

June 2008

## Joe Lipsius oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, June 30, 2008

Joseph Lipsius (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:** Okay, would you give me your name and spell it for me, please?

**Joseph Lipsius:** My name is Joseph Lipsius, J-o-s-e-p-h L-i-p-s-i-u-s.

MH: ... And your date of birth?

JL: January 8, 1918.

MH: And you were with the 69<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

JL: 69<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. I was with other units, also.

MH: How old are you now?

JL: I was ninety years old January 8, 2008.

MH: You're heading towards ninety-one?

JL: What was that?

MH: I said you're heading towards ninety-one?

JL: I didn't understand that.

MH: I said, "So, you're looking at turning towards ninety-one years old next year."

SL: I'll be ninety-one the next January.

MH: Right. So, just tell me a little bit about where were you growing up and how did you get into the Army.

JL: Tell you about what?

MH: Where did you grow up?

JL: Oh, I was born in a little Georgia town by the name of Forsyth, F-o-r-s-y-t-h, Georgia. It's in Monroe, M-o-n-r-o-e, County, population of about 2,000. My family—my father had what was known as a dry goods store: sold shoes, socks, and pants and dresses and overalls to the country people and the town people. And we lived there until 1928. My mother had become sick with various ailments, and we moved to Atlanta, Georgia, in 1928. At that time, I was ten years old, and my mother died in June of 1928, six months after we'd moved to Atlanta. Anything else? You want me to go further?

MH: Sure, go ahead.

JL: I'm a big talker.

MH: That's okay, I got time.

JL: Well, at any rate, when my mother died, I had two brothers—older—and a sister, who was younger. And some relatives with my father decided that my sister and I were too young for him to take care of. He had gotten into a grocery store business when we moved to Atlanta. He had come into a grocery store business when he moved to (beep sound) Atlanta and this—there was a call that came in, but I'm not going to answer it, so you may hear a little buzz.

MH: Okay, no problem.

JL: He had gotten into a grocery store business when he moved to Atlanta through the help of some relatives in Atlanta. As I say, it was decided that my sister and I were too young for him to take care of, so an uncle of my father, who had been relatively successful in Atlanta in a manufacturing business of dresses, cheap dresses, his son and wife took me in to live with them. They lived in a nice neighborhood, in a—I don't say rich, but yes, you might say a good, rich neighborhood. And my uncle, he owned an apartment building there, and he lived with his son and his daughter-in-law. They had one child, who was about six years old at the time I was ten. That child's name was Robert, or Bobby. He later became [President] Jimmy Carter's worker when he was running for governor, and he became Jimmy Carter's legal counsel when Carter was elected president. His name was Robert Lipshutz. He still lives here in Atlanta.

I lived with these people for about a year, and then went back to live with my father. I don't know why—what happened or how it came about—whether I was a nuisance to them or whether my daddy wanted me back or just what. But I went back to live with my father. My sister had been sent down to live with an aunt, my mother's sister, who lived in a little small, country town in south Georgia. And she stayed with them until she was in the tenth grade and then came back and lived with us. When I went back to live with my father, I went to the sixth grade in school. About that time I got a newspaper route, and from the time I was in that grade until I got out of high school, I delivered newspapers and made money. This information is on my website, if you want to look at it on my website.<sup>1</sup>

MH: Which is your website?

JL: Well, do you want me—I'll send you a message that has my website, do you understand?

MH: So, tell me how you ended up in the Army?

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<sup>1</sup> Joe Lipsius's website is <http://www.69th-infantry-division.com/Joestuff/lip.html>

JL: Ended up in the Army?

MH: Yes.

JL: Well, first place I was working at a newspaper in Atlanta. It was a Hearst newspaper [*Atlanta Georgian*]; William Randolph Hearst had a newspaper in Atlanta, Georgia. But in 1939, the day after *Gone with the Wind* premiered in Atlanta, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* movie premiered in Atlanta. The day afterward, the local newspaper, which was being run by the Cox Group at that time—the Cox Group had bought another local paper. That paper, the Cox Group, bought the *Georgian* [now the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*] and they closed the *Georgian*. And I went over to Montgomery, Alabama, to work with a man I was working with at the *Georgian*. And I was drafted from Montgomery, Alabama, into the Army. And that's on my website.

MH: Where did they send you for basic?

JL: What was that?

MH: Where did you go when you were drafted?

JL: When I was drafted? Did you ask me where did I go?

MH: Yes, yes.

JL: That's on my website.

MH: Okay.

JL: You want me to tell you, I will.

MH: Yeah, tell me about it.

JL: Huh?

MH: Yes, tell me.

JL: You want me to tell you?

MH: Yes, please.

JL: Okay. I was drafted in Montgomery, Alabama. I was drafted as a private. I was almost twenty-four years old at the time because I was drafted October 23, 1941, and in 1942 I would have been twenty-four years old. I was sent to an Army camp called Fort McClellan. It was located in Anniston, Alabama. And this is where draftees were sent to be examined and sworn in the Army or either rejected and sent back home.

I passed the examination there and I was sent to Fort McPherson, which was in Atlanta, Georgia, where I had been living, and I knew where it was. But I was at Fort McPherson from a day or so after McClellan until about the middle of November. And of course, I was still just a private. And in the middle of November, a bunch of us were loaded on a train at night and we didn't know where we were going, but we were sent to—what it wound up, we were sent to Camp Croft, South Carolina. There was an Army camp there called Camp Croft; it had been built for the war to train infantrymen for the Army. I got to Camp Croft in November of forty-one [1941], and I went through basic training. And during the time that I was in basic training, I had determined to become a good soldier and go back home.

Of course, let me go back just a minute. The draft was just for one year, do you understand?

MH: Yes.

JL: But in the beginning, they tried to get you to sign up for three years. Signed up for three years, you'd make thirty dollars a month. As a draftee, for twelve months, you only got twenty-one dollars a month for the first four months. But I didn't want to stay in the Army, so I just resolved to be a good soldier and stay in for one year and then go back home. But December 7, Pearl Harbor, happened, and then we were in for the duration.

MH: So how did you get to the 69<sup>th</sup>?

