

INTERVIEW WITH  
Col. Raymond Hoffman

by

Dr. Maclyn Burg, Head  
Eisenhower Oral History Project

on

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for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

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Raymond P. Hoffmann  
Donor

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This is an interview with Colonel Ray Hoffman done in Abilene, Kansas, on July 28, 1978, at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library. Present for the interview are Col. Hoffman and Dr. Maclyn Burg of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library staff.

DR. BURG: Let me ask, where were you born?

COL. HOFFMAN: I was born in Lowell, Massachusetts.

DR. BURG: Lowell, Massachusetts. And what year?

COL. HOFFMAN: 1922. I was about twenty years old, I think, when I enlisted.

DR. BURG: You were educated in Lowell?

COL. HOFFMAN: Went to Lowell High School and--educated in Lowell. We had junior ROTC program in the high school.

DR. BURG: I see.

COL. HOFFMAN: We called it "Brigade." We didn't call it ROTC or anything. We called it "Brigade." Boys Brigade, and the girls had a program called the "Girl Officer's Training", or something. But it was under a great old British Army major, who had since become a citizen, by the name of Kittridge.



BURG: K-i-t-t-r-i-d-g-e.

HOFFMAN: Right. Good, English, Kittridge and a fantastic man. And I think, probably, boys my age were prepared for the military by their fathers or their uncles. But certainly by this guy, who took it very seriously. He was a ramrod straight man all of his life. I think he died at seventy, and he was still just as--he looked the picture of an English major.

BURG: Did you ever, from him, hear what British unit he had served with?

HOFFMAN: No.



BURG: He never spoke of that?

HOFFMAN: Well, I'm not sure he did, and I would have to go look through any very, very early notes I made. But--

BURG: Could we assume that he had served during the First World War in France?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. Definitely he was a World War I--he was much respected and much loved man. And Lowell is a city, in those



days, of a hundred thousand people, and coming out of the depression years, you know. But the training in the high school was city-oriented. It was part--it was part of the Department of Education and the School Board was behind it.

BURG: Required of all male students?

HOFFMAN: You either took "Brigade" or you took gym.

BURG: I see.



HOFFMAN: And you entered as a private recruit, and you moved up by both written and oral and demonstration examinations for all the way through.

BURG: Now it would involve drilling, I'm sure. Did it involve any study of, let's say, military courtesy, squad tactics--

HOFFMAN: Definitely. Right from the individual--school of the individual soldier--through the Squad. And those were the days of "squads east" and "squads west", you know. Platoon, company, battalion, and regiment. And once a year the final competitions came, with an enormous field day held on the common, the south common, and a big parade down the main street. And then the

competition for the colonel of the brigade came during--and for the field grade positions, for major, and so forth--came in that final competition every year in the field day.

BURG: Did you rise to a particular rank by the time you graduated from--

HOFFMAN: Became a battalion commander, major. And, you know, great competition. The judging was done by Reserve, and National Guard, and Regular Army officers from the units in Massachusetts. Fort Devens was at Ayer which is only fifteen, sixteen miles away.

BURG: How is Ayer spelled?



HOFFMAN: A-y-e-r. At Fort Devens, Massachusetts. And they would come down. The bigger drills, of course, the battalion and brigade type, or regiment--yeah, battalion and regiment--were held on the common; but the smaller squad, platoon, and company drills were held inside the drill shed. We had a pretty big-sized one.

BURG: The reason I'm smiling about all this is that in 1942, at

Stadium High School in Tacoma, where John S.D. Eisenhower passed through just a few years before I went into the bottom end of that school, the man in charge of physical education was a retired British Army captain, from whom we had no military instruction, but in '42 with the war going on, our physical education was built around military lines--

HOFFMAN: Sure.



BURG: --by--I can't even remember his last name. We called him Cappy. He had been a captain; and we did a great deal, probably of very British kinds of falling in for formations and the whole thing. [Laughter] You called him "Sir!" And I mean it was "Sah!" when you replied to him. I wonder if Eisenhower, John Eisenhower, might not have had--in fact, I'm sure he had that same man. He would have to have had. But we didn't have the ROTC or "Boys' Brigade" aspect of it. Now, you had no time for college, did you?

HOFFMAN: I had one year. I was headed for, at that time, for boys' work, YMCA. And I spent one year at Springfield in Massachusetts and then the--

BURG: What is there?

HOFFMAN: That is one of the YMCA training schools, or colleges, found by the Y that trained--social science is your major if you're headed for boys' work. If you're headed to the physical education field, then physical education or P.E. is your major.

BURG: It's a four year institution?

HOFFMAN: Four year, oh, yes. George Williams in Chicago was the first of the YMCA-founded colleges. And it's since come out, now, all the way up to a doctorate in humanities. And women, you know, of course. The campuses expanded. And so I got a year at Springfield and then--

BURG: Did the war come during that--



HOFFMAN: Yes--

BURG: You had enrolled, I assume, around September--

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

BURG: And then December 7th--

HOFFMAN: And December, it came. I made--I had already made the



decision that I would go into the ministry if I were able to survive the war, and able to transfer what credits I had at the end of the year. But I knew I had to finish that year. My parents had put in what they could. And I earned what I could to get that one year. So I finished that year and then went looking to decide what service I wanted to go into, and so forth.

BURG: That would take you to June of 1942.



HOFFMAN: Yeah. Then all the--of course, the way we grew up, you know. We grew up with the people in the town. The older people, say, in the Y or in the schools, and so forth, were also known to us in the church or anywhere else. Some of them were our Sunday school teachers, and so forth. So the Y's boys' work director, a fellow by the name of Mike Pearson--

BURG: P-e-a-r or P-i?

HOFFMAN: P-e-a-r. Wanted to run at least one more complete, full camping season. So--

BURG: In that summer?

HOFFMAN: --we joined the staff and ran the camp. Another fellow and I ran it. Carrow and myself were the assistant directors and I taught arts and crafts and this kind of thing.

BURG: You called him Carroll? C-a-r-r-o-l-l?

HOFFMAN: Carrow. C-a-r-r-o-w.

BURG: I see. Was that his last name?



HOFFMAN: Yes. His first name is Grant. And--

BURG: Where di you stand with the draft? Was there any problem of being--

HOFFMAN: You know, we had two choices: volunteer or be drafted. But we had that "duration plus six months." No, I remember lots of numbers coming up and I never really gave it a thought. I knew I was going to enlist. So when the camping season was over-- this would have been in August--then I started looking and thinking. Ray Hall, who was the rector of the other Episcopal church in

town--Lowell had two Episcopal churches, St. Ann's Lowell and St. John's Lowell. Ray Hall was the rector. He went as the first jumping chaplain of the paratroops. Well, that poked me in that direction. I started looking, and I came on some of the literature, and so forth. And Ray Hall had been all-American swimmer for Brown University out of Providence, Rhode Island. Great, great guy. And that looked pretty good to me, so that's what I enlisted for.

BURG: Even in August of '42, that early, they had parachute formations, and they had some of thier propaganda issued, and Hall had already gone into that.

HOFFMAN: I forget the exact date, but I know that Ray--I'm sure it wasn't--it might have been about the time I finished that first year, or something, that Ray went in. But they'd already had the experimental platoon, and then the experimental company, and they, finally, the experimental battalion. They'd done all that bit.

BURG: Right. In fact, even in the thirties, I think they had.



HOFFMAN: Using the football helmets and this type of thing.

BURG: Right. Right. Looking quite different from the parachutists of 1943, '44. Well, did you enlist then at Fort Devin? Is that where you went?

HOFFMAN: No, the way you did it, you enlisted--at that time the offices were in the--federal offices--were in the Post Office building. It was downtown Lowell, Merrimac Street, east Merrimac, I guess. And I went in there and found a recruiting sergeant and talked with him, and so forth.

BURG: Did he try to dissuade you, Ray?



HOFFMAN: No, they were a little--you know, they'd always ask you several pointed questions. You could see their wheels going around in their heads. "We've got to make sure this guy isn't a little bit-- [Laughter]

BURG: --a little flakey."

HOFFMAN: And you really came to this when your thing was stamped "volunteer parachutist." All your papers were stamped "volunteer



parachutist" after you got to the induction--the examination center. They put us on a bus and sent us to Boston. And there was a big--I don't know whether it was General Motors or one of the big car companies, I think, used to use this place as a distributor's holding area for their automobiles. They had all the ramps and everything else. Well, this was the examining center. And if you can imagine running around there in your-- either your skin or your skivvies. Just hundreds and hundreds of people. But part of the examination was the interview with the psychiatrist, and you knew from that that there were certain questions being put to you to find out whether you were--

[Laughter]



BURG: He didn't just ask you whether you liked girls? [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: No! No. That was the furthest thing from his mind! At that point, you know, he wanted to know whether you really cared about living.

BURG: Yes. Yes. Did you have a death wish? Were you ever dropped on your head as a child? [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: These kind of things. Then, I suppose we were told to come home and then report somewhere.

BURG: Well, listen, before you go on, let me ask you as your psychiatrist, [Laughter] why had you decided to take up something that you knew a little bit about, but something which was very, very dangerous? Was it strictly because a man that you liked and admired had gone into it, or what was your thinking at age 20?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, I think this was a new way of doing the--I knew I was going to be an infantryman and I knew that I--this is my idea of a soldier, was the infantryman. But here was a new way of doing this thing, and I think this is probably the kind of thing.

BURG: It kind of excited you.

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah.

BURG: Let me ask you this, Ray. Had you ever flown up to that point?

HOFFMAN: Very few flights, but one of the greatest flights was



given to me by my parents; it was in an old biplane, and I was given it as a birthday present. I think I was twelve years old. And some guy brought an old biplane into--to cockpits, you know--into the South Lowell Airport, and you had--I think it was two dollars or something--and you had a complete flight around the city and then you'd land.

BURG: 1934 probably.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Easily. That was a great flight, and then I had probably one or two flights after that. But no particular jumping.

BURG: So you knew what it looked like from the air.



HOFFMAN: Knew what it was with the wind in your face. I can only say that I thought this was a new and exciting way of doing the soldier's job. And I thought, "Well, they're going to be out in front." I guess that's where I wanted to be. [Laughter]

BURG: What is sometimes difficult for people--the younger people today--to understand is the particular, and to them, I'm sure,



the peculiar attitude we had at that time. It doesn't make any more sense than the attitude of the British and Americans going into the First World War. You had to be shaped and formed by your times and you had to feel as we felt.

HOFFMAN: But you see, we were luckier than the Korean and Vietnam people because there was a total mobilization.

BURG: Yes.



HOFFMAN: Everybody was involved. Not just some. And you were involved until it was finished, plus six months. That's the thing. That's the time frame. That's what you're--

BURG: A total commitment from everybody, so that it was unthinkable that you wouldn't or couldn't go.

HOFFMAN: In fact, you see, even those who were crippled or somewhat limited could go into a general service corps and could serve. I have friends who had club feet and so forth. You could enlist for general services and somewhere along the line you found a job. It was a strange thing to hear of one's friends



being given an actual 4-F classification. He would more likely get a 4-F classification because he was the only son and a widowed mother or something else. But even young men who had one club foot, or one polio-damaged limb, or something else, were able to enlist in the general service corps, and a job would be found for them. There would be some way that they could serve. This we eliminated completely. They didn't have anything like this.

BURG: Yeah, later on.

HOFFMAN: One crazy mistake.



BURG: Now, they sent you back home then; the usual routine. Did you know that you had passed the physical at that time when they sent you back?

HOFFMAN: Yes, you knew it before you left the building.

BURG: Ah, did you?

HOFFMAN: And this was one of the few times when you knew it before you left the building. You knew that you had been accepted and that was stamped on your--boy, they used stamps that

were about an inch--letters an inch high, you know, and I think we probably were given a reporting date. Then we moved to--of course, we got on the bus, probably, there at the post office again and went to Devins. Now this time we went to Devins, and that was pretty interesting because, very soon, having had the manual of arms and the whole schmear, that made it able to function very smoothly.

BURG: The bunch that went with you from Lowell, they were not all paratroops?

HOFFMAN: Oh, no. No.

BURG: They were a mixed bag of--

HOFFMAN: In fact, I don't know anyone else at that point.

BURG: Did they give you a standard infantry basic at Devins--

HOFFMAN: No.

BURG: --or was it just simply a holding thing until they could--

HOFFMAN: That's all. They were just collecting us. We got



NOTE: Due to an error in numbering,  
Pages 17 and 18 were inadvertently  
skipped in typing this transcript.  
The transcript is complete without  
them.

issued our equipment and so forth. We had to pull guard duty, this kind of thing. And my first guard duty, I won the comandant's award, which was a one-day pass. But first, you become his orderly. That consisted in going and sitting in the outer office, but I won it because I could do the manual of arms without a click. I could beat any kid out there. Well, Lord, you know, you had it for three years, and we were using those old Spanish-American war rifles that had an open breech.

BURG: The 45-70 trapdoor Springfield. [Laughter] Yeah, I didn't ask you whether you were armed or not in that brigade, the "Boys' Brigade."

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. The whole thing. So most of the time when I hit guard, I could either get the pass or the orderly and so forth. But sometimes it wasn't offered, and that was okay, too, because you had to go on. Somebody had to pull the duty. But lo and behold, the first guard duty I had was a night shift and it was at the prisoner of war compound. At that time the submarines who had been captured were held at Devins. And this was the first time to look at a young German officer, blond hair, the





blue eyes, the leather coat--

BURG: The U-boat types.

HOFFMAN: The U-boat types--and a surly look, and he came right up to the corner where you had to pass and never said a word, just looked. That was, I think, a reality impression that you knew that what you were about to get into was real. Here these guys were, looking at you and still, even though they were prisoners, still projected the greatest disdain and hatred. Never said a word.

BURG: That period and the beginning of the next year were the glory days for the U-boats, so their morale was at its height.

HOFFMAN: They'd come in as close as, you know, Nantucket, and--

BURG: Sure.

HOFFMAN: --the Cape, and then they tried landing some saboteurs. They were captured and were put in there. So, not all guard duty is that important, but there it was.



BURG: That made an--

HOFFMAN: Outside perimeter to walk. Probably didn't mean a blessed thing, too, because they had, of course, guards in the towers. But, nevertheless--

BURG: That made an impression on you.

HOFFMAN: It made you realize that there were human beings out there who, even in a situation where they were prisoners, were still loaded with disdain, hatred, and would have broken out of there just as soon as they could. But, of course, that was a pretty high caliber type. These were all U-boat officers, and they didn't mix them.

BURG: I see. No crewmen.



HOFFMAN: I didn't see any crew. I saw U-boat officers. And you're a raw recruit. You haven't even gotten, I don't think, to PFC by this time.

BURG: No. No.

HOFFMAN: You haven't gone through your earliest basic training or anything else.

BURG: How long were you at Devins before they--

HOFFMAN: No more, I think, than five, six days. I wouldn't think more than that because.... Let's see, I enlisted in October, the first of October, and I was probably at Camp Croft, South Carolina, by the tenth of October, it seems to me. That's where basic training was.

BURG: You went down there by train?

HOFFMAN: Oh, boy.

BURG: Troop train?

HOFFMAN: That train! That in itself was an experience. Shunted off and just--of course, it had to go at times when there weren't other trains running some of the tracks. Yeah, we went down by troop train.

BURG: Just a mass of enlistees and inductees--



HOFFMAN: Yeah.

BURG: --and Croft, C-r-o-f-t.

HOFFMAN: --f-t. Yeah. It's just outside of Spartanburg, South Carolina.

BURG: That was an infantry training--

HOFFMAN: Basic training center.

BURG: --basic training center.

HOFFMAN: And we took our basic infantry training, and then you're--that's your first eight weeks.

BURG: There was an eight week cycle at that time.

HOFFMAN: Oh, wait a minute, here. We had thirteen weeks. So, the first seven weeks, I think, were basic and then the next six were, in my case, were the heavy weapons: the thirty caliber heavy machine gun and the 81 mm. mortar. From Croft, let's see, yeah. The interviews were conducted--every time you turned around you had another interview with an air-





borne officer or a team--

BURG: Really?

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

BURG: At Croft?

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

BURG: By the way let's break now.

[Interruption]



BURG: When we took a coffee break, we were talking about Croft, and you said that airborne officers had come there and did various kinds of interviews and tests, even while you were doing your training.

HOFFMAN: You never were, in your own mind, sure that it was all going to happen, that you were going to be allowed to go to jump school. There'd always be interviews and then they'd say, "Well, we'll let you know."

BURG: How did the interviews go? What kinds of things were they seeking to learn in their interviews?

HOFFMAN: A lot of it was, I suppose, they were after your experience and attitude. I can remember one young lieutenant talking to me about background things. What did you like to do in school? Did you play a sport? What clubs did you belong to? Church? The whole schmeer, and apparently this was important to them to find out whether you were active in your home community and, I suppose, how you related to people.

BURG: Were they doing that same sort of thing, as far as you could determine, with other people at Croft who also had volunteered for paratroops?



HOFFMAN: Yes. They did more of it when you got to Benning and OCS.

BURG: Were they doing any active recruiting with basic trainees at Croft who had not volunteered for paratroops?

HOFFMAN: No, I don't think so. I don't remember this happening.

BURG: So at that time that--

HOFFMAN: If your papers were stamped volunteer airborne, I suppose, a "volunteer parachutist"--I think that's the way the wording read--I suppose they had to keep that alive and did more--

[Interruption]

BURG: I'm getting the impression that in late 1942, early 1943, a parachute unit is a very elite outfit.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: That they're being very, very careful.



HOFFMAN: I don't say that to downgrade any of the other services, but I felt, all the way through, that--

[Interruption]

BURG: Okay.

HOFFMAN: Until the time when they had to just bring in massive replacements, I think they were selective. For instance, it was

nothing against you if you had a jump refusal, but you'd be gone by the next morning. You were not around. This is later on--

BURG: I got the impression that, in fact, on the jumps at Normandy--probably in the 101st--it seems to me that there were three jump refusals that night.

HOFFMAN: I don't remember any. Now, there probably were. I don't remember any. And it couldn't be really held against a man if he were to look out of that aircraft and figure he couldn't take it.

BURG: There was no prejudice against the man. He was simply--

HOFFMAN: No.

BURG: --released and returned to a regular unit, an infantry unit.

HOFFMAN: All we knew was, he was gone by the next morning. That took away that pressure and it took away the influence of the refusal on anyone else.





BURG: Yes, he was not around to be made fun of--

HOFFMAN: Nope.

BURG: --or harassed in any way?

HOFFMAN: Nope, and he wasn't around for anyone else to think about, either. That was, I think, important for the young new jumper. It wouldn't prey on his mind and--

BURG: Now, let me ask you this, Ray. When you finish at Croft, you've had your basic--seven weeks basic and six weeks heavy weapons and they've interviewed you various times--

HOFFMAN: It may even have been longer than that. It may have been eight and eight, but anyway, it was--

BURG: Yes, the training cycles changed so much.

HOFFMAN: --basic infantry and heavy weapons. I had those two. And why I got thirty heavy cali-water-cooled thirty and the 81 motar, I don't know. Probably size. [Laughter] You could carry the thing.



BURG: Exactly. I was thinking that, too, because a mortar tube or its base plate, or the ammunition for it, was pretty heavy and you've got a chunky build. When you finished that, that last heavy weapons training, did you then receive orders taking you to Fort Benning?

HOFFMAN: Went to Fort Benning, right. You had another airborne physical while you were at Croft, along with the interviews and so forth; and, you know, you had to wait something like a week to find out if you passed the physical. Well, I don't know how many of these physicals you had, but it seemed to me every time you turned around you were having another. There were selection boards that you appeared before, in addition to these interviews, and I would have to go back and check out some of this. But, nevertheless, we went to Fort Benning. And, let's see how that--

BURG: Again, by troop train?



HOFFMAN: Yep. Another great experience, moving that many men and feeding in a baggage car. You set up the kitchens in the

baggage car, and then you had to move along through several trains to get to the baggage car and then come all the way back with a mess kit. Can you imagine balancing this on a running train?

BURG: And coffee in your canteen cup. [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: Oh, it's a mess!

BURG: Yes. So there were quite a number of you going from Croft? There must have been quite a number of you who were volunteer parachutists at Camp Croft, if it takes a troop train to move you to Benning?

HOFFMAN: Well, of course, there was other training going on. There were other units at Benning.

BURG: I see.

HOFFMAN: Of course--the infantry OCS. You see, what we're going for is infantry OCS. And you still don't have a guarantee you're going to go to be a parachutist.



BURG: Oh, okay then. When you said selection boards, I almost asked you at that point--that almost sounds like going before a board for Officers Candidate School. So you're selected at Croft for that.

HOFFMAN: Along with the airborne interviews. Yeah. They were being conducted. Every time you turned around you had someone else to talk to.

BURG: Let me ask you this, Ray. Did you--was it possible to sign up for, or volunteer for, OCS or were you picked, and were you contacted and told we want you to apply for this?

HOFFMAN: I suppose there was, in the works, a method of anyone volunteering. However, if you had had, I'm sure, some college behind you, your company officers were after you to volunteer for OCS, to put the papers in.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: I had a good platoon leader; I also had a good company commander. They, of course--there was good rapport.





Platoon sergeants, of course, were your idols. They were the closest to you in all of your training. But your company officers were always around. Your platoon leaders were always around. And there were a good many talks and so forth. "What do you want to do?" So the advice was if you want, really want, to become a parachute officer, then you go to OCS first and then you go to jump school. Don't go the other way, because you're then specially trained and you're probably going to be run out to be a replacement somewhere else.

BURG: I see. I see.

HOFFMAN: So that turned me to the OCS channel.

BURG: Now, may I ask you, did the airborne officers who were coming in from time to time to question you and test you, did they agree with that thinking? Was that their recommendation, too?

HOFFMAN: They agreed with it. In fact, my platoon leader was a former airborne officer and he had been given this training assignment. How long he had it--I don't think he had it more than one cycle or something.



BURG: So when you go to Benning, you're there for infantry OCS.

HOFFMAN: You're there for infantry OCS--

BURG: Three months?

HOFFMAN: Yes. You still haven't been given the go ahead for....  
In fact, you didn't even get to Benning. I'll have to back up  
a little bit.

BURG: All right.



HOFFMAN: I'll have to back up. Now, I'm remembering. You  
finished basic training and you have already indicated you  
want--they knew you wanted airborne, but you now want OCS. Okay.  
You go to an OCS prep school, and you're run through another  
five weeks of training and performance. And from this--this is  
another way of sifting and selecting. From this, your movement  
to OCS is also determined.

BURG: Everybody went through that, Ray?

HOFFMAN: No. No. Those who--you mean, everybody who was  
going to OCS?

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: Everybody who wanted to go to OCS went to OCS prep first.

BURG: Everybody did.

HOFFMAN: If you didn't make the cutoff point, then you didn't move on. You would move to a cadre or NCO status or something, but there was a cut point at which you moved then to OCS.

BURG: I wonder if they altered that later on?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes.

BURG: And just eliminated that five weeks and let the ninety days eliminate the unsuccessful candidates.

HOFFMAN: I think they altered a great many of these things.

BURG: Yeah. But at that time, early '43--

HOFFMAN: It was a sifting quality process.

BURG: Yeah. Was that handled at Croft?

HOFFMAN: That was handled at Croft. Right

BURG: Yeah. So you had finished that five weeks and made that cut and then went to Benning for the ninety days.



HOFFMAN: Yeah.

BURG: Let me ask you this, was the ninety days for you, headed for parachute work, any different from what any other infantry candidate would go through?

HOFFMAN: No. You were first being trained as an infantry officer. The airborne training simply became a speciality on top of that. The demolition school of training became a speciality on top of that. But your prime job--your airborne training was to get you in, and once you got on the ground you functioned as infantry.

BURG: The airborne thing was a delivery system to put an infantry unit on the ground, to function as ground infantry. Yeah. So there was nothing unusual about that ninety days. Were there further airborne interviews and testing during the ninety day period?

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: They called you off the cycle--interrupted the cycle in



a sense--to interview you, or did they fit it in?

HOFFMAN: They fitted it in.

BURG: Took some of your precious free time.

HOFFMAN: Yeah. It's interesting. I seem to remember study halls and prep periods. They didn't leave anything to chance. You didn't have any free time.

BURG: Yes, during the ninety day period.



HOFFMAN: Yes, you wore an OCS patch on your pocket, and on your cap, I think. And if you did have any free time you were in town, it was never in doubt as to who you were, and you were always under observation, you know. Which was good. The pressure was on and you were expected to perform.

BURG: At the close, or toward the close of the ninety day cycle, what was the routine that was followed in your case? Were you told in advance, "Alright, you've passed and you're going to jump school," or how would they handle that?

HOFFMAN: Yeah. It seems to me we knew we were headed for jump school--there was a whole group of us--before graduation and commissioning on the nineteenth of June. And we went into airborne officers--no, the jump school. I suppose the reception center or--it wasn't a pool at that time. It was after it was all over with when we went into a pool, and from that you got your assignments.

BURG: Right.

HOFFMAN: So it must have been a jump school reception center.

BURG: Strictly for officers, or was it simply a reception center into which officers, non-coms, and men were put?

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

BURG: You were quartered separately?

HOFFMAN: Separately. Quartered separately, but everybody went to this one area. That was the beginning of the four weeks of jump training, A stage, B stage, C stage, and D stage.



BURG: Okay. You're a second lieutenant.

HOFFMAN: A second lieutenant. And then two weeks beyond that was the demolition school.

BURG: All right. Let's go back to that A stage. Let's go back to--I'm assuming housekeeping tasks, getting you into the center, and assigning you your orders, and issuing you all the gear you might need. Tell me what it was like that first morning, the first real morning when, now, you're going to start your training. How were you handled? Right from the outset.

HOFFMAN: Well, you're handled right from the outset, of course, by sergeants, and you hear all kinds of stories about them. They knew what they were doing and they knew--it seemed to me, they knew why they were doing it, just the same way that tac officers and the rest of the people in OCS..... You often hear of Mickey Mouse, but on the other hand, you had to think of all these things, so that when it was all noisy and you had some other things to do, you could do the other things with all





the rest of this going on.

BURG: You mean in combat, while there are plenty of distractions, you had to be so drilled that it was second nature to do what you had to do.

HOFFMAN: Yes. You were--if you call it harassment--but you were constantly being challenged for petty things when you knew you had some other things to do. But it seemed to me that it all went for the good.

BURG: I think I understand.



HOFFMAN: So A stage begins with sergeants in control. Now these are all jump sergeants. They're all airborne school sergeants. They're fantastic guys. Loud, of course. But your rank didn't matter. I was a second lieutenant, but there were [officers?] all the way up the grade levels. And I remember an officer reporting to the wrong formation, and that young sergeant called him out and sent him into the corner of a building, facing the corner, and he shouted at the top of his lungs, "I am lost. I am lost! I am lost!," while the entire



formation is out there trying to keep from strangling. And everything is double time, of course. Double time back. Get in the right formation! [Laughter] You can be assured that he never fell in with the wrong platoon from that point on.

BURG: Now, I can envision a platoon, designated with a letter or a combination of things, to which you belong; second lieutenants, majors, privates, corporals, NCOs, a mixed bag of men for this stage of the training.

HOFFMAN: Well, primarily your platoons would contain the same ranks.

BURG: So your platoon would be basically second lieutenants, or basically officers?

HOFFMAN: --basically officers. And A stage is physical conditioning. You know, you figure you don't need any more physical conditioning after all that you've been through now. [Laughter]

BURG: I can imagine.

HOFFMAN: But for one week, starting in the morning, runs,



calisthenics, more hand-to-hand combat. But hour after hour after hour, after hour. The whole day was devoted, and the whole week, was devoted to physical conditioning.

BURG: Under the direction of a jump sergeant?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes.



BURG: Did he call you "Sir," or did he just address everyone in the same, uniform kind way? [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: No, no. Mostly, you know, it would be the whole long-drawn-out "Loo-o-tenant." "Can't you keep up, Loo-o-tenant?" I can hear him now! And then you knew you were to keep up! It didn't matter if you died right there! You were going to keep up, and your body, by momentum, would just keep going down the road, because you weren't going to be defeated! [Laughter] And, you see, that kind of thing just shaped what was going on.

BURG: Yeah. Un-huh.

HOFFMAN: No, you either were called "Lieutenant" or you were called "Sir." It didn't matter. These fellows were not arrogant.

Now and then, you met some ones that were over on the side of cynic, but I always felt they were kept too long in the training situation.

BURG: But you knew from the tone of that "Loo-o-tenant," there wasn't a great deal of respect in that! [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: It was always drawn out in that bull-horn voice, you know. But it was for a reason.

BURG: You had a week like that, of the conditioning.



HOFFMAN: Well, and then, of course, you had the conditioning all the way through. But A stage was primarily physical conditioning. There were some orientation lectures, and some--I remember a film comparing the training of the German parachutist and the American parachutist. That film exists somewhere in the system.

BURG: Yes, I'm sure. Yes.

HOFFMAN: Then, of course, all the hand-to-hand combat stuff; you spent hours in those pits, working.



BURG: Then they moved you to a B Stage?

HOFFMAN: B Stage, and I think then you started on apparatus, which would be, you had your webbing and your straps and then the thing--you were being held in your webbing, which is the same straps and so forth that you'd have when you strapped on a parachute. But you were suspended from a big ring; probably ten, twelve trainees were suspended from this ring. But you were in it, so you were learning to pull on the risers and you were learning to turn your body, and you were learning to keep your feet, legs, together. All of these things, but you were learning them while you were suspended in the harness.

BURG: Dropping--

HOFFMAN: No, no dropping at this point. This was just a ring. It seems to me it was under--there was a little roof over it. We spend quite a bit of time doing this kind of thing. Then jumping from platforms in order to land, to learn how to tumble. They don't tumble today. They don't use the tumble at all. You have the five great contact points, which I never could learn.





If I hadn't had previous training when I came on as a Chaplain.... That was so foreign to me to use these. What we were using was the good ol' comfortable football tumble. But they didn't want that. They have a new method where you make contact with your feet, and then your calf, and then your thigh, and then your back, and then you're on the ground. We had to tumble. Your legs went over, whether you tumbled forward or backward, and you spend a lot of time learning this.

BURG: Sort of touching shoulder and roll--

HOFFMAN: Just the way we did it in football. You had the various levels of wooden platforms from which you did these jumps and tumbling exercises. But again, it was a learning and it was a toughening kind of thing.

BURG: So at that point you're simulating, to some extent, the impact that you're going to feel with the ground when you're coming down in the chute, and you're learning how to absorb that impact.

HOFFMAN: I think we began on a five foot and then we went to



a ten. Now, your impact comes from about a fifteen foot drop at twenty--I suppose we're coming in at fifteen, twenty miles an hour or something. Anyway, it's the impact of a fifteen foot drop. So you had this final stage in which you--I probably have some old, maybe even some published, pictures, of these things.

BURG: Yeah. I've seen some in our material here.

HOFFMAN: One of the interesting things was--of course, we liked it very much. We had gotten to the end of B stage and the French General, Henri Giraud came, and we put a demonstration of B stage on for him.

BURG: Giraud. Oh, yes. From North Africa.

HOFFMAN: And I think he had some South American newspapermen with him, and so forth. I don't know. Our group was selected to do the thing. It was a lot of fun. We'd already been through the B stage. We knew it. I can remember him coming, with that French cap, you know.

BURG: That's G-i-r-a-u-d .



HOFFMAN: Giraud. Yeah.

BURG: I think that's the way he spelled it. Now C stage was a little more advanced.

HOFFMAN: C stage, now, you began to get into your packing. Well, first, of course, the parachute, it's component parts. But primarily you're there to learn how to pack the thing in these enormous packing sheds with tables. Nobody slept, ever! Your eyeballs were wide awake, because you were learning how to pack your own chute, both your reserve and your backpack.

BURG: Was that typical, Ray?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes.



BURG: --that, throughout, you always packed your own?

HOFFMAN: Yeah. You always packed your own. You didn't have to do this in combat because the riggers were there, but in order to get through jump school, you had to pack your backpack and your reserve chute, and you had to do them for each one of the jumps. There were five jumps for the men. There were six



for the officers, because they were required to take a night tactical jump as their sixth jump. But, ordinarily, five is your qualification.

BURG: So C stage began with the nomenclature of the T-5 parachute--

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah. These were silk chutes, not nylon. The nylon went to the combat airborne troops; these were all silk chutes. But you learned how to pack them. You learned what moisture would do to it. You learn how to tie that breaker cord, and it's just a piece of string attached to that static line and attached to the crown or the vent of that chute. It's a piece of string about that long.

BURG: Had to be tied--

HOFFMAN: Had to be tied.



BURG: --absolutely right.

HOFFMAN: Because that static line--you learned how to close that backpack so that it would rip open. That's the only way



you're going to get that chute open. But a lot of time spent in learning to pack. And it was a fascinating thing. I watch these free fall, sport parachutists packing, laying out their chutes on the ground. And, boy, that looks dangerous to me. But, anyway, they do it, and they've got different equipment, and they know what they're doing.

BURG: But yours, the work is done on a long, long, absolutely clean table.

HOFFMAN: Highly polished table, beautiful. The chutes that have been used, of course, have been dried in a tower. There's a drying tower. And they're pulled--clip them on and pull them all the way to the top of that tower and the warm air just goes up through them and they get absolutely dried. You don't want any dampness at all. Dampness will pancake that stuff together. So, C stage you're involved in the nomenclature, the packing, and you get some concept of the air and the weather, and the speed of the aircraft, and so forth. And then D stage is your jump time.



BURG: Now, prior to D stage, do you recollect any one in your group who drops out or is eliminated?

HOFFMAN: It seems to me there were people eliminated, but not because they said they were not going to jump. I think they were eliminated for personal problems or for hardship causes. They were the only son, or something, or the mother was ill, and so forth. Now they may have come back and joined another--but I'm sure there must have been people. But, as I say, they were gone very quickly.

BURG: Anybody injured in the tumbling part of it would be set back--

HOFFMAN: Now, that's another situation.



BURG: --and when they've recovered from that injury, sprain, whatever it is, they just keep on coming, but they're behind you.

HOFFMAN: If you can possibly do it, you never admitted you were hurt, you didn't want to fall behind. You didn't want to be recycled. Once was enough. [Laughter]

BURG: Oh, yes, I can well imagine. All right. What I think we'll do, we've reached a point where we can call a halt to it, remembering then that we take up with the D-stage on the next one, because that, clearly, is the payoff to all of this. So I think I'd like to start with that when we have time to build on it.

[Interruption]



INTERVIEW WITH  
Col. Raymond Hoffman

by

Dr. Maclyn Burg, Head  
Eisenhower Oral History Project

on

August 4th, 1978

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library



This interview is being taped on August 4, 1978 with Colonel Ray Hoffman at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas. Present for the interview, Colonel Hoffman and Dr. Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff.

DR. BURG: When we finished last Friday, one of the things we wanted to do when we first started was to talk about the C stage. There was some work at the C stage or D stage where you actually worked in mock-ups of the C47.

COL. HOFFMAN: There were some things that I looked up that you'd be interested in. That thing running?

DR. BURG: Yes.

COL. HOFFMAN: Oh. Thought I had them here. These are doors-- here's a mock-up.

DR. BURG: Oh yes. Yes. Just a light wooden construction.

COL. HOFFMAN: Spent a lot of time--sometimes they were the actual old, plane carcass, you know.

DR. BURG: Yes. I see. And this is a paperbound book that we're looking at right now; about seven by twelve inches, perhaps, titled: Parachute School USA. Albert Love Enterprises.



HOFFMAN: Put out by Love.

BURG: Yes, in Atlanta, Georgia. This was published at that period, 1942-43.

HOFFMAN: Yes, at Benning. Here's the harness work that we did and talked about. You did this, really, in all stages but you started it out and did a lot of it in both A and B stage because you had to get used to hanging in the harness, and you had to get used to pulling the risers, controlling your--so you learned to--



BURG: So what we're seeing here in this picture are the four risers tied to a metal circle, braced metal circle, and then these people are jumping off the platform--

HOFFMAN: No, all you did in this one was to hang--I'll show you--

BURG: How about this? It looks like maybe they just stepped off the platform, and then--

HOFFMAN: The instructor, he got up there. They may have, they

may have gotten into the harness that way; usually you had to pull yourself up. The jumping off the platform is here; see how he hangs right there, because you have to get used to this business--

BURG: --the way those straps cut in.

HOFFMAN: We have to go back, I guess, and find the platforms. There's the old physical.

BURG: Yes.



HOFFMAN: Oh, we wore coveralls, by the way. One piece coveralls.

BURG: There are photos of physical training, hand to hand combat--

HOFFMAN: Hand to hand--

BURG: Rope climbing--

HOFFMAN: Here we go. Here are the platforms.

BURG: Yes. The men just come up in long lines and assume a jump position and jump off.

HOFFMAN: From varying heights, to get used to the shock on your feet, and also to fasten in your mind the tumbling. There were times when you came off that thing backwards, so you'd have to use a tumble to the back when you hit the ground, because you may come in backwards. And, therefore, he would either tell you "your feet go left," or "your feet go right."

BURG: You mean, in effect, he was ordering you, when you came off backwards, he was ordering you on one occasion to take your feet over your left shoulder, and the next time he may tell you to take them over right. So you got used to going into that tumbling roll in whatever configuration you hit the ground.

HOFFMAN: Every time. You went over--You started going directly over your head. If you went over your head, you'd be all tangled up in the risers, so you went over one or the other shoulder.

BURG: To stay clear of that.

HOFFMAN: Stay--Keep your feet clear, because if the wind were





taking your chute over to the right, then your feet would go to the left. So you wouldn't get entangled in it.

BURG: And, as a matter of fact, when it came down to it on June the 6th, [1944] there was enough wind blowing so that many of you in the chutes were oscillating rather strongly, and this kind of training that we've just seen here would be very very important to you. And even with it there were a lot of sprained ankles and broken legs.

HOFFMAN: This is the parachute packing.

BURG: Oh, yes. The big sheds--

HOFFMAN: A lot of time, a lot of time in the sheds. Nobody slept. That's a [trainsnasium?] to teach balance.

BURG: Oh, so you're walking over rather narrow planks and--

HOFFMAN: These are pipes.

BURG: Almost like gigantic monkey bars.

HOFFMAN: That's right, that's right. These are pipes. Like a big, what do the kids call them?



BURG: The impression one gets from looking at this particular publication is that they were really fitted out to, in effect, mass produce, the paratroopers, because these installations are pretty good-sized.

HOFFMAN: You did--in order to get your position in the door, and in order to exit properly--

BURG: Yes. The picture that we're looking at now, the left foot is forward in the door and the right foot somewhat drawn back.

HOFFMAN: That's right. And kicked with your right foot.

BURG: Kicked out the door with--

HOFFMAN: Out the door

BURG: --the right foot--

HOFFMAN: The prop stream hit your right foot, turned you a quarter turn, put your head on your chest, and you went down, underneath that--



BURG: Tailplane.

HOFFMAN: --tail. You practiced that hour after hour after hour, because you wanted to do it right.

BURG: This is--



HOFFMAN: These are towers that are used for harness training. You'd come out of that and get the full shock of the harness on your body. And then you would slide down this cable. It's a pulley. Here, you can get a better look at it this way. It's a pulley.

BURG: Yes. The pulley is on a cable and the pulley's attached to a crossbar, and two risers lead, in this case, down to the chute pack, or where the pack would be. And then you're jumping out of a mock-up of a door, and then you slide down that cable to the ground. Looks like these people are perhaps fifty feet in the air when they jump out of the mock-up.

HOFFMAN: They had two levels, I think we said. These are the actual towers, now. One is controlled and one is free.

BURG: And this is in the third week of C stage, when you come down either controlled or free.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: And I believe you told me at the end, that at least one of these towers had been at the New York Fair in 1939.

HOFFMAN: I think both of them were. This is a control; you see, there are these wires, and this is what they're using at--what is it? Worlds of Fun? --people sit in this. And this is the way you start it. In order to first experience coming down, and first experiencing the shock of-- Here he is, he'd just landed. Poor, poor.

