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# Harry Feinberg oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, April 27, 2008

Harry Feinberg (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

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Interviewer: Michael Hirsh (MH)  
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[Transcriber's Note: The Interviewee's personal information has been removed, at the request of the Interviewer. This omission is indicated with ellipses.]

**Harry Feinberg:** —was too Jewish-sounding, so he illegally changed it to Feinberg, which sounded in the higher echelons, of course.

**Michael Hirsh:** Right. And doesn't sound too Jewish.

HF: No. (laughs)

MH: Harry Feinberg.

HF: I got news for you. Where I grew up, in Passaic, New Jersey—well, we immediately moved to East New York, which is part of Brooklyn. We lived there about two years. My father had no trade. He was a young man, couldn't speak English. He never did learn how to speak English well; he finally understood and spoke.

My father's brother, who lived in Passaic, said "Yossel, come to Passaic, live with me." Uncle Abe was a builder of apartment houses in Passaic. "I'll teach you how to be a carpenter—'carpetnar,' " which is how they pronounced it. And that's where Pop learned a trade. He was a short man, but he was strong as a bull. He had muscles on top of muscles, and whatever he did, he did with—what's the word?—with fervor. He wanted to learn, he wanted to make something of himself, and eventually he did. He became a

contractor—a building contractor, believe it or not—with his poor English. He couldn't read or write English. It was not for him. My mother, on the other hand, she learned English with only a trace of an accent—a trace! I couldn't believe it. Very smart, very intelligent woman—with no schooling, of course; neither one of them had any schooling.

(phone rings)

MH: I'm sorry.

HF: Is that yours?

MH: That's me. Excuse me. (on cell phone) Can I call you back later? Okay. I'm sorry.

HF: That's all right. Anyway, I grew up in Passaic, New Jersey, went to school there, got up to the second year of high school, and I became stage struck. I went into show business.

MH: Yeah?

HF: I went with the biggest, greatest, most well-known act in the entire world. I'll tell you about the act later; ask me.

MH: Well, just—the act was?

HF: Borrah Minevitch and his Harmonica Rascals.

MH: Okay.

HF: If you hang in there, I'll show you a picture.

MH: I'll hang in there.

HF: (gets photos) These are the original Harmonica Rascals. This is Johnny Puleo. He was the comedy relief of the act. This is the greatest harmonica orchestra. These are musicians; here I am, right here, seventeen years old. I auditioned for the act three times. The boss, Borrah Minevitch, who is not on that picture, his eyes bulged. His eyes bugged out. "Can you read music?" I said, "Yes, I can." (belches) Excuse me. He hired me. I went out on the road for almost four years.

MH: When you were seventeen?

HF: When I was seventeen, yeah. Never left home in my life; didn't even know what a vacation was, we were so poor. This was during the Depression era.

MH: Did you finish high school?

HF: No, I didn't. I actually, after I came—just a few years ago, the state sent me a diploma (laughs) for nothing, because I went through the war. They claimed that it interrupted my education, which is not—"All right, fine." So, there's another medal up there for me. (laughs) It was—getting back to this; had nothing to do with the war, however.

I stayed in show business until 1940, 1937 to 1940; it's not quite four years, if you count—thirty-seven [1937], thirty-eight [1938], thirty-nine [1939], forty [1940]. And I smelled a war coming on at that time. My parents wanted me home in the worst way. "You don't even know your family. We don't see you anymore," all that. We finally decided this is enough. I'm not going to make a big star out of myself, I'm not going to make a lot of money, and I found out that the glamour is only on the audience's side, from the audience's side of show business, not behind the footlights. The glamour behind the footlights was hard work, even though you think, "Eh, a little harmonica." This was the greatest in the world. Nobody ever, ever played as well. These were all professionals. Comedy from Little Johnny Puleo, the dwarf—not a word was spoken; this was all mime.

MH: Are there recordings?

HF: Recordings, yes, many recordings out. I have some. Don't ask me where they are. We just moved in here December 15.

MH: What did you get paid?

HF: (laughs) Military secret.

MH: Okay. I got a security classification.

HF: (laughs) I don't tell anybody what I get paid; she's [his wife] the only one who knows. We were in a movie—they were in movies before I got in there, because they started in 1926. I came in eleven years later, 1937, but I fit right into the act, because I was a musician. I was a trumpet player from ten years old up until about fourteen, until I saw them in the movies and I said, "This is it." The trumpet is out in my car right now, in a back seat. I've got about a hundred harmonicas here in the room. I want to get a glass case for here, and display them; we'll get to all that in time.

We made a movie with Jane Withers and Rochelle Hudson.<sup>1</sup> Jane Withers—doesn't mean anything to you—was the same era as Shirley Temple. She was a child star, twelve years old, but such an unspoiled star, a celebrity. I can't believe at twelve years old; she was just a regular person. Rochelle Hudson, who was the love interest in this movie, was already a big star.

Let me just get a drink here. (clears throat)

That was my claim to fame. However, I finally did get home. I had no trade. I didn't have enough education. I did not go back to high school. My father said, "You come with me and learn the building business," which I did. When I did come home, I was only home for thirteen months, and I was drafted. January 14, 1942, was when I went into the Army.

(background noise from microphone)

MH: Let me put this on you, 'cause it's making noise.

HF: Oh, you want me—

MH: I'm going to stick it on your sweater. That'll probably be okay.

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<sup>1</sup>*Rascals*, released in 1938 by Twentieth Century Fox.

HF: All right, I'll just repeat: January 14, 1942, I was drafted, went into the Army, Fort Dix. We were there for a week, just to get our orientation, our misfit uniforms, find out just what the Army was like, learned a little about guns, about the—I can't remember now—the ten questions that everybody in the service has to learn.

MH: The general orders.

HF: General orders, thank you. Mind is going, too.

MH: Mine went.

(knocking on door)

HF: Anyway—

MH: Somebody's knocking at your door.

HF: Oh, just a minute. (calls to person at door) Just a minute. Probably my son.

***Pause in recording***

HF: Okay.

MH: So, you're at Fort Dix.

HF: Fort Dix, New Jersey, for a week, got ourselves oriented. We were sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky, for six months—did I say “six months”?—it was three months of basic training.

MH: That's where I had basic training.

HF: Basic training, AFRTC [Air Force Reserve Training Center], 8<sup>th</sup> AFRTC. I can't remember now what—

Anyway, from there, we learned about tanks, and what we learned was the old, old tank that just came out of the First [World] War. It was an experimental tank with a 75mm gun on the right side. We had no turret to speak of. I had about fifteen minutes of driving a tank, and the instructor said, “You will never be a driver.” (laughs) Because you had to put—in those days, you had to pull levers [to] stop, go. You want to turn left, you pull this lever; you want to turn right, this lever. You want to stop—and that’s the way it was. There were no radios in the tank. The tank commander hit you on the head twice, or once; that meant “Go forward.” Hit you on the left shoulder, “Turn left;” right shoulder; hit you in the neck, “Stop.” And that was my fifteen minutes.

Anyway, just to repeat, I was not a tank driver. However, going through all the basic training, the marching, the field and whatever we had to do, I learned about machine guns, take apart the various guns and everything. I never saw a real gun until I got into the Army and, of course, it fascinated me. “Oh, my God, I got a .45 here,” or a revolver, Colt .45 revolver. “Gee, whiz, I’m handling it!” Well, anyway, of course nobody was shooting at us, so I was fascinated. They’re very nice.

I went into the Army at 185 pounds—I was a chubby—came out 170 pounds in good shape, great shape.

MH: How tall are you now?

HF: How tall am I now? That’s a good question. I have to answer it this way: I was six feet right on the button. I had three back surgeries. I’m now five [feet] ten and a half [inches]. The back surgeries are due partially to my Army life, because in order to get onto a tank, you climb up. Orders were, you want to get off the tank, you jump. It’s a seven-foot jump. Every time I jumped, oh, my God, my back killed me. But I never complained; I just lived through it.

And from Fort Knox with our training, we were [taken by] trained—choo-choo—to Pine Camp, New York. That was our outfit; that was our permanent outfit. I couldn’t believe that we could beat the Germans with what we had and what we did. Everything was old-fashioned. It was a Springfield rifle. The kick was so bad that guys had black eyes, because in order to fire the gun—everybody had a black eye. For some reason, I didn’t. I was able to hold that gun. We went out and arranged for pistol firing, for machine gun firing. Greatest thrill of my life, seeing this in the movies, now I’m firing a .30 caliber machine gun, air-cooled, water-cooled. We had motorcycles. The entire 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division had about six tanks, that’s it.

MH: Six?

HF: That was our training, believe it or not, and we all wondered, “How in the hell are we gonna—how can we go overseas? My God!” So, believe it or not, for our training, we took 4x4 trucks—I believe they were called 4x4s, a big truck.

MH: Deuce-and-a-halves.

HF: Okay. They had signs painted “Tank” on each side. So, we knew we were firing at tanks, but with no ammunition. In other words, we were able to—

MH: Simulated.

HF: Well, this was a simulation, but—oh, jeez. My mind is really going. I have forgotten much of the English language.

MH: It’s okay.

HF: So sorry. But we were able to train and aim at the—of course, we had crosshairs that we could aim at, and simulate that we’re firing at them. And again, it was right shoulder, left shoulder, head tapped by the guy up above—tank commander—telling us what to do. Of course, each individual tank only knew what each individual tank was doing, because there were no radios to contact each other. All we had was signals: “Go forward,” or, “Left,” “Right turn.” And we had light tanks, incidentally. We had the Stewart tanks. That was only four men in a tank; the medium tank had five.

So, we went through training in Pine Camp, New York. The weather there—from Kentucky, which is nice and warm, two or three days later, we got over at Pine Camp, New York. The snow was three feet deep. We were given Russian parkas, these heavy Russian caps with flaps down here; everything was all fur lined. As soon as we got to Pine Camp, we didn’t even have a bed to sleep in or a barracks, although they were there. They took us right out in the field in these trucks, full field pack and these heavy parkas and everything. “Okay, guys, jump off. Try to keep yourselves warm.” (laughs) It was 40 [degrees] below zero, believe it or not. Pine Camp is a miserable, miserable place.

Anyway, “Okay, guys, let’s see, you just had chow. Nothing else to do. Get into bed; take your bedrolls, and go to bed.” So, we laid out our bedrolls on top of the snow, and

everybody jumped in. But these sergeants, (laughs) rebel sergeants, they did not let us—they were right on our backs. I mean, they busted our chops. Everybody's in the beds. Whistles blew. "Okay, everybody out." We just got in bed. "No, no, no you don't—you go to bed in that bedroll in this weather, you'll wake up in the morning frozen to death." They said, "You will take your clothes off, and then you will get into bed." How do you—and there's no pajamas, no nothing. In other words, you're in your summer underwear.

We looked at each other, and the sergeant started yelling and screaming, "Right now! You've gotta do it now, and that's orders!" And you don't question orders, and you don't complain. Okay, that's what we did, and we just froze. We got into each individual bedroll, took our clothes and put them in with us, and of course, our body warmth kept us warm. So, that was our introduction to Army life in snow and cold. Get up in the morning, and try to warm yourself up. We weren't used to field rations yet. So, we finally got ourselves warm. We had to run around, hungry, run around and try to warm ourselves up, which we finally did. And we all had to run over to the mess wagon. Mess wagon had a couple tables and some hot food, and we found out what coffee was. (laughs) I mean, this coffee was enough to bulge your eyebrows out of your head. And we found out that the Army gives you SOS ["shit on a shingle"] for your breakfast. What's SOS? Somebody came out with a—

MH: Creamed chipped beef on toast.

HF: That's exactly what it was. And that's what we had. We looked at each other, and our faces went awry. "My God, is this what we have to eat?" You want to know something? We all got to like it later on. I mean, this is every morning. You don't know what an egg is, what a pancake is, or bacon. (laughs) God.

So, we got our introduction to the Army in cold weather. It started warming up a little bit, because by this time, it was around March. January, February, it was around the end of March, and we're just getting into springtime so it started warming. The snow started melting, and we had to do our thirty-mile hikes in just our fatigues. Nothing warm, no jacket. Of course, it kept our blood flowing, and we got to be pretty tough. Here's guys from the city. We had guys from—the Southerners. I won't call them "hillbillies," but that's what they were. And they were used to this; this stuff meant nothing to them. Thank God we had them as soldiers. We hated them, because give them a little authority to the city-bred boys, oh, my God.

And you cannot complain. If you do, you're on a detail that you wished, you prayed that you didn't say what you did, or you didn't complain. So, we found out, and we found out that you don't volunteer for anything. One day, we're all standing in line, and the one sergeant says, "I need six men with good handwriting, somebody who can write that you

can read that writing. It has to be legible.” I happen to have had—“Step forward, step forward,” so a bunch of us stepped forward, you know. He says, “All right, you guys, come with me.” He gives us shovels and rakes and hoes, and we had to dig holes. “So, where’s the handwriting? What are you talking about handwriting? You said—” “Who said handwriting? What are you talking about? No, no, no.” there’s a detail now, and we had to go break rocks. We were like prisoners: break rocks, put them in the wheelbarrow. (laughs) So, we found out, do not volunteer for anything.

Some of the New Yorkers were street boys. All they knew was fight and argue. They didn’t trust anybody, and they found out soon enough, you don’t answer back. These sergeants are not gonna take it from you. One word out of you, you’re on detail, garbage, in underwear, and it’s still not—we’re still not springtime—in summer underwear. Put you on a truck and the garbage stinks, and this is what they had to work on. And some of the New Yorkers did not learn this. They still—they never did anything to me, because I was quiet. I never answered back, I never argued. “Tell me what to do, I’ll do it and that’s all. I know I’m gonna be here until a bullet gets me.”

We were told already—all lined up, maybe 1,500 guys, a little sergeant. As rough as he was, he signed up for regular Army, and he gave us a few little words like, “Look, guys, some of you aren’t coming back here. We’re going overseas, and we’re gonna buck the Germans, and they have some good guns. And we don’t compare with their guns at all, and they have tanks and stuff like that.” Some of the kids who were never away from home just started crying, and all you heard, “Mama, Mama.”

