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Ernest C. James oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, August 3, 2008

Ernest C. James (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

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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.]

Michael Hirsh: Talking with Ernest, E-r-n-e-s-t, C. James. And he was with the 238th Combat Engineer Battalion, attached to the 104th Infantry Division, at Nordhausen.

Ernest C. James: Okay, here we go. Are you there?

MH: Yep, I'm here. What's your date of birth?

EJ: April 23, 1920.

MH: Nineteen twenty. Where were you before you went in the service?

EJ: I was in Berkeley and San Francisco, California, and prior to that I was in—I went to high school in Ord, Nebraska.

MH: Okay. So, were you in college at the time, at Berkeley?

EJ: I had had one semester.

MH: So, how did you end up going into the service?

EJ: I joined the National Guard, California National Guard, on the advice of my older brother. He said that, “We’re going to be drafted soon, so you better get in.”

MH: And what were you supposed to do in the Guard?

EJ: Well, originally, I tried to join the Marines, but they told me to come back the next morning and my brother told me he didn’t want me to die that young. He said, “Go to the National Guard,” and that’s the way I got in. What did I do in the Guard?

MH: Right.

EJ: I was a buck private, the twenty-one dollar-a-month type, and I got promoted quite rapidly.

MH: So, how did you go from being in the California National Guard to ending up in Europe?

EJ: Well, in the Guard, we—I was there from—until—let’s see. It was about June 1941; I got in in 1940. I was promoted by that time to staff sergeant, and I’d had one semester of engineering in college, so of course that put me in the engineers in OCS [Officer Candidate School]. I applied for engineer OCS and got accepted, and went back to Fort Belvoir and got my commission.

MH: So, you were a second lieutenant at that point.

EJ: I got to be a second lieutenant. There, I was set up to Plattsburgh, New York, which is a very small base, historical place. I was scheduled to get into the 1st Engineer Shore Brigade, which was a secret organization at the time, and they didn’t even tell me that I was scheduled to go there. But I went—from September to December, every time an outfit would move out, I’d switch to another one. So, I was in a water supply battalion; I was in a heavy pontoon battalion. Eventually, the 51st Engineer Combat Regiment came to Plattsburgh, and I was transferred there and stayed there the rest of my career in the Army.

MH: When did you get orders for overseas?

EJ: About October of 1943, I guess it was. We were in Plattsburgh, transferred out, went on maneuvers in West Virginia, and then went down to Norfolk and got on a ship in October. Got on a Liberty [ship] and headed for the CBI, the China-Burma-India Theater. We went into the Mediterranean and took an unscheduled stop at Oran, [Algeria] North Africa, where we were put in a camp that was vacant. We sat there until January, not knowing where we were to go.

About that time, they had a conference with [Franklin] Roosevelt and [Joseph] Stalin and [Winston] Churchill—I think it was Yalta—where they decided on the invasion. We were, along with virtually every independent engineering battalion and regiment in the Mediterranean, put on a ship in Casablanca. We had no idea where we were going: went out to the middle of the Atlantic. And then, one night in a horrible storm, we made a 90-degree turn, and it was a fast one. We thought we were going back home. We went up around Iceland, into England, and found that we were to be part of the upcoming invasion.

MH: Hmm. You sure took the long route.

EJ: (laughs) Actually, what they did, they sent us—they're sending us to the CBI. They held us up in the Mediterranean and then changed our orders to go to Britain.

MH: So, did you take part in the D-Day invasion?

EJ: Well, we went down into southern England and went on training. We got training in the new Bailey bridges and the various other engineering-type training. And then we were on that training exercise where they went out into the Channel, and the Germans hit the training exercise and we lost several ships. I watched some of 'em go down. Fortunately, we weren't hit, but we got some real training there.

MH: That was your first experience with real combat?

EJ: Well, that wasn't combat as such. We were on a training exercise, and German little PT-type boats hit us. And, yes, it was combat. It was highly secret, however; they never—no one knew anything about that until long after the war. It was kept secret for quite some time.

MH: You were told not to talk about it?

EJ: We were ordered not to talk about it, not to say a word about it. We didn't want the information of what had happened to get back to the Germans. We had lost several boats with tanks and personnel on it. Anyway, we completed the exercise, landed on some beaches at Torquay, England. It was a pretty realistic training exercise. It had included quite a few troops.

Then, we went over to Bournemouth and got our—started getting the indications that we would be going on an invasion. Several weeks—two weeks before the invasion, they started with the high-ranking, field-grade officers, then down to the company-grade officers and then the enlisted men, in orienting all of us what we were going to do and where we were going to go. Well, when we were oriented, we were immediately put behind barbed wire and guards and couldn't get out of the compound. But we had full access to the dioramas and any information we wanted on the invasion.

MH: These were dioramas of what, the beaches?

EJ: The dioramas of the beaches and actual photographs taken by submarines. We knew exactly where we were going to land, where we were supposed to land.

MH: How big were those dioramas?

EJ: Oh, on the table, about a picnic table sized, maybe a little larger. And there were pictures and the dioramas. But they gave us a lot of information. One of the things that was very interesting was that all the time, in the background, there was a suggestion that we might be on an action which would be a false one. You know, they had the—oh, what was it?—a general, one of the tank generals, in charge of an army that was not there. And we were told that there may be a false invasion: just enough to start rumors. If we were captured, then anybody would complete the ruse that we were going to really attack around Calais. But that was a planned deal.

So, finally, on about June 2 [1944], first or second, we moved on to Portsmouth and started getting on ships. By June 4, we were on the ships and ready to go. And at that time, we knew exactly where we were going, what we were going to do. We left on June 4—let me see. The invasion was June 6 and we started on June 5, but it was storming so bad that we pulled back into harbor.

MH: How big a ship were you on?

EJ: (laughs) A little tiny one, LST [Landing Ship, Tank]. It was a small one, held—we had, I guess thirteen vehicles and the equivalent of about, oh, maybe a company, smaller than a company. Anyhow, the morning of June 6, we were—about midnight, we started hearing firing, and we—now, incidentally, it was raining and miserable. We were under tarps on the trucks and anyplace we could get out of the rain. We looked out over the horizon and all hell was breakin' loose, and we were not too far from it.

Anyhow, just about the time it started getting light, which was quite early, we had sprung a leak in our boat and the water was almost up to gunwales. We had got our pumps from our water supply equipment and pumped out the bilge, but it was slowly sinking, and we had to notify whoever was guiding us in. Actually, it was private yachts that were running around and were in charge. We told them that we were sinking and we had to either get in or we'd sink. So, that was about 7:00; by 7:30, which was H-hour, it was in that time we landed. We were amongst the first troops that landed.

MH: And you are at which beach?

EJ: Utah.

MH: Utah Beach, okay.

