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James H. Polk

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: General James H. Polk (1911-1992)
INTERVIEWER: Jesse Stiller and Rebecca Craver
PROJECT: _____
DATE OF INTERVIEW: November, 1987 - April, 1988
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
TAPE NO: 771
TRANSCRIPT NO: 771
TRANSCRIBER: Rebecca Craver

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Born December 13, 1911 in Philippines and died February 18, 1992 in El Paso. Graduated West Point 1933; assigned to Ft. Bliss as mounted horse cavalry officer; met and married Josephine Leavell of El Paso 1937; tactical officer West Point until European campaign of World War II; took part in D Day 1944; spearheaded General Patton's 3rd Army advances through France, Germany, Czechoslovakia; fought in 3 Korean War campaigns. In 1961 commanded 4th Armored Division guarding border of East and West Germany during Cold War; U.S. Commandant of Berlin in 1963 when Berlin Wall was built; commanded U.S. Army in Europe from 1967 to 1971 when he retired as 4 star general. Decorations include Silver Star, French Legion of Honor, Croix de Guerre, American Defense Service Medal, Distinguished Service Medal, World War II Victory Medal, and U.N. Service Medal.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Influence of parents, strong military tradition of family, West Point days 1929-1933, Fort Bliss in 1930s with trips to Juarez and polo games, cavalry school at Fort Riley, marriage and in-laws. Service in Europe in 3rd Cavalry under Gen. George Patton, battle tactics during European campaigns, comments about Patton, treatment of those released from concentration camps, comments about Douglas MacArthur, Korean campaigns, Berlin and political involvement required of military, comments on changes in the army between 1930s and 40s and 1970s, effects of Vietnam on the military, experiences during retirement years.

Length of Interview: 16 hours Length of Transcript 107 pages

General James H. Polk
November, 1987 - April, 1988
by Jesse Stiller and Rebecca Craver

C: General Polk, for the sake of the tape let's just start with when and where you were born.

P: O.K. I was born in Batangas, in the Philippine Islands, that's on the island of Luzon, on December 13, 1911. My father was a West Pointer, graduated in 1910, and my mother and father were married in December of that year and I was born a year later. The 8th Cavalry was over there putting down the uprising of the Huks and those things after we had captured the Philippines. I didn't do well as a child, as a baby. There was no milk. It was all canned milk or something like that, and so I was doing very poorly. So my mother brought me home to my grandmother who lived in Burlington, Iowa, and she returned to the Philippines to her husband. So I stayed with my grandmother for better than two years. A wonderful old lady, and she had great influence on my life, I think.

C: Tell me about her. What kind of influence?

P: Well, she was a wonderful Irish Catholic. The whole family were Catholic. For instance, she was very civic minded for those days. Among other things she started a Shakespeare garden in the city park where every plant that's mentioned in Shakespeare's plays was planted and labeled. So she did that. She was very active in the church, very knowledgeable. Her son Philip Fleming, Major General Fleming, was the graduate manager of athletics at West Point when he was a Lieutenant Colonel, I guess. So that got her to reading the sports pages because his name was mentioned. So when I got back from West Point in the Army, she'd discuss football and baseball and all these things, which was very

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unusual, so you can see she was a very interesting woman. But she became very much interested in big league baseball and college football and all that kind of thing. A fine old lady. Oh, she had a ... I must tell you a funny story about her. She had a little dog, a little Scottie. He was very much attached to her and followed her every place that she went. She walked about a block down to the Catholic church from her house and Plush, that was his name, sat outside the church, waited for her. And then if she went downtown, she'd take him along and he'd sit outside the department store while she went in. He'd sit there and so he got to be a landmark. They wrote him up in the paper. But one day she went to the department store in Burlington and left him by the door and went out the side, forgot him. And the manager called up and said, "Mrs. Fleming, your dog is down here waiting for you. I'll get a taxi and send him up." And she said, "Oh, no, don't do that. I'll be right down." [Laughter] Sailed out the other door and got his taxi and took him home.

S: General, obviously the military tradition ran deep in your family, on both maternal and paternal sides.

P: Yes.

S: Could you elaborate on what that meant to you as a child?

P: Let me run some of it by first. I'm a member of the Society of the Cincinnati. You know that society?

S: Yes, sir.

P: My great, great grandfather - maybe one more great - commanded the 4th Infantry of the Continental Line up in North Carolina. And one of his sons was in the outfit, and another of his sons was killed at the Battle of Utah Springs and so it went on like that. My grandfather, as I said, was a Captain, commanding Troop E of the First Tennessee Cavalry which

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was [N.B.] Forrest's first command and stayed in his brigade and division all the time. He was captured outside of Columbia in the Battle of Franklin and was a prisoner for about a year. He was a strong-minded man and the family was very influential and very wealthy in Columbia, Tennessee, and they went totally broke. They had something like 200 slaves. So my grandfather moved to Fort Worth, Texas, with his brother and ranched for a while and then set up the first stockyards when the Katy [Missouri-Kansas-Texas] Railroad got to Fort Worth. I have pictures of the Polk Brothers' Stockyards. So then my father was born in Fort Worth. He had one more brother. He went to West Point, kind of against my grandfather's wishes. But he became used to it and afterwards went up and visited and liked it. So my dad was commissioned in the 8th Cavalry, was Lieutenant and retired just before World War II began as a Colonel, and died shortly afterwards. He had a heart attack, several heart attacks. But anyway my brother and I, next brother, both went to West Point. My other brother went to Annapolis, 'cause he failed the physical for West Point.

C: What were their names?

P: My next brother is John Fleming Polk and my other brother is Thomas Harding Polk. Then I had a sister who married a West Pointer; Molly Polk married Harry Wilson. But it's funny [that] the next generation has not gotten into the army except in a couple of cases.

C: Do you have an explanation for that?

P: I don't know. I took my son up to West Point a couple of times and he finally said, "Dad, this is not for me." I think part of it was that I was a general by that time. He had lived on army posts and everything, but I think he thought it would be tough on him if he was a professional

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soldier, so he went to Vanderbilt, took ROTC, got his Master's degree at the University of Virginia in Business and did two years in the Army as a Second Lieutenant, Armor, but now he's here in town as president of Property Trust of America.

S: But at least the armor tradition was carried on, sir.

P: [Chuckles] Yeah. Correct.

S: What recollections do you have of being an army child? Did you return from the Philippines shortly after regaining your health in Iowa?

P: No. My dad came back to Fort Riley. My early memories are of Fort Riley, Kansas. One of my earliest memories was of my dad leaving for the Punitive Expedition which is in that Time [November 23, 1987] article there. When that happened we had a house next door to my grandmother's house, stayed there during that period. Then World War I broke out and Dad went to Europe in the Pershing forces [and] we just stayed right there. We were next to my grandmother for about three more years. Then went to Fort Leavenworth, were there for about four years, so we had a lot of fun. You know, the Army does a lot for children. We had Boy Scouts, we had riding lessons, swimming lessons, we'd go hunting, do lots of things like that. Then we moved to Lexington, Virginia, where my father was a commandant of VMI, Virginia Military Institute. And that was a wonderful time. That was my teenage years, from about 12 to 16. It was a wonderful town. It was a small town, marvelous school. All those professors' kids were going there, you know. Wonderful teachers. And the sports with two colleges there. So you know, we just had a great time. A marvelous place to grow up. It was right on the north bank of the James. We went canoeing and fishing. I played all kinds of sports. Just a great place to grow up. Then I went to West Point. Well, I went

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to ...Dad came to Washington and I went to Crane School, I went to Georgetown University for a while and then went to West Point.

S: Was there ever any doubt in your mind that you were going to make the Army your career?

P: I don't think so. Just always wanted to go. I nearly went to VMI, as a matter of fact, but I got an appointment to West Point so Dad said, "I'm just a Major and it's free, so you go to West Point." [Laughter] So I said, "Yes, sir."

S: What kind of man was your father, sir?

P: A big strong man, bigger than I am. Wider. Had a very resonant voice. Used to say, he's step out the front door and say, "Jim," and get me all the way across the parade ground. But he was a sentimental man, too. Used to embarrass me. I'd come back from a trip or something. He'd meet me at the station and kiss me. You know, I didn't like that. [Chuckles] He could sing. He had a wonderful singing voice. And he had a very fine military career. Went to the National War College and all that. I think if he hadn't gotten these heart attacks, he'd gone on to something bigger.

S: It was difficult during the inter-war period in any case for officers.

P: Yeah, but we had nice stations and good times and so on.

C: Tell me about your mother.

