all, yes, and it's probably all that you would really want to comprehend. You know, "Don't bother me with the details; I am going to die here anyway. I need to worry about defending this building or shooting somebody, someplace." In the other notion – about whether or not you knew what was going on – I have no idea. I don't think anybody did. I have a hunch that we started with some very basic ideas about the Japanese doing some bad things, and certainly, Pearl Harbor illustrates it. And the Nazis had done some bad things and we got told about that once in a while, I think, so that you might not have had some deep underlying understanding. Or as what's-his-name there just indicated, maybe not even cared about the future of trade in the western arc of the Pacific, for instance, from Attu Island to Bangkok. You wouldn't worry about that very much because you cared what that had to do with living in Hope, Arkansas. I have a hunch that that's the way that worked. Many people wouldn't have cared. People like myself would have cared and would have been interested. We probably read as much as we possibly could about it, but you are dealing with an awful lot of people who had no idea about much of anything and didn't really care. And I am the first to admit – I have got it written into several things, some of which have been sent on to you – none of us had any idea what Luxembourg was or where it was when we went there. We knew it was up toward Belgium and that was it. You just didn't have that kind of sophistication.

DB: Now in another chapter, Linderman contrasts what he calls, "German cultural obeisance. . . "

### **End of tape, side A**

DB: Linderman contrasts "Cultural obeisance to discipline and authority with American egalitarianism and American individualism," and he claims that a lot of discipline – as a sub-set of this discussion – he claims that after VE Day, among the GIs, a lot of discipline broke down because we were a civilian army and we weren't militaristic and so on. One officer observing, "Their war is over and they don't give a shit for officers' commands or any of the other trappings of the military." And there was a lot of disaffection. "Everybody was bitching," is another quote he gives. So I wanted to ask you, sort of in a case study, was this – do you remember this kind of thing?

CRH: Okay, I think that that's a very good point and it's one that you will see set forth many times. Start with the idea that nobody is going to give a hard time to anybody, particularly the officers, until VJ Day. Okay, so nothing could possibly obtain until the war was over, until the Japanese were gone, because the one thing you didn't, ordinarily, want to do, except for George Patton, was go to Japan. So you walked a careful line there. If there was any experience like that in an army unit, that I can think of, any place on the whole European continent, it could only have taken place after VJ Day. Then I think the bars may have gone down in some units. They did not in the units to which I was attached. That's all I can say. I know they didn't in mine. In part that was out of respect for the officers. In many cases these were men I know who had done very good things during the time when it paid to do good things, in the hard part, in combat, on the harsh end of things. So you respected them for that. Also I think we were all smart enough to realize these folks were just doing a job, just like we were, and we had been around long enough to realize that here's a man who is two, three, four, six years older than I am and he has no more interest in staying in Europe than I do after September [of 1945]. He is just trying to get by without getting anybody on his back and therefore don't give him too hard of a time. The same thing was true of the sergeants. Unless the sergeants or the corporals got after you in some kind of petty way, ordinarily you didn't give them any grief and of course most of the men I knew were men with whom I had served in the lines. When I was at regimental headquarters I was very respectful, I think, of the men with whom I worked, including the first sergeant, primarily because I know these were bright, hard-working guys who were doing the best they could and I could do some tiny thing for them, with my skill of typing and answering the phone for them, and I didn't need to give them any grief. But there was also the thought that "this is a pretty good job. Why should I mess it up?"

DB: So it sounds like Linderman sometimes generalizes.

CRH: He may have been in a terrible unit. They may have had all of these things. I have no idea.

DB: Well, he is quoting from some people.

CRH: They may have all been in bad units, but I can't imagine anybody giving anybody a hard time in the 319. That's all I can say. I gave more than one bit of grief, I think, to my sergeants at one time or another during combat. Particularly, if I felt we were being imposed on and being kept up too long or being called out on guard at some odd hours when I didn't want to be. I remember bitching at Leo Bowles, Sergeant Bowles, one time, about that I had already done A, B, and C and he patiently explained, "So has everybody else. Go do what I ask you to do." I could see the reason to that, and I have often felt pretty silly because I realized old Leo was just doing his job as well as he possibly could.

DB: But the fact that he patiently explained to you shows. . .

CRH: Well, we had been together. He was a PFC when we went overseas. We had been together since we had been in the desert and he knew that I knew who he was.

DB: So there was a sense of mutual respect.

CRH: Yes. Very much so. And I was tired. I told you I got so tired that you get to the point where you are asleep on your feet.

DB: Sleep standing up, yeah.

CRH: So anyway, he's (Linderman) dealing with a bunch of unfortunates, and the army is full of stories like this. I just don't know them.

DB: But I think what Linderman is trying to do, my take on this, is that he is, in historiography, there was a tendency in the 1990s to try to seem legitimate, that the most legitimate thing, historiographically, to do was to find chinks in the armor of this story that World War II was all good and all perfect, so to speak.

CRH: Okay. That's interesting.

DB: See what I'm saying?

CRH: Oh, absolutely.

DB: Fussell was sort of the ultimate expression of that. ["Fussell" was Paul Fussell, 22 year-old Infantry Lt. With the 103rd Division. WIA, France, spring of 1945. Harvard Ph.D. taught out of Rutgers, Pennsylvania, and other universities, colleges. Author of several (sometimes dyspeptic) reflections, studies reflecting his military and literary experiences and interests].

CRH: Yeah, but of course Fussell is a guy who spent much of his life at Rutgers and was mad about it, just to sum him up coldly.

DB: Right.

CRH: If he had taught at Harvard, he might never have written those books. [He did do guest shots at Harvard].

DB: So what I think Kinderman is doing is, I think, he is trying to come at this subject in a way that is somewhere in between Fussell and sort of a "rah-rah" type thing. Linderman is very respectful. In fact, he refers to Fussell as being extreme, but that's the way I see this. So it's good to – I think what I am doing here, getting a case study to sort of check something.

CRH: Well, our discipline in history, as you know, has always been, well for the last 75 or 80 years or so, has been anti-authoritarian. If nothing else, it has also been very

suspicious of the motives of leadership and you want to look at an example of that, all you have to look at is Beard on the American Constitution, and that's 1913.

DB: Something like that, yeah.

CRH: And that's been something of a tradition, so I think people who are conservatives and in the history business, such as I've been, were really rather rare when I went into it. It's far more likely that you would find a liberal chap such as yourself and I think that dominates. Paul Linderman, that side of business. And being anti-authoritarian means being anti-army, I think. You see that in almost all these movies, these war movies that are made. There were little more than a dozen good war movies, I'll bet, in 80 years.

DB: I think Linderman is basically respectful of what was done in World War II. Very respectful, actually, so he is sort of trying to legitimize sort of something in between.

CRH: He probably wants both. He is astride both horses. And you can see it, as you said, in the historiography of the '90s. I am not familiar very much with that particular sort, but I can see in the decades before that over and over and over again.

DB: Yeah. I think it started in the '70s and '80s. Although very little was actually produced in the '70s, '80s on World War II and then there is this big revival of interest in it.

CRH: If we are to publish, we can only hope it continues.

DB: I think it will because I think World War II is going to be as big 100 years from now as the Civil War was.

CRH: Possibly, in terms of military, it might be interesting. I see it in terms of its ultimate effects and I would rank it right there with the Congress of Berlin. Those years, 1814-15 are really key years and then there is a minor sort of mid-chapter in 1870-71 with the organization of modern Germany. It changed the whole balance of continental power. Forever, I suppose, certainly for our time. So, yeah. World War II is seminal and very interesting in that way. And, now, in 2002, it's interesting to watch the military try to figure out what all of the next answers are. They have been infatuated with light divisions and quick response divisions and sooner or later they get back to something that is pretty similar to what I am familiar with. Well-trained – such as the 10th Mountain division, or the 101st Airborne people and Special Forces folks chasing around mountains with a rifle. . . cold. Anyway. Go ahead.

DB: Well this fellow, Jay Glen Gray, he wrote a book called *The Warriors* in 1959. He talks about the appeal of that.

CRH: It certainly liberates you from any other concern, if that's the appeal.

DB: That is one of the things he talks about. Now, Linderman basically thinks that Gray went too far in his assertion that war was kind of – that Gray was almost saying that most GIs really liked it, and Linderman is saying, I think, that most GIs thought it was, in many ways hellish, but there were elements that were interesting and adventurous and those they did like.

CRH: There again, Dan, I think maybe this is an error, but it is certainly an attempt to educate you in terms of what you are trying to do and you will be around here long after I am gone. I think you have to draw an absolute line between line outfits, combat outfits, and anybody else doing anything else, anyplace, under any circumstances. I don't care how comfortable of whatever else, if they weren't getting shot at, it was a different world. Completely different world. [Again, consider the wry remark to the effect that, "the rear echelon is any S.O.B. behind me!"]

DB: Well you were sort of in a situation where you had some of both.

CRH: Yeah. I was lucky I had some of both. If the person is simply feeling liberated from the responsibilities of life and not having to worry about what mom wants me to do, or if I have to dust the corners, then the army does take care of you. It looks after you, it gives you three meals a day. It looks after you 24 hours a day. If you are not around, it worries. It's got a written record, somewhere, of where you are supposed to be, even on pass. So, if you were thinking about that and you were working for JC Lee, in the Supply Corps in Paris (after late August 1944), then life would probably be very liberating indeed. But for us, it was immediate, and it was noisy, and it was dangerous, and it was right now, and there was nothing at all liberating about it, except that they did have that notion, that again one of our Seattle U. (Dr. George Kunz) psychologists here speaks very well on this, there is some kind of interest in breaking and destroying things and we were breaking and destroying things. And you were solving problems, psychologically. If you shot somebody, that took care of that somebody, right then. That was it. And if you survived a firefight, or if you survived an attack, then you had survived. So there are these sharp differences within the question and I suggest one should always start with the question: "Is this a combat situation, a "combat unit?" Remember, perhaps one out of seven army men actually faced the enemy – meaning the "tooth-to-tail" ratio means many soldiers do not actually fight. And combat soldiers – "line outfits" – are sharply aware of that. If one was not in a "line" unit, then one was looked after, almost like children, and you were taught to do everything the Army wanted you to do. The famous "Right Way, Wrong Way, and the Army Way," so yes, one did not have to think, in many cases.

DB: If I may just go over a few of these quotes, "Appeals of Battle" with you.

CRH: Yeah. Please. I would be interested in them because I don't know.

DB: Well, in one of them, he talks about, and this is a paraphrase, the thrill, the rush of intensified emotion and excitement that comes with facing danger.

CRH: Well I would have to admit that – in my own words – “it was dangerous, but it was, also, kind of fun.”

DB: You’ve talked about that before.

CRH: Yeah. You’ve seen my letters home.

DB: So there is some validity to that.

CRH: Yeah, exactly.

DB: He sort of compares it to gambling, in a way, because with gambling you have that thrill, but, in this case, you are gambling with your life. It’s also scary as well.

CRH: Absolutely.

DB: Another one is comradeship. That you people would deal with each other in a way having loyalty and compassion, a sense of sacrifice without sham or pretense. What do you think?

CRH: I think that is very valid Dan. It was there and your whole world was that little squad. Expanded a bit. Your world got either bigger and bigger, or smaller and smaller – depending on how you looked at it – but when you were under fire, for instance, it was just you and your friends. That was it. So yeah, I think he is right about that.

DB: For example, when did it get to the point of knowing each other so well that, for example, you all would concern yourselves with the letters that the other guys received from home, for example, being happy when a buddy hears from his girlfriend or something like that?

CRH: Oh yeah. Exactly. And you were very sympathetic if somebody got bad news from home. Or every once in a while, somebody would get a classic “Dear John” letter from home and you were very much aware of that, ordinarily. So yeah. And if somebody had children at home and the kids were sick you heard about that too. Yeah, there was a great deal of empathy.

DB: Another thing he talks about is a keen appreciation of the mundane because one’s senses are quote, “sharpened by danger. For example, seeing beauty in a landscape or the appreciation of little luxuries like decent food or being able to bathe or feeling the sun shining on you or getting an orange to eat,” and quote, “an exaltation at being alive in the midst of so much death.”

CRH: I would endorse that. Stamp that, “Agreed!”

DB: Can you recall any examples, maybe of things that stand out in your mind?

CRH: For instance, in November 1944, Lorraine had over 7.7 inches of rain, and that is supposed to be the rainiest month of November in the century and certainly the worst one in 50 or 60 years. Well, any day that was a dry day we were grateful for, and I can remember feeling grateful for that. And when food would come up or mail would come up. Just childish things. If you dug a foxhole and it stayed nice and dry, well that was something you thought about. You were very much aware of those things.

DB: Appreciation of simple things.

CRH: Appreciation of simple things, yeah. There wasn't any sitting around thinking about, "how bad I have it," ordinarily. It was a question of thinking, "This is pretty bad; what can I do to fix it up?" It goes back, by the way, to that question about the German mind. I think the Germans probably worked exactly the same way. As far as the democracy, by the way, with the sergeants or rather the officers and the men – I have talked about this before and it's in some other notes we have made – I think there was much more of a camaraderie amongst German officers and their soldiers in combat units than there was in ours. I think the novels, which are expected to be believable, that have been written about this illustrate it very much so. In the First World War, that might not have been true, but in the Second World War, it's something that the Germans worked on very hard. See the combat novelists. There is a guy named H.H. Kirst. Hans Helmut Kirst, has written about this, and he is very good on it, I think. I say "good" because I have read a lot of other Germans who talk pretty much about the same thing, but he has got a bunch more democracy there. We had an awful lot, in the First World War, of a separation of church and state, so to speak, officer and enlisted men, that I don't think pertained necessarily to the German army.

DB: Interesting.

CRH: I think when the German army was being very formal, then, the division was probably very strict and very obvious. And, we would expect to be able to give our officers some grief, I think, without them pulling out a pistol and shooting you. Whereas, in the German army it was not uncommon, for instance, for a German officer to simply kill somebody who he thought was a deserter. You didn't see that in the American Army. [In fact, in the European Theater, only one unlucky American soldier was executed for "desertion in the face of the enemy," Private Eddie Slovik, who came into France as a replacement in August, 1944, deserted, and was shot for it, January 31, 1945. See Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, 143.] So there is a variation of these. All of these questions have to be approached in shades of gray. Hans Helmut Kirst is a revelation to anybody who had ever had this impression of the Germans as being very duty-bound to the old militaristic traditions that may have pertained in World War I. I don't think it was true in World War II.