EJ: And we landed. We're right under a battleship, which was firing, and every time they'd fire, our ship would almost jump out of the water. I just last year got contact with the English people who were running this ship. And we've had correspondence; he told us his side of the story and, of course, we told him our side. But that was just last year.

Anyhow, we landed. Our first job was to break through the beach barriers and open up so the vehicles could get through there. There's a lot of barriers there, and some of them, incidentally, had just been put in lately—I mean, within a week or so. Some of us who'd been around concrete had smelled the stuff, and it was fresh concrete. We went over and chipped off a little of it and found out our bulldozers could just go right through it. So, we built the first accesses to the beach, along with the—there's some engineers from the 1st Engineers Shore Brigade.

Anyhow, we broke through, went to an assembly area, and then our first job was to go out into the area behind the beaches and open the road. It was a very swampy area, and the Germans had opened the gates that controlled the water in that area. So, we had a lot of mud, a lot of water. We built a few bridges and opened up roads. By that time, we're—and that was in the afternoon of June 6, and the night—by that time, we were well into the area that the paratroopers were into.

We sort of became—everybody did the job that some officers thought needed to be done, and you didn't look at what organization you had. Ours was well organized, but the paratroopers were just in small groups. When two people would meet, if one was a corporal and one was a lieutenant, the lieutenant was in charge, and just automatically they organized themselves. Did a beautiful job, I thought, of organizing themselves. There'd be 101st and 82nd Airborne that would be kind of intermixed and in fighting groups. We got into a little of the fighting, but our job was to repair the roads so that they could get tanks through.

That evening, the evening of June 6, we could still see out over the ocean from some of the places we were at. We saw this—it looked like a bath of locusts coming in from England, and it was planes with gliders and more paratroopers. They dropped right above us and landed close to us. It was quite a spectacular sight to see these gliders come down right over your head and watch bullets going through 'em. Some crashed, and I thought I saw one crash that had a jeep in it, and men were sitting in front and the jeep just went through 'em, killed 'em all. But it was quite a spectacular scene, to be sitting on the ground and be watching a paratrooper come down and see bullets going through his body.

MH: How close were the Germans to you?

EJ: (laughs) We didn't know they were all around us. It was like a madhouse. There were Germans all around and there were Americans all around. And the Germans were more confused than the Americans were. That's one of the reasons that we come out on top. Incidentally, many of these Germans were Ukrainians and people who'd been almost impressed in the German Army, been captured and then given their so-called freedom if they'd come and fight for Germany. They surrendered very easily.

MH: So, what happens in the next couple of months?

EJ: Okay, next couple of months, our job—we were 7th Corps troops, actually, Army troops assigned to 7th Corps. We wore the 1st Army patch and the 7th Corps patch, and the 7th Corps would assign us wherever there was a push or wherever we were needed. As a

consequence, we got into an awful lot of combat, much more than many combat engineers would get into.

MH: Just out of curiosity, which patch do you wear on which shoulder?

EJ: You know, I don't recall which shoulder, but I believe it was on the left shoulder, the —

MH: The 7th Corps?

EJ: —the Corps, and on the right shoulder the Army. But we were always assigned to a division that was attacking or doing something, normally to build bridges or to blast installations, German installations, or build roads or repair roads. But always close to the combat situation.

MH: Were you ever wounded during the war?

EJ: Oh, I got several pieces of shrapnel but I never reported it. In fact, I really regretted it, because I got three pieces of shrapnel, but they were small. And I could have got a Purple Heart for each of 'em.

MH: Right.

EJ: (laughs) But we didn't take the time. I remember one, in the Battle of the Bulge. We were getting shelled by their 88s, and they were hitting pretty close to me. It was snowing and I dived into a little defile hands first, and it was into the snow. I got hit just as I went down on my hand—it was a small one—and I went down through the snow and then a whole batch of shit. I had that shrapnel wound on my hand, and it was surrounded with feces. My wonderful medic got me out of a lot of trouble: took snow, washed it off, put sulfa on it, bandaged it up, and that's the last I ever remember of it.

MH: (laughs) I thought you were going to tell me you got hit in the backside.

EJ: Nope! (laughs) No, I got hit in the front every time.

MH: Okay. So, anyhow, back to being in combat a couple months after the invasion. Where were you, and what was going on?

EJ: We went all through the Cotentin Peninsula, and we were in virtually every area. We got up as far as Cherbourg, the outskirts of Cherbourg, and of course on the opposite side. And then, our next big battle was Operation Cobra. Did you ever hear of that?

MH: No.

EJ: Operation Cobra was, in effect, a breakout of Normandy. And it was a real bastard. The Germans were trying to cut across our lines to escape, and we were trying to stop them and break out. This was around the time of Saint-Lô. You've heard of Saint-Lô?

MH: Yes, of course.

EJ: Pardon?

MH: Yes.

EJ: Okay. In the Saint-Lô battle, they took one of our platoons that was pretty good at fighting and put them with the infantry and tanks, and they were a platoon that was to help them clean the roads up and all that sort of stuff. And they got into a lot of—that platoon got into a lot of fighting. I was sitting over about a mile away waiting to move through at the time and watched the battle, the noise from the battle. But that platoon, they got a French Croix de Guerre and many Silver and Bronze Stars out of that.

Then, when they had the break out of Saint-Lô, we were on the outskirts of Saint-Lô and watching the big air bombardment of the German lines. It was just a massacre. When we went through—there's a lot of stories about that, which I won't get into. But when we got into the area, there were Germans around there just wandering around shell-shocked. It was carnage. And we went right through, had—I don't recall firing a gun going through there. We just ignored the Germans; there were others that were picking them up. But we had to get through quick to open up the roads, the area where our Air Force had bombed the area; our main job there was to open up the roads. And man alive, our tanks come through going like a bat out of hell. Everything was one way going east.

We made the breakthrough there, and went pretty fast over to Paris. I don't recall how long it was, but I was in Paris a day or two before the French got in there. You know, the French, in quotes, "liberated Paris." Hell, I was there and got kicked out by American MPs [Military Police]. They told us to get out; the French are coming in to take Paris. I went along the Champs-Élysées and all of the—I've got pictures of the Chamber of Deputies and the Eiffel Tower and all those, the day before Paris was officially liberated.

But we went from there, then, started going north, and we were going real fast. I was given a job—I was a platoon leader, a first lieutenant, and given a job of reconnoitering the area through where the Battle of Marne, Belleau Wood and those areas, where the Americans had fought during World War I. I was told that no Americans had been in there yet, that I might run into retreating German groups. My instructions were to report on the road conditions and bridges and so on. And we spent two days going through that area.