JL: Well, I was taking basic training at Camp Croft. I was sent to what they call Officer Candidate School to make officers, to make ninety-day-wonders. This is all on my website.

MH: But just tell me about it.

JL: You still want me to tell you?

MH: Yes, sir.

JL: Okay, so in about April of 1942, I was sent to Fort Benning to be in an OCS class. The OCS class was for ninety days. The group you were in was just like a company in basic training. There were about 200 men divided into groups called platoons and squads. And they went through normal training, just like we did in basic training; but in OCS, at various times each man got to do different jobs—be a squad leader, be a platoon leader, be even the company commander. This is the training they got to become a second lieutenant. We were in barracks with—it would hold a platoon; it would be two squads on one floor and two floor on another floor. This is about fifty men in all. You got to know people that were in your squad and on your floor closely, but you did not know all the men in the company closely.

During the ninety day training, we learned that every four weeks—

(phone goes quiet) Hello? You still there?

MH: Yeah, but you went away.

JL: Yeah. Well, we learned—

MH: Can you pick up the phone?

JL: Yeah, I got it—wait a minute. Can you hear me now?

MH: No, you sound like you are way far away.

JL: No, I'm still talking on the phone. Let me put it on the speaker phone, see if it's any better. I don't know what's happened. Just a minute.

MH: Okay.

JL: Can you hear me?

MH: Yes, now I hear you fine.

JL: You hear me better?

MH: Yes.

JL: Let me put my hearing aid in.

MH: I hear you fine; go ahead.

JL: All right. Anyway, we found out that every three or four weeks that we were going to grade each other to decide who we thought was the best soldier and the next best soldier and so forth and so on. And of course, what happened is, when the training was over, some of the men were eliminated from being officers because of what the supervisors felt or because of the grading by their fellow soldiers. You understand that?

MH: Yes, I do.

JL: Anyway, in July, I graduated as a second lieutenant, July of 1942. And along with sixty other men from this OCS class, we were all sent to Camp Adair in Oregon, near Salem, Oregon. It was a new infantry division being formed, and we were sent there to be platoon leaders in this new division. When we arrived at Camp Adair, this was the 96<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The division had the leaders, but no troops. So, the leaders and the lieutenants that had been sent there and certain soldiers that were there to be non-commissioned officers later, we trained each other for several weeks until we did get troops in who were to be trained. During this period of time, we each, these new lieutenants, we each were assigned a company to be a platoon later; and when we were training, we would have different training classes to give. We were training each other. Do you understand?

MH: Yes, I do.

JL: So, during this time, the commanders of the battalions or the regiments—do you know the structure of a unit?

MH: Yes, I do.

JL: Well, battalion commander, the executive officer, company commander, they would watch to see what was going on. Well, soon we got word that the recruits were going to come in, the new men that were going to be trained. And the executive officer, the second in command of my battalion, he was assigned by the regiment to follow a plan that the division had set up to receive the new troops in the division in that regiment, and to receive them, billet them and assign them to different units. So this officer's name was Major Mannan; he was the second in command in the second battalion. I knew him well; I had played poker with him. I also had played poker with the battalion commander. They trained me how to play poker. But the regimental commander put a stop to it, because he didn't like the junior officers to be close to the senior officers.

But anyway, one year Major Mannan, who had been assigned—I didn't know about it, but he called me and another lieutenant to his office and he told us that he had been given the assignment to make the plan for receiving the troops in our regiment. A regiment has about 3,000 men, and he told me that he gave us a written directive that'd been made up and gave us some field manuals that had different information, and he said, "Now, you and so-and-so," the other officer, "you all can go anywhere you want now. I want you to work this plan up for the regiment and bring it back."

So, this other lieutenant, he was a new lieutenant just like me. He and I went to our quarters or someplace and he told me, "I tell you what. You go ahead and work on this and I'll help you anyway you want me to. One head maybe can do it better than two trying to confuse things." So, I wrote up the plan and took it back to Major Mannan, the battalion commander. Now, to write the plan up, I had the basic direction that had been sent down by the division to the regiment, plus field manuals, which gave you the various directives, told how many men were in the company, how many were supposed to go, various things. They had field manuals that laid it out A, B, C how to do it. Do you understand what I'm saying?

MH: Yes, I do.

JL: But anyway, I took the directive back to Major Mannan, and he looked at it and he said—later he called me and he said it looks okay. And the next thing, we got word that the troops would be in soon and the regimental commander wanted this direction—what we were going to do, explain to all the lieutenants and all the non-coms in the regiment, telling them what they would do. So, they all assembled in the auditorium, the lieutenants and officers in the regiments, the non-coms; must have been maybe 200 or 300 men in all.

But they set this up, the lieutenant was helping me. We took charts, we made charts, and we put them on the boards and different things—anyway, but he took—this lieutenant deferred to me and said, “You explain it. You do the explaining.” So, on the given day to do this, I was one on the stage explaining what we were going to do. How we were going to meet these trains, how we were going to take these new men off the trains, where they was going to be taken, how they were going to be taken to get their clothes, how they were gonna be fed, how we was going to take them to the barracks where they sleep. I was explaining all of this; I did all the explaining of this. This was—I don’t know exactly how long it took, but it was maybe an hour or a couple of hours. While I was talking, the regimental commander came in and was standing in the back. Of course, I didn’t stop or anything like that, but I knew the regimental commander, and then the division commander came in. And when it was all over, the regimental commander came up and told me I did a good job.

MH: That’s a good thing.

JL: A day or two later, I was transferred from being a platoon leader to being what they call the battalion S-2. This was a battalion where Major Mannan was the executive officer and this was the battalion that I had been in in my company. But I was now what they called the regimental, the battalion staff. Do you understand me?

MH: Yes, I do.

JL: Now, this was in about September or maybe October of 1942 when these men and come in and we’d continue to train. Now, instead of being in a platoon, I was on the battalion staff and I would march with the battalion commander at the head of the line and I would go with him to inspect, and I was a big shot.

MH: You were still a second lieutenant.