DB: Well it could be that they were instilling this militaristic attitude in their privates as well. I mean, and they all sort of shared it.

Letters Home rewrite 2002. Comments for the taped interview with CRH and DB of 3/25/02, complementary to p 27 and the topics of French attempts to break up the Weimar Republic and Hitler's rise to prominence.

1918 Nov 9 Emperor Wilhelm II resigns (abdicates); Prince Max of Baden proclaims a Republic (to be led by "Majority Socialists" Friedrich Ebert and Philipp Scheidemann.

1919 Jan 5 – 15 Spartacists Revolt (Karl Liebknecht / Rosa Luxembourg)  
 Feb 11 Friedrich Ebert chosen first President of Weimar Republic  
 Feb – Mar Revolt in Munich: Broken by Gustave Noske.  
 Feb 21 Kurt Eisner assassinated by revolt in favor of Monarchy.  
 April [Soviet] Republic in Munich: suppressed by Weimar forces.  
 June 1 France attempts to set up Rhineland Republic.

1920 Mar 13 – 17 Pro-monarchist Kapp Putsch  
 Mar 19 Spartacist uprising in the Ruhr. . . repressed by Weimar

1920 Nota Bene: September 20 Malmedy, Eupen, and a major German population of 600,000 turned over to Belgium. Consider this in dealing with Malmedy Massacre 1944 during the Bulge attack.

Nov 9: Danzig proclaimed a "free city" under protection of the League of Nations.

1921 Mar Duisburg, Duesseldorf, and Ruhrort occupied by Allied troops in response to German failure to pay reparations.

Aug 29 Reactionaries assassinate Matthias Erzberger: Erzberger had signed the Armistice; was leader of Center Party, and caved in to Allied demands for increased reparations after French / Belgians occupied Duesseldorf, Duisburg. See, inter alia, pp. 119 – 123 of Vol. 1 of John Toland Adolf Hitler, NY, 1976.

[I spoke with Putzi Hanfstaengl (Ernst) when I was in Munich in 1975 and Hanfstaengl told me (in a telephone conversation in English [he was a Harvard graduate]) that "Toland has got it right" in his forthcoming Hitler book. (My intro to Putzi was achieved by invoking my connection with the Haushofer Family. CRH May 29 2002).]

1921 Poland awarded most of upper Silesia, with its many mines, much heavy industry.  
 Natural, nationalist, reactions amongst Germans favored Adolf Hitler.

1922 Easter Sunday: Foreign Minister Walter Rathenau signs Rapallo agreement with the Soviets (see pp 120, 121 of Hitler, by Toland).

June 4 Rathenau assassinated, Hitler to jail.  
 August Beginning of time of terrible inflation.

1923 Ruhr occupied by Belgian and French troops, who took over mines, railroad.

October 21 Belgium and France sponsored an abortive scheme for a “Rhineland Republic.”

November 11 Munich and “Beer Hall Putsch”: Hitler sentenced to 5 years in jail (Landsberg prison, where I pulled some guard in Summer of 1945).

CRH: Well, most of them knew pretty much what the German mission was. They were revenging themselves from World War I. There were taking what was rightly theirs, say, the lost Polish corridor. The French had obviously – anybody who knew history knew that the French tried to break up the German Republic after the First World War. Particularly, around Frankfurt, in the Rhine Valley. They knew that the French attempted to get their hands on the Saarland and they actually arranged for the League of Nations to occupy the Saarland until, 1935, I think it was. So every German was instructed, very carefully, on these bits of history. More so than we were.

DB: And they were instructed in a highly tendentious way, of course.

CRH: Of course. Well, when you figure that the guy who signed the peace treaty, Rathenau, was killed, in part because he was Jewish, and, in part because he signed the treaty. 1922, I think, he was assassinated. This is hatred of a very intense order.

DB: So there was also something he talks about that is something you’ve mentioned, and that was this concept of skill. You know, you were doing something and you could see the effects of it, and there was pride in that.

CRH: Yes, exactly.

DB: And he talks about the quote, “spectacle” of things such as fire fights. For example, gun muzzles flashing yellow, tracers leaving red streaks, shells and grenades creating orange arcs with jagged edges. You know, he says, this has sort of an awesome beauty.

CRH: Yeah it does. I am not sure we thought of it as beauty at the time. You have to realize that every flash and every crack was a sign of imminent death or possible death or that death had just passed you by. That old remark about, “you never hear the one that kills you.” So, if you saw it explode, you could think it could have very easily exploded 10 feet or 10 yards closer. So you thought about that, but yeah, you would notice this once in a while. You would be impressed, particularly by tracer fire, and I remember being very much impressed and not at all frightened by golden globes of anti-aircraft fire in the sky at night near Argentan in western France when we first went ashore. They would appear. They are not skyrockets, but they look like a skyrocket would. It just appears, this flash of gold. It’s beautiful. I can still see them very clearly. So yeah, some of this is entirely spectacular. It seems to me that I wrote to my dad about that one time too. About the impressiveness of shell fire because I knew that he, being a vet himself, would know.

DB: Right. And finally he talks about a quote, “Childlike release to wreck and ruin. A delight in destruction.”

CRH: Dr. George Kunz, S.U. Psychology Dept., clarified this for me – long ago – in an insightful Guest Lecture he gave to some of my History students. Yeah. There is something to that I think. Or an indifference to what you destroy. Somebody who might carelessly destroy, for instance, a down pillow. Stop and think of the work that went into making a down pillow. That's a lot of work for some peasant woman and children. Tear that apart. Tear up sheets or rip off sheets and put them over your tank or make a snow uniform for yourself so you wouldn't be dark against the snow.

DB: Did you do all that?

CRH: I don't recall if we did or not. You would think I would know, but I don't remember.

DB: Would you wear sheets sometimes?

CRH: A lot of people did. The only time that I can say we took sheets, we took sheets from someplace and put them over the anti-tank gun in Goesdorf so they could start with a white foundation.

DB: As camouflage.

CRH: Yeah, and then we put snow over that. It couldn't have been too good, although we thought it was okay, because the Germans, when they finally discerned it, destroyed the gun with a direct hit (in January '45).

DB: They destroyed your gun?

CRH: Yeah. Two rounds short, two rounds long, and the fifth round right on it. And it was on a ridge top. That's some good shooting.

DB: You were in a foxhole?

CRH: No, we were in our little barn where we were stationed. No one went out to the gun during the day. We went out at night when the Germans couldn't see us. You went out at night and checked to make sure the action was okay and that you had the ammunition you thought you had, but no one went out to the gun during the day. ["Action OK" means that the breechblock would open and the gun would traverse and ratchet up and down OK].

DB: In that particular place.

CRH: In that particular place. It was about as far, no farther that from here over to Garrand hall. That was the distance from the barn to the gun.

DB: Did the Army get you a new gun?

CRH: Oh, yes. Right away. [Interesting aside, here: Sgt. Trony Kudrna, a mortar-section leader with H Company of the 319th, came by just as our 57 mm gun was destroyed. Sgt. Kudrna was on his way to the edge of the village of Goesdorf to set up a mortar observation post and stopped to chat (briefly). We did not meet again until an 80th Division Reunion in 1997. I had posted a note at the meeting, asking anyone who had served at Goesdorf to contact me and Tony did so. One result of that meeting was that I talked Tony into letting me transcribe his (brief) WW II memoir. We completed that chore within a year (I finished my part in June of 1998.) Tony died of cancer in 2001].

DB: And then you saw him again 50 years later. Did he remember?

CRH: We got to talking and I told him he had to tell his story and turned it into a decent manuscript. You can read that if you want. I am very proud of it. Tony was a great man. He just died of cancer last year. A farmer from Iowa.

DB: He contends here, well, Gray says that there was a sense of power spurred by blind anger and that one felt empowered by the ultimate luxury of not giving a damn.

CRH: Yeah. I suppose that is absolutely true. Variation of road rage.

DB: Can you relate to that?

CRH: Sure.

DB: Do you remember instances like that?

CRH: I probably remember thinking about shooting at people and thinking if I hit them, that's just fine. That's what I am trying to do.

DB: And would you get angry sometimes?

CRH: I don't remember. I'd be more apprehensive than anything else while shooting at people. I am smart enough to realize, of course, that they could, possibly, shoot back at you. The best case of that was the night I was shooting out of a window at Goesdorf and somebody bounced a bullet off the stone right along side of me. I thought about that for a minute.

DB: A related question here. I will give you a quote first, "Being spurred by anger or feelings of vengefulness, soldiers were sometimes enthralled to a delight in destruction and they elatedly cast off not only restraint, but fear. Notably the unrelenting apprehension that one would die in battle."

CRH: Yeah. I think that happens. I think I remember cases of that.

DB: You talk about after your battle fatigue episode, you talk about a situation in which, I am quoting from your letters, "Trying to justify the lieutenant's faith in me I tried a lot of things, which were foolhardy." Can that be tied in, so to speak, to some extent with what I just quoted?

CRH: Yes. I think he is right about that, and of course there are all sorts of studies that indicate that people have done just that. The combination of fear and release and, then, the idea that you've got this vengeful weapon in your hand, whatever it was, and you may as well employ it. [That] Probably accounts for an awful lot of the terrible things that happened. People went right on killing, There is a tremendous set of stories, particularly from Australia, from both the First and the Second World Wars, of bayonet fighting, where people literally used the bayonet long after they should have quit. One of the people, I think, in the 82nd Airborne must have been like that because General Gavin comments on it. Gavin is certainly articulate, as well as a believable observer. General Gavin has a story about somebody who shot a wounded German captain, I think it was, without a qualm. He had lost some relatives or some friends of his early in his jumps, maybe in Normandy or Sicily. Anyway, they constantly were worried about this guy because he was always killing prisoners and was glad to do it.

DB: Did you ever realize after you would do things that you had gone too far, that you had acted recklessly and had, "abandoned reason" because of the intoxication of fearlessness?

CRH: Maybe. I think this is part of the reason for that line to my mother about you know, "it was kind of fun." Two or three of those patrols in German towns were done because you knew you had no alternatives. You were stuck with going out there but there was a real, giddy sense of adventure involved with it.

DB: Did you think afterwards, "Well, gee, I might have gotten myself killed unnecessarily."

CRH: Oh sure. You could always get sniped if nothing else, and they had excellent snipers. There was always that shot; otherwise it would have been easy. You wouldn't need any training to go out there if it wasn't dangerous. It was the fact that it was dangerous and that you managed to survive it. And it was a world in which being capable, I won't say even brave enough, but being capable of facing danger and overcoming it and doing whatever you are supposed to do was of prime importance. It was a world in which that was highly respected, and it was. The only activity, which was tolerated was success. You were supposed to face danger and you did. That was your standard of excellence, that you had done it.

DB: Well, Bob, I think this might be a good point to end for the day. What do you think?

CRH: Suits me. I think my voice is probably killing your tape anyway.

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**Interview 4/3/02**  
**53 min.**

DB: This is Daniel Burnstein interviewing Bob Harmon at Seattle University on April 3, 2002. Now Bob, this Joe Linderman, *The World within War*, often emphasizes the theme that GI's often felt, quote, "Utterly controlled by what went on around them." He was especially talking about infantrymen who suffered through, like cogs in a machine; he gives the analogy in a quote, "A relentless and unbelievable sense of being a target." Now I know you weren't typically an infantry man on the line, but, often times, you were in situations, at least at times, that were similar to that.

CRH: I would agree whole-heartedly with the whole statement.

DB: Can you elaborate on that.

CRH: Well, it's just that no matter what you are doing, if you were anywhere up near the line, you knew it was continuously dangerous and, after a while, you began to realize there were no safe places because you might be five miles behind the line and somebody would decide to fire a shell at you for some reason. You knew that that could happen. The whole idea that you were relentlessly being controlled was obviously necessary for the Army and it was one of the things to which you had to adjust. You had to realize that your little group would be told to go do this or that in an endless succession of missions. There was no end to it. You knew that you would keep going until you got hurt or killed. [As was famously said: "*Hang around the Infantry long enough, and you'll get yours!*"]. And that's all there was to it. So the odds of being hurt or killed became very obvious fairly soon. So, there was this understanding. But you also took a sort of, I suppose, grim pride in living up to that, and figuring, well, you can't let it worry you too much.

DB: Now with this sense that nowhere is safe...

CRH: Nowhere within reasonable range of long-distance artillery. I remember one night when we were supposed to be out of the lines somewhere, probably in the middle of November between two major attacks. And we were back somewhere that was supposed to be pretty safe and a long-range gun shelled the town. Later on we found that this long-range gun had been doing this off and on and we just hadn't known about it. But the Germans would roll it out, and these were guns that would fire around 15,000 yards. That's a long way. So the shells would come out of nowhere.

DB: That's several miles. Ok. Can you relate to Margaret Bourke-White [the famous photographer for LIFE magazine...?]

CRH: I love her work and I know it very well.

DB: (apparently she went over there and was on the lines...)

CRH: She is really famous for her WWII photography in Russia.

DB: She observed that, at times, the GI's were what she called "numb." That their defense against anxiety and fatigue, that numbness, was their, quote, "defense against an anxiety and fatigue that had become intolerable." Can you relate to that?

CRH: I suppose that does happen. The case that is most dramatic that you and I have talked about is a young man plastered up against a Siegfried Line fort.

DB: Sgt. Desgrosiliers had been injured?

CRH: [*I think that's when Sgt. Rudy Desgrosiliers was wounded (by our artillery) and I picked him up and dumped him somewhere on the medics at Regiment and was walking back up to Rudy Tomasik, where I knew we would be*]. We were in an attack together; I as a bazooka man. He had been wounded. I picked him up. He couldn't walk. I carried him on my shoulder back down to regimental. When I came back by that pillbox [it had been taken already] there was a young man there whom I always figured was a replacement, maybe not, and he was simply plastered against the pill box. He had his back to it, and his hands there, and he just simply couldn't move. I tried to get him to come with me because I realized what would happen to him. There was just enough noise, enough stuff breaking, not close to us but around us so that he realized it was dangerous and he was not going to leave that area. And where he was was terribly dangerous, but, in terms of your question, he was just shutting out the world. And I am sure that happened over and over again.