Well, I was already away from home, so I knew what it was like to be on the road—although civilization, you know; nobody was shooting at me. We lived in tents, six men to a tent. One guy had to take care of a pot stove that was in the tent, and that was his job. And you’d hear people sniffing and crying at night, “Mama, Mama,” and it was so sad. I mean, this guy put something in our heads. “You’re not coming back here again, you’re gonna be shot at. And these German soldiers, they had training all their lives. You can’t fool them. They are rough and they’re ready to go. They’re ready to do this for their country.” Oh, God. “And we’re not. You’re just learning how.” Oh, God.

Anyway, during the day, if it wasn’t marching, it was taking apart the 75mm breach block and learning all the parts in there, and then we’d have to blindfold ourselves, do it as though we have to do it at night, as though we can’t see anything, no lights. And then they timed us. “This is this, this is that. All right, put it together now,” and it’s all spread out on a blanket, and the sergeants made sure it was spread out, because we’re blindfolded. We don’t know where the hell these things are, and they used to push it around, and we’d have to grope around. “Okay, you took three minutes; that’s too long. You’re dead. Consider yourself dead.” Three minutes to put that thing together.

Same thing with the machine guns. There weren't too many parts in a machine gun, but they did the same thing: blindfold, you take it apart, you put it where you think it is, and then they'd scatter it. You'd have to crawl around and finally find the part and put it together. "Holy cow, it took you five minutes! Everything was right in front of you." And they talked down to you. They made you feel that you were garbage. That's what we had to go through, and they insulted us. "Your mother is this, your sister is that," and, "Your old man is—" I can't think of anything now, but always, "Your sister is a big—and your mother picks up all kinds of junk, and oh, my God, what the hell's she going out with?" They really made garbage out of us. I mean, we were spoken to as though we were in a gutter somewhere.

MH: Did they ever give you grief because you were Jewish?

HF: In our company—when we finally did get together, in our company, there were five Jews. I was a quiet guy. I knew to keep my mouth shut, do what has to be done. These other four, they would complain. They'd have to do it anyway. What the hell are you complaining about? They would complain, and the sergeant would say, "Oh, you wanna come out in the field with me? Come on, I'll take you on anytime. Yeah, I'll take you on." And you had to be careful. These hillbillies, they don't fight. They kick with their feet. They'll kick you right in the (inaudible), and you're down. They'll kick you in the head. They'll do anything to hurt you, and they don't care. Nobody cared. You got hurt? Didn't matter.

Anyway, I was very fortunate. I learned in life: keep your mouth shut, don't volunteer, do not answer back. Every morning, we'd get up—the different platoons, we'd get up, and the first sergeant would say, "All right, Sgt. Horsley, I want three men for a detail, and Sgt. Daly, three men for detail," and they would call out, "Rubin, Rochevsky"—Rubin, Rochevsky, I forgot the other guy's name—"step out front." So, every morning, they were on detail. And the other one—I call him, Zablotsky, whatever his name was, "Step out front," so only the five—one, two, three, four, five—there were six Jewish, including me. Every morning, they were picked on for details.

The details could've been anything: garbage, pick up butts, gutter stuff, clean the latrines. Oh, God, I'm telling you. And nobody bothered me. I used to say to them at night, "Schmuck, keep quiet, don't answer back, don't try to fight with them." And they'd say, "Yeah, I guess you're right, Harry," and the next morning, the same thing. "Rubin, Rochevsky, Stern, come over here." Now, I was very fortunate that way. As a matter of fact—mostly Italians; well, everything: Irish, Scotch, a lot of hillbillies. And I'll tell you, they were good. They were good soldiers. Boy, give 'em a rifle, they'll shoot a squirrel's eye out at 150 yards. Oh, great! Knew how to fight, but they were born with a rifle in their hands. And that's what we had to put up with.

MH: So, when did you get the tanks you were gonna go overseas with?

HF: We finally went on maneuvers from Pine Camp to—God, Tennessee maneuvers. We still had the yellow tanks and the “Tank” on the trucks and everything. And from Tennessee maneuvers, we got on a train and went out to the Mojave Desert. So, we had cold, snow, ice training. We had warm weather in Kentucky, the fields, and then the farms in Tennessee. We used to ruin farms, actually, cotton farms, and we would—the few tanks and trucks. We had to go through, that’s what we did. In back of us were two men in a Jeep, and they were federal men. They would go up to the farmer and say, “How much damage did we do?” and the guy’d say, “Oh, you did about 10,000 dollars worth.” “Okay,” [the federal men said] wrote it down. They’d get a check for 10,000 dollars for ruining their farm. “What do I care? Do whatever you want!”

MH: (laughs)

HF: Anyway, we went out to the Mojave Desert. Mojave Desert—it’s very, very hot outside, dry but hot. You didn’t sweat or anything. You felt so good. That sun was so nice, 115, 120 degrees. Oh, my God. And we had to dress in fatigues: no sleeves rolled up, no unbuttoned, everything had to be—and you had to wear a cap. And we all complained, “My God, it’s so hot. Why can’t we unbutton ourselves, roll up our sleeves?” So, the general got up one day, and he said, “Boys, out here, you’re no good to me being sunburned. Once you’re sunburned, you’re dead; you’re no good to me. And the sun is pretty hot.” And we found that out. You can get sunburned.

And you asked me another question. Just before we went overseas, a reporter—we had a bunch of reporters—came over to General [John S.] Wood, a beloved general, two stars. Everybody loved this guy: never raised his voice, never screamed at anybody. He was out there in the field with us, and he marched with us. We couldn’t believe it. He didn’t have to. He could stay back in an air conditioned or cool tent or something, but he was out there. We just loved the guy.

And the reporters came up to him and said, “General, we understand that with all the training you have, you’re ready to go overseas. How come these other tank outfits have names, like ‘Hell on Wheels’?” The 1<sup>st</sup> Armored was something else; another was—oh, “Hell on Wheels,” “Old Ironsides.”<sup>2</sup> So, General Wood said, “We don’t need a nickname. We will be known by our deeds alone. Name is enough, 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division.” And

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<sup>2</sup>“Hell on Wheels” was the nickname of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division. The 1<sup>st</sup> Armored’s nickname was “Old Ironsides.”

that's what we were known as, "Name Enough." "Name Enough," what else? We were called something else. "We shall be known by our deeds alone." There was another name that we were called, not really a nickname, but it was "Name Enough." So, you got that now.

You started asking me—

MH: When did you get your tanks?

HF: We got our tanks out in the Mojave Desert. Mojave Desert—General Motors sent a tank with a—

MH: Turret?

HF: A turret, revolving turret, 360 degrees. We had a 75mm gun on it, and alongside the gun was a .30 caliber machine gun. There was a driver and there was a bow gunner, who was the assistant driver; he had a machine gun right in front of him. And I had—as tank commander, I had a .50 caliber machine gun on a track that I can maneuver around. And I was to use that—it was not meant for personnel, although I could use it, but for aircraft, anybody comes in on us, and I can tell you some stories on that. But anyway, we're out in the desert, and—

MH: What tank was this? Was this a Sherman tank?

HF: It was a Sherman tank. Don't ask me about A1, M1 or anything, because we always had—every time a tank come in, "This is an A4, this is a"—but they were all M1s, whatever it was. But they were Sherman medium tanks. This particular tank that we were shown had five automobile engines in it. There were five of them all synchronized, and they had— name some of the General Motors cars.

MH: Cadillac, Buick, Oldsmobile, Pontiac, Chevrolet?

HF: No, one of—

MH: GMC?

HF: Well, it was an automobile engine. God, I can't remember. Anyway, they were synchronized, five of them—one, two, three, four, five—all on one shaft, so that's the power that we had to drive this thirty-ton vehicle. Actually, it was more, because in the turret there were clasps where we put our ammunition, and it was all around the whole turret; we had maybe another ton or so. We had to drive this vehicle with us, figure 170 pounds each.

MH: There were five people?

HF: Five guys in a tank. There was a tank commander up on the front. There was a loader who sat in the—well; he sat, actually, on the metal floor. Then there was a gunner, and he had a trigger, a solenoid trigger right by his foot. So after he zeroed in with this spyglass—he zeroed in onto his target—the loader was told to put a shell in. He would close the breach block, tap the gunner, which meant “All ready to go,” and the tank commander would give him an order: “Fire at will;” or, “Get onto target and fire as soon as you can, because he's”—this was all—

MH: It's practice.

HF: No, this is all—in other words we had nobody firing at us. And we had a radio, so everybody had earphones, and we knew what was going on. We could call from—assuming that my tank was 4, this guy's tank was 44, the other one was 43, the other one was 42.

So, we could talk to each other, and we'd say, “Four-Four, how you doing? This is 4, over.”

“Okay, 4, we're doing fine. We see the enemy. We're zeroing in on them now, and as soon as I get an order we'll fire on 'em.”

“How 'bout you, 43?”

“We're doing the same thing out here. I can see very clearly. This tank has a swastika”—it didn't really had a swastika, it had a cross. We had to learn—on paper—what the German tanks looked like, what their vehicles looked like, and what kind of tank you're zeroed in on.

“I’m zeroed in on”—whatever tank it was. “What about you, 43?”

He says, “Yeah, I got a personnel carrier, it has six wheels and it only has a 57mm gun on it. What size gun does your tank—42, what size gun?”

He says, “That’s an 88,” and we all shivered. “88,” that’s all we heard. That’s the best gun that was ever made, and the Germans had it; we didn’t. The biggest gun we had was a 75mm gun. It was a peashooter. Our guns and our tanks were nowhere near as good as the Germans, but we were told that our equipment was the best in the world. Which is a lot of bull, we found out later on. We got the light tanks, and they had the same motors as the mediums had, but they didn’t have as many—we had five engines; the light tanks might’ve had two engines. I don’t remember now, but it was lighter.

MH: Is this gasoline or diesel?

HF: Gasoline engines, yes. And we used high octane. And we also had—instead of a battery in the tank, we also had a—what the hell you call it?

MH: A generator?

HF: Generator is right, yes. It was a generator made out here in New Jersey. I forgot the name of it now. All we had was the first tanks. In order to get it started up, we had a 37mm blank shell. There was no bullet on the end of it; in other words, it was a blank. You push it in, and you fire it, and that started the motors up.

MH: Really?

HF: Yeah, so we had maybe a dozen of those. That was the first tanks. Then, the tanks out in the desert, we had gasoline tanks with a generator. We would push two—like they do in a battery, positive and negative. Push them, sparks, and that would start the motors over. And then we found out that the gasoline engines were no good to us, because—they could work fine, but not out in the desert, because of the sand. Any sand gets in the motor, the motors would die out, and if they weren’t synchronized, that was no good. Every motor had to be synchronized, all five of them. If they weren’t, that tank would just sputter along, that’s all, ’cause we’re not getting full volume.

So, they found out that the Wright Company out here in Caldwell made a cyclone engine. It was a 9mm—it was a Wright Cyclone—not millimeter, nine cylinder. A nine cylinder Wright Cyclone that the P-47s—the planes that we saw most of. Thanks, wherever you are; when we saw them, we knew we were okay. But the P-47s was an American plane. It was heavily armored, but it was a slow-moving plane. This was a combat plane. Had four .50s on each wing, eight machine guns, and when they fired, there was plenty of firepower that went out.

But anyway, getting back to the engines, they started putting the Wright Cyclone engine in. That was so powerful. Oh, my God. As soon as it started, you could just go up hills, down hills, sideward, my God. And that's what we had all through the war.

MH: How did they get you overseas? How did they take you overseas? From where?

HF: From the Mojave Desert, we went to Camp Bowie, Texas. We were there just to get our equipment all together. Now we get the new helmets, not the First World War tin cans. We had the new helmets, and everyone was given a sidearm. We were given a rifle, except—no, no, we weren't given rifles; we were given these tin can submachine guns. All the parts were stamped out, and it's called a "blowback." I think it costs the government about nine dollars to manufacture them; .45s put in a long clip. It was slow firing, but a .45—oh, man, anywhere you hit, you're down. Even if you still live through it, you're down, you're incapacitated. So, we were all given those, and we were given two—

MH: Grease guns?

HF: Yeah, grease guns is what they were called, what we called them. Yeah. And we were given two clips. One clip was always loaded, the other one was always loaded in our side—what would you call it? (laughs)

MH: Whatever.

HF: Whatever it is. And that was always loaded, so we were always prepared to fire. I personally had a .45 and my grease gun, and all the boys in the tank had the same thing.

From the desert, we went to Camp Bowie, Texas. We were there just to get ourselves—we got all our equipment from Camp Bowie, Texas. We went to Camp Myles Standish; this is in the wintertime. It was just before Christmas. That was in Massachusetts, Miles

Standish. We were there only about a week to make sure everybody had their uniforms, all their equipment, helmets, guns, and made sure they were all in good order.

Then, one morning, just between Christmas and New Year's, we all got onto our boats in Massachusetts. The boat I was on was the—I'll think of it later. From the Grace Line; it was a tour ship, you know. It didn't look like it when we went on. The swimming pool—they took everything out, and they put toilets all around, so there were plenty of toilets. There were something like 3,000 men on each ship. And they had hammocks hanging from the ceiling all the way down, and when you go to sleep, you got the guy's butt right in your face, and the hammocks.

We were out on the ocean for eleven days, and we had to sail zigzag; we could not go straight ahead; three minutes this way, three minutes this way. And we had the biggest convoy at the time. There were fifty-two ships. There were three aircraft carriers, and these cruise ships from the Grace Line. *Santa Paula* was the one I was on, then the *Santa Grace*—I think there were only three of us.

MH: Do you remember the date that you sailed?

HF: Just between Christmas and New Year's. I know that we—

MH: What year?

HF: Nineteen forty-three. Forty-three [1943], because we had our training in 1942 and forty-three [1943]. Anyway, we zigzagged. On the ship, they had one 5-inch gun. They had sailors there—the rest of us were all Army—and we were all given life jackets, the Mae Wests. We were fed only two meals a day, breakfast and then the evening meal. The officers had three meals a day. I could've killed them for that. (laughs)

MH: What was your rank at this point?