JL: No, by that time I got promoted to first lieutenant. Although the job I had in the battalion was that of the captain; that was the assigned rank of a battalion S-2, was a captain. But I did get promoted to be first lieutenant. In about January of 1943, the orders came down for a group of men to be sent to the 69<sup>th</sup> Division. They selected certain men to be company commanders for the 69<sup>th</sup>, they selected certain men to be regimental staff officers, and I was selected to be the regimental S-2 for a regiment in the 69<sup>th</sup>. And the commanders, the battalion commanders, were taken from the 96<sup>th</sup>. And the regimental commander didn't come from it, but the battalion commander and the battalion exec officers, company commanders and some regimental staff officers went from the 96<sup>th</sup> to the 69<sup>th</sup>.

MH: Where were they forming up the 69<sup>th</sup>?

JL: Well, the 69th, we first went to Fort Benning, Georgia, for thirty days' division officers training class. This is where we were going to be given classes in division tactics and operations in training. This was Fort Benning, Georgia, the infantry school. But we knew that we were going to go to Camp Shelby in Mississippi for the basic training and the training of the 69<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

We got down to Fort Benning in about February—maybe it was early March—of 1943. And we had this thirty-day training class where we would go out to lectures; it was all lectures. Each day we would get out and we would go to different areas to be lectured in tactics of defense or attack or different things. By senior officers, they're at Fort Benning who had done this over and over. In about April of 1943, we were finished and we went over to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. I was a regimental S-2 for the 272<sup>nd</sup> infantry regiment. And the regimental commander was Colonel Charles "Buck" Lanham, who was a West Pointer. And he had been, we didn't know it at the time, but he had been in Washington writing field manuals and even making training films with Daryl Zanuck. You've heard of Daryl Zanuck?

MH: Sure have.

JL: And information on Buck Lanham is on my website. It's on the 69<sup>th</sup> website; I can lead you to it later. But anyway, we did not have troops when we got to Camp Shelby. We went through this same thing of training each other. When I say "training each other," the officers and non-commissioned officers going through the daily routines in different basic training of the infantry. And on April 15, 1945, we even without troops—not forty-five [1945], not 1945, 1943—the 69<sup>th</sup> was activated. The division commander at the time was Brigadier General Charles L. Bolte, who was shortly promoted to being major general.

MH: Right.

JL: But we were activated—that means officially started—May 15, 1943. And about a month—a few weeks later—we began to get troops in. When the troops started coming in—I'll go back a little bit. During the time we were waiting, as an S-2, Colonel Lanham had assigned me to do different things. The main thing was mapping an area near where our headquarters was. The S-2's job was called Intelligence. This was to get information of the enemy. But the S-2 also dealt with maps: to be sure that maps were everywhere for people to use, as well as how to read maps and to be with the regimental commander with a map to show him what was going on. So, anyway, with my little group, maybe two or three men, we went into an area and we mapped it out, made a topographical map of this area. And when we got back and when the troops started coming in, there was a staff officer called—are you familiar with a staff in the Army?

MH: Yes, I was in the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Vietnam.

JL: Okay, all right—anyway, an S-1, S-2, S-3, S-4. An S-3 is the Operations or Training officer. When we began—when the troops came in and the S-3 had to make the plans for the training, he began to have trouble working out plans to send these men in our regiment, about 3,000 men, scheduled them to go with various firing ranges—rifle range, machine gun, mortar range—different ranges at different times.

And so, Colonel Lanham called me in one day and assigned me to work with the S-3 he told me was having problems and said, “I want you to help him to work on this.” Well, the S-3, he and I were close. He had been a captain and had been promoted to major during the time we got from Fort Benning to Mississippi. When he and I left Colonel Lanham's office after he told me to help him, he turned to me and said, “Here's the division elective, and when we're assigned”—he said, “I probably in a (inaudible)—go to wherever you want to the officers club, your quarters. Here are the field manuals, work on it and bring it back and we'll see what happens.”

So, I don't remember how long it took, but anyway, I worked out the schedule for the regiment to fire on the various ranges. And I brought it back to the S-3, Major Whitlock. And he looked at it and he said, “It looks fine, I'll take it up to Colonel Lanham.” He gave it to Colonel Lanham; Colonel Lanham called me in the office and I think I went in with him, but anyway, the Colonel looked it over and said, “This looks fine.” And Major Whitlock told him, “Lieutenant Lipsius drew this up.” Well, about two days later, Major Whitlock was relieved from the regiment and I was made the S-3.

MH: Ah.

JL: I was still a first lieutenant. The S-3's rank is that of a major. So, I became S-3 of the 272<sup>nd</sup>. I was a first lieutenant, and as S-3, I inspected, I was with Colonel Lanham, I dealt with the battalion commanders, I was a big shot. I was a five [foot] six [inches] little Jewish big shot. (laughs) We went to the field and had training. Colonel Lanham tried to promote me—he did promote me to captain, and he tried to promote me to major, but for some reason they wouldn't let him promote me. I think it was because I had not been a company commander; but I know that other staff officers had been promoted, or later I had learned they were promoted. But I don't know what it was, but I was not promoted although Colonel Lanham gave me the highest ratings. But at any rate, after D-Day, June 4 of 19—oh, what was it—June—D-Day was what, June 6?

MH: June 6, forty-four [1944].

JL: Yes, 1944. After D-Day, Colonel Lanham was sent from the 272<sup>nd</sup> of the 69<sup>th</sup>; he was sent overseas. And he became a hero with the 4<sup>th</sup> [Infantry] Division. Ernest Hemingway went with him and called him, the best regimental commander he'd ever seen in the war.

But anyway, I continued to be the S-3 and the executive officer of the regiment. A Lieutenant Colonel Halter had been passed over because of some problem he'd had in the Army. He was a West Pointer, but he had been passed over, and they did not make him regimental commander. And about August of forty-four [1944]—and I knew Halter well—in about August of forty-four [1944] he called me in and told me that there were soon going to be majors sent into the regiment because the division was getting ready to go overseas. See, we had been training since 1943. And we had gone through a cycle of training men and sending them as replacements and getting new men and training them and sending them as replacements, almost like a basic training center. But anyway, in August of forty-four [1944], we got word that the 69<sup>th</sup> was going to be sent overseas. And he told me that when they got majors in, that somebody was going to take my place, because they could not have majors running around without a job to fill. So I said, "I think E Company's got a lieutenant commander." He said, "No, you're going overseas, a rifle company." He put me in a cannon company, as commander of a cannon company.