DB: Did people ever find that sort of shutting off your emotions, being fatalistic or shutting off your emotions was a way of coping?

CRH: Oh yeah. I am sure they did. But for most of us, you have to remember, [I am thinking even of the time when I decided I was going to quit and Lieutenant Ellers talked me out of it], it was a very dangerous occasion. It was a very existential situation. You lived right in the middle of that and you waited for the shells to fall and you waited for them to explode and when they were through, you realized, "Well I survived that one." And then you went on doing whatever it was you were doing. You knew that this was important. What we were doing was extremely important, and you knew that you couldn't stand around feeling sorry for yourself. But once in a while, of course, it caught up with someone, as it did with that man at the Siegfried Line.

DB: Were the replacements sort of an out group, so to speak, within the squad and thus, for example, were they given the dirtier and more dangerous jobs?

CRH: No. I think you would purposely try to avoid that. There's probably plenty of evidence that in some places they were given the dirty jobs or the more dangerous jobs but usually the problem for them was that they would immediately be stuck someplace where they had absolutely no experience. So there are plenty stories about kids coming

up to the rifle companies and being told, “Welcome to platoon so-and-so. And now we are going to walk out here 100 yards in some area you have never seen before and you have never been in combat. There’s a foxhole, stay here. Here’s a telephone. Call me if the Germans come.” So one day they are in Fort Devins, Massachusetts, and three or four weeks later they are in an icy foxhole in Luxembourg. The shock for them must have been absolutely terrible but there wasn’t anything else that some of those people could do. For us, I think that we integrated our people pretty well and we babied them along a little bit. That’s why I think it would be nice if you would write to Rudy Tomasik. Rudy’s address is, very specifically, in there for you, with his phone number.

DB: I did actually.

CRH: Ok, good. And I didn’t find Virg Ronnebaum’s address yet. I have files at home and letters we have written, letters of response, and I presume you are doing the same thing. I just hope Rudy’s health is okay [Rudy Tomasik, of Connecticut, who joined us as a replacement after the Siegfried Line fight]. If he will answer you, he will be a nice critic. And Virg Ronnebaum would be the only other living critic I know who would be able to say, “Yeah I came in...” I think Virg came after the Siegfried, just as Rudy did, and see what they say about how we integrated.

DB: Let me know if you find Virg’s address.

CRH: Oh I certainly will.

DB: And Frank Marzek’s.

CRH: Yeah, if I find Marzek, yeah.

DB: Perhaps it depended on the squad.

CRH: Oh sure. Very much depended on the squad and the tone set by the squad sergeant. If the squad sergeant was sensible, he would welcome these people the best he possibly could and integrate them because your lives depend on that and on one-another. You have to be able to trust the other person. But, there are plenty of stories that say that these people were shut off. So I am willing to believe the stories. I just don’t recall from my own experience.

DB: Is it true that after VE Day quote, “ With the disappearance of necessity of deep comradeship, bonds loosened rapidly.”

CRH: I don’t believe that at all for our squad and my company. Not even for my regiment. But, certainly in the intimate level of the squad and the platoon and the company it was not our experience. Partly because the war was just about to become more dangerous than ever. In other words, we are off to Japan. There may have been a few people who thought, “Oh, well, I have so many points, I am not going to get shipped to Japan.” But most of us were very aware that next up was some combat in the Pacific.

And we all knew about that big army, what was it? A million men or something, that they had in Japan, or, excuse me, on the China coast. [The Kwantung Army] So there was a lot of fighting to be done and we were aware that we could just as easily get killed over there. But our unit was very close. We had a good time together. One of the things I think we all admired, for instance, I think I told you, one of the boys was, literally, a professional concert pianist and he would play, and we would all stand around and watch him. And all the Austrian girls would stand around and watch him, too.

DB: Was that a young man in your regiment?

CRH: In the company. That was regimental headquarters company. That's when we were up there with the Rangers. He wasn't a Ranger but he was in the company and he would scout out a piano in every village we hit. In Austria there was at least one in every village, plenty. And the weather was nice, as it is today here on this 3<sup>rd</sup> of April, and the windows would be open and there'd be Austrians standing around because a lot of the stuff that he would play purposely was to pick up the Austrians and, especially, the Hungarians. He liked the Hungarian music, so you would get a lot of that.

DB: That was a pleasant thing.

CRH: Yeah. And we would swim together. I have pictures of me, and, I think Joe Ragno and John Bean, all swimming together in some Austrian river.

DB: Very good.

CRH: We got along just fine.

DB: I would like to see those pictures.

CRH: Next time we do this at the house we will do that.

DB: Great. Another observation was from a GI who had been a member of a combat battalion and he said that his unit was ideal for comradeship in that quote, "While proximity to battle created comradeship of high intensity, its fortunes were so generous that few of its members were called on to pay the costs of comradeship destroyed. So we were able to remain together for so much longer as a unit. Like a family."

CRH: That would be true I think. I don't know what sort of support group he was in. He may have been in what was called a cannon company. They had 105mm artillery pieces and they fired in support of the regiment. He may have been in some communications and wire unit. I have no idea. "Combat battalion" doesn't tell us anything but he, obviously, had some variation of the same sort of job I had, where he was exposed to danger but wasn't in a rifle line all the time and, therefore, was able to appreciate the people he was around without seeing them all get killed. That sounds like a very possible situation. It certainly sounds familiar to me in terms of my experience at the end of the war.

DB: Linderman says that many GI's grew angry that people on the home front did not comprehend what they were going through.

CRH: That's true but we didn't waste a lot of time worrying about it. But one of the things that would tick people off was, whenever you would hear about strikes at home. That obviously would cause a good deal of bitterness. That was about it, because we really didn't have time to worry too much about that. But we did know that we had left the home world; that we were living on some other planet. So I think we took whatever came out of the States with a sort of resignation more than anything else. "They don't know what we are going through and it's just as well they don't." But, a sort of disgust, particularly when there were strikes.

DB: Was there a perception that many people in the US were selfish, materialist, not willing to sacrifice as you guys were?

CRH: I think that there was some of that. Probably most people had a story of somebody they knew, particularly in small towns, who had either entered the service and had achieved some really comfortable responsibility, or, had not entered the service at all. And you knew that they were physically capable of doing it but, for one reason or another, they were not in the service. Gossip like that would go around but I don't suppose any more than the ordinary amount. Certainly everybody notices any shortcomings of one kind or another and they were very quick to express them. Whether it was about with whom they were digging in over there, or, cousin John at home. This was all very important to us and it was all, as I said, a very existential experience. The here and the now.

DB: What do you mean by very existential experience Bob?

CRH: You were literally in the passage of time that brought you to a moment, which was isolated. There certainly wasn't a moment of "future" that was very evident, and you were not interested in anything that was not going on around you. You were interested in what you were supposed to be doing at a particular moment. You realized, somewhere, way behind you, was a time and literally the river of your family and the States but you were in Nomeny, France, or in Bastogne, where my friend, Frank Kneller, was, and that was it. There wasn't any evening. There wasn't any night. There wasn't any daytime. It was the *now*. If it happened to be night, fine. You waited until daytime for one reason or another. If it was daytime and you were stuck in a foxhole, but, could be seen from the other lines, then you in that hole until it got dark and you could try to crawl out of it and you were probably so damn stiff you couldn't move. So, "existential," in that sense. You could take, literally, the meaning of it.

DB: Because of the stresses of combat do you think that soldier's intellectual interests and even their cognitive concentration eroded?

CRH: I have no idea. That's a very interesting question. If you get any studies on that I would be interested in seeing them. There have been some studies of the psychology of combat and I've got some at home, which maybe you haven't read, and we could exchange titles. I don't know.

DB: One reason I wanted to ask you this is because I wondered if there was a connection between what this author calls "the shriveling of mental activity" and your consciously reaching out to read the Classics and so on. Were you trying to compensate for what you saw was a possible isolation from mental activity and so on?

CRH: No, I was trying to escape it. I was trying to escape the isolation of the battlefield and of the long series of simply dirty jobs that we had to do. I don't care if it was digging in the gun or whatever it was. It was something that would be so far removed from the battlefield and so demanding, so intellectually challenging, Shakespeare and Plato. And I think that's the reason why one should read *Quartered Safe Out Here* by George MacDonald Fraser, the man I told you was my age and reading Shakespeare in Burma the same time I was reading Shakespeare in France. And he had wanted something that would remove him from Burma. Same reason I wanted it. I think what you see there is - not that your mental processes slow down - but that you keep focusing on something other than what we would think of as 'intellectual' in our lives, the lives you and I have as academics. And it's reminiscent of Samuel Johnson's comment about somebody's being sentenced to death wonderfully focuses the attention. And I think that's exactly what happens when machine-gun bullets go by you or when you hear an artillery shell coming in.

DB: So it was hard to get your mind off of that stuff sometimes.

CRH: Yeah. And the more you realize how this is done and the more skilled you became in the game, the more you looked around and you saw that this is a dangerous place, or, it is not a dangerous place, or, that is something you ought to be careful about. You were simply constantly more and more aware because you were more and more skilled at becoming aware.

DB: So it was probably very good for your psychological health that you sought out Plato, Shakespeare and so on.

CRH: Sure. A lot of people probably found the same sort of release in trying to find something to drink and they would get drunk. The hopeful attempt at chasing down some girl in an area probably gave some people release. Something other than being concerned all the time about flying steel and loud noises.

DB: Just some sort of recreation, a lot of people sought out.

CRH: Literally in the whole sense of re-create.

DB: Did the American veneration of individualism and self-sufficiency make it difficult for you and other soldiers to own up to your loneliness and vulnerability when writing letters or talking among yourselves?

CRH: Interesting. I have no idea. That's a great question but I have no idea. I have talked to you on one of the other tapes. One of the ones that just went back, about the fact that I don't know how many others wrote as much or as deeply as I did. Deeply, if I might say so. I just don't know. We were busy, that's for sure, and maybe that's all I can say about it. That's all our families knew. What sort of exchange went back and forth with other families, I don't know. I am deeply aware of the eagerness with which Joe Rago, who was certainly uneducated, approached Shakespeare and Plato. That always has intrigued me, as a teacher, since then. I wish I could have seen Joe after the war.

DB: He was not college-educated, but he could read well and was shrewd.

CRH: Oh yeah. Good, solid high school education. He just wasn't a college boy and he never was going to be a college boy. He had no interest in that sort of thing.

DB: Were you and your buddies, before you hit combat, keen to close in with the enemy without delay and was this related to a sense of boredom with training?

CRH: No. There were only a few I think. Most of us were interested in the technical sense of finding out whether or not we could really do these things we were told we were going to do and that we knew we had been trained to do in a mechanical way. Fire the gun, fire the rifle, run a sensible pattern in combat patrol. Things such as that. But there were very few people who were anxious to get out there and come hand to hand with the Germans. Everybody realized that this was not a game. We had enough adults in there. There were a bunch of them in there 24, 25, 26 years old. They weren't kids and they realized this was not a game. The only one who thought of it as a game whom I can think of off-hand is that lieutenant whose name I said we shouldn't use.

DB: Right.

CRH: He really did think it was a game.

DB: And you all were aware enough to realize that he was dangerous for you.

CRH: We didn't realize when we walked ashore in Normandy on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1944, just how dangerous he was. We had to find out how dangerous that game was before we realized how dangerous that idiot was to us.

DB: Did you all see combat as a test of individual courage and manhood? One PFC, for example, said quote, "We had questions about ourselves that could be answered only in combat."

CRH: Well, in a way I think that everybody can say that, but this wasn't in the sense that you spent a great deal of time brooding about that before you went over, or before you were in combat. And then, after you'd been in combat, you didn't spend a lot of time brooding about it. I think there's always this notion of a formal military mission where you realize that this means, sooner or later somebody has to close with the enemy and this will result in death. And I think that's one of the reasons that *Red Badge of Courage* is a very good book. This kid realizes that he is going to be in a dangerous place. The danger itself frightens him at first. Finally he gets wounded and the author says, at the end, he's achieved his red badge of courage. He not only has been up there, but, he can demonstrate he has been up there because he has got his bloody bandage and he has got a scar that he will have the rest of his life. But he did do it. He failed in some ways, when he first was in combat, but he managed to survive, and I think we all had that feeling that this is something that you knew you had to do and you wonder if you are going to do it. I have often wondered if there are those of us who were in athletic competition were any more likely to see it as some kind of game. I boxed for a long time in high school and college. I don't know if that made it more of a game or not. I had enough sense to realize that this was a dangerous game. And I was also very much aware that I wanted to survive it.

DB: Did soldiers begin, before you had a lot of experience, with the sense that there was a connection between your actions and what happened to you. That is that you could control your fate by not making mistakes, not losing your cool? Did this assumption of individual control erode as time went on?

CRH: Good question and that's several questions with several different approaches to what may be only one question. The control, you will eventually begin to realize, is not in your hands. The control is literally in the hands of fate because nothing you can do will prevent the odd shell from falling on you. But you begin to realize that you, for instance, don't do silly things like light a cigarette at night. A lot of things like that. You don't just go charging into a village, unless you've been commanded to charge into a village, without thinking as you do this, as you approach it, "where are the likely lanes of fire from the enemy? Where are the likely approaches, which will be covered by enemy observation?" You don't go charging around in an area where there are mines, or the possibility of mines, without learning to look for mines and being very careful about that. It doesn't mean you won't step on one. People did who were looking for mines, and being very careful about it, and got a leg blown off, or a hand, or were simply killed by mines. So you knew that, if you looked for mines, you would probably be able to avoid them. But not always. I know this was one of the things about going through houses. I found a whole case of pistols once, I think it is one of my stories, and I had enough sense to realize that this is probably booby-trapped. Well it turned out it wasn't, but I took all the proper precautions. I forget how I opened that thing but probably with string from the next county. Just being very careful. So you took precautions like that and you took precautions about not just sticking your head up someplace. Particularly if there was fire going on, but, you also realize, for instance, that if there was machine gun fire or rifle fire and you could hear it cracking, if you listened to it, you had a good idea about whether or not it was six or eight feet above you. And you realize that you cannot afford to keep

your head down when there is an enemy attack coming. You must see it. And one of the things that got people killed in Africa was men were afraid to look out of their foxholes and they were simply bayoneted in their foxholes by charging Germans who overran them.\* Well that story got to all of us so we were told, "Look. No matter how scared you are, stick your nose up over the foxhole once in a while and see what's going on out there because you don't want to be surprised."