P: Well, let's see. Mother grew up in Burlington, Iowa. And her name was Esther. She was the eldest of six children. And she went to a Catholic finishing school in Pennsylvania and then as I say married my father. Met him at West Point where her brother Philip, as I mentioned, was a cadet. Mother went to see Philip and met Dad. So that's how they met. She got a pretty strong dose of the Polks all the time. [Laughs] She

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got kind of tired of it. Folks always getting into genealogy and family history and all that, all about Leonidas Polk and the President and all those guys, and she got kind of fed up with that. She played the piano. She read a great deal. She played bridge. Very social minded, very attractive, very charming. She acted in plays a couple of times, very successful, you know local plays. I took her to get a physical exam at Walter Reed when she was about 82 [years old] and the doctor at the end said, "Mrs. Polk, do you drink?" And she said, "Yes, I have a sherry for lunch and I have a cocktail or two before supper." He said, "Do you smoke?" And she said, "Yes." Said, "How much?" "Oh, maybe a pack or so a day." He said, "Do you play bridge?" And she said, "Yes, two or three times a week." And he turned to me and he said, "Now don't get smart. Don't change a thing." [Laughter] She died of a stroke when she was about 87 very quickly.

C: Tell me, do you have any fond memories of your teenage years there near VMI?

P: I remember a lot of nice things about Lexington, Virginia particularly. Going to football games and basketball games.

C: Did you play football in high school?

P: Yes, practically every boy in the school had to play, such a small school. But we were not a very good team as I remember.

S: Sir, you graduated from West Point in '33?

P: [Yes]

S: What was the Academy like in these years?

P: It hasn't changed very much. I think the women coming up there have changed it to some degree so it's not as rough and tough as when we were there. But basically it's the same. The curriculum has changed.

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They're allowed to choose courses and things like that, electives. We had a standard curriculum. If you'd been to college two years it didn't make any difference. You started right at the beginning and went right on through the whole curriculum. Pleb year was a very easy year for me. I was sort of amused by it, all this funny stuff. It didn't bother me at all. And then I started getting into trouble. And the last couple of years, I just hated it. I just hated it. I was in confinement a lot for demerits. I got to [be] kind of a bronco. I think if anybody thought I'd be a general, at that stage of my life they never would've believed it. I don't know what happened to me. I walked the area a lot and was confined a lot. I got to be a corporal in my second class year, my junior year, and got busted because I got caught out after taps one night downtown. I did about two months on the area for that one. And that's what really started me being such a bronco, you know. I was really glad to get out of there and be my own man again, you know, a 2nd Lieutenant in the army at Fort Bliss, Texas, which is just great! [Chuckles]

S: The prospects for officers were fairly bleak in 1933.

P: No. I don't think. Because that was the depression. So we lieutenants, see I got \$125 a month plus \$12 for a horse. They paid you for having a horse, owning a horse. So we were better off than our peers in town by far and so, I don't know. My set expenses were maybe \$80 a month and I had \$45 to blow. You can do a lot with \$45 in 1933.

S: You bet.

P: Well, the prospects of being a general or something like that never entered our minds. In other words, my ultimate ambition was to be the colonel commanding the 8th Cavalry some day. That was my ambition.

S: I was thinking about prospects for advancement, sir.

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P: Well, they picked up a little. We were promoted to 1st Lieutenants with three years' service, and there were some 2nd lieutenants with seven years' service. Caught up the whole bunch. So then promotion picked up after that. The army expanded some. But we worked hard and played hard. The notion was that the 2nd lieutenants should be better than any soldier in the troop. So we were supposed to ride better, shoot better, all those things. And pretty much we did because we went to drill in the morning and all the enlisted men were off on details, the quartermaster and things like that, sweeping up the place, cutting the grass and all. So the senior officers, squadron commanders and captains, we all went to school. So in the 8th Cavalry there were about 20 2nd lieutenants, and we went to school every afternoon except for Wednesday and Saturday [when] we played polo in the afternoon. Sometime on Sunday we played polo. We had horse shows and polo matches in Juarez and all that kind of thing, practice marches. It was a very active life. We drank a lot. I wouldn't say to excess, but we partied a lot at night. I don't think anybody drank anything in the daytime. I don't recall it if they did. And as far as any dope, any kind of dope, I don't think one of those lieutenants including myself ever touched marijuana or cocaine or heroin. We could get it in Juarez in those days. You'd have a man come up to you and say, "You want some marijuana? Or you want a girl? You want some cocaine?"

S: Is that right?

P: [Yes.] And the gambling stopped by that time. The casinos were closed. But there were a lot of ... You could take a girl over and buy dinner and have a good time, music and dancing, for about \$3 or \$4.

C: What were some of the favorite spots in Juarez?

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P: [Chuckles] Well, the Mint Bar was a wonderful spot. There was one guy named Finney and he used to take post-dated checks. I said we had plenty of money but about the 20th of the month you'd start to run out and write a check for \$20 and put the first of the month on the check and he'd hold it until the first of the month and then cash it. The Central and the Mint Bar were the two main places. When you had visitors, ... Air Force guys from Randolph Field used to fly through here so we'd sometimes take them to the Moulin Rouge. [Laughs] That was kind of a bad place.

S: A couple of things, General. First, you folks were deeply involved in equestrian activities.

P: Yes.

S: To what extent were you attuned to developments in armament? Was there a sense that horse cavalry was kind of a passing [thing]?

P: No, there wasn't, curiously enough. But yes, it began to be apparent. For instance, my last ... no, not my last, my third year here, 1935 and 36, I commanded the armored scout car platoon. That was six armored cars. They were supposed to be scouting, but the ... I don't know, the writing was on the wall. They formed an armored brigade up at Fort Knox and then the Infantry formed an armored brigade at Fort Benning. But we went to the Cavalry School. After four years here, we went to the Cavalry School and we were taught cavalry tactics except armored tactics by one man, Colonel George Patton, who you know had commanded armored brigade in World War I. So we had some sessions on armor by George Patton, but almost all of it was horsemanship and horse doctoring and shoeing horses and studying cavalry campaigns. Allenby's campaign and some of those things.

S: And yet there was a certain applicability of horse cavalry skills or

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tactics.

P: Oh, sure. The transfer to armor wasn't a difficult thing to do because we were thoroughly checked out in weapons, you know. And so the weapon part of it was all right. We were thoroughly checked out in terrain and this kind of thing. You ride a horse and you learn much more about terrain than you do driving a car or driving a tank even. So I used to tell my armor people, "You ought to know before you try to cross that creek whether you can get across or not." You know. "You ought to be able to tell 300 yards back whether you can get across or not. You ought to know if you can get through this terrain with your tank." You know. And some of them, they didn't know that, which was just instinctive. After a while they got so they could do it. After a while they could smell an ambush for instance, or something like that. They knew what kind of place they were going to be. You get pretty good at it towards the end of the war, but probably the maintenance was the toughest thing to transfer to. We didn't know much about that. We didn't know how complicated some of this machinery was and how you need to take care of it, how often you need to do these kind of things. So when you've got an armored unit, you bear down on that pretty hard.

S: Tell a little about Fort Bliss in the 1930's. Was it considered a desirable post?

P: Yes. Well, the cavalry division was scattered along the border so the other places, Fort Clark and Marfa and those places down there, were not nearly so nice as Fort Bliss. We had the division headquarters here, two regiments of cavalry, and a regiment of artillery and then the supporting troops, signal and quartermaster and all that. So then the other two regiments of cavalry were scattered along the border in little, small

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posts, squadron posts. So yeah, we had everything up here that we needed: nice quarters, good barracks, and all that kind of thing, good stables.

C: How did you meet the local women?

P: Well, it wasn't very hard. [Chuckles]

C: Were there parties?

P: Yes. We were much closer to the town than the army is now, I would say. The army is working so hard now too, you know. The girls would come to the polo games and we'd pick 'em up. And we were told a good way to find a girl if you didn't know any was to go to church a while, so we'd go to the Episcopal church and meet some girls. But it wasn't hard at all and they were happy to have us to their parties and things. So we were I'd say, an integrated society with the nice girls in town, very quickly. When you'd arrive, they'd introduce you right away.

C: You met your wife here?

P: Yes.

C: Tell me about that. When was that?

P: I was a bachelor for my first three years and she was away at school, in Europe and so on. So I hadn't met her. And she came back to town and I thought she was a great beauty.

C: Do you remember when you first laid eyes on her?

P: Yes. [Chuckles] The 8th Cavalry was giving a gambling party and we went down and saw the sheriff and got a roulette table and a crap table and so forth. We raised money to get curtains for our mess hall and some nice china and so forth. So I was running the crap table. And all of a sudden there was this pretty girl right across. [Laughs] And I told somebody, "You run it for a while." So I started dating her. And the funny thing

Poik

about it was the standard thing was to stay at Fort Bliss for three years and then go to Fort Riley for the Cavalry School. So I was counting her, but I didn't have it locked up at all. Come June got orders to go to the Cavalry School, so I wrote a letter to General Cromer who'd been the chief of the cavalry, wrote him direct. Told him I was trying to marry a darling girl and could I please stay at Fort Bliss one more year.

S: And he granted that request?

P: Yeah. Orders came out. He never answered it; just orders came out cancelling my orders so I could stay at Fort Bliss. The agent called me in and he said, "What's going on here?" I said, "Well, I wrote a letter to General Cromer because I'm counting Joey Leavell and I didn't want to leave." And he said, "You're supposed to go through channels on something like that." [Laughs] I didn't, though. It worked anyway.