BURG: Landed on mats. Now you say that is a poor landing?

HOFFMAN: Oh, worst possible--

BURG: Legs spread apart and--

HOFFMAN: You want to land with everything touching and together.

BURG: Uh-huh. I notice that on this controlled drop, all





around the periphery of the chute, at perhaps eight different points, there are guide mechanisms, and so the chute is open and its coming down within a circumference formed of about eight vertical wires, so the chute can't possibly drift.

HOFFMAN: This is a control. You'd go up, the first time you'd go perhaps one hundred feet. Then he'd take you up to two hundred, or one hundred and fifty, and then he'd take you up to two fifty, and that's the top. And in this you would just come straight down but you would get the sensation of coming down. You can see how high up it is there.

BURG: Yes. right. They are very good photographs, by the way, of people doing this.

HOFFMAN: These are the free towers.



BURG: Yes. And this permits them to take up four chutists at a time.

HOFFMAN: Yes, per tower. Of course, you're being observed, by the instructors all the time. They've got their megaphones and they're talking to you while you're on your

way down and while you're on your way up. He'll say, "Release number one." Each one of these arms is numbered. "Release number one," then you're watched as you come down.

BURG: Yes. We might comment that at that same time, I don't believe the British, were using towers. They usually were taking four men at a time, and an instructor, up in a structure hung from an observation balloon. They'd run the balloon up to the height they wanted and then the men would drop out a hole in the bottom of this container, with the instructor telling them what to do. Then it was necessary to winch the balloon back down, put four more jumpers in it with an instructor, and winch it back up to altitude--

HOFFMAN: I think our navy was doing that with the blimps, weren't they? When they were teaching their riggers to--

BURG: They might have. Now these are the uncontrolled, free jumps.

HOFFMAN: That's right, free jumps.



BURG: They take you up where your chute is enclosed in a metal circle and, as you say, then, from the ground they instruct them to release number one. And at that point the parachute, already opened up, is simply released from its iron ring, and the jumper falls free.

HOFFMAN: At that point, you have the same sensation as you do in descent with a parachute from a plane, except for the height.

BURG: And he's not feeling an opening shock--

HOFFMAN: No, not at all.



BURG: --but he's been--in effect, he's been getting some of that when, on these earlier stages, he goes out the mock-up door on the harness.

HOFFMAN: This is--these are enormous wind machines. Because you had to learn to control that once you hit the ground, and from various positions. Here again, you would lay down and the chute would be opened by the machine behind you. A couple men would hold it up until the wind hit it. And then the thing



would be revved up and then he would tell you whether to come up left or come up right with your feet. And you had to come up, yet on your feet.

BURG: With the wind machine inflating your chute and dragging you.

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: And then you had to do the--pull on the proper risers to--

HOFFMAN: Run around behind it if you could. Pull it down or pull in the bottom risers, to try and empty it of air.

BURG: Make it spill the air. Was that D stage when--

HOFFMAN: No, this all came in portions of B and C stage; D stage was entirely devoted to the jumping. You may go back on the harness apparatus for more harness training in guiding, pulling down the risers, or reaching across to turn your body. You wanted the wind at your back if you could get it. This kind of thing.



BURG: So if I want to turn right, then I'll reach across my body with my right hand and grab the left risers, and draw them, or attempting to draw them, across in front of my body, and that will rotate my body to the right.

HOFFMAN: Uh, which way is the wind blowing? o.k. Which way is your drift?

BURG: Supposing I'm drifting right.



HOFFMAN: And you're looking--suppose you're drifting right and if you're drifting to the right, but your body isn't facing to the right, you want to get over there.

BURG: I want to face the direction of drift, if I possibly can.

HOFFMAN: Yes, yes. Then you would make your pull. Now, there are other ways of doing it after you set--you take hold of both of them and you shake them. And you can turn under.

BURG: I've got a pair of risers at each shoulder. Am I shaking myself around with the front pair, the front two risers?

HOFFMAN: Well, you wouldn't, you wouldn't be taught to do that. You'd get that later. [Laughter] You'd get to--  
[Laughter]

BURG: Oh.

HOFFMAN: --but the way you were talking about reaching across, that would turn you around. But your idea was, you wanted the wind at your back if you could get it at your back. Otherwise, if the wind is any other direction--say it was in your full face, or coming at you from the side--well, you're not going to be in a very good position to get a good solid landing on the balls of your feet, with your feet together.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: You see how would you do it?

BURG: I'm jumping ahead in my own mind to all of you coming out of those planes that night on June the sixth [1944]. You had precious few seconds, many of you. Now, I know some were dropped from heights of fifteen-hundred or two thousand feet,



but I know that some of you evidently went out at two hundred feet. You had very little time to make the necessary evaluation of how you were going in, and to work with your risers, and to try and get a face-forward-with-the-drift landing.

HOFFMAN: Well, I--You know--

BURG: Which is probably why so many got injured.



HOFFMAN: If there are, if there are accounts of guys that came out at two-hundred, they're lucky.

BURG: Yes, there were evidently some who did that. They said they came out and their chutes deployed and their feet hit the ground.

HOFFMAN: I would say it would happen just about that quickly. You wouldn't even oscillate, I don't think, once. But by this time, by the time you came out of the planes in Normandy, you were--all of these things were conditioned reflexes, if you worked at it. But, you know, your idea was to get on the ground, and--

BURG: Alive! Uninjured!

HOFFMAN: Yes. Yes.

BURG: As I turn pages here, I see these men are wearing, they almost look like the present day football helmet.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: And their coveralls and their packs.

HOFFMAN: In fact, it was a plastic, interestingly enough, it was a plastic helmet.

BURG: And the static line, judging from these photographs, on the main chute, the static lines are sort of bound back and forth across the back of the chute--

HOFFMAN: That's right.

BURG: And then hooked up in your--

HOFFMAN: During your packing you learned how to sew this back pack; after you've stowed the chute, left and right, you





captured each one of the folds of the chute in the elastics. That's all inside the pack, then you learn how to sew this.

BURG: The little panel in the back of the pack.

HOFFMAN: You learn how to tie the static line to the apex. And that had to be tied in order that the chute would deploy. And the rest of the rest of this had to be done correctly, so that all of this would rip free.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: And so this static line, and then your hook, is somewhere where you can reach it. It's about on your--coming over your shoulder, it's about here.

BURG: Oh, the hook for that static line.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BUEG: I see. So it's over on your left hand side.

HOFFMAN: Depends if the stick is hooking up from that side. But ordinarily it is on the left hand side.



BURG: Uh-huh. So all you had to do then was reach up somewhere around the left side of your coveralls, your uniform--

HOFFMAN: Yes. You'd have it where you could get a hold of it, probably hooked on a piece of the--

BURG: And for your training, these are C47's?

HOFFMAN: C47.



BURG: Which the British called the Dakota. So your training jumps are made from the aircraft that you're going to be dropping out of in combat. I count sixteen men loading the plane in this photograph. The sticks going into these aircraft are bigger than the ones that you--

HOFFMAN: No, there should be twenty-four going in, twelve on a stick. But you see, no equipment, no bundles--

BURG: Right. Strictly for training. Where in a wartime jump it'd be more like seventeen.

HOFFMAN: When you went in, you had bundles in bomb racks

underneath the wings. Equipment bundles. Then you had your pack, your ammunition, everything else. And then say, you had to have a radio or a boat, these extra things; they were either on the front or they were in a leg pack. And the leg pack, of course, was released before you hit the ground. At least you tried to.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: You let it drop. It would drop maybe fifteen feet and hit the ground before you did.

BURG: It wasn't secured to you, so that between the jump--

HOFFMAN: Yes. Yes. It was.

BURG: It's secured at your ankle--

HOFFMAN: On its own line. No--

BURG: But what I'm wondering is, that fifteen or twenty feet of--

HOFFMAN: It was secured up on your harness.



BURG: Now in mid-air you release it from your leg. Did it then hang at the--

HOFFMAN: About fifteen feet--

BURG: --at the length of fifteen or twenty feet below your body.

HOFFMAN: What you wanted to do was to get that weight off you, and not hit that ground with that weight, because it was attached to one leg. Wow!

BURG: In theory, if things worked right, that struck the ground fifteen feet before you did, roughly.

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: And you weren't hitting the ground with, say, one-hundred and fifty pounds strapped to your leg. Rather, that hundred and fifty pounds struck and then shortly after that, you struck. Except in those cases where men went out the doors at one hundred and fifty, one hundred and eighty miles an hour, when, oftentimes, those heavy leg loads simply wrenched their bodies



out the door. At that speed, men got bad backs, wrenched backs, and landed already injured or even disabled. No way they could avoid that, I guess. Alright, I understand. Going in the aircraft during the training, they would take a couple of sticks, because you don't have all that additional stuff with you. You're seated along the sides of the aircraft, facing into the center of the aircraft--

HOFFMAN: It's all there were, just those seats in metal, you know, aluminum. A bench, that's all; they had two benches.

BURG: And these photographs show the preparations--

HOFFMAN: Stand up, hook up. On the command. When you got the red light, ordinarily, your jump master would give the commands. And at the stand-up, everybody would get up; and at the hook up, you'd hook your static line onto the cable that ran from the tail to the nose of the plane.

BURG: Inside the aircraft.

HOFFMAN: Inside. You'd start with equipment check. You'd check



the fellow in front of you. You'd check the back of his; you'd check your own in the back. And then if there were twelve men in this stick; "Twelve okay, Eleven okay, Ten okay, Nine okay," and so forth.

BURG: The jump master is the last man to jump?



HOFFMAN: The jump master? It depends--no, in the training situation the jump master simply--unless he's taking his jump master training--the jump master is simply controlling; he's an instructor, in the plane. You have a jump master and an assistant jump master, so the jump master would go first on the combat jump, and your assistant jump master is bringing the stick forward. He leads them out.

BURG: Yes, I see. But in the training situation, the jump master might not jump at all.

HOFFMAN: Ordinarily, he didn't jump at all. Unless he--the officers took an extra week of jump master training, and of course, they did jump.

BURG: Yes. And then everybody, on the green light--and that light, by the way, is located at the door of the aircraft?

HOFFMAN: That's right. Your,--

BURG: On the left hand side I think.

HOFFMAN: You can get a look at it, and he's looking at it, of course.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: You practice hour after hour, the stand up, the hook up, the equipment check. When the command is given, "Stand in the door!", that's when you saw the man with his left foot in the door, with about four inches of his sole hanging over the edge of the door.

BURG: Yes.



HOFFMAN: Both hands outside the aircraft on the door frame, left and right, head up, looking at the horizon. Then on the "Stand in the door," everybody moves up close, they're touching. And



part of that is to get the rest of the stick in a position to hook up as they move through, because you couldn't put twenty-four men on. You couldn't put the whole stick across that-- hooked up onto that--

BURG: That cable.



HOFFMAN: Uh huh--into position, because you're going out one door. You're not going out two doors.

BURG: Alright, Ray, let's jump forward again, because I know that in some aircraft this happened on D-Day, early morning-- and seeing that picture of men in the aircraft, all hooked up. It was on that day, possible for a man in the stick, hooked up-- perhaps a number five man, or the number six man--to take a piece of flak through the body as he stood there hooked up, and to drop onto the floor of the aircraft. And at that stage, he's obviously badly hurt, and you're not going to take him. But he's hooked on there with his static line. You've got to get him unhooked before the rest of the stick can go.

HOFFMAN: Well, you carry him on and push him toward the rear of



the plane, push him out of the way.

BURG: But his static line is still hooked up there--

HOFFMAN: That's right. That's alright, as long as he's on his feet and I can keep him moving. He won't interfere with anything. All the static lines are on the other side of the door, by this time.

BURG: I'm afraid I don't understand, because--

HOFFMAN: Static line runs this way. Everybody's hooked up--

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: --on. And you're going down like this. This man gets hit, so, just hold him; don't try to unhook him. You can, but you have to delay, and every second you delay, you delay those men behind you.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: Just carry him along. And his static line is on, so you just carry him along, okay.



BURG: To the rear of the plane.

HOFFMAN: Here's the door at the left rear of the plane. It's to my right front as I'm standing, hooked up to jump.

BURG: I meant, to the door.

HOFFMAN: That's right. Here's the door. Just put him over there in the left rear of the plane near the crew chief. He'll take care of him after we're out.

BURG: And his static line will then sort of run down the line.

HOFFMAN: That's right! Well, it won't go any further than the rest of them. The rest of the lines are all--

BURG: Yes, I see.

HOFFMAN: --now, all bunched right here, and they're going out the door and around. I don't know if we've got a picture of it.

BURG: They're towards the back of the book, I think. We've got a shot of them going out, and here you see the static lines



going out through the doorway.

HOFFMAN: There we are, there we are, see?

BURG: So we shove him back here to the tail--

HOFFMAN: Let's put him back here.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: Now if you worked out your--well, usually your crew chief was somewhere in this area; he could help you out. The aircraft crew chief.

BURG: Yes. Who was not going to jump.

HOFFMAN: No. He could help you out. Sit him down, lay him down--

BURG: Yes.



HOFFMAN: But try and not delay those men behind you.

BURG: Yes. Yes. Where you would have trouble is if the man is badly hit and goes down. And, of course, with all the gear on, your weight has been increased a hundred and fifty pounds;

he weighs three-hundred plus pounds with all his gear. Then you've got to make a quick decision. Unhook him, or if you think you can get him on his feet, staggering back to the back of the plane to get out of your way, you would do that. But your point is that every second that you use in making a decision to pick him up, or trying to drag him--

HOFFMAN: I had decided that this would have been my method of handling it. That I would carry him forward, rather than delay those men that were behind me.

BURG: Because we have to figure if things are right, the aircraft is probably going about one-hundred and ten miles an hour over the ground. Some of those jumps on D-Day, as we know, were made at one-hundred and fifty, one-hundred and eighty miles an hour, so each second that you delay, trying to take care of that man that's been hit, translates into yard after yard of separation on the ground between the man ahead of him and you standing behind him.

HOFFMAN: Figure--they're supposed to travel at ninety--but figure one-hundred miles an hour, and how far that aircraft can





travel in one second.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: And if you could, you didn't want to increase the distance unduly.

BURG: Yes. Because it's night time. It's going to be hard enough to assemble, anyway. And every second of delay translates into fifty or seventy-five yards of distance between each of you on the ground.

[Ed. note: At 110 miles per hour, a one second delay between jumpers would result in a fifty-four yard separation between the two jumpers on the ground.]

HOFFMAN: I don't remember anybody saying that they were unhooking people, but they probably did.

BURG: It isn't really very clear in the books.



HOFFMAN: You see, even that would be bad. You go to unhook him and suppose he drops on the floor?

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: Now, you run the risk of somebody tripping over him, and so forth. But if you can get him forward, by holding onto his webbing or something else; if you can get him forward, get him up from under foot, but if he's really down, you have to unhook him, because his static line will foul everyone behind him if he isn't unhooked. You have a lot better way of doing it.

BURG: My understanding is that a lightly wounded man, lightly injured man, would probably jump.

HOFFMAN: Most men wanted to jump to get out of that plane.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: They didn't want to stay in there.

BURG: Here we're seeing photographs of more of the practice jumps. And these are at a pretty decent altitude, as far as I can tell.

HOFFMAN: Daytime, too.



BURG: Daytime jumps. And then things dealing with signals and codes and the radios--

HOFFMAN: This would be, probably--I don't know. Whatever it says there.

BURG: Maintenance of communications equipment.

HOFFMAN: Yes. These are calm old boys.

BURG: Well, Ray, surely that wasn't part of your jump training, was it? I mean, the things I'm looking at here are quite specialized. The ump master training involved the use terrain, the use of aerial photos, the use of maps, and so forth, and you did it day and night. You picked out the--you identified your drop zone and so forth. This is what your officer spend his time doing. That's why he made that sixth jump.

BURG: Yes, before he's qualified.

HOFFMAN: He bets his five regular jumps. And he has one more week of--

[Interruption Side 2]



BURG: Does every officer take that jump master training?

HOFFMAN: Well, at that time every officer did.

BURG: Alright then, the picture I have of you is that you're newly commissioned out of OCS, a second lieutenant. You do the four stages--four weeks, really--of this jump school that we've looked at here. You do five qualification jumps.

HOFFMAN: Qualification jumps.

BURG: But you're going to do a sixth one because you are an officer.

HOFFMAN: Some of the NCO's were in for jump master training, but I know it was a requirement for the officer to take the jump master training.

BURG: And you take it. Does that take an additional week?

HOFFMAN: One week. Yes.

BURG: An additional week beyond D stage.





HOFFMAN: That's right. Because you had tactical jumps, that is, with equipment. You had night jumps; you had--

BURG: Now these are jumps that only the officers made?

HOFFMAN: Only the jump master classes made.

BURG: Night and tactical jumps.

HOFFMAN: Yes, yes.

BURG: The rest of the men are going to get that kind of thing--night jumps and that kind of thing--later.

HOFFMAN: In the unit. In the unit.

BURG: Yes. So, when you finished that fifth week successfully, what happens then? Is there some kind of little ceremony that you go through?

HOFFMAN: When you finished your qualification jumps, you received your badge.

BURG: Your jump wings.



HOFFMAN: Yes. There wasn't any particular ceremony for the jump master training. That was just part of what you did.

BURG: So you'd already got your jump wings on after the fifth--

HOFFMAN: After the fifth jump.

BURG: --successful jump. And then finished the fifth week. Then what happens, once you've done that fifth week?

HOFFMAN: Well, then there was a selection made. Now, I forget whether people were sent to communication school or anything else; but I know there was a demolition school and I was selected and sent to demolition school. That's another three weeks.

BURG: All officers?



HOFFMAN: No. No. Officers and NCO's, if I remember correctly.

BURG: Alright, let me ask you this. You were selected to go to that particular school. There was a communication school. Is it safe to think that all officers who are passing through

this jump training are going to be sent to one school or another?

HOFFMAN: I don't think so. I think a lot of them went directly out to the pool for assignment to an established airborne unit. I suppose they had quotas or something.

BURG: Yes. But you went to demolitions.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Held at Ft. Benning? Was that where the school was?

HOFFMAN: It was at Benning, but I think it was in the Alabama area, but I'm just not sure. It was at Benning alright.

BURG: And it's three weeks?

HOFFMAN: Three weeks. Classes again, graded tests. In fact, in demolition school the graded tests came at the end of each day's work and--

BURG: Written test?

HOFFMAN: --written test.



BURG: Yes. As far as demolitions are concerned, you're learning to handle various kinds of explosives and detonators, new plastic explosives, various pieces of equipment like this, so that you can blow bridges--

HOFFMAN: Doesn't seem to me that we had the plastic stuff. We had the quarter pound blocks of TNT. We were learning how to carve those things and make a shaped charge, among other things. Of course, you used the dynamite; you worked with the detonator.

BURG: And fuses and--



HOFFMAN: You learned how fast the fuses would burn. You learned what size charges were going to be needed for the different types of bridges.

BURG: Steel, concrete, wood. And where to place the charges, I assume.

HOFFMAN: Right. You know, you actually went out and did this kind of thing but your classroom work was involved with



the formulas. If it was an eight inch beam, what's it going to take to cut it? Where's the best place to drop the span, you know? Learning, for instance, where the greatest amount of destruction could be made for a communications center. What do you go in and "get"? What do you want to destroy?

BURG: I see. So, for example, if the Germans are operating a telephone exchange in a building, you don't want to waste your time; you want to place a charge that will do maximum damage. You can't proceed at random on anything like that.

HOFFMAN: Then, later on, you figured out, "what on earth did we wreck a telephone exchange for when we could have used the whole thing?", and then you were very selective and careful about how you did that. You learned how to drive a tank. You learned how to steal a tank. [Laughter]

BURG: As part of this work in demolitions?



HOFFMAN: You learned how to drive a locomotive, because you might want to steal one, and you might be in a position to do it. You learned how to fire enemy weapons. You did the whole schmear.

BURG: But not necessarily during that three week--

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: --during the demolitions work?

HOFFMAN: During the demolitions work.

BURG: So we, we must think of all of you in that course, that three week course, going off, getting into a tank, and you're given a familiarization course on how to start it--

HOFFMAN: Start it, drive it.

BURG: --drive it.

HOFFMAN: Actually drive it, the whole works!

BURG: Locomotive the same way?

HOFFMAN: The whole business. Locomotive the same way. Yes. Big steam jobs and other types of vehicles. And this was just adding another resource to the skill of the airborne soldier so that when he was there, he could make use of what he was



able to lay his hands on. Because he wouldn't have tanks of his own.

BURG: Did that three weeks course also include familiarization, for example, with how you might immobilize, let us say, a German 88 gun?

HOFFMAN: What will it take? What kind of charge? How quick? Where do you put it? Put it in the breech? Put it in the barrel? What do you do with it? Yes.

BURG: You learned also something about how to fire--

HOFFMAN: How to immobilize a tank.

BURG --German weapons, for example.

HOFFMAN: Yes, fire of enemy weapons. You probably--I don't know how many weapons, but we had them all, I think. At least all that were captured at that point.

BURG: So you actually had the German weapons there?

HOFFMAN: Yes.





BURG: And when they instructed you, you could learn how to feed German ammunition into a German machine gun; how to load and fire a German artillery piece.

HOFFMAN: I thought the training was very good.

BURG: And, given the kind of reasoning you had used in selecting airborne, that three weeks must have been a pretty interesting--and, to you, a very worthwhile kind of training.

HOFFMAN: Yes, oh, it was. I would say the demolition was-- of course, it was very interesting. You were always wide awake, because the instructors were keeping you awake, you know. After all, they're handling the things right in the classroom, even though they've got dummies, they've also got live ones.

BURG: Yes. Live charges.

HOFFMAN: But, finally, you had to take the live charges in your hands and you had to learn how to put the thing together. Yes, it was a good course.





BURG: By the time the three weeks is over, you have also blown up some things, I suppose?

HOFFMAN: Oh, boy!

BURG: Because you've taken it all the way--

HOFFMAN: And your final tactical jump--which I think might have been eight or ten, maybe ten--was fully loaded, with your field gear, and your weapon, and your demolition things, and as assault against a fortified position, in which you had to place the charges. So, you learned the whole thing.

BURG: Now at the end of that course, when you'd successfully passed out of that, were you then assigned to a unit?

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: Alright, I don't want to go there for a moment. What I do want to do is go back and ask you--after thirty-five years or so--do you remember your first jump?

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Do you?

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: How did it strike you?

HOFFMAN: Of course, you've been, you've been--you've spent weeks on physical conditioning and you've spent--you know, you've put in all this time at OCS and everything else. You are motivated. And you spent days in learning all of the sequences in the stand up, the hook up, and stand in the door. Now, "stand in the door"--you weren't walking; it's a shuffle, with the left foot forward, and the right foot comes down and then your left foot goes to that door, with about four inches of the--

BURG: You're describing a left leg swinging around to the door.

HOFFMAN: Yes. And so you stand right on the threshold of that door and your hands are outside the door, and you're looking. And when you touch--that's all he does; he says,



"Go," and he touches your leg. It's instantaneous, because you've been doing this in the towers, and in the mock-ups, and everything else. You kick your right leg--and I remember all this--you kick your right leg forward, try to come up as far as the hip. But what's happening is that that slipstream, from that propeller on the motor on that side, hits that leg and turns you, immediately, a quarter turn to the rear of the aircraft. You duck your head, put your head--your chin on your chest--your hands are open but on your reserve chute. Your feet and knees are together. Now, you're going; you're dropping down and passing under the tail, and you're beginning your count; "one thousand"--you did it as "One thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three." It's noisy. It was noisy in the aircraft; that C47, without any lining in it, is a noisy thing anyway. And the static lines are clacking, and the, of course, the motor, and then the slipstream; boy, you feel it in your face and you feel it on your body! But you begin your count: "One thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three." And you know that at one thousand and three, you want to feel something. You want to feel the chute! [Laughter] You





can feel the thing being ripped--

BURG: Vibration as it's coming out of its--

HOFFMAN: Yes. Ripped out of the--back pack being ripped off. That part that was sewn on, that little panel. And then you can feel each one of those things coming loose that were put in there with the elastics.

BURG: The folded-over risers and the chute panels--

HOFFMAN: Yes. The whole business. But the thing that you're waiting for, the thing you're waiting--you're waiting for that tug! And if your position is right, then you get--the chute is opening up--being dragged out of the pack and opening up--but it's going over your head--

BURG: Oh really?



HOFFMAN: --toward the rear of the aircraft. I don't know if they've got any good pictures over here. I guess not. I'll find some for you. It's opening up--

BURG: Here, these people show--



HOFFMAN: There we are. See it? See it?

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: See it? It's going over your head. Okay, now, you're waiting to feel a tug, and when you feel that tug you know that blessed thing is open. Immediately you look up. You want to find out if you've got any blown panels. Is it really open? Have you got a riser--shroud line, rather--over? And it gives you--it's called a "Mae West"-- [Laughter]

BURG: Because the chute almost is divided in half into two smaller chutes.

HOFFMAN: Yes. And you don't want that. You want to make sure it's open. If it's open, fine; if it isn't then you got to go and make your decision to go for your reserve. And then, it's quiet. Just quietness. And you're floating; be even better then when you came off the free tower; you're just floating, quiet, because--now you're excited. And you want to talk to that other guy. And you know if you talk, that instructor on the ground is going to know you're talking. But



sometimes you talk.

BURG: You were not permitted to talk in mid-air?

HOFFMAN: No yak yak. No yak yak. Because that's to keep everything--later on you did, of course. But a great, great feeling! The great feeling, of course, is that the blessed thing is open.

BURG: Yes. [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: But then the thing was, it was quiet. Later on, oh, after I came back,--of course these are silk chutes, now. They open just, they open with a pop! Nylon chutes open differently, but we only had silk. Nylon were given to the combat units. For training, we had the silk ones. But later on, after I came back as a Chaplain, then you had the big, oh, the big cargo planes, and you would tailgate off the back end of those after they opened them up.

BURG: The whole back opens like a clam shell.

HOFFMAN: And on those, you just ran down and jumped over the



edge, you know, and all this. There was nothing like jumping from that C47! But it was quiet and you're underneath the thing. And then, of course, you've got all the things that you've been told you got to do. You've done them on the towers and so forth here. Looking. You have some time to look around and you see tiny people on the ground. Everything looks little. The trucks look little, and the--now then, you come to the realization that, "Hey! You better quit enjoying this, because you've got to get ready to make the landing." By this time your oscillations have calmed down and you're pretty much just sort of moving, moving across. If the wind is gentle, and it mostly was in a training situation--about one hundred feet up, now, you prepare for your landing. And you decide whether your drift is such that the wind is at your back or not. If it isn't, you adjust yourself and you get it at your back. You get your feet together, knees slightly bent; up to the risers, hold on. But you don't look down! That's the fatal mistake. And you're looking off, oh, maybe thirty, forty degree angle you're looking off, trying not to let your brain know when your feet touch the ground so you won't stiffen and break something.





BURG: Yes, I see. That's why no looking down.

HOFFMAN: That's the most difficult thing to do! Especially if you've had any hard landing. In that first landing, you don't know what to expect, so it's a joy! You just come in; it was a nice landing. But when you get a bad landing, then you know how hard it can be. Anyway. Yes, I remember the first. I remember everything on that plane.

BURG: Was the second jump more difficult or easier?

HOFFMAN: Well, the second jump, now you know what's going. There's nothing--you still go through, I think everybody in the world goes through, the sweating-out period. But increasingly the landing becomes the concern, because you know the wind isn't always going to be nice and gentle as it was on the instruction jumps, and so forth.

BURG: They'd pretty well see to that, I suppose.

HOFFMAN: Well, the rule was--I believe the wind could not be more than 12 knots; I think they would abort a flight that was in the air. They would cancel any coming off the ground.





But you had to get to a point where you could, and many times you did, handle that wind. Yes, they tried, they tried to-- and the safety features are still on today. The wind is tested and--

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: --but you know, you can test it at one time, and at an altitude, we'll say, of two hundred feet or three hundred feet, you might have a different set of wind currents. The shape of the land--we jumped in Turkey one time--the shape of the land will give you some sparks, I'll tell you. There were two--it was a valley, and then the valley broke into a fork and the two went up this way. But the wind whistled down these two and came into the long valley where the drop zone was. You could measure in the drop zone; it would be just fine, except the gusts were coming down these two valleys that entered into this area. There are things like that will--



BURG: But by and large, I would suppose, by the time you're taking these qualification jumps, people that have problems with

heights--fear of heights--have been weeded out. I would expect you aren't going to have very many refusals to jump in the five qualifying jumps.

HOFFMAN: No. By that time you have suffered so much--you've gone through so much PE, and packing, and everything else, apparatus work, hand to hand combat--that, you're going to make it, if you've made it that far.

BURG: Yes. You'll jump.



HOFFMAN: Yes. There were some. I just don't remember any refusals at--there were none in the sticks that were suited up in my area. There probably were some.

BURG: Yes, somebody who had screwed his courage up as far as it would go and made it part way, and then that was it.

HOFFMAN: You really think that you've got it all put together but, boy, that last push. In a way, it's a fear of the unknown, and it's a fear of doing something that you're--it's unusual for a man to do.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: You've been given a great amount of confidence. You've learned how the chute is made, how it operates. And you've tried it out from two hundred and fifty feet. I would say that most of the refusals would have come prior to this. And they wouldn't really have been connected with the fear of the heights. They would have been connected with, "I don't want the harassment, I don't want any more of this PE--

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: --any more of the pain."

BURG: When you are assigned to a unit--can you remember the approximate date? You finished the demolition course--

HOFFMAN: That would have been in August and September. September of '43, I went to C Company, 1st Battalion, Five Forty-second, 1st platoon. We had two lieutenants per platoon, and the other second lieutenant ranked me by a few days so he got to be the platoon leader, and I got to be the assistant platoon leader. The company commander was 24 years old, and a 1st lieutenant.





BURG: Yes. Five, the five--

HOFFMAN: Five Forty-second.

BURG: --Five Forty-second parachute infantry battalion?

HOFFMAN: Uh, regiment.

BURG: Regiment. Sorry, regiment.

HOFFMAN: This was the great Colonel Ryder.

BURG: R-I-D-E-R?

HOFFMAN: R-Y. Same man who lead the units into Sicily and got shot up so badly. Fine guy.

BURG: Although you joined that regiment, the regiment itself was not part of an airborne division at that stage?

HOFFMAN: Colonel Ryder trained this unit, put it together from replacement types, and so forth. Passed the Army ground test, that every combat unit goes through. And then they broke it up to be used as replacements.





BURG: Not an uncommon thing in those days.

HOFFMAN: I can remember him, officer's call one morning in the theater--filled the theater with all the officers in the regiment--I can remember him coming out on that stage, having to make that announcement. Tears in his eyes. Good spirit. We put our--we received our volunteers but they were not yet in jump school. So we took them through the jump school training. We did the PT and the lectures, and these things, and then took them into the hands of the jump school instructors and they put them through the last or final stages of their jump training. We went all the way through. Tactical jumps and field problems, and all of the testing that the Army does for a large unit, a regiment, battalion, company. All the range firing, the whole thing. They were ready. They were ready. By that time, they'd changed their minds between types of airborne--airborne operations are going to be tried. And they've decided that they're going to stay with just the two--of course, you don't find this out until years later--101st and the 82nd [airborne divisions]. The 17th [airborne] isn't on the scene yet.



BURG: Right. And, of course, the 13th [airborne] is quite late. It doesn't get over to Europe until 1945, the last two, three months. They're there, but I don't think they ever went in as a unit, but parts of the 13th were used in various places.

HOFFMAN: The 11th [airborne] is out in the Pacific, but it isn't really put together as a big unit.

BURG: The Five Forty-second was stationed at Ft. Benning?

HOFFMAN: No, we were in the Alabama area. See, Benning overlaps both Georgia and Alabama, so we were in the frying pan area and across the other side of the Chattahoochee River.

BURG: You took these men that were assigned to the Five Forty-second, and the officers and non-com cadre trained the unit, and then suddenly Ryder's got to call you all together and tell you that they're breaking up the unit. I can understand what a disappointment that would be. If you've built morale in a unit and given it spirit--



HOFFMAN: Well, and they liked him. They liked him. He'd been on the Sicily thing, and he was one of these unusual men who could run, and he ran with the whole regiment. This kind of thing. He had great visibility. You always saw him.

BURG: Yes. What happens once that decision has been made? What happens to all of you? The troops, are they to be assigned to differing units? But, now, what about your non-com and your officer cadre? What happens to you?

HOFFMAN: We are all destined for the Army Ground Replacement Pool in Ft. Meade, Maryland, those that are going over to Europe. So we're broken up into units and we get on the troop trains and we go to Ft. Meade.

BURG: When you go as units, you're going just as casual companies--

HOFFMAN: We're going as nothing! Not only that, but no jump pay. You're a casual and, therefore, you don't get paid.

BURG: And at that point you, personally, don't command





anything. You're not the assistant leader of anything, really--

HOFFMAN: Well, on the move--

BURG: --except a casual company on a troop train. How's morale?

HOFFMAN: After we arrive there--Terrible. Disappointed. When we arrived there, then of course you're just funneled off to an enormous officer pool. And you're waiting for an assignment.

BURG: Ryder, too?

HOFFMAN: You know, I forget where he went. No, he didn't go to Europe, if I remember. But he stayed, maybe in the planning end of the thing. It'd be a shame to loose the expertise that they had in that man.

BURG: Yes. Well in the pool--this would be at the end of 1943, November, somewhere in there?

HOFFMAN: Yes. It would have had--let's see. We, uh, September, October, November. It would have taken us three months to





put the unit together. End of November, Oh, I don't come up that far.

BURG: How long were you in the pool, roughly? I assume the next move was that they shipped you overseas?

HOFFMAN: Right. We were being put together for shipment on the Santa Rosa and we were, of course, grouped into companies and platoons.

BURG: Again just for administrative purposes.

HOFFMAN: That's right.

BURG: This is not a viable combat unit; it's just an assemblage of men grouped up for ease of handling.

HOFFMAN: Yes.



INTERVIEW WITH  
Col. Raymond Hoffman

by

Dr. Maclyn Burg, Head  
Eisenhower Oral History Project

on

August 11th, 1978

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

This is an interview being taped with Colonel Raymond Hoffman in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas, on August 11, 1978. Present for the interview Colonel Hoffman, and Dr. Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff.

COLONEL HOFFMAN: Yes, well we traveled by night.

DR. BURG: You remember it as being by truck.

COLONEL HOFFMAN: By truck. And--yes, I know we came by truck. I know we came by truck to--I guess every movement from the port was by truck; it may not have been. We were closed in, no patches, no boots. No identification whatsoever that you were coming in as a--to build up the airborne units. And when we arrived in the camp at Hempstead Marshall--

DR. BURG: Two words?

COLONEL HOFFMAN: Hempstead Marshall, yes. That is the estate, owned by a Boston lady who had married an Englishman, being used as the base camp for the Five Oh First outside of Newbury, England.

DR. BURG: Would that be N-e-w-b-e-r-r-y

COLONEL HOFFMAN: --b-u



BURG: --B-u-r-y

HOFFMAN: Like in Newbury, Massachusetts.

BURG: Right.

HOFFMAN: And when we arrived--it was just a tent camp, that's all. About the only thing that--the only thing that was a Nissen hut--you know, the old metal--was the latrines--

BURG: N-i-s-s-e-n?



HOFFMAN: Yes. --the latrines, with the showers and so forth. The rest of it was tent. We dropped our bags, and so forth, and went and got a cup of coffee. We were sitting around with the men in the section and [laughter] here comes "Axis Sally" on-- on the radio, "Welcome!", and starts reading names [Laughter].

BURG: So you were. I've heard stories like that --

HOFFMAN: We could have died! The care with which the whole thing was taken. Your [jump] boots were at the very bottom of your duffelbag; you know, your pride and job [laughter]; and



every patch was cut off. You'd never displayed your wings; [laughter] and here she had the whole thing --

BURG: Now, literally, you new arrivals got off the trucks, went in to have coffee --

HOFFMAN: I dropped my--they had a series of smaller tents in the officers' row, and then they had the company tents, and so forth, where the men were--and went by, got a cup of coffee. I was sitting around with the men in the section, and here she comes.--

BURG: She was on the air; and identifies this new shipment, this new arrival, identifies Hempstead Marshall--

HOFFMAN: Yes, these new arrivals. Welcomed them here. [laughter]

BURG: -- and gives your bloody names!

HOFFMAN: [Laughter] and the whole thing!

BURG: Oh, boy! Oh boy.



HOFFMAN: You began to wonder just what was going on.

BURG: Yeah. Well, you're the first one, I think, I've talked to that had that experience and could tell me, "Yes, I sat there and I heard her saying it."

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: And you people recognized the names that she was reading off?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, yeah.

BURG: Did you know, then, when you went in and got that coffee, that you were going to be with some particular battalion of the 501st?

HOFFMAN: I knew I was going to be with the intelligence section. Ben West was the (or Ben Wicks, wacks, wax), was it West or Wacks, West.

BURG: I would say West, but we'll check that.

HOFFMAN: Ben West, old Southern Louisiana boy.



BURG: Was he S-3?

HOFFMAN: No, 2, S-2. You see, the only reason they wanted the lieutenants were to lead the recon, only it wasn't called recon then, it was called scouting and patrolling. And to set up the O.P.'s and do a little patrolling. I thought it was a fascinating business, I tell you. We'd work.

BURG: Did you know, by the way, before you arrived there that that would be your assignment, or was it given to you as soon as you got off the truck.

HOFFMAN: I think it was--they may have known, but I think we didn't get it until whoever was your guide or your sponsor was taking you over to your tent. I think Ben was there.

BURG: So that that night. I assume you arrived after dark, or do you remember that?

HOFFMAN: We did a lot of traveling by dark but if I remember, we arrived shortly after noon at Hempstead Marshall.



BURG: So there was plenty of time for you to be taken to meet him and told of this--

HOFFMAN: Yeah. It seems to me they had had their chow, and we had had rations or something on the way, but the old coffee, you know, they had made in one of those big, twenty-gallon [Laughter] pots!

BURG: Remember it? I have the burntout insides to prove it! [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: That was always on, you know; the cooks always had that, so--

BURG: In fact, it had been on since December 8, 1941! [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: Probably from World War I ! They'd never cleaned it! [Laughter] But, it tasted good, right at that point anyway. It's you know, it's pretty damp and miserable at that time of year--

BURG: Sure, because your--





HOFFMAN: --in England.

BURG: --there in the winter time, really, or the early spring. March, was it, that you got there?

HOFFMAN: I think March. We traveled twenty-five days, I think, by boat so it was a very slow convoy; enormous, enormous convoy. It seems to me, yes, late February or on into March. I think we got there in March. But here, what I was doing was getting acquainted with everybody.

BURG: Yes. Do you happen to remember what West said to you when you met him for the first time?

HOFFMAN: Well, old West was a very, very friendly and exuberant guy! He had a, he had a laugh that began down at his ankles, you know, and just--and you had to listen very carefully to what he said, because he had that wonderful Louisiana accent, or something. Primarily, it was, you know, "Welcome, we're glad to have you." Gee, I don't know his exact words. I can see him now, waving, "Come this way! Come this way!" He'd taken me over to my tent and--



BURG: You were coming in to serve with, or even command, an existing unit?

HOFFMAN: The 2-section of the Five-Oh-First Regiment.

BURG: Was there a scouting and patrolling platoon?

HOFFMAN: They did it. No.

BURG: You were there to form it?

HOFFMAN: The S-2 section did it. The S-2 section did the-- each battalion-2 had his own section.

BURG: Ah. Then maybe you'd better explain that to me, because I'm not grasping it, and anyone using this might not--

HOFFMAN: Regimental -2 has his regimental intelligence section, made up of an assistant -2--

BURG: That was you.