DB: Did they tell you about that at Fort Benning?

CRH: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, stories like that, you were alerted to think about them.

DB: So that was kind of a dilemma.

CRH: Yeah, right. Because you knew that there was no reason to think that you won't get killed if you looked, but, you knew very well that you could get killed if you didn't look out. That's one of the reason they have you crawl through live-fire ranges, as I did at Fort Dix, with machine gun fire going over you and you are thinking, "Yeah I am listening to this because they told me to and they said, 'well, listen to the cracking and see just how close this is.'"

DB: That was at Fort Dix you said?

CRH: Yeah. I did that at Dix. There may have been other times when the division did it but I don't recall doing it in the desert when I joined. I certainly recall doing it at Dix. It was a rainy, messy night when I did it and there was always a story about machine guns that dug themselves in a little low because of the muddy sandbags under the gun and somebody got hurt. I don't recall if that actually happened, but we were all told that it could happen, and that that, again, gave you something to think about. Another reason, also, that you crawl through barbed wiring, is so that you learn how to do it. You learn sooner or later, too, that no matter what you do it was just a matter of luck.

DB: Was there a lot of barbed wire to crawl through in Europe?

CRH: Not for me, but there was some. A lot of people had it and you learned how to do it. You were on your back if it is high or rather on your stomach if it's high but otherwise probably on your back just inching along. I don't recall ever doing it in combat. I don't recall any attack when I ever crawled through any barbed wire. It just depended on what the situation was.

DB: If you are in control of your fate by not making mistakes, there is this corollary concept: the war is a personalized war. One of skill-based, individual combat like in a bayonet charge, for example, as opposed to the reality much more often of a faceless sort of rain of death coming down from artillery and so on. Do you have any comments about that?

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\* [See the Battle of Kasserine Pass, Tunisia, February, 1943. In the North African campaign (1942-1943), see, also, "Mareth Line," German generals: see Rommel and Juergen Von Arnim.

CRH: Well I think the faceless enemy and the faceless threat would be the ones that would be most typical, Dan. You wouldn't see the enemy all that often. Obviously if he was in a foxhole shooting at you he is not going to expose any more of himself than he wants to. I think that was one of things that so disturbed the men who fought in the Huertgen Forest in November.

DB: The what forest?

**The Huertgen Forest:** South of Aachen, Germany – In German, the “u” has an umlaut; on the English typewriter there is no u-umlaut, so it is replaced by a “ue.”

1944: October 28 – “Ike” orders attacks to clear German forces from the west of the Rhine River.

Capture of the **Roer River** dams was deemed essential. The town of **Schmidt** and the **Huertgen Forest** were involved, and the fighting was terrible and costly, with fortune favoring the defending Germans at every turn. November 16 – December 15, 1944. The American 28<sup>th</sup> Division did much of the fighting. American First Army, under General Courtney Hodges. In his *Citizen Soldiers*, Stephen Ambrose (see p. 167) says “. . . the forest without the (Roer) dams was worthless; the dams without the forest were priceless. But the generals got it backwards and went for the forest (in) a plan that was grossly, even criminally stupid.” (I agree. CRH, June 1, '02).

***September 18, 1944 to circa October 1: German 5<sup>th</sup> Army tries to split connections between Gen. Alexander Patch (7<sup>th</sup> Army) and Patton. This effort fails.***

October 3 to 17, 1944: Patton attempts to capture **Metz**.

November 16, 1944: American First and 8<sup>th</sup> Armies attack into Siegfried Line, toward Huertgen Forest, Roer Dams.

November 18, 1944: Metz capitulates. See, inter alia, narrative and text on these developments in Volume II of *The West Point Atlas of American Wars*, maps #59 & 60. Chief Editor, Colonel V.J. Esposito; Intro by Dwight D. Eisenhower, Praeger, N.Y.: 1959. Text compiled by the Department of Military Art & Engineering, The U.S. Military Academy, West Point.

September 19, 1944: 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored and 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry begin Huertgen.

October: 9<sup>th</sup> Division loses circa 4,500 **line** troops.

November 28, 1944: General Norman Cota (D-Day hero) leads 28<sup>th</sup> Division into the Forest. Pennsylvania National Guard. “Bloody Bucket” / keystone red-colored patch. 28<sup>th</sup> fought – inter alia – at Schmidt.

See p. 169, *Citizen Soldiers* for “crucifixion Cross” story.

November 5: Failure of the “**Kall Trail**” attack (*Citizen Soldiers*, p. 169).

November 13, 1944: **By this date, all rifle** (and Heavy Weapons Company, I would guess –CRH), **company officers** [Captains, Lieutenants] **were KIA or WIA.** P 170, *Citizen Soldiers*.

In the 28<sup>th</sup>, of an effective Divisional strength of ca. 15,000, there were 6,184 battle casualties, + 738 trench foot victims and 620 “battle fatigue” cases.

4<sup>th</sup> Division also “bled” in the Huertgen Forest, losing 7,000 men between November 7 and December 3. eg: One Infantry Company of 167 men lost 287 men.

November 27: First Army sends 8<sup>th</sup> Division against town of Huertgen: By December 3, regimental staff officers reported, of one Battalion, that “every man up there should be evacuated through medical channels. . . “ Quoted in *Citizen Soldiers* p171.

Huertgen lasted 90 days and cost 24,000 casualties and + 9,000 others injured.

Nota Bene: by the end of Huertgen, the *only* American reserves were the 82<sup>nd</sup> and 101 Airborne Division and that was still true when the **Bulge** broke out on December 15, 1944.

CRH: Huertgen. Huertgen forest was one of the most bitter battles the Americans ever fought anytime, anyplace.

DB: What year was that?

CRH: '45. No, '44. They were going through this thick forest. So many times they never saw anybody who was shooting at them. They had to go, literally, find them at close range, and there was thick brush and thick trees, and then kill them. We lost an awful lot of men doing this. The better part I think of the combat membership in at least one division and maybe two divisions were pretty well chewed up. They were not able to see what they were doing. And when you are charging, unless you possess excellent eyesight, you probably really don't see whatever you are charging at very clearly. You are busy looking at 1000 different things at once rather than picking out something special. And you have just been told to go to a tree line, go to a village, go to a barn, go to that creek, whatever, rather than seeing any particular individual. So it is a very faceless enemy and consequently probably more dangerous or more frightening. At least, reflecting on it, good question; reflecting on it, I think it probably was more frightening. You don't really personalize it that much. It's you as a person but you are being threatened by this impersonal death by these awful people who are out there somewhere and you don't even know where they are and they are causing you all sorts of grief and making loud noises in your ears.

DB: Did that surprise you at first, the early experience of combat that it was not as you imagined? Not an individualized combat with rows of people advancing but rather fighting some unseen.

CRH: No. The entire system of attacks had changed so that, for instance, in Europe there were very few bayonet charges. One of the great famous ones, I think the man who led it won the Medal of Honor.\* He was with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne in Normandy. He just looked at a situation which was so bad that he knew that the men he had with him were going to get killed right where they were unless they could - I think they had to cross a bridge and defend a river - this was some major at the time, or lieutenant colonel maybe. He called out, "Fix bayonets and charge." And off he went. Some of the men couldn't believe it at first but, pretty soon, they started one by one following him and pretty soon everybody went and they were all yelling and screaming and the Germans who survived that and were captured were all really surprised. They were firing like crazy and it was a hail of fire hitting these paratroopers and the paratroopers were all yelling and screaming and they ran right through it and overran the Germans. They killed a lot of people.

DB: Did you rarely actually see individual enemies? How often?

CRH: It would depend on the situation and what you were doing. For instance, in the attacks in the Siegfried Line I doubt that I saw one single man except the famous "man who stood up." That story I told. Everybody else was hidden away in the forts. The only ones that we saw were either dead or they were people such as the ones whom I talked out of one of the forts, the last fort in the line on a hilltop. [*"The man who stood up" is a sad reference to a story told elsewhere in this work. In essence, a German 'out-posted' in front of the Siegfried Line forts just above the River Our and opposite the Luxembourg village of Hoendorf, arose from his foxhole after dawn one morning around Feb. 10, 1945, and took a step or two toward the River. Dozens of rifles (probably from both the Germans and ourselves), plus a machine-gun or two battered him. I suppose no one will ever know why he invited - and, found - death in such a fashion. CRH 11/4/02*].

DB: You talked them out of that by using your rudimentary German. Saying things that you had read in the leaflets.

CRH: Yeah and things I had learned from Sergeant Knorr who was trying to teach us German.

DB: Basically, "save yourselves."

CRH: Yes. Exactly. That's that same group. We didn't see any of them. They were just noises in a pillbox, dangers in a pillbox. And we didn't see any of the mortar crew who were firing at us that day. Other times you would see them. Obviously, on patrol was your best shot at seeing Germans. One patrol told a story about me, but the reports of it were badly fouled up in the news. Anyway I shot some German lieutenant and we captured four or five men. They were out in the open. And then when you saw people in the snow, at Goesdorf, coming up on the snow, and the poor guys were coming up that

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\* Reference is to Lt. Col. Cole, CO, 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn., 502<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), 101 Airborne. Twenty-nine year-old West Point grad (1939). June 11, near Carentan, France. See pp 44-45 of *Citizen Soldiers*, Ambrose. See, also, p, 523, *Medal of Honor Recipients*, 1863 - 1973. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1973. Lt. Col. Cole was KIA, September 1944, France.

hill, and our mortars were putting up flares and illuminating that whole hillside. You could see them against the snow, anyway, and you really didn't need the flares. The flares just added to it.

DB: This was early, early morning, right.

CRH: Yeah, they usually would come around 5:30 or 6 in the morning and then you would see them. You wouldn't see individual faces. It wouldn't be that bright, but you knew, exactly, that these were human figures out there and they were human-sized targets.

DB: Goesdorf was part of the Bulge. Linderman says that anti-personnel mines, like artillery barrages, were key instruments in dashing one's sense of invulnerability and control.

CRH: Exactly. That's exactly right because, no matter how careful you were, you realized that you could get hurt anyway because one of the things the Germans were good at was putting mines down where you knew that they knew you would find them and then fixing it so the mine would blow up. They would booby trap the mines. So you had to be very careful, for the fact that you had seen one didn't mean you had evaded it. It was just like, sometimes, machine gun, mortar fire and even artillery fire were set up so they would fall on the place, which looks like the best refuge. People running into some machine gun fire would think, "Oh well if I jump behind this building or down in that creek bed I will be just fine." And the Germans and we did the same thing. They would know, and then they would wait for that to occur, and they'd see people going into this "beaten ground" and throw in mortar shells, particularly.

DB: So these are the kinds of things that these replacements would not know about but you guys who had a lot of experience would know.

CRH: Right. And you could tell the replacements that, and you did, but, you couldn't tell them everything at once and a lot of times they didn't live long enough to get the message. There was just so much to be told, and then, you were haunted by the idea that it didn't matter what we told each other, we might not make it anyway.

DB: Do you remember a process in which you and others having been so often confronted with exhaustion, discomfort, confusion, fear, etc...decided to quote, "dismiss bravery and resolve to being cautious?"

CRH: I presume that happened constantly Dan. I have no idea, but, I am sure that we thought about it over and over and over again. I am sure there were all sorts of wry comments about "don't do this unless you have to." Don't do anything you don't have to do. It's part of that whole military thing. A little saying that says, "Never volunteer." And I am sure that same sort of idea pertains in regard to that question you just asked.

DB: You don't remember any incidents that would be able to illuminate that for us?

CRH: No. Not off-hand. I might sooner or later but I don't remember right now.

DB: That's ok. Did you find that consideration of principles and larger aims diminished drastically, becoming extraneous compared to the absorbing daily pursuits? That is to say that the cause became sort of taken for granted, sort of background as opposed to being in your thoughts on a daily basis.

CRH: I think that's probably very accurate. I doubt that we stood around and thought very much or talked very much about what we were doing in the long run over there. The idea was that, in the next 20 minutes, sergeant so-and-so wanted something done and you would do it, rather than worrying about home and mother and apple pie and the end of the Axis. But you could see that the war was lost for the Germans. We knew it. So you could think, in that way, that we have to do this and this and we have to cross the Rhine and if you knew enough geography you realized we had to close the Ruhr Pocket sooner or later. But your immediate thought was that I need to survive the next 20 minutes doing whatever it is that I am supposed to be doing.

DB: This thought that the war was basically going to be won, that it was just a matter of time...

CRH: Yeah. We had no doubt about it.

DB: That must have made you guys approach the war in a different way than, say a German soldier who, despite the propaganda, that I am sure he was getting, many Germans soldiers probably realized that the war is going to be lost.

CRH: I am sure, overwhelmingly, they did.

DB: Especially after a while.

CRH: Well, particularly after Normandy. I think that most of them realized that the war was lost when the men came ashore in Italy in '43. But there was always the idea that well, Italy is not German, and it *is* south of the Alps and we might be able to defend the homeland. But once we got ashore in Normandy, there was a long series of really great German generals who said that it was time to make peace. "We cannot win this thing now." So you had that interesting question of did you defend the beaches by throwing the Allies back into the ocean on that first day – the Longest Day – the Rommel Theory? Or did you wait and counterattack and smash them so badly that they would never come back again, which was Churchill's great fear, that that might happen.

DB: But in either case the generals realized, "if they get through Normandy then that's it."

CRH: Some of the German generals did. And I am sure that most of the American generals realized that, "if we get ashore in Normandy, this thing is over, sooner or later."