HF: My rank was—I was a T-5.

MH: (sneezes)

HF: Oh, *gesund*.

MH: Thank you.

HF: You need a—?

MH: No, I got it.

HF: Yeah, I was a T-5. I was a gunner. We were in the middle of the Atlantic, and all of a sudden, the sirens started blowing. All you heard was (makes siren sound). That was a submarine attack, which was real, and everybody had to just put the Mae Wests on, stand out on the deck from the railing to the back, and we had to line up, just in case we had to jump over, just in case they got us and the ship blew up or anything. Fifty-two ships on the convoy; on both ends there were Canadian corvettes. It was a low-silhouette ship, very fast, very quick, and being it was low, you could hardly just about see them because of the curvature of the earth. And they were always with us, thank God for them. Anyway, the call came out that there was a submarine attack, and that's all we knew, submarine attack.

MH: Daylight or nighttime?

HF: This is afternoon. I believe it was afternoon. Yeah, we could see each other. One corvette, who was all the way out—I don't know where he came from—came right—here we are, came from around the front of us, all around, and he circled us again, and then he stayed in back of us. And all of a sudden—you would enjoy this—you see two ashcans, you've seen it in the movies; I don't think you've seen the real ones. *Toom!* These ashcans go down, they go down, and it looked like the whole Atlantic Ocean was just erupting. Boy, I'm telling you. It was enjoyable; let me say that, even though we had no idea what the hell was happening. We were ready to drown and everything. They were putting on a show for us.

This corvette started doing circles in that one area, stayed right behind us, and it seemed that we were the targets, the *Santa Paula*. All of a sudden, they're right in back of us, and there's two more ashcans go out and then another two, and we saw everything erupt and we saw things coming up. We don't know what the hell it was. It looked like oilcans or something. And you just look. "Holy cow, I've seen this in the movies"—there was no television at the time. "I've seen this in the movies; now I'm actually looking at it." And he must've gotten the sub, because he just went right around us once again and he took off into position. As I said, thank God for these Canadian corvettes, who were in this silhouette. We could just about see them.

And from there on, we had no problems. It was—what do you do on a ship when there's nothing to do? They spread out a blanket and they played dice, they played cards. I remember I had eight dollars in my pocket, eight American dollars. I got into a card game, and that was it. (laughs) I had no money, because I didn't know how to play cards. The money was no good to me, and—

MH: You were a musician and you didn't learn how to play cards?

HF: No, never. I was always practicing, eight hours a day, always practicing. I had to get as good as these guys, because they were in the business eleven years before I got there. I had to top them—which I did, believe it or not.

Well, I'll change the subject. Some of them, they started bullying me. What I used to do, we always had a big trunk, a steamer trunk full of music. So, during the day, between shows, I'd pick out somebody's part, I would go to the dressing room, and I would—so, it was eat, perform, practice, practice, and I would practice the other guy's part. One guy would come in and say, "Yeah, why don't you take my part? Maybe you can take my place." So, I said, "Hey, I'm just trying to—I'm not as good as you guys. I'm trying to get better." "Take my part; maybe you can take my job away." So, I said, "I'm not trying to take your job!" This is what I used to get, because I was the new kid on the block. Okay, this is to be expected.

Anyway, getting back—

MH: So, the ship went where?

HF: The ship went to Swansea, Wales. Two nights before we landed, that whole port was bombed, and they cleaned it up in a hurry. We were in Wales, and the British were soldiers—infantrymen, I would assume—with their handguns, and they looked so funny to us with their short leggings. We wore—I don't know if you know anything about the canvas leggings. We used to tie them in; our legs were always tied together—not tied this way, but just tied up. I suppose it was to strengthen your muscles, or whatever it was. We'd see them, and some of the New Yorkers would start just throwing some language at 'em. (mimicking English accent) "Hey, limey, how are you?" and the limey would turn around, "All right, Yank, you'll find out what it is." So, they were always bullying each other.

We were out on that ship for two nights—three nights. “What the hell are we doing here? Why aren’t we on land? They’re gonna come over again; they’re gonna bomb the place.” Fortunately, we weren’t bombed. Anyway, at night—it was about the third night—we all got lined up. Have you ever seen an English train with—the aisle was on one side, and you sit on the other side, so you could walk through.

So, about six of us sat in the cabin part. There was Scotland Yard guys with us: black coats, black derbies. I don’t know if they carried a gun or not. But they looked at you, just kept looking at you, and their heads were all around, just in case somebody infiltrated our troops; maybe they could smell them out or something, whatever it was. And their cigarettes were awful. I didn’t smoke at the time. We were given Camels, which were the top. So, I passed by one of them and said, “Care for a smoke?” “Oh,” he says, “for me?” and started pulling one out, and I said, “No, no, take the whole thing.” He said “Oh!” like it was gold, you know. Their cigarettes stunk like hell. But we got to know them, they got to know us.

We were on the train all night long. I think it was about two nights or so. And what we saw—we didn’t hear, but what we saw was flashes of light at night, because you know, windows, you could see; just flashes of light. We had no idea what they were. I once asked this—

MH: Scotland Yard guy?

HF: Scotland Yard guy. Thanks. (laughs) I notice it’s coming on now. I asked him, “What are these?” and he says, “London is being bombed, and these V-1s”—whatever they call them; they used to bomb and it lit up the whole sky. So, every night we’d see a few of those flashes. I said, “Do these bombs come out here?” and he said, “No, they’re just after London.” And I was there for four days in London. I saw the areas that were bombed, just—I’ll tell you, it was really rough for those people. We didn’t like them, they didn’t like us, so it didn’t matter.

From Swansea, Wales, we flew—we trained into Devizes. We were all around: Swindon, Devizes, different camps all over the place. But we were in Devizes for about six months, until we finally went across the Channel into France. But we had more training there, and we had the newer tanks, and these tanks were with the P-47 motors. We went out to the—oh, God, the plains, the Salisbury Plain; that was like the moors, nobody living there. There was smoke, smog about this high, and fog. If you ever saw these Sherlock Holmes pictures, everything’s so smoggy and rainy. The weather was miserable. We didn’t know what sunshine looked like. All day long, it was smoggy. Well, anyway, that’s what we had to live through.

We trained next door to the English. There was one Scottish guy who was the big sergeant there. He was in charge of the English. They didn't wear their tin caps; they wore Scottish tammies—so cute, so colorful: red, yellow, blue. And the way they marched, like robots. So, we used to tease each other. Then—this is something I don't know how important this is. They were getting a threepence a day, each of the limey soldiers. We were getting fifty dollars a month. Suddenly, we get a newspaper that the English soldiers want us to contribute to their monthly salary, or weekly salary or whatever they got. In other words, we have to share our money with them. And boy, there was an uproar. No way! We got fifty a month and that was it. That was ours. That finally cooled out. It was almost a war between us.

*Part 1 ends; part 2 begins.*

While we were in England, we see Italian soldiers walking around freely, doing nothing. They were not training. They were prisoners, walking around freely, wherever they wanted to go. And all of them were very talented. We would give them a silver dollar—or whatever it was; it was pure silver, and they used to make cigarette lighters for us. I don't know how they carved it out; they hammered it, did whatever they had to. They got the wicks, the little turner which made the spark, and the wick, and you could fill it full of whatever the hell it was. I don't know what it was, gasoline. But, anyway, we all wanted the cigarette lighters, and these guys—we used to pay them, a nickel or something, whatever it was. A nickel was a threepence.

MH: When did you go—

HF: Okay, we were on the—this was in June. I think it was either June 5 or 6, D-Day. We were out on the Salisbury Plains, and we saw planes, B-17s, the English planes. And what they do, they came in like this and then they went east. We'd see squadrons; the sky was black. Squadrons—I don't know where the hell they came from. There might've been—I don't know, maybe twenty in a squadron, twenty-five or so. And then, you'd see them come back: half a wing shot off, half a tail shot off. These are four-motor planes; one motor was working, the other three are out. The sides of the plane were knocked right out, it was open. And with one motor, they couldn't fly like that; they had to fly this way. And we looked at them. I tell you, our hearts really went out for them. Oh, my God, the whole thing took maybe a half hour. They'd come over and then they'd come back, and we'd look at them. Oh, my God. How did they fly with the tails—the tails were just chopped off, nothing. How did they steer? I have no idea. But we used to watch them. Boy, I'm telling you, we'd just wave to them. And that's it.

Anyway, June 6, we heard that the invasion is on. Well, I know that this is the date—I know that they were going out June 5, the day before; and then the next day they were

going on, one flight after another. Oh, boy. And we thought we were going over, and then at night we got into our barracks. We were all brought together into a gymnasium. And some boys—oh, we waterproofed all of our vehicles, because when you go over the Channel, you can't go right into the shore; you're gonna be about 100, 200 feet away, and the tanks have to go down. How else are they gonna go? They're gonna go down. Everything had to be waterproofed. The motors had to be running, had to have air; it had to keep operating.

We waterproofed all our vehicles, and it wasn't until July 17—it was around that day; don't take that July 17 for granted. It was around that day; it was about a month, a little over a month later. We finally got to Portsmouth—Portsmouth is a little fishing town with small English boats. They used everything to get us over. Anyway, we had three of our tanks went on this one boat. The boat was a flat bottom, made of steel; it had a ramp in the front that went up or down, and the sides were all steel. The back had a little tower, maybe twelve feet high. That's where the guy steered the boat.

That night was the worst weather that England ever had. The storms—the seas were just going up and down, and we all got on that. There were ships with infantry, there were ships with medical supplies; combat, of course, went first. And we were finally—okay, okay, we finally went out. Who do you think went out to France? Just our one ship; all the others remained behind. How we did this, I don't know, 'cause that flat-bottomed ship went like this, banging and plop, and here we got three tanks tied down, and it's cold and miserable.

We had no protection from the weather at all; we just huddled up right against each other. We had no food. What they gave us was a can, maybe twice as big as this and twice as round, and what you did—never saw this before. What you did, you just pulled a little tab, and the whole thing caught fire, but there was a pipe inside this that got warm and heated up the soup that was all around this. You couldn't touch it, it was so hot. Oh, man. So, you had to put gloves on, and you had cream of pea soup. That was our first meal going over to France.

(phone rings) She's got the phone.

Anyway, that was it going over the Channel. It was a miserable trip. We got over to France in the morning, and we looked around. We're the only ones there. The weather was nice, the sun was out; there were no waves or anything. And it was disgusting. Here we see soldiers and sailors just floating on top of the—(clears throat) Excuse me.

MH: You came into one of the D-Day beaches?

HF: Onto Utah.

MH: Utah, okay.

HF: Utah Beach. The beach was quiet. There was nobody there except the beach masters. They told us where to get off, when, and all that kind of stuff.

Let me just get a drink.

MH: Sure.

HF: We were the first ones in there, and we landed about 200 feet from the shore. It was just like a beach, sandy beach and all that stuff. As a matter of fact, I got some sand from that beach. One of President Bush's bodyguards—his uncle got killed, and he was there with Bush—this is just recently, maybe about eight, ten years ago. He took a bottle, a little jar, and he just scooped up sand from Utah Beach, and he covered it. He sent it to his father, whose father's brother—this bodyguard's uncle—sent it to me. He took a shine to me. He said, "Harry, you deserve this," and I tell you, I started crying. I couldn't believe it, you know. Instead of keeping it himself. It's in the other room now.

MH: Was it uneventful getting off the landing ship?

HF: What we did—again, I don't know why they did this. They kept us on that ship for two whole days, right on the shoreline. So, we had a colonel; I don't remember which colonel this was. I said, "Colonel, when are we getting off?" He says, "When we get orders, son, when we get orders." I said, "We're targets out here," because every night, Bed Check Charlie came over. It was so dark there wasn't even stars in the sky.

MH: You call him "Bed Check Charlie"?

HF: Bed Check Charlie. Came over, you could hear his motor—it was just like a Maytag washing machine—and you knew right away. Everybody said, "Hey, Bed Check Charlie." Bed Check Charlie didn't do anything; he didn't drop any bombs, didn't strafe us. He took pictures, and we were told to not put your head up to try to see him, keep it

down, because when they go back, they get these pictures printed, and then they'll know just where we're at, because our white faces will show up on the pictures.

So, the ship we were on—the little ship—was camouflaged green and white, so that blended in with the seawater. And we knew right away, at night, we're out there—maybe it was three nights; I don't remember now. And we started getting jittery. We said, "Hey, Colonel, how's the chance of getting off?" He says, "If you wanna swim onto that beach, sonny, you do it," and I said, "I'm not gonna do that with a full pack and everything." So, anyway, we finally got orders. We got some food. And oh, yeah, we were the first ones there, and we're looking around. What's going on here? What happens if we get strafed? There's nothing we can do. We got some guns on the tanks, but that'll run out fast. What can we do here? Fortunately, nobody fired at us.

However, while we're out there—the weather was beautiful; we could see the beach and everything. We saw a few houses up above, and it seemed that every hour or so, four or six shells came in on the beach. And the war has already been going on for over a month, so the Americans had footholds already into France. So, these shells were pretty far from us, I mean, didn't do us any harm. So, I said, "Colonel, what is that going on out there?" He says, "Oh, that's the engineers. They're clearing the beach of any shells out there." I said, "Well, who's doing this? I don't see anybody out there. Once every hour so, these shells come in, they hit the same place." So, he says, "Take my word for it, sonny, there's some engineers out there. They're getting rid of these shells; they want to make everything clear." And we looked at each other and we said, "This guy's full of baloney." Either that, or he's shell shocked now.

Finally—I don't know what happened, but somehow just at that time, we got in pretty close to the beach. The ship did not come in there. The motors were not going. Somehow, we got close to the beach. The ramp was put down, we unlocked the chains that were holding down the three tanks, warmed them up, and one by one we went down. We didn't have to use the waterproofing, because we were right on the beach, really. So, evidently, they waited until the tide was close to shore, because if we had to go 200 feet, I don't think any of our tanks would've made it. Our waterproofing was taken off before we got on the ship, so we were pretty lucky that way. I'm sure that's the only reason I can think of that the tide came in where we were, right on the sandy beach.