C: Well did you marry then that next year?

P: Yeah. We got married in November.

C: November of 1937?

P: '37.

S: I guess that's one of the advantages of the compact inter-war army, sir. There was that personal touch which I don't think is lacking altogether these days. A little more problematical.

P: Yeah. Well, we knew each other a lot better than they do now.

S: What about your wife's family, sir?

P: Mr. Leavell died just before we got married. Well, he died in March, and we got married in Novemeber. He was a very prominent insurance man. Sherman and Leavell was an insurance and real estate company both, and he was a fine athlete too. A championship golfer and he was a fun guy. I never really got to know him, but I hear fun stories about him. How he

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went to a big ball the night when Mrs. Leavell had a baby and she was mad at that. Things like that. He's in the El Paso Hall of Fame because he shot four consecutive holes, six under par. On a Par 4, he made a birdie. That's one. A Par 5, he made a 3; chipped in his third shot. So that's an eagle. Par 4, he made another birdie. Par 3, he made a hole in one. Two eagles and two birdies, so he's in the Hall of Fame. Mrs. Leavell was a very fine woman, awfully good woman but a very good Baptist. And I'm afraid I was a cross to her because he didn't like drinking or anything like that. She didn't approve of drinking. She didn't mind dancing and that kind of thing. She wasn't that strict a Baptist. They had four children: Imogene Moore, who lives here. Mr. Moore was president of Mutual Savings. So they are quite old and kind of infirm. And then Kate married Dan White. White and Mithoff had an advertising firm here and he retired and now they live in California.

Beginning of Side Two

P: Charles is the youngest of the four and president of the Leavell Corporation here. He's very successful, very wealthy man, very public spirited man. He's into everything, he and his wife.

S: I was going to ask you, sir, whether there was anything in your wife's background to warn her in advance of the trials of being an army wife?

P: No. Not at all. She didn't know anything about it. Didn't know how to cook either. [Laughter]

C: Did she learn?

P: Yes, she learned. I'll tell you a funny story about her. She doesn't like for me to tell this story. But right after we got married we lived

right opposite the officers' club in those little bungalows, you know. And I gave her a dachshund for a present, for a one month wedding [anniversary] present. A cute little dog. And General Lear was then the Post Commander, a tough old bird. We were all scared to death of him. All of us were scared to death of him. He was mean, too. General Lear was walking by the house and Joey came running out the door with the little dog in her hands and said, "My god, Gretchen's got a bone in her throat." Oh, no, she didn't carry the dog out. I have it wrong. She came running out the door and said, "Gretchen's got a bone in her throat." And General Lear said, "I'll be right back." And ran back to the commanding general's house and got his car and came roaring back to our house and Joey came out with the dog. Well, bless his heart. He laughed and took Joey down to the vet's and the vet got the bone out. It frightened the hell out of the vet with General Lear there. And Joey didn't know who he was, came home, and told me about it. And I said, "My god, that was General Lear." But we found out later that he had a daughter that strangled on a piece of meat or something, so he was conditioned to react. So after that Joey was a great friend of his. They were good friends. Used to come up and dance with her and everything. Was crazy about her. [Chuckles]

S: So she had no inkling?

P: No. She didn't know rank or anything. She said, "Oh, he had a star up there." [Laughter] Oh, my god. But uh, she really was a great army wife, she was a great army wife. And we were overseas so much, you know. We were overseas about 14 years, and Mrs. Leavell used to come visit us, her mother. We got on very good terms. She used to come stay a month with us. We always enjoyed having her. She was a great cook, too.

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Taught her daughter to cook on those occasions. My wife's a very good cook now when she puts her mind to it.

C: Well, you stayed at Fort Bliss for how long after you were married?

P: Just November 'til July, the following July. Then we went to Fort Riley to the Cavalry School. Got a little apartment there and all of us going to the Cavalry School were clustered in two courts, I guess about 50 of us, 50 lieutenants that were married in these two courts, Carpenter Courts we called them. And then there was a BOQ for the few bachelors, so we were very social there in a very simple way. Fort Riley and Junction City don't offer very much, so it was all sort of playing charades and parties like that, very simple parties. Everybody was having babies.

C: Were you having babies?

P: Yes, my daughter was born there, my eldest child. A lot of the women rode, and we had fox hunts and polo games there. Very active, equestrian business. We played a little tennis, not much. No golf. There was a golf course there, but nobody played golf. We were so busy at horse business, that if you didn't play polo, everybody kind of looked down on you. And we stayed there two years. And the second year was devoted entirely to equestrian events. We got four horses, and we had a finished charger that you could do saber or pistol or throw him and shoot over his back and jump and ride cross country and all that. Then we had a remount, which was a 4-year-old thoroughbred that was raised at Fort Reno, and he had nothing on him but a halter. And then we had a polo pony and then we had a green charger. That was a horse that had been a remount the year before. So we had four horses and we rode Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday we rode eight hours a day. We rode four hours in the morning and about three hours in the afternoon, I guess.

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And that's all we did. And then we played polo or raced on Saturday and Sunday. We rode our four horses. Wednesday morning we only rode an hour, an hour on each one. We rode our four horses Wednesday and Saturday mornings and we played polo sometimes on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. So I guess we were putting in pretty near 60 hours a week on a horse!

S: Was the first year mainly classroom?

P: Well, there was some equestrian events that first year but only about two hours a day, something like that. And then the best riders, about 15 of us, went the second year. It was a great feather in your cap to get second year, and it was fun. It was the most fun I ever had in my life, that year. Most fun. It was just fun all the time. We were very competitive. We had two olympic riders as our instructors. One Jimmy Curtis and ... can't think of his name right now, but anyway we would always try to get our instructors thrown. If you got thrown and there was dirt on the saddle, that is the horse went down, you didn't have to buy beer. But if there was no dirt on the saddle you had to buy the whole class beer, so after riding on Wednesday at noon and Saturday at noon we repaired to the officers' club for beer and whoever had been thrown the previous three days bought the beer.

S: How much did that wind up setting you back, sir? Which I guess is my way of asking how large your class was.

P: Fifteen of us.

C: Who were your best friends up there?

P: My very best friend was Jess Hawkins who was a company mate at West Point and a summer roommate. We'd switch around. And then he came to Fort Bliss and was in the 8th Cavalry with me for three years and he went to

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Riley and I caught up with him up there. Married a darling girl from Pennsylvania, no West Virginia. But he was killed in World War II. I really felt bad about it. He was the intelligence officer of the second armored division, killed in Normandy. But we had lots of friends. We lose track of some of them now. Some of them are dead, you know. We're all getting kind of old. I'm 75. [Chuckles]

S: Sir, how would you evaluate the quality of the tactical instruction you got at Riley?

P: Well, we learned the basics of frontal attacks, enfilade, surprise, security, all the fundamentals. There's not much difference than the fundamentals of armored warfare except things happen faster. They happen a lot faster but it's the same things [that] pertain. And we studied Napoleonic campaigns, studied World War I, and so I'd say the basic company tactics, battalion tactics, were laid that first year at the Cavalry School. We had some of it in the 8th Cavalry as a matter of fact, before that, because our squadron commanders would teach us things like that. Charlie Gerhardt was my squadron commander. He was a very controversial lieutenant colonel, later commanded the Maryland-Virginia Division in World War II. A wonderful athlete. Used to take us on rides, just the lieutenants in the 8th Cavalry. That was about ten of us I guess. But he'd ride out across country and he'd pull up and say, "You just had a machine gun shoot at you from right over there. What do you do?" Then he says, "You're dead." [Chuckles] [We'd reply,] "Draw sabers and chargers." [He'd answer,] "O.K. That's not very smart, but you did something." So the division is that you go to Leavenworth to the commanding general's staff school and that's when you get into the brigade and division level things, and you get into supply and

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transportation and that kind of stuff which we never got [previously.] There's a sharp line between the branch school and the Leavenworth school and essentially you're dealing with company and battalion at the lower level, some on brigade, not much. And then when you get to Leavenworth you start right off on brigade and get to division and corps and how they're supplied and you get the right orders. You know, you do that sort of thing. Have sand table exercises and command post exercises and that sort of thing. That's where you learn the higher tactics.

S: There are critics of the army during the 30s who suggest that the army of the 30s was characterized by a kind of ennui, that professionalism wasn't what it should have been, that the pinch-penny conditions of the time retarded training. The picture that some paint is not a very flattering one of the army during those years.