MH: What is cannon company?

JL: Cannon company had six short—like six small artillery pieces. It was an artillery unit under the regimental commander. Artillery is handled by the division commanders. But when they started a cannon company in the regiment, which was a new thing that gave the regimental commander a short-range artillery unit under his control that he could do

with as he wished. The regimental commander could not drag the artillery from the artillery battalions until they were assigned to him by the division. But at any rate, I was put with cannon company, I was assigned to the cannon company.

And meanwhile, a new regimental commander did come into the regiment. His name was Colonel Walter Buie. He was a West Pointer, and he was not like Colonel Lanham. Colonel Buie and I didn't get along well at the beginning. The first time I met him, I had been handling supply for the regiment and officers who were waiting to go overseas in assigned jobs in an exercise called POM, Preparation for Overseas Movement. And the officers who were being assigned within this camp, being given some preliminary training, the rest of the unit was out in the field going through training exercises, was acting leader. I was an acting supply officer, an S-4, seeing that the troops were fed, that the kitchen crew got wherever they were supposed to go. So, I was an acting S-4 in the field and I had not shaved for a couple of days, and I smoked a cigar all the time.

I came back to the regimental headquarters and the acting regiment commander was there, and he immediately told me, "Joe"—he called me Joe; he was the lieutenant colonel, but he was just acting, but he was new also. He said, "Colonel Buie is going to take the regiment over is here. I want to introduce you to him. And he's not commanding this training in the field right now; he's just looking to see what's going on." He introduced me to Colonel Buie, walked up to him. Colonel Buie was one of these straight-assed guys, and he introduced me and he told me why I had been in the regiment, I had been an S-3 before, and in about a minute or so, Colonel Buie said "Captain, when did you last shave?" I said "Sir, I've been working twenty-four hours a day. I didn't shave for a couple of days." He says "In my regiment, everybody will shave before breakfast." And he looked at my cigar and he said, "There'll be no smoking in my command post." And he turned and walked away. Anyway, that was my first encounter with Colonel Buie.

MH: I was going to say, not a promising start.

JL: Huh?

MH: Not a promising start.

JL: (laughs) No. Later, we went back to camp and I took over the cannon company. I was—we were getting ready—this was in September or early October of 1944. We were getting ready to go overseas. We were getting our equipment clean; we were getting weapons cleaned and so forth. And one of the men came into the company headquarters, and he told me that Colonel Buie was inspecting the area and he wanted to see me. So I

rushed out and met Colonel Buie and saluted him, and I took him around to two or three of the barracks, and everything was okay and he turned to walk away and said, “Captain, what are the orders about shaving in the regiment?” I said, “Everybody shaves before breakfast.” He said, “Did you carry out those orders this morning?” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “Next time, stand closer to the razor.” (MH laughs) This is all on my website. But anyway, I had various encounters with Colonel Buie. We sailed overseas in about November of forty-four [1944].

MH: Where did you sail from?

JL: We sailed from New York—this is all on the website. But the 69<sup>th</sup> went to Camp Kilmer in New York from Camp Sheridan. When we left Camp Sheridan on trains, we didn’t know where we were going. We wound up in Camp Kilmer, and even there, we didn’t know what was going to happen.

MH: Let me ask you a question. At that point, what do you know about concentration camps, about the Nazis and the Jews?

JL: We didn’t know anything about concentration camps.

MH: Nothing?

JL: No.

MH: They didn’t tell you anything that you’re likely to encounter other than combat?

JL: No. All we knew is what we read in the newspapers, and we didn’t read the newspapers very much. But in the Army, at that time, to my recollection, there was no knowledge about—we knew, even prior to the war, about Hitler and the Jews. I’m Jewish. We knew about that. I knew Jewish people that had come from Germany before the war even started, and we knew that they’d been treated badly. And of course we read in the newspapers about, you know, different things. But you know, these things were not much concern. This was another world.

So, when we were in Camp Kilmer getting ready, we didn’t know where we were going overseas, but at any rate, we didn’t know about concentration camps. We didn’t know about starving people and all like that. But at any rate, I was still with the cannon

company at Camp Kilmer. And in about November, we boarded boats to go overseas, and we landed in England. And we still didn't know—we know we were going to Europe, we knew we'd wind up in Germany, but we didn't know—we didn't even know we were going to England, and what would happen from there we didn't know.

But anyway, we landed in England about the first of December of 1944. And we trained, we were training in England until about—the Battle of the Bulge started about the middle of December, and the 69<sup>th</sup>—in about the twenty-fifth of December, the 69<sup>th</sup> was called on for about 2,200 replacements to go to units that were in the Bulge. This is Christmas Day we lost 2,200 men. I don't remember whether I lost any from my company, the cannon company. But at any rate, we did lose—the 69th did lose 2,200 men. So, of course, while we were in England we had a good time: we met English girls. We went to London, we had a good time. We were training. And then sometime early in January we got alerted and we started to boats to go to France. A lot of these things you don't remember, especially what happened or how they happened, you know; they kind of blur, it's just like a gap in time. But at any rate, we crossed the Channel and we landed in France in January, cold as hell.

MH: Where in France did you land?

JL: I think we landed at Le Havre. There was no fighting, we just got there. There was no fighting. And my cannon company, before—in the first place, we stayed in what they called tent city, these big areas with big tents that we camped in.

MH: That was in the dead of winter?

JL: Huh?

MH: That's in the dead of winter?

JL: In what?

MH: That was in winter?

JL: Oh, yeah, it was in January. It was cold, snow, very, very cold. And we were in tent city, and as soon as we got orders we didn't know what was going to happen. We moved on orders, and we were moved in what they called boxcars, 40-and-8s. And we started

moving, and one time my company stayed in the—we were in a chateau that had been overwhelmed by the Germans and the fighting and the English, and there was just an empty chateau. But there was enough rooms for 150 men to stay. While we were in that chateau, incidentally, I continued to have brushes with Colonel Buie at company commander meetings. Of course, I had been the S-3 and had full knowledge of what was going on, something that would come up in the company commander meeting and I would speak out, like I would with Colonel Lanham. I mean, I was Colonel Lanham's right hand, although Colonel Lanham was a genius himself. I mean, I didn't direct Colonel Lanham, but he trained me.