And we waited there, we waited on the beach, and all the—oh, I said we were the first ones? All of a sudden, I looked around, and I said, "My God, the whole Army and Navy is here. How did they come there without us knowing, so quickly?" That first day, we used to just look around and say, "Nobody's here, only us." And for some reason, maybe twenty minutes later or a half-hour, I look around and say, "Oh, my God, look at this." All kinds of ships, everything you could think of, Navy. They told us there were about 5,000 ships there. I don't know; maybe there were 5,000. Couldn't count them.

But we started one by one, we started de-training, de-shipping, whatever it was. Got on, we lined up, and the beach masters, they would have, “Okay, you guys, come.” There was always somebody in the front to lead us, so we had to follow them; they knew where we were going. And then the next would line up, and then we’d—we were one of the last to get off the beach.

MH: What was your unit? What was your unit?

HF: Our unit? 37<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division. 37<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion. Our colonel was Colonel Creighton W. Abrams. The man became the—

MH: Chief of Staff.

HF: Chief of Staff of the United States Army, 1957, around that time; fifty-six [1956], something like that. And he was so well loved by every man, I tell you. The man never raised his voice, never screamed at anybody. The only time I ever heard him raise his voice was to another officer. I’ll tell you that story; ask me and I’ll tell you that story sometime. (laughs) That was funny.

MH: Anyhow, so, you start inland—

HF: We started inland, yeah. We didn’t know, but we were a mile from the front. We had no idea. We found out later on. But it started getting dark, and we had already heard about Sainte-Mère-Église. Does that sound familiar to you? That’s where the parachuter got caught in the clock up in the steeple [on D-Day]. Here I am, looking. There’s the clock, there’s the parachute still up there. I think the ’chuter got killed, I’m not sure.<sup>3</sup> But I think he went—I’m looking at this. Holy cow, I’m looking at history.

Well, we passed that, and we got into our bivouac area, where we’re in the hedgerows. You heard of hedgerows? You probably never saw them. That’s what they were. They were areas—I can’t tell you how much area they were, but they were areas with one little spot where you can go right through, because one tank had a bulldozer blade on it, and he could push everything out. We got into our area, had my—I was a gunner at the time, still a gunner. Everybody was told, “Dismount, dismount, get your guns cleaned.” The tank—

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<sup>3</sup>The paratrooper in question was Private John M. Steele. He pretended to be dead for two hours, but was eventually captured by the Germans, later escaping to rejoin his regiment. Steele died of cancer in 1969.

everything has to be cleaned before you eat or clean yourself. You can be as hungry as you can possibly be; that tank has to be cleaned, has to be ready for load and gassed up and everything. And that was our job every night. And we had to grease the bogey wheels and all that sort of thing. The treads could operate freely.

As soon as we got in, we got off the tank, we jumped off, and I hear a whistle. I mean, that's the loudest whistle I ever heard. A plane came over, and right into the next hedgerow, a bomb fell there, and you see a flash, and you hear screaming, "Medic! Medic! Medic!" I started shivering; I know I wasn't the only one. And we were told, "Do not stay in the tank when there's firing going on. Do not get under the tank." You think you're going for protection, but you're not. I don't know who was in the next hedgerow, but I know a lot of guys got hurt there.

You could hear the—well, you could see—even though it was dark, you could see the ambulances that had gone right into the hedgerow, and you could hear a lot of excitement. "Over here, guys, over here c'mon; here's one guy over here, c'mon." And you'd hear another guy say, "I can't feel my legs, I can't feel my legs," and you hear all this. And this all came down as a big surprise. You can imagine my head. I can't talk for anybody else's. My head just started spinning. My God, what can I do here? Where can I run to? I can't run anyplace.

Anyway, somehow we started cleaning the inside of the tank. It wasn't dirty anyway, but any sand or anything; just started cleaning. Got the grease gun, started greasing the bogeys. A truck came by and dropped off jerry cans of fuel, and being I was the tallest, I got up here gave—handed it to the man up there. He gave it to the man—to the driver—and unscrewed the gas cap and he'd empty that tank, throw it down. We had to keep these jerry cans together so that when the truck comes back, it can pick them up—you know, not look all around for them, just pick them up and go get more gas.

Well, that was one night to remember, one night not to forget. Anyway, we cleaned up the tank. The mess truck was there, and I don't even remember going to mess. Anyway, we got something to eat. We didn't even talk to each other. Nobody talked to each other. We were so scared. You cannot imagine that whistle. I heard this in the movies. I heard bombs in the movies, but that's Hollywood. Now I hear it in person, but it was so loud. Those bombs are made with fins on each side to make that whistle. It's very demoralizing. Boy, just getting those things in your head.

You got enough water?

MH: I'm good, thank you.

HF: Anyway, we were in that hedgerow. We stayed there. It was pretty quiet, except for every so often, during the daytime, the Germans would send over—not artillery—

MH: Rockets? Mortars?

HF: Mortar shells, yeah, into each hedgerow. So, if they hit the one next to us, we know that we're the next one to get hit and we'd get hit. There were some cows walking around, and both of them just dropped dead. And the smell—the odor was so terrible, so one of our guys took a shovel and just covered the wounded parts of the cows.

So, anyway, we were there for about a week, and then we had to move out. We went to Saint-Lô, and now things were pretty quiet. We just went in line. We went to Saint-Lô and we got up on a hill, and we stayed there for about six days. We just stayed there; of course, cleaned the tanks. You move two feet, you have to clean everything up. That is an SOP, standard operating procedure, you had to do it, and make sure there's enough in the gas tank.

We had two fire extinguishers in back of the tank, inside by the motor. In order to make sure they were working, you had to pull—you had to jump out of the tank, pull—in case the motor caught fire—had to pull. Yeah, this one works, okay. Now we know the next one works, but we don't touch that, because we need that one. So, we only had one fire extinguisher, even though there were two. You try it out with one and then depend on this one just in case the motor catches fire—which is very easy to do, because we used airplane gas, the highest octane that you can possibly get, and it'll catch fire in no time.

Well, we got into Saint-Lô, about four miles outside of Saint-Lô. We could see what's going ahead. Suddenly, 3,000 planes come over, and again we watched them. They came from west, east, south, wherever they came from. They got together, moved forward, and we saw these bombs just dropping. And there was one small American plane that flew around in that area. He would drop down a flare, that flare would come down, and that showed where the target was for the big planes. And as soon as he did that, ooh, he just took off, because now bombs started coming down, and he certainly didn't want to get hit.

And then, when there was a little—it became a little quieter, silent—the American—the small plane would go out, and he would see enemy artillery tanks or anything, whatever it was. Artillery, infantry, no matter what it was, again, he would fly down. He'd fly pretty low, and he knew he was safe. Here are the Germans down below, they could

machine gun him down, but they're smart. If they did that, they'd give their position away, and we're ready to pounce on them. So, they didn't fire on them.

But he would take flare; a couple of flares, just throw it out. We'd see him throw it down. That flare would go down, and you followed the smoke on down, and then the planes would come in. And, of course, there was communication between the small plane and the big leader planes, the B-17s and all that. They would tell him—we could hear it on our radio somehow—"Okay, little guy, get outta there, 'cause we're gonna drop some" — he didn't say bombs. "We're gonna drop some eggs down." And of course, he would move right back to our area. He would gas up and make sure he was in a flying position. And then there's a little lull in the bombing, and he'd get up again and he would look at another little sector. And, of course, he was looking at sectors where he saw a buildup of plenty of Nazis, plenty of Germans—the enemy—and he would give—well, he would give the—drop the flares. And this kept on going for a few days.

One day, I was on guard, right near my tank. It there was a big hole, maybe 6x6, maybe five feet deep, big hole. And, instead of walking guard, they said, "Get into this hole and just keep your gun with you, and if you see anything—anything—if you hear anything, just shoot at him. Don't even ask who it is, just shoot wherever the noise is coming from." And boy, I tell you, I just stood up there and had that gun up there. All of a sudden, I hear this. (footsteps) "Oh, my God, I don't wanna kill anybody." And I just heard what's going on, and I gave him some short bursts (sound effect), and when we got up in the morning, two cows were just walking around. They could've come into the hole with me. But I killed both cows. What the hell did I do here? There were no Germans near us.

Anyway, Germans were about four or five miles from us. There's the little plane always overhead, and he was giving us signals, and he would tell us just where the enemy is, what to expect. "There's tanks here on your right flank, there's tanks in the front. There's artillery right in back of them." And he would tell us so we knew on our maps just where it is.

And we had one—each platoon had a lieutenant. The lieutenant I had was the greatest in the world. What a sweetheart. We all loved the guy. Came from Mahanoy, Pennsylvania. His name was Bernard J. Susavage, funny name, S-u-capital S-u-v-a-g-e.<sup>4</sup> He looked out after the tanks—our tanks, his platoon—more than he looked out for himself, believe it or not. He went into enemy territory, and he'd radio back, "Guys, be careful over this ridge. There's some tanks when you go over. Just be ready. Stop there, get into position, and

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<sup>4</sup>Transcriber's note: Feinberg is misremembering the spelling. In cemetery records, the lieutenant's name is spelled Susavage.

when you see them—I'm telling you where they are. When you see them, just annihilate them." And he would give us—

Well, this poor guy, he went ahead once. We were always attacking, constantly attacking. There was no such thing as going back. No such thing. Everything was attack. And we were given enemy positions. This one time, he went to an enemy position, and he went to a machine gun—Bernard Susavage went to a machine gun, an American machine gunner. They had a .30 caliber water-cooled machine gun, and one guy was feeding him belts, feeding belts into it.

The gunner says, "Hey, Lieutenant, this is as far as you go." So, Lieutenant says, "Why? There's nothing out there." He said, "There's one house out there, and there's a sniper in there. He's knocking off anybody who goes there. There's a few of our soldiers that are down, because he's knocking them off. And if I fire at him, he's gonna know my position. I'm just here just in case I really have to fire." And Susavage says, "He's in a Jeep"—we call them peeps. "He's in a Jeep, or a peep, with his driver, himself, and an artillery forward observer, a Jewish guy." I forgot his name.

Anyway, the machine gunner says, "Lieutenant, do not go down there. I'm warning you. Matter of fact, I forbid you." So, Susavage says, "Sonny, I got the bars, you have the stripes. You're only a sergeant. I'll decide what to do." Okay, do what you have to. So, he went up; he was almost close to the house. Lieutenant Susavage wore three hand grenades—six hand grenades, three on each of his suspenders—and he got hit by the sniper. One of the grenades blew his head right off.

And the forward observer, he was ready to go out of his mind. From what he saw, he just was just going nuts. And the driver—a nice Irish kid, really nice, we got along so well. All he did was just made a left turn. Susavage flew out of the Jeep, and he came back to our sides. He says, "I give up. I give up. I cannot—" And the poor forward observer, he's just shaking like the wind was blowing. And they took them both back. I mean, they were useless. And then we heard that Susavage—I didn't see his head come off; I say I did, but I didn't. We were told that Susavage got killed, and we got a couple of lieutenants after that. They were just no good to us.

MH: At this point in the war, did you know anything about concentration camps?

HF: No, nobody knew anything about concentration camps. As I say, we were constantly pushing forward, pushing forward, pushing forward. We saw plenty of action, because they were waiting for us. We got into a town, Gotha, Germany, and here we are. We went through the dragon's teeth, you know, and there were signs on the—I know I'm going off

—signs on the sides of the mountains. “See Germany and Die,” all in whitewash. “See Germany and Die.” And we went through a tank and just knocked those dragon’s teeth over.

We got into a town called Gotha, Germany, and we noticed that the war was winding down. We didn’t do as much shooting. We were getting strafed, we were getting bombed, but not as much groundwork. And we saw tanks; we saw enemy tanks just knocked out. We saw our own knocked out. I mean, it was not a pleasant sight. There’s no such thing as a good war. People might say this is a good war; it’s baloney. Anyway, I got into Gotha, Germany, and I gotta tell you this story before I tell you about concentration camps.

We were on a road, a paved road. I don’t know what position; I was in a tank. By this time, I was now a tank commander, because our guys were getting killed so they promoted me, gave me three stripes. Baloney. I didn’t want those three stripes, or any of them. Anyway, we’re on attack. I don’t remember what was on my right side, but I remember on this [left] side, I see about maybe I don’t know, eight, ten houses, well-kept two-story homes. We stopped on the road, we gassed up, oiled up and greased up and did what we had to, and we’re just waiting for a command to move out.

So, I said, “Hey, guys, I’m going into this house across the road.” It’s a big, well-kept two-story home, and there was a wrought iron fence all around with fleurs-de-lis all on this black fence. And as I’m going in there, I just want to see what’s in the house, which is the most stupid thing I ever did. I go to the door, and I turn the handle—the lock—and the door’s unlocked. So, I go in, I look, and I’m in a big, big living room, and there’s a woman on the other end. She’s dressed from here down to her ankles, and she had a German honeycomb hair comb. I don’t know if you’ve seen them; it looked like a bee’s.

MH: Right.

HF: And she says, “*Kommen in Heim, kommen in Heim.*” I was used—being I could speak Yiddish, I was used as a German interpreter, so I understood her. And I looked at her. All I had was my .45 and my grease gun, and I look around, and I see a door here and there’s a door there, and it didn’t dawn on me. “What am I doing here? There might be enemy in there. My God, they can make mincemeat out of me.” But it didn’t dawn on me until I ran out.