HOFFMAN: Yes, it may of--no--but, you know, we're always beefed over in personnel in a combat situation.



BURG: Higher than the Table of Organization would call for?

HOFFMAN: I'm quite sure. I think I, perhaps, was the only officer at that time. But you had draftsmen, you had--oh, I know, sure, of course! You had Meyer, Captain,--I guess, then, lieutenant--who was the interpreter in the interpreter section; you had draftsmen--

BURG: M-a-y-e-r?

HOFFMAN: M-e-y-e-r, I think. I'll have to look him up--

BURG: But pronounced Meyer.

HOFFMAN: I'll have to look him up. Wonderful German kid, and he had his enlisted interpreter. And these were all trained at language school, and so forth, you see. They taught them you know--

BURG: "German kid" in the sense he was German-American.

HOFFMAN: German, oh, German-American, yes! And then we had a Jewish--



BURG: And his language skills, French, as well as German? Do you remember?

HOFFMAN: He was primarily a German interpreter, I forget whether he spoke some French. I think he did, but primarily a German interpreter. Because this was the POW section, you see. They were going to do the interrogation.

BURG: Interrogation of prisoners, sure.

HOFFMAN: He had an enlisted man by the name of Schwartz, a Jewish kid from Brooklyn, and they were a good team. Now later on, he may have had someone else with him, and I have to check on that. But this would be the kind of set-up that the regimental-2 would have.

BURG: I see. And cartographers, do you think, or just draftsmen?

HOFFMAN: Well, they were, of course, trained both ways. Of course, he had clerk typists, and these kids could do anything under the worst kind of conditions. They had to make the





overlays--some of those overlays that you have in that file were made on a gelatin--you remember that poured gelatin? Well, they were made on that thing.

BURG: You often got a purplish color out of that.

HOFFMAN: It was purple going on! Yes, when it was put on. Those kids were magicians, they could make that stuff work in the field; no human being can make that stuff work in the field [Laughter]; those kids could! So, that's the kind of section. Your patrolling, your draftsmen, your interpreter section, were all part of the regimental-2's intelligence section.



BURG: So we would have to figure that included in that group--part of the S-2 operation--would be at least one officer, yourself, for example; non-coms; and enlisted men whose job mainly was the patrolling and reconnaissance aspects of it.

HOFFMAN: Scouting and patrolling, that's right. What would be called today, recon; except on the jump, and for days afterward, you didn't have any vehicles, so you did it all on foot.

BURG: Yes, and as I think you may have noticed--I certainly did when I went through the overlays that we're referring to of the Five-Oh-First Regiment--there are overlays showing patrol routes.

HOFFMAN: Constant.

BURG: --across--

HOFFMAN: Constant.

BURG: --various areas of ground to test out what is there.

HOFFMAN: Major Allen was the -3. Now, General Allen. The air mobile concept was his baby. He was a major at that time and was the -3. In every briefing, there was always the patrol, the patrolling routes, and so forth. That was constant. All the battalion sections were out on patrols.

BURG: So you met, presumably, that day or the next day, you would have been introduced to the noncoms and enlisted personnel that you would be working with.



HOFFMAN: Yes, that afternoon.

BURG: That afternoon.

HOFFMAN: Yes, that afternoon. I would say it was shortly after 1:30, 2:00, somewhere in there.

BURG: Now were these personnel--or West, for that matter--combat-experienced? Had some of them served with the 82nd [airborne], for example, in Sicily.

HOFFMAN: No, you couldn't get, to my knowledge--there may have been some in the regiment, but not to my knowledge. But the thing that they had going for them was that they were the old hands from the days of Camp Toccoa in Georgia, when the Five-Oh-First was activated.

BURG: And the Five-Oh-First was one of the first, if not the first, parachute regiment activated in the American Army, isn't it?

HOFFMAN: Well, I think so.



BURG: I think it was.

HOFFMAN: You know, why it was ever left off the official rolls of the 101st Airborne, I will never understand that.

BURG: You were always "attached"--

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: --not assigned?



HOFFMAN: Oh, Lee said, you know, it was a mistake, an, an oversight; it was a tragic oversight.

BURG: Although the division itself, evidently, in the things that are published under divisional auspices, always goes out of its way, it seems to me, to say the Five-Oh-First was attached, but in the eyes of the division there was never any doubt that the Five-Oh-First was an important and integral part of that division. There's no way around that!

HOFFMAN: It keeps you--it keeps you--it keeps morale up. What was the first unit deactivated? Five-Oh-First!



BURG: At the end of the war?

HOFFMAN: Absolutely! Without any I, if's and's or but's. Break'em up! So, yes, they said that. But if it was an oversight, it was never corrected.

BURG: It's a bit of a sidetrack, but would any of that have been due to Howard Johnson's personality, do you think?

HOFFMAN: It's--that may be the best explanation involved. It seems--it seems tragic that that would be so.

BURG: And I should say for the record that Howard Johnson was the commander of the Five-Oh-First Parachute Regiment, until he was killed in Holland, and he did have the reputation of being pretty abrasive, and setting very high standards, and rigorously holding to them.

HOFFMAN: He never did anything that he didn't--when he said it was a regimental run, he led the regiment. And if you saw an airborne regiment running cross country, there he was out in front. [laughter] I imagine he had a hundred jumps before



Normandy even started; by the time he was killed, maybe, he had 150-200 jumps. But I'm sure he had a hundred jumps before Normandy started. That was too bad.

BURG: Yes, if that were, if that were the cause of--

HOFFMAN: That's my, that's my feeling.



BURG: But getting back onto our main theme--we'll return to Johnson; you have to return to Johnson in discussing these matters. The thing then, to you, that the Five-Oh-First had going for it was the fact that many, many of its personnel, officers and enlisted men, had been parachutists literally from the beginning of the American parachute endeavor.

HOFFMAN: Right. They volunteered and were recruited and went through jump school together, and went through the Louisiana maneuvers together, and came overseas together in troop ships. They were already a put-together unit. But, that would be the old boys and the new boys, in a sense; because after Normandy, it didn't matter too much. But of course, they had their memories of that, and that's good. They were in the unit from day one.

BURG: Yes. So you were joining a regiment with very high morale.

HOFFMAN: But, we were joining and bringing plenty of people in, a lot of replacements--I don't know if they were replacements, they were--what you were doing is beefing the thing up. Yes, good morale. Really, you know, they were the "Geronimo's" I don't know if you have ever seen the Indian head, the Geronimo Indian head, which was their shoulder, their regimental insignia.

BURG: The distinctive insignia on their shoulders, an enameled crest.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Yes, I think I have seen a picture of them.



HOFFMAN: They were the "Geronimo"s", and that didn't always go down well with the other units; but yes, high morale here. They couldn't have done as well as they did if they hadn't had a lot of confidence, good training.

BURG: Precisely. What was your routine like? We've got you



there and established, and you've met the people that you're going to work with. What kinds of routines are you involved with in S-2 in the Five-Oh-First?

HOFFMAN: Well, you started out with reveille and, of course, you run.

BURG: Every day?



HOFFMAN: Everyday. [laughter] You're still doing it, [laughter] still doing it. Come out the gate, run left, down the hill, and Newbury was at the bottom of the hill. Ah, you felt great. All the way out the gate, down the hill. Then you turn right, and you had to come back up that hill [laughter]. And, of course, here is the thing that I always thank the jump school sergeants for, the "loo-oo-tenant" boys. "What's the matter, can't you keep up?" And, as we started back up that hill, I heard the words, "Can't you keep up?" And, you know, I'm the platoon leader, I'm going to keep up! I'm going to keep up! It doesn't matter; I might die at the gate, [laughter] I'm going to keep up! [laughter] Of course, you know, we were young; my heavens, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two; some of the kids were seventeen, eighteen. Anyway,



you did that, you did your map training, you did your weapons training, you did your scouting and patrolling, you did your formations, you know. One of the great formations of all time, which is hardly used that I could see in Viet Nam and Korea, is that diamond formation. I thought that was the greatest formation that ever came along.

BURG: The point, and the flankers, and the rear.



HOFFMAN: And the rear. And, I could turn that thing anyway I wanted to go; every one of those men knew what we wanted. We got out of many a good scrape that way. I thought that diamond formation was the finest thing they ever put together, but it's almost like it never existed.

BURG: It's so basic, Ray, it's hard to imagine why it would cease to be used.

HOFFMAN: Those units that I went with sure didn't use it.

BURG: I mean, it's an ancient.

HOFFMAN: You did it Indian file, and I'm saying to myself,

[whistle] "Here we are, Indian file and [laughter]--

BURG: You see, that goes back to James Braddock. [Laughter]  
It just doesn't make sense.

HOFFMAN: But, nevertheless, I don't want to get into that.  
They're the tacticians; I'm not, at this point. In those days,  
you didn't tell me how to do it.

BURG: So you're out in the field, part of the time, practicing  
that kind of thing as a section.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Yes. Then we had--all the time operations are  
being planned. They may be training; they may be diversioary  
and so forth. And this is all going on. There is a war room--  
that is, a tent which is a war room. It contains the plans.  
This is one of the fascinating things, you know; you could be in and  
out of it. This is why so many of my letters contained, either  
vague references for my own use, or small amounts of discriptive  
information that I could give to Priscilla while I was writing.  
Because you respected the security.



BURG: Yes. But this would be enough, even all these years later, to key in your memory certain things going on. In effect, labeling a file drawer that you could open 35 years later and remember.



HOFFMAN: Then, let's see of course, there were exercises; there were, as the time grew closer to May and June, live fire exercises down in the south of England. Fantastic.

BURG: Live firing. You'd better tell me how that would work. What would be done?

HOFFMAN: You'd have a long exercise and long maneuver--simulate jumps, sometimes you had to jump. Sometimes they'd watch you jump; sometimes there's a simulated jump off the back of the trucks, making it look like the way you'd land with a stick, and so forth. Have to assemble. Of course, you have to practice these things. There were jumps, day and night jumps, and so forth. But the live fire would involve the entire regiment. Apparently the English had set aside a whole slash of southern England for live fire. And you would go through this exercise; you'd call for your artillery, you'd call for your air--



BURG: I see.

HOFFMAN: --use the whole business. Until everybody got bored, and some guy saw a water tank and they just put about seventy thousand rounds through that man's watertank! [Laughter]

BURG: And this would be light stuff; rifle fire, carbine fire--

HOFFMAN: Rifle, machine gun--

[Laughter]

BURG: Machine guns? [Laughter]



HOFFMAN: Machine guns! AR's! Just because, you know, it's about the third or fourth day and you're getting bored out of your skull. Now you've seen all the good stuff. The artillery's come over, you've heard it. That was the thing--to hear, to know about outgoing shells--and they were coming right over your head. Of course, you had gotten some of this in the States. In your training. The commanders, of course, were maneuvering the units. But those were great training exercises.



BURG: In something like that, would they go to the trouble or have the capacity, to let you hear the sound of German mortar fire, for example, or more particularly, the sound of German light machine guns firing, or their machine pistols firing?

HOFFMAN: No.

BURG: Of course, my recollection, from talking to my friends who had been there, was that when you heard a German machine gun, you didn't mistake it, because--

HOFFMAN: Never.

BURG: --it was Brrrrriiiiiipppppp, instead of pop pop pop pop pop.

HOFFMAN: Yes. In fact, most countries' weapons have a distinct noise.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: And you come alert.

BURG: If nothing else, you know it isn't one of yours.



HOFFMAN: Right. You come alert pretty fast. That's why you didn't want everybody, even though they could use them, carrying [enemy] weapons, because how are you going to know who's behind you?

BURG: So if someone had captured an MP38, you didn't want them firing that thing in combat.

HOFFMAN: If possible. Sometimes the pistols were kept, just in case. But yes, there were reasons for it--

BURG: Yes, sure.

HOFFMAN: --there were intelligent reasons.



BURG: And besides that, the Germans tended to take a dim view if they captured you and you're carrying one of their machine pistols.

HOFFMAN: Very much. Very much. But, of course, the ammunition supply.

BURG: Right.

HOFFMAN: Our weapons were more dependable. In fact, your own weapon was more dependable, because you took care of it.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: But the sounds; well, you either picked those up at some other previous training or you heard the sounds in a training film or something. But the actual sounds you didn't get until it started.

BURG: Alright, let me ask you this, Ray. Had you, within a few weeks, met the battalion commanders of the Five-Oh-First?

HOFFMAN: Oh, sure. They were--you had great, you know, great camaradeire. I didn't think there was another unit in which men were so easily met at all levels. Sure.

BURG: Because I would imagine that those three battalion commanders and their assistants, and on down the line, they're going to have to rely on you and your group--

HOFFMAN: Well, the battalions--

BURG: --for a certain amount of information.



HOFFMAN: --yes. But the battalions had their own -2 sections and they patrolled for their commanders. We patrolled for the regimental commander. But we had the prisoner of war interrogation team, and many times we would take him with us or he would go out and patrol with them, so that he would be available.

BURG: Yes. And there's a sharing of information, I assume. As much as possible.

HOFFMAN: Boy, that was the key to making the thing work; if you had the information, get it out, share it with them. Yes, I thought the battalions commanders, particularly Ballard--who is, what? Isn't he the Adjutant General with

[Interruption]



BURG: Alright, as we come up then into mid-May of '44, coming into the last couple weeks of May, the training, I assume, kind of tapers off. The last of the exercises, the maneuvering, this kind of thing; because whether you people knew it or not, you're coming up on D-Day. When do you first realize that that day is now very close? It is when--do they shut you off at Hempstead Marshall?



HOFFMAN: You see, so the German intelligence would not know, we did many movements into marshalling areas and back out again, just as every night and every day there were overflights, troop carriers towing gliders. Many times they'd make a circle out into the ocean, and this kind of thing was going on all the time, day and night. We moved into marshalling areas several times. The time you began to realize it--of course, if you had access to the "War Room," you knew: "Hey! Here we've got some new aerial photos." And, of course, we did a lot of work with aerial photo maps and the photos themselves. But I would say, from the 20th of May, perhaps, on, we were pretty sure that the thing was going to go. You were certainly sure by the end of May that it was going to go, because we made the final move. And the final move was the one where you were closed in, and where the briefings <sup>w</sup>not started with contour maps, and using the little mock-ups on the sand tables, and this kind of thing.

BURG: On those aerial photographs, had there been anything to identify what those photographs were of? Or were you working with photographs--roughly, let us say, 6 by 6, 8 by 8--that simply



showed unspecified terrain? You could see the fields, you would see villages, and this kind of thing, but it's not identified.

HOFFMAN: Yes, some were that way. For training purposes, some were of the area where we were.

BURG: So they were photographs of England.

HOFFMAN: Yes. But they were of similar terrain; and we could map out training on them.

BURG: But as far as you know, at that stage you weren't being shown photographs of Normandy?

HOFFMAN: No. No.



BURG: Now, let me ask you this. When you moved to a marshalling area, as you say you did several times, were you able to tell on those moves, on your way to those marshalling areas, that it wasn't the real thing?

HOFFMAN: Sometimes. Sometimes you couldn't. But most of the time it was playing it pretty straight.

BURG: Yes. But you knew that you hadn't been briefed on specific objectives, so--

HOFFMAN: No. And we would have had something more than what we had on some of those moves. The last time it was pretty well certain this is a go. We know now that we're going, and we know that we're going into the Cotentin Peninsula. We just don't know exactly where. On the other hand, many of the problems involved these water barriers, and all that mess. So you knew that you were certainly going to hit some of that kind of stuff.

BURG: Because you'd been briefed; they started briefing you on things like that.

HOFFMAN: You ran the tactical problems: They'd say, "Well, this area is marsh. There's a river here," and so forth. Well, okay, it could have been anywhere, but not under those circumstances. Why are you going to brief people to run tactical problems, and not pay attention to the fact that they're telling you about specific kinds of terrain. That would have





been a waste of time, if you'd thought about it.

BURG: Yes. So, obviously, everything that they'd been telling you, you needed to know.

HOFFMAN: Yes. But when the aerial photos began to show up, and the telephone poles--or the poles--were being put on the drop zones.

BURG: Erected in the fields.



HOFFMAN: And the wire running through--across the tops of them, I mean. You began to feel that somebody knew something.

BURG: Yes. I should say for the purpose of the interview that Col. Hoffman and I are talking across a xerox of one of the maps that would have been used at the time; a map of France, and particularly the area around Ste. Mere-Eglise down past Carentan, which has been marked. It has the contours, the road intervals, everything. So, when we refer to these things we have this one-to-fifty-thousand scale map in front of us. Now, how about your own specific job, as we hit that last



period of time? The aerial photographs show you the terrain that you're going to jump into; you're being warned of the marsh areas along the Merdere<sup>t</sup> it and the Douve Rivers. What was said to you, personally? What kind of briefing are you getting, and what kind of briefing do you have to give to your men?

HOFFMAN: Well, the major objective given to the section was to move to the high ground above St. Côme-du-Mont--which I assume is up in this area--to set up an OP. Johnson wanted the advantage of having an observation post that might be of some value to him.

BURG: Then we should say, too, Ray that the reason for moving to that higher ground around St. Côme-du-Mont is because the drop zone is just to the east of that town. That's where they--where you thought you were going to land.

HOFFMAN: I'm still--this would have been his reason for it but--we must have known enough, or Ben West or somebody, must have been looking ahead that we wouldn't make it in; that we'd



make it in somewhere into here. Because we had the rubber boat, the radio; you know, the collapsible paddles and the whole schmear.

BURG: And when you say "here", you're pointing to the map south and slightly west of St. Côme-du-Mont, and you're also showing me an area across the Douve.

HOFFMAN: Yes. I'm just wondering, now, why--

BURG: Why the rubber boat?

HOFFMAN: Yes. I know that we were, that we had it because we had to get across that thing. But it may have been a precaution.

BURG: Well Ray, among the objectives for the Five-Oh-First, I think, was the lock at la Barquette.

HOFFMAN: Oh yes. And all the bridges on the Douve.

BURG: And the bridges on the Douve. It's possible that the rubber boat is not for you to return from south of the river back north of the river, but rather for you to make it across that



river from north to south. To secure the other ends, perhaps, of the Douve bridges. The one at le Port was also an objective, I think, for the Five-Oh-First.

HOFFMAN: Yes, that would probably be 3rd Battalion [506th Parachute Regiment].

BURG: Yes. Captain [Charles G.] Shettle, I think, is the man who ultimately winds up there, under the conditions of the drop.

HOFFMAN: Well, I just know that we had a rubber boat, we had the radio, and so forth. The idea was to get to that high ground beyond St. Côme-du-Monte.

BURG: "Beyond," to the north of the town or--?



HOFFMAN: Well I think so. I'm looking at this contour line.

BURG: Yes, the ground does seem to rise, doesn't it?

HOFFMAN: I'll check my other maps. But it doesn't rise very rapidly, nevertheless--

BURG: No.

HOFFMAN: --I can't see what that is; that may just be a spot on the map. But, nevertheless--

BURG: I get the impression the ground from St. Côme-du-Mont is rising as you move east. There seems to be a little rise there.

HOFFMAN: But it didn't work out, because--if I remember correctly, this is an artillery position or an artillery unit headquarters, or something--

BURG: That is, the Germans?

HOFFMAN: --up on that hill. Yes.



BURG: The Germans had set up that way. But when you're briefed, you're shown sand table--

HOFFMAN: Mock-ups.

BURG: --mock-ups of the territory around St. Côme-du-Monte, and of the Douve bridges that you're to work with, and la Barquette.



HOFFMAN: la Barquette.

BURG: Everyone, I gather, was very, very nervous about the locks there and that was given as a very definite and major objective.

HOFFMAN: If the locks went, then the causeways would be virtually useless in moving the troops up.

BURG: Evidently, the fear was that the Germans--if they controlled the lock--would flood this area. And, of course, what no one realized was that the Germans had been working on flooding that area, I think, since 1942, and had flooded it about as much as could be done by admitting sea water through the lock at high tide and shutting off the lock when the tide fell. So, really, the damage that the Five-Oh-First is supposed to prevent has been an accomplished fact for months, and it simply isn't picked up in the serial photographs.

HOFFMAN: Yes, and I don't understand why it wasn't.



BURG: I guess you'd have to get the exact right angle. The

photo-recon aircraft would have--preferably, I suppose--the sun sinking towards the west and the aircraft flying to the east of the Merderet and the Douve. Then the light would have gleamed off the water, but the reeds and marsh grass had grown up, and therefore that water surface--I guess here along the Douve the water surface was visible from the air and you were warned about that area.

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: But on the Merderet--and this was particularly bad, I think, for the 82nd Airborne and some of the 101st--somehow it didn't get picked up. Remember, I mentioned to you that there's actually an engineer map of the Merderet on which some engineer has written, in a nice percise hand, "This ground may be soft." Soft? It was under six feet of water is what it was! But anyway, that area around St. C<sup>o</sup>me-du-Mont is the area that you--in those last few days of May--that you and your men are working with. You're sort of memorizing that terrain.

HOFFMAN: St. C<sup>o</sup>me-du-Mont, even more than some of these other

places, is the orienting point, because you knew where everything was from that town.

BURG: Was there a church there, do you remember? And had you memorized the shape of the steeple of that church, so that you could recognize it to help you rally? I think it's [Brigadier General James A.] Gavin who speaks about memorizing church steeples. I don't believe it's St. Côme-du-Mont but-- it's Ste. Marie-du-Mont, whose church steeple--

HOFFMAN: He would have been up in this area, but [Ed. note: North of St. Côme-du-Mont] he may have done that. You certainly had enough information about every town, including maps of the towns, their streets, all of which was probably taken out of old tourist guides. [Laughter]



BURG: Yes, and awful big effort had been made to do that.

HOFFMAN: You had those things for briefing. I might look through my stuff and see if I've got anything better than that. But, anyway, that was what was assigned to us. It was impossible of completion at that stage. He wanted it at first light, you



know; well, you weren't anywhere near that place at first light! [Laughter]

BURG: Yes. Well, we'll get to that--I'm smiling, too, because I can see where we've marked this map to show where probably you came down, and there's no way you'd get there. [Laughter] You had a minor little lake between you and the St. Come-du-Mont area. Now, did they lock you up; that is, did they enclose and guard your compound at Hempstead Marshall, or did they move you to a marshalling area and lock you up there?

HOFFMAN: Yes. The marshalling area was near the airport.

BURG: Which airport, do you remember?

HOFFMAN: No, I don't. And, I don't know how to jog that out of me but, nevertheless--

BURG: Yes. Listen, if we--

HOFFMAN: --we definitely were locked in, and somebody goofed and there weren't enough tents, and this kind of thing. But they finally got the whole thing settled. And then, of course,





the barbed wire all around the place.

BURG: Do you remember when they locked you in?

HOFFMAN: About four days prior, I think. Yes. Maybe, maybe, five or six, but anyway--

BURG: First of June, second of June, somewhere in there?

HOFFMAN: No, I think end of May--30, 31st, somewhere in there.

BURG: Okay.



HOFFMAN: Because, you see, the real decision for the sixth wasn't made until he had to make it. So, I think the first, or the original, was to go on the fourth.

BURG: Well, the fifth. I think you were slated to leave the night of the fourth and drop in the early morning on the fifth.

HOFFMAN: 12:30 on the fifth, you see.

BURG: Yes. Right.

HOFFMAN: And we would have been in the planes on the fourth. Yes, we were locked in and guarded by security. But we also were very cautious about guarding our own areas.

BURG: When it came to that, when you got to that area, how did you keep the men occupied? Or let us put it another way, what kind of duties had to be carried out once you're locked in to the marshalling area near the airport?

HOFFMAN: Well, of course, you had your--if you had bundles, you had to pack them. And then there were work details, because you had to help people getting things out to the planes and getting them strapped underneath in those pseudo-bomb racks, you know; they carried the bundles on them.

BURG: That was done ahead of time; not done, let us say, on the fourth of June, but done earlier than that.

HOFFMAN: Well, I think, you know, they would have backed it up. They would have done it in however much time they needed for it. But if they had to draw work details, they'd readh in and get-- and you had chance to get yourself an apache-type [mohawk]? hair-



cut and so forth. But most of us got just the fuzz, you know.

BURG: Yes. Just clipped it short.

HOFFMAN: You knew you weren't going to get a bath very soon. You also knew from the medics that it's a lot easier to work on a scalp wound if you haven't got a lot of hair.

BURG: Yes. Right.

HOFFMAN: We didn't have very much hair anyway, but it's a lot easier to keep clean. Plus the fact that there was a bit of fun going in to it, you know, watching people look like a bunch of boiled eggs. [Laughter]

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: We did not--a lot of them had the--

BURG: The Mohican.

HOFFMAN: --the Geronimo thing, you know.

BURG: Yes, the Mohican roach of hair left along the top of the



head. Yes, I've seen pictures of that.

HOFFMAN: But most of us didn't have that. We had a short, fuzzy haircut; maybe about a quarter inch of hair. But for very practical reasons. It was sanitary to keep yourself clean, but if you did get a wound, it's much more easily treated.

BURG: Now you told me that your equipment included a rubber life raft, an inflatable rubber life raft. It included a radio. What, what types radio? One of the fairly large command sets?

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: A 300--

HOFFMAN: Well no. Oh, let me think back. It would--yes, if you're talking about the type of radio that a company commander would use, and it would be carried on the back of the radio operator.

BURG: Yes. I'm not sure of the number of it, but--



HOFFMAN: No, I'm not either. That's why I stopped--

BURG: The case would have been carried on the back by a radio man.

HOFFMAN: But it was jumped in as a leg pack.

BURG: Yes, I was afraid it was! [Laughter] That probably meant a wrenched back for somebody when he went out with it.

HOFFMAN: No, usually--[Laughter] It sometimes meant that the set was damaged when you got it on the ground. [Laughter]

BURG: I'll ask you this, too. Had you or any of your men ever been in an inflatable rubber raft?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes.

BURG: You had used one.

HOFFMAN: Oh yes.

BURG: Okay.

HOFFMAN: I think one time we used a farm pond. And we had some



fairly savvy kids who had lived in the out-of-doors, you know. Yes, we could have used it if we had to.

BURG: Yes. Did you learn that--

HOFFMAN: The thing I was afraid of was, we were going to lose the paddles and we'd be trying to poke that think along with a gun butt or something. The paddles weren't much bigger than that gun butt, I'll tell you that.

BURG: Yes, collapsible--

HOFFMAN: Yes. You put them together; you had them in two pieces.

BURG: --aluminum things, probably.

HOFFMAN: Yes. No. They were wooden.

BURG: They were wooden, ay?

HOFFMAN: Yes. They were wooden in those days.

BURG: Did that stuff go out to the aircraft early, as a



bundle under the aircraft?

HOFFMAN: No. No.

BURG: It went in the ship with you, as a bundle to be kicked out.

HOFFMAN: No, it's a bundle to be worn on the leg.

BURG: Oh, the raft also was a leg pack?

HOFFMAN: It was a leg pack. Oh yes. Oh yes. Didn't want to have to scramble around looking for that thing.

BURG: Any other heavy, leg pack equipment for your own section?

HOFFMAN: No. The radio and the rubber boat, that was about all we wanted to look at, I'll tell you.

BURG: And you carried neither one of those; they were slung on somebody else.

HOFFMAN: Yes, Jim Gartner, I think--Gartner, I think carried



that radio. You know, I have in my mind--I guess my chief scout took the boat. I have in my mind, I was going to jump the boat.

BURG: But you don't think you did?

HOFFMAN: Yes. I don't think I did. I think Sayers jumped the boat.

BURG: S-a-y--

HOFFMAN: e-r-s. An Indian boy. We called him "Chief". Fine, fine person.

BURG: Where was he from? Do you remember?



HOFFMAN: I'd probably have to go and look it up. Arizona, New Mexico, somewhere in there.

BURG: Yes. So perhaps, Navaho.

HOFFMAN: Maybe. Yes. Left-handed. The only man I ever saw who could handle an M-1 rifle left-handed. It was the most beautiful thing that--



BURG: And not get hit in the face with the ejected clip?

HOFFMAN: Yes. Always kept that thing crooked in his right arm. And he could put that thing on his shoulder faster than any man I knew. But he'd always, always carry it in the crook of his right arm, and he could throw that to his left shoulder.

BURG: So he may have been the one who jumped with the boat.

HOFFMAN: I think Jim Gartner, the draftsmen--you were, everybody did everything, you know. He, uh--

BURG: Are you saying Gartner, G-a-r-t-n-e-r?



HOFFMAN: I believe so, I believe so. I think that's--I remember they had a baby while we were somewhere, after the Normandy thing. Yes, I think we'd decided to do it that way; it would just leave me a little freer.

BURG: What were you wearing when you go out that door? Can you recollect your own personal gear? I know every one of you was loaded down. But let's get a picture now of what you're carrying: weapons, equipment, the whole bit.

HOFFMAN: We had that impregnated jump suit.

BURG: As gas protection.

HOFFMAN: I think so.

BURG: Yes. That's a two-piece outfit, isn't it Ray?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes.

BURG: It's the baggy pants with the pockets that were so distinctive, and the pockets are sort of a slash pocket with a couple of snap fasteners.

HOFFMAN: Like a jungle coat. I'm trying to think if we had that impregnated, or whether we used that khaki, where we had to put the impregnated stuff on afterward. It was for another operation.

BURG: You think it might have been a material, a chemical, that you put on just prior to the jump?

HOFFMAN: No. These would have been clothes completely impregnated. They wouldn't have left that to--



[Interruption]

BURG: You're not sure, then, about the impregnation. Except that when you jumped, the jump outfit that you were wearing was impregnated.

HOFFMAN: Yes. I think, you know, there was no question about us doing any impregnation. The uniform issued already were impregnated. I was just trying to figure out whether they had used a khaki, or whether they had had to use this O.D. that is about the color of the fatigue uniform, you know.

BURG: Yes. The pictures seem to show a light color cloth.

HOFFMAN: Yes, that's what makes me think of khaki. And the one I have at home is--

BURG: Now you're wearing--you're going to jump in June-- I'm assuming that you're wearing light underwear, the O.D. colored shorts and O.D. colored undershirt. Then, did you wear a regular O.D. shirt, wool shirt?



HOFFMAN: No. You had a undershirt and you had your jump jacket on over that.

BURG: I see. So you're not wearing a shirt with sleeves in it at all.

HOFFMAN: Not that I remember. I may have had one in the pack or bag--

BURG: Yes. Yes, you probably did. You're wearing jump boots.

HOFFMAN: Oh, the boots, definitely. Up in here, just about at your chest, where your breastbone comes, there's a zipper pocket. Inside that was a jump knife to help you cut yourself loose. It's about yay.

BURG: Maybe three, four inches long? The blade, that is.

HOFFMAN: Yes. No longer. It's a fold-up, Like a pocketknife. But it's pretty good size. The officer's pack was a musette bag. The old musette bag.

BURG: Yes, I remember.





HOFFMAN: Packed! I'll tell you, it was packed with everything you could put in it. In your--

BURG: That was slung, I assume--

HOFFMAN: No. Underneath your--you flip it over your head and it hangs on your back. But you have your webbing on first. Your regular field webbing belt--

BURG: To support a web cartridge belt.

HOFFMAN: That's right. Belt. Yes. Belt and suspenders and so forth. The musette bag would have been on your back, but to put it on with the chute, you brought it over your head and it lay against your thighs, underneath the reserve chute.

BURG: Yes. I see.

HOFFMAN: See. And that's the way you jumped it. So you had it bumping against your knee caps. [Laughter]

BURG: On the jump anyway. Yes.

HOFFMAN: And when you get out, you ducked your head and



flipped the thing back and it landed up on your back. Had rations in your pockets. We used the K ration. That's the thing that came in the pack; looked like "cracker jacks."

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: About the size of a cracker jack box, completely sealed with heavy wax. Those were in your side pockets.

BURG: Were there a specified number of those that you were to carry?



INTERVIEW WITH

Col. Raymond Hoffman

by

Dr. Maclyn Burg, Head  
Eisenhower Oral History Project

on

August 18th, 1978

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

This is an interview with Colonel Raymond Hoffman being done at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas on August 18th, 1978. Present for the interview, Col. Hoffman and Dr. Burg.

DR. BURG: When we were talking last week, we talked about how you, personally, were loaded down and the kinds of things you were carrying with you. We talked about rations and sticking the stuff into your pants pockets and the jump jacket, or whatever they called that. How did you refer to that jacket you wore?

COL. HOFFMAN: Jump jacket.



DR. BURG: What I didn't ask you was, what were you carrying as a personal weapon or weapons?

COL. HOFFMAN: On that one, I think I had a carbine. Carbine.

DR. BURG: Now, would that mean that you were wearing the web belt with the one pouch, over here on the left hand side, with the carbine clips in it?

COL. HOFFMAN: With the clips in it.

DR. BURG: Right. And then a canteen slung off that, and I think you said you wore your medic pouch slung on that belt--





HOFFMAN: On the belt--yes.

BURG: --rather than carrying it loose or tying it on your arm, or on your helmet, as others did. Were you carrying any--

HOFFMAN: Just standard webbing and standard items uh,--

BURG: Right. Did you carry a jump knife strapped on to your right leg?



HOFFMAN: Well, there was a jump knife that went into that little--

BURG: Inner pocket, inside.

HOFFMAN: Yeah, it was a zipper pocket in the chest portion of the coat.

BURG: I know that a number of them were wearing knives, long knives, slung on their leg.

HOFFMAN: Yes, usually attached to your boot so that it could be reached. This, you see--when your webbing, when your harness, was all buckled, it was almost impossible to get into this zipper pocket for the other knife, and so you put one on your leg, and

and I think there were a variety of knives carried.

BURG: Oh, yeah. I've seen machetes--

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Some men are holding machetes in photographs taken at the time.

HOFFMAN: But, these that were on the boot, many of them were made by old blacksmiths, and so forth, with a long, oh, probably a ten-inch blade. And a metal handle with a spike, and with kind of a brass-knucks arrangement.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: I had one like that.

BURG: But you didn't carry it in on the drop?

HOFFMAN: I took it in on the drop, and as I was getting out of my chute, pulled it out, because I couldn't get to my carbine at that time--still laying on my back, trying to get unhitched--pulled it out of my boot and stuck it in the ground, so that I'd



have something close to me.

BURG: Oh, so you did have one strapped on--

HOFFMAN: Yes. I'd have something close to me and then, in the excitement of getting free and so forth, I left it in the ground. [Laughter] It was sticking--it's probably plowed in by some French farmer or something.

BURG: Yes, like the Civil War infantryman who stuck his ramrod in the ground and then retreated fifteen feet, and there's the ramrod! [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: Right.

BURG: Yes. Now, the pouch--as I remember those pouches--would only have had two clips in it, for your carbine.

HOFFMAN: Yes, but, you know, you always had extras.

BURG: You were carrying extra; that's what I wanted to find out. You were carrying extra clips, tucked into pockets and--

HOFFMAN: Oh, but you could put extras on the web belt.





BURG: Extra pouches.

HOFFMAN: Yes, sure.

BURG: Do you remember if you had done that?

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Uh-huh. Because, with a carbine, you can run through a clip in the weapon and two clips out of the pouch fairly fast.

HOFFMAN: Well, you remember now, these are not semi-automatics at that stage, if I remember right.

BURG: You may be right. I don't remember when they put the automatic switch on.

HOFFMAN: Later, a little later, they came up with that kind of a semi-automatic type thing.

BURG: Well, a full automatic! You did have semi-automatic's--

HOFFMAN: I guess that's it. I guess that's it!

BURG: --like an M1. Then they put a switch on it and you could



actually fire them in a ripping sort of burst. The whole clip at one time. Can you think of any other--we've talked about the musette bag, the knife in the boot, the jump knife inside the pocket in the front of the jump jacket. How were you carrying that carbine when you jumped? Slung on you in any way?

HOFFMAN: In a case and--

BURG: In a case?

HOFFMAN: --Yes, and, kind of a scabbard-type case.

BURG: My recollection is, that was a web scabbard.

HOFFMAN: That's right!

BURG: It's not leather?

HOFFMAN: Oh, no!

BURG: Right.

HOFFMAN: No, no! No, no! It's--the riggers would sew these



out of canvas.

BURG: Yes, uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: And it seems to me it had a piece of webbing at the top with a snap and you hooked it in your D ring, and it went down along your side, and then you just brought your harness strip around--

BURG: Your parachute harness--



HOFFMAN: --yeah--and that kept it against the left side.

BURG: And that's where you carried it.

HOFFMAN: Left side.

BURG: And secured like that, there's no chance that on the opening pop of that chute, you're going to get the butt plate jammed into your armpit so that you're disabled.

HOFFMAN: That's right, and there's no chance that that thing is going to flip up.

BURG: Yes, I see.

HOFFMAN: See, if it weren't secured by the--even though it stayed attached to you, it could flip around--

BURG: Right.

HOFFMAN: --make an arc in the air, or half an arc.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: But, just having it snapped on your webbing was not any assurance that it wouldn't have broken free with the opening shock. So that was another reason for having it cinched on and tight, so--

BURG: Exactly.



HOFFMAN: --there was no possibility of the thing going out. And, of course, your helmet--they didn't have this--

BURG: Kind of a cup?

HOFFMAN: Well, we used a cup, but today they have a strap on the top of the chin and the bottom of the chin. We had the leather cup.

BURG: Yes. But other than that, it's a standard steel helmet with



helmet liner--

HOFFMAN: That's right. And your little knitted cap, the little beanie.

BURG: Like a--oh, you wore that under it!

HOFFMAN: Under it, to keep you warm. Otherwise you--

BURG: Then, were you using helmet netting?

HOFFMAN: Netting.

BURG: Over the top--

HOFFMAN: Netting over the top. Yes.

BURG: Did you wear any of those insignia for the side of the helmet? The club, the diamonds, the hearts, the spades--

HOFFMAN: Yes, and if I--it was Klondike's. I'd have to look it up. Klondike, I think, was a diamond, but we could look that up. Everyone had that.

BURG: The regimental headquarters would be wearing the diamond?



HOFFMAN: Yes. The whole regiment would wear the designation; it didn't matter.

BURG: I see. Everyone wore it.

HOFFMAN: Yes. I don't think we broke it to battalions, except in the code words.

BURG: Alright, I'll check that out, because I think--



HOFFMAN: See, if you looked out, you knew that here was a Five-Oh-Six man, here was a Five-Oh-Deuce man, and these were Five-Oh-One men, because you saw either the diamond or heart or spade, or something, on the side of the helmet.

BURG: Can you think of anything else slung on you, attached to you, in your pockets, or anything; for that particular drop? Did you, for example--I think you have told me you were carrying maps, or--

HOFFMAN: We had maps.

BURG: Which you had covered over with this material.

HOFFMAN: That's right. Maps, and of course, your flashlight.

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BURG: No sidearm, except the carbine. You weren't carrying a .45 Colt?

HOFFMAN: Not for that one. No--

BURG: Okay.

HOFFMAN: This was, you know, everybody wanted one, but finally-- and, I guess, by scrounging there were some extras around. But there weren't enough.

BURG: You carried no grenades?

HOFFMAN: Yes, we had grenades.

BURG: Did you carry them?

HOFFMAN: We had grenades. Oh, yes.

BURG: One, two? Do you remember how many?

HOFFMAN: I didn't carry any taped on me. I would say--

BURG: None taped onto your web equipment?



HOFFMAN: No.

BURG: You were carrying them in pockets, presumably.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Just an estimate, I would say four. But, yes, I would say four. It didn't seem to me that I needed to carry more or wanted to carry more than that, but they were available.

BURG: Alright now, on the day--in the first place, I think you and I have talked about this. You were due to jump the night, or the early morning hours, of the 5th; therefore, you were to load in the late evening hours of the 4th, and they cancelled it. You then had to spend the day of the 5th making do, whatever you could. Then it's on again, so they're going to load you the night of the 5th and you're going to drop in the early morning of the 6th. Now, tell me what happened and what it was like when you pull out of that marshalling place now--for the last time;--on the evening of the 5th. You're going now to the airfields to board. Do you, do you remember what airfield you boarded at?