It's a question of when. They set up phase-lines which said that we were supposed to be so far into France at the end of 70 days or 75 days and so on. And we exceeded those phase-lines, and sped across France, as we did, so rapidly, and went beyond the planned phase-lines. Then, you begin to get these great plans from people like Patton and Eisenhower about, "Well, we will jump the Siegfried Line on the run and the river Rhine. We will jump the Rhine and we will end the war this year in '44 or early in '45," and they got very cocky about that. We've talked about this. It's another reason that the Bulge was such a nasty shock.

DB: Well, these German generals, they didn't let this, I mean this wasn't public knowledge that they were thinking this.

CRH: No, no. They didn't dare say it, most of the time. There were several resistance groups. Particularly in the staff, the general staff and sometimes that would happen. There are records of outright comments being made to the Fuehrer that it's time to end this thing. That general would ordinarily be sent off to be in charge of mess kits someplace and then get called back again. That's why Field Marshal Gerd Von Rundstedt was sort of like on a yo-yo. I forget how many times Rundstedt was commander-in-chief in the west. At least twice. It could have been three times. He would simply say something in a saturnine way, he was a very blunt old man, and the Fuehrer would not like it, and he would fire him. I think this happened to von Mannstein who was probably one of the best, and Guederian, one of the great tank officers. Guederian was in charge of PX's or something for a while because he had told the Fuehrer, "What we are doing here is stupid." And the Fuehrer didn't like to hear that.

DB: Guederian was on the eastern front right?

CRH: He was on both fronts. He served, on both, as so many did. Particularly the armored people kept getting shuttled back and forth. That was the advantage of what is called "interior lines of communication," where you are within your own protected area at home and running your own railroad and they would shoot these people back and forth. There were armored units from the German army who were fighting in Russia one day and, a few days later were fighting in Italy.

DB: Bob, did the prior concept of American material superiority suffer somewhat in combat. For example, Russell Whigley, the military historian...[Russel Weigley (author of *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, Indiana Press, 1981). I heard Weigly lecture when I was at West Point with the Summer History Institute in 1982, 1984, CRH]

CRH: Yes right. I have listened to him lecture.

DB: Very good. Says that...

CRH: That's the advantage of having been to West Point for those courses they ran in the summer, in which I eventually taught. Yeah. Russ Weigley and people like that were brought up there constantly.

DB: Well he says that German machine guns and anti-tank missiles were significantly better and the German 88's were the most successful artillery pieces and the Tiger tanks and Panther tanks were better than the Shermans, although the US possessed more artillery and more tanks. That compensated. But did the prior concept of American material superiority suffer in your eyes once you got into combat?

CRH: I suppose. That's an interesting way to think about it and I have reflected on this. There's some notes in the material I just gave you I think, maybe the January interviews, about superiority of German artillery and then I sort of backed off on that, because I realized I really thinking more about the 88 than anything else. Certainly our 155 millimeter guns were very, very good. The 240's and the 8-inch guns were very good. The 240's were particularly accurate. So I wasn't thinking very clearly on that interview when I talked about what should have been specified as the 88's more than anything else. And then we knew that the German machine guns were dangerous but for some reason or other, because they looked sort of strange, I think, we tended to feel that they weren't as good as ours. Ours our very solid looking. Those old Brownings that we had looked very capable. The German thing looked like it was kind of stamped out of cookies yet we knew it had a high cyclic rate of fire. The barrels could be changed very easily. All the things that we now do with our machine guns, I think, tend to come from the Russian and German examples. But, boy, that 88 certainly got everybody's attention.

DB: And the anti-tank missiles?

CRH: Well we knew that our tanks, that our anti-tank gun, I told you, unless you were really lucky, was not really an adequate weapon and that the Germans had better guns. We knew that they had better tanks and our tankers knew they were better. That's why our tankers had to get very smart about what they were doing because, otherwise, they would get killed and they knew it. So this was kind of a rude awakening, I think.

DB: That was a very dangerous job, to be a tanker.

CRH: Oh, yeah, because it's like so many things: if something goes wrong it goes really wrong. You can image in a compartment which is not much bigger than the undersides of both your desks in here, you have got five men in there all trying to do something which is extremely noisy and dangerous and hard work. At any moment a shell, maybe four inches across, will come flying through and then the fuel and ammunition would explode.

DB: Was there a chronic shortage of artillery? It widely seems to indicate that, that, all too often, made infantry attacks more dangerous.

CRH: I think that depended. For instance, in the Bulge we ended up having plenty of artillery shells, we had a lot of artillery shells. For a while there just before Thanksgiving and in late October we were out. We had a hard time getting shells, hard time getting gas, hard time getting food. And then, gradually, that was ameliorated. So Dr. Weigley might

be talking about a kind of cyclical set of occasions where, for one reason or another, you did not have shells. We did not in September of '44.

DB: So, if the Germans had been able, somehow, to launch the scope of a counterattack that they did in December, but – if they had done in it in early October or late September – you all might have been more endangered than you were.

CRH: Yes. Right. But they, of course, suffered from the same things we did. They were desperately pulling these people together. They had to move, I think, they had almost 100,000 men somewhere up at the Belgian/Dutch border who they were moving out of the area around Antwerp. And they did that very skillfully. We were completely surprised by the fact that those men were out of there and that they had survived that. Some of those men were then in the attack of the Bulge. The German army came out of nowhere. But they also had some very sharp people sent in to simply pull all these refugee units that had fled from western and southern France. They were setting up in Alsace-Lorraine and these guys did a marvelous job of pulling those German units together and bringing in some armor from the eastern front and setting up an army. But Hitler was smart enough to realize that his counterattack could not possibly take place until it was too cloudy for our airplanes to fly all of the time. He learned that in Normandy.

### **End of Side A**

DB: Did infantry men complain that they were less recognized and had harsher conditions than say, air men or tankers, and was this, in part, because many men were unaware of the price paid by aviators and tankers and so on, in part, due to the secrecy of the air war and that kind of thing?

CRH: I have spoken about this before and there is some material on the tapes. The longer one was around, the more you began to realize that there were a number of other very dangerous jobs. You began to realize that the airplane people did have the advantage of finishing a mission and going home and at least, sleeping in some dry place and getting a good meal, but we didn't at first realize that they would be too nervous to enjoy it. It wasn't until long after the war, I think, in long conversations with my brother, that I began to realize just how dangerous training was. They lost all kinds of people. Incidentally I read something the other day - in a very authoritative book on the German Luftwaffe - that when the jet aircraft units were set up, the people who designed the units for the Germans decided that all of the jet flyers would be aces and have at least five kills. Well they had to abandon that.

DB: That's what an Ace meant?

CRH: Yeah. Five kills. That's a term out of the First World War. An Ace was always five kills. After that decision was made, they had to abandon it because they lost over 200 first-rate pilots in training accidents, training them to fly that 262.

DB: That's the jet.

CHR: The jet yeah [ME 262]. So it's dangerous. The training is very dangerous. My brother, Neil, was the one who convinced me of that. He said it was dangerous, even just practicing flying around over here in the aircraft – two wing (bi-wing) aircraft, and so on. It was no accident that one of the planes they flew was called the “Yellow Peril.” A lot of men died trying to learn how to fly that relatively safe aircraft.

DB: Did Neil train in the...?

CRH: He didn't get to fly. He was one of those people who was told, eventually, that, “the program just doesn't need you.” You can ask him about that next week. I asked him to correct my ideas about what happened to him. You can go ahead and correct that too. We realized that the people who were in the rear echelons had what we would think of as a very comfortable deal and that they would survive the war unless they drank some bad whiskey someplace. That would be a very possible option for them but not for us. There was sort of a grim pride in us. We began to realize this, too, in the medics. The medics, when the infantry badge first came out, then the medics said, “Well what about us? We were right there with the rifle guys.” So then they didn't want to give them a rifle badge; that's not what they were doing. They set up a special medic badge for the combat medics. You can get some good stuff from Dan Doyle, Professor of English at Seattle University, on that from his experience, of course, in Vietnam.

DB: Did you all have a lot of respect for the medics?

CRH: Absolutely. Particularly, I was intrigued by the ones who were conscientious objectors and who could have said, “I will not have anything to do with the war” but who simply said, “I will go to the war; I just don't want to kill anybody.” I thought that took a special kind of courage. I began to meet those guys in Benning, when we were in training, when we first started in '43.

DB: Were they Quakers?

CRH: Some were. Others were very fundamentalist Christians of one kind or another, not necessarily Quakers. I suppose one of two were intellectually committed and didn't have any religious belief at all. I have no idea. I have read enough to know that there was a wide variety of reasons. Of course there were one or two spectacular Medals of Honor for people who were up there doing that kind of thing and had no intention of killing anybody but did extremely brave things that most of us would never dream of trying. [See, e.g., *PFC Desmond Doss, Medic, who won the Medal of Honor on Okinawa, May 1945*].

DB: Right. Now, there is a guy, well you are probably aware of him, Bob do you need to get going?

CRH: No, I will give it another 15 minutes.

DB: So these are some questions I came up with while reading a book by Samuel Heinz called *A Soldier's Tale*. It's interesting, he talks about the major wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and spends a lot of time talking about World War II, but also talks about Vietnam and World War I and Korea.

CRH: He is certainly a well-know name.

DB: Yeah and he had been in a unit in World War II himself. He is an English professor actually.

CRH: So, by the way, was a great author of western tales, Louis L'Amour. He must have been 40 years old when he joined in.

DB: Oh really?

CRH: Yeah. He was in tanks all the way across Europe. He never wrote about that. I often wished he had because he was very good at describing things. He never did a war novel, so far as I know. This guy had been a real soldier of fortune and, I guess, when World War II came along he thought, "I may as well do that even though I am an old man." Married man with family and he went off anyway.

DB: Heinz says that strangeness is a part of war life.

CRH: Oh, sure. Yes.

DB: And strangest of all is the presence of death, which isn't what one expects before hand. It's uglier and less human than one had imagined. And he gives an example of a soldier spotting a dead German who had been eaten at by a rat. So, Bob, I was wondering if you could relate to this observation of his?

CRH: Well, first of all, you have to realize that – once you open up the stomach cavity – what you've got there is a whole bunch of either baseballs and footballs, and an awful lot of what looked like sausages. And none of it is very attractive. I think my most vivid memory in answer to your question was seeing German soldiers who had been dead about three days in the September sun in the Moselle Valley.

DB: So that was shortly after you got over there.

CRH: Yeah. We had come ashore in August on the 6<sup>th</sup> and we were in the Moselle by the 1<sup>st</sup> of September. So somewhere in there. But I know that this was in counterattack in the 317<sup>th</sup> Rgt. territory in the Moselle Valley, where the 317<sup>th</sup> lost some of its anti-tank guns. That why I can place it there. These people had been in the sun for at least three days or so and it was hot and, of course, they were swelling. And my first reaction and – I think – the reaction of some others, was that these guys are awfully big. They are fat or something. Then somebody said, "No, this is what happens when the bodies swell." And you had to force yourself to look at that. I have another memory of a young kid who, as

with so many German soldiers, had extraordinarily long blonde hair. It must have been well down over his collar. Anyway he had lost his helmet and he was dead in a French forest, and we walked by him. I remember he wasn't opened up in the sense that whatever had killed him had not torn open his body clothing. He hadn't been hit in the face so you saw the face. I can still see him lying there by that trail as we went by. And you realize that 'this is a human being,' and, you see your own dead. My most vivid memory of my own dead is looking at some boots on one of the young men somewhere in the Bulge and thinking, "I would really like to have a pair of boots but those probably won't fit me and even so I shouldn't take them off of this corpse. I shouldn't monkey with this kid." He was stacked away under a stairwell or something, outside, in the cold. It was freezer-cold so he wasn't disintegrating. But there was this youngster. Those are probably the most vivid memories of something like that. And I will always remember the story I have told you about the kid named Blackie who was a scout in the village that we went into and got surrounded. Blackie was killed at the outside of a door of the last house in the village. He had been ordered to step out, and when he did, he got killed. He was there, until nightfall, that first day before we could go out and get him. Couldn't get him during the day.

DB: He was part of your scout unit?

CRH: He was a scout for the company we were with. I didn't know him. I just will always remember him as "Blackie" because the people from the unit who did know him told me that, "that's our lead scout; that's Blackie." Blackie was lying at the front door, four or five yards out of the front door. And he wasn't messed up either. He was just dead. But you could see some awful things. And twice I saw people cut in two. Once in a crossroads in Luxembourg, at Goesdorf, and once somewhere in eastern France. They had been literally sliced in two by artillery fire. So what you were looking at were two pieces of a person. It was an American in Goesdorf, cut in two. In France, somewhere around Nomeny, there was a kid – a German soldier – and I never knew where his whole top half was. He was in a shed and shells had come through I suppose. I can still see the entire bottom half of this guy, boots and all. I had no idea where his chest was.

DB: So that must have been pretty shocking.

CRH: It was. I got the hell out of there. But we were being shelled in the same area which was pretty interesting psychologically, because we were being shelled with rockets and they would come in and scream like hell and make a lot of noise and you would think about this guy who is over there just a few yards away, what's left of him.

DB: So those were Katusha type of rockets. Katushas were Russians.

CRH: Russian, yeah. The Russians used to lose their equipment like crazy in the big 1941 and 1942 encirclements, and the Germans would then use the Russian equipment.

DB: Oh, I see.

CRH: But the Germans had rockets of their own. Multi-barreled rockets. Eight tubes or something like that. And we had them in something like that. We had something like 45 or 50 tubes mounted on tanks. That was a racket to hear. Of course we thought that it was great because it wasn't we who were being targeted.

DB: You had told me at one point that there was a medic or an aide, I am not sure if they called them medics...

CRH: Their term was "aid men" and I think we just called them medics. I am sure nobody ever called out – in the press of combat – "Aid man! Aid man!" I think we all screamed, "Medic, medic!"

DB: So this medic was killed in Normandy?

CRH: That's the guy whose bloody brassard you have seen before. We have talked about that before. I also corrected the spelling, for our typist, of brassard.

DB: You had known him?