P: Well, we did have some... I remember in the 8th Cavalry we had one captain that was a drunk and one that was incompetent but by and large they were not. Quite the opposite of what you say, I've heard often and I kind of believe it's true that the army school system is what permitted the army to expand to 3,000,000 men or whatever it was. For instance, you see, I was a lieutenant all during that period. I got to be a captain when the war broke out, so I was a lieutenant for eight years, but I had a lot of command experience in that eight years. And then I went to command a squadron, battalion, and then a regiment. So I jumped from a captain in 1941 to a colonel in 1944; captain, major, lieutenant colonel, colonel [taps finger on desk to accentuate each rank] with the appropriate commands. And I don't recall having any trouble about tactics or skills or the things I needed to know. I think the school system was very good. I think we made a bad mistake in the Vietnamese

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war in continuing the school system full bore. It didn't change a bit and this drew off so many talented officers for years, you know, that we were very short-handed. In Europe, my command over there in Europe, we had in our battalions a lieutenant colonel, maybe a captain, maybe - He didn't stay very long; he went to Vietnam - and then about 20 lieutenants, some of them just fresh caught, you know. I was proud of the fact we could hold the army together under those circumstances.

C: You were in Kansas when Hitler was starting to move around over there. Do you remember what you were thinking or what you were hearing about what was going on in Europe at the time?

P: I don't think we were aware of it at all. [Chuckles] We were in a little, enclosed enclave you might say, living our own lives. It didn't cross our mind that we'd be going to war at that period. Now when we left there and went to Fort Myer, Virginia, and George Patton was a colonel, that changed our minds right now. He got us getting ready to go to war. We were kind of shocked, you know. We thought the old guy was crazy. [Chuckles] Crazy like a fox. No, that didn't concern us. I remember very well. I went ahead from Riley to Fort Myer, and Joey went to see her mother here in El Paso, got a train and came up. The day she arrived in Washington was the day the Germans invaded Poland and that's ...

C: In September?

P: Yeah, in September, and that's when we knew uh oh, this is starting to look bad.

C: But until then it didn't even [occur to you]?

P: No, not really. It was events in Europe plus George Patton in the 3rd Cavalry that got us started getting ready to go to war. We started

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working a lot harder, studying more, going to classes that the senior officers held.

S: One further advantage of the interwar army, you formed associations with folks who became senior commanders. In your letters you speak of your days at Fort Myer and was it General Marshall who lived nearby or the across the road.

P: He lived right there. He was in Quarters Number One at Fort Myer. Yes. We knew George Marshall. He used to walk in the evening and speak to everybody. They weren't very social. He was working real hard. He'd go riding sometimes, but we went to his house to his daughter's wedding. It was his second wife's daughter actually, Molly Brown, but she was a ... They had a very small wedding. I guess he figured that if he opened up to all the senators and the high muckimucks and so forth, that it would be endless. So he just had the garrison on the post which were Molly Brown's friends. Sweet little wedding, just the military attending. But you know, we got to know Patton, Terry Allen, all those people. I knew all the cavalymen one place or another, polo tournaments or stationed together on the Cavalry School or something like that, practically all of the senior officers in the cavalry.

S: There's that very memorable episode that you recount in the notes to your letters of your being called to I guess it was 3rd Army headquarters and Marshall and Patton were there and Marshall

P: It was at the 90th Division headquarters. But I had just been attached to the 90th Division. My 3rd Cavalry was frequently attached to a division. That was General Van Fleet commanding then, who was very famous, and he didn't know much about us and he wasn't very interested. And so George Patton and Marshall came to the division, and Marshall was

going down the line and he was a very stern guy and he had sort of metallic eyes, scary, and he'd made the mistake of mixing up Van Fleet with Van Fleet, which is a well-known story, [Editor's note: The "well-known story" is that Marshall kept confusing two officers named Van Fleet, one of whom was known to him as a drinker and philanderer. Every time the other Van Fleet (James A.) appeared before him on a promotion list, Marshall crossed him off.] and that's the first time he'd met Van Fleet and he was kind of stony about it too. He went down the line and introduced his three infantry regimental commanders and his artillery commander and he got to me and he said, "Why, Jimmy, what are you doing here?" I'm smiles. I said, "I'm commanding the 3rd Cavalry, sir." He said, "Oh, I know that." He said, "How's your mother?" I said, "Just fine, sir." He said, "I'm afraid I didn't write your mother when your father died. I was so busy. I really can't remember." I said, "You did write her, sir. I know." He said, "Well, I'm glad I did. Is she getting along all right?" I said, "Yes." He said, "You getting along all right here? How are they treating you?" I said, [laughs] "Just fine, sir." Off they went and Van Fleet said to me, "Where did you know General Marshall?" I said, "I've known him all my life." [Laughs] He said, "Well, if you need anything, let me know." [Laughter] Isn't that funny?

S: Where were you when war broke out, sir, still at Fort Myer?

P: I was at West Point. No, I left Myer and went to West Point. I was a tactical officer up there. Everybody can remember what happened, where they were on Pearl Harbor Day, if you lived that early. We were at a cocktail party and somebody listened to the radio, was listening to the radio. Said Pearl Harbor had just been attacked. Said, "Oh, no. Come on. No way. This is an Orwell story or something. This was a drama."

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We knew pretty soon that wasn't so.

S: Was the course at West Point shortened to cope with the ...?

P: Yes, one year. Knocked off one year. And they also tried to train aviators there which turned out to be a bad deal. Too much pressure on the cadets to be able to be able to fly. They tried that for a while and gave up on it. They lost some cadets that way too. That was a bad idea.

S: What was the general sense in the army upon our entry into war? Great confidence, uh, something else?

P: That's a hard question. I don't know. I know that uh, personally I was very frustrated that I couldn't get out of West Point and join a unit. The superintendent, right after the war declared, went down to Washington and got an agreement that nobody could leave West Point unless he personally gave them his authority because he was afraid that they'd pull all of these talented officers because that was where a lot of talent was concentrated there in the instructor corps. So I didn't get out of there until June of '43. I got very frustrated about it. I went to see the Commandant two or three times and he told me one time, he said, "You come in here again I'm going to prefer charges against you. You are disloyal." I got the worst efficiency report I ever got in my whole life. The guy said I was disloyal, not interested in my job and stuff like that, which is not true at all. I didn't let up on the job, but I was frustrated.

S: Was that a common sentiment?

P: I'd say it was about 50-50. There were some guys that were perfectly content to stay there. Normally, not the tactical department but some of these English professors and history professors and so on. I'm ashamed to say it, but it's true. They didn't volunteer. We had a very happy

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two years at West Point as a matter of fact. Except for the frustration, there's lots of things to do around there. We'd go down to New York and over to Goshen to the races. Then we had parties ourselves and all the cadet activities we went to. They had lecturers and we could go to lots of those things, and they had great athletic facilities so we could play in the gym and we had basketball games among the officers and hockey games and all that kind of thing after hours. So it was a very interesting period and a lot of interesting, fine people there too, so it broadened my experience a lot with meeting all those instructors up there.

S: I'm surprised that you weren't plucked out of West Point.

P: I had several generals write me letters saying I ought to get out of there. Well, I couldn't get out. Said if I could get out, they'd give me a troop right away or something like that, you know. General Crittenberger [who] was commanding the armored division, wrote me a letter saying, "It's not good for your career. You better get out of there and come down here." Made me furious. [Laughter] I wrote him back a letter said, "See if you can get me out." Actually it turned out better than you expect because I was teaching tactics for one thing to the cadets, so you do a lot of studying when you teach. And in addition I just missed all the maneuvers. You know all those horrible Louisiana maneuvers everybody moans and groans about in that swampy country, mosquitoes and all that sort of thing. I just missed all those. So it's all right. I was lucky. [Chuckles]

C: Your son was born while you were up there?

P: Yes, he was born there.

C: Maybe this would be a good time to stop, General. We're about out of

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tape here. And then maybe you can start with the war another time. What do you think?

S: Can we arrange to meet again, General?

P: Yes.

End of interviewing session, November 24, 1987.

Beginning of interviewing session, January 7, 1988

S: General, thank you very much again. When we last spoke, you were speaking entertainingly of your time at the Military Academy, on the faculty there, I believe during the first year and a half or two of American involvement in the Second World War. Would you tell us something of the circumstances of your transfer to combat duty?

P: Yes. The tactical officers thought of themselves as an elite group. We were very highly selected. So three of us went into the commandant about three times. Marched in there, the three together, and requested that we be released. And the third time we went in there, he said, "Come in here one more time and I'm going to make sure you stay here forever." But it had some effect. Anyway, I was released in the summer of '43 and went immediately to Leavenworth to Command Staff School, which was an eleven week course where they poured everything at you just about as hard as they could. And I was fortunate. I had a good friend on the faculty, dear friend, and the night before school began I went to call on him. And he told me confidentially that the first five weeks they just threw all the papers away. You had homework every night. You had pop quizzes and everything. And he said, "We just can't handle it on the faculty, so we just throw it all away." But he said, I guess it's the fifth week, he said, "Boy, you knuckle down 'cause we're going grade practically all of them." Well, my two friends from West Point thought I was indifferent. I said to him, "Can I hand in a blank piece of paper?" He said, "Sure, we don't even look at 'em." So they thought I'd gotten indifferent on them, you know. [Chuckles] And they were working their heads off and I was going to the movies with my wife and all this kind of stuff. [I kept

saying] no problem about this. And so then the fifth week I hit it, and we had a class of 600 and I stood 9. [Laughs] I wasn't exhausted. I was feeling great. So I was very fortunate there. Took all the family there, so we had a nice time. Lived downtown in a little house that belonged to Murray Dickson who was pitcher on the St. Louis Cardinals, and his house was all full of pictures of the Cardinals and everything he'd won. It was a nice little house. Anyway I was ordered to command the Sixth Reconnaissance Squadron at Camp White, Oregon, and I got out there. It was at Medford, Oregon, which was a small town. And there was a division there and we were just a squadron attached to them. Medford was snowed under for quarters, rent houses. I couldn't find anything. Well, fortunately I didn't stay there too long. It was a good squadron. I had great admiration for my predecessor. But I only stayed there about two months, and they got ordered to patrol the Pacific coast for enemy submarines and things and I was detached fortunately and joined the 106th Cavalry at Fort Hood, Texas. And then again we couldn't find a place to live, but my wife Joey had a cousin there, so she stayed with this cousin for a while.