Anyway, she says to me, “*Kommen in Heim*, this is my living room,” and she spoke in German. She asked me “*Keine Schokolade?*” I said, “*Nein, keine Schokolade.*” I explained to her—she says, “I’ll make a trade with you.” I said, “I’m not going to do

anything with you, so what are you bartering about?" She said, "See this lamp, here, on the end table? You take this. You give me chocolate, and you can take this home as a souvenir." So, I said, "*Nein, nein, die Schokolade ist für die Kinder,*" because every town we went to, it seems the little five, six, eight-year-old kids were not afraid of us, even in Germany. They used to come around to see us, look at us around our tanks. Very poorly fed, very poorly clothed in Germany. And the American soldier's not a tough soldier; he's a sweetheart, he's a marshmallow. They see kids, they jump off the tank and they'll give them *kaugummi*, chewing gum; and if we had any tanks—or cookies, oh, these kids would love us. And we'd pick them up and just play with them. They would laugh. Of course, this is when we're not firing.

And I said, "*Nein, die Schokolade ist für die Kinder.*" She said, "For a souvenir, take it home with you." So, I looked at the lamp, and something shuddered over my body. It's a small lamp, maybe this big, and what do you think the hood was made of? It's human skin. And I tell you, I got so numb and so—

MH: With a tattoo number?

HF: With what?

MH: A tattoo number?

HF: I don't know if I saw one. I'm not gonna lie. I don't know if there was a tattoo number on there or not, but I saw human skin with a light under it. I waved her down, and I turned around and ran out, and the guys said, "Hey, what happened?" I said, "I did the most stupid thing that I ever did. What the hell did I go in there for?" and I told them what went on. They said, "You're nuts. How did you know there wasn't enemy soldiers?" I said, "Boy, I'll never do that again. I must be nuts!"

So, anyway, we were told that it's time to move out. We stayed in Gotha, Germany, which is such a beautiful little town, about 50,000 population, laid out so nice and neat and everything, and we didn't do any firing. And I never remembered what was on my right side, but I did find out later on. We came into town, and we chased people out of houses. We made headquarters in one house, and they all screamed, "*Mein, mein! Raus!*" I'm a marshmallow myself. I said to the colonel, "Colonel, I can't chase these people out," and he says, "Why not? They're your enemy." I said, "They didn't do anything to me. I can't do this. Get another interpreter." So, he says, "Feinberg, come on, you're in a war now." So, I said, "I can't do it anymore. I can't interrogate these people anymore; chase them out of these houses."

Anyway, we stayed in Gotha for just a day or two, maybe three or so and there's no firing. Everything was just quiet. And then we were given orders to go out. So, the next town that was—pooh, pooh, I forgot the name of the town. Anyway, it's a small town; it's in between. We were told to make a left turn, go up this street, and we come up to the woods, and we see there are signs there written in German, "*Verboten*," which means "forbidden," 'cause the kids used to tell us, "We want to go up there and play in the woods; these soldiers wouldn't let us go."

And we got up there, and—a tank itself has an odor, but this was—we were smelling something up there. We went up there, and suddenly we look—we see fences, and we see guys who are delirious, in striped uniforms, and they were like skeletons. They were looking at us with owl eyes. Just looking at us, didn't say a word, but they were skeletons. Cheekbones like this, and the owl—the eyes were just round, like owls. They didn't even know there was a war going on, believe it or not. After we got into there, we found out.

So, some of our—especially one guy had, as I told you, a bulldozer blade on his tank.

MH: That's the guy who was at the—

HF: Yes, he was there.

MH: The guy in the wheelchair.

HF: Yeah, he was there, Joe Vanacore.<sup>5</sup> But he was in a different sector. He was in the 8<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion; I was in the 37<sup>th</sup>. There was another tank battalion; two of the guys that were sitting there that you were talking to were in the 35<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion. Come to think of it, we had no 35<sup>th</sup>s with us at the dinner—luncheon.

Anyway, we went through and what do we see there, guarding this—what we saw, a camp, we had no idea what it was. The two old men, maybe seventy, seventy-five years old, with long German uniforms on, their helmet, and they're walking back and forth. They see us, they take their helmets, threw it down, they threw their guns down, they're "*Kommen, kommen!*" and they started shaking. And, of course, I'm there to interpret them.

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<sup>5</sup>Joe Vanacore was also interviewed for the Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project. The DOI number for his interview is C65-00139.

MH: You used the dozer blade to—

HF: Yeah. Well, he did; he was in another section. But our tanks—with thirty tons, you just go through. We went through the gates. There are two big gates there.

MH: You knocked 'em down?

HF: So—where—

MH: You knocked the gates down?

HF: Oh, yeah, right through. No question about it; they were maybe ten, twelve feet high. So, we asked, “Where are the soldiers?” “They ran away about a half-hour ago; they saw something coming and they were told something was coming. They ran away. They took this road, they went away.”

So, the guys got off their tanks. We looked around to make sure that there was no enemy soldiers; nobody was there, just these two guys. What the hell are they guarding here? And I look at the courtyard, and I see bodies laying in the courtyard. I have pictures; I can't even show them to you, because we recently moved in here, and I have no idea where they're at. They're still in boxes somewhere. But when we get ourselves settled, I'll look for them.

MH: Yeah, I'd like that. Okay.

HF: So, guys jumped off their tanks. They all had their—

MH: Grease guns.

HF: —grease guns with them, and they all looked around and said, “What the hell is this? Jesus, look at this. You ever seen anything like this?” And the gentiles, they started bawling. They had tears in their eyes. And me, I started walking around, and these bodies were laying all over. Some were clothed; some had just this striped thing. Their heads were all shaven, and none of them are breathing. And I look, and I see one guy, his eyes

back, and he's laying. He had a (inaudible). I don't know if he was Jewish or what the story was. But he had no face, everything was just—I see him just gasping for air, so I looked at him, so he suddenly looks up at me. I don't know how he opened his eyes, and he says, "*Amerikaner?*" I says, "*Ja, Amerikaner,*" and he goes like this. (makes gesture) And I look around, and there's nobody else is breathing, just this one guy.

I ran over to the tank, got on the horn. I said, "Medics, medics, come out here, I'm in so-and-so area. Get Doc [John] Scotti here." Doc Scotti was our battalion commander, an Italian guy.<sup>6</sup> He was the greatest. He was the salt of the earth, just the greatest; had a heart as big as a whale. He came over in his Jeep, and I motioned to him. I said, "Doc, the guy's still breathing. I see him gasping." All of us took our handkerchiefs out, and we had to cover ourselves. It was impossible to breathe, because the smell—the odor was terrible. At one point, I even went over to one of the barracks. I opened the doors, and here's bodies laying over these wood beds, two-decker beds. Oh, jeez. I had to close the door.

MH: Dead?

HF: Dead. I didn't go inside, I couldn't go inside. They were just—all of them the same, all with heads shaven. This particular camp, Ohrdruf—it's named Ohrdruf because of the town. It was Gotha, then another town, then Ohrdruf. We made the left turn there and went into the camp, and we had no idea what the hell it was. "What the hell is it? What's going on here?" There's a big hole about 50 feet by maybe 200 feet with railroad ties shoved in there. They were going to bulldoze the bodies in there and then set the thing on fire, and then cover it up so the Americans can't see what they'd done. But, anyway, there was no time for them. They escaped.

So, Dr. Scotti, he gets on his horn and says, "Ambulance, come here, we're in this sector." Ambulance came by, he says, "Back in, back in." Somehow he touched here, touched here, and he listened; didn't take his—

MH: Stethoscope.

HF: Didn't take his stetho [stethoscope] out. He just touched. He says, "Get the—" (laughs)

MH: Litter?

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<sup>6</sup>Dr. Scotti was the battalion's surgeon, not its commander.

HF: The litter carrier, yeah; you know what they look like, two oak poles with—

MH: The canvas, yeah.

HF: —and canvas. He says, “Very, very carefully, pick this guy up,” and this guy, he didn’t have the strength to do this.

MH: You’re putting your hands on your breast.

HF: He was praying, just “*Amerikaner*,” so evidently he was one of the guys who knew that we liberated him. But that’s the only one I saw who was—

MH: Did they have the Star of David on the—

HF: They must have, because they had uniforms; they had these striped uniforms. They must’ve had. I didn’t notice. We didn’t know what Star of David was, believe it or not.

Finally, after a few minutes, we looked around, covering our nose and our mouth. We look around, and Colonel Abrams—he himself, I see him with tears. Jeez, I couldn’t believe that. He’s a very soft guy. He was a nice guy. He didn’t try to show you how tough he was or anything. And he gets up on his tank and says, “Okay, guys, come here, let’s settle here.” We found out that the troops that were guarding the camps, they took off, so he had a few tanks go down the road. “Which way did they go?” “They went down this road.” Go down this road; the little airplane was up above. He called the plane and said, “Let us know, somebody’s trying to escape. Get their position.” He got a platoon of tanks—maybe five, six tanks, something like that—had them go after them. I understood that they put on full steam ahead and got them and just annihilated these guys. I didn’t see them.

But anyway, Abrams gets on his tank. “All right, guys, now you know what we’re fighting for.” He himself had no idea. The colonel in charge of a whole battalion had no idea what was going on, had no idea there was concentration camps or anything. And that surprised me, really surprised me. Anyway, after he says, “Don’t touch anything, guys. The best bet is to get away from this area, because there must be a lot of disease floating around.” What they did, I don’t know.

MH: Did you find any other people alive?

HF: There were people alive, yeah. All of them were not dead. There were gays, there were Gypsies, there were—

MH: How did you find that out?

HF: Talking to some of them. Yeah, talking to some of them. There were—

MH: Political prisoners, too?

HF: That's what I'm trying to think. Boy, my head must really be—

MH: It's okay. I'll work for you. (laughs)

HF: That's all right. I'm glad. There were political prisoners, too, yeah. And one guy was pretty heavy. He didn't look like he was there too long. I don't know what the story was. He may have squealed on—I understand there were some Jewish guys who were squealing on some of the other Jewish or some of the other prisoners. But I look at his picture even now, and he's pretty heavy. His hair is combed nicely. There was a—there was something built there for hanging.

MH: A scaffold?

HF: Pardon?

MH: A gallows, you mean?

HF: Yeah, it was a gallows, two A-frames on each side and a block of heavy wood. They'd get the guys up there. I didn't see anybody hanged, or anything.

MH: Were there gas chambers there, at Ohrdruf?

HF: Not in Ohrdruf, no. Six days later—oh, anyway, Abrams said, “Feinberg, get a Jeep, go down into town, get the *bürgermeister*, tell the *bürgermeister*”—he was the mayor of town; he was top man. He wants every man, woman, and child to get up here. We even sent trucks down there to get them. But anyway, they came up, and they had handkerchiefs over their mouths. They were laughing like it was a big joke, the townspeople. Oh, they dressed in their Sunday best, every one of them. Nice hats, the woman had nice hats and everything, and they were taken through the camps. Some of the men in their best clothes were told to, “Put the people gently into this big hole so we can bury them,” because how are you going to find out who they are? Anyway, we were told to bury them. I didn’t stay there that long. I couldn’t.

Anyway, we weren’t there that long, either. [Dwight D.] Eisenhower had a Jewish colonel [Bernard Bernstein] as an aide. The colonel came down, looked at this, couldn’t believe his eyes, couldn’t believe his nostrils, and he drove back to headquarters. And from the story—I didn’t see this, but I heard that he came over to Ike and he says, “Ike, you have to see this.” Ike says, “I don’t have time, I’m too busy.” He says, “Ike, you have to come down here. I’ll drive you. You have to come and see this.”

He finally talked him into it, so Ike—there’s a picture of Ike, [Omar] Bradley, [George S.] Patton: the three big ones. I think [Walton] Walker was there, I’m not sure if he got killed yet.<sup>7</sup> But Bradley, Patton, Eisenhower, the three of them came and they looked at it, and they could not believe their eyes. From what I’ve been told—I didn’t see them, I didn’t hear them say it—from what I’ve been told, “Now you know what we’re fighting for.” And Patton says, “No more prisoners. We are not going to take any more prisoners.” From what I’ve been told, from some of the guys who were still behind, Patton went behind one of the barracks and, as tough as he was—he didn’t love anybody, he hated everybody—

MH: He was an anti-Semite, too.

HF: He started throwing up. Yeah, he was anti—well, he didn’t do me any harm, let me say that.

MH: Okay. (laughs).

HF: I was close to him as I am to you, two, three feet away.

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<sup>7</sup>General Walton Walker was indeed at Ohrdruf. He died in 1950, during the Korean War.

MH: You were there when Patton was there?

HF: Well, we had already gone out. We had gone out of there to—I don't know why, but our mission was to keep going ahead. Our mission was to—37<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion and the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 35<sup>th</sup>, our battalions—the three armored battalions were told to go out. In other words, we had them on the run. We actually had the Krauts on the run, and we saw guns laying all over the road. They were stripping themselves just to run faster and everything. So, we knew the war was just about ending.

MH: This would've been April 3, 1945?

HF: Around the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, something like that. Six days later, we come upon Buchenwald. Oh! This one had the ovens. We went in there and, again, because of my speaking, I got a hold of somebody, talked to some of the Germans. I spoke to some of the prisoners. They were walking around; they were delirious and very light—like pajamas, striped clothes, little caps, striped. And we did something wrong. We didn't know what we were doing. You see a guy, hasn't eaten in two or three weeks, so you take your cookies, your candy, and they take it and run away, because they don't want anybody to take it away. Our doctor got a hold of all of us, "Do not feed them! You're going to kill them. They cannot—they're not in any position to eat anything." And from what I understand, they were given just milk and—

MH: Turnip soup, I heard.

HF: It wasn't—no, no, I don't think so. I don't know, maybe.

MH: Were you in the first group to go into Buchenwald, too?

HF: No. The guy that told you—

MH: Mel.

HF: Mel Rappaport; he's a *meshuggener*. Nice guy, I love him. (laughs) You ever get any of his e-mail?

MH: Yes. I'm going to see Mel on—what's today? Sunday? I'm going to see Mel tomorrow.<sup>8</sup>

HF: He's a nice guy, loves me. I don't know why. But now he sends me e-mail. This is kindergarten stuff. (laughs) But don't tell him I said so. I like him very much, nice guy. He can't attend these meetings anymore. I wish he could.

MH: Because of his health, you mean?

HF: He's got his own, yeah. Every day, he sends me e-mails.