HOFFMAN: No. Wish I could.





BURG: But that's something we can--we'll look that up.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Wish I could,--

BURG: Howard Johnson has split regimental headquarters and it is going to jump with two different battalions.

HOFFMAN: He always did it this way, because you never kept them together. But I'm quite sure that I would have gone with the 2nd battalion.

BURG: With the 2nd. So that's Klondike White.

HOFFMAN: Is it?

BURG: Klondike Red would be the 1st Battalion. The reason why I suggest that, is that when I plotted the drop pattern for Klondike, the headquarters, and Klondike White, the 2nd Battalion, the headquarters aircraft all dropped--these red circles on the map here--all dropped pretty much in the drop zone. And Johnson evidently dropped with that outfit. From what you've told me, it seems more likely--in plotting Klondike Red, the 1st battalion, we find that there headquarters aircraft dropped up to the north



and slightly west of the drop zone.

HOFFMAN: Uh-huh.

BURG: So it looks as though your part of regimental headquarters went with the 1st Battalion. Their drop, by the way, was badly scattered, as you see from the map--

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: --the 1st Battalion--what do we have? --eleven, twelve. Twelve sticks are dropped south of Carentan, one of the worst places that I can imagine to be dropped. And several more of the 1st Battalion drops were made in the drop zone; we can see those green circles here. But, also, a number of aircraft--seven of them--dropped well, just south of Ste. Mere-Eglise, as a matter of fact.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Obviously, some of you would have found 82nd Airborne men around you. But, if this works out right--and we have to base it on the fact that you're pretty sure you didn't wind up in the



drop zone, and we know you were in a headquarters aircraft--it looks like you must have gone with Klondike Red that night.

HOFFMAN: Yes, that could be.

BURG: And that Johnson went--

HOFFMAN: Who had 1st Battalion?

BURG: I don't remember who had that. It wasn't Ballard, was it?

HOFFMAN: No, Ballard had 2nd. Ewell, Julian Ewell, had 3rd. I'll look it up. I think Julian Ewell had 3rd.

BURG: Yes, well, again, we can pin that down, as to who it was.

HOFFMAN: It may have been 1st.

BURG: So, you load with them--we can almost give you, in fact, the number of the aircraft, but you don't remember which aircraft--

HOFFMAN: No.



BURG: --it was. But, we have their numbers, of course.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: And we assume that you got in one of those four. Did they truck you to the airfield?

HOFFMAN: I don't think so. I think we were close enough to walk from our area.

BURG: When did you start out for the field? Do you remember? Did you have a meal in the camp?

HOFFMAN: You were well fed, you know; steak and the works. It seems to me we had the evening meal and then started out--

BURG: There was plenty of time for it.

HOFFMAN: I think, probably, we may have left the area long about eight or eight-thirty. Maybe even before that, you know, as early as--you know, the old thing about hurry up and wait.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: We spent a lot of time laying under the wings of the aircraft.





BURG: It was still light.

HOFFMAN: Yes, I think so. I think so.

BURG: It had been pretty stormy. It had rained, but that evening, do you remember rain falling while you were out there on the field?

HOFFMAN: No. Clouds, but--it's an interesting feeling that you know this is the, this is the thing. It's going to come off. You're ready for it. I won't say you don't have anxiety, because you'd be a fool if you didn't.

BURG: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.



HOFFMAN: But, I think, to a man, they wanted to do just the best they could do to make it successful.

BURG: Yes. Were you wearing, or carrying, your chutes and harness when you went out there?

HOFFMAN: They would be at the plane, if I remember correctly. They were at the plane.

BURG: So when you marched out there--

HOFFMAN: Both the reserve and the backpack.

BURG: Alright, basically, what you yourself are wearing are the things you've described to me, less the reserve and main chute.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Yes. I don't believe we had to carry our own chutes out there. They would truck that out, and they were in piles beside the planes. So are the bundles. So you didn't have to carry the leg bundles and this kind of gear.

BURG: Right, the radios and rubber raft, and things of that sort.

HOFFMAN: You might have had to carry them if it were packed late, or something, or there was some tie-up. But I think everything was clean side.

BURG: Then, as you got out there to the field, each stick, each aircraft load of men--

HOFFMAN: Manifest load.

BURG: --just stopped off at that aircraft.



HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Is there, at that point, a check made to see that these, let us say seventeen men, are physically present at the aircraft?

HOFFMAN: Whoever was jump mastering the plane, or was the plane commander, would make his checks.

BURG: They had--

HOFFMAN: Nobody had his, nobody had his people.



BURG: Right. He had a list with him. Now on that jump, did you have any responsibilities, aside from your responsibilities as an officer heading up a section? Were you a jump master or assistant jump master?

HOFFMAN: No, we didn't have to do that, you know. You had battalion and regimental staff people in the plane so--I forget who was the jump master on it. But I believe it was one of the company commanders. It was probably the C Company commander, maybe. But on that, I didn't have jump master responsibility.

BURG: Okay. Out of that group--again, I say seventeen men,

because that's probably approximately how many there were--how many of those men were your own responsibilities as an officer?

HOFFMAN: Oh, I think we jumped the whole section, because we had the--so we probably had--maybe I didn't jump them all; maybe I jumped only about ten. Because we had the OP objective to go up on the high ground at St. Côme-du-Mont. So there were probably eight or ten. I think there were more than seventeen in the plane. You just sat on both sides.

BURG: From one of our previous interviews, we know that during training, with everyone wearing nothing but the chutes, double sticks went off C47's all the time.

HOFFMAN: That's right.



BURG: But the more heavily-laden the men were, the less room there was in the aircraft. And a jump stick of seventeen men or so would be more like it. And you think it probably ran a little more than that?

HOFFMAN: I thought we had twenty or twenty-one. But that would be alright. Seventeen to twenty, would do it.



BURG: Sure, sure. Let me ask you this vulgar question. Anytime anything exciting happened to me in the Army, I usually had to go to the can. [Laughter] I can figure that, for some purposes out there on the airfield as you're waiting to load up, that's easily done, but some men are going to suddenly-- at least twenty per-cent of every unit, will have to have a bowel movement [laughter] just prior to getting on board the aircraft. How was that kind of thing handled?

HOFFMAN: Well, in--if it was before you suited up, that was easily taken care of.

BURG: [Laughter] Yes.

HOFFMAN: But that's not what I worried about! I worried about what the hell was going to happen after you got in the aircraft! And, of course they had a pee tube, this kind of thing.

BURG: Yes, a little relieving tube.

HOFFMAN: I tell you, with all that stuff on, it just--there's no way. You simply did it by inhuman discipline! [Laughter] You just turned off all thoughts of it, or anything else, because--



BURG: In other words, you didn't do it at all--

HOFFMAN: Right!

BURG: --once you got in that aircraft!

HOFFMAN: Just unbelievable, the tightness of that thing; you didn't want it loose, you didn't want that harness loose! You wanted that tight. Of course, the webbing comes up through your crotch, and I'm not sure I could have made water if I finally succumbed, but I wasn't going to! [Laughter] That's all!

BURG: Yes, yes. Well, I was thinking that while you were waiting to load up, then--

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes, no problem then.

BURG: --then you don't have to--



HOFFMAN: You just get away from the plane.

BURG: Yes. Were the pilot, the co-pilot, and the crew chief out there at the aircraft when you arrived? Did they stay with your group while you were waiting?

HOFFMAN: Well, it seems to me that they arrived after we got there, but we were always there first.

BURG: I see.



HOFFMAN: Then the Air Force people would--or, then, the Army Air Force people, came.

BURG: In some instances, obviously, the pilot, co-pilot, and crew chief introduced themselves to the people in the stick. Now, not always, I guess, did they do that, but in some instances they did. Do you remember them doing it with your group?

HOFFMAN: I think, probably, what I remember is that they--well, we would just sort of gather around and the pilot would say that he was the pilot, and this is the co-pilot, this is his crew chief--some of the amenities. Then he would tell a little bit about his briefing, what he thought the weather was when he got there, and this kind of thing. I thought it was a reasonably friendly way to try and make the whole plane as much of one unit as you could.

BURG: Yes, do you recall at this period of time whether that

little briefing gave you confidence? Were you confident in his ability? Did he come across as a knowledgeable man with whom to fly?

HOFFMAN: Well, yes, I felt he was going to--you're really looking ahead. Is he really going to do what he says he's going to do? Hold to the course, no evasive action, this kind of stuff.

BURG: Slow that aircraft down, so you can get out of it safely.

HOFFMAN: This kind of thing, this kind of thing.

BURG: Will the altitude be right?

HOFFMAN: Will he really do this when he gets over the drop zone?

BURG: Because, in your case, he did not!



HOFFMAN: All I know--I just know we were going pretty fast!  
[Laughter]

BURG: And [Laughter] he missed! He didn't put you anywhere near that drop zone, except by comparison with the other people



in the serial, who got dropped--well, I just--at a rough guess, I'm going to say some of the drop that should have gone into your drop zone, went thirty kilometers away from where you yourself landed.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Well, in some cases, I suppose this drop zone was in pretty good shape.

BURG: Yes, it was.



HOFFMAN: Sometimes the jump master said, "No, I'm going to hold", because of the flak, the fire on the drop zone. He could see the tracers. He just went on and hit it two, three fields away. Their guns are in place; they can't move them that fast. So, sometimes it was the jump master who made this decision to let the green light stay on a little while longer.

BURG: Yes, yes. Your drop zone, I think it was D Z D-for dog, but I'll check that and we'll put it into the interview correctly. As we look at the map, one does get the impression, coming in from the west, that your particular serial--although some of it did drop right on the zone, absolutely on the zone--it looks as though some of the aircraft, seeing the ground fire, bore off

to the southeast and dropped south of Carentan, and that your group of planes tended to bear off a bit to the northeast, and dropped early! But, you have that meeting. What time, do you remember, did they put you in the aircraft?

HOFFMAN: I'm guessing, but I would say around ten o'clock. Because we're going to fly for awhile.

BURG: I think your guess is probably pretty accurate. Ten-thirty is a time that we often encounter, too, so--

HOFFMAN: I would accept that. Yes. Because we're going to fly. Then, this had been done so many times before; every night the troop carriers took off and flew. And the gliders. The tow ships and the gliders, two gliders, would take off and would fly. They would fly all over England and they would sometimes sweep out to sea. And just to confuse the issue. All during May--

BURG: Right.

HOFFMAN: And so--but, anyway, we got to fly for some period of time. First to rendezvous. And then, to start in across the



Channel.

BURG: Where were you seated in the aircraft? Just in general terms. Up in the bow? Aft in the aircraft? Or if you remember, what number were you to jump?

HOFFMAN: I was about third or fourth, I think. So that would have put me about five or six seats down from the door on, as you're looking, it'd be on the left hand side. Then you'd be on right hand side when you get up to jump, because you're going to go towards the back, but--

BURG: Yes--

HOFFMAN: You'd be on the left hand side.

BURG: You entered the aircraft, turned towards the pilot's cockpit, and you're on the left hand side, about the fifth seat, perhaps.

HOFFMAN: Five--Four or five seats down.



BURG: Was the door on that aircraft taken off the aircraft, or was it shut in flight?



HOFFMAN: Now I believe for the Normandy jump the doors were off.

BURG: Often they were.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: And from your position, you could not see out that door very easily. You'd have to lean way forward and turn your head to the right to try and see anything out the door.

HOFFMAN: Well, you know, you weren't tied to the seat. You could hold on to the static--you could hold onto that wire that was going through. And you had good chance; everybody was up having a look, you know.

BURG: From time to time people would--



HOFFMAN: From time to time. Whenever something was exciting, or something to cheer about. When the coasts came--when you left the English coast--but when the French coast was starting to come into view, everybody wanted to have a look at that. But you could look out the little gunport windows. But one of the



biggest thrills was to know that the fighters--

[Interruption (Side 2)]

BURG: Sorry for the interruption. You could see the fighter aircraft, then?

HOFFMAN: You could see the fighters. You were told they would accompany. But when you looked out, then you saw puffy clouds, and you saw the ocean, of course. Then you saw the coast of France coming up, but you also saw the--I guess they were Lightnings, and so forth--but, anyway, you saw the fighter aircraft sweeping in.

BURG: Above you and below you.



HOFFMAN: Well, we pretty well knew that they were above us, but it was kind of nice to see them coming in below you, too. I don't know where they were going at that point.

BURG: Right. On that flight, particularly since you're headed out southwest from the English coast, you're going to run out to sea from Cherbourg--did you see any of the invasion armada

beneath you?

HOFFMAN: I don't remember. No, and I think it probably was deliberate, in that we would have gone out the southwest corner of England. In fact, we may have rendezvoused, moved out west, and then started back southwest and made the sweep.

BURG: Some men saw them.

HOFFMAN: Yes. They could.



BURG: Some aircraft went over parts of the fleet as it was assembling, but you didn't.

HOFFMAN: Well, they were probably down there, and somebody probably yelled, "Lord, look at how many!" And this kind of thing. I'd have to go back and see if I can find a note on that.

BURG: But it isn't in your recollection, now, that you saw them?

HOFFMAN: No. No.

BURG: Now, you went out to the Channel Islands and you turned toward the southeast when you were northwest of Guernsey. And

you flew past Guernsey and Jersey, headed for the Cotentin Peninsula and coming onto our map, here.

HOFFMAN: That's right. From the west.



BURG: So you saw the coast coming up; the weather was clear at that point?

HOFFMAN: Well, there were puffy clouds and we seemed to be probably five, six hundred feet above them. You could see the coastline quite clearly.

BURG: Some of the reports indicate that just about the time they hit the coast the cloud cover did thicken up and many aircraft flew into clouds.

HOFFMAN: As you flew over more of the land mass the cloud did get thicker. But at that point it may have just been a break in the clouds where you could look down through.

BURG: Alright, let me ask one more question before we break for a cup of coffee. Was there any sickness in your aircraft thus far on that flight?

HOFFMAN: No. I do not remember any air sickness in that particular aircraft. But they were all pretty seaworthy guys.

BURG: Did you yourself take any Dramamine or air sickness pills?

HOFFMAN: No. I took nothing. I hardly would take an aspirin, unless I was desperately put to it; and then it worked, if I had to have it, but I did not.

BURG: Who would have handed those out? Would they have been handed out as you waited to board?

HOFFMAN: Ordinarily you'd have at least one medic around, and the jump master would indicate that he had somebody he thought might want to use the Dramamine. But that would have just been a measure that was taken plane-side. But if you had some history of having trouble with air sickness, you probably would already have your Dramamine as a regular part of your kit. I don't think anybody would worry about that.

BURG: So you weren't aware, or you don't recall now, anyone taking it plane side, although they may have taken it in the camp before they went out.





HOFFMAN: Most fellows who had used Dramamine to counter sea sickness or air sickness would have taken it, I think, prior to going to plane-side.

BURG: It seems to me that's the way it is usually taken. You take it in advance, some time in advance.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Because it has to have a little time to work, as I understand it. I did not take any.

BURG: As you know, I'm raising the issue because we have many reports, from varying sources who were there on that night, that numbers of men attributed their--not just drowsiness--their ability to simply fall asleep on their feet--after they got on the ground to the fact that they had taken air sickness medicine. They describe it in various names but Dramamine is one of the names that is used.

HOFFMAN: Well, that may be. Then, of course, you were tired. You had worked hard; you hadn't had a great amount of sleep. You're not going to sleep prior to that thing.

BURG: Yes. You didn't get any sleep the night of the fourth or fifth.



HOFFMAN: And it was on again, off again, on again, off again.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: You were tired. Those bundles are heavy. There were plenty of work crews, and this kind of thing. Plus the fact that, you know, psychologically, the human body protects itself by going to sleep. And if it's bad, and you get an opportunity to stop, I would say that the guy could fall asleep. And that's up to his buddy, and his squad or platoon leader, to make sure that he doesn't stay there, seems to me.

BURG: Yes. Well we could probably figure that the previous night of 4 / 5 June had been a strain, work details on that day, and then again on the 5th. And loading up, and the strain and the tension, lack of sleep; probably, the absolute relief of, "My God, I got out of that plane! I'm alive, I'm on the ground!"

HOFFMAN: "I'm on the ground!"

BURG: And, any of those men who took the Dramamine to be sure they weren't airsick, were adding that drowsiness on top of fatigue.



HOFFMAN: And what if--here's a guy who doesn't understand, really, Dramamine.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: Maybe he's used to aspirin. So he's already taken some back in the camp; maybe he took some on the plane. He's got, maybe he got too much. But I do not remember any of our people having any problem with it. There were quite a few people who were not blessed and would be either sea or air sick. Some of them would get car sick. They knew this and they had this as part of their kit. They would have Dramamine but they knew how to take it.

BURG: Buy anyway, in your aircraft, as you come into those clouds and start to cross the Peninsula on the last leg of the trip, no air sickness.

HOFFMAN: No, not to my knowledge.

[Interruption]

BURG: Okay, as you came in--coming out of the west--you were





in clouds for a time, then I think you break out of the clouds and at that point certainly the pilot, co-pilot, and maybe some of you in the aircraft, could see ground fire. You're even receiving ground fire out here on the west side of the peninsula. How were things in your aircraft?

HOFFMAN: Of course, as you came across the coast you saw flak and this kind of thing; however, I don't think it was-- it may have been put up at us. It was probably up for the-- trying to get the fighters. But, nevertheless, that didn't bother. But it was as you began to get inland, then you began to get the tracer stuff. The .50 caliber, the 20 millimeter. Tracers everywhere! I think I said, "My travel agent scheduled me into France and I slid down a stairway of tracer bullets! [Laughter] Tracers everywhere. You could hear the aircraft being hit. When it goes through the aluminum skin it has that distinct kind of a--almost a "thud, ping!" And you knew that it was real, that they really didn't want us in there. [Laughter] But tracers everywhere. And the interesting thing was, at least in my recollection, they were beautifully organized on certain on the drop zones with their fifty calibers. And they color-keyed--





if I'm not mistaken about this--they color-keyed their--I think they were probably firing them in batteries of fifty calibers. Because control was a control, not only of units, but a control of sight in which they could see their machine gun--you know, you fire a machine gun out and when it hits the ground it will give a long elliptical. And when you traverse, what you're doing is laying down long elliptical. When you turn--.

BURG: The beaten zone where the bullets are falling is in that shape.

HOFFMAN: Yes. That's right. Caused by the vibration of the gun. When you turn that up--say you've got a battery of four, five, six guns, so forth--and when you turn that up, you're still going to get a spread of that beaten zone, even if you're firing in the air.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: Say this map is the drop zone. In the four corners, he was traversing in to the center and back out again, using



his fire to come through. And so when it met in the center, you had a cone of four streams of tracers coming up. That sticks in my mind. That was over flown. Nobody went--as far as I know, nobody went into that one. But they were sure--. And it seems to me that there were colors--white and a kind of a red, maybe a pink. But the tracer types were of colors. Now that might have been due to smoke or something else but, nevertheless--.

BURG: Your impression though, coming in and seeing that, was that these were deliberately--you would get the impression--

HOFFMAN: So they could keep track. It would seem to me that they were keeping track of the way their machine guns, fifty calibers, were firing by having different colored tracer bullets. And I think this would be entirely possible and a little more--

BURG: Now there was one drop zone--or what you assumed to be a drop zone--that was really blanketed in that way, with converging--

HOFFMAN: I'm assuming that they had a good many of them, but the



one that sticks in my mind is the fact that whoever was controlling this thing--of course, they're not going to be shooting across the drop zone. If they've got people on the other sides, they're not going to--. But what they were doing was moving the guns so that it came to a point about in the middle of the drop zone and then they were going back. And traversing up and down.

BURG: Yes. What we'd have to assume, Ray, is that for purposes of anti-airborne attack, which they assumed would happen sooner or later, they had picked out certain fields that would be ideal dropping zones and had positioned guns in a place, then, where they could try to put an umbrella over that drop area and make it tough for anyone to come in.

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: Was your pilot, as you flew into the drop area, was he jinking around quite a bit with the aircraft? You were still seated?

HOFFMAN: Oh no, you were on your feet. You know, I wouldn't



know--

BURG: Yes. No way to know where--.

HOFFMAN: I could probably figure out how long it's going to take but I would say we were on our feet for a good fifteen minutes. Actually, you wanted to be on your feet. And the jump master wanted everybody up. We were up, hooked, equipment check, and ready; he hadn't given the "Stand in the door", but we were ready.

BURG: You didn't have a red light that soon, I assume.



HOFFMAN: Oh, I don't believe so. I don't believe so. And I'm sure that even after the green, he chose to delay to overpass another place because--. But if you're asking, "Does the pilot take evasive action?", I don't think our pilot did, although it was certainly bumpy from the weather, the wind, and so forth. But I don't think he slowed it down very much. I think he took his evasive action after we had cleared the aircraft, and that was--. There may have been some evasive action but he really couldn't do very much. If you're flying along in a formation, you're not going to make very many evasive moves



at that point.

BURG: Yes. Do you recall looking out of the aircraft and seeing other aircraft near you?

HOFFMAN: Yes, you could see. You could see them.



BURG: Yes. So this outfit you were with were still in some kind of formation. It looks like it, because of--

HOFFMAN: I think we were in a reasonable formation. I don't think we were as tight as we were in the training things, but you couldn't expect that.

BURG: Then after passing through the clouds and breaking out in the clear near the drop zone, and then hitting all of the flak, the tracer coming up, it looks as though that serial of aircraft probably was broken up. But it looks as though at least seven aircraft were fairly closely grouped up when you were out. Did your jump master delay after getting the green light?

HOFFMAN: Yes, I saw the light go on, but he waved the crew

chief off. And, of course, the crew chief is working for the pilot. And he waved him off; then he went.

BURG: Your impression was that the jump master delayed because of fire coming up. I wonder if he saw that water?

HOFFMAN: Well, he may have done that, too, but, you know, there were tracers, you know, in all kinds of spots. He may have. He may have decided that he didn't want that water.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: But, in any event, he did the same thing that I think anybody would have done. He was paying attention to the light but he was also looking on the ground. And you learned to do this in your training because--even your early training--what we were doing in Alabama was jumping along the Chattahoochee River. And you don't want to mistake the Chattahoochee River for the drop zone, and you don't want to mistake the concrete airport landing strip for the Chattahoochee River. You want to come in between them. So if the position of the plane was wrong or if the green light, because of weather or something else, had come on too soon, you could have



dropped the back end of the stick in the Chattahoochee River or put them on the concrete. So it was not unusual for jump masters to use their brains, as well as being aware of the light.

BURG: And the question that we can't ask him, of course, is-- there'd be so much noise in the aircraft, I imagine you would not have heard him--

HOFFMAN: Noise.



BURG: --if he said anything to the crew chief. The jump master must have known--the jump master is experienced--he must have known that the aircraft hadn't slowed down.

HOFFMAN: Yes. There was nothing that he could do about that.

BURG: Nothing he could do. He's got no communication.

HOFFMAN: He could yell at that crew chief all he wanted, but the crew chief isn't going to influence the pilot at this point, and there may have been a reason he didn't slow down. He may have been, and undoubtedly was, a plane on his tail.



BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: But, you see, if there was somebody behind him they would be flying at a slightly higher altitude. And if he slowed down, you'd be sawing the stick directly underneath the next batch. And there's so many planes. But, our pilot, as far as I could feel, did not take any of this kind of evasive action that threw you on your knees, as some of the men talked about.

BURG: Yes. Yes.

HOFFMAN: He probably was as jumpy as anyone, because of the tracers coming up, and you could feel the aircraft being hit by rounds. I think he did what he had to do. But I'm sure he didn't slow it down. But on the other hand, we still had wind. We still had wind and it was still bad weather.

BURG: Yes.



HOFFMAN: I mean, the whole thing was a feat of will to come off, because we still had bad weather for this thing. Wind and rain.

BURG: So you went out. About the fifth or the sixth man out of the plane.

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: Any incident in getting out the door? I mean, nothing slowed you down, you had no bundles--

HOFFMAN: I had the rubber boat on the leg.

BURG: You had that on the leg.

HOFFMAN: But I had shuffled enough to--I had shuffled through the thing enough to know and I got out. I don't think body position was very good. I think what I [Laughter] did was to get out of the aircraft!

BURG: But when you kicked that bundle out into the slip stream, you must have found yourself whipped out there pretty fast.

HOFFMAN: Just as--faster than I had ever experienced in my life, and the opening shock, of course, was a beauty!

BURG: Did it tear that bundle loose?

HOFFMAN: No. No.

BURG: Did it injure your back?

HOFFMAN: No. My position must have been reasonably good in the



air, but it also could have been youth at that point. [Laughter]

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: Strong enough to--

BURG: You checked your chute to see that it had opened?

HOFFMAN: Am I opened? Of course by now, the count and everything else is absolutely automatic. Then you're in the air, and interestingly enough, there is--you know, you hear fire, you see tracers, and so forth--but you know you're going down in a place where there isn't any. So the jump master made the right count. And he may have only been playing with four or five seconds!

BURG: But the first impression you have--when the chute's opening, you're free to look, and your right leg is still attached to your body along with that bundle; you looked around, you could hear small arms fire, machine gun fire--

HOFFMAN: And see tracers.

BURG: --flak. You could hear the aircraft.



HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. You could hear the aircraft going over and another is coming.

BURG: Yes. But you could look down and where you were going to land, there wasn't tracer coming up.

HOFFMAN: There wasn't any obvious--that's right, no tracers coming up--but there wasn't any obvious fire or movement. Now we're getting into about, I suppose, it's twelve thirty; it's dark. But as you--it's interesting that you can see the ground from above at night. In a kind of a--half way able to make out shapes and so forth. But there didn't seem to be any activity on the drop zone we were going into.

BURG: Could you see water from the air?



HOFFMAN: Yes, you could--well, you could see--I suppose what I thought was, "Well, now that's kind of swampy." You could see something. But you could also hear people. Zush! And you hoped that the place that you were headed for was a little more solid.

BURG: You mean "Zush!," the noise of somebody going into water?



HOFFMAN: Of the water, yes. Of a jumper going in to a kind of a marshy--

BURG: How high were you, by the way? Did you make an estimate when you made that look around? Were you higher than you thought you ought to be? Were you lower than you expected to be? Or is your recollection that you had been dropped at a reasonable altitude? Another way to figure it is, how long were you hanging in that chute in the air?

HOFFMAN: That's just what I'm trying to do. I would say that we were higher than we would normally be, which may have been good because I think the wind moved us far enough so that we got up into pasture land, instead of landing in the sort of marsh, or in the irrigation ditch for that matter. But we got in the pasture land.

BURG: Was the wind out of the south, by and large? Or southwest?

HOFFMAN: Maybe southwest. The movement--

BURG: Because it would look as though, from the position where we have those headquarters aircraft on the map, that to avoid landing in a swampy area that wind would have had to shove you





from the southwest up this way. And it did. You did not land in water; you hit in pasture.

HOFFMAN: Right on the pasture along here.

BURG: Do you remember how long you were dangling? Long enough so that you figure your jump was made from a higher than usual--

HOFFMAN: Yes. Long enough to say to yourself, "You're really in the air too long for this kind of operation." But, nevertheless, you finally realize you're going to go in to some solid pasture land, and you're not too well-dressed for water.

BURG: Did you see anyone in the air, anyone else's stick?

HOFFMAN: You see other jumpers. Yes, you could see other jumpers in the stick.

BURG: Did you talk to them or did you stay silent?



HOFFMAN: I think, I think we were well enough disciplined not to say very much. You might say, "Are you all right?", something like that. But there wasn't a lot of talk in the air.

You just didn't want to alert anybody, if you didn't have to, until you were--because you knew you were going to be helpless from the time you hit the ground until you could get free from the chute, because you couldn't get to your weapon or anything else.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: You had to get free from that harness before you did anything.

BURG: Did you manage to drop that leg bundle onto its cord in plenty of time?

HOFFMAN: I got rid of that, I got rid of that thing so that it hit the ground before I did.

BURG: Were you oscillating in the air because of the wind, or--

HOFFMAN: No. Well, you finally damp that thing down. But it isn't the wind that's going to cause you to oscillate. The wind will make you move, but it's your body position that will



give you the--and the weight of course added to it--will give you that. But finally, you damp it down by using your risers. And so, primarily, it's the lateral movement of the--that the wind is pushing you along on. So I hit in a pasture maybe about ten or fifteen feet from a hedgerow. You know, all those pastures were bound by hedgerows.

BURG: And you had no problem. Your bundle hit, then you hit.

HOFFMAN: And I hit, I'll tell you! [Laughter]

BURG: Did you hit hard?

HOFFMAN: Oh, boy! Oh, boy!

BURG: In what position, Ray?

HOFFMAN: Backwards! [Laughter] You know I came in backwards, as much as I tried not to! Gah-donk! It was just awful! [Laughter] You would have gotten twenty laps and push-ups and everything else if you ever did that over here. There I was in the most important jump and I slam in backwards! But you're so happy to be on the ground. [Laughter]



BURG: Did your chute--

HOFFMAN: Roll over try to get the chute collapsed. Well, the way to do that is--without, you know, we didn't have these, they have snaps on them now. So you get the bottom of the risers and pull them in, so that you can collapse the chute this way: Make it lay down. Okay, it laid down. Roll over, and you're trying to stay low in case anybody starts to shoot. Roll over now. Get out the knife. Stick it in the ground. You know where that is, in case you can't get everything unbuckled, and you had to quarter turn--I'm sorry, we didn't have the quarter turn. Snap. You see, your leg straps come up through, and your shoulder straps come down, today, and they go into a circular snap holder. And they all come together, and if you punched that in and turn it a quarter turn, all of the things will unbuckle.

BURG: Yes.



HOFFMAN: Okay. We had D rings, so you had to undo each one of them, and if you couldn't undo them, you cut them. We had the snap one to go into Holland though. We didn't for the Normandy.



I guess they didn't have enough of them. But I can't get that D ring unhooked from everything! [Laughter]

BURG: You've got a strap run through sort of a double D ring. Is that how it worked?

HOFFMAN: Let's see. You put your harness on; okay, you bring your leg straps up and they hook. Yes, there are two for your leg straps and two for your shoulder straps. And they're all D rings. So you have one here, one here, and then down here. Well, that's your--about where your hips are.

BURG: You've got two up there on the chest--

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: --two more down at the hip level.

HOFFMAN: Best I can think of. Anyway, you're trying to get these things unhooked, you know.

BURG: They've already been cinched up.

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes.



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BURG: Something fierce! So--

HOFFMAN: You want them just as tight as you can get them.  
But, here I am! The chute is not waving in the wind, so I  
don't worry about somebody being attracted by--



INTERVIEW WITH  
Col. Raymond Hoffman

by

Dr. Maclyn Burg, Head  
Eisenhower Oral History Project

on

August 25th, 1978

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

This interview is being taped with Colonel Raymond Hoffman in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas, on August 25th, 1978. Present for the interview are Col. Hoffman, and Dr. Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff.

DR. BURG: Now, when we broke off last Friday, I missed my opportunity. I didn't realize the tape had run out. So what I'd like to have you do is tell me again. We've got you flat on your back. Despite all your training, you made the worst possible landing you could have. You came in backwards. You took out the knife strapped to your boot. You stabbed it in the ground. And you told me that you then heard, on your side of the hedge row, behind your back, footsteps approaching you.

HOFFMAN: Over my head. That is coming toward me. And, of course, you had the helmet on. You're trying to look, but the helmet's keeping some of your top vision away. And you can hear these feet [sound of stomping feet] and they're coming, and they're coming. And [Laughter] the--today, the parachutist simply has to pop into his chest and make a quarter turn and his straps will fall away. But in those days they were hooked in, with very very strong D rings. You're trying to get those things out; if you can't get them out then you try to cut yourself loose. Well, in the course of trying to screw my head around to





see what it was that was coming, I was, in the dark, getting further and further away from that knife I had stuck in the ground. And the footsteps, they sound just the way footsteps sound in the dark. And I thought, "Well, boy. Here I am", you know, "five minutes I'm on the ground and I'm about to get it, and here I'm flat on my back. I've got to do something here. I got to roll--" I can't get to my weapon and now I begin to look for the knife and I can't find the knife! The best thing I can do is to screw my head up as far as I can and try to look over the helmet, the front of the helmet. And by this time the footsteps have stopped, and I am looking up into the eyes of a big brown cow!

BURG: [Laughter] "A bossy cow," as you said.

HOFFMAN: Big old bossy cow. I'll tell you--whew!

BURG: And, of course, it would have sounded like two people coming up on you, too! [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: Right. It was just chump, chump, chump, chump, chump, chump. And moving at a rate that you didn't identify with a simple, walking human being. These "people" were kind of--



they looked like they knew someone was there and they were coming. And she did. [Laughter] She was just saying, "I'm going to have a look."

BURG: Your sigh of relief; you're lucky that that didn't give you away to nearby Germans!

HOFFMAN: Boy, I tell you. I finally got free from the--

BURG: About that time you were able to unclip--

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: --from the D rings and crawl out of your harness. And you hid your parachute and packs and everything underneath the hedge row? Shoved them in there?

HOFFMAN: What you usually did was to cut that chute loose, the silk, loose from the harness. That enabled you to roll it up into a little tighter ball. Now I remember hiding that thing in, or under, it seemed to me, a wood pile. Then, I must have carried it along with me or something. Perhaps it was simply brushwood at the side of a hedge row, or at the end of a hedge row. That

was about the size of it, anyway.

BURG: I remember that the instructions they gave all of you was that during the hours of darkness, they suggested that you rely on your knives or on hand grenades. Neither one of them gives away the position of the person who used them. There's no noise from one. There's no muzzle flash from the other. I remarked, in fact, you'd lost your knife. You never did find the knife.

HOFFMAN: No. Never found that nife.



BURG: You suggested to me that either somebody got a souvenir or the French farmer plowed it in. Or it's still there, stuck in the ground somewhere. But you had removed your knife from circulation. [Laughter] I assume that you probably had a hand grenade ready for use, but what you did was to uncase your carbine.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Because you figured that the grenade was--in the dark, you weren't about to throw it.



HOFFMAN: No.

BURG: For fear of who you'd be throwing it at.

HOFFMAN: It didn't seem to me that that kind of use of the grenade was called for, unless you knew what you were after. And at that point, we were more interested in collecting people than uh,--so I decided not to use it. Not to use the grenade.

BURG: So, you were starting out in the approved fashion. We had talked about the fact that you had been fifth or sixth one out the door, so you're about the fifth or sixth one on the ground. The rest of the stick, presumably, is ahead of you to the northeast, roughly, as a compass direction. Judging from how your plane was probably coming in when it dropped you, they're out ahead of you to the east or northeast. So you were starting down the hedge row to find them. You had your cricket, which, for a few times, you used.

HOFFMAN: Right.



BURG: Then you stopped using it. You went to the password. Let me ask you why you quit using that cricket?



HOFFMAN: Well, the Germans are no dummies. They soon caught on to the fact that these crickets were being used. And they only had to listen in the dark to figure out what the sign and the challenge was.

BURG: You remarked, I believe, that these crickets had been chosen for use simply because there were no crickets in France that sounded remotely like that. And when you say the Germans were no dummies, you figured they also knew darn well there weren't any crickets like that in France! [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: The other thing was that part of the stick would land on one side of the hedge row and the other part of the stick would land on the other part of the hedge row. And those hedge rows were tough to get through, so you weren't quite sure what your answer--coming across there, coming across the hedge row--what that was.

BURG: The hedges often stood, I believe, on low banks of earth, maybe four feet high, and in the hedge row there would not only be brushy stuff, but very tough, rather tall growth, and all that pretty much interlocked.



HOFFMAN: Over the years those roots made a mound inside of which--or through, up through--everything was growing. But the mound, really, was just heavy roots. Now, very often it was doubled and there was a path or a road in between.

BURG: I see.

HOFFMAN: So you were not sure.



BURG: One other thing that I would like to have you comment on again. We were talking about this after the last interview. We've both seen the movie "The Longest Day", in which, in the sequences on the parachute drops, much is made of the fact that the cricket sounded like the bolt on a German Mauser rifle when it was being operated. But you found that a little incredible, because you indicated to me that the cricket sound was a very quick: "Click, click!" And the response was: "Click, click! Click, click!"

HOFFMAN: Sure, and it was a percussion sound. That is, it, yes--quick, I guess, would be the best way. And it just doesn't seem to be possible that you would confuse that with the sliding of a bolt, no matter how fast you slid the thing.

BURG: Because the bolt does have to travel quite a distance.

HOFFMAN: Yes. You'd get at least two sounds from that bolt coming back. You might get even the third sound of the clip, the top of the clip.

BURG: Yes, there's the unlocking sound as the bolt is raised and the bolt handle hits metal. Then there's the sound of metal sliding. Then its got to slide again, and as it picks up the cartridge off the top of the magazine follower, there's another kind of sound. The sound of the round going into the breech, and the sound of the bolt locking down again. You point was that it--

HOFFMAN: Yes. I saw that in "Longest Day" and I just wondered, wondered why he put it in there, but perhaps somebody told [Cornelius] Ryan that but--

BURG: Yes, somebody may have thought that.

HOFFMAN: And, you know, by that time, who would be using the crickets? Because he was talking about the airborne thing. But I suppose perhaps he talked to someone but I do not identify





that thing with--nor do you identify it with a cricket. [Laughter]  
Really, that thing doesn't sound like a cricket! [Laughter]

BURG: Yes, when you worked it, it didn't really sound like a cricket anyway. [Laughter] It didn't sound like a Mauser bolt and it didn't sound like a cricket! So you went to the passwords, "Flash"- "Thunder".

HOFFMAN: My own feeling was that they--here they picked a very well known thing. Because every kid who ever got a "Cracker Jack", got a cricket in a "Cracker Jack". He knew what that sound was. He knew that was an American sound!

BURG: Yes. That could very well be. Even though these crickets, as you pointed out--it may be in the other interview--are little brass boxes. They look nothing like the metal insect-shaped crickets that we got as toys.

HOFFMAN: That's right. The sound is the same, because you had a piece of watch spring that had been stamped with a little circle, so you'd get that click.

BURG: Right.





HOFFMAN: The bottom portion was a piece of spring metal, the same as they'd used to make all of these things from.

BURG: Yes. Now, one other thing I want to establish before we move into what happened to you next. We remarked on this, and I don't think it got into the tape. When you had shooed off that cow, whose attentions were unwelcome to you at that moment, your chute's tucked away, you've got a hedgerow about ten or fifteen feet away from you, and you look around and there is nothing in sight on which you can take a bearing. There's no convenient church steeple in view, no structure in view. So, in effect, you're dumped inside a hedgerow-lined pasture with no real idea of where the heck you are, or whether you've hit near the drop zone, or anything. You start out then to find the rest of the stick. Did you encounter anybody?

HOFFMAN: Yes. I went along and found, both sides of the hedgerow, there were people. But what we did was to keep moving until we came to the edge of the hedgerow which would-

BURG: Edge of it, or the end of it?



HOFFMAN: I mean the end of the hedgerow.

BURG: You picked up responses on the other side of the hedgerow, so you all start moving the same direction.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Everybody was moving. It would seem to me that everybody at that point was sort of moving east, but with a feeling that eventually we were going to have to go south, south east if we were going to get to St. Come-du-Mont. And if, as we have, or you have, figured out, we were in this area, we had to see whether we could get around all this water here.

BURG: You had seen that, as I recall, from the air. So we can assume that as you got people you didn't head north, which would have brought you onto that road that leads to Chef-du-Pont.

HOFFMAN: No.

BURG: It's a road that runs east and west, but--

HOFFMAN: You could get your--you pretty well knew your north and your south directions--

BURG: Did you?



HOFFMAN: --your east, you could get those.

BURG: Could you see enough of the stars, for example, or were you carrying a lensatic compass?

HOFFMAN: Well, of course we had compasses, and--just trying to figure. Uhh-h! So long ago! I think we worked til we came to the end of the hedgerow. Gathered together, we probably had ten or twelve people by that time.