CRH: Yeah, right. He was in the company.

DB: And that was the first...

CRH: First friend of mine who got killed.

DB: So how did you feel when that happened, Bob?

CRH: Well disappointed and hurt at his loss, but, also, everybody was extremely angry because the story was that he was out in the open and it wasn't a secret about who he was and he was wearing his brassards and he had the cross on his helmet. He probably would have had four crosses. Two on each side and one front and one back. And so some sniper killed him. And I have shown you that brassard with the blood on it. That's his blood. We were mad about that. But interestingly enough the way things happen I haven't any idea what his name was now.

DB: You said the 317<sup>th</sup> lost their AT guns at a certain point [see above].

CRH: I think at least one platoon was overrun. That was the rumor. The first rumor we heard was that the whole company, with nine guns, had been overrun but I think that was moderated, after a while, to just one group with three guns. But Sergeant Mitchell, our sergeant gave us a very strong lecture after he heard about that. Probably the company captain pulled the lieutenants in charge and told them to be more careful.

DB: To be more careful.

CRH: Yeah. Be careful where you put the gun and you can't just fire this thing and expect that the German tank is going to say, "I surrender" because they don't tend to do that. They apparently rolled right over these guys. Killed all the gunners.

DB: So that must have sort of hit home, the fact that it was a unit that was just like yours.

CRH: Yeah. And a lot of times, I probably didn't know any 317<sup>th</sup> gunners, but I'll bet some of the older men in my company knew the other gunners. They would have gravitated to bars or something like that, in the States, to talk about what they were doing.

DB: Your boots, you said, after a while were not comfortable or were you wearing them out?

CRH: The soles wore out. The water was running right through my shoes.

DB: And did you finally get new boots?

CRH: Yeah we did. It's an example of how much the supply lines broke down in the fall of '44.

DB: When did you wind up getting the new boots?

CRH: I don't remember when. At the time I went to the Bulge, I didn't have snow-proof, "cold" boots. I had good shoes, but, what I really needed was something that would be more like shoepacks or whatever you call them.

DB: Like galoshes?

CRH: Yes. Right. I remember seeing that this young soldier had been wearing his when he died (rest of sentence unclear).

DB: That made you feel guilty to think that?

CRH: Oh yeah. Right. And, also, the dead men belonged very closely to their squad. So one of the things that I thought of was, and I remember this very clearly, was thinking that if one of his friends finds me taking his shoes, he is not going to be happy about this even though there is absolutely no use to the poor dead man. It's just not done. I should probably quit, my voice is going.

DB: Ok. This is a good place to stop then. Thank you very much.

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**Interview 4/24/02****53 min**

DB: This is Daniel Burnstein interviewing Bob Harmon at Seattle University on April 24, 2002. Bob, I was reading this book by Samuel Heinz, *A Soldier's Tale*, which is about accounts of the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Heinz took part in World War II himself and Heinz says that, on occasion, in the narratives about World War II, he notes, "high emotions and heroics" that talk about courage and skill and death in battle and courage and skill with regard to that. He says that "The base, the ground base of the soldier's tale of the Second War remains an affirmation." That's his quote. But he asserts that the Errol Flynn type of character in war movies became, for the GI's during World War II, a figure of irony because that was an example of how war is not fought because "That's the kind of thing that would get you killed" he says. And he asserts, well, first let me ask you about that. Does that ring true with the way you and your buddies would talk about heroics and that sort of thing?

CRH: I am not sure we talked about heroics per se or in the abstract, Dan. That's a very interesting thought. We talked about things that various people had done. Things that we'd seen or thing that we heard our friends had done and we knew about. And of course there were a number of extremely heroic things that were done and well within sight. And some of us participated in one way or another in that kind of thing. So, as I say, I don't know if we had talked about heroics in the abstract. We would not have seen, ordinarily, Errol Flynn movies and that sort of thing. Maybe if you were in Paris or London you would, but, certainly we would not have seen them. He did a thing about Burma, for instance, which I have seen on TV. I haven't any idea whether it is good, bad, or indifferent but I think that each of those is laced with some sense of- probably in the old theatric belief- that you must suspend disbelief or none of this will work. A good example that, I think, does show combat and showed it very well, was a very realistic thing and that's *The Battle of San Pietro*, we have talked about that before. And then there's the other thing that they have to jam all of this stuff together to make it work as a movie. You don't have time to tell all these stories. Again, the classic example and we have talked about this one night at my dinner table. I was entertaining three highly experienced combat officers, or six rather, combat officers from Vietnam. Each of them decorated many, many times. Absolute split three and three of white and black, for instance. All ranked major or lieutenant colonel except for one full colonel. And they had seen *Platoon*. The famous *Platoon*.

DB: The movie.

CRH: The movie. And each of them had their own opinions but there were three who came down fairly well on the side that it was a good war movie and the other three who had had exactly the same experience and just as many ribbons said "no" they didn't think it was. So you ran into a problem. But I think you have a question of concision many times in those extravaganzas, those war movies. You certainly get a lot of casualties. If you have any seen any of Lee Marvin's war movies, some of them are very good because he was a Marine, out in the Pacific. He knew what this was about. But sometimes you

simply have, as I said, concision has to be brought in and you have to put them together. I once attended a spy movie dealing with a whole series of interesting European and Middle Eastern adventures and I went, specifically, with a man who had been the executive officer of the famous Parachute Regiment of the SAS, in England. He and I were acquaintances from my 1984 Summer teaching in the Military History seminar at West Point. Major Julian D.A. Baker was the Liaison Officer and a guest Professor at the USMA. [*Major Baker lectured at Seattle University on October 29, 1984. His topic was terrorism and his chief thesis was that – in an open society such as one finds in Britain or the United States – terrorism was virtually impossible to eradicate because our societies will insist on retaining the chief aspects of our constitutional civil rights*].

DB: The SAS?

CRH: Yeah. Special Air Service. It's one of the elite units in the world. And he had experience in a dozen countries with this kind of thing and we were talking about it professionally and we had sat off, way off to the side of theater, so we could whisper without bothering anybody. And one of the things he said – when one of the heroes was tailing the bad guys, car to car – was, “Well of course you wouldn't stick with anybody very long because they would get picked up ('spotted'). You would have a relay of six, five, seven, eight, ten cars of one kind or another.” Of course that wouldn't work in the movie. Major Baker pointed out that certainly, they were tailed. It just wasn't quite like they did it in the film. I think that maybe that happens. One of the things that goes wrong in some of the movies – because of the necessities of using the sets, for instance, for the Battle of Bulge – a lot of those were shot in Yugoslavia, which doesn't look anything at all like the Ardennes. There are good movies and then there are bad movies about war. So each person can see something of what they like or what they would approve of.

DB: I think, Heinz, what he is trying to get at, because he talked about World War I also, and he said that when Western civilization went into World War I there was still a lot of romanticizing of the image, like a John Wayne type or Errol Flynn type of heroics. Whereas in World War II he said that the soldiers, in part due to the legacy of World War I, were wary and determined to be armed against heroics by possessing a sense of irony in a way.

CRH: Interesting thought. I am not sure I can really speak to it. I know that in World War I there were certain sorts of heroics that became common stories. The famous story of the U.S. Marine captain at Belleau Wood, who, upon being ordered to retreat by the French, said, “Retreat? Hell! We just got here!” And, of course, General Harbord (later, Commandant of the Marine Corps), while serving with Marines brigaded with the Army's Third Infantry Division, somewhere in France, said something about “We will defend this place against all the Austrian waiters in Europe!” So there was a lot of that sort of thing. You get Wild Bill Donovan, the OSS chief, who – quite rightly – was awarded the Medal of Honor for his bravery in World War I. And, Douglas MacArthur should have had the Medal in the First World War. The things he did, as an Assistant Divisional Commander, were simply incredible. Such as walking around battlefields, pointing out targets with his walking stick. When they finally gave him the MOH, in

WW II, I think it was just a make-up gesture, because he had certainly earned it. I think he had eight Silver Stars. He was just the sort of person who – so often – gets killed. And wasn't.

DB: In World War I.

CRH: Yes, right. Or in the Philippines where he won several stars. He was determined to live up to the family's reputation. The family had a Medal of Honor winner from what was it? Mission Ridge, Tennessee [November 25, 1863. Lt. (Later, General) Arthur MacArthur, 24<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin].

DB: Let's see. Another thing Heinz talks about is that he says the GI's often would be skeptical about the operations of the Army, the strategies of the Army, the officers, the food, the propaganda language that the government uttered and so on. He calls them "civilian soldiers."

CRH: Well we were. I think that in the tapes that we have cut so far you can see that over and over and over again. You can see what I thought, and what several of my friends thought. But you did tend to be more or less suspicious, or, to a greater or lesser degree highly trusting, depending on the track record of the person involved who was directing some operation. Whether or not you knew them, that sort of thing. And whether or not it looked like a practical sort of operation. I think the statement would stand. There was a lot of skepticism, and I know in one of my letters home, I wrote, and we have talked about this before too, "Everybody is winning the war in the headlines." And I forget when I wrote that, March or something of '45 I suppose. For us, it didn't look like it.

DB: Too quick to pop the champagne corks.

CRH: Well, when you see the things that the Germans managed to do, like recoup their forces and pull them together in October and November of 1944, after the debacle in France, then the Battle of the Bulge itself, and literally built themselves an Army.

DB: Was World War II unlike Vietnam in that Vietnam was mostly, you know, a lot of working class and poor kids but Heinz contends that unlike that that during World War II the GI's were mostly from the middle class.

CRH: I think they were from every class in World War II.

DB: I think that is what he is trying to say. [some surveys have indicated that most Americans think themselves to be "middle-class"]

CRH: The secret to not being a GI, but, being an officer or maybe a tech sergeant or master sergeant was to have had some sort of university work, maybe just a year or two even. In Vietnam there was great deal of this class war thing. But you want to remember that, when you are talking Vietnam, if you want to see casualties amongst the upper class, just look at the officer class. The casualties were terrific amongst those second

lieutenants who had come out of ROTC and reserve programs, out of college. West Pointers. I have seen the graves at West Point of young men who had graduated not two years before and they had gone on from West Point, probably done their jump training or something like specialty training, and, the next thing you knew, they were KIA in Vietnam and never saw their 25<sup>th</sup> or 26<sup>th</sup> birthday. So you have to be very careful about this sort of allocation of class in the Vietnam War. Essentially I think it was a lower class as far as the GI's were concerned, which is one of the things that led me to write to the President here at Seattle University and say, "I don't think we ever ought to have this university exclusion from the draft again. I don't think we ought to comply with that."

DB: Yeah I remember you showed me your letter. Now, we had an interview in November in which you said, "There were many cases of people being very nice to us in France." Can you give any specific examples of that?

CRH: Not at the moment except the usual funny one that everyone remembers and that is as you are going along in convoys and people wanted to be kind to us so they were throwing fruit for us. They would bring apples and other things from the orchards. Well of course, as we crossed France, the crops weren't really ripe yet so you would catch these green apples. Well, if you got smacked in the face with a hard, green apple, all the best will in the world from some French man or girl, trying to be kind to the GI's didn't help. The stuff simply wasn't useful yet (in August of '44), and it was damn dangerous. I presume, I just can't think of anything off hand. I do recall nice, long, very comfortable moments with the grandmother in the house in Goesdorf where I was doing the squad cooking and she was cooking for her family and for the 35 or 36 people in the basement too. And so she and I would bumble along in my German or somebody would come and translate French for the two of us.

DB: And Goesdorf is in Luxembourg?

CRH: Yes. Goesdorf.

DB: I was reading this book by Patrick O'Donnell called, *Beyond Valor*, which contains mini-memoirs about World War II. He contents that he found a hidden war, what he calls a hidden war, in which veterans, "Bottled up memories that they never shared with their families or others in order to try to bury the pain or to forget about it." But they found they could not forget these things and these memories came out in nightmares and so on. Do you have any such memories and if so would you like to share them?

CRH: The most piercing for me, I think, Dan, are the two cases where I can still see, very clearly, the body of soldier. One, a German, when I was in eastern France, and, later on one in Luxembourg, the body of an American soldier who had physically been cut in two by shellfire. And I can remember thinking about that at the time and I happened to be stuck in the places where these were. So, yeah, that's very vivid to me. As far as other things are concerned, probably not except the notion of the intense fear that is aroused by the sheer chance that you are going to get hit with a shell or smacked with a machine gun bullet or rifle bullet. But I think probably a lot of people suppressed memories of one sort

or another. I would imagine. I was never engaged in any sort of real hand-to-hand fighting. As I have told people, everybody I ever killed, I shot. I image that people who have bayoneted somebody else, or, like Sergeant Day Turner at Dahl, who won the Medal there, and he was also burning people with burning oil, which he managed to set afire. Clubbing folks, that sort of thing. I imagine, had Day lived, he would have remembered that forever.

DB: This was a famous Medal of Honor winner?

CRH: Yes.

DB: Day Turner?

CRH: Day Turner. D-A-Y.

DB: And Dahl.

CRH: January 1945. He defended a barn up there. He had 12 men with him. I think they all got wounded and several got killed, the rest were killed. Day wasn't wounded I guess.

DB: Is that in Belgium?

CRH: No. Yes! Wait a minute, it's in Luxembourg. It's about three miles from Goesdorf. So I watched the attack as it was taking place.

DB: And did you hear about it in Stars and Stripes?

CRH: No. You heard about it right away. The rumor ran throughout the regiment about what he had done. It was incredible. The Germans got in the barn where he was and he took a rifle away from one of them and shot some of the Germans. He ran out of ammunition. He hit people with their own rifles and killed people with a bayonet. I will show you the citation for the medal.

DB: And did people in the States know about this then?

CRH: Probably not. At home somebody may have heard about it. I don't know.

DB: This is not a famous incident then.

CRH: No it's not.

DB: It's just among those who...

CRH: Those who know, yeah, or anybody who has got what's called the 'Green Book' of the Medal of Honor. Yeah. Day was killed on the night of February 7<sup>th</sup>, '45 in the Siegfried.

DB: Oh so he was killed later. Not in this incident.