We finally got up to Soissons, on the outskirts of Soissons, and three French—we call them FFIs [French Forces of the Interior]—jumped out and scared the daylight out of us. We could have blasted 'em, damn fools. Anyhow, they said, "Don't go any farther; the Germans are waiting up there and they know you're coming." And so my orders were, when I had any contact with the Germans, to turn around, and that was as far as I was to go. So, we turned around and left. We got up as far as the monument, the 1st Division monument of World War I, as far as they had gone into France, got to Belleau Wood.

An interesting little thing going into Belleau Wood: There's a monument there, and we drove up to it, and some Frenchmen come out and were pointing to the monument. These were people that were in charge of maintaining Belleau Wood cemetery and monument. And they're pointing to a place where, just about thirty minutes earlier, Germans had pulled out, and they'd let loose with the machine guns on the monument. There's a whole batch of bullet holes on the monument. Well, years and years later, I called up somebody from the battlefield monument commission and told 'em about that, and they said, "Well, you know, we never knew where those bullet holes come from." I was there a half an hour after the Germans had left, and the French told me where they'd come from.

And, let's see. You want me to continue?

MH: Sure.

EJ: Okay. We went on up to—am I going into too much detail?

MH: I'll tell you if you are.

EJ: Okay. We went on up north and we're going pretty fast, built a few bridges and come into an area at Mons, Belgium. And it was night, we're at a large convoy, and I mean miles long. We were in the advance guard—I was. Well, I'm not sure whether it was the advance guard as such, but it was, oh, a mile or so behind the point, and the point was light tanks and armored vehicles.

Anyhow, it was dark of night, and all hell broke loose. What had happened—I didn't see it. I saw the battle, because I was only a mile or so behind it. But the Germans from Pas-de-Calais and Dunquerque areas, from over in there, were retreating from the west to the east towards Mons, and we were coming from the south to the north towards Mons. And the two columns met, and before they had integrated, some of our tankers recognized that they were Germans and they immediately started firing at 'em. And then, like I said, all hell broke loose. That was the damndest battle I've ever seen.

But we captured a couple hundred thousand German prisoners; and, of course, as usual, the combat engineers were the ones that had to clean up. So, that morning, we had to go in and clean up the roads; that meant taking the bulldozers and pushing everything off the roads, and that included dead people and horses and all the rest. We were in one area where there was a field, and I swear you could have walked across that field, across dead bodies.

MH: How do you deal with that?

EJ: What?

MH: How do you deal with that?

EJ: Get them out of the way and let somebody coming up from behind clean it up.

MH: But, I mean, personally?

EJ: Oh, you got to a point where—it was kind of interesting. We went through a psychological exam before we went overseas, and my doc, the doctor that we had, told me, "You're never gonna make it. You haven't got the—" oh, I dunno. He said, "You're gonna—" It was so damn ridiculous. Anyhow, I found that, on the contrary, every time I got into a battle like that, or into anything like that, I just got cold and calculating. I've

picked up my dead buddies, I've been in skirmishes, and never once do I recall that I was emotionally scarred. And something like that, we just—well, that was war.

I remember one time, coming further into Germany; we come into an area where the German column had been strafed. And everybody—I mean, they must have been just caught complete unaware, because everybody was still sitting in their vehicles, which had burned. We sat down to eat our K rations, and right next to us was a man on a motorcycle, just a complete charred body, and you didn't think anything of it. You got to a point where you either—some guys, it bothered, but not a lot of them.

MH: Right. Were you in the Bulge?

EJ: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Well, okay, I'll go on from Mons. We went east, and at Charleroi—are you familiar with these towns?

MH: No. Charleroi, I'm not.

EJ: Well, you can look on a map. At Charleroi, we received orders to go up to Namur and build some bridges across the Marne River. We were told that the Germans still held the area, but we hoped that it would be captured by the time we got up there, but to be ready to go in and fight.

So, we started up, and a couple of Belgian freedom fighters stopped us and told us that the Germans again were waiting for us—not for us, for American troops to come through—and that we'd be trapped. They said that—and they knew where we were going; I don't know how. They knew we were going to Namur. They said, “We can lead you through a route where there are no Germans.” Of course, we didn't know who the hell they were, but fortunately, one of our officers spoke fluent French and spoke to them and asked them a lot of questions and decided they were legit.

These guys took us up through—it wasn't back roads, but it was an alternate route, other than the main route—and took us up to Namur. We went into the citadel of Namur, which is an old—I guess it goes back to Roman days. Then we went down to where the bridge was being built, and we did run into Germans there. I know the bridge that I built was a Bailey bridge; it was a big one. We had to clear out the opposite shore of Germans—who were retreating, incidentally. One of the other companies had another bridge upstream from that, where—when they got the bridge across, the Germans started firing at 'em, while it was being put across. They went up and took a small combat group and knocked out all those that—there were people who had been left to defend or slow us down.

MH: What kind of vehicles were you traveling in?

EJ: I had a Jeep. I had weapons carriers and two-and-a-half ton trucks, and had a half-track per platoon with four .50 calibers and a .37. Each company commander had a—oh, I don't know what the hell they called 'em, but it was a six-seater car.

Anyhow, we got those bridges built, and then moved on up to—I forget the name of the town; starts with L; one of the big towns there. And then we went in. In a few days we were in Germany, and we were with the first troops that got into Germany. We were with 1st Division then; we were attached to the 1st Division. We went into Germany; we built the first bridges in Germany. We were then told that we were going to go in as infantry and put in a defensive line around Aachen. So, our battalion relieved about a regiment of the 1st Division. They'd been all shot up; they really had been through battles.

We went in and relieved them, and they went back, reorganized to hit Aachen from the east to the west. We were on the west of Aachen, right about the Belgium line. We could overlook—we could see Belgium from where we were. And we had a beautiful position on top of the hill, where we held the top and down towards the Germans. And we used—we, of course, knew how to set booby traps and all kinds of things like that. We put in one hell of a defensive line. It was in the woods. We cut the field of fire using .50 caliber machine guns. Incidentally, I went back there in 1990, I believe it was, and you could see the growth that was fifty years old versus the original growth, which it was all along our front line. (laughs) It was kind of interesting to see it.

But, anyhow, we were there fighting for about a month. Got hit with German patrols a lot. One of our—two of our men had been captured, and the commander of the Aachen garrison called 'em in and asked if they would go with a white flag and surrender the city, which they did. It was quite a story. I won't go into it, but two of our sergeants accepted the surrender of Aachen: the first major city in Germany that we captured.

So, want me to continue?

MH: Sure. Take me to the Battle of the Bulge.

EJ: Well, okay. We moved into the area between Aachen and the Ruhr River, where we did a lot of bridge-building and roads, preparatory to crossing the Ruhr River and going over to Cologne. This was about—a matter of a month or two. In December, we were

called—all the officers were called to an officers' meeting, and we were told to get prepared to move out, because there was something going to be happening down in the Ardennes. And this was before it happened.