S: In Killeen?

P: [Yes] In Killeen. And the children stayed with their grandmother, Mrs. Leavell, here in El Paso. But that didn't last too long. The 106th Cavalry was the Illinois National Guard outfit and they had been doing nothing but acting as enemy for these tank destroyers. You know that was a big tank destroyer post at that time. And they were doing nothing but acting as enemy, and they hadn't been trained in their role that they were going to get and apparently they were dissatisfied with the leadership because they creamed off the whole top and they sent in four

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West Pointers. They sent Bernard Wilson as a colonel and me as exec and two squadron commanders, West Pointers. And I'm telling you that regiment didn't like us very much. [Laughs] We were getting tough with 'em, you know. And wringing 'em out real hard. And Bernard Wilson had been in World War I and was a very wise man, and he'd been chief of weapons and tactics at Fort Riley and had been through all army schools and so he was a brilliant soldier and a gruff old guy. And [he] had a lot of hobbies. He knew all about watches and clocks and could repair them. He knew all about weapons and everything. You know, head space was always a problem in those machine guns and he was perfect on it. But anyway, he was a good trainer for me, for me as his exec. And we had to do a lot of things, like we had to go 25 miles with a pack. You had your unit march 25 miles with a full pack in 8 hours, I guess it was. A pretty good workout, a very good workout. And so then after training there about two months I was put in charge of the advance detail. We weren't allowed to say where we were going or anything. You remember in those notes I referred to people so Mrs. Polk would know where I was. Things like that. We were in Brooklyn for about two weeks; something wrong with the shipping and then sailed for France on the old Aquitania. It was not escorted because it could go 20 knots which is faster than the German submarines could go, but that wasn't a very good feeling. There were about 10,000 on board and I'd made a rough estimate that the life boats would hold about half of them. [Chuckles] I cover that in those notes pretty well.

S: I recall your saying that the voyage was relatively comfortable or at least that the ship in its heyday was fairly comfortable.

P: Well, it had been but no, we were eight to a state room. We were doing

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what is called hot bunking. Two people to one bunk. [Laughs]

S: Well, that's not very comfortable.

P: No. That's not very nice.

S: And it was with the 106th?

P: Yes. I was advance detail. About ten of us went as advance detail to lay out the camp and get it started and get all the British and find out where the supplies were and where we drew supplies and rations and all that kind of thing. So it was a busy time. So then the regiment followed me by about two weeks, I guess, and we had things pretty well in order at that time. British are funny the way they set up a camp. First thing they build is the officers' mess. [Chuckles] It's a fact. And then they build some latrines and then they put up some officers' quarters and then they put up some tents for the soldiers. And you know you couldn't get coal or oil. We had peat. The American soldiers were so disgusted with peat, you know. They couldn't stand that stuff because all it did was glow. There is no flame to it. It just kind of glowed like the end of a cigarette, you know, and didn't put out much heat. We trained hard in England. There wasn't much else to do in the first place. So we'd go up on the Midhook moors and shoot our weapons and maneuver and that kind of thing. We had a lot of command post exercises. And Colonel Wilson's knowledge really paid off and he made the comment one time, just before Day D. He made the comment that, "This is a good regiment and if we just got about three days of quiet, front line duty so we could get all the nerves down to normal," said, "we'd be real good." And we did. We were very fortunate in that regard.

S: In your letters home, you paint a picturesque portrait of England during wartime. Could you amplify on that a little for the record?

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P: Well, you know, it's such a tight, neat little country with all the hedges. We were in the nice part of England, in middle England, near Chester. Chester is a very charming town. It's a two tiered star town, a beautiful little town, right near Wales. And we had a ... Liquor was rationed in England but it was rationed on the basis of the pre-war consumption, how much they used before the war. So there was an inn on the top of the mountain called The Cat and the Fiddle, and the British didn't have enough petroleum to get up there, so [laughs] we took it over in our jeeps. And it was a very good ... they had plenty of liquor and wine and very good food, so it became kind of our second officers' club. I'll never forget The Cat and the Fiddle; it was a great place.

S: I remember your writing to your wife about the china. Do you still have it?

P: Yes. We do. We still have it. I've got a dozen dessert plates, beautiful plates. It think it was Spode; I can't remember. We were near a place called Stoke-on-Trent. That's not quite right, but anyway there were three famous china factories there: Spode and a couple of others. And we went over there and got some one time. I was horrified at that place, though, because they had twelve-year-old boys working in there, working hard, working 10, 12 hours a day.

S: In manufacturing?

P: Yeah. Right in the manufacturing bit of it. Of course, a lot of the men had been drafted and left and so they were kind of short-handed. They said they were apprentices and they said, no, this was very common.

S: Was there much evidence of the war where you were billeted?

P: No. None at all where we were. They had a home guard there. And the British wouldn't mess with them. They thought they were kind of silly.

And they were kind of funny, but they were serious about it and so a couple of times we maneuvered against them just for the heck of it. And these old guys would turn out with their shotguns and things, you know, and they meant business. It was pretty good training 'cause there were ambushes and all that. Well, of course, when you went to London, it was all around you, all over the place. I got a leave in London for three days, stayed at the army hotel there, Columbia Hotel, right there on Hyde Park, and there was a raid every night. And a lot of batteries out there in Hyde Park and they'd all let go. It was very spectacular. I never heard of anyone getting shot down. Must have scared 'em off or something.

S: There were random flights over England?

P: Yeah, uh huh.

S: The V-1 had yet to be ...?

P: The V-1s were just starting about the time I was in there. I think they had one or two of them. And that was something else again, really scared people.

S: I would imagine by 1944 the British had felt they had come through the worse. Was there an edge to the British mentality at that point? A sense of great confidence, indifference, ...?

P: That's hard to say. They certainly welcomed us. You know we were told, everybody said, "overpaid, oversexed, and over here." [Laughter] We were told not to comment on the royal family or their funny, little railroads or their language. [Chuckles]

S: Was there admiration on the American side, that the British had come through?

P: We didn't see them very much, to tell you the truth. They were in a

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different part of England than where we were. Most of the British troops were down in the south part of England and we were in central England, so.

S: There wasn't much fraternization then?

P: No. We didn't really see them. We got some of the local people. For instance, we'd take a #10 can of mixed fruit, you know that peaches and apples and stuff and give it to somebody. They hadn't had anything like that. They didn't even have canned fruit. It was just wonderful for them. We were sick of it. I went to dinner five or six times with British couples that I met through these maneuvers, people around there. I think that I remarked in my notes: the women didn't have any stockings and their legs were all chill-blained. [Chuckles] Very ugly legs. And they didn't have any clothes to speak of either. Very poorly dressed and very conscious of it, as a matter of fact. But they had really suffered, really.

S: What I gathered from your letters, [there was] a fairly difficult regimen in England for Americans. Living conditions were I guess varied.

P: Yes. Well [in] England February, March, and April are pretty mean months as a rule. There's a lot of rain, not much snow, just miserable weather, fog and rain and that kind of stuff. Then along about May, it just gets beautiful. May and June in England are just super.

S: Hard work?

P: Yeah, we were working hard all the time. We did a lot of night maneuvers which paid off too.

S: Did you have any sense of what it was you were working hard to accomplish ultimately?

P: Yes. We were ... well. The senior officers - that is the squadron

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commanders, myself, and Colonel Wilson - were what was called "bigoted," "Bigoted" meant that you were in on the scheme and you knew what part you were supposed to play in it. Now they didn't tell you the grand scheme, but they gave you for instance the map of the beach you were supposed to land on and the road net behind it and what we were supposed to do. And we had a mission [that] scared the dickens out of us 'cause we were supposed to land at Utah and cut across Brittany and Normandy and go down and capture Quiberon Bay, as an independent mission to get the port facilities down there at Quiberon. You know that mission didn't work out at all, but we had maps how to get to Quiberon Bay and it looked to us like a pretty tough mission. But we had some things that were going to be attached to us, some tank destroyers and some artillery. I've often wondered what would have happened had we done that. [Laughs] Probably be dead!