But they were there, the first ones. We get over to Buchenwald, again, we see—and we captured some of the guys. Some of our MPs [military police], we gave them over. We have no time. We're combat, we're not—and we were told not to take prisoners. Patton said, "No more."

We walk around, and all of a sudden, I see a box—unpainted, just raw wood, maybe six, five, four feet high—filled with children's shoes. And a few of us look, and we look—I can't believe it. How could one human being do this to another—little kids? Then we walked around, saw this box. I could never forget that. And we walked around inside. We saw the showers; we saw the experimental room made of tile—a tile bed or table, whatever you'd call it. There were two glass—filled with—glass cases, filled with doctors'—whatever they need—

MH: Surgical instruments?

HF: Surgical stuff, saws, the little knives they had. Oh! And you look at them, you don't know what to expect. Of course, they weren't there now; they weren't there at the time. We saw those, and we went through; we saw the ovens, which is enough to make you just drop dead, just to look at it, and they did not clean the ovens. There was a little railway you'd push by hand. You'd get these prisoners, put 'em in the shower, cold shower, and there's a window on the other end of the shower. This guy turns it on, cold water, and he looks and "(laughs) They can't take this ice water!" Can't believe it. We heard it from some of the guys. There's a guy watching them taking this cold shower, no clothes on, unclothed. And they'd walk into the next room, and they're shoved into this—I don't know. There were three or four of those—

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<sup>8</sup>Melvin Rappaport was also interviewed for the Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is C65-00110.

MH: They were killed in the cold shower?

HF: With the cold—no, no, no. They were taken out. They were taken out; all their clothes were taken off. They were put on this little railing, and they were pushed in there. The railing came out, door closed, and—

MH: They were put in the ovens alive?

HF: Not when—well, maybe when we were there. I was going to say, “Not when we were there.” I was invited back there in 1999. I was invited by—I don’t know if I told you yesterday—a high school principal who wants to get rid of the stigma, the swastikas, these crosses, anything Nazi. He wants to get rid of them, so he and his whole school of teachers, they formed some sort of association. They don’t want this done, and they’re teaching it in their high school. Imagine that. They’re teaching it. And they have a 4<sup>th</sup> Armored jacket, combat jacket, 4<sup>th</sup> Armored patches—the ones that we had—and some guns.

MH: This is in Germany?

HF: In Germany. In Buchenwald, yeah. No, no, it’s in Germany; it’s in Gotha. And we have befriended ourselves. The principal, he’s got a girlfriend; he may be married now, who knows? Anyway, whenever they go on vacation, on holiday, they come to America. They’ve been to California, to Grand Canyon, Philadelphia. Whenever they have a vacation, both of them come out here and they visit. They want to see as much of America as possible. And they look upon us as saviors, that we liberated them.

Once, while I was there, I said, “How in the hell did we liberate you? We were fighting the German army.” He said, “No, no, you weren’t fighting the German people; you were fighting the Nazis. All Germans are not Nazis.” And I opened my mouth, and I said, “I can’t believe this”—and I just found this out ten years ago. I was there. Imagine that. All these things were kept from us. We thought we were fighting Germans. (laughs) We were fighting Nazis. Can you believe that? But it’s hard to believe, because you see—

MH: But—talk about at Ohrdruf, when they marched the *bürgermeister* up there.

HF: I said that?

MH: When they marched the *bürgermeister* up at Ohrdruf, they said they didn't know anything about it?

HF: They said they didn't know anything about it. That's what they say, but how could you not smell? There's nothing to camouflage that.

MH: When the woman showed you the lamp, how did you know that was human skin?

HF: I got a feeling. I got a feeling and looked at it, because the light was still on and I could see through there. It was sort of a grayish-yellow coloring. When she—I could not say—if she didn't tell me, I could not say that was human skin, because I never saw.

MH: Oh, she told you?

HF: But then she finally said, “Do you know what this is made of? This is human skin,” that's when I just turned—I wheeled around and just waved her down. How could she live in a house with this? And then when I went back to Gotha in 1999, where do you think the hotel was? Right next door to that house. Yeah.

So, I had to make speeches in Gotha. I had to make speeches to the mayor of town. I had two interpreters, one on each side; one was the high school principal. The first night we were there, they had the *bürgermeister*—the mayor—who was a judge, big heavy guy, German; a doctor; a florist—these are wealthy men—an attorney. They were in the room, and they wanted to know from my side of the fence what it was like.

So, I asked the principal. I said, “Well, should I pull punches? I'm talking to your people,” and he says, “You do not pull punches. You say whatever you feel, whatever you went through, that's what we want to know.” So I said, “Are these guys gonna be mad at me? They throw rocks at me or anything?” and he said, “Absolutely not. They're the ones who paid to have you come here.” Okay, fine.

***Part 2 ends; part 3 begins.***

A few of them spoke English. But when I walked in the room, they're all seated in a square, all around. I'm seated right next to the *bürgermeister* and the two interpreters. I wasn't seated yet, I was introduced: “This is the doctor; this is—” And the doctor says to

me, “I have to introduce you to somebody,” because they already knew I was a tanker with the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division with General Patton. This, they knew.

So, a tall guy, slim—the bluest eyes I ever saw. I never saw Frank Sinatra with blue eyes like that. The blues eyes, the whitest crew cut haircut, stood at attention like an arrow, straight as a beam. And the doctor says, “This man was a colonel in the Nazi army.” He puts his hand out, and I looked at him in his eyes, and I put my hand out. We shook hands, and he bowed right down to his ankle, right in front of me. I just gave him this, like, “I’m the winner, you’re the loser,” you know. I would not give him the satisfaction of giving him a bow, but he just shook my hand and he held it, just held it. I’m introduced as a liberator of their town, so they did not look upon me as an enemy.

MH: What years was this?

HF: I think it was 1999. We were invited to Holland—I don’t remember if it was 1995 or 1999. I have to look it up and see. I really don’t remember. I think it was ninety-nine [1999].

MH: Ninety-five [1995] would’ve been the fiftieth anniversary.

HF: Fiftieth anniversary? All right. I was invited to Holland in 1995. I was invited to Holland, and in ninety-nine [1999] I was invited by these guys.

When I was in Gotha, Germany, the *bürgermeister*, the mayor, had American flags put out, plus their now-German flag. From the top of the building all the way down, there was a streamer. I was driven up there. One of the guys has a Jeep; he brought it to him; it’s gold. Anyway, he says, “You do not walk into the square; I’ll drive you in.” So, I took another 4<sup>th</sup> Armored guy with me, because I didn’t want to be alone. Okay, they paid for him, what do I care?

We were both in the Jeep, and he had the siren going, drove all around. German towns, or European towns, have a square. It’s not like this town. If the town wants to gather, where the hell we gonna gather? We just don’t have a square. But over there, every town has a square. The people were told that Feinberg is going to be here, the liberator will be here. We got out; we’re introduced to this *bürgermeister*. He looked just like Abraham Lincoln; he was maybe seven feet tall, with the beard and everything, didn’t speak a word of English. Whatever I remembered, I tried to speak German to him. And he, in turn—I had the interpreters with me, anyway.

But it's nice to be looked upon—and the people in the square gathered around; there were seats there. And I had to make three speeches: one to the high school students—the auditorium was packed. I was very, very shocked when I found out that the German kids spoke English better than the kids here, without an accent. And how did you learn English? “We see American movies,” and that's the way they spoke. Even our interpreter spoke English, I couldn't believe it, with—it wasn't the King's English, I mean, this is English that you talk, that you hear every day.

And, let's see. Beer was a nightly thing. They took us to beer gardens, whatever they call it. And I'm not a drinker. First, I'm a diabetic, I can't have it, and I don't go for any alcohol. What else was I going to talk to you about?

MH: When you went into Ohrdruf, how do you even deal with what you're seeing?

HF: Well, I think the correct word is “numb.” You become numb, you have no feeling. You say, “I don't believe this.” You look around, and of course you had to cover your mouth and your nose. Of course, we have seen dead people before we got there. We had damaged all of Europe; my God, France, Germany, Luxembourg, where else?

MH: Belgium?

HF: Belgium; yeah, we were in Belgium. Oh, man. Now, how do we feel? It's something that's just not true. It's not true. Hollywood couldn't make it as true to life as what we saw, because the smell was there, the odor and everything.

There's another time we went into a town in one of our escapades. We went into a town, and we were told—there was one guy who had two big speakers and a microphone, and he said in English and in French, “Do not resist us, do not resist us, we're coming into town. We are here to liberate your town.” And he kept saying it, and it was loud enough that everybody in town could hear it. And right off one of the buildings in front of us—here the tanks are ready to go in. He's on a porch, and he runs out. He was a middle-aged man, roly-poly, and there were bazookas, German bazookas, laying all over the road.

MH: Were they Panzer guns?

HF: A bazooka is—

MH: *Panzerfaust*?

HF: *Panzerfaust*. One shot, one shot. But they were all over the road, guns and everything else. And he ran off his porch, ran out, picked up a *Panzerfaust*. He wanted to fire at the lead tank, and the guy in the bow gunner, the assistant driver, just let go his machine gun. Oh, God. I saw this guy just—he was in a meat grinder. I saw everything just flying off him, and he didn't get to fire that thing. What else can I tell you?

MH: When you came back—when did you get back to the United States?

HF: I got back October 15, 1945. I went there—well, I was in the Army almost four years, just a few months shy of four years. Drafted in 1942.

MH: So, you come back to your family in Passaic. What do you tell them?

HF: The first night, I couldn't say anything, because I think everybody in Passaic came in there. "Welcome home, Harry." Of course, my mother hung onto me, my father and my kid brother and sister, who were just babies—I didn't even know who they were; of course, I'd seen them, but they were maybe four or five years old—and the people on the block. And I have scars, which were very pronounced. Over here; there's one here. My nose had a slash across it. Of course, people at the time that came to see me didn't see fifty-two pieces of shrapnel; they were small pieces, but you may see them now, I don't know.

MH: When did you get hit?

HF: We were making an attack in Ploërmel, France. We went into a town—(coughs) Excuse me. We went into this town at five o'clock in the morning, to raid the town. There were two-story buildings on both sides, and these are buildings that the people lived in. However, the people were chased out, and the German soldiers took the buildings. They occupied the buildings. We had no idea what we were gonna do. All we knew is we're going into town. We were on the outskirts of town, we're going in there, and we're only about ten feet apart, the tanks.

So, the first tank went through this narrow road; it was just wide enough for a tank to get through. Second tank went through. I was the third tank. When the first tank went through, he woke everybody up, because you could hear the clanking. The second tank

went through, and now they're rubbing their eyes. "What the hell's going on?" Here I am, in the third tank. So, I didn't see the guy, but he threw a grenade down, and it exploded. I heard a pop up my head, and I just sat right down in the seat. I was out for maybe a second or so.

MH: You're inside the tank, or you're outside?

HF: My head was out. I was looking around, and half my body was out. So, there are scars here. But, of course, these are all little pieces. When we got into the town—this is something else I can't understand. My gunner was directly below me. Now, there wasn't much room for me to get into the tank. Now, how did this grenade explode, and most of the shrapnel went down and hit my gunner here? He wasn't wearing a cap, his helmet or anything, and he's bleeding, blood is just spouting out.

I looked and got on the horn. I said, "Hey, medics, come into the center of town. My gunner is hit, and he's bleeding. I don't know how bad it is." And my loader says, "Holy mackerel, you're bleeding, Harry." I didn't feel anything. I said, "What do you mean, I'm bleeding?" He says, "Look at your head." I didn't realize, but blood is spouting out.

MH: Of your forehead?

HF: Yeah. I have some scars there that are marks of honor. And I had this—I just didn't feel anything. I said, "Not me." Oh, the medics finally came up and said, "Come on down, Harry." I said, "Not me, my gunner." And the gunner is like, "Am I gonna die?" Took his handkerchief out and started mopping up his skull. He got killed anyway, later on. But I got down off the tank, and the medic says, "Get in the ambulance." I said, "Not me, my gunner." He says "Come on in the ambulance." So, I get in there and we drive in the center of town. By that time, the—

(door opens) Just a minute! My son.

MH: Oh, okay. Oh, he's in.

**David Feinberg:** Hi, everybody.

HF: David?

DF: How you doing?

MH: Hello.

DF: How are you?

MH: Okay.

HF: Okay. I'm driven into the center of town, and I keep telling the guy, "Not me, it's my driver." He said, "Come on in here." They broke down a liquor store, because there was no first aid station. By that time, a French doctor with grenades on, he comes in: a real handsome guy, wavy black hair. He starts talking to me. They didn't have alcohol, so he goes to one of the shelves, and he opens one of the bottles, pours it on gauze, and he starts. I said, "Doc, do you know what's going on?" He says, "You were hit," and I says, "I don't feel anything." So, again, he keeps wiping me up, and I think the alcohol probably stopped it.

By this time, now I feel something. He says, "Anything else?" I said, "I'll tell you, my arm is burning." So, he takes my shirt and he just rips it open and says, "Oh, my God," and you see these black pieces of metal—it just pierced the skin; it really didn't do anything. But it pierced the skin, little pieces of this grenade, both sides. There's one really big one I have here, you can see that. But between that and the gash that I had across my nose and some of these—so, I was hit by two grenades, actually, one at another time, and I got some more shrapnel. I'm glad they were only grenades, and I'm glad they weren't close enough to really—

MH: So, you come home. The first night home, everybody from Passaic is there?

HF: All people: relatives, friends, people on the block and everything. "Welcome home, Harry," carrying boxes of candy. I don't remember if reporters came up or not.

MH: When's the first time you told somebody about the camps?

HF: I don't know. It was all so new—you know, I really can't answer that, because the next day, I didn't have any civilian clothes to wear. I wore my Army uniform. Of course, I got used to my mother and got used to breakfast, and my father didn't even go to work—

it was Depression time; just getting out of the Depression, anyway; didn't go to work. They just looked at me and felt me, and when I took a shower, my little brother had to go into the bathroom with me to see if I had any scars. And I heard my brother say, "I can't see anything." But I didn't have anything. (laughs) But I knew he was doing it. "What's the matter, Bobby?" He said, "Nothing, just looking."