What we did, we laid a minefield for the 104th Infantry that was probably five miles long. It was called a hasty minefield: thousands and thousands of mines. We mined their whole front. We had orders—by that time the Bulge had started. Our orders were to lay the minefield and, when finished, immediately take off for the northern part of—well down into the Bulge area, what turned out to be the Bulge area. So, it probably was two days after the Bulge started. We were down there, and they had hit into—Malmédy had happened. Anyhow—

MH: Do you remember hearing about Malmédy?

EJ: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

MH: What was the reaction at the time?

EJ: Pissed off. We pretty much changed our attitude: "Take no prisoners."

MH: Did that apply just to the SS, or to the Wehrmacht, too?

EJ: We didn't—

MH: Distinguish?

EJ: We didn't distinguish. They're all the same. And we were not very happy. Whenever we ran into any—now, engineers didn't run into as much combat, of course, as the infantry. But we had skirmishes, an awful lot of 'em. And there in the Bulge, we had quite a few relatively small ones. We lost a few men, probably twenty or thirty total killed, and a couple hundred wounded out of the battalion. Actually, it was something like a quarter of a battalion got Purple Hearts. But, anyhow, we—do you want to go into any detail on the Bulge?

MH: Only as it affects you. I mean, just—you know.

EJ: Okay. Our biggest battle was in Manhay, M-a-n-h-a-y. The Germans had—it's as far as they'd got, and we laid a big mine field. It'd started snowing, so it was a hasty minefield; we didn't have to dig 'em in.

MH: You mean you just drop 'em?

EJ: All three of our companies were involved in it. It was a pretty good-sized one.

MH: With those kind of mines, you just drop them?

EJ: Well, no, we didn't just drop 'em. You wouldn't drop a mine; what you'd do is lay it on the ground and arm it, and then the snow would cover it up.

MH: Ah. Okay.

EJ: Anyhow, we built a defensive line, and that was Christmas, the day before Christmas. And then, when we laid a minefield, until we could get the infantry in, we guarded it. That was part of the engineers' job, to guard the minefield until the infantry could come in and take it over. Usually, the infantry is fighting just beyond the minefield.

Anyhow, Christmas Eve, the Germans hit us, and it was the last—the dying gasp. They hit us with a batch of their Tiger tanks. And I was—I had my platoon guarding our minefields, and we were dug in, in the snow; it was kind of comfortable. The Germans hit us, hit us half a mile from where I was, and busted through. They went in behind the minefield, and for some reason, they turned into the minefield from the friendly side, and we got five or six German tanks. It made *Life* magazine, the picture of all those tanks that we got.

But we stopped the Germans there, and from there, the Germans got out of their tanks and were on foot, had to go back by foot. They were out of gas, out of everything. They tried to get back by foot, or were captured. That was the—then, from there on, we turned around. It was cold as hell, and miserable: some of the nastiest weather I've ever been in. We had to put gravel on roads where there was ice, and just do anything to keep our roads open and our vehicles going.

But that Christmas Eve and Christmas Day was the last of the Germans making any progress in the Battle of the Bulge; from then on, we were on their tail. We moved up, always behind—let's see, we were with the—there was an airborne division. Which one was it? 104th—not 104th, 101st and 82nd. Anyhow, one of 'em we were attached to, and we went with them through the end of the Bulge. And then, when the Bulge was over—is that enough on the Bulge?

MH: Yeah.

EJ: When the Bulge was over, we moved back to the area that we were in, over by the Ruhr River. We were attached to the 104th Division, the same as we had been before the Bulge. The 104th had stayed and held the lines that we had along the Ruhr River. And we started planning for the crossing of the Ruhr River. By that time, my company commander had gotten wounded, so I was acting company commander.

Each company was assigned a bridge across the Ruhr River. The A and B—B and C Companies had floating bridges, and A Company, which was mine, had a Bailey bridge. Mine was to be built about two days after the crossing. Bailey bridges are not combat-type bridges. I had it all loaded on trucks and all ready to go, and the crossing wasn't going very well. The Germans kept knocking our other two bridges out. So, General [J. Lawton] Collins came down, they called me in, and asked me if I could build the Bailey bridge with small arms fire coming at us. I said, "Well, give me enough—give me what I want and we'll do it."

MH: What's the difference between the floating bridges and the Bailey bridge?

EJ: What?

MH: What's the difference between the floating bridges and the Bailey bridge?

EJ: A floating bridge is a bridge that is across on rubber pontoons, and the Bailey bridge is a truss bridge which is built on—you start on the near shore, put a light nose made out of—like an erector set, almost. As you build it behind a fulcrum, you push it out, but you know exactly where the fulcrum is; if you go too far, it'll dip over, and you must keep it ten or fifteen feet behind that. And you push it across, you land it on the opposite side, push it across, jack it down onto some plates and put ramps on it, and you've got a bridge.

MH: But it's not resting in the water.

EJ: Oh, no. No, it's above the water.

MH: How long a bridge can you build that way?

EJ: Oh, you can build anywhere from a few feet to hundreds of feet. This one—I don't recall just what it was, but it was a long one. It was at least 150 feet, something like that, and it had a pier in the middle. So, they had started the crossing, and it was by boats. The 104th Engineer Battalion had taken their own troops across by boat. We came in; we were building the pontoon bridges at the same time. They said the pontoon bridges were knocked out several times by artillery, and we lost a few men and a few of our vehicles at that.

Anyhow, they weren't making any progress, so General Collins came and called me in and asked me, and I told him yes. So, I asked for as much security as I could from the 104th on the opposite bank. They're still fighting right in close there. And I asked for the half-tracks with multiple mounts, four .50s and a .37, a couple of batteries of those to just keep the opposite shore covered with .50 caliber fire, and I built the damn thing in about an hour and a half. It was by far the fastest bridge we've ever built.

MH: What river was this now?

EJ: The Ruhr River.

MH: The Ruhr? And how wide was it at this point?

EJ: Well, we were up on a—it had been an arched bridge, and they'd blown it, several spans of it. And I don't recall [how wide the river was]. The bridge itself was 140 feet, something like that.

MH: So, are you using the parts of the bridge that they had blown?

EJ: Oh, no.

MH: No, you're just starting from scratch.

EJ: No, the bridge they'd blown was a concrete arched bridge.

MH: Oh, okay. What was your rank at this point?

EJ: First lieutenant.

MH: First lieutenant, okay. At this point in the war, had anyone said anything to you about concentration camps or slave labor camps?

EJ: We knew nothing about them. That's one thing. We did not know the term. We did not know what they were doing to the Jews. We knew that they were pretty mean to people that they'd captured. But we didn't know that. Anyway, it wasn't until we got further in that we started running into these things. We ran into small instances of them, a farm that had forced labor and so on. I'll tell you about one of those later on.