BURG: Roughly, how long would you suppose that took, by the time you got to the edge of the hedgerow and you're all face to face?

HOFFMAN: I wouldn't say very long, maybe half an hour or so.

BURG: Some of these men you were meeting on your side of the hedgerow?

HOFFMAN: Yes, others were on the other side.

BURG: These were men from your stick?

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: I mean, they were your men, you knew them.

HOFFMAN: Yes, yes.

BURG: Were you the ranking officer? Or, in fact, the only officer in that group?

HOFFMAN: At that point, I guess I was. But it seems to me that we picked up one of the captains. And I just don't know whether it was Phillips or one of the others.

BURG: Would this have been a captain from division headquarters?

HOFFMAN: No, it would have been from regimental headquarters.

BURG: I mean from regimental headquarters.

HOFFMAN: Yes. But, no, it would have--it seems to me it would have been from the 2nd Battalion, because that's who we went in with.

BURG: No, I think you went in with--

HOFFMAN: With the 1st?





BURG: You went in with the 1st.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Wish I knew that for sure, you know?

BURG: Yes. Well I do too.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: But we only have headquarters aircraft--Headquarters the 501st, as you recall, was split in two by Johnson--we either have headquarters aircraft dropping their sticks right on Drop Zone D for dog, or we've got four headquarters aircraft up here. [Ed. note: slightly south of the Chef-du-Pont-Ste. Marie-du-Mont road]

HOFFMAN: Yes--



BURG: And it's--

HOFFMAN: Well, I'm assuming--

BURG: Yes, and I don't see how we can put you down there. [Ed. note: on Drop Zone D]

HOFFMAN: We're looking for this road.

BURG: Right. Right, that--

HOFFMAN: I remember.

BURG: --that main road that leads out to Carentan and runs up through Ste. Mere-Eglise and up to Cherbourg. And evidently you were headed, roughly, for it.

HOFFMAN: Yes, yes.



Burg: Now when you found that captain, does he then sort of take over command of this small group of a dozen or so of you?

HOFFMAN: Yes. It's not a taking over. You know, he's there, and you're there, but you're the only group that's there, so the senior man takes the command and you begin to move. And it wouldn't have mattered if it was you know, a corporal, or a platoon sergeant, or anyone else.

BURG: And presumably, he had some kind of mission to accomplish. You have something to accomplish. Were you still carrying the rubber raft?

HOFFMAN: No.

BURG: You left that.

HOFFMAN: Let's see. No, we have the raft and we have the radio, now broken. [Laughter]

BURG: Usually, yes!

HOFFMAN: Now smashed! [Laughter] Oh, boy. I think we probably abandoned that rubber raft down here toward Houeville, or somewhere, when it became obvious that we weren't going to need it for deep water, you know.

BURG: Yes. The reason I ask the question about the captain, phrasing it that he probably had his mission and you had yours, was that most of the men there were your men, who were--you and they had been tapped for a particular job; that's why you had the rubber life raft. The captain presumably has not found any, or few, of his men, yet, he has a task. I wondered, whose task at that point prevailed? Could the captain, who outranked you but has none of his men there, put you to work on his task?

HOFFMAN: Well, I don't--



BURG: Did he do that?

HOFFMAN: He didn't do it. And I'm sure he wouldn't have. But, as the situation became--it became obvious in the movement. We knew that all of our objectives lay on the southern flank of St. Come-du-Mont. The idea was to get to St. Come-du-Mont or none of us were going to do a thing. And whatever high ground was above St. Come-du-Mont, that was where I was going. And, of course, he had--if he's going to do anything, he's going to go into this area, too.

BURG: Right, I see. So it wouldn't make any difference.

HOFFMAN: So we're moving toward St. Come-du-Mont.

BURG: Let me ask you this. Did you come far enough to the east or northeast to hit the Carentan-Ste. Mere-Eglise highway? Or did you turn south before you got there?

HOFFMAN: I believe we stayed off that thing and used it simply as a marker for the flank.

BURG: A marker on your left flank.





HOFFMAN: And moved down through this way, because [Laughter] I can remember all the water and going through the irrigation ditches.

BURG: I remember you telling me about that. And our map, the one that Colonel Hoffman and I are working with, shows very roughly where the inundated areas were. And from his drop point moving to the east or slightly northeast, there are drainage ditches shown on the map. And as they turn south to get down to St. Come-du-Mont, they're going to have to pass through swampy, flooded areas, because there's very little room between the road and the inundated areas west of the road. And I remember you saying it seemed to you that a good part of that night, you were chest deep in water. [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: Chest deep, yes, and no way to get across those irrigation ditches. You just had to walk on through them.

BURG: Yes. Your rubber raft really was not of any use in that kind of thing.

HOFFMAN: They were only--I don't know--I think at the most, the widest one would have been, maybe, ten feet across, but



they were mostly four or five feet. But deep!

BURG: And you gave that raft the deep six near Houesville.

HOFFMAN: Just left it where I knew it'd get picked up later on. Because the quartermaster people would have been along later on. Scrounging, picking up, and --

BURG: They, and the French farmers of the area. [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: The raft really was to use on the river to come across the Douve. And that is why, I believe, that probably one of the drop zones was to be on this side. It wouldn't have been near Carentan. Carentan's too big a town.

BURG: Oh, yes. Right.

HOFFMAN: You know, this is one of the big mistakes that the British made. You can't take Arnhem by putting an airborne unit in. That's a big industrial city and you don't want to come that close to it.

BURG: Well, one of the things about that raft. If we look at the area of the Douve, just to the north and slightly to the



west of Carentan, you may recall that the air reconnaissance photos, and everything, showed that the Douve area was flooded. And you were to grab bridges on that Carentan-Ste. Mere-Eglise road. Four of them, I think!

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: And that area was flooded. So there might be the need for a rubber life raft if the Germans had blown any of those bridges. If they hadn't, you would have grabbed them.

HOFFMAN: I have an idea that we're looking at drop zones that would have been in this area.

BURG: Over to the west.

HOFFMAN: The overflight carried us here. Somewhere in Appeville, maybe.

[Interruption]



But anyway I think, I think the area, Appeville, somewhere in here, probably was one of the original drop zones. But I don't have any of those maps, you know.

BURG: That was cancelled out, you mean?

HOFFMAN: Well, we may have overflown it. That may have been where all of the tracers were.

BURG: I rather doubt that.

HOFFMAN: The area around here.

BURG: Let's take a break and take a look at the official maps.

HOFFMAN: Alright.

[Interruption]



BURG: Well, as we found out in looking at Cross-Channel Attack, [U.S. Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations] there were drop zones west of the Merderet, but none south of the Douve near Appeville. These western drop zones were for the 82nd Airborne Division, not for the 101st. Well, we've got you down here at Housville. What happened after that? You kept on heading down, paralleling the main highway, toward St. Come-du-Mont. Did you pick up anymore men on the way?



HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. Yes.

BURG: Did you get into any action during that trip?

HOFFMAN: Sporadic type of--no real engagements that I can remember. Let's see. Yes, until--it seems to me we arrived--let's see--somewhere in the vicinity of Housville. There was a farmhouse. It seem to me that this was a pretty good gathering place. We began collecting people around that farm, around that farmhouse. Probably arrived there an hour or so before dawn. [Ed. note: first light in Normandy on 6 June 1944 came at approximately 5:30 a.m.]

BURG: What size force are we talking about, including your own?

HOFFMAN: We're talking maybe 50-60 people. And near as I can remember--the thing I remember well, we had sporadic fire in and around that place. The thing I remember there--by that time, you're so hungry that--and it was farmhouse and a barn and so forth. And there was a milk can, you know, one of these metal milk cans.



BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: I put my canteen cup down in there and it was almost pure cream. [Laughter]

BURG: Oh, really?



HOFFMAN: I think I drank that whole canteen cup of pure cream. It was so--it was delicious! It was the best meal I had! [Laughter] You know, you weren't, you hadn't thought about eating, but--

BURG: You held up there at that point, at that farm.

HOFFMAN: Trying to use this as a kind of collecting point. Putting people out, bringing them back. And I'm just trying to think of who was in there. But I think the movement then was across over here to where Johnson and the rest were skirting, to the north of St. Come-du-Mont.

BURG: You crossed the main highway and then you crossed the highway running northeast.

HOFFMAN: Yes, I think so. We may have come straight across to

Angoville-au-Plain and made the hook-up in this area somewhere.

BURG: How's that spelled?

HOFFMAN: A-n-g-o-v-i-l-l-e au Plain. Yes. a-u P-l-a-i-n.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: Probably assembling in this area.

BURG: So you did not run into Ballard or Allen?



HOFFMAN: Allen was over in here and so was Ballard. This, yes, this is where the regiment started to get itself together.

BURG: But Johnson was not there. Johnson was further south. Johnson seems to have collected people and headed for la Barquette.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Because one of the things he's angry about is that neither Ballard or Allen, who are engaging now to the southwest, at les Droueries, I think.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: And I forget where Ballard was. Ballard was further north than Allen. Allen is the one who finally does go to join Johnson.

HOFFMAN: Ballard was pretty well engaged. This is, you know-- we're now talking daytime.

BURG: Yes. Dawn has come.

HOFFMAN: Yes, we're talking daytime.

BURG: Sure.



HOFFMAN: And I think Ballard was pretty well engaged around--

[Interruption]

BURG: We had been talking about the fact that Ballard was pretty heavily engaged up to the north and west. And you commented to me that at least one of the histories indicates that Johnson had communicated with Ballard, using an assistant S-2. You.

HOFFMAN: On the radio.

BURG: On the radio. And you remarked that it hadn't happened



that way. That Allen had actually sent you up personally to talk to Ballard.

HOFFMAN: That's right. It was pretty obvious, trying to get to him even, that he was so heavily engaged that he wasn't going to be able to disengage from it and move down to help Johnson.

BURG: And you'd been sent up there about mid-day on the 6th of June to make contact.

HOFFMAN: Yes, and Ballard told me to remain with him and not to return.

BURG: Had Allen tried to use your force, which in part --

HOFFMAN: Oh, it was absorbed immediately into the--

BURG: Yes. Just as regular infantry. No scouting.

HOFFMAN: That's what you do at that point. Everybody is part of the force.

BURG: There was no point in trying to do any S-2 work and so your own command, the scouting and patrolling group, was now



being used as basic riflemen by Allen.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: But he did latch onto you and gave you the order to personally go up and pass this message to Ballard.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Your--Allen's force was at that time engaged in a fire fight at les Droueries.

HOFFMAN: Somewhere in that area. He was using that farmhouse that I spoke of as a kind of a base. It had thick walls, and he used that for his command post, and put the security out all around it.

BURG: Now on your trip up to Ballard, did you yourself come under fire?

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: You had to make it as best you could. Did you encounter any other paratroopers who were trying to find--

HOFFMAN: No, by this time whatever forces were, at that point, in the area, were pretty well tied into either Allen's fight, or Johnson's fight, or Ballard's fight.

BURG: They'd gone to the sound of gunfire.

HOFFMAN: Yes. You knew something was happening, and you'd find somebody there that would be a part of some unit and then, eventually, you'd make your way to your own unit.

BURG: Let me ask you, at that stage in your own development as an infantryman, as well as an infantry officer, could you pretty readily distinguish between the sounds of our own fire--

HOFFMAN: Absolutely.

BURG: -- small arms fire, and German small arms?

HOFFMAN: In fact, you learned that that night.

BURG: Yes. Yes.

HOFFMAN: This is one of the reasons why souvenir weapons you know, that were picked up were not allowed to be fired in the rear areas. Because you then would be confused as to whether you had an attack on, or something else going. He was pretty insistent on that. Oh, any commander was. Yes, I think that in the dark--of course, you'd heard some of these sounds before, recorded, and you'd heard them fired in training. But that night you learned; I think you learned in order to at least not be responsible for your own, either death or wounding.





BURG: Yes. When you reported to Ballard, did you have any difficulty finding him in his perimeter?

HOFFMAN: Well, once you got to where any of his people were, of course you, then you were directed to the commander.

BURG: Do you remember what you said to him?

HOFFMAN: I smiled! [Laughter] I knew--I knew what was, I knew what was happening! [Laughter] I could hear what was going on the radio before I left. And I knew why Allen had sent me, and why he had sent an officer. And why he wouldn't do it that way on the radio.

BURG: So, what was the message you passed to Ballard?



HOFFMAN: That Colonel Johnson wanted him to break off his engagement and bring his force to assist him at la Barquette.

BURG: Do you remember what Ballard said in response?

HOFFMAN: [Laughter] He's a very fine Floridian! [Laughter] And he had some things to say, and then he laughed and he said, "I'll take care of this one." And, "That's not going to be possible."

BURG: His first words to you were in army speech?



HOFFMAN: Not really. A couple of one-syllable words and--

BURG: Did you keep your face straight?

HOFFMAN: --then he laughed. No, I was already smiling.

[Laughter] When I delivered the message, I was already smiling. He knew! He knew when he saw me! To see me crawl in there from-- and knowing that I had come from where I did. He knew what the message was going to be.

BURG: Yes.



HOFFMAN: But I don't know where one of these histories got this business about the junior officer, assistant S-2, giving this message over the--one delivers a message to a commander. One doesn't, you know, give any order or anything else. You just, you tell him what the message is.

BURG: Yes. And one of the things you object to is that, somehow, this account has been twisted around so that you're giving him an order over a radio, when you actually delivered an oral message to him, in person.

HOFFMAN: When I made my way the distance that I had to go to deliver that thing, as hot as it was, I felt that I had, in the first place, made it in there to give the message, but I also felt that that would be one devil of a message for some

junior officer to be giving to a battalion commander. And he knew. He knew when I came. He's a very fine man.

BURG: So he laughed and told you that it wouldn't be possible and then ordered you to stay with him and not to return.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Not to return. Later on there was a link-up between he and Allen's force and, after awhile, the whole thing came down this way. Clear into--

BURG: Right. Along the Douve and Merderet.



HOFFMAN: Yes, so the bridges were secured and so forth.

BURG: What did he assign you to do, having asked you to stay with him? Did he put you into his perimeter? How did he use you, Ballard, while he had you?

HOFFMAN: I think he used me right there among his--

[Interruption]

BURG: Yes, you were telling me how--

HOFFMAN: Yes, I think he used me as one of his young staff

officers at that point. He had a very fine 2, battalion 2. Wish I hadn't said that; I've forgotten his name. So he had no use for my services in place of his own 2. So I did what I could. And then sometimes it was hard enough to where you were out on the perimeter, too! [Laughter]

BURG: Yes. So, in some sense, you're carrying on whatever useful work there would be for you. And that might include bringing up ammunition, or directing some--

HOFFMAN: No. Usually, you would take some responsibility for a portion of the perimeter, even if it were where his radio was, and so forth. It could even be checking the messages, checking the map, this kind of thing. Whatever, at that point, was needed.

BURG: Yes. You had occasion to use that carbine of yours during this - -

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes.

BURG: - - activity. Were you satisfied with it as a weapon?





HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. I had no quarrel. I'd heard a lot of things about the carbine and so forth. But seems to me if you're in a close, fire-fight situation, it's a good weapon.

BURG: The German force that you were engaged with, were they equipped mainly with small arms of rifle and machine-pistol caliber, or were they using heavier weapons? Were they using light or heavy machine guns against you? Were they using mortars against you?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. They had some heavy mortars and they also had plenty of machine guns. Both the--what do you call them, light?--I guess both light and heavy. But they could lay down a pretty good batch of fire. You know, you've pinned what essentially was a battalion, down in the hedgerows when you've got that much fire going.

BURG: That's what they had or that's what you had? Approximately a battalion?

HOFFMAN: I would say that's what Ballard had. It may have been pieces and bits of everything else.





BURG: Probably a weak battalion--

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes.

BURG: - - made up of portions of commands.

HOFFMAN: Whatever pieces a battalion commander could put together the first day. You see, he was pretty fortunate in having a great many of his people in this area on the drop.

BURG: Yes. Is it your recollection that you made progress against this German command? That you advanced against them? Or was it a fairly static kind of fire fight? Or did they make advances against you?

HOFFMAN: No. As I recollect, there was no possibility of making any advance against them. It was a question of the fire being heavy enough to be pinned down, not being able to withdraw. That was the crux of the thing! The fire was so heavy, they were being pressed so hard that he could not withdraw. He'd withdraw and get his force destroyed. But he wasn't going to do that.

BURG: He found it impossible to disengage.



HOFFMAN: That's right, that's right.

BURG: And, on the other hand, I wonder if maybe the Germans felt that they, too, couldn't disengage? They're stuck in against a force of Ballard's size; they may have been in the same predicament.

HOFFMAN: They probably did.

BURG: They've got the flooded areas behind them, pretty much. Well, how long did this thing go on?

HOFFMAN: Most of that day. I think the disengagement came after dark. I think that was the first time that he was able to get a force in the la Barquette area that satisfied him.

BURG: Yes. Sent them down there.

HOFFMAN: I have no idea what the histories say, but it seems to me that that would have been the time when you could do it.

BURG: Did you go down to la Barquette then?

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: And rejoined Johnson.

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HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Or, rather, for the first time, you joined Johnson.

HOFFMAN: And Allen did, too. Because Allen was his 3. I believe that that's the first day. Because all the bridges, la Barquette, and le Port--I think we had these all tied up by night of the first day.

BURG: Including those causeway bridges?

HOFFMAN: I think so.

BURG: You think you had them then? I'm not sure whether they were secured by that night, or whether you were overlooking them by that night and investigated them early the morning of the seventh.

HOFFMAN: Well, that could be. But it seems to me that patrols were always out, and maybe we didn't have forces that could have held those causeways if there was a serious attack against them. But it seems to me we knew that at least elements have been to every one of them and knew, and were there, or in the vicinity.



BURG: I think that's probably right. Let me ask you this before I move onto something else I want to inquire about. During your time with Ballard, does anything now stick out in your mind as being unusual? Or funny? or touching, in that period of time from roughly mid-day until dark?

HOFFMAN: Well, I think the man's understanding of the situation, I think was--the way he handled it. A junior officer delivering such a message to him, known even to the junior officer to be absolutely impossible, because there was enough fire coming from everywhere to put him in his--and yet, Ballard was a man-- a quite unflappable person, I felt. He just handled the thing quite well, as he handled most everything.

[Interruption]

BURG: This was your first time in combat.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: And you've gotten over whatever fear or fright you might have had making the drop. You survived that and you were only threatened by a cow. Now you've been under fire; you've returned





fire. What is your recollection of your feelings about that, your first time in combat? Fear? How did it strike you?

HOFFMAN: Well, you of course have always have, I think, an amount of fear. A man who doesn't have any is probably going to be pretty dangerous. He won't know what he's doing. But you were confident. You had been through some very good training. You tried to absorb everything you could, so that it wouldn't be some stupid thing that you did that would cause your death, or your injury.

BURG: What would be a stupid thing, Ray?



HOFFMAN: Well, violating any of the principles that you'd been taught. If you were on patrol, you knew how to patrol. If the situation was such that it called for not exposing yourself at all so that the enemy would not know that you were there, and bring fire on you and the people with you, that you wouldn't make that kind of mistake.

BURG: Did you find yourself moving almost instinctively? That is, moving low and kind of recognizing when it was safe to move

low, and when you were going to have to crawl, and when you were going to have to fall flat.

HOFFMAN: You got so that you could read incoming and outgoing shells. You understood the sound, the difference, between incoming fire, be it rifle or any other, and you understood the sound that a bullet makes as it cracks over your head. You hear that crack, you know it's gone and above you. Yes, you pretty well knew whether you were--I suppose it was instinct. How to move, and not to take the short cut across the open space when you can move along the hedgerow, and move along the low ground, and this kind of thing.

BURG: Do you now, looking back on it, remember thinking that, whereas an awful lot of fire can be thrown in your direction, a good bit of it is going wild. It's going high; it's going off to the sides, and maybe you're safer then you have any reason to think you are.

HOFFMAN: Well, you know that they will use infantry fire and tactics much the same as you are using yourself. A lot of fire is laid down, not necessarily seeing anyone there.

BURG: Yes, right. Firing into an area to make everyone keep



their heads down.

HOFFMAN: So this had been part of the training.

BURG: You must have seen wounded men.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Did it bother you?

HOFFMAN: The first man I saw was a major--great, enormous, strapping man, and I believe he had a French name--laying along side a hedgerow. Someone had been there first, and he had been dead perhaps some hours, because someone had checked his dog tags. I suppose that that's when the realism of the war opened up. Here he was. And he was a big, magnificent body and, as I remember, a very, very jolly guy. But he was one of the earliest, I think, of the field grade officers killed. And as I say, somebody had opened his jacket, so that you could see this broad expanse of his chest and his dog tags laying on top. They must have checked his dog tags.

BURG: Yes, yes.





HOFFMAN: The second, and perhaps the most difficult, was at la Barquette, when an incoming--most of those farmhouses had stone walls around them and, of course, they were perfect places to be behind for your firing. But a mortar shell came in and exploded along the wall and killed a young sergeant's friend. Just laid the boy's head open, and that was just too much for his friend to take. He really went to pieces. That was the, almost the, final step in setting your mind to the reality of this thing. From then on you were pretty well off and running. But there were, you know, I saw other bodies there. These were the people you knew. But you saw both Americans and Germans along the hedgerows, and were responsible for some of them. But I think those two incidents, the one of seeing the major laying there, and then seeing the young sergeant go to pieces. He had to be evacuated. There's nothing quite that can match--you sometimes see it in in automobile accident--but there's nothing that can quite match half a head, and especially when these two boys were friends. When pieces of that sprayed all over the other fellow, and the other fellow was not injured at all. Except for psychically; psychically he was done. So





I think your training made you want to see--because you were young; because you were committed to the war--but you wanted to see whether you could match yourself out there, and whether you were going to fight or run.

BURG: I understand, yes.

HOFFMAN: You hoped you wouldn't run. It seemed to me it was no--even though you passed through these other things--it was no guarantee that the situation might not be so bad the next time that you would get defeated. But you always had your training behind you and you always had the almost instinctive things of how to handle yourself and how to run and how to walk and when to fall. And how to read terrain and this kind of thing.

BURG: When you got back down with Johnson's group after dark, did you encounter Johnson, have any conversation with him?

HOFFMAN: Well, no, you don't really, at my level, have any real conversations with Johnson.

BURG: I wondered if he had seen you, recognized you, said hello, or--



HOFFMAN: Oh, I would say, undoubtedly, he must have said--he always called me "Hoffman". Never, never "Lieutenant", or anything else. It was always "Hoffman". Oh, sure, there would have been that type of thing. But Colonel Johnson--and I have nothing against him; in fact, I think he's been miscast in some of these things--he always--he never really spoke. He always shouted! [Laughter] About everything. If it was, "Pass the butter", he always shouted. He was always intense! Everything was intense! In training, you know, line up the whole blessed regiment, and now we do our PT or we run! And we run cross country! And who's out front? He is! [Laughter] He is! And it didn't go well with you if you couldn't make the run, you know, this kind of thing. And that's the kind of man he was! What'd they want? That's what they wanted. [Laughter]

BURG: Yeah. Yeah.



HOFFMAN: Yeah. Oh, boy! When he was on the radio, it was just--he it seemed to me he always shouted. He lived at that intense pitch. I can remember in England he--I don't think anybody really knows how many jumps he ever had--but very often the planes would come back, and then one chute would come out of

the plane and land behind the commander's tent. And that was him.

BURG: Taking the short cut home.

HOFFMAN: Yes. [Laughter] But that's the kind of man he was. Just intense. There were all kinds of legendary stories about him. One of which was that he--now I'm not sure that this is true--but that he had graduated from Annapolis but was put out of the Navy because he flew his plane upside down underneath a bridge. Even if this was not true to fact, it was kind of an illustration of the intensity and the wildness of the way he lived.

BURG: Yes. When you got there, when you rejoined him, he had beaten off that attack by the German 6th Parachute [Regiment]. That was already over. He had finished them off.

HOFFMAN: I suppose I'd have to sit down with a, you know, with a day by day, but it seemed to me there was always something going on. If the locks weren't that important, somebody was at least keeping some pressure on those blessed locks.



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BURG: Well, actually, pressure on Carentan.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: That would be the most obvious pressure on Carentan  
itself, just across the Douve River and a kilometer or so south.





This is an interview with Colonel Raymond Hoffman being taped on September the 1st, 1978, at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library. Present for the interview are Colonel Hoffman and Dr. Burg of the Eisenhower Library Staff.

DR. BURG: We start this morning with the morning of June the 8th, 1944. We traced your movements roughly on the 6th; on the 7th, probably in the afternoon, you are sent to Ballard with the message that he's going to have to come and join Johnson. He cannot and does not. You yourself--probably that night on the 7th, I would expect--went back down to la Barquette. And on the morning of the 8th, you're with that group that Johnson has assembled around la Barquette. Do you remember what your next general move was?

COL. HOFFMAN: Well, I think from the time--la Barquette, the bridges and so forth, and St. Come-du-Mont, that whole area--by the time that was reasonably secure, then everything hinged upon taking Carentan and getting ready to take it. And of course if we were going to take it, you're going to have to come across the river. By this time, tanks are moving up from the beaches.

DR. BURG: Utah Beach. Yes.



HOFFMAN: And artillery and engineers. Got to have engineer help. Got to have boats to come across that river. And which day it is, I don't know. But anyway, it was an awful good feeling to have those tankers bringing those tanks in.

BURG: It would be all the difference between being very skinny and suddenly becoming pleasingly plump. [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: You're laying in a ditch and you can hear the motors, and you can hear them come. And they're coming. But you--and you've been through the training where you get in a foxhole, you know, and the people come ride a tank over you just to give you the sensation of being in a foxhole and having a tank go over you. That you've already been through in your training, but to have those babies come in when you know that they've got all kinds of mobility and all kinds of armor and all kinds of fire-power! And I remember we were off the road. In a ditch, anyway, and the tanks were moving up, and to realize how heavy one of those tanks was. He got over just a little bit too close to the edge and he began to crush down. The side of that road with that wide track--



BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: --you could see that thing just mash down. You moved a little further back in the ditch! [Laughter]

BURG: Yes. Now, one attack, which is mainly an infantry attack to cross the Douve and get down towards Carentan, comes down the causeway. You have bridges One, Two, Three, and Four, and that is the causeway on the main road from Carentan up to Ste. Mere-Eglise and up towards Cherbourg, ultimately. That attack along the causeway, seizing those bridges, was an infantry attack. On the far side of the Douve the attack branched off a bit to--actually, it would be to the south and west--and involved itself in a fierce little fire fight down there. Now, at la Barquette you had a bridgehead, a small bridgehead--

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: --and further out here to the east you had Captain Shettles--

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: --at le Port, and I think he had a little bridgehead towards



Brevands. Which way do you recollect going yourself? Where were you, once you crossed the Douve. Did you cross yourself at la Barquette?

HOFFMAN: Yes. I think we came across at la Barquette because--

BURG: And then you pushed south towards Carentan?

HOFFMAN: Pushed south towards Carentan, I'm pretty sure. I remember the fight along here for the causeways but, I think we came across, la Barquette. Best I can do.

BURG: Now some units, as I recall, are drawn off towards the east to link up with the troops from Omaha Beach--

HOFFMAN: That's right.

BURG: --who are driving west towards Carentan. And I wondered whether you found yourself involved with that move, after you've crossed the Douve, over to the west to link up with those troops. Because, obviously, one of the first things they had to do as a primary task was get the Utah and Omaha Beaches linked--





HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: --so that that link couldn't be broken. That is always a bad spot, the joint where two forces touch one another. So I thought I'd ask you whether you can recall being in that separate--

HOFFMAN: I remember seeing other troops, because you saw the armor first, and you saw the combat engineers. I don't think so. I think that would have been given to one of the battalions. I'm guessing, but I would have guessed it might have been 1st Battalion.

BURG: Okay.

HOFFMAN: Bottomly [?]. But I just--I don't know.

BURG: All right. Let's take a brief break.

HOFFMAN: Okay.

[Interruption]

BURG: During the time that we were talking off the tape, we



checked the Department of the Army Historical Division book, Utah Beach to Cherbourg. And there was a map on page 88 and another on page 90 that shows the fall of Carentan on 12 June. And the German counter-attack on the 13th of June would seem to indicate that the 501st, after la Barquette and crossing the Douve, swung around to the east and made its attack southwest of Carentan. The city fell and then the German counter-attack come up from the southwest and at least struck parts of the 501st. Do you recall anything, any particular incidents, out of that general period of time? Or does it now just stand out in your mind as combat?

HOFFMAN: I think one of the big attacks, plus, I think the main attack on Carentan, was done by Colonel [Robert F.] Sink's 506th.

BURG: Yes. Right. They came down that causeway.



HOFFMAN: The think I remember was--besides the boats, engineers crossing the river, this type of thing--seeing the artillery fall for the Carentan attack. That was a sight to behold. I think that was probably one of the first times that smoke was used.

BURG: Yes. But it was sort of a preparatory bombardment--

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. Yes.

BURG: --and that impressed you.

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: Of course, since your typical heavy piece of artillery was a rifle or a carbine, I suppose anything looked big to you.

[Laughter]

HOFFMAN: Well we had, of course, we had some mortars, but then they had what 75's they could find and put together, you know.

BURG: Yes. My recollection is they couldn't find very many and they couldn't put very many together again. [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: And a 37 millimeter anti-tank gun.

BURG: Yes. Yes. That would have stopped a very thin-skinned vehicle. Armored with cardboard, for example. A 37 would take care of it.

HOFFMAN: Of course you had to hit it in the right place.

BURG: [Laughter] Like right between the driver's eyes?!

HOFFMAN: Right where the turret was turning. If you could put an armor-piercing there, you could put his neck out of joint and--

BURG: With a 37 millimeter?

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Well, after Carentan is secured and that counter-attack is beaten off--by the way, let me finish that question--what happened to you then? Were all of you turned back north to fight?

HOFFMAN: When?

BURG: Toward the end of June?

HOFFMAN: We started moving north to Cherbourg and out. I think we were out of there, weren't we, by the 17th?

BURG: Sometime around the 20th, 22nd. Sometime in later June they pulled you out of there.





HOFFMAN: Probably by the 17th we started the move up to the north. There was still some sniping, some pockets, but there wasn't anything really going on. The Port was pretty well secured and usable now. Of course that was the thing, to get the--

BURG: Well did you ever get--it seems to me they pulled the 101st and 82nd out. Did you ever get anywhere near Cherbourg itself?

HOFFMAN: We came out on LST's--

BURG: Interesting.

HOFFMAN--auto.

BURG: From Cherbourg?

HOFFMAN: I think from Cherbourg, yes.

BURG: Yes, I see. To go back to England.

HOFFMAN: Oh, gee, and the weather is still miserable. We're not really--we haven't really gotten out of the rain. We got--



BURG: My recollection is that the storm that wrecked one of those Mulberry harbors comes around the 19th of June.

HOFFMAN: It may have--

BURG: That indicates how bad the weather was.

HOFFMAN: It was miserable! Well, we got on board an LST. I think it was an LST.

BURG: Yes, because I've seen photographs of the 101st debarking in England out of LST's. Sure.

HOFFMAN: As many as could get under the deck, you know, down below, fine. But we had to put troops on the deck. And I had to have my people on the deck. That was the only place left. Okay. And we were wet and miserable. And I think the nicest man in the world was a young ensign who came by and he said, "You guys look terrible." And I said, "Friend, you don't you really don't know how terrible we feel." And he bangs on a wooden panel and all of a sudden this thing shoots up and he's banging on the side of the galley! And inside he has got his people with gallons of hot coffee, and there is a man making homemade donuts. And he



said, "Lieutenant," he says, "Line up your people. We're going to have coffee and donuts before they have them down below." And I said, "Oh, friend!" [Laughter] I don't know that man's name; I wish I knew that man's name.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: Without doubt, that was the best cup of coffee and those were the best donuts I have ever eaten in my whole life.

BURG: Oh sure. I can imagine.

HOFFMAN: And there this guy was, making homemade donuts just as fast as he could make them. [Laughter]

BURG: Yes. Yes.

HOFFMAN: That was just great. Of course it took, I suppose, six, seven hours, maybe more, to make that trip. You didn't make it rapidly.

BURG: Yes, I've made it on one of the Thorson Line ships from Cherbourg to Southampton and it took probably five to





six hours for us to make it and I think we made better time than an LST--

HOFFMAN: I would say it took longer. If I remember, quite a bit longer.

BURG: I was going to ask--



HOFFMAN: You may be right on that storm because the weather, it seems to me, sure wasn't very great.

BURG: Yes. They were delighted, I know, that they had gone on the 6th of June, dicey as the weather was, because the next time that the conditions all matched up--that is, conditions of tide and moon and everything else--was roughly around the 19th. And it would have been a catastrophe if they had launched that invasion in the middle of that kind of weather that they had. Now I was going to ask you a couple things. Approximately when did you have your own section back together? The S-2 section. Many of these men that jumped with you, I'm sure you don't see for some period of time.

HOFFMAN: Oh, I think we had put that whole crew together, or



most of them anyway, except those Johnson would take for his own bodyguards or something else. Actually, I think we would have had them together by the second day.

BURG: You think sometime on that second day. When you're sent up to Ballard--

HOFFMAN: That's right.



BURG: --with a message, you think most of them were back--

HOFFMAN: Yes, most of them.

BURG: --probably most of them with Allen do you think?

HOFFMAN: No.

BURG: Or with Johnson by then?

HOFFMAN: Just parts with Allen and parts with Johnson.

BURG: Yes. Were you able to function on your normal kind of duty? That is, you had special assignments that everyone hoped could be carried out on the 6th or the 7th. But from the 8th

through the 12th or 13th, when that counter-attack came, were you back carrying out patrolling and accounting duties?

HOFFMAN: Yes. But now, you see, the prisoner of war interrogation section begins its work.

BURG: I see.



HOFFMAN: And the movement of prisoners, so that Meyer and [Schwartz]?--Meyer was an officer and Schwartz was a tech corporal I think, or sergeant. He was a corporal at the time, I think he got promoted to sergeant. These were interpreters and interrogators. And they were good, they were good. Meyer was a kraut [Laughter], and they'd "good guy" and "bad guy" 'em and--

BURG: Oh yes. Would they--

HOFFMAN: --and it worked.

BURG: --double team them?

HOFFMAN: Oh yes. Oh yes.

BURG: Just the old police routine.

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. The whole thing! [Laughter] I said,

"Meyer," I said, "you sound like a kraut." He said, "I am a kraut!" [Laughter] He was a kraut and Schwartz, I think, was a young Jewish fellow from Brooklyn. But they knew their job. They knew interrogation. And what we were after, of course, was these messages. It was part of our prime job, of course, to keep the situation map posted. All the red marks belong to me.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: Get this stuff up.



BURG: And here you're referring to the overlays that you and I have looked at that are part of our holdings.

HOFFMAN: Yes, but on the situation map that the headquarters would have--that the old man would look at whenever he wanted to--every contact and so forth was plotted. The -2 plotted his in red and the -3 plotted his in blue. So you always had the situation as current as you could get it.

BURG: Yes, as you understood it.

HOFFMAN: That was part of our job. Of course Ben West was there. Wax. Wax. Ben Wax, I'm sure of that.

BURG: Now the interrogation, it would be difficult, because you're running a complete gamut. You're interviewing everything from SS men, who are exceedingly tough, to Russian volunteers--

HOFFMAN: But you know--

BURG: --from Georgia, for example.



HOFFMAN: But the officers we had respected what could be gained from prisoners of war when there were prisoners available. When you could either capture them or get them on patrolling and so forth. If, say, one of the battalions had them, as soon as it was known that they were there, you'd either move Meyer to a spot where he could talk to them, or they'd get them on the road, pass them on back. Pump them, and so forth.

BURG: Yes. These guys are going to have to move something. We'll break for just a moment.

[Interruption]



BURG: Yes, and I was mentioning the wide variety of people that they had to cope with. The Russian volunteers probably spoke enough German, or pigeon-German, so that Meyer or Schwartz could cope with them, too.

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: Now among the things I want to clear away before we go back to England, some of the histories, some of these accounts-- Rappaport's account and others--suggest that Johnson was very irritated, very angry with Ballard. And even when cooler heads told him Ballard's situation, he remained angry with him. Now could you, from your association with Johnson--what you saw yourself--did that unhappy situation continue?

HOFFMAN: I believe it did. Given Colonel Johnson's personality, I think it did continue.

BURG: Yes. And yet the men are going to have to continue to work together.

HOFFMAN: Uh, that could go. They could do it.

BURG: They could?

HOFFMAN: They could work with them. They'd been with him a long time, you know. They'd been with him since Camp Tecoa in Georgia. They knew him. And they knew how excitable he was and so forth. But I think he never believed, honestly, that the situation was so bad that Ballard couldn't have disengaged. And I can assure you, he couldn't have disengaged.

BURG: Did Johnson ever ask you?

HOFFMAN: No, no.



BURG: You're far enough down on the ladder, he wasn't going to--

HOFFMAN: He dealt, he dealt directly. He wasn't that kind of a man. He dealt directly. He would be very excitable and yell and scream, but he would deal with his commanders. Oh, yes. No, he never went--

BURG: Am I correct in thinking that Ballard is the kind of man who wouldn't lose sleep over that? He knew his own situation.

HOFFMAN: He would take it in stride. He knew what he was doing. And Allen would continue to try to explain it to him. And Julian Ewell would be entirely unruffled by the whole

thing. I think he is probably the most unflappable man in the world.

BURG: Ewell?

HOFFMAN: Ewell. Julian Ewell.

BURG: Probably those men--Allen and Ewell--would be, perhaps, the major people who would be telling Johnson that Ballard was stuck. There wasn't anything that Ballard could do about it. Now let me ask you this. How about your own group of people? Had you--

HOFFMAN: The reason I don't believe--



BURG: Sorry.

HOFFMAN: The reason I don't believe the radio thing--you see, the reason I wouldn't believe it anyway--was that the radio communication was through Allen or through Ewell. And the radio communication at this point, I don't believe, was able to be accomplished from regiment to 2nd Battalion, which was commanded by Colonel Ballard. I don't think he had that--he was going



through Allen and messages were being relayed in these ways. So that business about "put somebody on a radio," you know, I think that couldn't have come about anyway.

BURG: Yes, yes. Had you in your section taken casualties?

HOFFMAN: No, none.

BURG: You were very fortunate then.



HOFFMAN: 3 Section took some. 3 Section took some. It was at that point where the mortar shell killed one of the sergeants and his friend.

BURG: Oh, yes. I remember you telling me about that. Now let me ask you this then. When did S.L.A. Marshall's people interview? Was that after you'd gotten back to England?

HOFFMAN: Oh, no. No, no. It was on the ground. And I was trying to put that together, and it seems to me that after the Carentan thing was secure that this is the time that Slam Marshall's young lieutenant came in, and he came in himself. It seems to me this is what was done. The map sheet was mounted on a board



and on a kind of a makeshift tripod so it could stand up. And then you lined up and used a grease pencil to give some indication of where you thought you'd landed; and some indication of your route.

BURG: Was it this map, do you happen to remember, Ray? What is this map, one to fifty thousand?

HOFFMAN: This is a fifty thousand and I think we were using twenty-five thousand, so he would have had four sheets of one to twenty-five thousand taped together and mounted.

BURG: With an overlay sheet on it.



HOFFMAN: We tried to use twenty-five thousand if we could; if you could find them and you could have them. That was one of the intelligence section jobs was to get maps and--

BURG: Yes, because that map, that one to twenty-five thousand, gives you far more detail than the one that you and I have in front of us right here. I notice that some towns, little hamlets, are not marked on this map and yet they're referred to continually. So, obviously, they would be on that other map.

HOFFMAN: Yes. You try to use them and to get out to the, certainly, the company commanders, the one to twenty-five thousand's. If you needed bigger areas this would be all right in a headquarters situation. Of course you had many more sheets than this because you were keeping track of what was going on other places.