But anyway, I continued to have brushes with Colonel Buie, and while we were in the chateau in the dead of winter, the regimental executive officer, whom I had known since he was in 96<sup>th</sup> Division, we had played poker together; we had gone to socials together at Fort Benning waiting to go to Camp Shelby. He came and he told me, he said, "Joe, you better watch out. Colonel Buie is going to reclassify you if you keep after him." I told him, I said "I'm not doing anything wrong. I'm doing what's best for the regiment." He said, "Yeah, but you irritate him." I says, "Well, I'll watch out." But anyway, I was still—he came over to tell me that I was on the shit list, see.

So, anyway, we continued to move and we moved through France, we passed and then we moved into Belgium. We passed areas where they had German soldiers dead along the road: German soldiers were up on posts with their arms stretched out pointing the direction to go.

MH: You mean dead German soldiers?

JL: What was that?

MH: Dead German soldiers?

JL: German soldiers. Yeah, yeah. This was in the dead of winter. In January or February. There was ice on the ground, snow on the ground, and this was an area where some of the Bulge had taken place. Near Saint-Vith we passed through Saint-Vith. But anyway, finally the cannon—my regiment got to a position, and we would lead the 99<sup>th</sup> Division. The 99<sup>th</sup> had been decimated in the Bulge, lost maybe half the men or more. But anyway, 272<sup>nd</sup> was in reserve, and we got back to the Belgian-German border, where the Siegfried Line was. I was still the cannon company commander, and we were just waiting. We used some dugouts that maybe the Germans had built or maybe the Americans had built, but that's what we used, already prepared dugouts.

But we were in reserve, and finally the 272<sup>nd</sup>, finally one day—yeah, we were moved, told that we were going to be moved up and take position of where a company in the 99<sup>th</sup> had occupied. And the—my executive officer, he had been the lieutenant commanding the company. He and I decided that the position that the 99<sup>th</sup> Cannon Company had been in—the regiment was the 99<sup>th</sup>—was too far back. So we went to reconnoiter for a better position, and we finally find an area that we thought would be all right. And we walked into this area, looking around to see if everything was okay. It looked like a good area. The idea for the cannon company was to be in a place where it was back and could fire over, see.

And as we were looking around, all of a sudden we found out that we saw a shoe mine. A shoe mine was a wooden box put down flat by the Germans; it had a long, metal-like pin that stuck out of the ground for you to step on. If you stepped on it, it'd blow the hell out of you. We found a shoe mine where we were walking, so we carefully moved out of that area. We had decided it was a good area as far as a position, as far as the geographical site. But at any rate, we decided to ask for a mine platoon to clear the area out of mines. And a platoon was sent up and they cleared the area and told us it was all right.

And we moved up my company, I took my company up, and when we got there, we saw all these mines along the side of this dirt road, and we started moving in with one of the trucks and my company clerk, a fella by the name of Bernstein, he was a T flat corporal. He wasn't even supposed to be there. He got out and started walking with the first sergeant, and he stepped on a shoe mine, one that had been overlooked. It blew his foot off. And they moved this two and a half ton truck up in the area to put Bernstein on to take him out, and when it started out, it rolled over another shoe mine and blew the tire off.

We decided that this place wasn't clear, and so we beat the hell out and went back where we'd been. When we got back to the other place, where the command post was in, there was a truck, a Jeep there with a driver. And he said, "Captain, Colonel Kennedy has asked that you report to the command post," the regimental command post. "Get in the Jeep and bring his gear, and I'll take you there." So, I put this other guy in command, and I got in the Jeep and went back to where the regimental headquarters was. He said, "Wait outside, Colonel Kennedy will be out." He went in, and about two or three minutes Colonel Kennedy came out and he told me that the regimental S-2 had been in an accident, and that Colonel Buie was going to make me the S-2 if I could get along with him.

And I told Colonel Kennedy I could do anything that was good for the regiment. So, he went in and in about two minutes Colonel Buie came out and he told me, he says "I'm

making you S-2. I hope we can work together.” He says “By the way, if Major Green”—Major Green had taken my job at Camp Shelby, an S-3. He says, “If Major Green is allowed to smoke in the command post, you can smoke, too.”

So, he took me in the command post, and Major Green of course knew I was coming. And Colonel Buie, the first thing he said—we were just this side of the Siegfried Line. He said “I want you to make out a route for patrol to see if there are any Germans in the pillboxes.” And so I worked on the map and the information I had, and a few minutes later, a patrol leader came in, and I showed him which way to go. That patrol leader finally went to a pillbox, that they thought was taken and he came back later and reported that it was warm. They’d had a fire in there, but it was not occupied. And with that information, the next day we moved forward and moved through the Siegfried Line. And that lieutenant was given the Silver Star for that job. Which made me with this Colonel Buie and this was my first job as S-2. This is on the Siegfried Line we passed through.

MH: When did you see your first combat?

JL: Well, remember, I was on the staff. I was not a front-line soldier that was moving where Germans might be firing at me. I was on the staff. The staff moved behind the troops. Does that answer you?

MH: Yes, it does.

JL: In other words, I wasn’t out in front with a rifle or patrol myself. That wasn’t my job.

MH: But weren’t you dealing with incoming enemy artillery or enemy aircraft?

JL: When we first—when I first moved up to meet Colonel Buie to be the S-3, to be the regimental S-3, the artillery was flying all over the place that night. We had artillery firing over us.

MH: So, you’ve moved through the Siegfried Line.

JL: What was that?

MHL You’ve moved through the Siegfried Line.

JL: Yeah, we moved through the Siegfried Line, and then we moved—and this is over a period of time. We crossed the Rhine River, we went a long—we were at Fortress Ehrenbreitstein, where the flag flew last in World War I when American troops left Germany. The fort was Ehrenbreitstein. And Fortress Ehrenbreitstein is where a flag was raised, the first flag on German soil in World War II. It was raised in a ceremony with General [Omar] Bradley, General [George S.] Patton, and other generals at Fortress Ehrenbreitstein.