But, anyway, somehow I'd like to—later on, had lunch. I said, "Mom, I'd like to—I'm living with you anyway, I'd like to go out and see some of the people." The old ladies that hung around the house, around the corner said, "Why don't you get married?" I said, "Please, (laughs) I'm not ready for marriage." But anyway, I went around, went to different stores, people I bumped into. Patsy Befunda, the shoemaker said, "Hello, Mr. Feinberg! Come in, sit up on the chair," and he shined my boots. And I saw people, some of my friends; some of them had come home before me. But we ran into each other—and then, something really sad.

Cattycorner from where my parents lived and I lived, there was Willy—I forgot his name. Willy and his brother, I forgot—anyway, we used to play together, went to school together and everything, and just right across the street. Willy went to the Pacific, and he—from what I heard, a sniper got him and killed him. And it was very sad. I went in to see the folks, and we sat around the table. Of course, the mother started—tears in her eyes, and then she said something. I just didn't want to go back there. She said, "Oh, you're home alive, and Willy's over there in a cemetery someplace." I was shocked. I didn't expect that.

So, anyway, it was the first time I heard that Willy did not come back. There's another brother, Bernie—Bernie and Willy, yeah—so Bernie didn't go into the service. He was still alive. I really felt very bad because she said that. "My Willy's in a cemetery somewhere over there, and you had to come home alive." I could see that the father didn't want her to say—he didn't really want it. So, he patted her and said, "Okay, all right, okay." And, what else?

MH: When's the first time you ever talked—can you remember talking about seeing the camps?

HF: Yeah, people came over, and I started opening up. They wanted to know, "Did you kill any Germans? That's what we want to know." I even went to shul, and, "Did you kill Germans? That's what I want to know," the rabbi used to ask me. "Yeah, we killed plenty of them." It wasn't bang-bang, you're dead. I didn't do that. We had guns that we fired with the heavy tank guns, and when did I—it's a very fair question, and I'm at a loss for words, because all this is fresh in my mind.

MH: Let me ask you a different approach to it: How do you feel seeing what you saw in the camps affected you later in life?

HF: It affected me plenty.

MH: Tell me about that.

HF: Edie [Mrs. Feinberg] could tell you. I still—well, not lately, but when we moved from the other house, I—it hurt me, really felt terrible, because you can't forget about it. I go to a psychiatrist now. The VA [Veteran's Affairs] wants me to see a psychiatrist, so I go there every three months, every six months, every year, whenever he gives me an appointment. This one doctor is the head psychiatrist, Dr. Falcone, speaks a—terrible accent, comes from—well, anyway, he speaks with an accent. He wants to hear stories, and I keep telling him these stories, and he—like yourself, he questions me.

I said, "Doc, do you want me to pull punches?" "No, no, I want to hear what you—" And he will ask me, "Does it bother you at night? Do you dream about this?" "Doc, I can tell you plenty of stories. I can be here all day and all night with you and just tell you stories from start to finish." I start crying, I start bawling myself; tears come out of my eyes. I try to hold back, but he says, "Don't hold anything back. I want to hear you." I never went to a psychiatrist in my life, but he wants to hear these stories. "Do you dream about it?" I said, "Yes; you know, at times my wife has to nudge me because I'll start moaning and jumping all over the bed—not vertically, but start tumbling around, and she'll say, 'Harry, what's the matter?'" And at the time—"You just woke me; I don't know." She'll ask me, "Is it the war?" I'll say, "Yeah, Edie, I was just dreaming about the war." And many times, it still happens; even lately, these years now.

MH: Did these dreams increase after you retired?

HF: Yeah, they increased. Yeah. You can't forget it. I asked Dr. Falcone, "Isn't there a magic bullet? Can't give me a pill?" He says, "Mr. Feinberg, you cannot forget it. You will never forget it." I said, "Why am I coming here? I want to forget about this, or I want a pill that's going to soften everything. I don't want to think about this anymore." So, he says, "There's no such pill, and you will never forget about it," and I said, "Why am I coming here?" He says, "I'm gonna give you a pill." He gives me a prescription, and I get thirty pills every month.

MH: What do you take?

HF: It's the shape of a canoe.

MH: It's not Prozac?

HF: No, no, not Prozac. It's—

MH: You'll look at it later and tell me.

HF: Yeah. I have some in my bathroom. I'll get it out.

MH: What's it supposed to do for you?

HF: It's supposed to slow me down. How it can slow me down? I'm the slowest person on earth.

MH: (laughs)

HF: My wife even says, "There's nobody more relaxed than you." She doesn't know anybody. I try—not knowingly, but I try to just take it easy, take it easy, because I earned this being slow and careful. I can't walk because of my leg. I had three back surgeries; I think I told you that. And after the second one, I was home for three years, and the walking got worse and worse. No pain, but I can't balance myself, that's why the cane. Some people say, "Well, get a walker." I don't want a walker. I don't want one of these.

MH: What did you do professionally? What was your work?

HF: After I got out of this, I had no trade. I didn't know what I was gonna do. I was not gonna go back into show business. I wanted to do something. Did not finish high school, so I cannot go to college, and I really didn't know what to do. My father was a—by that time a contractor, a building contractor. He had men working for him. He had a partner, because of his knowledge of the English language; his writing and his speech was not that good. He would make himself known. He was a tremendous worker. He could carry a whole shoulderful of 2x4s, climb up on the roof, do whatever has to be done. Great worker and everything.

I took advantage of the GI Bill when I came home. My father says, “What’re you gonna do?” and I said, “I have no idea. I don’t want to go traveling anymore, had enough of that, enough of show business, and enough of the Army.” So, it was almost eight years between both of them when I didn’t see my mother, never had a furlough. I think it’s because I’m Jewish that this one first sergeant—

Oh, I gotta tell you about him. Hated everybody, and wouldn’t even give me a pass to go home. We were in Pine Camp, New York; it would take me eight hours by train. I’d be there Friday night, Saturday, come home Sunday night, get back to camp. Couldn’t get a pass out of him. Everybody’s getting passes, not me. So, I hated the guy. I swore that if I ever get him in civilian life, if I ever get him alone, I’d choke him to death. He was the meanest, meanest person, just made things very, very miserable for the other—there were five Jewish guys—and for myself. I didn’t get the garbage that the other guys did.

So anyway the Army—the military—started with GI schooling. My father said, “You know, you better take advantage of it. Go to a trade school,” which I did, signed up for trade school, and he says, “And work for me on the job. I’ll pay you three dollars a day.” What did I need money for? I could take the family car wherever I wanted and when I wanted, and three dollars a day, so I made my twenty—what’s three times seven?—about twenty dollars a week, something like that. It was a lot of money in those days.

Girlfriend, I didn’t have. That’s another story that I don’t want to go into. I got a “Dear John” letter, after getting all these beautiful letters in four years in the service. Last mail in Germany. I didn’t know should I open this letter? I felt something there. I opened it. Oh, man. I kept the letter until just recently. I just picked it up and read it again. I said, “Eddie, you want to read it?” and she said, “No, I don’t want to read.” (laughs) Beautiful girl, nice girl, but I found out from some of the people she got pregnant while I was away. (laughs) So, it’s better it didn’t happen. It all worked out well. I was not gonna get married. No way. People started hounding me. “Harry, get married.” I just didn’t want to. This is a blind date, best thing that ever happened to me in the world.

MH: What year?

HF: Nineteen forty-seven we got married, two years after I got out of the Army.

MH: So, you just had what anniversary?

HF: Sixty-first. We just had our sixty-first; it was the 20<sup>th</sup> of this month. Today's what, the 27<sup>th</sup>?

MH: Yeah, today's the 27<sup>th</sup>.

HF: Last Sunday. Yeah. So, it was an interesting life, between this—

MH: So, you were in construction all your life?

HF: I went to this school in Patterson, New Jersey, took advantage of the GI Bill, and signed up for a four-year course. I only went three years, because I met Edie and I wanted to see her. But I had a great teacher. He was a man who worked on the job. He went to college.

MH: (sneezes)

HF: Gesundheit.

MH: Thank you.

HF: He went to college, and he knew how to teach. He knew how to show the students how to do this, how to lay out a house. See, I can take a house with a big square—you've seen a carpenter's square?

MH: Yeah.

HF: I can lay everything on the house, have it cut up and put together, it'll all be put together. I can number each part and do all this on the ground. I got to know my tools. I worked with my men, and we got some pretty big jobs. We got sixty home developments, my father and I. We hired men. And we worked some bigger developments, made a good name for myself. My father was a tough person; he was not liked at all. People like me because I'm nice. My father, not nice: argue, scream, yell. They didn't like him. The men who worked for us didn't even want to work for him—that worked for me. It was—I hate to say it—I mean, my father—but what can I do?

Anyway, that's what I did. Worked on the job, went to school three nights a week, learned all this stuff. I can make payroll out with this big square, figuring out how many hours this guy worked, how much an hour, how much do I take off for FICA and all that stuff. So, I was doing everything on the job. It was a tremendous experience for me. Anybody would hire me.

The only thing is, the men that we had—I had some good ones. Not all were good. I had some good ones. Boy, I would keep them until today if I was able to. But can't blame a man, he doesn't want to work for somebody the rest of his life; he wants to go into business for himself. Even my good men, even if I offered them more money. "Harry, it's not you. I'll stay with you forever, but I want to see what it's like." So, they became my competitors. And they were undercutting me on price, and we were undercutting each other. No good, no good.

Then, my back started acting up. I don't know if I told you, but I started with my back in the Army. You get up on the tank, you climb up; to get down, you jump down. Every time I jumped, I would complain to my first sergeant. All he wanted to know is, "Any bones broken?" No. "Any blood showing?" No. "Get outta here." And he wouldn't let me see a doctor, wouldn't give me a pass to see a doctor. If I went over his head, I would be dead now. He would give me some detail.

So, second operation—first one in 1953. Home for six months, went back to work. I made sure that I wasn't clomping, I wasn't lifting, tried to be as gentle as I could for myself. But the back started in 1988 again. This time, I'm home for three years, and there's nothing I could do to relieve myself. The pain was just terrible. So, our family doctor calls me one night; we got to know him on a first-name basis. He says, "Harry, you're suffering, you're not getting better. There's a doctor in"—I forgot where he lives; out here in Jersey—"he's tops in the field for your back." He's gonna make an appointment for me, I'll go see him. "See him, and whatever he says, do it."

So, I saw Dr. Nicola—a little guy, maybe this big—and he heard all about me through my other doctor. He says, "Let me examine you." He examines me, takes X-ray, he says, "Nothing wrong with you. Go home, sit like this in bed for a week. You sit like that, you'll be fine." He knew all the while I had to go in for surgery. So, I sat in bed; the only time I get off is to go to the bathroom. It's getting worse and worse and worse. The pain was unbearable. So, finally I said, "Edie, call Dr. Nicola; tell him I can't take it anymore." He had a room all ready for me in a hospital, and said, "Okay, get him down there." So, one of our neighbors drove me there. I was there two weeks. Two days later, they took a myelogram, terrible thing to go through.

He operated on me. He admitted that, at that time, 194—oh, it was 1953 already—he admitted that they don't know too much about backs. But he has a name; he's already made a name for himself in that field. He says, "I don't want you to worry about anything. You're going to be fine. I'll put you out." I said, "Okay, Doc, whatever you can. I can't take this anymore." Did that, got up the next morning, and I didn't have the pain, but I knew that I went through something. I was so weak, so weakened. And he came in to visit me a couple times a day, pinch me here, made me feel better. "All you do is lay here. We'll get the nurses to put you in a wheelchair. Go into solarium, get some sunshine. You just lay in bed, you'll be fine." So, he made me feel good. And, sure enough, that first surgery without knowing what to do, made me feel great, and went home after two weeks.

MH: What year is this?

HF: This was 1953. Yeah, that was my first one. I was able to pick my kids up—little kids; I was able to handle them. So, I felt better. Six months home, went back to work, got myself a bunch of men, we got some jobs together. And in 1988, the next one came on. Boy, that was bad. I was home for three years. Three years, nothing would help me, and the doctors even said, "You better retire, you can't do anything." So, I—

MH: Did you get VA disability?

HF: I didn't want to. I was too proud. People kept saying, "Go for disability." I said no. I was making money, I was losing money, and we got along. And second time I went in—the second, 1988, I went back to work after three years. It was not good. I took a lighter—I did something lighter. Instead of putting up buildings, I went into locksmithing, which is—a lock isn't heavy; you, just kneel and bend. And I was getting work, working for people.

I never knew what it was like to work for somebody, and a boss could be mean. They'd send me out on a job with my van and whatever I needed to fix the locks, install them. I had that with me, and as soon as I'd get to the job, the phone would ring, and the owner of the house would say, "Your boss is on the phone, he wants to talk to you." "Yeah, what's the matter, Tom?" He says, "How many locks did you do?" I'd say, "I just got here; you just sent me here." He says, "You didn't do any yet?" So, that didn't last too long. I thought, "I better leave; I don't like this." I'm doing work for you, working very cheaply—very!—just so I have money in my pocket.

Then, my third operation was in 2000, eight years ago. Couldn't take it, but they made a little hole and put a camera in there. From what I understand, all they did was take a little

bit of the disc out, and now I'm fine. But I'm afraid if I walk off a curb and step off the wrong way; if I cough, it would—if I sneeze, I have to be careful for that. I can't jump. It's impossible. And I can't be pushed around. If people push me around, I'd fall over. That's where it's gone. I'm not complaining.

People watch over me. This big guy wouldn't let me do a thing, number one son. Number two son lives in New York. He comes here as often as he can, and he helped us take all the boxes out, empty them, put them where everything had to be.

How are we doing on time? (laughs)

MH: I just have a little bit more to ask you about. How'd you get involved with the Association, the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored?

HF: Okay, the Association started in 1947. It was started the night before I got married. I was sent a postcard. One guy got all the guys' names and addresses and sent out postcards, and he said, "There's a 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division Association; it's gonna take place." So, he sent these postcards out. Next day, I was supposed to get married, and I was over at Edie's house, said goodbye to my grandparents. "This is it, you're not gonna see me anymore." Of course, we did see each other.