Anyhow, we got that bridge across. Incidentally, on our side, there's a field—or, not a field; a garden—and there were dead 104ths and the wounded. The wounded were yelling for us to come and get 'em, but we just couldn't. We couldn't do it. I had orders that I did not go out and get any of those guys. They had their own troops doing it. But they couldn't afford—we couldn't afford to send any men out because every man was essential. But that was the thing that really—that bothered me, seeing those poor guys, with their legs blown off with shoe mines, out in that field. I don't know how many there were. I can just visualize—I can visualize them, but I can't visualize numbers. They really took a beating there.

Anyhow, we got the bridge across, and I, incidentally, didn't lose a single man. On both sides of us, the other bridges were losing—not a lot, but we lost several men. But I didn't lose a single man, killed or wounded. One of the things—we were up pretty high, and they had to have direct sight to get us, and all we were getting was indirect fire. We were getting some small arms fire, but it was small arms fire that was—they weren't aiming it. Oh, I lost a couple men that night when a piece of artillery hit the place that they were sleeping. They were wounded.

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

EJ: Anyhow, they got across, and that started the real rush across the plains from the Ruhr River to Cologne. That area is fairly flat, kind of marshy, lot of water, and we had eight or ten small bridges that we had to build in that area. We got over to Cologne, and I was bivouacked someplace close to the Cologne cathedral. My first job was to reconnoiter the Rhine River in Cologne for the best place to put a floating bridge. And I did that. I had to be pretty careful, because if they saw any movement, they'd shoot from the other side. But we didn't—we were pretty careful.

It was a while doing it, and we never did do it. I located a few sites where we had good access to do it, but nothing ever came of it. I recall I was looking out over the river at the opposite bank, and somebody comes up. "Officers meeting, immediately," and we had to go quick. They said, "Get all your troops and we're moving out." Where are we going? We're going down to Remagen. Well, we didn't know where Remagen was, except that it was about ten miles down the river or up the river. And he said, "Somebody has captured a bridge across there."

So, we didn't wait to get any further information. We took off. We were moving within hours. There was an autobahn on the right side of the thirty, thirty-five miles an hour, which you never did that! (laughs) We'd come to openings where you'd see across the river, and every time you'd come to an opening, you'd have to stop. A few trucks go as fast as they could go, and about the time they got into the opening, the artillery started at 'em. But we didn't lose anybody.

We got down there in very short order, and immediately started planning the second bridge across the Rhine. Remagen was still intact and our troops were fighting across it, on the opposite shore. And there was one bridge that had been built; boy, they built that in a hurry, too. I knew I had to get on the other side, because my job was to prepare the opposite shore. So, I snuck my platoon onto the bridge and moved across and had to clean out the opposite bank. There were a few German soldiers, but it was mostly civilians; had to kick 'em all out, and then fix up the access roads and so on. I prepared the opposite bank for the landing. Anyway, we got that bridge across. We got all the beer we could drink from General Collins on that one.

MH: Oh, that's when they captured the brewery?

EJ: Yup. That was nice of him. (laughs) We put a big sign on it, called it the Beer Bridge.

Anyhow, once we got across there, we expanded that bridgehead very, very rapidly. My regiment—my battalion went off across the hills on the bank, and we started building bridges that had been blown on the other side. And from there, we took off and tore ass

up to the north towards the Ruhr industrial area, Essen and some of those. We were not in the industrial area itself; I think General [Maurice] Rose took that. But we were east of there. We went up north and then turned to the right, to the east, and went into the Harz Mountains. And now, we start the Holocaust.

MH: Right.

EJ: We ran into several places where we found farms that had people—they were behind barbed wire and under guard—that were forced laborers, that had to work on the farms and in factories and so on. And I don't recall that we did much of it, because our job was not to work with the people. We were to fight Germans and keep roads open. I'll tell you of two instances. One, we going through the Harz Mountains and came into this beautiful little town. There were only women there, and a lot of them were pregnant. What we found was it was one of the places where Germans had—they were trying to develop the

MH: They were breeding the Master Race.

EJ: They were breeding a Master Race. Now, this just surprised the hell out of us, because these girls were pregnant or they were pushing baby carriages. And you talked to 'em, and they were—you didn't get a hell of a lot out of them, except that we surmised after a while what they really were. And they had a school—oh, incidentally, when we went into the town, we started getting some small arms fire, and so we quickly set up a line and somebody contacted those that were firing at us. They were boys in their preteens and early teens. They had a school.

The mothers would keep these guys, or keep these kids, until they were a certain age, and then they had to put them in the military schools. And by that, I mean six or eight years old. And I was in the military school. They had all kinds of arms that were—oh, for instance, I brought home a shell that had the bullet in it and everything, but it was a stainless steel deal, and it wasn't a real one; it was for training purposes. And their guns were training guns. But these were kids, and—

MH: But they were shooting at you.

EJ: They were shooting at us! We quickly convinced them to, "Hey, knock it off," and we disarmed them. I don't know where they got their—oh, I guess they actually furnished them with arms. I don't know. But they had rifles. Anyhow, that was kind of interesting,

and when anybody questions the building of the Master Race, I can say that by God, I saw it. Anyhow, the next day is when we hit Nordhausen. So, am I doing okay?

MH: Yeah, you're doing fine. So, this is the day you hit Nordhausen; it would be—? I'm just trying to figure out a date.

EJ: Oh, God.

MH: About April 11?

EJ: April 11, but I was there on the twelfth or thirteenth. The 104th had already gone in. They hadn't buried the people yet, and they were laying out on the ground. Anyway, we were called in to use our 'dozers [bulldozers] to dig trenches.

MH: How many bodies do you think you saw there?

EJ: Well, I've come up with a—I've done a lot of study on this, and my number is 10,000. And that's verified by some of the writings that I've seen, and then you look at these pictures and they're just laying all over. And I think that 10,000—I saw a figure of 10,000 had been killed and buried before we got there, and 10,000 were in the camp when we got there.

MH: So, what's your first view of the camp?

EJ: Well, I find it difficult to remember exactly what—for instance, I can remember going in and opening the crematorium, the ovens. And I can remember instances, but what I saw first—

We weren't prepared. I was given—my platoon had to go down and into a railroad yard to see if there were any engineering materials. It's one of the things we always did when we'd come into a new area, reconnoiter for engineering materials, and that's lumber, steel, anything we can use for roads or bridges. And I went down in here, and the German civilians were breaking open the railroad cars and looting what was in it. I remember seeing one that had sugar in it, bags of sugar, and the people were fighting over that.

Anyhow, there's a train. I don't know how big it was, don't have any idea, but it was several cars. And down on the siding—nobody was around those—the sergeant and I went over there, and we busted open the doors and out slithered dead bodies. What the Germans had done was go load up these people as we were moving forward. They'd load these people up and move 'em back towards Germany, trying to find ways of getting rid of 'em. So they were moving them all into this area with hopes of getting them in—they only had two ovens. That didn't do a very good job of getting rid of 'em. But a lot of them were sent down to one of the camps down south—I forget which one—for killing and disposal.