S: What was the general sense in the command upon receiving your orders to ship out?

P: Well, to begin with, we were on a command post exercise somewhere up in the Moors, [in the] south of Scotland, and we got word about 4 in the afternoon, no more radio traffic of any kind. Before that we'd had periods of intense activity where we were told, "Send anything, just fill up the air with messages to each other" on the R&R assigned frequencies, and then we'd get a cut-off sometimes. Well, we got a cut-off, I guess it was June the 5th, and then that night that ended the CPX, we couldn't have any radios. So we sort of gathered in a temporary camp and that night we heard all these airplanes going north into Scotland, a huge number, and then we heard them coming south again. They had to go up to Scotland to form up, all the parachutes and everything. Well, we knew

that was it. There wasn't any doubt. That was too big to be a dress rehearsal. So we packed up and went back to our camp near Chester and got ready to go. And we were supposed to go to Southampton on D+4 and go across on D+6, but that slipped a bit because when they got over there and got in the hedgerows, they wanted more infantry. They didn't think there was much use for us over there until they got out of the hedgerows. So we didn't go down to Southampton until about D+10 and went in about D+14, as I remember. And it was very scary getting ashore, not from the enemy because we landed in a safe place, all right, so there was no shooting at us except there was a lot of shooting at night, anti-aircraft stuff. Like the Augusta was right out there in the bay, and it was letting go at night at all the enemy planes; there weren't too many, I don't think. Well, anyway, all the carnage of battle around there, you know: burned out tanks, broken LSTs, ammunition boxes. There weren't any American dead, but there were some German dead that hadn't been all cleaned up. Busted airplanes. Well, you know, really scary. Burned up trucks. Foxholes all around the place, you know. So Colonel Wilson was right. The night we got ashore two troops lined up at angles and fired at each other. That's how spooky we were. And headquarters company of the 106th Squadron, headquarters company sunk. Their LST hit a mine just out of Southampton and so they did beach it, but they lost all of their equipment and lost a few men. So they had to go back and refit and they lost the whole squadron staff and everything. So had all the line troops, so Colonel Wilson put me in charge of it, and all I had was an armored car and a jeep and a couple of real good radio operators, so I was running one squadron with nothing. It was very exciting. [Chuckles] Very hard. But the headquarters company and the commander showed up

again about two, three weeks later, so he took over his command and I went back to being executive officer. So I learned an awful lot in that period, and I was really getting ready to come in my own. It was wonderful experience. The early days we were fortunate in that we were sent from Carentan... . We were next to a division, but they hadn't closed all the way across the peninsula, and they were just about to turn around and start to go get Cherbourg when we got there. So we were spread out from about Carentan to the bottom of the peninsula, along Lessay we wound up on. I wish I had a map here. I should have one. But anyway it was a rather quiet sector. We had a double mission. We were to prevent any reinforcements from going to Cherbourg and similarly to prevent any breakout from Cherbourg. Well fortunately enough, neither aim was attempted by the Germans. They didn't try to reinforce Cherbourg and the Cherbourg people pulled back inside of it. So we had a very quiet, I guess you'd say, a very quiet ten days of frontline contact, but very slight contact. So what Bernard Wilson said was right: we were good after that. We were real good.

S: So your baptism of fire had yet to arrive. There were no scattered pockets of German resistance encountered?

P: A little bit that we cleaned up, but they'd just gotten lost or something. There wasn't any of this SS-type tough guys that we encountered later on, pockets of it. No, it was very easy, very easy mission. And then about the time we were to break out, I was pulled out of that job and given command of the 6th Cavalry. That was an interesting job because the month of August I had a frontline seat at the war because we were running this... well, one squadron was protecting 3rd Army headquarters and the other was flung all... a detachment of each

division. The 3rd Army had the divisions at Brest all the way to going across France in the other direction. The signal corps couldn't handle it. And this 6th Cavalry was a very unusual outfit. They had been in Ireland. They were supposed to go to North Africa, so they hadn't been cadred. They'd been together for a long time and so they had marvelous radio operators. They'd been sitting over there doing nothing else, you know. So we had this far-flung network. It was sort of modeled on Montgomery. [He] had the same outfit with his divisions that reported direct to him. The division commander didn't like it very much, and the corps commanders because we went over their heads. Didn't go through channels. Went straight to my headquarters at 3rd Army, and I was just stuck right up next to 3rd Army. We'd just deliver messages to the operations officer as they came in. We knew where every division was, what they were doing, and everything because we had a guy right there in the division headquarters. So I kicked around to that job. And they were old-line cavalry regiment. I hated to leave them, but Joe Fickett, their commander, came back, so then I was sent out to take command of the 14th, which was at that time at Brest. I didn't stay there very long. As I mentioned in my letters, General Patton sent me out in his airplane and when the 3rd Cavalry CO got captured, Colonel Drury, he sent his airplane out for me and I got the 3rd Cavalry. Well, the 3rd Cavalry was another different kettle of fish. They were so new it was ridiculous. The old 3rd Cavalry at Fort Myer had been sent to Benning, turned into tank battalions, so this 3rd Cavalry had just been activated about nine months before. They had great personnel. Most of them were drafted from northern New York and were steel workers and farmers, not from New York City, but from Syracuse and Albany, all that area around in there. They

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all worked in factories. They were tough guys. Really tough guys. And a lot of them Polish. Lot of Poles. And we had a lot of linguists. They all spoke Polish or German or something like that. Some German extraction, but several generations so they didn't have much feeling.

S: Was there a particular passion that those folks felt?

P: [Chuckles] They hated the Germans. The Poles really hated the Germans. I think most Americans, after you've been in combat a little bit, you know, you hate 'em. But it just came naturally to these Poles, so if you surrender to the 3rd Cavalry, you'd better be quick about it. It's not a nice thing to say, but there were some prisoners that tried to surrender that were shot and not just in the 3rd Cavalry either. We don't write about it very much. Although in that Overlord, Hastings other book that I'm now reading, he mentions it happened a good bit with the British army. In that book incidentally it's about the same as the Korean book. It's very much about the British army and very soft on Montgomery, which I didn't agree with.

S: Let me ask you something, sir, at the risk of sounding naive about it. There was a particular altruism about this war, but I wonder how much that infected the thinking of the individual American fighting man. In combat, I suspect all bets are off, and combat is combat regardless of cause, but aside from the actual fighting, was there a particular sense of mission?

P: Oh, I think very much so. Yes, uh huh. After a while, we could see the end. When we got in that race across France and banged into Siegfried Line, we could see the end. You know we didn't have a tour like they did in Korea or Vietnam. We weren't there for a year. We were there until we won the war. So "Get on with it" was sort of the attitude. Let's get

this dad gum thing over with. We were not accepted by the French in Normandy at all. The French were very neutral. They didn't know whether we were going to stay or not, I think. And they'd been under German occupation and so these farmers, they wouldn't help you at all. They weren't against you, but they wouldn't help you. Now we got a little further into France when we finally broke out of that beachhead and the French just overpowered us with wine and flowers and cheers and tell us there were some Germans down the road and things like that, you know. And these resistance guys turned out. You wondered if they'd just joined the resistance the day before. They all had some kind of resistance story, every man. [Chuckles] And you'd look into them, and it [would be] pretty shaky. But we were picking up pilots too that had been very well treated, had been concealed by the French, until we came along. I remember one pilot. He said, "Oh, don't get me. I'm happy." [Laughter] He had a girl friend in this farmhouse, drinking that stuff.

S: What about the political consciousness of the average American fighting man?

P: I don't think there was very much, no. And you see we were in the lead so often, we hardly ever got The Stars and Stripes. About all we did was listen to the radio and there wasn't too much news on the radio, so I don't think we had any reason to know about Roosevelt or the things at home or anything like that except from letters and The Stars and Stripes occasionally. No. It was just a job to do and they were very good at it. We got a compliment one time. I considered it a great compliment. We were up around Trier, in Germany, and we were hit by the 2nd SS mountain division, early, early in the morning. They didn't have any tanks with them, so we cleaned 'em up pretty easily. There wasn't much left of

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them either. It wasn't a big outfit. It wasn't a whole division or anything like it. Probably a good, big battalion was about all. But we captured a tank order of the Division S-3 and S-2, and they said, "The 3rd Cavalry will"

End of Tape #2, Side One

Beginning of Tape #2, Side Two

S: What about the orders that were captured from this SS mountain division?