BURG: Did they make any kind of a special issue out of it, Ray, that you recall? "This morning we're going to be interviewed by an Army historical team."

HOFFMAN: Oh yes. It was passed as to who he was, and so forth.

BURG: You were told to tell him whatever he wanted to know?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

BURG: The issue has been raised by an Army reserve historical team that was here not too long ago and they wanted to know about oral history. They have not ever done this, of course. They wondered what would happen? Would they be cleared to tell this sort of thing? And I said, well, I was quite sure that they certainly would be cleared to tell them.



HOFFMAN: You couldn't have come into a commander's area if that man--in the first place, if the division hadn't allowed you--and, of course, they had it all the way from headquarters level that they were allowed to come in. But you wouldn't have come into Colonel Johnson's area. And you wouldn't have come into any of the battalion areas without the clearance of that commander.

BURG: Let me ask you, do you recollect now your own reaction, or the general reaction of the men around you, that this was going to be done? Was your reaction supportive, or were you--did you kind of view this as, "Oh, for heaven sakes, this is another pain in the neck. We've got better things to do?" What kind of reaction did you have or did your men have?

HOFFMAN: Well, I thought it was a great way to collect the historical information. To do it on the ground. And to do it that soon, surprised me.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: That they were going to do it, because--I had a good attitude toward it.





BURG: Others--

HOFFMAN: Didn't take a very long time, you know.

BURG: Yes. Did others seem to have a pretty good idea about it?

HOFFMAN: Some did, some didn't. Some thought it, you know, was a waste of time. But I--and I think the men thought it was a pretty good thing. They understood that these people were military historians and they wanted this information.

BURG: About how many of you were in that formation that morning to be interviewed? Do you remember?

HOFFMAN: Impression is that there are thirty-forty people, certainly. But there were more people than that.

BURG: Oh, right.

HOFFMAN: They would simply pick up the map and go to another--

BURG: Exactly.

HOFFMAN: --area. But I'd say thirty, forty people in our general area.





BURG: Headquarters people, basically?

HOFFMAN: All headquarters people. At that point.

BURG: Yes. And did they--

HOFFMAN: And I know he had been out with the battalions and down with the line companies.

BURG: Right. Did they line you up in any particular order or rank or--

HOFFMAN: No. He just asked that everyone come by. Took a little time and you stood around. And after it was made known who he was, just what it was he was after--

BURG: You don't remember his name?

HOFFMAN: No.

BURG: One man was doing this?

HOFFMAN: There were two of them there. Seems to me that Slam had a lieutenant doing the instructions and then manning the map. But it seems to me he did some of the talking himself,



as to why they were actually on the ground. That this was the first time airborne troops had been used; "we want to see if we can't preserve this," and so forth.

BURG: Yes. When you stepped forward to take your turn, did you give them your name and your rank?

HOFFMAN: Yes. I think they did it by roster, because they had the morning report--

BURG: I see, so they took you off that.

HOFFMAN: --and they would have been able to make a checklist on that. But I'm sure that's what the young lieutenant who was beside the map was doing. He was checking names and rank and serial number.

[Interruption - Side 2]



HOFFMAN: No. Probably there were other verbal--or other interviews going on. I'm sure there was no recordings or anything else.

BURG: I don't believe so.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: You were saying that, just prior to that--the machine was off--the thing that stuck out in your mind was going forward to that map--

HOFFMAN: To the map. So in the course of it perhaps they did interviews with people who happened to strike them as having landed in a particular place. I just am not completely sure, and I don't know whether in my stuff I've got--probably do--have some notation of the fact of how they did this. But I know they were there and they did talk to people. And it wasn't a big rush-rush thing. They seemed to take time. Of course it would have taken, what? at least a half-hour, probably or maybe an hour, for thirty or forty people to come up to the map and make a mark where they thought they had landed.

BURG: So your recollection now is that what they were looking for was, "Where do you think you landed?" "What route did you follow?" "Where did you wind up?" Did they ask you--

HOFFMAN: And they pretty well knew that here we were.



BURG: Yes, down south of Carentan--

HOFFMAN: In the Carentan area.

BURG: But they would have wanted to know what had happened, particularly on the first and second days, I think. Highly essential to know that. Did other men in that formation of thirty or forty people--do you remember them correcting people? You know, the sort of thing. "No, no, John! You weren't there, you were with me." Do you remember?

HOFFMAN: No. It wasn't a real formation. It was very--it was an informal group.

BURG: Yes.



HOFFMAN: We weren't lined up or anything else. We just stood around--

BURG: Oh, no, I didn't mean that.

HOFFMAN: --you just stood around. And I can remember no one correcting anyone. They were after what you were going to put on the map, and then unusual incidents that would have occurred--



would have happened to you on the way. And I'm sure that I told the bossy-cow story to whoever was there. But it always seemed to me that he was to the right hand side of the map and we approached kind of from the left front. And then stood in front of the map and whatever was--perhaps he took people who had-- I would imagine he took commanders and other people and sat down with them for awhile. But I would--I suppose S.L.A. Marshall was doing that himself.

BURG: I think you're absolutely right about what they probably took, because Marshall's own book, Night Drop, and some of the other books that have been written since which relied upon some of these interviews, are full of the accounts of people who wound up in pastures and found herds of horses thundering by them, or found themselves landing on cows--

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: --in the field, and this kind of thing. I gather, too, that a number when interviewed were able to pass the names of not all, but one or two or three, sometimes, of those who grouped up with them--



HOFFMAN: Yes. Yes.

BURG: --in those pre-dawn hours on the 6th. In some cases, friends came down fairly close together and, therefore, they gave them a little better picture.

HOFFMAN: In other cases, you know, you really wouldn't have had names; you would have had faces, if you were split off from your usual element and you went in with someone else's unit. But if you recognized someone you'd--I suppose that kind of information--it wouldn't seem to me they would need date, time, and tactical situation information, because they already had that on the situation reports and the overlays.

BURG: To whatever extent that was possible on those first two days. My impression is that almost none of that got done--

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: --in the early days. It was just too utterly confusing for anybody to be able to put it down. They may have done it afterwards.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Well, I noticed--I'm sure that's somebody's notebook over there, and I'm sure that things like that were being kept. [Ed. note: The "notebook" refers to material contained in Eisenhower Library files regarding the 101st Airborne Division.]

BURG: Yes, but painfully brief, as you remember, Ray.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Yes.



BURG: Those were notations. We don't have--as I remember that notebook, there isn't much there for the 6th, the 7th. There might be a notation at ten o'clock in the morning and there might not be another notation--and both notations would be very small--until three o'clock in the afternoon. That's probably one reason why the technique that you're now describing was highly essential. You couldn't imagine anything more fluid, open--you could even use the word confused [laughter]--than the picture in the drop zones in the first forty-eight hours.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Now let me ask you this then. When you get back to England and you're unloaded from your LST's, were you taken



back up to the area from which you had implaned or back to your camp ?

HOFFMAN: No. No. Right back to base camp. Base camp was there; everything was there. You know, the supplies, the mess hall, and the object is now to, of course, refit.

BURG: Fill in the gaps.

HOFFMAN: Turn in the junk, get new equipment, whatever was needed, and then start training; start all over again for the next, for the next drop.

BURG: Did you have an idea at that time--?



HOFFMAN: You knew something else was coming.

BURG: Yes. In late June or early July, you had no idea at that time the next one was going to be Holland, I would imagine.

HOFFMAN: Oh no, no. But you knew something was coming.

BURG: Yes. Now let me ask you this, Ray. Here you are. All of you are back now in England. Back in your, let us say,



permanent camps there and you're in the process of refitting. You replace equipment. Men evidently jumped with M-1 rifles that were disassembled. I remember reading of one man who managed to drop his trigger assembly into water and had, therefore, an M-1 rifle with everything except the trigger mechanism.

HOFFMAN: That's funny. Yes.

BURG: There's a rifle that's out of action.

HOFFMAN: You know, my question now is why would a man do that? He has--

BURG: He jumped with it broken down; the M-1 was broken down.

HOFFMAN: Probably thought he would save himself from getting hurt, but--

BURG: Yes, and another man jumped with a model 1903.

HOFFMAN: Yes, sniper's. Yes.



BURG: And he didn't have it broken down. He deliberately chose, he said, a Springfield '03 and it dislocated his left shoulder when he struck the ground. The muzzle struck and the butt

rammed in under his armpit and dislocated the shoulder.

HOFFMAN: You see, there again, you have a case for the thing; you don't jump it raw, it's in a case.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: And if you rig it wrong, you see, this is the thing that should be looked at. It was snapped into a D-ring, or should have been. But what happened was it got up underneath his--

BURG: And it was just that much longer than your carbine, you see,--

HOFFMAN: Oh yes.



BURG: --so that he hit just wrong with that thing, and there he went. But evidently some men were jumping with disassembled weapons. But in any event, all of that equipment --whatever equipment dropped into the water and was gone forever, or parts of it fell off; in this man's case, losing that trigger mechanism. All of that is replaced.

HOFFMAN: Well, he would have had that thing replaced, you know--

BURG: Oh, yes. He would have picked somebody else's up. Sure.

HOFFMAN: --he'd have had something very shortly.

BURG: But, is there a period of time where, for example, in the 501st--let's just stick to the 501st--where Johnson or Allen or Ballard--or any concerted effort is made--to sit down your headquarters detachment, or a battalion, or a company, and ask, "What went wrong and what went right?" Because you know you're going to do this again, and it seems to me that you've got to find out what didn't go right. How can you correct the errors of Normandy?

HOFFMAN: Well, I think what went wrong, if it went wrong, was the evasiveness taken by some of the troop carriers. And I don't think that was something that the infantry units could correct.

BURG: Oh, I know they couldn't. That leaped right into your mind, didn't it?

HOFFMAN: Yes.





BURG: Because I think we would both have to agree that you were dropping something like ten thousand men into that--in the two airborne divisions--into a fairly limited piece of ground, with specified objectives that everyone is to take care of. And what you get on the ground is thousands of men who get nowhere near their objectives. The objectives are, by and large, fulfilled, but usually not by the men who were supposed to do them, and usually by a force of very small size compared to the size of the group told off to do it.

HOFFMAN: Much of the training was just geared for this very kind of thing. You know what the objectives are. Not one--you know what your own is--but you also know what the rest of them are.

BURG: Right, exactly.



HOFFMAN: And you make every effort. A lot of individual training--a lot of the training, and the esprit de corps of the parachutist, is to individual effort to get the mission accomplished with whatever means are there. How many men, and so forth.



BURG: So, in effect, you've said in the last couple of minutes; To the degree that things went wrong, it was beyond the control of the airborne troops.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: They were dropped off the drop zones, and sometimes, I think--

HOFFMAN: That was fortuitous.

BURG: --you would agree, for reason.

HOFFMAN: That was fortuitous, yes.

BURG: Yes. Sometimes they were dropped, for reason, away from the drop zone. It would have been terribly dangerous to put them in, with the amount of fire that was coming up. And that this circumstance, which is beyond the airborne soldier's control, is corrected to large degree by the airborne soldier's training, even though dropped almost by himself. He begins to act--



HOFFMAN: Right.

BURG: --in accordance with his training to carry out, if not the mission assigned to him, he'll carry out any mission that he can conceive of, starting with, "That wire looks like it might carry a message. I'll pull it down." [Laughter] And we know now, these years later--like Monday morning quarterback, we know that although the jumps were terribly confused and scattered, the Germans never could react to them because--

HOFFMAN: That's right.



BURG: --they couldn't tell what was happening. Mainly, because the first thing the airborne troops did was to destroy the German communication network. Their radios still worked but their ground network was obliterated.

HOFFMAN: And I have seen somewhere the map, German high command map, and the thing looks like measles, it's got so many red spots on it.

BURG: And the red spots being us.

HOFFMAN: Their enemy, you see.

BURG: Yes, their enemy. Sure.

HOFFMAN: Same as ours--they would be red spots on our map.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: But their red spots are all over the Cotentin Peninsula. And they must have gone out of their minds.

BURG: Yes, and it's obviously been--

HOFFMAN: Because there may have only have been a few people, maybe only a couple, but nevertheless, there they have a report their communications have been knocked out here. And I don't know what their names were, but there were some men as far away as eight, eighty-five miles away, made their way south.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: You know, it takes some initiative to do that kind of thing.



BURG: Yes. Collected small bodies of men and fought by themselves, evaded capture, or were captured and then escaped from capture. Was there any kind of a critiqueing session in the first weeks, then, in England? Do you remember?

HOFFMAN: I think it was maybe a continuous critiqueing. But I don't remember any--of course, undoubtedly the commanders and the division commander would sit together and talk. And I think all the way down to battalion commanders, too.

BURG: Did headquarters section pick up--they probably wouldn't need too many--reinforcements, replacements?

HOFFMAN: The -2 was changed. It seemed to me that this is the time when Ben Wax--I don't know what happens to him; he gets ill, transferred--and Hugo Sims comes in as the -2.

BURG: S-i-m-s?

HOFFMAN: m-s.

BURG: All right.





HOFFMAN: He led the incredible patrol in Holland.

BURG: Sims then becomes your boss, your new boss.

HOFFMAN: Yes, yes.

BURG: Were you a first lieutenant by this time?

HOFFMAN: Promoted--this is one of the things. You get back to England and you begin to get a leave, and this kind of thing. You know, I forget when I was promoted. I'll have to look.

BURG: Was Sims an experienced man?

HOFFMAN: Sims was a company commander with Allen, I think.

BURG: I see.

HOFFMAN: If I remember correctly. He was company commander, I think, in that 1st Battalion. And they brought him up to be the -2. And I don't know whether I was promoted then or after Holland.

BURG: Okay.



HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: When you get this back to edit, you can check that out and bring it up to date.

HOFFMAN: I've got that date.

BURG: One thing that comes to mind is, at least in headquarters, you haven't suffered heavy casualties, by and large. Certainly your section didn't. So as you continue your training, step up the training for the next operation, whatever it would be-- and we know it becomes Holland--everyone in the unit has already done one big combat jump--

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: --so critique would be, as you suggest, a continuing thing. You all did it.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: And you know what was wrong. And one can think of the various things. For example, if those leg bags cause problems, or assembling at night, in hours of darkness, was difficult,

those are things that you can work out among yourselves. But the leg bag doesn't work very well because, in some instances, the aircraft are going too fast. Now were you aware of any work being done with the troop carrier squadrons to say, "Hey, fellows! With the best will in the world, some of you dropped us too high. You dropped us at too fast a speed."

HOFFMAN: Yes. And their commanders, of course, were aware of this and were told many times, but they're a law unto themselves, you know. They have to make the air, the aircraft decisions--

BURG: Yes, they're in command of that aircraft, responsible.

HOFFMAN: --for themselves. That's right. And for the most part, they're good, responsible guys. But I think the critiques at our level were threats more than anything else! [Laughter] You know, you don't always know why that man didn't throttle down. Now, number one, he couldn't throttle down if the people behind him were not throttled down, because what would happen was that they would drop on top of his aircraft and that would have been a mess. So they have--you know, there's so many things in here.





BURG: Because they're probably stair-stepped behind--

HOFFMAN: That's right.

BURG: --and a little higher altitude--

HOFFMAN: That's right.

BURG: --and if he throttles down and they don't, then they'll overfly him a bit and drop their men right on top of his aircraft.

HOFFMAN: And if somebody takes evasive action in front of him, well, he's in a spot. If these planes are flying--and they do fly at different heights, but they fly in formation.

BURG: Yes, in vee's.



HOFFMAN: Okay, well, what if the lead man moves over here and now he drops and this fellow doesn't move; he's going to come along and he's going to be dropping on top. So he may have been taking evasive action to get out of that. Get some--

BURG: You're suggesting that the next two planes in the vee, and maybe the next planes behind them, are pretty well going to have



to conform to whatever evasive action the leader takes or they've got problems dropping their sticks. They're going to drop on top of one another.

HOFFMAN: I think that's true. And, well, it was--the planes were a little fast, faster than we wanted them. You don't know why. Was it the wind? The--

BURG: --excitement in some cases, I think.

HOFFMAN: [Laughter] Oh sure!

BURG: Nervousness, excitement.

HOFFMAN: They were being shot at. They were in an aircraft. They had to--

BURG: And no way to shoot back.

HOFFMAN: That's right.

BURG: And they can't relieve all of that tension by jumping and going down there to do something about it, as you men could do, so they--



HOFFMAN: They know they have to fly that plane back.

BURG: --had a difficult job. Yes. Do you happen to remember when it was that you were told that the next one was going to be in Holland? That's data that we can--

HOFFMAN: I can look, I can look--

BURG: I can find that out.

HOFFMAN: It would seem to me that we're getting on up into-- we probably knew--of course, you know, you're always doing the dry runs so that the Germans never know when. You're also-- the dry run is part of the training. You still have a lot of other training to do. I am estimating, since we went in on the 17th of September--it was a Sunday morning--I would estimate now that we're gonna back up five or six days from that, when it's an absolute knowledge that we're going.

BURG: Okay.

HOFFMAN: I'd look and see what I've got.

BURG: But you were trained before that. We could use the word



"blind," just as you had been for Normandy. You were working out: you were doing exercises that were training you for Holland, but you didn't know yet that it would be Holland.

HOFFMAN: Yes, that's right. Well, and in some cases, I think there were other missions planned by the high command that didn't come off.

BURG: Yes, that's right. It happened before Holland, and after.

HOFFMAN: And you would have tried those on. Then you began to say, "Hey! We've got a different terrain mock-up here that we're going to look at." And so something's different.

BURG: Yes. One final question this morning. You mentioned leave, in passing, a few minutes ago and I know that you said to me privately that one of the things you enjoyed doing was getting on the train and going someplace in England when you did have some leave. Was there leave for you between Normandy and--

HOFFMAN: Everybody.



BURG: For everyone.

HOFFMAN: Everybody had a leave.

BURG: Was it of any length or was it a week-end pass?

HOFFMAN: No, no. I think it was about a week. If I remember correctly. About seven days.

BURG: Do you remember what you did?

HOFFMAN: Let's see. We are in England so I would have gone off, probably to Scotland. I forget now whether I did this then or at the [sounds like] glove. I think I did it then.

BURG: Do you remember any reaction to you from the British or Scottish public when you were on that leave? They would know by now what you had all done and where you had been.

HOFFMAN: You know, the crazy Yank paratroopers. Yes, it was always good reaction, always a good reaction. But I'll have to look, I'd have to look that one up.

BURG: You can check that out and we'll start with that a week from today.

HOFFMAN: Okay.





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This interview is being taped with Colonel Raymond Hoffman at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas on September the 8th, 1978. Present for the interview, Colonel Hoffman and Dr. Maclyn Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff.

DR. BURG: Well, when we broke off last Friday, we were discussing leave, and you thought that the one week leave you got after Normandy and probably taken you up to Scotland, and you looked around up there.

COLONEL HOFFMAN: To London first and then to Scotland.

DR. BURG: Yes. Rail traffic was still possible for you in 1944.

COLONEL HOFFMAN: Everywhere. It was just so fantastic. Good public transportation was everywhere.

DR. BURG: The trains were crowded, I suppose.

COLONEL HOFFMAN: Oh, just packed. Nevertheless, they ran and realtively on time.

DR. BURG: Now, I would assume that you went from London up to Edinburgh. Or did you make it further than that, up into the Highlands?



HOFFMAN: Glasgow.

BURG: You went to Glasgow?

HOFFMAN: Yes. I had relatives in Glasgow, so I went to look them up.



BURG: Because I was going to ask you, under wartime conditions, how could you be sure of some place to stay up in Scotland?

HOFFMAN: Well, you know, there were troops everywhere, but there were still good English hotels that Americans, you know, could afford. But Red Cross pretty much everywhere. Especially in the big cities. For the purposes of leave there were leave hotels or arrangements. Many times--I think this is one of the finest or nicest things that was ever done; I'm not sure it could be done today. But the Red Cross would have lists of places that would give --either had rooms or a kind of a home hospitality.

BURG: In a private home.

HOFFMAN: And it was the nicest way to get to know the English people.

BURG: Sort of "bed and breakfast" set-ups.

HOFFMAN: And sometime rather than take that, you'd take a hot cup of tea or something, rather than have the food for breakfast.

BURG: Well evidently, from what my travelling friends have told me, and what Pat and I saw ourselves when we were there in '73, that is still very commonly done the length and breadth of Britain. And many tourists prefer to do that; drive their cars and do that kind of thing. If they're there for fourteen days, they wind up meeting fourteen families in Scotland and England. But relatives in Glasgow that you had never seen, I assume.

HOFFMAN: Oh, never, never. I got a list of names, a few street addresses that were quite old, from one of my aunts and spent some time going around to find them. But this was the London, I think, of the buzz-bomb times, too.

BURG: Yes. Yes, I think so. Right. So it was much better to be up in Scotland for a week's uninterrupted rest.



HOFFMAN: I don't know long--how much time we spent. Of course, we'd been to London before. It wasn't very many, you know, days. We didn't have very much time, really. It took time to travel, but you'd go by train all the way up there and all the way back. You're looking at about two days of travelling --

BURG: Exactly.

HOFFMAN: --by train.

BURG: Right. Right.



HOFFMAN: And yet it was certainly enjoyable. Of course, we were--I like to travel anyway so what better way to do it than on a train with a lot of people to talk to. They were friendly.

BURG: Were you able to stay with any of those relatives in Glasgow? Stay in their homes or--?

HOFFMAN: Seems to me that we had enough time, after we found the bunch.

BURG: And you say "we."

HOFFMAN: I had a friend with me. Yes.

BURG: Another officer from your regiment.



HOFFMAN: Yes, a young--trying to think of--you know, I'd have to look that up. I just, I have a feeling that there was another officer with me.

BURG: You're probably right.

HOFFMAN: Usually you went with somebody.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: Well, I must have--



BURG: Let me ask you this, did you take food with you? That's a heavily-rationed country in that year.

HOFFMAN: Yes. We would take the kinds of things they wouldn't get a hold of. Sugar, candy--

BURG: Coffee, I would assume.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Mostly powdered but, nevertheless, yes, we stuffed one of the bags. We would have plenty, because we just didn't want to--

BURG: Jams, jellies, things of that sort would be in short supply. Probably a little--

HOFFMAN: You just didn't want to take--and yet they were almost hurt. I know they were saving their ration things, and it almost hurt if you didn't eat their meal.

BURG: Yes. Well Pat was there two years later; the war was over but the rationing was still on. She, too, went up into Scotland to see relatives--and in the Midlands of England--and they found it necessary--they took their ration books. They also took stuff in the packages that had been sent to them. They were in school in London and they took those things with them and kind of replenished the supply.

HOFFMAN: That's right. That's what you'd do. You'd leave these things. But while we were in England, I can remember-- I don't know whether it was this trip or some of the others, because any time I had an opportunity even for a day or a day and a half, I'd go somewhere just to see--



BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: I can remember one of these home hospitality things in which a little, bitty English lady--she took me upstairs and showed me where the room was and showed me where the water closet was, and so forth. And in the--I told her I had to be up early, and I think maybe I had to; I timed it so that I had to be up at 6:15 or something like that. There was a little tap and the door opened wide enough for just a little, little hand to come through the door and it had a cup of strong tea with milk. And it laid this on the table beside the bed and then that door just closed. She didn't do anymore than just--. You know, I drank that tea. That was the best-tasting cup of tea I've ever had in my life. I'm no great tea drinker but my mother, being a Scotch lady, always drank her tea. And my grandmother, of course, never had anything else but tea. She wouldn't drink coffee.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: But that little, bitty hand coming through that door, you know. I was sort of half awake and looking.





BURG: Serving this big, barbarian, paratroop officer.

[Laughter]

HOFFMAN: "Crazy Yank," you know. She was, you know, she might have been all of five feet tall and a whisper of a lady. She was very nice.



BURG: Well, after some of these opportunities to relax, as you mentioned last Friday, the jump into Holland--I think the divisional history that you've given to us indicated that there had been times where you literally were trying on your chutes by the aircraft when operations were cancelled. And particularly because Patton's Third Army had moved so fast--

HOFFMAN: Well they changed their minds. They had other operations in mind and then they would discover that the Germans had just moved troops in or something. Or it had become unnecessary because Patton was moving.

BURG: Right. So, ultimately it's going to be the Holland operation, in which you jumped on the 17th of September of 1944. And just in quick summary, the story of the whole operation pretty well told by Cornelius Ryan in that book, A Bridge Too Far.



HOFFMAN: A Bridge Too Far.

BURG: It's the 101st that makes the nearer jump. That is it's jump area is closest to the Britist--I think it was the British Second Army. Then the 82nd Airborne jumps, let me say, in the second area, which is now just beyond the 101st. And then the British 1st Airborne Division jumps on Arnham itself.

HOFFMAN: Crazy.

BURG: The operation intending--



HOFFMAN: Absolutely crazy.

BURG: --then to open up a road and to seize those bridges, particularly those bridges over the--it's the Rhine there, isn't it?

HOFFMAN: Well, up where they jumped to, it's the Neder Rijn, Northern Rhine. But we also had to secure the canal, which is the Prince William [Zuid Willems Canal]. You had to have that canal. And that's what the glider troops did. And you had to have the bridges that were all the way up through. And the

bridges were secure. There's no question about that.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: [I just wish you could--garbled on tape] because the British troops, the British tankers, came up and sat on that road. We cried.

BURG: You cried?

HOFFMAN: We cried. They sat on that road.

BURG: Ah, yes.

HOFFMAN: We got hell beat out of us and they sat on that road.

BURG: And wouldn't move.

HOFFMAN: Would not move. Montgomery wouldn't move.

BURG: Yes, because the gentlemen in command was not going to take a chance.

HOFFMAN: Well, I also have sympathy for him. Look at the men that England lost. And it was the British strategy, if they



could, to mass everything available before they mounted the attack. But it was hard to take.

BURG: Yes. We'll get to that in a few minutes. You went through the same kind of exercise, in effect, for this one that you had done for Normandy. There were the sand tables, the aerial photographs; the jump zones, the drop zones, were thoroughly familiar to you. Do you recollect now any definite change in procedure from the procedures that you were trained for for Normandy. I think I asked you before if there had been critiques and if you had changed techniques in response to your Normandy experience; your answer, I guess, was, no, you really didn't.

HOFFMAN: No.



BURG: You're going to do things pretty much the same way. The objectives now were a little different.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: The ground on which you're jumping is--and there's no

more bocage, no more hedge rows, but low, generally-featureless land. Roads that are more like causeways. In a sense, it's something like that situation that you had to cope with on the first day or so in Normandy. The ground to the side was going to be a little soft; not negotiable really by armor, not easily negotiable. The roadways are up, elevated a bit. The bridges that you--the 501st had about four bridges to seize in Holland--very reminiscent of the four bridges on the causeway into Carentan. But basically the training for Holland, the exercises in preparation for it, are not radically different from Normandy.

HOFFMAN: No and somewhat expected to be easier, since we were going to jump in the daytime. This is a daytime jump. It's a Sunday morning jump.

BURG: Now, could I--



HOFFMAN: We move in and out of marshalling areas like swinging doors, you know.

BURG: Thinking you're going to go, and then it's called off. So would you say, Ray, that as far as anxiety is concerned and



tension, you personally might have felt less of that for the September 17th jump? It is, after all, your second big combat jump.

HOFFMAN: Some mysteries have been removed, but you still have your thoughts before the jumps, and your young man's knowledge that you're going to test yourself against this situation. I think anxiety may not have been of the anxious type, but the tension of being up for it--

BURG: As you would be "up" for a game.



HOFFMAN: --the tension was there. Yes. The tension was there.

BURG: I like your use of the words "some of the mysteries had been removed." At one and the same time, you also had learned how exceedingly fragile a human being is. You'd seen some who were rather badly broken in that thing in Normandy. What mysteries particularly, come to your mind now?

HOFFMAN: Well you now know what it is to be fired upon, as well as to fire.

BURG: Yes, yes.

HOFFMAN: Yes, we'd been through combat, and we'd been through night combat.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: Now that's the cutting--

BURG: The worst kind.



HOFFMAN: --I really think if the professional wants to cut his job into two difficult halves, he cuts it with night fighting and day fighting. To control and to take objectives--to control men and to take objectives in night fighting is without a doubt that most difficult.

BURG: I've not read any of the preliminaries that I should have at hand at this moment on Holland, but maybe you know; maybe they didn't tell you, maybe they did. Why a daytime jump in Holland, rather than the night jump that was made in Normandy and at the other end of Omaha Beach where the British dropped?

HOFFMAN: Well, I think we--unless--I guess, we had control of the air for the Normandy thing, too. I don't know, really, at least at this point. I could probably go and think about it, or look at my letters, but--

BURG: As I think about it, I think I know exactly why. I should have thought of it sooner. Your jumps, and those of the 6th British Airborne Division in Normandy, are predicted on seizing either a river at the British end or seizing key bridges and causeways away from the invasion. You had to be timed to coincide with a seaborne invasion that is going to land at the best state of the tide that it can. And, therefore, the only way you can have the causeways from Utah Beach locked up and the bridges--

HOFFMAN: I suppose that's right.



BURG: --locked up, you've got to be there before the seaborne units hit at dawn. Therefore, you had to jump at night. In Holland, there's no question of a seaborne invasion so the daytime jump must reflect some other kind of thinking. Now I realize, as I remember, why you had to jump at night on the sixth of June. But you wouldn't have to do that in Holland.



HOFFMAN: I forget now whether to the south, down by the canal, there might have been some units coming in after. They may have come in at night, next day.

BURG: You're thinking of Holland?

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: Yes. Well, from what I've just read in that one particular unit history, 101st Airborne history, the column of aircraft--those carrying parachutists, the two American divisions, the British division; those towing the gliders--was a long, long column. And I think it's probably quite likely that some--if everyone was to jump sometime on that day, or drop sometime on that day--some would have to go, perhaps, before dawn breaks in order to be on the ground.

HOFFMAN: No, I don't think so. I don't think anybody went before we did. I think we were out Sunday morning, at the time people were coming back from church. But I'm thinking of to the south. It may have been that night or maybe it was the next day.



BURG: But some did come down at night?

HOFFMAN: There were units--I don't know, I'd have to go and look that up.

BURG: That's conceivable, because the Polish airborne unit doesn't come in as I remember, on that first day at all at Arnhem. It seems to me that it comes in on the second or the third day. And so that kind of thing, in trying to pull it all together, that kind of thing happened. Well, perhaps we can take a break right now.

HOFFMAN: Okay.



[Interruption]

BURG: Anything special about your loading up? Did that go about as usual? Putting the stick into the aircraft? What plane, for example, was headquarters in? Were you split up again, the way you had been in Normandy?

HOFFMAN: Normally, split up. I went in this time with whatever serials [Lt.] Colonel [Harry W. O.] Kinnard [Jr.] at that time had.

BURG: K-i-n-n-a-r-d?

HOFFMAN: R-d. Yes.

BURG: Was he a battalion commander in the 501st?

HOFFMAN: Battalion commander.

BURG: Do you remember the battalion?

HOFFMAN: Well, I'm inclined to say it was the 1st but--

BURG: Yes. Klondike Red in that case.

HOFFMAN: I'm not sure. I saw something here. It says 501st, less the 1st Battalion, landed here up at Eerde.

BURG: How's that spelled?

HOFFMAN: Let me see. The First [Battalion]. Here we are. Yes.

BURG: How do you spell Eerde?

HOFFMAN: E-e-r-d-e on this map.



BURG: All right. And that's in Leonard Rappaport's Rendezvous With Destiny.

HOFFMAN: But I believe we went into DZ A-2. 1st Battalion, 501st, landed here, and I think we went in with them.

BURG: So that drop zone again was--

HOFFMAN: DZ A-2.

BURG: A-2. And you think that's where you landed? Now that puts you west--

HOFFMAN: North and west of Veghel.

BURG: Of Veghel. V-e-g-h-e-l. [Ed. note: Also spelled Vechel]

HOFFMAN: Right. I believe that's the way we came down.

BURG: Were you in the same aircraft with Kinnard then?

HOFFMAN: No, I don't think so. However, I think I was in the same vee, because I landed near him.

BURG: I see. You still had the same job, scouting and patrolling.



HOFFMAN: Scouting and patrolling until we linked up and then continuation of that, and posting situation maps, contacting of patrols, Dutch underground. Very, very fine bunch of people. Did a lot of work for us.

BURG: And, unfortunately, were not believed by the high command when they tried to tell the high command that the area was rotten with Panzer units, including SS Panzer, and that the Germans were no longer running.

HOFFMAN: I believe the 501st believed them, but we weren't moving anything. But it was three days of loveliness. [Laughter]

BURG: Yes, that's my understanding. Well let's talk about entering "loveliness." When you went out of the aircraft, I would figure that you're probably garbed about the same way, rigged out in the say way. Did you now have the new quick-release parachute harnesses?

HOFFMAN: Yes. Quick release. Quarter turn and it would pop. It was daytime; you could look around. You could see people. Now they were coming from church.





BURG: Yes. Did you have any unusual occurrences in the aircraft leaving England and coming in over the coast? Were you fired at on your way in?

HOFFMAN: There may have been some fire as we came across the coast but it didn't seem to bother anything.

BURG: Fairly light flak.

HOFFMAN: Yes. It didn't seem to bother anything.

BURG: Of course, the difference between that and Normandy is that it isn't quite so obvious as it is at night, when you see every iota of tracer coming up, and this kind of thing. As far as your personal equipment--

HOFFMAN: And the weather was great.



BURG: --did you have a--and the weather was great. Did you have a leg bag on this time?

HOFFMAN: No, no extra stuff this time.

BURG: So were you still armed with a carbine?

HOFFMAN: No. I think by this time I had enough experience and I went in there with a Thompson sub-machine gun. In fact, I know I did.

BURG: And spare clips for that in the pouches up here in front. And as you think about it, no real change in your gear except those that we have mentioned so far--

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: --from what you had gone into Normandy with. No problem getting out the door?

HOFFMAN: No.

BURG: Your stick emptied out.



HOFFMAN: Perfect daytime jump. The weather was--it was a bright, sunny Sunday morning.

BURG: The aircraft flying at the usual drop speed this time--

HOFFMAN: I think so.

BURG: --very little evasive manuevering.

HOFFMAN: No, none.

BURG: None.

HOFFMAN: None. They didn't have to.

BURG: How about the height? More like the three hundred feet or four hundred feet?

HOFFMAN: No, I would say we probably went out at about nine.

BURG: At about nine hundred feet.



HOFFMAN: I don't think it was necessary to come out. We were encountering no problem and--

BURG: No ground fire coming up.

HOFFMAN: No ground fire coming up. There wasn't anybody around.

BURG: Your landing was perfectly satisfactory. You have any problems coming in?

HOFFMAN: Yes. [Laughter] The usual clobbering into the ground.

BURG: I didn't want to ask you that! [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: My first jump was just fine. I didn't realize how bad it was until that second jump. [Laughter]

BURG: And every jump after that you managed to botch in one way or another! [Laughter] Did you come down in open fields?

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: I know there were many around that area.

HOFFMAN: Alongside the road and in the fields. We got on the road for approach march.

BURG: It must have felt unusual to you, in that nine hundred feet--

HOFFMAN: Absolutely.

BURG: --with no fire coming at you.

HOFFMAN: No fire, but people down below, [sound of applause].





BURG: Applauding!

HOFFMAN: Applauding. [laughter]

BURG: For heaven sakes! In their Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes.

HOFFMAN: People in their Sunday clothes! They're coming back from church and they're just cheering! And then they get flowers and they begin to break out the flags! And they came along--if you passed a farm, the house alongside the road with a fence and so forth, the mother gives to the children ice cream and she brings ice cream out to the soldiers. And the little children are given [Laughter] the American G.I. paratrooper ice cream to eat! And it's hot, you know.

BURG: Yes. A totally different picture from that one a couple of months earlier.

HOFFMAN: So different.

BURG: Well, in that field where you landed, Ray, I assume that all around you you see your stick coming in right and left of you.



HOFFMAN: You knew where everybody was.

BURG: And you linked up fast with the people you were to link up with. So on that one, in Holland, you could start right then to carry out your missions, with virtually the full personnel. Probably the full personnel, except for those injured in the jump.

HOFFMAN: We had the--yes.

BURG: And were there many of those?

HOFFMAN: No, I don't--you hear of some but nobody that I remember having to be carried. Of course, you always get knees and ankles, and there may have been a few broken bones but I don't remember any.

BURG: Let me ask you this. As you bundle up your chute and everything on the DZ, and you assemble with your men and the rest of the men, did you hear so much as a shot being fired?  
[Laughter]

HOFFMAN: No, no. There was no fire. There was no fire that



I can remember. And you didn't fool with the chutes at all. You just left them. You weren't, you know--even though all of this was going on, you weren't quite sure at that point.

BURG: Have I seen pictures, in fact, of 101st personnel coming along later on and stuffing those chutes--

HOFFMAN: The riggers.

BURG: --into bags. The riggers?

HOFFMAN: Riggers would pick up. Oh, yes, that was their job. Try to salvage as much as you could. Sure.

BURG: Yes. Something which probably wasn't done with any great effect in Normandy.

HOFFMAN: Well, what they could find was--there were always salvage parties. Either the G-4s, ES-4's who--quartermaster--control riggers--and, yes, they'd salvage what was available. But a lot of those chutes were either hidden or claimed by the natives. But that was night time, and a lot of them were in the water, I suppose. But not so in Holland. It was all there.



BURG: Yes. Now what was your own specific task, as soon as you got clear of that chute and your weapon unstrapped and ready to go? What was the job that you and your section had to do?

HOFFMAN: The entire battalion formed up to make an approach march down that road.

BURG: Which road is that? The main road?

HOFFMAN: From--right down this road right here.

BURG: So you're showing a--

HOFFMAN: From the northwest into Veghel, on the north side of the--whatever that canal is. Willems Vaart Canal.

[Interruption - Side 2 of Tape]

BURG: What time did you hit the ground, approximately? Just before noon, roughly noon?

HOFFMAN: Yes. It must have been, maybe, a little after noon, because I figure this, their church service must have been around eleven o'clock.





BURG: I would expect they would be.

HOFFMAN: They were returning home so it must have been a little bit after noon, and as we formed up, I joined the Colonel Kinnard. Of course the battalions have their own-2 sections and he had a fine one. But where my people could be used for flankers or anything else, point--

BURG: And you, in effect--an actual fact--you simply walked down to Veghel. The whole unit, without opposition.

HOFFMAN: Of course you had a point out, you had flanks, and so forth, but the main body walked on down both sides of that road without any opposition whatsoever.

BURG: About how big a town was Veghel, do you remember?

HOFFMAN: You know, I'm trying to think. It's a pretty good sized town. I would think, off the top of my head, perhaps thirty thousand people, but it may not have been that big.

[Ed. note: Veghel is shown to have approximately 6,000 people in a 1952 gazetteer.]



BURG: Yes. But that's the impression you have of it.

HOFFMAN: But I've been back there and--I don't think they give any size of the thing.

BURG: Well we can find the size. I assume, from what I can see on the map, that it was not a village.

HOFFMAN: Oh, no. No, no. When I went back for their seventeenth anniversary of their liberation, you had a chance, you know, to stroll around and [there were] good sized buildings, good sized churches. And Howard Johnson moved into a very beautiful stone home that belonged to a doctor and made that his regimental headquarters.

BURG: Yes.



HOFFMAN: So it was from there that we operated. They used the dining room, I believe, for the war room.

BURG: So you, too, were at that house or near by.

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. Yes.

BURG: And operating with the regimental headquarters set-up from the time you got to Veghel. As you went there, can I assume that the aircraft were still overflying you, taking the 82nd further up to the northeast. Taking the British even further up?

HOFFMAN: Seems to me that the aircraft kept coming in and then, I suppose, later in the day or the next day, the resupplies came in. Yes.

BURG: Dropping additional equipment to all the units. But that first day and that second day, nothing.

HOFFMAN: Nope.

BURG: As far as you were concerned, the 101st is in there almost scot free.