MH: How many railroad cars do you think there were, filled with bodies?

EJ: I can't even visualize how many, but I've said there's over ten.

MH: And these are boxcars or 40-by-8s?

EJ: Oh, sure.

MH: And how do you break the doors open?

EJ: God, I don't recall. Went up there and knocked the locks off, I guess.

MH: And you get the doors open and the bodies just start falling out?

EJ: Slithered out, that's the only word that I could use, 'cause they were—they'd been dead for days, and were in various degrees of decomposition.

MH: What do you say? How do you react?

EJ: I don't recall. I don't recall. All I know is that it was discussed, but I did not have emotional reactions, except hate.

MH: How does that present itself, the hate?

EJ: It's in your mind. "How in the hell can people do this?" And then, the 104th were guarding the civilians who were doing the burials, and they weren't very nice to them. They used the butts of their rifles, I think, to encourage them on. But we all felt the same way.

MH: What did you do after you found these boxcars? Who do you go to, what do you say?

EJ: We just walked away. Others took care of those things; we didn't take care of them.

MH: Was this in sight of the people who were ransacking the other cars for sugar?

EJ: Oh, yes. They knew what it was. That's the thing that pissed me off so much was that there were these people looting that stuff. Of course, they didn't have anything to eat, either. But they knew what was down there. You could smell it.

MH: But their standard line is, "We don't know anything; we didn't know what was happening."

EJ: Oh, that was the standard. Everybody didn't know what was happening, even—that's the damn thing. These guys you start questioning on it, they didn't know it was happening, but you'd find out later that they themselves were working down in the tunnels. For Christ's sake, you had to know what was happening! Down in the tunnels, if an inmate got into trouble, they'd hang 'em on hooks for everybody to see. And I saw those hooks—I didn't see anybody on 'em, of course. I saw the hooks.

Now, I didn't go into the tunnels when we were in Nordhausen; I went into them in 1990. You know, I went into there, and they still—the toilets were still there, and some of the bunks. The Russians had blown the entrance; nobody could get in for years. But it just—it's just inconceivable. It's very difficult to describe what we saw. After going to it in 1990, I could remember several instances, several things; opening the ovens up was one of them.

MH: The ovens inside Nordhausen itself, in the camp?

EJ: I'm going to have to—there were several camps.

MH: Well, there was Dora, Mittelbau—

EJ: Dora, Mittelbau; and Nordhausen is the term I use for the general, the whole set-up. The factory was in great big tunnels, some of 'em sixty-foot in diameter, several long tunnels a mile long, with cross-tunnels. That was the factory. Then, outside of the factory, there were barracks, where some of 'em were kept. Now, many of them were kept in the tunnels themselves, and never got out. Then there are those that were outside. Then there was another camp that I never did really locate; that was Dora, I believe, the one right outside of the tunnel. The other was a camp for—when people came in, they were put in there before they went to work. Or if they were sick, they were put there getting ready for shipment to the killing camps. And that, I believe, was in the town of Nordhausen. I never really located it.

MH: Was there one that looked like, you know, a prison: stone building, stone walls?

EJ: No, not that I saw.

MH: So, this was all barbed wire, wire fencing kind of thing.

EJ: Yeah. Then the burial place was actually in the town of Nordhausen, quite a ways from the factory.

MH: When you say “the burial place,” this is where you guys were digging with the bulldozers?

EJ: It must have been three or four miles away from the tunnels.

MH: Where were—when you saw the thousands of bodies, how close were they to the area where you buried them?

EJ: That was the area that they buried them.

MH: Where you found the bodies.

EJ: Yeah. No, on second thought, that had to be the area where they had the holding camp, because there were barracks in the pictures. They'd been burned out, but these were big, big barracks. And it had been—I think it had been a military camp of some sort. This is in the town of Nordhausen, probably on the east side, whereas the tunnels were on the northwest side.

MH: When you get the task of, you know, you gotta figure out how to bury these bodies, how do you—do you approach that just from an engineering perspective, or from a human perspective? How do you cope with that?

EJ: You just cope with it. All we were doing was digging trenches. We knew that they were going to be buried there. And, you know, you get kind of a cold, deliberate feeling. I never was bothered too much. I hate to say that, but you got to a point where you saw so much of it, that you'd seen so many dead bodies that that's just another dead body.

MH: How deep are the trenches you have to dig?

EJ: Okay, they were probably four or five feet, and they were as wide as a bulldozer blade. And what we did was we made the Germans get in there and clean 'em out—I mean, they were cleaned out neatly, neatly prepared.

MH: The bodies, you mean?

EJ: No, the trenches. And then the bodies—

MH: What did they have to prepare, once you—

EJ: Oh, take the loose dirt out.

MH: Oh, okay.

EJ: And then the—when I say “we,” I'm talking about the 104th, not the 238th. The 238th dug the trenches and observed. What was I going to say?

MH: You were talking about the German civilians had to clean out—

EJ: Oh, the German civilians. The 104th Division commander ordered all able-bodied German men to get out there. They didn't give 'em gloves; they didn't give 'em things to put over their noses. Made them handle these dead bodies with their bare hands. Mean as hell.

MH: I'm not crying for them.

EJ: (laughs) We weren't either. But they'd fabricate things to carry them out—a door, or they'd take two poles and put them between, through the arms of a coat or something like that, to make the litters. And then four men would carry one body. We wouldn't let 'em put two bodies on, or anything like that.

But anyhow, they were picked up over in the area. Now, these people were not the ones that were in the tunnels and down there. They may have been and brought over, but those details I didn't know. Anyhow, they laid them out neatly, and God, I've got pictures of—I've got one, a little baby with its mother, apparently its mother. You know, come to think of it, that must have been some of those that were in the railroad cars, because they didn't have women and children in the workforce there. But anyhow, I've also got a picture of one that is partially burned that come from—apparently come from—the crematorium. They were then laid neatly in the trenches, and then the trenches were covered up.

MH: Was there a religious service conducted of some sort?

EJ: Oh, good God, no. They wouldn't do anything like that. Well, now that I don't know, but I've never heard of it. In fact, I don't think the Germans would have done that for Jews anyhow.

MH: Right. I just wondered whether a U.S. Army chaplain came in and did it.

EJ: Now, that I don't know. I would assume that there were, from that standpoint. But I never saw any of it. I think that—have you read the book on the 104th?¹

MH: Um, no.

¹There are several books on the 104th Division, but James is referring to *Rally the Pack: Music, Morals, and Morale in a Medical Battalion*, written by Ragine Farris.