P: Said that "The 3rd Cavalry will counterattack in 30 minutes with one tank company, followed 10 minutes later with another tank company." And it said - I won't name the division - it said, "Such-and-such infantry division will counterattack with one battalion in the late afternoon." Well, as events came out, I had one tank company hit them in 20 minutes and 10 minutes the next one, and this division counterattacked with one battalion the next day. [Laughs] So they had a pretty good feel for us, you know. They also said, "There are two outfits we don't like to be around because they harass us all the time. One's the 3rd Cavalry and the other's the 90th Division." I believed in being aggressive, you know, and we were spread out lots of times real thin, so I figured if we weren't aggressive, they were going to start picking on us, which they did very little of, but sometimes they did. But we also were along the Moselle in October I guess it was, of '44, and General Bradley moved his headquarters up to Luxembourg City. We were in front of them in Luxembourg City, on the Moselle, about ten miles in front of them. And so one of the colonels from the SC section, from the army group, came up

there, and we showed him the map and everything and he said, "What are those little circles there along the river?" And I said, "Those are recon platoons." He said, "How many people in a recon platoon?" I said, "Oh, there are supposed to be about 30, but we are down to about 25." And he said, "How far apart are they?" And I said, "Oh, three or four kilometers." He said, "Can you see each other?" I said, "No." He said, "What keeps the Germans from coming through?" "Well," I said, "Some came through last night." [Laughs] That got his interest. And so a little after that, we were relieved by the 83rd Infantry Division. [Laughs] That's quite a compliment I think.

S: Were the Germans that you encountered beaten fighters?

P: It was all kinds. Uh, the people that manned the Siegfried Line were very low class kind of soldiers. They were conscripts and some of them were sick and old or young, or something like that. They were just crouching in their concrete forts. But a sick man in a concrete fort can be kind of dangerous. He'll shoot at you and feel perfectly safe himself, you see, so they put the high class people in the mobile divisions. The Panzer divisions, they were high class troops, very high class, all of them. The Volksgrenadier divisions were sort of medium; they weren't too good. But they had usually a couple of SS in each rifle company. They were more afraid of the SS than they were of us almost. So they did an adequate job, but we got to know some of the Panzer divisions, and for instance the 11th Panzer Division was sort of the back-up fire brigade in front of 3rd Army. And when some fighting started, the 11th would show up. And so we were trying to break the secret switch line, and this new division came in and put them up against the Siegfried Line. I think it was the 94th Division, could be. Anyway,

this general said what he would plan to do was to take a battalion and have them capture a casemate every day, one a day. And I was right next to him and he had taken over a sector from us, so I kind of watched over them. And he asked me what I thought about it, and I said, "The generals don't want you to break this line." So I said, "I guess you are going to pull in the 11th Panzer Division in about three or four days." And sure 'nuf, [in about] three days they showed up and just clobbered this battalion that was trying to take this casemate. So that kind of slowed them down on that idea, but we had a very bitter winter. It was cold and rainy and tough, but we pretty much lived in the villages by this time.

It was kind of funny. My headquarters was outside of Thionville, a chateau by Count Dimitri, and we camped out. They had lovely, big park around the chateau, and so we all camped out there like we'd been doing all the time. And so it started raining in September, so the First Sergeant said, "Can the mess move into the chateau?" I said, "Yeah, move in there." Well, we gradually began moving into the chateau. [Laughter] In a few weeks everybody was in the chateau. And it was funny. We thought there was something funny going on because Count Dimitri owned one of the big steel mills in Uckange, which was down the river, and we noticed after a while that the steel mill never was fired at nor was our chateau. And we figured he had relatives or friends on the other side and was sort of half German, half French, you know, having lived there in Alsace all that time. But we didn't trust him worth a damn. He'd come up and visit us once in a while. But after that, we lived in dirty, little villages most of the time. Comfort better than safety a lot of times.

S: You spent much of that winter in and around the chateau on the Moselle?

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P: We spent most of it We crossed the Moselle on about the 14th of November and so we were between the Saar and the Moselle 'til March, moving up and down as attacks went on or the battle would sway around. So we moved up and down the Saar. Got to know that area pretty well, but we didn't break that switch line until I guess it was about March. Then the war started rolling.

S: To what extent, sir, was your unit affected by the loss of the logistical train or at least your having outrun your logistical train?

P: Well, it was very costly in terms of what we could have accomplished because the 7th Armored Division ran out of gas, tank by tank behind us when we were going up to the Moselle. That was the first of September, and we actually had one reconnaissance troop, commanded by a Captain Jackson, who broke through and went all the way to the Moselle and Thionville, captured the bridge intact, got wounded in the process, and they had to call him back. [That happened] before I had taken command of the regiment, just before. But every time we got running, we would have halt lines, the reason being that we didn't have enough gasoline to keep going. And so the 3rd Army got smart about it after all that mix-up in France. So really the logisticians said how far we could advance more than the enemy resistance. Not that there wasn't enemy resistance once in a while, but we were so powerful by that time, we could overcome it.

S: Well, was there any disenchantment with Patton?

P: The soldiers liked him, yeah. No, I don't think so. His speech before we got into action I think antagonized about ten percent of the command, 'cause it was so profane. It wasn't the gallant leader that some people thought should be leading us, you know. But I think ninety percent of the soldiers thought it was just great. Right down their alley. I wrote

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an article in the Army magazine just about Patton's stories.

S: Yes, sir. December, 1975.

P: Yeah. 'Cause I'd known him since I was a little boy. A great friend of my father's and so forth, been stationed together and so on. So, no I don't think so. The only ...I heard Patton ... Patton didn't like [Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell] Smith, Eisenhower's chief of staff, and he didn't like Eisenhower very much I don't think, although he got along with him. He made a point of trying to get along with him. But Smith was Eisenhower's hatchet man. He was rough. There was a fair amount of hiring and firing of division commanders and brigade commanders in those days, and if you didn't measure up... In 3rd Army if you got overrun, you got relieved. That was just about the size of it. As you know, in the Battle of the Bulge the 14th Cavalry - was it the 14th? yeah, no, I'm not sure - 102nd Cavalry, yeah. They got overrun, although they fought like hell, individual troops. But both the commander and the exec got relieved. That's about it. Overrun, they don't want you any more. You've lost the confidence of your soldiers, was the attitude. So I knew doggone well that if we ever got overrun, I was gone. [Laughter]

S: Do you think that was a salutary precedent? Or salutary policy?

P: I can't really say, although we accepted it. We understood it, understood the reason for it. General Patton visited us quite often, more than anybody else 'cause he had commanded the 3rd Cavalry. There was a collective nervousness every time he'd visit us because they thought he was going to put us in a hard place. Sometimes just a social visit or just see how we were getting along, you know. Sort of go over the situation, very nice about it. Wanted to know if we needed anything, that kind of thing. I got in trouble about it once. Well, I knew

General [Hobart G.(Hap)] Gay, chief of staff, very well too. He'd been in the 3rd Cavalry. And so General Gay used to call me up every week or so; wanted to know how we were getting along. Or if we had some fight or something, he'd call me up that evening. Wanted to know about it; wanted to know how many people we'd lost and so on. So we had a fight and he said, "I notice you lost five tanks." I said, "Yeah, we got about half the men back." And I said, "We dished it out to them pretty hard too." And he said, "Well, what do you need?" And I said, "Sure would like to have five tanks and about three tank crews." So he says, "On their way." [Laughs] So the next afternoon here comes five tank transporters with five tanks and a bunch of soldiers, and the corps headquarters heard about it and they said, "Just what in the world is going on?" Then I told them about talking to General Gay, and they said, "You're not supposed to do that. You are supposed to go through channels." [I said] "Well, he asked me. I'm sorry." "Well, don't do that again."

[Laughs] You know, General Gay was real good, but you know, another story on General Gay was: I was coming into my command post late in the afternoon in my jeep and there was a wire truck from corps coming down the road, throwing wire off the side, you know. And this sargeant running the wire team said, "Are you Colonel Polk?" Said, "Yeah." "Oh, for God's sake, General Gay is doing a clear the line. Been lashing me down the road since early morning getting some wire in to you." I said, "Hook it into the switch board." He said, "No, no. It's right here." [Laughter] Right on the truck. So he cleared the line back to General Gay and gave me the phone. And General Gay said, "Have you seen The Stars and Stripes this morning." I said, "No, sir. I haven't seen it for four or five days." He said, "Well, there's a front page story about

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the Maid of Orleans rides again with the 3rd Cavalry." [Laughs] Did I put that in those notes?

S: No, sir.

P: I didn't? And he said, "Is that true?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "Well, it's a pretty lurid story. Her name is Marcia. A Lieutenant Downs picked her up in Orleans. And she rides a bicycle ahead of them into town sometimes to see if there're any enemy around there." And I said, "I didn't know about that, sir." And he said, "Listen, Polk," he said, "Maid of Orleans will return to Orleans tonight, do you understand?" And he says, "If you got any more of them, you better clean them out, too." Well, turns out there was another girl riding with ... This was a front line reconnaissance platoon. So I don't know, maybe women have a place in combat. [Laughs] A few of them. Ordinarily he was very good to me, but he didn't like that story at all.

S: While we're on the subject of personnel, sir. Have you seen the new Army magazine? There's an interesting characterization of General Van Fleet.

P: Yeah, I did see that.

S: What do you think of that?