HOFFMAN: The orange flags broken out on almost every house and building. But you know, as the underground talks to you and as you begin to secure the area, that this is a very, very strange thing. And, really, it can't last. I couldn't see





how it could last. These bridges were important. That highway was important.

BURG: In effect, I suppose the 101st has fanned out on either side of the highway and taken up defensive positions to hold back any kind of attempt to seize the highway again. And it has sent out patrols up to the northeast to link up with the 82nd.

HOFFMAN: You had to make your contacts.

BURG: You have parties placed to protect those bridges that you've seized and I assume you've got to move out far enough so that you can have half a chance of keeping German artillery from coming in on those bridges. You would try to keep them, at least their lighter pieces, from getting close enough. I suppose a heavy German field piece that can throw a shell seven, ten miles, I would imagine you can't do anything about that.

HOFFMAN: No.

BURG: But you can keep the lighter stuff away.

HOFFMAN: You don't have enough people at this point.





BURG: Even though the entire division is down there on the ground-- [Ed. note: The 101st Airborne Division was not finally assembled until D + 6, when the final air drops and seaborne lifts had been accomplished.]

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: --and this time not scattered all over creation. You're all there; you're formed up. But there's a limit to how much you can do, how far away you can keep the Germans from approaching you. Now let me ask you this. Did the elements, any elements, of the British Second Army, arrive in the 101st area of the first day?

HOFFMAN: No.



BURG: On the second day? [18 September]

HOFFMAN: No, I think they came on the third day. But maybe they did come on the second day. [Ed. note: It appears that the Guards Armored Division of British Second Army passed through Veghel on the third day [D + 2], 19 September, 1944.]

BURG: Okay. We'll look. We'll check that out.

HOFFMAN: Yes, you might check that.

BURG: But right now your recollection is that they didn't reach you until the third day, and yet you're the closest airborne division to them.

HOFFMAN: If I remember, they were delayed or something. And I think they were delayed at that bigger canal [Wilhelmina Canal] to the south, where we put a lot of the gliders.

BURG: Okay, we'll check it out.

HOFFMAN: Yes. You might check that.



BURG: Did you have any contact with any of the personnel of the Second British Army yourself?

HOFFMAN: Oh, sure. But this came later on, you know. You had the --I believe, part of those were Black Watch, I think. From their tartan. It was a black and a green.

BURG: Without any white in it or any red in it.

HOFFMAN: I don't think either one of those things were in it. I think it was just the black and the green. Almost a forest green.

BURG: Yes. No yellow.

HOFFMAN: No.

BURG: That sounds Black Watch.

HOFFMAN: I think that was the Black Watch. And I believe that as this thing progressed along, they were in on the night attack at Eerde and this kind of thing. Oh, yes, they were great. But they weren't moving.

BURG: But for you, at least three days with no combat.

HOFFMAN: I think the first combat came on the third day. And boy, just--the shells started to fall into the city and the flags --ffrrrt, ffrt, ffrt--the flags disappeared.

BURG: All the Dutch flags.

HOFFMAN: People into their houses and into their cellars. Yes, it was pretty sad. And the commander kept saying, "This can't hold," to the civilian contacts that he had, the doctor and the mayor and other people. "Tell your people, be careful." Then I think on the third day it started. The--I don't know





what else to say.

BURG: In that period of time, in those first three days, as assistant S-2--because I assume you still were--

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: --assistant S-2--did you start receiving reports about what was happening at Arnhem, further north where the British had attempted to seize the bridges?

HOFFMAN: Yes. Whatever reports came in, we posted on the headquarters map. The -3 people would post all of the friendly forces and the -2 people would post all the enemy things. And any messages such as that would come in from either XVIII Airborne Corps or the division. It would be, of course, immediately posted. But I would say that the commanders, of course, knew it before it ever came to the point where it was posted, unless he happened to be out.

BURG: Yes. He'd be the first one to really get a look at those messages.



HOFFMAN: Well the message would come--it might come directly over the radio--but it would be written down.

BURG: Let me ask you this. Did you know in England, prior to broading the aircraft, did you all know the extent of what was being attempted here? That is, did you understand, not only what the 101st was supposed to do, but what the 82nd and the 1st British Airborne were supposed to do? In some sort of broad sense?

HOFFMAN: This is one of the great things about being in the -2 section. You got to know more than other people would know, because you had a chance to go to division to pick up maps or to bring reports, or something else, and you had a chance to look at their maps, and so forth.

BURG: Get the skinny, so to speak!

HOFFMAN: I always did that, see. [laughter] I would say that the briefings were for the operational area and not for the larger portions of operation MARKET-GARDEN. Except for, of course, the senior officers. But I couldn't help but pick up



the plan, either by reading the documents or looking at the map. So I think I knew the extent of MARKET-GARDEN. But I don't think anybody realized how bad it was going to be, except maybe the British.

BURG: You, for example, even though you might have seen the maps that showed where the drop zones were going to be for all three airborne divisions, you don't recollect looking at the British drop zones and thinking to yourself, "Why there? Why not up at the objective?" Because I believe the British dropped something like seven to eight miles from--



HOFFMAN: Yes. I estimated that it was five. But my real brain-ticking was not so much that they were, say, five miles from it, but how come such a small unit is going to tackle an industrial city and think they can get away with it? Airborne units are not set up to tackle cities that size.

BURG: So that was the thing that struck you at the time.

HOFFMAN: What is Arnhem? Arnhem is something like eighty-five or eighty-seven thousand--

BURG: I suspect you're right. [Ed. note: Shown to be 97,350 in a 1952 gazetteer.]

HOFFMAN: Big, you know, factories and--there's no way.

BURG: And that was your thought at the time.

HOFFMAN: yes.

BURG: Not something that--

HOFFMAN: Not necessarily that they were--I estimated they were five miles out. How come such a small--they really--you know.

BURG: You're saying that by our airborne doctrine, that was an unusual decision.

HOFFMAN: Sure. Well, there's you know--they haven't got heavy artillery. They haven't got heavy anti-tank stuff. They don't have any armor, this kind of thing.

BURG: Well, when it came right down to it, when they disembarked on those landing grounds they also didn't have jeeps.





HOFFMAN: That's right. You walk. We didn't. We didn't have them.

BURG: They had to make that five to seven miles, to the bridges that they were to seize, pretty much on foot.

HOFFMAN: Your jeeps, if they came in, were in the gliders. And if they made it in and out of the gliders, then the jeeps would be for command units, because they had the radios and so forth. Or they might be for medical use.



BURG: As I remember, it was of the order--and I can and will correct it later if I'm wrong--but as I remember, of the seven jeeps that they're supposed to have for coup de main that could reach those bridges rapidly, they might have had two. Certainly not enough to transport a force strong enough to seize it while the rest are walking the five to seven miles to get there.

[Ed. note: See Cornelius Ryan, A Bridge Too Far, pg. 259, where the commanding officer of the coup de main attempt, Major Gough, is quoted as saying that he had more than enough jeeps.]

HOFFMAN: This is why the airborne always did the airborne trot.  
[Laughter]



BURG: Yes, so that you could--

HOFFMAN: You wouldn't move along that--but even at that, they had to have what was behind if they were going to hold that bridge, assuming they got to it.

BURG: The reinforcements, the additional supplies, the added ammunition.

HOFFMAN: Oh, that tank--that armor, they needed that armor.

BURG: Yes. You're speaking now of the light tanks that could be air-transported in?

HOFFMAN: No. The ones that were supposed to be on the road.

BURG: Oh, yes. The ones that were supposed to come in on the road, yes. Right. The Second British Army.

HOFFMAN: After all you know, they can travel twenty, twenty-five miles an hour, probably, even with the loads they had on them.

BURG: Let me ask you. Did others share your sense of, "I



wonder why they're doing it that way?" Do you remember if others in your unit, regimental headquarters, were also a little puzzled?

HOFFMAN: Well, my assumption was that they knew more about the operation than I did.

BURG: You hadn't been in service long enough yet to doubt that. [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: Yes. Probably were privy to better documents than I looked at. But I looked at the plan.

BURG: How about the people around you, and their general feeling about their part of the operation? Was the general feeling, "This is quite feasible. It is something we can do. Looks good to us"?

HOFFMAN: I don't think our people had any problems with it.

BURG: Nobody had grave doubts.



HOFFMAN: And, of course, morale was way up. To get in and get established before you were hit. This was a great bonus, you know.

BURG: Yes. A follow-up question on that. You're saying that our people were pretty well confident about what they're going to be doing. You can't speak for the 82nd or for the 1st British because you weren't with them.

HOFFMAN: No. Just for the 501st. But I think the whole 101st felt that they had missions that could be accomplished. And getting in as easily as we did; almost gracefully, insofar as the thing was like a big training exercise.

BURG: Yes. A textbook example of how to do it. When does uneasiness, if I can use that term, or anxiety, begin to set in?

HOFFMAN: I think we believed the Dutch people because they had been at this. The regimental commander was using a doctor's home. The doctor was one of the leaders, as everybody would come there to share what information [they had with him?]. The young members of the underground--and these were really kids; some of them are now lawyers in Amsterdam--but they were some of our best eyes and ears. They would take their bicycles,





pack a lunch. A girl and a boy would go bicycling into a place where they had an opportunity to observe activity and then come back and show on the map what they had seen. And you're seeing and you're hearing things.

BURG: They could probe out further than our uniformed men.

HOFFMAN: Sure. They could make believe that they were just a couple of young teenagers out. They took an awful chance.

BURG: Yes.



HOFFMAN: They had a map underneath the cloth in which they wrapped their lunch, inside the basket on the front handlebars of the--on the handlebars of the bicycle. And then, of course, our own patrols were moving and out and listening and watching.

BURG: Had you expected, or been led to expect, that elements of the Second British army, and particularly, armored elements, would be up with you sometime during the first day? Do you remember now?

HOFFMAN: We thought that as soon as the bridges were secure that



it would not be long before those guys would be going down the road. Not stopped on the road.

BURG: Where had you jumped--and that's something I haven't had a chance to check. I'll look into it--had you jumped, perhaps, ten miles ahead of the leading elements of the Second British Army on the road, or fifteen miles? Do you happen to remember?

HOFFMAN: Oh, easily that, I think. But that wouldn't take them that long.

BURG: No, it sure wouldn't.



HOFFMAN: On division history, you've got a map on page 261.

BURG: This is Redezvous with Destiny.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Well let's see. Veghel. Use the old thumb nail. All right. We're jumping, if we can believe this, twenty-five--no ten, fifteen, that's twenty--okay, twenty-five to thirty miles, I think, in front of them. And yet there were other troops down in the Eindhoven area, and so forth, which is south of us.

I believe division--maybe 506, 508. But, anyway, division, I believe, is down in that area. But, I think their big hold-up was getting across this, the bigger canal. And I don't know what the name of that is.

BURG: But south of you and in the Eindhoven area.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Excuse me, let me turn that off.

[Interruption]

HOFFMAN: Back about here.

BURG: Oh. You were saying that what you were waiting for was the Guards Armored Division.

HOFFMAN: Guards Armored Division. Yes. To push through. They were to be with us no later than forty-eight hours. And we expected them on the first day. But according to this, the division had a sixteen mile stretch of this road, but we were dropping--Veghel's about twenty-five miles from the canal.



And they've got to break through across this canal first. This is what the British have to do. But from Eindhoven to Veghel-- and that area given to the division was sixteen miles long. Well, you know, a division with a sixteen mile road; the best you can do is to do the strong points.

BURG: When you say do the strong points--

HOFFMAN: Fortify around to hold the bridges. You've got to have the bridges. Because the tanks are bound to those roads. They can't go off.

BURG: The ground is too soft off the road, so--



HOFFMAN: In order to cross they've got to be able to cross over those bridges. And sixteen miles of corridor was an awful long way for a combat unit to hold. Our kind, anyway.

BURG: To hold those bridges against--

HOFFMAN: No, to hold every piece of the road. And had they wanted to cut, they could have cut.

BURG: The Germans could have.

HOFFMAN: Yes. As they tried to do.

BURG: But, did they try--

HOFFMAN: You couldn't put a main line of resistance on both sides of that road for sixteen miles. You didn't have enough troops to cover thirty-eight--uh, thirty-two--miles on both sides of that road, so you fortified the strong points at the bridges.

BURG: Yes. And the country is so flat, with virtually no relief features at all that you could use for defense. You can't even hold the Germans out of observation range of that road. Observation in that flat country is like western Kansas.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: You can be fifteen miles away from the road and you still see it quite plainly. All right. So that's the outfit that you're waiting to come up and they do not come up at quite the speed that you thought. And yet, obviously, this whole operation





MARKET-GARDEN hangs on that British armor getting up to Arnhem with all speed.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: And the people in the 101st and the 82nd are going to have to hold a corridor until those heavy units can get up. Once they get up, once they hold the road up to Arnhem, then they have the power to widen the corridor.

HOFFMAN: That's right.

BURG: Which you do not have.



HOFFMAN: The road is secure on the first day. That is, as far as the bridges--

BURG: Yes. All the way.

HOFFMAN: Everything is secure. I was just trying to see whether they tell when that Guards Armored came through. "First light on D-Day the first German strength made an obvious--." D + 1 is when the Germans start in.

BURG: So it isn't until the second day that they--

HOFFMAN: Second day.

BURG: And that's when the shell fire comes into Veghel,  
for example.

HOFFMAN: That's when it begins, I think.

BURG: And I don't remember but it seems to me that the 82nd  
Airborne may have run into trouble a little earlier than that.  
And, of course, the 1st British Airborne is in trouble right  
from the minute they drop, virtually. They begin to get  
resistance right away. All right. Then let's have it at  
that point, where you're beginning to take German fire in  
Veghel on the second day.

HOFFMAN: Yes. They talk about Rafferty here.



BURG: Who is Rafferty?

HOFFMAN: He's a platoon leader. Lieutenant Rafferty.

BURG: Someone in the 501st?

HOFFMAN: Yes, that's when they being to get some German fire.

BURG: D + 1?

HOFFMAN: D + 1. Yes.

BURG: We'll start next week, then, at that point. Because I think it's in the next days, perhaps as much as two months-- it seems to me that you're tied up there for seventy days--

HOFFMAN: Established the longest, continuous contact with the enemy that had been established up to that point in the war.

BURG: By an airborne--.

HOFFMAN: By any unit.

BURG: Oh, you mean even the outfits that had come in over the beaches on D-Day hadn't been seventy days in continuous contact?

HOFFMAN: Withdrew to the, you know--you take them out to give them rest.



BURG: Oh, ho. So the 101st didn't get out during those seventy days?

HOFFMAN: Oh, no, constant contact with the enemy, just pushing north, pushing north, come to the Neder Rijn, turn to the west and fortify the line along the dikes on the Neder Rijn. Across the [Suder Rhine,] get over, and then form that line from Arnhem on the east, going west, and defend that line. And I believe the Germans are sitting at eighty meters and we are at minus twenty. And if you don't think that was a shooting gallery.

BURG: You are below sea level and they are--



HOFFMAN: Yes, we're below and fortified the dike.

BURG: You are twenty meters below sea level and they are eighty meters above sea level?

HOFFMAN: On the other side of the river. On the other side of the Neder Rijn.

BURG: Kind of looking down at you.



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HOFFMAN: Looking at us. [Laughter]

BURG: Okay, we'll start at that point next week.



This is an interview being taped with Colonel Ray Hoffman on September the 15th, 1978 at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library. Present for the interview are Colonel Hoffman and Dr. Burg of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library staff.

DR. BURG: I might just say that the map that we happen to have in front of us right now is a map of operation MARKET-GARDEN which shows the entire terrain covered by that operation, from the place where the 101st came down, to Arnhem where the 1st British came down. And the map we're using is contained in the official Army--U. S. Army--history volume, The Siegfried Line Campaign. Now when we broke off Friday we'd been talking about your activities around Veghel or Vechel. It's written Veghel here.

COLONEL HOFFMAN: Veghel, yes.

DR. BURG: And I found in this same volume, which is the one that covers MARKET-GARDEN, the interesting fact that [Lt. Col. Harry W. O.] Kinnard's 1st Battalion of the 501st, the battalion with which you probably jumped, was the only battalion in the division that missed its drop zone. You were dropped about three miles northwest.

COLONEL HOFFMAN: Beyond Heeswijk.



BURG: Yes. And they point out that, nevertheless, you assembled correctly and quickly and marched into Veghel and did your thing. Didn't slow you down a bit. And another interesting thing is your troop carrier squadrons, the units that brought you in, encountered quite a bit of flak. The losses for the operation were pretty heavy in the units bringing in the 101st. But it's a comment on how these things can go. For you, your particular aircraft, and perhaps others in your particular serial, no problem. You got through without noticing flak to any extent at all.

HOFFMAN: I don't think we had any flak in the area but I think probably units coming to the south may have had more.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: The first day, getting in, the losses were not very great.

BURG: Well, that first day the losses for the entire show, I think, were something like 2.8 percent, which was phenomenally low.



HOFFMAN: Well, you know, really, the only part of this which refers to Americans, I think, is the MARKET part. But the--

BURG: Well, the whole thing--I think the MARKET part was the three airborne divisions; the GARDEN part is the ground.

HOFFMAN: Yes. The ground troops coming. On that first day, you're looking at bringing in about six thousand parachutists--

BURG: Seven thousand.

HOFFMAN: --to do this.

BURG: Just a little short of seven thousand.

HOFFMAN: We lost aircraft and we lost people, but--sixty-seven hundred, plus, parachutists on that first day.

BURG: Right. That's right.

HOFFMAN: And as I check this out, we were in the Kasteel area. There it is right there. Yes.





BURG: How's that spelled?

HOFFMAN: K-a-s-t-e-e-l.

BURG: All right.

HOFFMAN: Kasteel area. That's where the 1st Division--

BURG: The 1st Battalion.

HOFFMAN: --I mean, 1st Battalion. Scattered resistance. One of the interesting things--I told you about coming down--was the--it was after church, because their church services would have gone eleven to twelve, or maybe even longer. So the drop started at thirteen hundred.

BURG: Exactly, yes.

HOFFMAN: One o'clock in the afternoon. So it was after church. And then later on, as we moved on down here, one of these Volkswagens that we now call, or in those days looked like what Volkswagen calls, the "Thing."

BURG: Yes. Kubelwagen. K-u-b-e-l-w-a-g-e-n.



HOFFMAN: Kind of square, with red crosses on it.

BURG: Yes. The equivalent of a German jeep.

HOFFMAN: Yes, it was the German jeep. But enclosed. But with red crosses all over it, on the top, and so forth. Somehow it appeared on a side road--so I must have been with a flank patrol--and coming of all things from south to north. And he must have pulled out of a side road, or something; anyway, all of a sudden here he is; he's coming! And so we stood in the road. [Laughter] So he whipped that thing over toward a stone farmhouse or building. And three soldiers got out and were running for this building. I told you I had the sub-machine gun. I had no idea what they were going to do, but what we wanted them to do was stop. I put one burst down the left-hand door frame. [Laughter] It even surprised me. Just split that door frame to bits, but it was probably ten, twelve yards in front of them. And, needless to say, [Laughter] they completely stopped right in their tracks. Well I thought, well that's funny that these guys now are going to run when they're in a medical vehicle, until my people got to the vehicle.



These guys were carrying weapons and ammunition, either for their own use or for somebody else's but, nevertheless, it was no more connected with the medical requirements than a tank would be. So that's why these guys were so intent on getting out of the area. [Laughter] That was one of the minor things. There were--they really made no defense of the area at this point. Just scattered kinds of resistance, but what they're doing is getting out.

BURG: Do you recall what were they wearing? Were they wearing a field tunic?

HOFFMAN: Gray, that gray--

BURG: With the pockets.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Now can you remember, Ray, the shoulder straps?

HOFFMAN: I'm not sure.

BURG: If they were medical personnel those shoulder straps were a dark blue.





HOFFMAN: These were not. They were--

BURG: That is, the piping on them would be dark blue.

HOFFMAN: Yes. I think this was an orange, but I'm not sure. Either that or the panel was an orange and there was a piping around it.

BURG: Hard to say what they might have been. Orange--when you're dealing with those German piping colors, you have problems with them--but orange might be the recruiting service, which is unlikely.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Field police, feld polizei, which might be possible in that area. It could also indicate cavalry of one sort of another, depending on the shade of it. But dark blue for medical personnel, and for Red Cross--

HOFFMAN: Well I say Red Cross because that's the medical symbol.





BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: You know, the circle with the red cross. White circle with the red cross.



BURG: But if they were part of the German Red Cross, then their color tabs would also, I believe, have been blue, and distinctively different from the collar tabs that you would have been used to seeing on military personnel.

HOFFMAN: Yes, yes. They were neither. They were soldiers.

BURG: Yes. And they had--

HOFFMAN: The result was we had a vehicle for transport [Laughter] --at least until somebody decided it had to go back.

BURG: Yes, they had probably liberated the first thing on wheels that showed a chance of running, and whatever their real branch of service was--arm of service--they ran into trouble. Well the account in the official history indicates that around Veghel, at the north end of the 101st Airborne Division effort--although there was desultory firing, the

Germans usually never mounted any thing against you except understrength, small approaches.

HOFFMAN: Either scattered resistance or minor probing attacks.



BURG: Squad, platoon--I guess maybe an occasional company strength effort, but nothing really very much.

HOFFMAN: What I wrote down was "no defense, scattered resistance of the whole area and we're beginning to move on down that road toward Veghel." And, of course, we closed that night in and around the Veghel area and that is then secure.

BURG: By the end of D-Day--

HOFFMAN: Yes, the first day. Yes.

BURG: --the 501st or let us say, the 501st and, certainly, your battalion--but I think, Johnson's whole regiment--had every objective that it had been asked to get.

HOFFMAN: True.

BURG: Over the canals.

HOFFMAN: And no communication with division as yet. Now this often happened. You didn't get communication until next morning. We're talking about, now, the second day.

BURG: Right, D + 1.

HOFFMAN: I don't think--Do we show the canal at Zon? Should be way down here anyway. I see you've got the Guards there. Okay.

BURG: Yes, Z-o-n.

HOFFMAN: The British forces were on the south side of Zon--the canal. There's a big canal there. They have to get across but the Germans have blown up the bridge, so they've got to build a bridge. Okay, that's--they're there at--their engineers--find, first-rate, engineer boys--they begin to construct the bridge over the canal so that the British forces can get up. At night now. We're talking about twenty-one hundred. They're doing it in the dark.





BURG: On D-Day? or the next day, D + 1?

HOFFMAN: Second day, D + 1. The reason I went back and tried to refresh and look at letters and other things, was that we [were?] asked many times whether the road was open, and this kind of thing, and whether we saw them on the road, British forces, and when we saw them, and so forth. Well, the--we're talking about D + 2 now. We're talking about the third day, about six-fifteen in the morning. This is one of these happy things that happens to airborne troops [Laughter]. They're coming!

BURG: "Weight" comes.

HOFFMAN: Here they come! The Household Cavalry and the Guards Armored have begun their crossing. And forty-five minutes later they start through Veghel. So we got them in Veghel on the third day. They passed through half an hour later. Six-forty-five. And by this time, of course, we were beginning to stretch the regiment out to Dinther.





BURG: How is that spelled? D--

HOFFMAN: D-i-n-t-h-e-r.

BURG: Which lies up to the northeast.

HOFFMAN: And then Erde and then the rest of the regiment is in Veghel.

BURG: The rest of the regiment is there? The 501st?

HOFFMAN: The 501st, minus. Which would be 2nd Battalion, supporting elements, so forth, in and around Veghel. And now we begin to feel the pressure. There's an attack.

BURG: In effect, you're trying to hold a corridor--

HOFFMAN: Now this is the third day and we begin to feel now the attack. And it's a night attack. And they knew that the German parachutists were in there. It's a night attack by German parachutists. And of course battalion would put one company out on an outpost, say two hundred yards forward of the line. Echo Company, probably under a fellow, who is now



a colonel, by the name of Gregg, G-r-e-g-g; redheaded, tall fellow. I believe he had Echo.

BURG: Why was it designated Echo instead of Easy?

HOFFMAN: In those days it was--the alphabet was Echo.

BURG: It was, ay?

HOFFMAN: Yes. There have been a lot of changes because of NATO and the foreign troops, and some words cannot be pronounced easily by other nationalities.

BURG: Now the Guards Armored, for example, was already on its way past Veghel, up the highway towards Nijmegen.

HOFFMAN: On the third day, D + 2--

BURG: You had **seen** them early in the morning. I assume a steady column of them is coming down that road.

HOFFMAN: Right. Now there's transports on the highway, always--



BURG: Yes. Right.

HOFFMAN: --you see. The early elements of the point would be on ahead of them but their transport would be on the highway.



BURG: The infantry and everything else. Ray, can I assume that as the Guards Armored and the whole British XXX Corps comes up that road--which you people called "Hell's Highway"--that those elements of the 101st Airborne between Eindhoven and your positions in Veghel can't come up that road. They can't come up to help you. They're under attack south of you, trying to keep the road open. And you people you can't move up with the Guard Armored on your way to Nijmegen, because you're trying to hold Veghel.

HOFFMAN: A little later, when the pressure gets bad, they take a battalion, or two battalions, from one of the division units that's not so badly pressed at the time and move those in to protect Veghel. Now on D + 3--now this is the fourth day. We've had the night attack by the parachutists and so the 1st



Battalion attacks in order to reestablish the line and gets four hundred and twenty prisoners. 2nd Battalion stays in defense of Veghel and the 3rd Battalion is at Eerde to the southwest.

BURG: I see.

HOFFMAN: We've got to secure this thing, because we've got to hold those bridges and we've got to hold that corridor open, and so forth.



BURG: In other words, Ray, the actions are going to tend to group up around the points on the road where there are bridges over rivers or canals. But it isn't apt to be quite so heavy on straight stretches of causeway, because that's going to be hard for the Germans to grab and hold or do anything with. But you don't dare let them get those bridges, because if they blow those, then they've cut off the Guards Armored.

HOFFMAN: I think one of the earliest things that the airborne engineers did when they got into Veghel was to begin constructing



a second bridge, so that they could have two-way traffic. And bridges were pretty narrow, you know.

BURG: Oh, yes, sure.

HOFFMAN: While the space wasn't very long--that is, they were not long bridges--they weren't very wide.

BURG: I remember reading in the official history that [Lt. Gen. Brian] Horricks had given orders to the Guards Armored that they were to come down that causeway two abreast. Two tanks abreast. There was to be no southbound traffic as they made their initial thrust. Then, of course, they'd have to single down to cross over those bridges, I'm sure.

HOFFMAN: That's the only way they could get across.

BURG: Yes. And the weight factor, too, of course, would be a problem.

HOFFMAN: Then on the fourth day the--you always try to keep pushing them back and get area--I'm looking for Heeswijk. Oh, it's up here. We go over the canal, which is--I think that's a



canal. Anyway--both sides, in order, to clear it up as far as Heeswijk.

BURG: Actually, if you had to retract your steps, you're working in your drop zones.

HOFFMAN: [Identify "he"? Maxwell Taylor?] He keeps pushing. He keeps pushing them out. Keep them out away so that [they?] can't bring fire or get in close enough to cut the road. That's what he's trying to do. And then that night, in a place called Schijndel--it's got to be--right there! Pretty good size. Right here.

BURG: Yes, and that's S-c-h-i-j-n--

HOFFMAN: d-e-l.

BURG: And again, that one is pretty much due west, isn't it, of Veghel?

HOFFMAN: Yes. Now you notice that's fairly--it's about half as large a town as Veghel. But there's such a concentration in there that they take just about a quarter of the town at that



point. It's dark, you know. It's about twenty-two hundred hours. He still kept a battalion in Veghel and some support, and so forth. And then--St. Oedenrode-Schijndel road right here. The railroad--no, that's not a railroad. But there's a railroad in here.

BURG: It may not show on the map. You notice there's a railroad--

HOFFMAN: Yes. There it is, right here! There it is coming right across there. [Ed. note: This railroad runs diagonally from southwest to northeast across the St. Oedenrode-Schijndel road.]

BURG: Oh, yes. I see.



HOFFMAN: Okay. The 3rd Battalion, this probably was--

BURG: It wasn't [Col. John H.] Michaelis [502nd Parachute Infantry?] was it?

HOFFMAN: No, Michaelis comes later on. He's going to come up. Nevertheless, 3rd Battalion [Lt. Col. Patrick F. Cassidy?] moves at about seventeen forty-five, so again we're getting in--we're



getting a late night. We're learning an awful lot about fighting at night and darkness. But move up in that area to the railroad station.

BURG: The 3rd Battalion did that?

HOFFMAN: Yes. Pretty good fire fights now begin to take place around that railroad station.

BURG: But you were still with the 1st Battalion.

HOFFMAN: No, I'm back now with the regiment and moving--of course when the prisoners came then, of course, you have to get pretty bush. You know, to maintain unit integrity they have their own sections and they're going to do their own patrolling. Their companies as well as their own sections--

BURG: Their battalion S-2's, for example.



HOFFMAN: Sure, sure. But the coordination between them, the movement of the prisoners and, you know. Nobody believes the amount of paperwork that's involved in combat. Just incredible. Situation reports--and they're all being created, even when it's--



BURG: When it's going on.

HOFFMAN: --it's a mess. That's right. Use these gelatin pads. Some of them are as big as this desk and they would roll up. This is how these things were printed, initially. On gelatin pads. And the draftsman will put it in with the pencil that will make that sink into the gelatin and then you run a piece of paper over it. When you peel it off, you've got it, in bold color! [Laughter] These things go on even during the battle. [Laughter]

BURG: Okay, let's break at this point.

[Interruption]



BURG: I did want to get on the tape the fact that the German parachutists that you mention as being part of the attacks on the 101st Division included the 6th Parachute Regiment. You had tangled with them in Normandy. These men did not jump into Holland, as you did, but had been put there by [Colonel] General Kurt Student--and not only the 6th, but other German parachute units--but they were simply marched into the area and

put into battle. Very tough troops, as I understand it.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Very tough. As we got ready to break, you mentioned that about the fourth day, or so--

HOFFMAN: Sixth. D + five.

BURG: You're still at Veghel when the German panzer's--

HOFFMAN: All of this takes place in the Veghel area, and the , 107th Panzer Brigade goes to Erp--where is it? Erp, E-r-p. Right there. Here we are.

BURG: I see.

HOFFMAN: West of Veghel. And you can see what's happening. He's building the thing up.

BURG: Group up, Walther, that's called. [Kampfgruppe Walther] W-a-l-t-h-e-r.

HOFFMAN: That's what the map says. I don't know. Anyway--



BURG: My recollection is that the conditions are so unusual for the Germans--this whole thing is, you know, beyond belief--that they had to put together special groups which often had the name assigned to it of the officer who commanded them. So Walther was an officer, German officer. [A colonel. First name not known.]

HOFFMAN: That morning, probably late that morning, they launched the attack to try and seize Veghel. This is the time now that division has put together a relieving force under [Brigadier] General [Anthony C.] McAuliffe. He's the assistant division commander. And McAuliffe is moving up to bring some relief--

BURG: From the Einhoven area.



HOFFMAN: Yes. To the 501st. By noon the 2nd Battalion is trying to hold them off on this road between Veghel and Exp. The road runs right out here; it's cut by the [map] symbol but there's a road that runs here.

BURG: I see.



HOFFMAN: And they--by early afternoon, around two o'clock, they cut the highway--

BURG: The Germans did?

HOFFMAN: They cut it to the northwest. They're coming in from both sides. They cut it up here, beyond--up in the northwest, so it must have been up in this area.

BURG: Northwest of veghel.

HOFFMAN: But we still have Veghel and we still have the bridges but they've cut the highway. And, you know, they could do this. After all, we couldn't occupy every hunk of the highway.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: But here again--you see, there's enough British in this area. The British artillery helps to repulse this attack that's coming in from Erp against the 2nd Battalion. So the British artillery's in there. The attack is repulsed. But coming this way from the northwest, now, we get this coming from the--what?--southeast--





BURG: Southeast, roughly.

HOFFMAN: Coming down from the northwest is infantry tanks. They're astride the--this is a canal in here--they're astride both sides of the canal; they're beginning to make a serious effort to take this thing. And this is also repulsed. So we stop both of these attacks short on the--the one up to the northwest is just short of that railroad station, the railroad bridge, that we talked about earlier.

BURG: Yes. And you're very fortunate that British artillery was handy.

HOFFMAN: Yes, but by this time the 44th Royal Tank Regiment's 1st Squadron arrives with General McAuliffe.

BURG: From the south.

HOFFMAN: From the south. They've come up. And so the Veghel area is again held all the way out to Schijndel, out here, and so forth, so [we are?] pretty well beginning to hold onto this thing. Now the seventh day, D + 6, more attacks coming in. It's



really getting hot now. They're knocking the dickens out of the town and everything else.

[Interruption - Side 2]

BURG: Okay, when the tape ran out you were saying that you usually expected the attacks to come at dawn.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Dawn, more attacks against Veghel. Those are held off. But the pressure is getting pretty bad now. And the reason I tried to get specifics from my own notes, and so forth, is that we talked about, "Were the British on the roads?", and so forth. A plan was drawn to--let's see, a plan was drawn that called for bringing the British [32nd Guards] Armored Brigade from Nijmegen--

BURG: Which is up here.



HOFFMAN: --back down. See? With some 506--well, 50--maybe 504. I see 504 here. Anyway, bringing the British [32nd Guards] Armored Brigade from Nijmegen to advance toward Veghel. Oh, no, they're coming from Uden, U-d-e-n. They had come out of here, down through, and they were going to come down through

Uden to clear the road so that the flow of traffic could continue. Now there has been a flow of traffic. And you got transport on the roads.

BURG: But now you're talking about one big retrograde movement, when you consider what they have to do, which is up here beyond Nijmegen! You're telling me that they had to leave Nijmegen, come back to Uden--

HOFFMAN: That was the plan.

BURG: That was what they had planned to do.

HOFFMAN: They want to clear the road. They want to get the traffic--and then they elect to swing south, Uden; come down here, put pressure on here. The plan was to swing south to Erp, come in, clear the road, swing south to Erp, and try to make a flank on these attacking Germans.

BURG: On this Group Walther.

HOFFMAN: Yes. And the encircling--because of bad communications--the encircling thing didn't work out, but the pressure





from the British armor coming down, that did save the town. And by seventeen hundred that night the British were in Veghel, in contact. The enemy is gone and the defense of Veghel continues. Yes, they had to bring back some of their armor. Still have transport at various places. A lot of it is burning and knocked out and messed up.

BURG: Sitting up there in the roads like targets. The tough thing is though that that strength was diverted from trying to get up there to Arnhem to help the 1st British Airborne hold what they've gotten.

HOFFMAN: Well, they've got others out ahead of them. They only took pieces.

BURG: Yes. But it's still a diversion of your strength that you really need up here beyond Nijmegen if the whole thing's going to work

HOFFMAN: Yes. But if you lost Veghel then you've lost--

BURG: It isn't going to work anyway.





HOFFMAN: the middle of the--. By the eighth day, or D + 7, the enemy is to the southeast, this Walther's group. That's clear--so clear in this area--that the division moves its headquarters to Veghel. They take the same building as the 501st is using for their headquarters.

BURG: I see.

HOFFMAN: Probing attacks continue. This time from the Schijndel-Koevering area. Schijndel is directly to the west and Koevering is a small town to the southwest. These probing attacks continue to come in from that direction, from those troops that are over there.

BURG: Yes, to the west.



HOFFMAN: Here's Koevering. Here's Schijndel. The probing attack coming in from Koevering succeeds, again, to cut the highway northwest of Koevering before dark, because we've got troops out as far as Koevering. And then during the night they're beginning to build up with infantry units and tanks and self-propelled artillery. Interestingly enough, they find a corridor in

between the 501st and the 502nd. As they're repulsing these other attacks and moving out, somehow or other there is a corridor between them and the Germans slide in between that thing. This is going to give us fits. The ninth day, which is D + 8, about nine o'clock in the morning the 44th Royal Tank Regiment and the 506 now--see, we're now beginning to bring in--in fact, there are a lot of division units, the gliders, and the glider-borne artillery, and so forth. But anyway, [they] begin an attack toward Koevering to the southwest, which goes beautifully for about two thousand yards and then all this stuff that was built up during the night in that corridor between the two units, hits, pins them down. The 50th British Division, with its armor, is now beginning to come up in force from the south. And so 501, 502 and the 506, all become fire bases to supply fire as the British begin to move up on the road, since we're not on a--we begin to give them the base of fire that they need. So the area is cleared again by dark. You don't know what's going to happen at night. And we begin then the defense at Eerde, which is right there. Right there. They made a dandy, dandy penetration.



From then on, small attacks, defended against, and that was the end of it. Those ten days were the worst, and actually of those, nine days saw the complete clearing of the area. And from then on it was just "Swish, Swish." They began. They were moving. But it's too late.

BURG: You were hanging on by your fingernails, roughly from the third day through the ninth day, and especially the eighth and ninth day.

HOFFMAN: D + 2 on, which would have been the third day, to about the ninth. And then--or through the eighth, but--

BURG: The timing was just right. Enough British strength in armor and artillery was coming up the road to take up the slack just when it was needed.

HOFFMAN: Of course, you know, by this time we have our division artillery, we have glider troops, we have a lot of things to help ourselves, but in those first days they could have, I think, stopped this thing. But all during this time transport at--unless the road is completely cut, there





are things on the road. Some type of transport or some type of armor or something else. And a lot of it--of course, when the attacks come, then any transport that's caught on the road very often gets itself destroyed.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: Then we begin the move on to the north.

BURG: You're going to link up with the 82nd.

HOFFMAN: Well, you know, I suppose so, but they were at Nijmegen and we went to the Neder Rijn, the [lower] northern Rhine and established defensive positions along the dike on the [lower] northern Rhine.

BURG: What side of the Rhine were you on?



HOFFMAN: South. South side of it. And the high ground was on the other side. [Laughter] And that's a whole other thing, I think. What have you got on this map? No, you don't have it.



BURG: Yes, I doubt that that map will show that situation.

HOFFMAN: Probably not. Neder Rijn. N-e-d-e-r R-i-j-n. And I believe that's Northern Rhine, isn't it?

BURG: Or Lower Rhine.

HOFFMAN: Well I think the Waal is the Lower Rhine. Maybe not.

BURG: W-a-a-l is the Dutch name for the southern branch of the Rhine as it runs through their country.

HOFFMAN: Okay. Okay, then the Maas is below it and the Waal is in between, and the Neder Rijn is north of the Waal. Anyway, we take the position on the Neder Rijn, and this now is going to take us through Thanksgiving.

BURG: From the 17th of September through Thanksgiving in November.

HOFFMAN: Miserable rain and mud.

BURG: It's there that you lose Colonel [Howard R.] Johnson.



HOFFMAN: Yes. I forget now, I believe we're talking in terms of October when we lost Johnson because--let's see. We jumped on the seventeenth; ten days we're still at Veghel, so that's the twenty-seventh, so we're talking, I think, in the middle or maybe even early part [of October]--I'd have to look it up--when we lost Johnson.

BURG: But it was along the Neder Rijn?



HOFFMAN: Yes. Whatever churches, whatever windmills were still standing, were excellent observation posts.

BURG: In that kind of country.

HOFFMAN: Yes. And, of course, the Germans knew it, so the armor piercing--if they hit straight, why they'd break through: if they didn't they'd ricochet off. But you use them as observation posts in the daytime and listening posts at night. And I don't know how far you want to go.

BURG: Was there any change in the kind of duties that you were having to carry out, under slightly different geographical conditions, over that which you had done in Normandy? Or is it pretty much the same?

HOFFMAN: No. You had your section work to do. You had prisoners to interrogate. You had observation posts and listening posts to man. And, of course, any headquarters people are also part of the security for the headquarters area. No, probably on the Neder Rijn we had good opportunities to use the high buildings, churches, and so forth, for observation posts.



BURG: At some risk, since the Germans knew they had to be used that way.