EJ: That would probably tell you. You could get an awful lot of information. Guy by the name of [Ragene] Farris is a medic that wrote a lot about it. That's in the book. You have access to that book?

MH: I can find it.

EJ: Damn, I've got it around here someplace. It's out in storage, I think. But they wrote a bit about it. So, anyhow, these—well, I guess I've covered Nord—

MH: How long were you there, digging trenches, watching this process?

EJ: One or two days. We had to move on. We were moving awfully fast; in fact, I don't even recall covering the—I'm sure that we had our 'dozers there doing it, but we moved out within a day. We're going over towards Eisleben, starting in to plan to cross the—oh, what is that river? The river that we didn't cross—

MH: The Elbe? Elbe? E-l-b-e?

EJ: It escapes my mind.

MH: Wasn't it the Elbe River?

EJ: Elbe, yes.

MH: I'm just curious about something: the 'dozers that you're using, these are like painted olive drab, and were they made by Caterpillar?

EJ: Well, yeah, I would suppose. Caterpillar and some of those made all of 'em. I don't recall.

MH: Okay. After you left there, did you run into any other camps?

EJ: Yes. I'll tell you about the one. It was sort of a—it was an estate, and the inside was just like a small castle. Anyhow, we ran into this place and there was a barracks—not barracks, but places where people slept. They had—I have no idea how many were there, but they were civilians; probably not Jews, probably just Ukrainians. There were Italians, there were Ukrainians, there were Polish, and French in this place that I'm talking about. I went into it and—or, we went into it; I had my platoon there. Some of the guys were—of my guys—could speak German and Italian and Polish, and they talked to some of the people and got the story. They came over and told me that these people hadn't had enough to eat, were forced laborers and so on. And at the same time, the baron that was—it was his estate—was telling me how mean and nasty they were.

So, I told my—Al Fiore was one of my Italian men; I forget who the Polish guys were. I told them to go out and find out what the hell it was all about, and I went in to have a glass of wine with the baron. He had one of his—one of the forced laborers was waiting on tables and acting as an employee. Anyhow, the main room had all kinds of armor and artifices and lances and things like that, and then heads of game, African game. It was a very elaborate place. And this guy, he was an editor of a newspaper, apparently; that's one of the jobs that he was doing. Anyhow, he was telling me how these horrible people were trying to—were breaking into his stores and taking his food and so on, and he says, "Why, I even have a hospital over here for them." Gave me a big line of bullshit.

I went out after going in there. I was sick of listening to the son of a bitch, and after I went out and started talking to my men, they started telling me what it really was. They had women and men sleeping in the same barracks; they wouldn't let 'em get married. One of them told 'em that they wanted to get married, so they just got together and says, "We're married." But they were treated pretty damn rotten, and they were—I don't think they killed them or anything like that, but they made them work long hours and so on.

MH: What was it, a farm?

EJ: What?

MH: Was it a farm?

EJ: It was a farm, a large farm, a large estate. And they just—I guess that the German government gave them people to work on their farm.

MH: I think the SS was actually selling—you know, it was a business.

EJ: Well, that may have been. I, of course, didn't get into that type of thing. But this was—of course, this wasn't typical, but you run into so many places that had even small groups, especially factories that had groups of people that were forced laborers.

MH: So, what did you do? How many men do you have with you at that point?

EJ: I had a platoon, thirty men.

MH: So, what do you do when you come into a situation like this?

EJ: You don't do anything. It's not our job to take action on those things. We reported it through channels, and it got to—in this particular case, it got to what was civil government at the time; it was the beginning of civil government. What they did, I don't know.

MH: But you don't arrest the guy who owns the land or anything?

EJ: If you did that, you'd arrest 50 percent of the people in Germany.

MH: So, how long were you at the place?

EJ: Oh, hours.

MH: And when you leave, what do the people say to you?

EJ: I don't recall. We just left. We could take no action. It wasn't our job to take action. Our job was to fight the Germans, and capture them and so on. I know right after—before the war was over, we were—well, it was about the time the war was over. We were at a big camp, where we had German prisoners. There were a couple hundred thousand, all outside. One end of the camp was—now, we were guards. We were helping guard it. We had MPs and others, and we were really maintaining—the platoon chiefs that had the men there were in charge of the camp: a hundred thousand, two hundred thousand people.

It was in areas where they had a lot of lignite mines, and had big piles of the stuff. And so the camp was tied into that, and you know a pile of lignite, that's 100 feet, 200 feet tall. You try to walk up it and the whole damn thing slides down; it's a barrier. And so we tied—or they had tied—their fences, barbed wire, into those areas, and then they had put machine guns so placed that they had crossfire. And there's two lines of barbed wire, and if anybody got inside of the barbed wire, they were killed. I mean, that was a death penalty to get in there. That way they kept them from trying to escape. I shot one that got in there. But these people were being processed. It was silly for them to escape, because they're being processed to get out—their names, serial numbers and so on—and then they're led out and they walked home.

MH: So, between then and the end of the war, it's only a couple of weeks away.

EJ: Yeah.

MH: Did you see any more?

EJ: No. About the time the war ended, we were put in charge of, oh, little towns. For instance, I had a town by the name of Wimmelberg. That was my responsibility as civil government. And mainly what we did was confiscate any nasty type stuff. If we'd get any report of a soldier that had been hiding, you know, we'd get him and put him in the camp. Things like that. And then after a few weeks, the regular civil government came in. But we were the first step.

MH: So, where were you on V-E Day?

EJ: I was out umpiring a baseball game. We got word that it was V-E Day, so I announced it and we went ahead and played our baseball game.

MH: This was Americans playing baseball?

EJ: Yeah. It was an anticlimax.

MH: And how long before they sent you back home?

EJ: That was May. I got home in October.

MH: What'd you do once you got back home?

EJ: I went up to where my fiancée was and got married.

MH: And did you go back to school?

EJ: Then I went back to Berkeley and went back to university.

MH: And got your degree in what?

EJ: Civil engineering.

MH: Is that how you spent most of your life?

EJ: Yeah, I was—I worked with the California Department of Highways, bridge design and construction. And then I—you ever heard of the State Water Project in California?

MH: That brought the water from up north down to Los Angeles?

EJ: Yeah. I was in charge of the civil engineering design of that.

MH: Okay. There's that great spot, when you're coming north out of the San Fernando Valley where you see the water coming down—

EJ: That's not the—that's another portion of it.

MH: That's another portion of it?

EJ: That's not the State Water Project; that's coming from Owens Valley.

MH: Ah, okay. So, you have children?

EJ: Yeah, two.

MH: Two. And when did you retire?

EJ: When I was sixty, I retired. I had thirty-two years in, and I'd got into—I was starting to get into the peripheral political areas (laughs) and got into crosswise with the governor.

MH: Which governor?