We moved along the river, we got into Kassel, then we moved to other towns in Germany, but I was not—in fact, I'll tell you something interesting: the man who was supposed to be the S-2 had got in an accident and I had to replace him. He was later made the S-4; the S-4 is a supply officer; he was a West Pointer. And one day he and I were in a Jeep together, we were driving, we had a chauffeur—I mean, somebody was driving us. We were driving down the road, this was maybe a dirt road, woods on either side, and all of a sudden he pulls his .45 pistol out and he starts firing. I said “What’s the matter, George? You see a German?” He says “No. I’m not going back home and telling my wife I didn’t fire my pistol.” (laughs) I didn’t fire mine, because I would have had to clean it.

MH: I see. So, at this point, what’s your objective? Are you still racing to try and meet —

JL: What was that?

MH: What’s your division’s objective at this point? Where are you going?

JL: Well, at our headquarters, we had situation maps. Each day, an operations sergeant kept the situation maps. Berlin was the objective on our situation map. That was—now, each day as we moved, we moved according to the division orders. See, a division commander gave orders to the regiment, he made them give—there were three regiments in the division. He may have given the two orders to go down this road, this way or that way. But each day we moved according to the orders from the division. Go ahead.

MH: So, you’re moving, and your objective at that point was Berlin.

JL: Well, this was our made-up objective. You understand?

MH: Yeah.

JL: The regimental commander had decided on his own that Berlin was our objective. So, this was like put on the map, we just had Berlin marked. But we hadn't been given Berlin as an objective by the division or by General Bradley or anything like that. This was our own objective. You understand?

MH: Yes. But, I mean, what do you know at that point about where the Russians are headed—

JL: What was that? I didn't understand.

MH: What do you know about—you know, the Russians are coming from the east—

JL: Well, Colonel Buie was—in the first place, in our regimental staff, I don't recall that we were too concerned about the Russians. Colonel Buie had been wary of the Russians, and he thought that maybe before the whole thing was over, we'd be fighting the Russians. I don't know where that came from, whether it was a personal feeling or whether he'd gotten that in high headquarters meetings or what, but his general feeling was that he was kind of wary of the Russians. And as far as I was concerned, I was never thinking about meeting the Russians. I was not thinking of (inaudible) of meeting the Russians.

MH: Okay, so at what point do you first begin to come across either refugees or you know, people who were inmates in these camps?

JL: We began to come across refugees in Leipzig. Leipzig, Germany is when we first began to see refugees, people—displaced persons, on a bicycle riding around or people walking along the streets or roads. We did not see displaced persons, to my recollection, until we got to Leipzig.

MH: And when do you first come across any of the camps?

JL: What was that?

MH: When do you first come across any of the camps? The concentration camps or the—

JL: My first—I do not have any recollection of Thekla, which was a camp in or near Leipzig.

MH: Thekla is T-h-e-l—

JL: T-h-e-k-l-a. I do not have any recollection of seeing it. I do remember being in an area where DP men were riding around on bicycles, wandering around trying to get through and what not. But I don't remember if that was near Thekla or where, or were we just in the general area. We really were not concerned with the individual DP wandering around. But at first, the first—I first began to see many DPs after we had been in Leipzig and we had cleaned up for a few days and when word, in fact I don't even—when the 273<sup>rd</sup> met the Russians, now we had what they call an IE officer, Information Education Officer. And I held copies of bulletins that you put out right now, but I don't remember there was a time of any big hullabaloo about we had met the Russians. But certainly we were given orders that the regiment was to move from where we were, which was right outside of Leipzig, that we would move to guard the road between Eilenberg and Torgau, Germany.

MH: What's the name of the first city? Eilenberg?

JL: Yeah, E-i-l-e-n-b-e-r-g. Eilenberg is on the Mulde River, M-u-l-d-e. Torgau is on the Elbe River, E-l-b-e. It's a stretch of about twenty-five miles running east to west.

MH: And Torgau is T-o-r-g-a-u.

JL: T-o-r-g-a-u, Torgau. And the regiment—our regiment had been given the orders to move and guard the road area between Eilenberg and Torgau. Now, we moved on about April 26, and the Russians were met April 25. Now, I wasn't there, I don't know what happened, and I don't remember any big hullabaloo about it. But anyway, we moved, the regiment started moving, and I usually moved with Colonel Buie. He would be in a Jeep. He would be in the front seat on the right side; there'd be a driver. I'd be in the back seat with a map. And we moved, at some point, and what was called the quartering officer had already found the headquarters for use to use in a little town called Mockrehna. Mockrehna was about halfway between Torgau and Eilenberg. And we stopped at Mockrehna, at the headquarters, and I'm not sure whether that same afternoon he and I got in the Jeep and went on to Torgau, which would have been maybe a ten-minute ride.

And we were moving on this road, that's when we first began to see a lot of DPs, and even German soldiers, moving from west to east, getting out of the way of the Russians, and also even civilians moving. Anyway, don't remember—I think it might have been that same afternoon of the twenty-sixth. He and I went to Torgau, and when we got to Torgau and we went to the public square, we found a (inaudible) drove in to and this—you could tell was the main area. There were Russian soldiers drunk with vodka and bottles in their hands just raising hell, having a big time. Colonel Buie is one of these prim guys and he didn't like that, but he couldn't do anything about Russian soldiers. Now we had soldiers there, and our soldiers were quartered as guards in different places, and they were not allowed to roam around like that. We didn't stay there five or ten or fifteen minutes when we turned around and went back to Mockrehna.

MH: Right. So when did you come across that small camp that you told me about?

JL: Well, I had this sergeant, Spiegel. Spiegel was a Jewish guy that I don't know where he was from. Anyway, he and I—I was a captain and he was my sergeant, we wasn't buddy-buddy, but I mean I respected him as a good soldier and he respected me as an officer. Spiegel—I'll put it this way: in Germany, as we were moving through Germany, one of the things that soldiers began to do was look around the loot—you know the word?

MH: Yes.

JL: Look for a (inaudible) or a Luger pistol or Walther pistol, or Mauser pistol, stuff like that. So, Spiegel would roam around. And he came into the headquarters, which was a house, one day, maybe the next day or the second day, and he told me about finding this camp where there were a bunch of women who'd been held prisoner. And he wanted to know if I wanted to go see it—

MH: What did he tell you about that camp?