HOFFMAN: I'll tell you, we had a great one--somewhere I probably have some pictures of churches--and got up in the belfry. That was great. If you were seen, or you were suspected, they would use armor piercing against it. And if you have ever been in a belfry, with a church bell that might weigh twenty tons, and that armor piercing shell hits that thing! [Laughter] It is worth the inside of your brain to hear that bell!

BURG: So you had that kind of an experience?



HOFFMAN: Oh, yes, yes.

BURG: Having your bell rung. [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: Oh it was rung! It was rung! Then, of course, the dikes were back from the edge of the river and the outpost lines, and so forth--the main line was on the dike--but you would patrol or man strong points down along the river. And now and then, bring in the bodies of the British and Polish paratroopers that were floating down the river.

BURG: From Arnhem. What a sad task that would be.



HOFFMAN: It all melded into the whole thing.

BURG: You remarked to me that within your division there was considerable skepticism about the German 6th Parachute Regiment, because you thought you had cleaned them up in Normandy, and here they were again.

HOFFMAN: Decimated in Normandy. We decimated them in Holland, and lo and behold, we're going to meet them in other places. We couldn't believe it. Everytime you turned around, you had



6th German Parachute Regiment, all reconstituted and refitted and--

BURG: You said that you had the opinion that they just brought up masses of men, changed their tabs, and sent them in as the 6th German Parachute. [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: I don't know whether that's true, but that's the way it felt. Everytime you turned around, you had these people.

BURG: Now let me ask you this, Ray. In part, although you certainly had to deal with the 6th Parachute and other infantry formations in France and Normandy, some of the troops that you had to cope with there were eastern troops, Russian troops, for example. What would you say about the quality of the German soldier that you met in Holland compared with the quality of the Germans that you met in Normandy?

HOFFMAN: Well, I thought those attacks they launched against Veghel were launched with some pretty darn good troops. One of the cutting lines would be, if you can fight at night, you're a pretty good unit. And those night attacks were no botched



affairs; they knew what they were doing. Gee, to compare them-- I think what probably worried us, what bothered us more than anything was why, when we were there, didn't these eastern troops quit. [Laughter] There were already liberated! Why didn't they lay down and--here we were, the liberators come to get them. Why didn't they just quit? Well, I suppose, you know, you take big batches--and we took big batches of prisoners in Normandy--and I suppose part of that was what--but when they shot back at you, that was bad news.

BURG: Yes. Do you remember any of the interrogations of those men? Many of them Russians, loads of Russians.

HOFFMAN: Poles--

BURG: Poles, too?

HOFFMAN: --were impressed soldiers. I remember Meyer doing interviews on, and so forth.

BURG: Did they offer any suggestions as to why they continued to fight?



HOFFMAN: They would maintain that they were forced to serve in the German army. Well, of course they were. Of course they were. They would tell--

BURG: Or maybe they volunteered for it.



HOFFMAN: Yes, sure, because of course this gets you better treatment. But once captured, some of these guys would spill out almost everything they knew. But the trouble is, you know, they don't really know very much but units and--it's nice to know what you're up against. Meyer was able to get a lot of that.

BURG: When did they pull you off that Neder Rijn line?

HOFFMAN: My feeling is that it was after Thanksgiving, because the real Thanksgiving, I think, was held until we returned to a base camp which is now established in Mourmelon la Petit in France. There's la Grande and Petit.

BURG: Yes, right.

HOFFMAN: But the real hero of the -2 section--you see, my section had its intelligence work to do, and inside the head-



quarters, on the OP's. And to also supply to Colonel Johnson some of his bodyguards. Half, at least, of his bodyguard contingent were members of the section. But the real hero here turns out to be young [Lt.] Hugo [Sheridan] Sims, [Jr.], who has taken Ben Wax's place as the -2. We set up on that Neder Rijn so badly, not knowing what's in front of us or what they're doing, and the patrolling is bad news. The battalions and the companies--you know, units always have trouble with patrolling. So Sims--

BURG: S-i-m-m-- [This name is spelled "Sims" in the official history.]

HOFFMAN: --s. He's going to run for representative from Orangeburg, South Carolina when he get out.

BURG: That's what he told you?

HOFFMAN: That's what he does. [Sims served as a Representative in the 81st Congress (1949-51); unsuccessful in attempt to be re-nominated; served as a captain in the 82nd Airborne Div., 1951; resumed law practice.] But he concocted the "incredible patrol," which was written up in Life and so forth, but he used the -2 section to do it. The idea was to cross the Neder Rijn and to





move into that northern territory, north of the river, and to bring back prisoners.

BURG: Sounds like something out of All Quiet on the Western Front.

HOFFMAN: It was incredibly well-planned, imaginative. He had to do something to break the resistance against patrolling in order to bring back prisoners. He had to show that there was a way to get them and you just had to go and get them. And every unit I've been with, once the active, hard fighting stops, it's pretty difficult to get men out on patrol. To patrol aggressively. So he concocted moving inland about--I'd have to look it up on the map how far. Five miles? Setting up a base--doing this at night--setting up a base alongside a highway, in a farmhouse, observing what traffic is moving along that highway, and returning the next night. To do this, he's got to go through some towns. He's got to go first through the German lines. And he's got to take these youngsters, that he hadn't worked with as long as I had, but he had to take these kids with him. So while everything else is going on, we begin



the training for this type of operation, the orientation. He gets permission to do it, so forth.

BURG: What is he, by the way?

HOFFMAN: He's a captain. [Official history gives his rank as lieutenant at the time of the patrol. Sims is promoted to captain in November 1944.]

BURG: In one of the companies?

HOFFMAN: No, he's an S-2. He is the S-2. He took over from Ben--

BURG: From Wax. W-a-x?

HOFFMAN: I believe it's Wax.

BURG: Yes, we'll check it.

HOFFMAN: Either Wax or West.

BURG: Yes. We've got a note to check it.

HOFFMAN: That's terrible. I think it's Wax. He has to have a way of keeping his direction and knowing his time. And he



works this whole plan out. At specific intervals at a cross road--when we get a decent map, we can--at a crossroad, one artillery shell will fall. He will not only know his direction in the dark, but he'll know what time it is. It's a good section, good section. And they never get a chance to do this kind of wild, hero thing. And I'm crying, because I have to stay with the radio! [Laughter] I can't go.

BURG: That's your assignment.

HOFFMAN: Oh, I have to stay behind.

BURG: To stay in communication with this patrol.

HOFFMAN: Oh yes. But, by golly, he goes; they get in there. They have to watch the people in the house, of course; they don't hurt them. Can't take a chance on anybody spilling that they're there.

BURG: Although these people are Dutch.

HOFFMAN: Yes. So there's a way. You got to--it's better to ride than walk, so they captured a truck--stake body--get a few





prisoners, put them in the back of the truck, and now they start home.

BURG: How many men went on the patrol, by the way?

HOFFMAN: I don't think he took the whole--I think ten or eleven. [Six, according to the U.S. Army official history.]

BURG: I would just have guessed that figure.

HOFFMAN: I have to go and read the account, or go and look it up.

BURG: I will too. I'm wondering if we may not have something on it here with our after action reports. I'll look for it.

HOFFMAN: But Sims is the hero. They get to the edge of the town, and by this time they've got some way to get through this town. And you're not going to get through just driving a German truck. So you form the prisoners and you march down the street in formation. Get to the river bed. But you've got people in fox holes.

BURG: Germans that is.





HOFFMAN: Germans. As you come along, peel my young section men off and go on and just pick up some more prisoners right out of those fox holes. Clear out that area so that you can--

BURG: Get across without being shot at.

HOFFMAN: Get on back and bring them. And, lo and behold, as luck would have it, why he has got himself an SS Colonel [Laughter] and, I think, fifty-two or fifty-four prisoners. [Thirty-two according to the official history.]

BURG: He may have been the one wearing the recruiting tabs by the time he got back! [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: Made it all worthwhile.

BURG: Yes. How'd they cross the river?



HOFFMAN: Set up the signals and then put the rubber boats over, and of course there's a--to enter through one of the company unit areas. But you know what he's doing when he's-- from the communications that are going back and forth. It was pretty exciting kind of thing.

BURG: Yes. [Laughter] Darn exciting.

HOFFMAN: And the kind of thing that he put together. What I told him was that what he had were some darn good kids with him. They knew their business.

BURG: Yes, must have.

HOFFMAN: Talk about a comando operation.

BURG: Well next week--it'll give me a chance to look over that, and also to see if that patrol route--if anything on it--may be in the after action reports. We're very light--have almost nothing, I'm afraid, on the operations around Veghel. They just didn't get here with the 501st material. They may be in 101st Division Headquarters material, but at the battalion



level, we don't have it. But it seems to me that our 501st after action material really begins in October.

HOFFMAN: That was our longest period, yes. Up along the-- up along here, the northern Rhine.

BURG: Things were so bad, I suspect, in the first ten days that not a heck of a lot got written down, at least at battalion level.

HOFFMAN: You just don't have it. Because every single day, even if it had to be done on a--if it was typewritten, it was done with one of those little tiny Coronas, or it was done by hand. But situation reports and overlay maps, those were always there and were prepared and they exist somewhere.

BURG: Okay, fine. We just don't have them.

HOFFMAN: Then division after action reports exist out the gazoo, but they're all prepared from the information sent in, otherwise they couldn't be prepared if they weren't fed any. But they were prepared from what the units fed them.



BURG: All right. When we embark on this next Friday, let us look then at your experiences at Bastogne, because I think that's the next move we make.

HOFFMAN: I would think that's where we're going to have to go. There's just so much that--





This interview is being taped with Colonel Raymond Hoffman in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library on September the 22nd, 1978 in Abilene, Kansas. Present for the interview Colonel Hoffman and Dr. Burg of the Eisenhower Library Staff.

COLONEL HOFFMAN: I thought he was a captain. He got promoted after that and got the Silver Star.

DR. BURG: You're talking now about Sims.



COLONEL HOFFMAN: And the "incredible patrol."

DR. BURG: And you mention the fact that he took six men with him.

COLONEL HOFFMAN: Yes. Six of the intelligence section. He was the S-2. He became S-2 in August, after Normandy, and before Holland.

DR. BURG: So he had replaced Wax.

COLONEL HOFFMAN: As a first lieutenant. Right.

DR. BURG: And he outranked you.

COLONEL HOFFMAN: He was a first lieutenant. That's right. But they were men from our section, and they did a fabulous job.

BURG: Now let me ask you, because I want to get it on the particular record. Did that patrol occur before or after Howard Johnson was killed?

HOFFMAN: After.



BURG: Now, you might mention, just for this taped record, what you told me in private. Johnson, during the Normandy jump, had suffered a partial hearing loss in one ear.

HOFFMAN: Yes. I believe an explosion or a concussion grenade punctured--and I think it's his left ear. Or at least a hearing loss in that ear. I'm saying "left", and I'm not sure now. But anyway, one ear. And when we went north from Veghel, up along the highway and to the Neder Rijn--and it's N-e-d-e-r Rijn. I think the German word for that means "lower" Rhine and not upper or northern Rhine. We took positions up on the dike, and so forth. But to get from where he was headquartered up to his battalions and then up to the line, the last cover you had were apple orchards, or orchards, that were spread. And then a wide open space before you got to the dike.

But you were under constant observation from the Germans who were across the river. And their elevation was about eighty meters or ninety meters and our was about minus eighteen or something, however they built the dike up and [considering]? where we were. And he came up into that--I believe it was an apple orchard. And I think he had Allen, and I know he had his commanders, some of his commanders, with him. And in the course--the battalion commanders--they were talking and the people around him, staff and commanders, heard the mortars open up; and with the intensity of what they were talking about, apparently forgot that he was standing with his bad ear in that direction. And I forget who it was knocked him down, or tried to knock him down, just as the explosion happened. Shrapnel came through and cut him--I think lower back and upper--in the neck area of the spine. But that happened, I believe, after we had gotten up above.

BURG: That kill him instantly?

HOFFMAN: No, but he didn't live a long time. In the first place, it was difficult to get him out of there. But it was severe damage by the shrapnel fragments.





BURG: He was the only one hit?

HOFFMAN: As I remember he was the only one out of that crew. You know, it's almost automatic when you hear that "wvhsssh", that you go down. And when they realize it, they hit toward him. He either just started to go down or was on the way down when the thing exploded and got him. I think probably somebody wrote that up in--

BURG: Yes, they may have.



HOFFMAN: --in Rendezvous--.

BURG: Now let me ask you, was [Lt. Col.] Julian [J.] Ewell then given the 501st? Because I know he had it at Bastogne.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Because Ewell was senior battalion commander, I'm sure.

BURG: How long did you--or put another way--when did you move off that line on the Neder Rijn?

HOFFMAN: As far as I remember, it was a few days after Thanksgiving. If I remember correctly, we had our real Thanksgiving



dinner back in the base camp that was established in France at Mourmelon-la-Petit.

BURG: And I think we got that name on the tape last week.

HOFFMAN: Yes. So we stayed until after Thanksgiving, whichever Thanksgiving that was in 1944. [Laughter]

BURG: I don't remember it either. But we can find that easily enough.



HOFFMAN: Some Thursday. [Laughter] Anyway, that is my recollection, that we really didn't have--and he wanted to make it a good one, because it'd been constant rain, constant contact, constant on the line, and it was no place for--if you could delay it a few days--it was no place for serving a Thanksgiving dinner. We may have had some parts of it or some better meal, a hot meal, or something. But I think we had the real Thanksgiving meal back in the new base camp.

BURG: When you left that base camp, where did you go and how?

HOFFMAN: We went to France. Now, how we got there--

BURG: Well, you were in France at the base camp. But from the base camp, where did you go next and when?

HOFFMAN: Oh. Now we're into November, and then on the seventeenth of December came the alert to load up. And again, here we are. We're going to swap--refit the unit. The tubes on the artillery pieces have been--

BURG: Because the bores are shot out. Yes.



HOFFMAN: --have been worn, and so forth. We don't yet have winter underwear. This kind of thing. So we have a very short time. Little after November--after Thanksgiving--we got there; on the seventeenth of December, it's a go.

BURG: Roughly, we're figuring a period of three weeks in which you're supposed to refit, absorb replacements--

HOFFMAN: Of course, nobody knows this, you know, at the time.

BURG: When you go back there to the base camp.

HOFFMAN: I didn't know it, anyway. Yes.

BURG: Yes, nobody knows that the Ardennes offensive is going to pull you back out in a hurry. But, in actual point of fact, you have roughly three weeks--though you don't know it--to try and absorb replacements, re-equip. You spent that time in Holland, up until, roughly, Thanksgiving, still wearing the clothing that you would have worn in June in France.

HOFFMAN: Yes.



BURG: So you're wearing those jump jackets, the baggy pants, the short G.I. underwear--T-shirts, in effect. When they get you back to that base camp and you do refit, what does that put on your back, for example, in the way of clothing, now?

HOFFMAN: [Laughter] It depends. [Laughter] I had jockey shorts on, if you can believe it. You'd put an overcoat--and that was it. Later, later, much later, we got enough winter underwear, and so forth. We were, you know, halfway into the middle of being refitted and getting new supplies, and so forth. But I did have an overcoat. I had that rolled in my bedroll, I think.

BURG: Well, was it one of the G.I., brass-buttoned, wool O.D. jobs--

HOFFMAN: No. no.

BURG: --or was it an officer's--

HOFFMAN: It was an officer's coat. Has a--well, like a raincoat on the outside. Like the green one today, except it was an O.D. color. Forget what they called it. What a hood.

BURG: Well, do you mean to say that the outfit went up to Bastogne dressed like that?

HOFFMAN: Many did not have winter underwear.

BURG: Were you wearing your jump boots?



HOFFMAN: Oh yes, oh yes. Never take those off.

BURG: You didn't have winter pacs, shoe pacs, or anything like that?

HOFFMAN: No, no. Those came later.



BURG: Your little feet must have been like ice. [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: Oh, I'll tell you! Today, I can tell you when the temperature's going to change because the big toes begin to chatter! [Laughter] Oh yes, we had a lot of--and shoe pacs, too, were--you had to be careful of those. You had to have dry socks, you know.

BURG: Yes, yes.



HOFFMAN: The supplies like that, for the most part, came in later. We went pretty much in--not very well equipped for winter.

BURG: Shades of the German Army in front of Moscow! Still wearing the light summer wear.

HOFFMAN: Some of the refitting was going on. Some overshoes were still available, but they'd had a lot of hard hard use in the mud and the rain, and so forth, in Holland. I can't say how much winter gear had been distributed. I would say not very much. Which units had it, and so forth, I don't know. But it

wasn't very much. We went with what we had because it was pretty quick. So far as we were concerned, it was pretty quick. But if you looked at the map, it was certainly something that was going to happen. I'm sure somebody expected it to happen.

BURG: Now, really, what you could expect when you went back to France to do this refitting around Thanksgiving is that your next employment would be on another air drop. You could expect that you were going to be used as you've already been used in Normandy and used in Holland; that you'd be back there refitting, training, and jumping again, probably into Germany. But my recollection of the timing is that when the Ardennes-- the German Ardennes offensive--hit in mid-December, you are desperately needed. They've got to have trained infantry, combat infantry, and lord knows that the 101st--



HOFFMAN: We're also near. We weren't tactical reserve--they called it stratigic reserve--but we were near enough to get there.

BURG: Yes. So what was the process then. Take me from that

base camp. Tell me what happens when the orders come in.

HOFFMAN: Well, my recollection is, you look at the map and you know something's happening. I saw a division map and you knew something was happening. You saw increased fighter activity, but the weather's getting miserable. I think it was in the night--no, early morning of the seventeenth. Yes, early morning of seventeenth, or late night of the sixteenth; anyway, I hopped in the jeep and went and drew the maps that supposedly they would be used. They were great. Most of them were road maps, you know. [Laughter]

BURG: Michelin maps.



HOFFMAN: But, nevertheless, they were maps. And when you draw the maps, you know you're about to start. Early on the seventeenth--miserable weather. Weather starts to close in. It begins to snow, fog. The trucks--stake-body, open trucks--begin to pull in. Of course, by this time the orders have been issued. the briefings--as much as you could of it--were given and then we start on the way. Most people are in the big--what are those?--twenty-ton stake-body trucks.



BURG: Bigger than the six by six.

HOFFMAN: Oh yes. Oh yes. But they're in any kind of transportation they can get. We start out on the road and start moving in. It is just as miserable as it can be. Snow and rain and fog.

BURG: Canvas over the trucks?

HOFFMAN: No, no canvas over the trucks.

BURG: No canvas! You're in the open.

HOFFMAN: Some may have had it, but most that I saw--there was no time. There wasn't any canvas. It's dark. They're supposed to travel with their cat eyes on, you know. The slit lights.

BURG: Yes, the blackout slit over the light.



HOFFMAN: And I think finally the old man or some commander decided this is ridiculous. We're going to lose the entire convoy traveling at this speed and trying to make this thing.



And in this fog, who's going to see us anyway? But anyway-- or maybe it was individual initiative [Laughter]--but a great many lights were turned on. But as luck would have it, we came down the road that the Germans did not. And you had to have Bastogne because--what? There are eight major arteries or more that meet in Bastogne. It's the major road and rail center in the area.

BURG: Right.

HOFFMAN: We go down the road, and they're on the two roads beside us. For some reason they didn't take that road.

BURG: Now this probably is the Fifth Panzer.

HOFFMAN: We went right on into--

BURG: And they're running on two roads, one on either side of you--parallel to you, in effect--and you're coming in--

HOFFMAN: I don't know whether they're parallel, because I forget--we're coming in, I think, from the south.



BURG: This map indicates--well it's a little--

HOFFMAN: It's too far.

BURG: Yes, I don't think that's going to do it.

HOFFMAN: No, this is a little--

BURG: Yes, it depends on what--the earlier maps are here but, you see, they're cued to various German units as they penetrate. So they just don't quite do the job. I might say that we're now looking at maps in the Army official history, the volume called The Ardennes: The Battle of the Bulge.

HOFFMAN: Why don't you get that Rendezvous book?

[Interruption]

HOFFMAN: Oh wait, wait.

BURG: We're now using two maps. We have a slightly larger one from Rendezvous with Destiny, the Rapport and Northwood book.



HOFFMAN: I was just trying to get back--

BURG: There are only two maps in there. There's that one and there's the one that shows Bastogne itself. Well, as you say, the essential thing is you slipped in there.

HOFFMAN: Moved from Mourmelon la Petit--met some units coming from la Grande, you know; there's all kinds of Mourmelon's by truck and took the road into Bastogne that was the one that they didn't use as they came through to cut it.

BURG: Yes, yes. So you got in there. You were--all of your section was traveling in the same truck?

HOFFMAN: I think so, think so.



BURG: Was Sims with you?

HOFFMAN: No, Sims was traveling with--Sims may have had the jeep, or had a jeep at the time. But again, some of my people were with Johnson as his bodyguards.

BURG: Only now they're with Ewell.

HOFFMAN: They're with Ewell. I think mostly we're on the back of a truck, headed on in.

BUEG: Now as I understand it, your regiment, the 501st, is the first one there. And I think it's McAuliffe who turns things over to Ewell and tells him--shows him a rough map which indicates where the blue [i.e., American] forces are, out here, evidently to the east of the town.

HOFFMAN: What's left of them.



BURG: Yes, what's left of them. And he indicated that he hopes that Ewell can get out there and set up and join those people before they disappear or are run over. And I think the official history makes the remark that Ewell was even more interested by the red marks [i.e., the German forces] out there, since they were between Bastogne and the blue marks! [Laughter] So the 501st then, I suppose, detrucks--if I can use that expression--in Bastogne. Has Bastogne taken much artillery fire at that point, or is it still an intact town?

HOFFMAN: Oh, it's quite intact. Quite intact. No fighting



over it at all. There wasn't anybody there to fight.

BURG: Now did you drop off--

HOFFMAN: You know, it's so miserable foggy, and so forth, that you couldn't see anyway.

BURG: So Germans hadn't entered the town and left it or anything. They haven't reached the town. Did you drop off--

HOFFMAN: What I seem to remember is that what they did was to come on through it, their advanced elements, and take these roads out, because they all lead in and out.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: And if you sit on this, you sit on the center of communication that has to be used if they're going to move anything in a large offensive.

BURG: Well, did you get off in the town or did the trucks-- the 501st, the whole outfit--keep going on out of the town to the east?



HOFFMAN: No, I think he dropped his headquarters out and--  
Of course, the battalions and companies, I think some of them  
would have kept on going until they got into a place where  
they could detruck and then move into their positions. They  
picked a convent for the regimental headquarters. It was a  
big stone convent and they could use it as their headquarters.

BURG: Let me show you a photograph, an air shot--low angle  
air shot--in the official history [see page 446-47, The  
Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge] which shows division headquarters  
up here towards the north end of town.

HOFFMAN: Yes, that'd be the warehouse complex, yes. No, we  
were in a--this would be it. Wouldn't it be a--

BURG: I note, for example, this road is the road to Bizory.  
So we're looking down into the town this way, with the 101st  
Division command post way up in that northern extension of the  
town in what, as you say, is a warehouse complex. And you have  
picked out--



HOFFMAN: I thought these big buildings here were, but it--

BURG: They look like multiple story--maybe five-, six-, story buildings.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Yes, that's what--but then, I can't be sure.

BURG: That puts you in the northern half of the town, if that's true. And, in fact, it puts you on the Bizory Road as it comes into Bastogne. Does that kind of match what you recollect?

HOFFMAN: Well, I see two big buildings there and it didn't seem to me that there were--that could be it. There's another big building. Anyway, it's a convent with Belgian-French nuns, and that's what is used.

BURG: They are still there?

HOFFMAN: Oh yes. Oh yes.

BURG: In the convent.





HOFFMAN: Hiding in various places. In the cellar. Oh yes, they're still there.

BURG: Did you have any contact with them when you got there? I mean, what was their attitude? I presume you all stomped on into the building and there they are.

HOFFMAN: The attitude is always, "Hurray! Here you are! We're glad you're here." Oh yes [Laughter] they were--

BURG: Did you try to persuade them to leave?

HOFFMAN: No place to go, really. The Mother [Superior]? took over a portion of the cellar, I think, and that's where they spent their time. Sometimes they'd bring candles or something when they thought we needed more light. I just forget where the building is. It seems to me it's towards the center, more towards the center of town. There was a square, it seems to me. But that could have been the building, because when the fighting got real rough then the regimental surgeon, Carroll-- Major Carroll, I believe--turned their chapel into a combination





hospital ward and operating room. Used the sanctuary--  
chancel area, rather--in front of the altar as the operating  
area. And of course this was--we were in there, all right,  
but here were fragments of other units. So it was pick-up-  
sticks, grab everybody you could--Red Ball Express boys--  
anyone else to help.



BURG: And people from the infantry divisions that had been  
routed out of their positions and driven back.

HOFFMAN: Anybody. Quartermaster. Any units at all. Anybody.  
And they were put into kind of mobile forces that would be  
organized to move into various places as the pressure began  
to increase.

BURG: Yes. I might ask you, when did you arrive there? That  
we can pick off from the official history, too. Would it have  
been the nineteenth?

HOFFMAN: Oh no! The morning, early morning, of the seventeenth.

BURG: On the seventeenth.

HOFFMAN: I'm quite sure. Hell, the trucks went as fast as they could go over those roads. And darkness. And I think it was the morning of the seventeenth that they started to push along the road; almost immediately detrucked and-- oh yes, didn't take us that long.

BURG: What was the first thing that you and Sims did, once you got off the truck there at the convent?

HOFFMAN: I suppose you try to get as many reports on enemy situations as you can. In order to get those, he always carried a map that he could use that was on a board and could be stuck behind a seat or something. Plot as many as you could.

BURG: Let's take a break and when we come back, let's talk a little bit about where, under those conditions, you'd ever get reports--

[Interruption - Side 2 of tape]

HOFFMAN: --pretty well-known and documented.



BURG: Now let me just return to the question that I was about to ask. When you step off that truck and you get in that convent on the seventeenth--

HOFFMAN: I'm not sure we go directly to the convent on the seventeenth, but that ultimately is where--

BURG: That's where the 501st headquarters is.

HOFFMAN: Where the headquarters is.



BURG: Obviously, for your section the problem is, where is everybody? Where are the Germans? Where are the American forces out to the east? So, the first thing that you have to do then is to start trying to find out. Even as the 501st goes out there to take up positions, you're trying to set up a situation map that means something.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Trying to filter the reports, funnel as much information, receive as much information as we can. And you see, building up, you see what's happening as contact is made. But you also know that you were mighty lucky to get in there,



and for the division to get in there in force the way it did. Now the question comes down; can they hold it?

BURG: Now when they moved you in there, you go in with the equipment of an airborne division, which means your artillery, I assume, is the 75-mm pack guns.

HOFFMAN: Yes. The parachute artillery and, of course now, the 327 [the Glider Infantry] is--the division is on the ground and in--on the trucks and in the area with as much equipment as it has.

BURG: As it would jump with.

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: But it's been trucked in.

HOFFMAN: Also picked up whatever was in there and on the roads, and whatever pieces of units were still available. Red Ball Expresses with .50 calibers.

BURG: Trucks with fifties mounted on them.





HOFFMAN: Trucks with .50 calibers. And all of these became malded into a mobile combat force that would move to the strong points as a reserve and back-up.

BURG: Had any armor retreated in front of the Germans and established itself in the Bastogne perimeter? Or any armor you had, I guess, had to come in.

HOFFMAN: The only armor, I think, that ever came around was what came in. I don't think there was any armor in here.

BURG: Yes.



HOFFMAN: Those were just green kids, untried divisions, sitting in front of that.

BURG: As far as the American forces were concerned.

HOFFMAN: No, I don't think we had any armor inside, if I remember. The commanders worked with what they did have and it was just, you know, it was fantastic--and the cooperation of men who had been separated from other units. And the use made of them. Make them into mobile combat forces that could

move to whatever point was being hit. And for some reason the Germans never hit the perimeter in great force all at once. They kept hitting into one area and then we'd move the forces into that area; stop them. Then they'd hit some other place on the perimeter.

BURG: Piecemeal attacks.



HOFFMAN: But never hard attacks, say from the east and the west at the same time, which would split everything.

BURG: Yes, yes. Now let me ask you this. Do you remember any particular incident, from that period of time while you were surrounded, that now sticks in your mind?

HOFFMAN: Oh there are many. Major Carroll and his operating room in the chapel and his hospital. And, of course, the tension as the thing gets surrounded. Let's see, by this time, I think Kinnard is now the G-3 of the division, Colonel [Harry W. O.] Kinnard, who had First [Battalion]? And, of course, now we're getting up toward Christmas, so we get the division situation map, all surrounded with the red marks, the

enemy marks. Okay. And then the blue marks, and so forth. And written across the inside of the doughnut was, "Merry Christmas."

BURG: On your situation map for Christmas!

HOFFMAN: On the situation map! For Christmas! [Laughter] I thought that was great! That was a great touch! And the kind of thing that he would do, or allow to be done.

BURG: After McAuliffe was asked to surrender the town--

HOFFMAN: Fantastic.

BURG: --I would imagine you probably knew what his answer was within minutes of it being given.

HOFFMAN: You know, the town was in pretty good shape when we got there. But when the artillery barrage started--and, of course, there isn't any aircraft. Nothing. The ceiling is schmaltz. It's just hanging up there. The weather is just so miserable. The snow. There are no planes. There is no aircraft. No cover.





BURG: No tactical fighter bombers to help protect you. No supply drops.

HOFFMAN: Nothing gets through, if I remember, at this point. Anyway, they start the bombardment of the city. Going to bomb [us]? into submission. And of course that won't do it. He [who]? isn't about to give up this ground. This is a major communications center. You can't swap those for oats, for anything. Otherwise they could just pour through there, including that railroad.

BURG: Yes.



HOFFMAN: And that makes a mess out of that city. Of course the convent is all windows; I think all the windows were broken. There was an incident with--how, why, ammunition trucks came into the CP area, I don't know. But there were one or two, two-and-a-half ton trucks completely loaded with ammunition and they were parked outside the CP area, unbeknownst to the commanders. And once it was known, the order was immediately given to get those things out of there. [Slam] and they went up!



BURG: Both of them.

HOFFMAN: One or two. Anyway, complete. Well that was as bad as a, you know, a direct hit. Why they came in there--I guess, maybe, somebody was asking directions, or something else. But, anyway, they were ammunition trucks. Whether it was a direct hit--must have been. They exploded. One or two ammunition trucks parked out in the--sort of a--maybe it was a kind of a courtyard, or maybe it was a parking area on the outside of the building. But it was one of the biggest concussions, I think anybody felt for a long time. [Laughter]

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: Of course, there were incidents of armored attacks. After all, what else is out there but panzers? [Laughter] They're going to prove they can do it. Of course the armor is building up, building up, building up, because there isn't any air. We don't have any air, so they can bring what they want. And I don't know whether it's--you can look it up--maybe twenty-seventh, twenty-eighth, something like that, and the



weather starts to clear. A little opening comes in the clouds, and I tell you, the fighter pilots must have been up there looking for a hole. And they just came down through the hole in those clouds. It hasn't really cleared yet, but they've got an open space and they poured down through those and started to attack the armor and whatever transport is on the roads. That was the high point of the thing, to see those P-38's, Lightnings--maybe even some British Spitfires, I don't know. Anyway, they just poured down through whatever hole was in the clouds and started in to take on that armor.

BURG: That was it, then, as far as the Germans were concerned.

HOFFMAN: People always say that we were, you know, we were rescued by Patton's tanks and so forth. We always felt we just held it until they got to it. [I mean they weren't going to take kids. (Not entirely clear.) ]

BURG: The 101st Division didn't need to be rescued!

HOFFMAN: Right! Right! We held it; you guys finally got there. [Laughter] You know, great morale. I think it's the



first unit in the Army. From them--of course, there are a lot of battles and so forth, but then comes the fight through the Haguenau Forest.

BURG: Haguenau or Hürtgen?

HOFFMAN: Haguenau. The railroad overpass and some of the other battles that went on.

BURG: So they kept you in a ground role?



HOFFMAN: Oh sure. Sure.

BURG: After Bastogne, you simply went with the advancing armies. Now, they mounted another airborne drop on the far side of the Rhine. VARSITY, I think it was called. But they didn't use the 101st in that.

HOFFMAN: No. No.

BURG: You stayed in as ground troops to the end of the war.

HOFFMAN: That's correct. But they didn't use the division, did they, for that one on the other side? Didn't they use just the 508?



BURG: I'm not sure who took part in it, but I don't think that the 101st--

HOFFMAN: Oh no.

BURG: --made that jump.



HOFFMAN: . None of ours. None of ours.

BURG: They may have used the 17th, which was fairly new in Europe at that time. [Ed. note: Operation VARSITY was carried out by the American 17th Airborne Division and by the British 6th Airborne Division.]

HOFFMAN: And from then on--let's see, somewhere along the line I get--in the Forest, I guess, at that time. Casualties are pretty good and I finally get to be a platoon leader of a rifle platoon.

BURG: They take you out of being assistant S-2.

HOFFMAN: Yes. Yes, I get to be a platoon leader.

BURG: In the 501st?



HOFFMAN: Yes. And I got--it wouldn't be called Montezuma's Revenge there--but I got the GI's. And I think my platoon sergeant's name was Jones. We were, seems to me, in the wooded area with a main line on the military crest of the hill. The military crest is beyond the top hill.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: So, if you wanted to peacefully use the facilities--  
[Laughter]

BURG: You had to cross that crest.



HOFFMAN: You went on back and took your little shovel with you if at all possible. We really had--not really fox holes, but primarily slit trenches. And I would run back, and just as soon as I ran back, the OP--the German OP--would pick it up and you could hear the mortars cough. Takes them a while, ttttt. And Jones is laying in that--he's laying in that slit trench and he is just breaking his sides laughing, to see whether I can make it, do it, and get back in time. And I am yelling at him, "Jones, if we ever get out of this thing, I hope that Louisiana sinks into the sea!" [Laughter] He was a kid. I came out of there

looking like death warmed over. My cheek bones were sticking out. [Laughter] I don't know how many pounds--I would imagine that I lost thirty, forty pounds. Anyway, cold. Miserable. Feet. Toes, really--because you don't say, "I can't do it any longer." You keep it going. But the toes didn't blacken or anything else. They froze, but working them--but even today, I can tell when the weather's going to change. They start to tingle. Then the movement was on, and somewhere or other, relief. Travel by train across Germany in a--oh, freight cars--and see mile after mile after mile of destruction. Railroad track, just like somebody tied or twisted it in great loops. Most fantastic thing. All the way down into--of course the Haguenau Forest thing lasted, I don't know how long--but whenever it was over, we moved on down into southern Babaria.

[Ed. Note: The 501st was withdrawn from the Haguenau area, Alace, on Feb. 28, 1945, and moved by train--straw filled 40 and 8 boxcars--back to Mourmelon.]

BURG: The war was over.

HOFFMAN: Or pretty close to it. When was the war over: In May?



BURG: Yes, eighth or ninth was VE Day.

HOFFMAN: January, February--I think we were down there before it was over, but we may not have been. [Ed. note: The 501st was held at Mourmelon in case it was needed to jump into Nazi prisoner-of-war camps. When this was cancelled, the 501st joined the rest of the 101st--whose missions had also been cancelled--after VE-Day in Berchtesgaden.] Might have to go check some of the letters and see where I was. But we ended up in southern Bavaria. I think probably it's one of the most beautiful spots on the face of the earth.

BURG: Yes.



HOFFMAN: Those mountains.

BURG: Well, they were afraid that a redoubt had been established down there, which is why they directed so many troops into Bavaria. And, of course, there was nothing, but that was what they feared.

HOFFMAN: They took over the Eagle's Nest and Hitler's you know, hide out.

BURG: Berchtesgaden.



HOFFMAN: Berchtesgaden.

BURG: You were a first lieutenant when the war ended?

HOFFMAN: No, I was a Ca--uh, when the war ended?

BURG: Yes.



HOFFMAN: I was a first lieutenant. They broke up the 501st; first unit to be disbanded. So both jumpers and glider men were mixed in the glider units. Some went to the 325 of the 82nd; some went to the 327 of the 101st. When the 101st was disbanded--uh, no. When we got ready to come home--because the 101st is going to stay--when we get ready to come home, we went over to the 325 of the 82nd. And the victory parade, we made the victory parade with the 82nd.

BURG: Oh did you?

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: Wearing their patch?

HOFFMAN: Wearing their patch.



BURG: How embarrassing for you. [Laughter]

HOFFMAN: The only way your pride survives is that you've come home. [Laughter]

BURG: Yes, yes. Now did you step out of the Army at that point, once you got back here in the States?

HOFFMAN: Not until March of '46. Married in June and started to finish my college; go on to seminary. I knew I was headed for the ministry.

BURG: Yes. Where did you do your college, the finishing off of your college?

HOFFMAN: Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut.

BURG: Yes. So you did that and then theological seminary. And where was that?

HOFFMAN: In Virginia. Theological seminary in Virginia. Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia.



BURG: Yes. How long was that training?

HOFFMAN: Three more years. Graduated. For which you did not get a Master's or anything else. You got a B.D. They have since changed that so that now you at least are able to earn the Master's.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: Three solid years of seminary. I don't know why we're putting this on the tape.

BURG: I want to just put this on this record. Did you do any parish work after you finished the seminary?

HOFFMAN: Oh yes.



BURG: How long was that, approximately?

HOFFMAN: I did some--seven years, and that was the last year I had waiver of age against previous service. If you wanted to come back as a chaplain, you could use your previous service to waive the age requirement. That's the only blessed thing that

can't be waived otherwise. And that was my last year of waiver of age against--you're supposed to be thirty-three or something. Then I rejoined the 327 at Fort Campbell.

BURG: As a--

HOFFMAN: As a chaplain.

BURG: As a chaplain with the rank of captain?

HOFFMAN: Yes, captain. Yes. Had I been promoted to field grade, I would not have come back on active duty. I could have gone reserve, but I couldn't come back on active duty.

BURG: If you had made it as far as major.

HOFFMAN: And that's why I was [ ? ] chief. Yes at that point.

BURG: So after quite a number of years, roughly ten years, you come back and you come into the 327th Regiment, which had been a glider regiment, and you're with the--

HOFFMAN: It's now a brigade.



BURG: With the 101st--

HOFFMAN: Yes.

BURG: --Airborne Division again.

HOFFMAN: It's a jump brigade. And one of the--well, several of the officers--but Colonel Jones was commander there and he had been with the unit during the war. In about six weeks he was on his way to another assignment. We had a new commander. But it was interesting to return. These guys rotate out of and back into airborne assignments throughout most of their careers.

BURG: So at about that time you're a chaplain with the division with which you had fought. You're a chaplain who has a right to wear jump wings and--what was it? Three battle stars?

HOFFMAN: Two.

BURG: Two battle stars. Combat infantry badge. The European Theater ribbon. A little unusual for a chaplain, but--





HOFFMAN: Well they make the pastoral work an awful lot easier.

BURG: Yes.

HOFFMAN: You can move easier.

BURG: Yes, that's been my thought, too.

HOFFMAN: Bronze Star, and--

BURG: You had that, too?

HOFFMAN: --Presidential [Unit] Citation. Of course, the Presidential citation was given to [ ? ], and all the ropes.

BURG: Yes the fourragères.



HOFFMAN: Orange [ ] and the Belgian and French fourragères.

BURG: The 101st could wear all three?

HOFFMAN: All of them. And if you were with them, you wore them [sounds like "pretty way"].

BURG: Permanently. Yes.

HOFFMAN: Much to the chagrin, sometimes, of people.

BURG: Well, that's marvelous, Ray. Thank you so much for all of these sessions. We appreciate it.

HOFFMAN: Now there are--you say, you're going to put this together in a manuscript form?

BURG: Yes, that's right.

HOFFMAN: There are tons of things that are, you know, other incidents, but--and I will see it?

BURG: Oh, indeed. Yes.