EJ: Jerry Brown.

MH: Jerry Brown, okay. Santa Rosa is where?

EJ: You ever heard of Valley of the Moon?

MH: Uh, no.

EJ: You ever heard of Napa? Sonoma?

MH: Yes. Right.

EJ: I'm about eight miles from Sonoma and a little farther from Napa.

MH: Okay, now I know where you are. Did your experiences in the war ever come back to you?

EJ: You know, I've been very fortunate. I think probably it was because—I told you before, but I'll repeat it. My brother was—he contributed a lot of money to emerging countries and things such as that. He was back in Leningrad at a meeting where there happened to be a lot of discussion on the Holocaust. And he met a woman who had been involved in the Holocaust. She had been one of the people that Dr. Mengele had

experimented with, and she was horribly disfigured in her face. And he told her that I had been in Nordhausen, and she said she'd like to contact me, which she did.

It ended up that the Holocaust Museum Foundation paid my way back to Washington, and she did a two-hour interview much like this, but videotaped, and then she took me all the way through the planning of the National Holocaust Museum. She asked me if I would speak to schools and others on this, so I decided, by God, I've got a story to tell, so I'll do it. And so I have. For fifteen or twenty years now, I have been going to schools all the way from universities down to grammar schools, and to civic organizations and the like, speaking on much of what I've told you here, but in more detail on the concentration camp itself. And, also, I developed an approach to talking to high school kids on their responsibilities to remember this and how it came about and why, and what they can do about it.

So, I've done a lot of lecturing on this. I think I stopped counting at 15,000 students. And I've done just a little bit in the last few years. I've talked to quite a few people. Several Jewish organizations have given me recognition for it.

MH: What do you find the reaction is of the students most of the time?

EJ: Most of the time, they are—this is new to them, and many of them say, "I can't believe that that happened." Now, I've had two instances of very unusual reactions. There's a little town in the gold country here in California with a lot of, well, redneck types, and the school was hearing from the kids that they didn't believe it happened. So, they called the Jewish organization down in Sacramento and asked them if they could send somebody up to talk about it.

And so, I went up and talked to them about it. These kids had been told by their parents that it didn't happen. And after it was all over, I had—I was surprised. Girls would come up and throw their arms around me and thank me, and guys would come up and shake my hand, and almost to a person they'd say, "We didn't realize that that happened that way." What they were really saying is, "Our parents told us different." And that little town made quite an impression on me. It was a consolidated school, and I had the whole school. There were several hundred kids. But that was a very interesting reaction from them.

Then I had another one, a school in Elk Grove, California, where the teacher warned me that there was a girl that didn't believe it happened. Well, what had happened, her parents—her grandparents—had moved over here from Germany because they wanted to get away from Hitler. But they were Hitler supporters. (laughs) And the grandparents convinced the parents that all of this did not happen, that it was a big lie. And she had a

lot of arguments on that. But she was the granddaughter. When they were going to get me in, she objected to it, saying this was just perpetuating a lie. And her parents refused to give permission for her to attend, but she attended anyhow.

Afterwards, I talked a little to her, and she was absolutely convinced that I was wrong, that it didn't happen, no matter what my arguments were. And she then wrote a thesis. They had to write—in this school, they had to write a thesis of some sort, not necessarily connected with the Holocaust. And so she wrote this thesis, of a sort, where she put down all of her arguments, and they were right down the line, the arguments that you hear from the nasty types. And there was nothing I could do to convince her. But she absolutely refused to believe it. Here's two generations that had refused to believe it, and were passing it along to the third.

MH: That's sort of discouraging.

EJ: Well, I relate this only because that was an unusual reaction. Most reactions are the antithesis. The kids just—they're almost thrilled hearing what they call the truth. I'd say 99 percent of 'em are that. I've had such tremendous reactions. I went to one school where they were going to have it in the library. The teacher called me up and says thirty to forty people. They called me up and told me they were going to move it to another room, but there were going to be many more. When I got there, the room was so packed that they sat around my podium on the floor and on the floor all over, and there was a line outside. So, they moved it into the auditorium, which was filled. It's that type of reaction that I've got so many times.

MH: Do you—you mentioned pictures. Do you have a picture of yourself from World War II?

EJ: Yeah.

MH: What I'd like to get is a copy of that that I can then scan and send back to you.

EJ: Okay.

MH: And a picture of you today.

EJ: Okay. Well, I think I've got it over in my storage.

MH: And the other thing is I'd like to look at the pictures that you have—(phone beeps)
Whoops. I'd love to look at—

EJ: I just—

MH: It's okay. The pictures you have from, you know, showing some of these things that we've talked about.

EJ: I'm going to have to dig on that. I've moved three times and put stuff in storage, and frankly, I'm having a problem. What am I going to do with all my records? I have given much of it away to Jewish museums, but I've got a lot of other stuff that one of these days is going to have to go somewhere.

MH: Well, what I'd like to find is pictures of the GIs in the camp, doing what they had to do.

EJ: Okay. The pictures I have of the GIs that are in the camp are more—they're incidental to the picture itself, but I do have pictures. I recall in one, the guy's got a gun and he's walking around there.

MH: You have pictures of the GIs with the German civilians who had to bury these people?

EJ: Yeah.

MH: Yeah, something like that. Well, if you have time to find these, I'd really appreciate it. I'm not in any rush.

EJ: Okay. Well, give me your—

MH: I'll send you an email. Actually, I sent you an email yesterday.

EJ: You did? I haven't looked at it.

MH: Yes. So, you've got my address and everything.

EJ: Okay. Tell me what you want.

MH: I'll send you an email that describes it, how would that be?

EJ: I've got those interviews, but I've covered here most of what's in the interviews. The one with the [Steven] Spielberg group was really quite an experience. They came at one o'clock in the afternoon, and at midnight, I busted open a bottle of scotch.

MH: (laughs) Maybe you should have started with the scotch.

EJ: (laughs) I was just amazed at this woman. God, she was a gorgeous woman, a Jewish woman. Gorgeous. She was dressed fit to kill, and she was from Hollywood. And she did the best job of interviewing I have ever had. It was just amazing how she brought things out. I'm sure glad I've got a copy of that one. It's five hours long.

MH: You have it on what, CD?

EJ: Yeah.

MH: I'd like to listen to it.

EJ: Well, I'll see if I can dig it out.

MH: I'll send you a list of things I'd like to get a hold of that I'd return to you, and if you can find 'em, that'd be great. Okay?

EJ: And I've written quite a few magazine articles.

MH: Okay. I thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it.

EJ: It's part of the promise I made to this lady. And this, I think, is my swan song on it. I probably will not do much more.

MH: Okay. All right. I thank you very much, sir, and I'll send you an email.

EJ: Sure thing.

MH: Okay. Bye-bye, Ernest.

End of interview