CRH: Yeah. He won the Medal for action on, I think, it was the same day that Nick Grossi was wounded. But anyway, early January '45 and within almost six weeks he was dead. He was killed at the Our River.

DB: You knew him?

CRH: No, but everybody knew about him.

DB: Yeah. Joanne Levine wrote a book on Holocaust survivors and she found that "Often those who were best able to cope in their post-Holocaust lives were those who tried to see their survival as a special obligation to give meaning to their lives." Do you, to an extent, recognize this in yourself or in some of your comrades from the war?

CRH: Well, a) I would certainly recognize it in many of the Holocaust survivors I know. They are very much aware of that. It was for me and I think whenever I brought this up as a topic of conversation most of the men with whom I have ever discussed this said, yeah, they felt something special. They devoted themselves in one way or another to public service or some farmer might just do a little bit extra with the 4-H club. b) I certainly felt it and that's one of the reasons that I was pleased to be teaching some of the courses I taught here because I felt that I was doing something that was morally useful. That's one of the reasons I designed the War and Peace course, the history of War and Peace course. It's one of the reasons I designed the Churchill seminar.

DB: I thought that would be your answer.

CRH: Well, I think anybody raised with faith of any kind almost, certainly in the Judeo-Christian tradition, feels that there is an obligation: "to him to whom much is given, of him much will be required."

DB: Now Patrick O'Donnell, back to him, he felt that there was a key theme among the narratives that there were countless small moments of courageous sacrifice among the men, especially in the good squads. Can you relate some examples of these countless small moments?

CRH: Well I think whenever somebody would do something special just to help someone. One of the things that we always prided ourselves on was to try to relieve whoever was on guard and if you were relieving them, usually try to be a couple minutes early and never be late. Frankly, if you were late you heard about it anyway, somebody would bitch at you about it. But you would usually think ahead a little bit and think so-and-so is probably tired and is going to welcome an extra five minutes, which could be precious. So you would do that. It is something I have talked about before somewhere in one of our recent tapes. Shells came in sometime when we were in Hoesdorf in the attack on the Siegfried and there was this kid there, Slobechevski, and I knew he didn't know

what was happening and he was near a window and I just knocked him to the ground and fell on him. That's me; it's not necessarily heroic, it's just that I was trying to save somebody who obviously could get cut in two very easily. The little things that you would do for one another. The time that I tried to help out Joe Ragno by carrying his rifle when we were carrying assault boats down to the river Our, which was a bad idea. We got separated and there's Joe, all night long with no rifle, until we found each other in the morning. So there are, constantly, little things like that where you would look out for one another.

DB: Can you remember from your mom's letters or from what she or others told you later what her experience was of the war?

CRH: Well yes. She found it a dreadful emotional strain. She wouldn't tell us that at the time because she didn't want to worry us but, when I talked to her afterward, for years afterward, we explored more and more of this together and she spent a lot of time worrying about me. Not so much about Neil. She didn't know enough to realize that Neil was in terrible danger too, a lot of times, when he was flying around Alaska. But she was really concerned about me and that was exaggerated by the fact that Neil and I are the only two out of six kids who survived. Yeah, they (Don and Laura Harmon) had four other children and they lost them all. So we were particularly precious to our parents, which is why I said we were spoiled. We were spoiled. She was worried about us. She prayed for us constantly and there was this constant sort of thing of Rosary and Mass. So it was hard on her.

DB: Were your siblings that died, did they die at birth?

CRH: One of them died 36-48 hours after birth in 1935 or 36. One of them died after 12 or 13 years of a history of violent convulsions, which was terribly hard on my parents, especially my Father. And, she lost a set of twins, at their birth.

DB: The one that died after 12 or 13 years. Were you around?

CRH: Oh yes. I knew him. I remember him very well. I remember playing with him and so on.

DB: Was he younger than you?

CRH: No, he was the oldest boy. The oldest person among the 6 kids.

DB: Oh wow. That must have been very upsetting.

CRH: It was. It wasn't so upsetting to me at the time I think as it would have been later on when I was old enough to realize what it really meant to my parents.

DB: You were pretty young.

CRH: I think I was six or seven when he died.

DB: Were you aware when you were overseas of how she felt of her experiences?

CRH: Well I was smart enough to realize what she must have been going through, which was one of the reasons I tried to be reassuring all the time. It was one of the reasons that you always post-dated your letters or backdated your letters. Sure, you were aware that it was hard on your parents.

DB: What did you like most or least in an officer or an NCO and why?

CRH: Good judgement and fairness in what they did. In other words, each of them was responsible for disposing, you might say, of your time and also of you and your energy and if necessary, your life. So all you asked was that they be somewhat thoughtful about what they were doing and as well-informed as they could possibly hope to be and that they be even-handed or fair in their distribution of the responsibilities. We have been working on this long enough so you have heard me say it and you see it in every book: every soldier in every squad and every regiment always assumes that everybody else is imposing on them and that they are doing all the work.

DB: That all the others...

CRH: All the other squads are getting it easy. "Why me?" is very much a constant question in the military, so it's important that whoever has the stripes or the bars or the leaves be even-handed and well-informed as possible and not everybody was, so that was a big problem, I would think. It was another thing, I think, that they be calm. And that's something I have told cadets to whom I taught military history. Over and over and over again, somehow you must, somehow or other, retain control of yourself and be as calm as you possibly can because your men will understand immediately if you are excited and they will be baffled by dumb things you might do. I guess the last message that General Custer ever sent was, "Many Indians, come quick, bring packs." I think that's the last thing he wrote to Captain Benteen. Well what they hell does that say? It doesn't say anything, really, and I can just see poor old Benteen wondering, "Well, what am I supposed to do now?" And as a matter of fact, what he did was fort up on a little hill up there and he survived the Battle of Little Bighorn. It's a good thing he didn't "come quick." You liked experience and you like the sense of authority and maturity and the men who gave us orders didn't have to be older than we were as long as they had had some experience and their judgement was right most of the time, no matter what it might possibly be, including posting a guard or making an attack.

DB: Did you ever have any officers or NCO's who showed favoritism? You know, who weren't fair in their assignment of tasks?

CRH: I can't think of anyone off hand in the Company. There probably were some. I just don't have any remembrances of it. The men who directed us were, I thought, superb. Some of them were sort of laid back or perhaps, seemingly ineffectual at first. One of my

friends was a guy named Leonard Aquilino and he had corporal stripes and to this day I have always wondered why, but he was a happy, nice, happy-go-lucky guy from eastern New York. And he was bright enough, but there was a very slow-spoken typical hillbilly, Sergeant Bowles, and Bowles was one of these people you had to listen to all day to get four words out of him because he just spoke very slowly, but he had very good judgement. He had no education as far as I know but he understood what it meant to be a mature man and he understood the soldiering business very well. I remember arguing about going on guard one time. Either I felt he had stuck me on a late night guard or something I didn't like and he just made some off-hand comment about how 'we all have our problems.'

DB: He was a sergeant?

CRH: Yeah. He was probably a three-stripe or what we call buck sergeant. Most of them were really nice. I remember one person who was probably 24, 25, or 26 years old, Corporal Torney, possibly a Finnish name. Torney was liked by everybody. I didn't know anybody who didn't like Torney. I didn't know anybody who didn't respect Tech Sergeant Meyers, our platoon sergeant. We may not all have liked him but we certainly respected him.

DB: And your squad itself was a cohesive unit.

CRH: Oh yeah. It sure was. Full of wildly individual people but all of them very interesting and all of them very good at working together. And every one of them a skeptic, by the way, to go back to one of your good earlier questions. Everyone was skeptical about authority and what we were doing and full of all sorts of funny, wry remarks all the time, but nevertheless, very good at cooperating.

DB: Were you able to compress concerns about the invasion of Japan or, you know, where you would have to serve in that or similar service in China, or something like that? Were you able to compress concerns about that into a tiny corner of your mind?

CRH: Well I wouldn't say tiny. It was certainly compressed, but, you were always aware of it. And also, we have talked about this before, you are always aware that you weren't going to survive an invasion. Not as an infantry guy. Survive, at least, without getting hurt. I had used up all my odds, so, I really did not want to go to Japan and I talked about it in my letters. I thought occupation duty isn't bad considering the alternatives. Like that old joke about old age and death. For some reason the idea of going to China or Burma never bothered any of us. I never heard a person say, "Boy, I sure hope I don't get sent to Burma." You knew it was bad, you knew it was rough there, you knew China could be rough. But it was the invasion of Japan that panicked us all because you could just see 39 million mad Japanese.

DB: Yeah. Kamikaze.

CRH: Yes. Right. The kamikaze business starts just about this time of the year. Maybe earlier.

Kamikaze (“Divine Wind”) attacks began after Saipan. See dates November 24, 1944, Philippines; December 4 and 13, 1944, Sulu Sea. Saipan was April / June of 1944.

DB: That’s when it started?

CRH: In May ’44 yeah. I think so.

DB: That was at Iwo Jima I believe.

CRH: No. Iwo Jima is too far away. No, it was in the Marianas.

June 15 to August, 1944. Admiral Turner’s Amphibious Force arrives at Saipan, Marianas Islands. Organized resistance ends circa July 9. Circa 27,000 Japanese KIA (including Admiral Nagumo [suicide] who led the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941). Turner’s force = ca. 530 ships, 127,000 Marines and Army. Japan did not have the industrial capacity to send out such forces at this stage of the War.

September 1944: USMC to Pelelieu, in Palau Island group.

October 1944: MacArthur “returns” to Leyte.

DB: Bob, in that incident in Eastern France when you all were talking about whether or not to steal some rations off of a truck convoy, the back of a truck that was part of a supply convoy, you remembered talking about it. Can you tell us why you all decided not to do it?

CRH: Yeah. Well, first of all, realize that usually when a unit moved a lot of trucks from the same unit, they would all try to stay on the road, one behind the other. But every once in a while you would get a situation where for one reason or another the MP’s would intermix various traffic of one kind or another. So we were tagging behind a series of trucks carrying 10-in-1 Rations, cardboard cases of rations. And you could see what they were. We knew what they were. Probably driven by black truck drivers. We speculated on the idea that if Frank Marzek could pull up close enough to the truck so that the driver ahead would have a lot of blindside, that he would not be able to see, and one of us could jump on his truck and then throw off some rations to another one of us who would be standing on the hood of Frank’s truck as we moved.

DB: You would jump onto the back of that truck from your truck?

CRH: From our truck, yeah. You do enough of that sort of thing. It’s just like moving on and off a moving freight car and moving trucks. Running along and jumping on a moving truck when you want to catch it for one reason or another. It could be done. It’s just that we finally had enough sense to realize that - if something went wrong, we didn’t care about the idea that it might be, seemingly, stealing – but, we were worried about falling between the two vehicles. So we finally decided to give up, but as I have said before,

Marzek was just crazy enough that he would have pulled that truck within about six inches of that black truck driver and held it there. It wasn't virtue; it was a sense of discretion that kept us from stealing rations.

DB: Let's see. At one point you comment that you had been in touch, you make a post comment that you had been in touch not only with the Goeres-Thines family in the Goesdorf but also the Lanners-Engle-Kraemer family in Hoesdorf.

CRH: Yes.

DB: Near the Westwall area. So who are they and what's their connection with you Bob?

CRH: Okay, the Goeres-Thines family is the family who own a farm in Luxembourg in the town of Goesdorf and it's in their house and barn that we were outposted, defending Goesdorf for 10, 12, 14 days or something during the Battle of the Bulge. So I stayed in the house all the time and it's their son - it must have the oldest boy, Jempi - who was hit by shellfire and I tried to save him and it didn't work out.

DB: Did you know his family?

CRH: No, I knew that his family was there but I had no idea what the relationship was except that I knew that his mother was watching. His mother was the one who used to cook with me, and I knew it was her son. She watched me when I dragged him in and tried to work on the kid. I didn't realize until later that Therese- now, in 2002, my close friend- was Jempi's sister. So she was standing there watching me, too. But I didn't find that out until 1964 or 65.

DB: You knew Therese back then?

CRH: She was there but I didn't know her. I wouldn't recognize who she was.

DB: She became your friend after the war.

CRH: Well, I came back and knocked on the door, in 1965, I guess it was, in September, and said I had been there during the war and she invited me in. They offered me coffee and wine and ham, Ardennes ham, as they always will. And we sat and talked and finally the subject came up, I asked her if she remembered the incident of this boy and then she went almost into shock and she said "Oh, he was my brother." And then I went into shock, too. So anyway, she and I have been close friends ever since and I always see her when I am there. She always puts on a big party whenever I come.

DB: Now let me get this straight now Bob. When you were there for those 10 or 12 days during the war you cooked with Jempi's mother. So you knew Jempi's mother but you didn't know the rest of the family?

CRH: No, because you realize this whole house was quite a bit smaller than the area between here and the front of our office spaces. You had all of us, you had the crews of two different tanks, I don't know who else was in there. You had my 12 or however many we had at the moment, all in that place, and then you had about 35 or 36 Luxemburgers circulating and you didn't know any of them. The only reason I knew Mom and recognized her was that she was older. An older woman, maybe 60-65. Because she and I were both using the same sink and the same little stove and we got to talking and when I couldn't say anything in German, why, then, one of our men who spoke French – and she of course spoke French too – would translate for us. So we talked and talked. But I had no idea who these people were except that when Jempi got hit and I went out and got him, Mom, for some reason or another, knew. I don't know if she was watching it right then or what. She and Jempi's sister were there immediately as I dragged him in and dragged him half way down the cellar stairs and started working on him. And I couldn't get him down any farther because it was so crowded. In other words that's the reason. There were dozens of people in there.

DB: So who were the Lanners-Engle-Kraemer family?

CRH: We used their house as a fort when we attacked the Siegfried. And after the first attack across the Our. We tried to cross the river on the night of February 7 and 8, and we retreated into a couple of houses. My squad all ended up in the house that belongs to the Lanners-Engle-Kraemer family. They live in maison – that's "house" – #13.

DB: In Hoesdorf.

CRH: Hoesdorf.

DB: And you have seen them since.