JL: When?

MH: What did he tell you?

JL: Well, he told me that he had found—while he was wandering around, he had found a camp—have you seen pictures of these camps?

MH: I've seen pictures of some of them, yes.

JL: Well, it was a typical camp, as far as I had seen—is an area that's got barbed wire running around it with barracks inside for the people to stay and a big gate to be opened to let vehicles in and out. So, anyway, he had found this camp, and when I think Patton when he first went there, because of the situation, these women had not been prevented from going out of the barracks. When they were not doing work, they went to the fence to beg him to let them out. And he didn't let 'em out, but he came and got me and he and I went back, and when we got there, the women came—the women were at the fence again begging to get out.

*Mp3 file 1 ends; mp3 file 2 begins.*

MH: Tell me what the women looked like.

JL: Well, my understand was about 300 women there. And they were all ages, from maybe teenagers up to their sixties. There was a woman that I met, I think she was a medical doctor, but she was more or less in charge of these women. She was like a leader of them. She'd probably been made leader by the guards there. And between Spiegel and I, Spiegel speaking to them and we communicated; we talked back and forth. They wanted to get out, but we couldn't let them out because we had had orders not to let the roads get loaded down with Germans or prisoners or DPs or anything.

MH: How did you communicate? What language were you speaking?

JL: What was that?

MH: What language were you speaking?

JL: Well, I didn't speak—Spiegel could speak Jewish, Yiddish. He may have spoken Russian. These were Hungarian women, they were Jewish women. He may have been speaking Hebrew to them, Yiddish.

MH: How did you know they were Jewish?

JL: They told us. We knew it. He found out they were Jews.

MH: What else did the women tell you at that point?

JL: Well, first they wanted to be sure—there were two or three guards, older Germans who were their guards. They wanted us to be sure and not harm them, because these guards apparently had been good to them. You hear me?

MH: Yes.

JL: And these women were in relatively good shape, I mean they were not emaciated or starved. They wasn't dressed up in Sunday clothes, but they weren't like skin and bones and starved. They were in good shape.

MH: So, when you got to that barbed wire fence, they weren't begging you for food.

JL: What was that?

MH: When you got to the barbed wire fence, they weren't begging you for food?

JL: They were what?

MH: They weren't asking you for food? When you got to the fence—

JL: They wanted us to let them out.

MH: Right, but they weren't begging you for food?

JL: They didn't what?

MH: They were not begging for food?

JL: They were not heading for home.

MH: No, they were begging for food.

JL: Oh, yes. My recollection is they wanted sole companion more than they did for food. Spiegel cooked them food the first time; we cooked them some food. And we cook them some (inaudible). I think that they lacked the luxuries more than they lacked food. I sent you a message with this German, who had just told me exactly what that camp was used for. You got that message?

MH: Right, I got that message in front of me.

JL: Yeah.

MH: Yes. But I want to hear more about your interaction with them.

JL: Now what?

MH: I want to hear more about, you know, the interaction you had with them. It was—

JL: Well, I wanted to let them out, but I couldn't let them out. We couldn't open the gates because we had been told not to let them out. And it might have been more dangerous for them to be wandering around on the road than it was locked up behind the fence.

MH: Did you see these German guards that they had?

JL: No, I don't remember ever seeing the guards.

MH: Did the women tell you what they were doing in the camp?

JL: I don't remember that. I don't remember, I think—I don't remember that. And I don't think that I was curious about it. I mean, I was just so excited to see that these women were there, and I knew they were prisoners. I knew that they were made to do labor, but I don't remember that I asked them about what they did.

MH: How did you feel?

JL: How did I feel? I wanted to let them out, and I felt sorry for them, but I couldn't let them out.

MH: Were you able to explain it to them?

JL: We explained it to the doctor, the woman who was in charge. You see, the woman who was in charge was like the spokesperson. We wasn't talking to a whole bunch of them, although when we were there, there was a whole bunch of them up at the fence and squealing and talking and trying to get us to listen to them. But we had to try to talk to just one person. And, of course, Spiegel was doing the talking with them, because I don't speak Yiddish and I don't speak Hebrew, and I don't speak German.

MH: I'm just curious: is Spiegel still alive?

JL: No. See, the 69<sup>th</sup> has an association. They tried to keep in touch with the people who were in it; it was started in 1948 by the division commander. But Spiegel, to my knowledge, if he was contacted, he wasn't interested. But he has not been a member of the association. And I don't know where he is.

MH: So, now you've seen this camp with these women in it, and your mission at that point is to keep the road clear.

JL: What was that?

MH: Your mission at that point is to keep that road clear?

JL: Yeah.

MH: Okay, so you've seen the camp. What do you do, do you have to go back and tell somebody, "We've found this camp with 300 women?"

JL: No, no. There was nothing that the regiment could do about it. When I went back to the regimental headquarters, I may not have even told Colonel Buie about it, it was just there. Also, see, following the fighting troops there was a military government group. You see, when we went through a town and we took over the town, the Army had what they called a military government group, people who would come in to see if the city or town could govern itself. As far as that camp was concerned, my feeling was that sooner or later the military government was going to find it. Somebody else was going to find it and would handle it.

MH: So what happens for you next in the war then?

JL: What?

MH: What happens next for you?

JL: Oh, what happens next to me? Well, I requested, after—in the first place, I got promoted to major on June 1, 1945. Colonel Buie had me promoted to major. But I didn't want to stay in the Army, and I didn't want to stay in the occupation troops, so I requested to be assigned to a unit going to the Pacific. I was assigned to the 78<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The 78<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was a hero division, crossing the Rhine River where the Remagen Bridge is, and they were scheduled to go to the Pacific. And that's where I went. And when I first got to the 78<sup>th</sup>, I was assigned to the 311<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.

MH: Where was this?