I went to New York to the Pennsylvania Hotel, and I met some of the guys that you saw. Gee, I haven't seen them in a couple years. Hated the Army. I said to myself, "If I ever see them again, I'll just run. I don't want to see them anymore." Hated everybody. Suddenly, we get to see each other, we're hugging each other. So, the National Association was formed, and a president—one of the presidents—one of the guys became a president. He formed a chapter, New York Chapter, and then somebody in California formed a chapter, so there are about nine different chapters: Tri-State, Midwest—I forgot already—Connecticut Chapter. There's a chapter in Florida; that's the Dixie Chapter. I don't even though if they're still in business. I think the only chapter that's really going now—this has been so successful that we're the only ones who are operating.

Anyway, we went through a few different secretary/treasurers. We vote upon different officers. And the guy who had it for twenty-eight years, he kept us together. He really did a grand job. He was always doing newsletters, three-, four-page newsletters, phone calls. We would have—like we had the other day, get-togethers, and we'd go to the Catskills once a year; we'd spend weekends there. It was really nice.

I had nothing to do with the chapter. All I did was—“You’re coming here. When is the meeting, so-and-so? I’ll be there.” We’d pay our dues, I’d come to the meeting in New York, and it was nice, every three months meeting. Then, he got sick; he got Lou Gehrig’s Disease and couldn’t walk anymore. His doctor said, “You’d better move to warm weather, to a warm climate. You’ll feel better.” So, he packed up, left to Arizona. Before our last two meetings, he got up, ran the meetings and said, “Boys, somebody better take over; otherwise, we’ll fall apart.” I figured somebody’s going to take over. Nobody took over. So the last meeting, just a night or two before the last meeting, I called him up. I said, “Ed, did anybody call you?” He said, “Nobody called.”

MH: What year is this?

HF: This was 1985, eighty-five [1985]. It’s twenty-three, twenty-four years ago. I forgot already. Anyway, I said, “Ed, this can’t fall apart. It’d break my heart.” He said, “Harry, I have to move to a warmer climate.” I said, “Somebody’s got to take this over.” He said, “Harry, nobody called.” So, I said, “All right, I’ll be at the next meeting, and ask once again. If anybody wants to take over, fine; if not—”

MH: You’ll do it.

HF: “I know what I’m in for, I’ll take it over. I’m sure there’s somebody better than myself who can take it over, who can speak better.” In those days I spoke better; now, I don’t know what the hell’s happening. I want to say a word; I just can’t get it out.

MH: It was hard giving the speech you had to give the other day?

HF: Oh, no. It’s tough. I want to say things—

MH: No, I don’t mean finding the words, I mean looking at these guys and realizing there’s only a few of you left.

HF: Well, I don’t think of it that way, because there used to be four meetings a year—anyway, a meeting every quarter, and then I just made it into a family affair. Women were not allowed to come to this. I said, “To hell with this, let the wives. We have some money in the bank. Let’s have these meetings, but we’ll cut it down to twice a year.” They come in from all the way down South Jersey, from Connecticut who couldn’t make it, New York, where else? On the Island, Bronx, Brooklyn.

And we're losing them. We're losing too fast. I get these phone calls—I hate to get on the phone. Every time I—she'll say, "Harry, it's for you," and I get on the phone. One of the children, or a wife, would tell you, "Sorry to tell you this, but Bernie just passed away," or Charlie. So, this semester, there were two that passed away. I just got one the other day; his son called.

So, you ask me, they're like—believe me when I tell you they're like brothers to me. Hate to say that we're just not strangers. What we went through, the bond—from what we went through, we would do anything for each other, believe it or not. You go to any of these meetings, and you'll see guys hugging each other; they'll hug or kiss on the cheek, you know. And we're all straight men, I want you to know. But that's the way it is. I never saw anything like it in my life. Even the women, the wives—they love her. She has helped me tremendously; she's really done a lot for me.

MH: Did the experience, especially of seeing the camps, change the way you feel about religion or about God?

HF: I was never religious, but now I am less religious, and I'll tell you why. We had some kids from New Mexico—they spoke with an accent, believe it or not—and American soldiers. A few of their boys, a few of their boys, they used to hang around together because they'd speak Spanish; nobody else spoke Spanish.

So, whenever one of them got killed, I would see them get together, and they would say—I'd go in with that gang, 'cause I wanted to hear them, even though I can't speak Spanish, but they would tell me what they're saying. A few of them said, "I am going to be more religious now. Danny just got killed. Now I'm going to be even more religious. And one of the other guys, Abraham, he got killed. We're always on the front line; every minute, somebody's getting knocked off." And I would hear that, "I'm getting even more religious now. Boy, it's terrible; they come here, they come to save our country and looks what happens? They get killed for nothing."

One of these guys, who I liked very much—we were discharged from Fort Dix—where were we discharged from? I forgot already. From Fort Dix; it came to Fort Dix. So, he says, "Harry, I don't have money to get home. Could I borrow some money from you? I'll send it to you when I get home." I said, "Of course," so I took out thirty bucks. My father came to pick me up; I didn't need any money. Took out thirty bucks, he never paid it back. But I keep laughing about it. If I saw him today, I would hug him. I never saw him after that.

MH: You were talking about religion.

HF: Yeah, religion. From what I've seen, I just cannot believe there's anybody upstairs looking. I don't tell this to my wife. I go to shul only because my wife says, "It's Friday night, let's go." But I just do not believe. How come—here we're six tanks together, making an attack. How come these two over here get hit, how come I didn't get hit? Why? Why? I can't understand it. And think about that. How come? Why didn't I get hit? The only time I got hit was when I was standing still or when I didn't make an attack; they threw the grenades at me. I did get hit once, but nobody was in the tank.

I had an argument with one of my replacement lieutenants. We had made an attack all day long, and then at night we bed down and he says to me, "You see that hill up there? I want you to go up to the hill, get on top, and I want you to park there for the night. Take your gun, and I want you to zero in on the roads down below." So, I said, "Lieutenant, I'm a target up there. I get on top of that hill, I'm a target. Why don't you let me go behind the hill and let me just put the gun out, let the turret be exposed." He says again, "See this? You only got the stripes on your—I'm telling you what to do. You don't like it? You want to complain tomorrow after the battle's over?"

Okay. So, I got down, got my boys together, and I said, "Boys, we're going to be a target. We're going up on top of the hill." And they said, "Why can't we go behind the hill? Everybody else is behind." I said, "Yeah, you just heard the lieutenant." They said, "Oh, for Christ's sake, we're gonna be hit, sure as shootin'. We gotta get hit. How in the hell can we get up there?" So, we get up on the hill, we park. The hill is like this; everybody's behind us, and we park just like this on top of the hill. And we're parked sideways, so if they hit us, they hit the side of the vehicle.

Nothing happened all night. We got in our bedrolls, slept the night through, got down, breakfast time—breakfast is early, five o'clock in the morning. Went to the chow wagon, got our oatmeal, whatever, slices of toast and bacon, whatever they put in there, and we sat down by the tank, right alongside—no, right in front of the tanks; we were targets, too. Anyway, we're sitting there talking, didn't even think anything about getting hit.

Suddenly, a shell comes in. This is a high explosive, and it comes in near us. Fortunately, none of us got hit, but oh! We heard this and saw that, saw the smoke going up in the air. So, we just dropped our mess kits and we got into the tank, and I looked around. I didn't see anybody there. Well, I was so scared, so nervous, I didn't see anybody. As I'm looking, and we're all in position, I said to the gunner, "Get a shell in there"—I said to the loader, "Get a shell in there, and hurry!" Which he did: put the shell in, locked the breach. I said, "If you see anything out there, or if I tell you to fire, you just fire. If you see anything, just step on that solenoid trigger and fire."

So, we didn't see anything, and I'm looking. I swear, I didn't see anything. It's all woods out there. Finally, after just a few minutes, we get hit right on the side of the motor. Our motor's in the back. He hit us right in the motor, and I see sparks coming into the turret; they start coming all around. I said, "Guys, we're hit, get out of here!" The loader, a big tall guy—I don't know how he passed me by—just jumped out of the tank. The driver and assistant, they jumped out, which I didn't know, and the gunner sat there. I said, "Smitty, get out of here, we're hit!" He was such a nice guy, he says, "Go ahead, Harry," I said, "Smitty, get out of here!" I figured this is the last man in the tank, because I'm in charge of this, I'll be the last one. I'll stay with the tank until it goes down. Why did I think that, of all things?

I kept arguing with him. "Smitty, get out of here!" So, finally, I had to pull him. He steps on the chair, he dives out, and I step on the little stool, and I dove out. I looked around. I still didn't see anybody there, but I see billows of smoke coming out of that tank in the motor area. And I jumped down and, boy, you wanna see me run down that hill! I started running and the medics started running after me and they tackled me, and I said, "Oh, my God, did the guys get out of the tank?" They said, "Don't worry about them." I said, "God, did they get out?" I'm more worried about them than myself.

So, they finally tackled me. They tagged me with a little piece of cardboard tag; it's like you'd see [at] a sale. So, they tied it around and got me to the ambulance, so I sat down in the seat. By that time, I'd cooled off, but I still kept wondering, "Gee, I hope those guys got out." And I said, "What am I doing in the ambulance?" Here's a guy on the floor with a broken leg; they doctored him in the field, and he's all bandaged up. He's got splints on both sides; he's on the floor. Another guy sitting this way across from me, and he's got a tag on him marked "Moron." He didn't even know what the hell was going on. And this is the way he looked. I looked at a few other guys.

MH: (laughs) I'm sorry.

HF: Yeah, just be happy you weren't there. And I see these guys in the other seats, and I'm in this seat here, and I look out. Some were bleeding, they were bandaged up: the arm, the head. And this guy, the moron—this moron did not even blink an eyelash; he just sat there. Poor guy with the broken leg, he was moaning. And suddenly the ambulance driver gets in, his assistant gets in the other side, and we start going back to the field hospital. As we're going there, the Germans start firing at us. Oh, man, am I glad they didn't hit us; we would've just exploded.

MH: Did your guys get out okay?

HF: Did we what?

MH: Did your guys get out of the tank okay.

HF: No, no. Oh, alone, yeah, but that was the tank. We were in the—

MH: But they got out of the tank.

HF: Yeah, they did get out, because I met them in the field hospital. Yeah, so everybody got out. And we drove I don't know how many miles back, maybe five, six miles or so, and there were tents all over the place, these big field tents, hospital tents.

So, I go in there. They grabbed me as though I couldn't walk and they gave me a pill. I swear, that big blue pill, and they say, "Gotta swallow." I said okay, I swallow it. I see everybody's walking around drunk. One guy comes over, "Oh, Harry, you're gonna walk the same way we do. Oh, that blue pill." I looked at him, I thought it was funny. I said, "What the hell's the matter?" They're drunk, I swear. They're walking around and they're ready to fall and everything.

So, anyway, I had my dinner and they showed us a movie, and [when it was] time for bed, so they put us to bed. The male nurses grabbed me, both under each arm, and they said, "We'll walk." I said, "Wait a minute, I can walk." They said, "No, you can't." I thought I was walking. I must've been walking like them, too. I said, "Guys, don't hold me, I can walk myself," and I must've been—anyway, they put me in a cot, and both of them—one nurse on one side, one on the other side. They were awake all night; they stayed with me. And I said, "Hey, guys, get some sleep. I'm okay." "You think you're okay, you're not okay." So, I don't know, really don't know, if that pill affected me, too.

But you want to see these guys in the field hospitals. Oh, jeez! That field hospital had to be erected in one day. It's not one tent, it's a bunch of tents put together. Had to be erected in one day, and then the next day, the combat soldiers would make their attacks. The male nurses, they would have to put all the tents up—

MH: Yeah, fold it up and move it.

HF: —and move with them, so we had to stay with them. I was there for three days.

And if you want to hear something funny, I'll tell you. One of the guys in our outfit, he was an Englishman. He was so funny. They cleared the tents, put them all away. They get a little card table. The doctor sits on this side and we're lined up; a whole bunch of us were lined up in the field, and he's interviewing each guy. He looks at them, he looks at the eyes, and he's got a big cigar. I didn't smoke then. I said, "God, what're you doing?" He's puffing his smoke right into us. So, one at a time, he says, "Okay, you stay here with the hospital, you stay here, you—" And he's interrogating, and he says, "You go out to the front again, and you—" I couldn't find my way to get to the front of the line, so I—

(phone rings)

MH: Sorry.

HF: (laughs)

MH: (on phone) Hi. Hello? Hi, I'm not quite finished. I'll be finished in a few minutes.

HF: Yeah, 'cause he wants—they want to go out to eat.

MH: (on phone) It takes twenty minutes, twenty-five minutes to get home. Yeah. Okay, bye. My wife.

HF: In order for me to go to the back of the line, I'd have to run all the way back there. So, I'd push one of the guys back near the doctor's desk (laughs), his table. "What's your name, soldier?" and he looks at my dog tag and all that stuff. He says, "How do you feel? Are you nervous at all?" I said, "No, I feel pretty good."

While I'm being interrogated, this one guy who was with us, he says, "Watch me go back to Paris." He starts running up and down the line. He says, "Let me in the front. My men need me! They're out there! Let me out in the front! Take me back to the front!" I look at him and said, "What're you, crazy?" I said, "Doc, please, don't send me to the front anymore." He says, "I'm sorry, son, I have to send—you're in shape, you can go back."

So, this poor guy, Georgie, he goes to the doctor and he almost upset the table, and the doctor says, "Take it easy." Two of the male nurses grabbed him, and he says, "Leave me

alone! I gotta go with Harry! I have to go to the front!” So, I didn’t see George anymore. That was the end of him. I saw him after the war.

MH: He got to Paris?

HF: He got to Paris. (laughs) He had the time of his life there.

MH: Anything else you want to tell me?

HF: Uh, I know they want to go out to dinner.

MH: Let me turn this off.

*End of interview*