CRH: Oh constantly. I first saw them in '58. Gina and I were leading a Seattle University student-tour and we ran the tour through that little valley. So I just went and knocked on the door and told them I had been there during the war and of course they were absolutely incredulous. So I described the inside of their house to them and what it looked like. The real key was when I said that, "In what is your front room, under the carpet, are the stairs which go down to your root cellar." Then they knew I had been there before. So they went through the whole thing. [*The typical Luxembourg hospitality*]. I was there in '58. I was back in '65. I may have been there in '70. I have been there a half a dozen times and they put on a real reception in 1994 when I took my brother and the rest of the six of the family. They put on a big reception and then I have seen them since several times and they have always put on a reception. They come to all of the celebrations in June of the Battle of the Bulge commemoration. So they are very helpful. And I just got a letter back from Nic. I wrote to Nic Kraemer. I wrote to him and said, "What are the real distances across the valley from crest to crest, across the Our River valley? Because I am telling stories about shooting across through there." Well he wrote a nice long letter and what he did was that he dictated it to a fellow who had splendid English who is the director of the National War Museum in Diekirch and who used to be a banker and used to work for the

US State Department, Mr. Roland Gaul. But, he is a Luxembourger. He has four or five languages just perfectly. Anyway he wrote that and I will give you a copy of the letter which that man wrote.

DB: It will help to understand the valley more. So did you know any of that family?

CRH: No because they all would have been evacuated. So I knew about them. There wasn't anybody in the village but you could tell essentially what their family was like. Two of their horses were dead. That was another thing, the barn was right next to the house so, when I identified myself in '58 and they were wondering who I was, I said when your father came back the first time after the attack there were two dead horses right there, and I pointed to where they had been. "Oh" he said. That was evidence that I knew that I had really been there.

DB: You saw the father come back?

CRH: No, I said when the father came back this is what he found. So I eventually met the whole family. The father, the grandfather, the grandmother.

DB: Had their horses died from...

CRH: Shells. Artillery shrapnel. Concussion would probably bother them but no, these were cut to pieces by shells.

DB: Well Bob another thing you say is that the 57 millimeter gun, which was your anti-tank gun, could fire either an explosive or a solid shot.

CRH: Yes.

DB: Now could you explain that?

CRH: Well the explosive of course would be just like a flying tin can loaded with dynamite if you will, loaded with gun powder. And that would have an impact fuse on it so, say, when it hit a wall or hit the ground then the explosive would be triggered.

DB: And it would blow to bits.

CRH: And the whole thing would blow to bits. And the idea was that the shells are carefully designed to break into lots of little pieces. Metallurgists spend a lot of time figuring out how to do that. The solid shot was like...

DB: Let me just ask you so why would a metallurgist want it to break into thousands of pieces?

CRH: So it would fly off and do the same horrible things that all those terrorist bombs are doing in Jerusalem. You want to get as many pieces in the air as possible with the hope that one or two or three or 20 of them will hit something.

DB: Shrapnel, basically.

CRH: Yeah, and the shrapnel breaks down to everything from as big as a piece the size of your fingernail to a piece this long or this long. Depends on what it is.

DB: That was a piece as long as your hand.

CRH: Or as big as a fingernail. The piece that would literally cut you right in two. Depends on the size of the shell. But, anyway, we had that, and then the solid shell would be to hit a tank and, theoretically, go right on through the armor. And that would be about as if you were to saw off the first 16 inches of the end of a baseball bat although it was made out of solid steel with a copper coating on it. So that missile would go flying through the air with the idea that it would hit the tank with a sharp pointed nose and then you get all the physical effects of a tremendous amount of kinetic energy being imparted to a very small area and gets multiplied by all of the laws of physics.

DB: The hope was that it would penetrate a tank.

CRH: Yes, or knock the treads off. That was really a good thing, if you could knock off the treads.

DB: But it wouldn't explode into thousands of pieces.

CRH: No, when it went through the tank shell, the armor of the tank, that armor would be broken into tiny pieces and they became deadly. They would become shrapnel and some of them could become simply molten drops of metal. So you are getting hit by flying fire.

DB: And would you all do that to break down houses in towns too?

CRH: Yeah. If you thought there were German machine gunners or something in a house then you would shoot your guns.

DB: With the solid shot.

CRH: Yes. Or you could use the explosive. Either one would work in a house because the explosive shell would detonate as it hit a stone wall but then it would throw all that stone, which became shrapnel, into the room.

DB: So it would have a double effect.

CRH: Yeah, double or triple effect. Which was why, always, when you were sleeping in a house, you always had - if possible - at least two walls between you and the Germans,

so the shell would come in and hit the first wall and explode and the little pieces would strike against the second wall and you would be behind that.

DB: So when you were in houses like the one where Jempi's family was, you all would go toward the middle of the house instead of staying to the outside.

CRH: Yeah. Although that house was small enough so that you couldn't. Let me spell Jempi for our typist. And that's a combination of two French names, Jean Pierre. Jempi. "J" has an "H" sound in Luxembourgish.

DB: So that was a nickname?

CRH: It was a regular name. There were a lot of people named Jempi but it was a shortening, maybe honoring some uncle or somebody who was named Jean Pierre. But on his death notice, which you have seen, it's JEMPI.

DB :Right. Yeah. So wasn't that to be a target, to be in that house then?

CRH: Yeah. It sure was. Yes it was Daniel. There wasn't any place else to go. We were the frontier post. We were the 7<sup>th</sup> cavalry out there. That was as far as the American lines had gone north. If you went out beyond us 20 miles or so I suppose then you could get to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, 1<sup>st</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies, the very famous combat engineering crew who defended two or three really critical villages on the northern side, the 7<sup>th</sup> Armored would be up there. We were as far as you went. The Indian country was the next step down the hill, which is why they attacked every morning for a long time. They would come up that hill and we would have a John Wayne fight. You mentioned this, earlier, about some of these being heroic. For us, there wasn't anything heroic about it. It was just that this was the thing to be done. It was target practice and for them it was heroic, for the Germans, to march up that hill under that fire with us shooting at them.

DB: Why didn't they shell the house?

CRH: They did.

DB: Did the shells hit sometimes.

CRH: They hit houses all around us. They didn't happen to hit us. Across the street, one of the houses on the crossroads, where I had my encounter with the body of an American cut right in two. So in one corner of the room there was the head and the upper thorax and the rest of him was three or four feet away.

DB: So there were other houses around.

CRH: Oh yeah. It was a small village. There were probably 30 buildings in Geosdorf then, maybe 100.

DB: Were there men in other houses, GI's in other houses?

CRH: Yeah. I'll bet every house in town had people because there must have been two or three hundred of us up there.

DB: And that was the high ground.

CRH: Yes. Beautifully high ground. There wasn't anything higher.

DB: Would have it been safer for you all to dig foxholes?

CRH: It would have, theoretically but you have to remember that the foxholes were extremely cold so we were willing to take that chance. And if you had a foxhole then you still had to defend the house if there was an attack because they weren't going to attack the foxholes, they were going to try and attack the town and take the houses.

### **End of Side A**

CRH: ...They had to be. Otherwise there wasn't any point in having the hole because you had to have a place where you could shoot Germans.

DB: So there were some people in foxholes.

CRH: Everyday there were infantry guys out in those foxholes as far out as you could possibly feel that you could run an outpost, because you needed people just watching as far out as you possibly could. So if some poor devil from a rifle squad got sent out there in the night, they would have been there from 8 o'clock in the morning to 4:30 in the afternoon, they would be out there in that hole.

DB: Until dusk.

CRH: Well, it might be 6 o'clock before they could stand up straight.

DB: And they would be very cold and tired and hungry.

CRH: Cold and tired and nervous because you never knew when you would get sniped out there. Some German or Austrian with a really good sniping rifle. So they had to keep their heads down except to peek over once in a while to see what was going on.

DB: Now in one of your letters you recall dealing with old men and young boys in the German army in April of '45. Can you recall specific examples that would help to put this in concrete terms for the readers?

CRH: I would hope that I did that in one of my letters in July or August of '45. But essentially there were two experiences on the same day. Combat patrol in the morning in some town in central Germany where I shot some lieutenant, wounded him and captured

him. Two or three of us were out there on combat patrol, and captured, I would say four maybe five young boys and they were all about 16 years old. The lieutenant was probably in his early twenties. And they were not combat wise. In other words, these people were obviously very green, because, when I shot that officer, he was at the gateway to a house which was set back from the street, strangely enough. Most European houses are not. Rather, the front door is set right at the street / sidewalk. But if they do have a house lot, they will set back the house just like we do. And he and these kids...

DB: Instead of being built to the street.

CRH: Yeah, right and they will have little lawns and gardens. Anyway, I knocked him down, and by the time we got up there, the kids had grabbed him and dragged him into the house and dumped him on a sofa, and they were going to escape, I think, and they came running right back out the same door, which is a dreadful thing to do. I have talked about this before...

DB: And they were about 15 or so?

CRH: They were 16 I think, they may have been younger but I think they had to be about 16 to be in the Hitler Youth and that's what they were. Anyway, we caught them and hauled them off and took the lieutenant with us, too, to POW. But in the afternoon we were told that there were some Germans and no one knew exactly who they were – German soldiers, in a loft, a business loft. And it had been turned into a kind of house I guess to hold soldiers coming into active service and all of these men, I have talked about this before, in the letters that you and I have done, all of these men were between about 40 and 50 or 55 years old and I think most of them were sick.

DB: You all took them prisoner.

CRH: We took them prisoner, and they were in the second story of the loft and I was the first one into the loft because, that afternoon, I was carrying a Thompson sub-machine gun.

DB: Did they resist?

CRH: No they were just utterly delighted. I think I've told you, I apologized to them, in German, for having to bother them. They came toddling down the stairs as fast as they could and we sent them off to the POW camp. So, anyway, you get the contrast of the two. And to me that's the whole debacle of the German force at the end of the war. They were literally dragging the bottom of the barrel for everybody they could get, and they had combed out every possible spare man from anti-aircraft units and airforce- Luftwaffe.

DB: Now, in addenda to one of the transcripts, you mentioned writing Leo Heye\* during the war, who is now a retired physician in the Seattle area. Did you write Leo a lot during the war?

CRH: No, but once in a while. He was and remains a close friend.

DB: And was he in the service?

CRH: Yeah he was an infantry sergeant down in the Vosges mountains. That would be down toward, what's the capital right, on the Rhine, Strasbourg.

DB: About the Jempi incident, and Milt McCormick, I don't know if you got a chance to read his letter.

CRH: Yes I did read Milt's letter.

DB: Did he get it right when he discusses the Jempi incident?

CRH: No. I think of this in terms of your own appreciation of what we are doing, in terms of the things you read. Milt and I have two completely different visions and versions of what happened in Goesdorf. We agree that I went out and got this kid and family knew that I was trying to work on him. I think Milt understands that.

DB: And that his mother and sister were there when you brought him into the house.

CRH: Yes, right. And Milt knows that part. But somehow or other he has either mixed this up with something he did or some other friend of ours did so I will not write to Milt and say, "Wait a minute"; I will just let him go on with this. Once you get to the real 'Errol Flynn', kneeling at the grave and along comes his sister, no no.

DB: He also says that as you left the house a German soldier began to shoot at you, Bob, and that you returned the fire and killed that soldier.

CRH: Yeah. He knows that we had a lot of firefights up there. In others words there was shooting all the time. But there wasn't anything like that and there isn't any concrete notion of "leaving the house," to quote Milt. When we left there, when we finally pulled out of there, all Germans were gone. There wasn't any shooting so I would not even know to what he is referring. Every morning, for a long time, there was an attack and they would try to hold us on that hill to discourage us from coming down into their valley. So there would be shooting for five, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes, half an hour until they finally got permission to withdraw because they were never going to take that hill from us. We had everything you could think of. Machine guns and mortars. I think we had both 60 and 81-millimeter mortars. We could call on artillery fire.

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\* Leo Heye is a grade school, high school, and college associate. Wonderful fellow and good friend, these past 70 years.

DB: But they were trying to keep you there.

CRH: Yeah. They didn't want us down in the valley so they had orders to keep us out of there if they could but they just hadn't a chance to get up there. That's why it was an act of bravery for them. That's where I shot that German sub-machine gunner who died, falling into the snow, still shooting, in the front yard. [see my letter from Mindelheim, Germany, July 3, 1945, p. 3]

DB: But that didn't have anything to do with the Jempi incident, per se.

CRH: No.

DB: Eventually they surrendered right? They came in and surrendered.

CRH: Yeah, I think I mentioned that, on the second or third night, some began to come in and then I think there is a line about, after that, we got them in by the dozens or something. Once word got amongst the Germans, about surrendering at Goesdorf, people trying it would have been shot by their own officers or non-coms. I mentioned how sniffy they were, how smelly they were from living out in the dirt and snow and rain and cold. God knows what we did with them. We must have had a fairly covered exit road out of Goesdorf if you think about it. You would have had to go down into what is called the Heiderscheid Grund, it's a plain, down below us, and, then, cross the river Sure. But we must have had a pretty decently covered exit out of there. Either that, or they brought up all the supplies at night, when the Germans couldn't see us. I don't know, I never thought about that. Anyway, I don't know what we did with these POW's but we sure didn't keep them in that town. But they did come in.

DB: You all were kept pretty well supplied.

CRH: I don't recall ever being hungry there. I was cooking all the time so I must have had something to cook. And we would not have taken rations from the Luxembourgers in that town. We would have known that there is nothing here except what these people had in their cellar and they couldn't afford to give us food. So we must have been getting rations.

DB: A lot of people eating potatoes.

CRH: I suppose. Straight out of Van Gogh. [see Van Gogh's *Potato Eaters*]

DB: Well Bob, thank you.

CRH: Thank you. It's been a pleasure Dan. I have really enjoyed reading these things and enjoyed the conversations and I will look forward to the meetings.

DB: Me too. Very much so.

CRH: I should also compliment you on two things. One is the depth of your questions.

DB: Thank you Bob.

CRH: And another, I think, is the range of your reading. You have, obviously, done what you said you were going to do. That is, pick up some background on some of these things. So, I know some of the things you have read, I have only heard about, or, didn't even know about. You have read a lot of this that I have not yet read. Thanks, again.