JL: They were in a little town called Grebenstein, G-r-e-b-e-n-s-t-e-i-n, outside of Kassel. And Colonel Willingsham's headquarters was in a house in Grebenstein. My remembrance of Grebenstein, it was a farming town, big farming town. And when I reported to him, of course he was at the headquarters. He asked me what I had been doing in the 69<sup>th</sup>. I had with me a copy of our regimental history, and he thought—I showed it to him—my picture's in it, being on the regimental staff. And anyway, he immediately—he held men in the regiment who had been heroes in their fight on the line on the Remagen Bridge. He had captains in majors' jobs, and he did not want to replace with an outside major. So, he didn't assign me to a job in the regiment; he assigned me to look after the publication of the history they were putting out.

He had a group of men, about five or six men, down in Fulda, Germany, where the 311<sup>th</sup> had been earlier. And they were in the process of printing up the history of the 311<sup>th</sup>. And when he saw the history of the 217<sup>th</sup>, he molded the 311<sup>th</sup> history after that. We even

got men who could draw maps for the 272<sup>nd</sup>; we got them assigned to the 311<sup>th</sup> so they could do the map work for this book. And I was listed as the executive editor of this combat journal, which was the 311<sup>th</sup> history and I have copies of it.

MH: To come back to your—what were your final days with the 69<sup>th</sup> like?

JL: What was that?

MH: Tell me about your final days with the 69<sup>th</sup>?

JL: The final days? (laughs)

MH: Yeah.

JL: Well, the final days were in late June or early July, and we were just in a status quo. We were not—we were training and just sort of having a good time. We're trying to fraternize with frauleins.

MH: I thought that was against the rules?

JL: What was that?

MH: I thought it was against the rules?

JL: It was, it was. (inaudible) (laughs)

MH: How did you feel about the German people?

JL: Well, I don't know. The German people were civil; they were respectful of American soldiers. I did not have a terrible feeling toward the German people, and I've been back to Germany three times in the last two or three years. And I have very good friends who are very respectful of me as a Jewish person, and I'm respectful of them. And they're very good people, the ones I know. I think that they feel it was a different generation, that's all.

MH: But how did you feel about the German people in the final days of the war? You had seen the horrible—

JL: My feeling wasn't one of hatred. This was just something that took place, that's all. It was just something that they had no control over. Hitler was like a hero person, and there was a (inaudible)—they were forced to do things they had no control of, some of them.

MH: Did you ever run into the SS?

JL: What was that?

MH: Did you ever run into the SS?

JL: The SS?

MH: Yes.

JL: No, I did not.

MH: So, you never saw the SS people there.

JL: No.

JL: Hope you (inaudible).

MH: All right. Did you ever get to any of the other concentration camps?

JL: No. I did not see any other concentration camps.

MH: Well, you're very active in the 69<sup>th</sup> Division Association.

JL: I'm what?

MH: You are very active in with the 69<sup>th</sup> Division?

JL: No, I'm not active. I started the website at the request of a president of the 69<sup>th</sup>. I was not computer savvy. In fact [I got] an outside person to do it. Now, the officers in general of the 69<sup>th</sup>—I'll back up a minute. The website is not recognized officially by the 69<sup>th</sup>.

MH: Why is that?

JL: Well, because they didn't want to spend the money to support it. I will tell you this. The last president, who was the membership chairman, he and his wife run articles about the website in the bulletin. And the membership chairman, who is the person who gets track of people who die, he sends me the Taps so I can put it on the website. The president of the association is a two-year affair. The new president went into effect a year ago. He never wrote me and thanked me what I'm doing. When the website was started, the president and the treasurer allocated the money to start the website; we had two reunions where the website was discussed without any decision. Later, I wanted to have what I called a website tour at a reunion. Well, a computer would be set up and the website that we had at the time—we didn't have near what we have on it now—the website would be shown to those who do not have computers, and the website would be shown to those who did not know how to work a website—you know, old people don't know how to, you know—

MH: Use the web, right.

JL: Yeah, know how to open everything up. But the guy who was the reunion chairman, he wouldn't let it, he said no. Then he tried to tell me that the website was not officially approved. And when he did that, then we became self-supporting. And the money on the website is self-supporting with donations, and we made a video, got hold of a video of the 69<sup>th</sup> in Europe, and people who donate. I have a bank account that pays for the host and pays for the website, pays for everything.

MH: Is it likely I might be able to find some of the people who were at—

JL: I didn't understand that. I didn't understand that.

MH: Is it likely that I could find some of the men who were at Thekla?

JL: How to find some of the men who were at Thekla?

MH: Yeah

JL: The 69<sup>th</sup> men?

MH: Yeah.

JL: Well, your friend signed in on the guest book. Did you get any answers from that?

MH: I got one response from somebody.

JL: Well, you see this is a problem. I don't know if there's a person who never saw your message or whether people didn't see Thekla that never saw your message. But the only—whether there are people who didn't see Thekla. But the only way I know to find people who may have witnessed anything at Thekla would be that they would read the guest book and see you are missing. Now the—I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to do you a favor. My support engineer just got married and he won't be back till next Monday from his honeymoon, and he's not posting anything to the website. I'm going to have him put a marquee on our home page. Do you know what a marquee is?

MH: No.

JL: Huh?

MH: No, I don't.

JL: Well a marquee is a streamer that will go across—have you ever seen the homepage of my website?

MH: I don't think so.

JL: Have you ever opened my website?

MH: I don't believe so.

JL: You ought to open it.

MH: Okay.

JL: I'm surprised. You want me to send it to you?

MH: Yes, yes, I would appreciate that.

JL: You open the website, and when you look at you will find out a lot about the 69<sup>th</sup>. But anyway, of course there's so much on there it will take you a month to look at it; we have a bunch on it. But anyway, a marquee is a streamer that will run on the homepage. I will have about six to eight words in that streamer. In that streamer—I'm going to try word it so to direct anybody that opens the home page to know that there is a guestbook signing—speaking about information about Thekla Concentration Camp. You understand?

MH: That'd be great.

JL: Yeah, I'll do that. When we hang up, I'm going to send you both my website and the 69<sup>th</sup> website. Now, you know what Favorites are?

MH: Yes.

JL You know how to add a website to your Favorites?

MH: Yes, I do.

JL: Add them to your Favorites and look at 'em.

MH: I'll do that.

JL: You'll find a lot of information. A lot of what I just told you.

*End of interview*