P: I think that's good. I'm not sure I read it all, but I knew him very well. Yeah, he's a fine man. I was attached to him in World War II a number of times, two or three times. And then I was his G2 in Korea for a while. A man of great character, great character. He'd listen to his staff, listen carefully, ask questions, wouldn't make up his mind very quickly, but when he made it up, by God, that was it. There wasn't any quibbling or ... You carried it out. We had a funny thing happen that's worth putting in here. You know he led the leading infantry regiment to shore at Utah Beach. I guess you read that. And finally he got the 90th

Division, and they had had about three generals relieved by this time and one promoted. They'd had a bunch of generals through there. It was a good division, too. I liked them. But the first day he took command of the 90th Division he had his regimental commanders and me - 'cause I was attached at that time - and said he'd been talking to General Walker, the corps commander, and that we hadn't taken a prisoner in about three weeks along the Moselle. And by God, he wanted some prisoners. So he said, "Each regiment will get me a prisoner tonight." No, it was along the Saar. We had to go in the Siegfried Line. So, uh, we had several plans, so I went home and said, "OK, we'll execute Plan B." And it was in Uckange. And the idea was that we'd send a Lieutenant Cartwright and a sargeant across the river in a boat and we'd stack everything around them. We'd have box barrages prepared and some tanks and some anti-aircraft guns with 50 caliber, multiple 50s. We had 'em protected every possible way. And so Cartwright took off and just about that time they called me from headquarters. I was down with the troop. And said General Van Fleet was in my headquarters. That was unheard of. No general ever came in our headquarters at night. And I said, "I'll be right back." And they said, "No. No. He wants to come down." I said, "Oh, my God. Keep my ass free." And he says, "I can't. He's coming down. I've got to bring him down." Well, the god damn thing was all screwed up! And finally about the time Van Fleet came in this beat-up place, dirty, all the soldiers were dirty and tin cans around, horrible looking outfit, greasy uniforms. And just about then Cartwright says, "I've got a prisoner. Let it go." So everything fired. [Imitating sounds of explosives] It was a hell of a display. And General Van Fleet walks in just about this time. And he says, "What's going on?" And I

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said, "well we've got a prisoner and we're protecting him coming back."
"Great." So Cartwright comes in with this German who didn't know a thing. A dumbkopf. And General Van Fleet and I interviewed him right there on the spot, you know. This guy didn't know anything. So the next morning we had another meeting down there and nobody else had gotten a prisoner. And General Van Fleet said, "I think we're going to have Colonel Polk teach you infantrymen how to patrol." Well, boy, that went over. They were friends of mine, you know. That really went over. [Laughter] So we walked out and Ray Bell says, "Jimmy, you son-of-a-bitch, you had that guy stockpiled all the time. I'm not even sure he's a German." [Laughter] "You've been keeping him for two weeks for just such an occasion." I said, "No I didn't. We really captured him." You know those three guys don't believe me yet. I said, "Why didn't you think of it?" General Van Fleet thought I was great after that, just great. We were his favorite outfit. [Chuckles] And that's how I got to be his S2 in Korea. I was S2 of ??? Corps and when his S2 got sick or something, why, he pulled me down. I always thought he never had any bad habits or any bad faults. He didn't drink and he didn't smoke and he wasn't profane. Very positive, but not profane. But after being his S2 and eating in his mess, I found out he was a gourmet. Loved to eat. He was kind of fat. He always worried about his weight, and he loved to eat. I remember he said one time, "What's the use of being the commanding general of the 8th Army if you can't have steak every night." [Laughter]

S: He had his priorities right.

P: [Chuckles] Yeah.

S: Sir, have you ever stopped to think who the most important influences on your own leadership style have been?

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P: That's a hard question, but I know Lt. Col. Charlie Gerhart, who was my squadron commander in the 8th Cavalry here, a great athlete and a great guy, He wouldn't put up with anything. He didn't have any incompetent people around him, I'm telling you: he made you work. And I admired him, and I admired his methods and things. I learned an awful lot from that guy. And then I would say Colonel Wilson was the other one that really influenced my career. Charlie Gerhart used to take us on tactical rides, for instance, as lieutenants, and he'd pull up on a hummock or something and say, "You've just been fired on by a machine gun right over there. What do you do? You're dead. What do you do?" [Chuckles] Stuff like that, and he'd outline. And we'd go and get on a little hummock and he'd say, "Now how are you going to put your platoon in here in a defensive position?" Or "Where are you going to put your base of fire with one platoon and take your other platoon around the flank? Which flank are you [going around]? How far, deep are you going? Are you going to charge? Are you going to advance on foot?" You know. Made you think about things, and I never knew another officer in the cavalry that did that kind of thing. None of my troop commanders when I was a lieutenant did anything like that. But he had been in World War I and was still eager and active. Some of the captains in the 8th Cavalry had been in World War I and they were still captains 15 years later. They were just captains 15 or 16 years later, but they didn't have any ambition. They weren't going any place and they knew it. Just putting in their time. They all got weeded out pretty fast when we started hard maneuvers and stuff. They got weeded out real quick.

S: Do you know General [Walton H.] Walker?

P: Yes, very well.

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S: Can you characterize him?

P: He was uh..., well General Patton said he was his best corps commander. He was a good tactician. He was very poor with the media, very poor. He kind of acted like Patton, but he couldn't quite pull it off. He'd pull his chest up and walk around and talk tough. It wasn't natural to him. The media didn't like him, and he didn't like the media. So he got a bad press, almost without exception. You read about him and you get bad things. He also had a chief of staff named Collier, a bald guy. Called him Curly, Curly Collier. Mean as hell. And I have a very hard time getting to General Walker if I had something I had to see him about 'cause Collier would say, "Tell me. I'll take care of it." But on the other hand, Walker was kind of a front runner, so I got the word out that if he appeared anywhere in my sector, let me know right away 'cause I wanted to get to him and talk to him. So if I'd catch him out alone in his jeep with a couple of MPs or something, we'd sit down on a log and talk things over and I'd show him my situation and tell him what I needed. "I need some artillery up here, General Walker. My three little batteries can't cover this whole front." He'd say, "All right. I think that sounds reasonable. I think we can find a battalion for you." Next day I got a battalion. So if you could get him alone, he was almost boyish. Very, very nice guy, but in a crowd he wasn't at all. He just reacted wrong to a lot of people. He did something else for me. I don't remember what the occasion was, but I think it was around Merzig. It was about February, cold and mean, and I was eating the hell out of somebody about something. I noticed somebody called attention and turned around and there was General Walker in my CP. [He] got in there without us knowing it, so I raised hell about that later, too, but he had heard me

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going after this guy. And we talked over our situation and he said, "Come out to the jeep with me." Said, "I want you to do me a favor." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "My airplane will pick you up at Etain tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock and take you to London and I want you to stay there a week and I'll send the plane for you." Isn't that nice? The nicest thing? Well, he modified it later; just flew me to Paris and there was a regular Paris - London ..."

S: This was R&R?

P: [Yes]. R&R. Just thought I was up too damn tight, you know, getting to me, so said it was time I took a little leave. He was very good to me. As a matter of fact General Walker himself recommended me to be a Brigadier General in March of '45 and General Patton approved it and it went to General Bradley and he disapproved it. He said I was too young. So Bradley is not one of my favorites really. [Chuckles]

S: What do you think of that decision in retrospect. Turned out to not have had

P: Well, it's a very nice thing to have on your record, you know. But it was quite a while before I got to be a general. As a matter of fact I got busted from a colonel to a lieutenant colonel after the war was over. They had a two bust. One was: colonels last made were busted to lieutenant colonel, and then they changed the routine and said that the more junior on the permanent list were busted. That's when they got me.

End of Tape #2, Side Two

Beginning of Tape #3, Side 1

S: Sir, as far as I can see, sir, there were at least two major actions in which you were involved in your time along the Moselle. There was [the] Saarburg engagement. Can you say something about that?

P: Actually we weren't the attacking unit to go across the Saar into Saarburg, but we were spread out so that the 90th Division could concentrate, so it was very shaky. We were all the way from the Moselle, the switch line, all the way down almost to Saarburg. We had about 25 miles of front line. We were reinforced a little bit, so that the Germans got kind of aggressive in that period. So every morning we had to make sweeps and find people and so forth. We had some people hurt too. I don't know. The tougher one was crossing the Moselle, and we were very deeply involved in that one because first we had to be sure that the west bank of the Moselle was clean. So we had a number of little actions there and a very constant patrolling and working hard at it to keep it clean so that the Germans would be surprised. They wouldn't be able to say that the 90th Division had moved up. The 90th Division was operating through us. So then when the 90th Division crossed the river, it took them about a day; then we crossed right behind them and we turned left on a sweep between the Saar and the Moselle north while the 90th Division curved south around Metz. So we were diverging. There was a lot of enemy territory that nobody touched. So we had the job of cleaning that up. And so we had some tough little fights. And then we blundered into the ... uh, well, right after we got across and got ourselves a perimeter next to the 90th Division, from the Moselle around to their left unit, they got counterattacked. They got counterattacked

hard. Our soldiers started burying their German weapons, their pistols. [Laughs] That's how nervous they were; it looked real bad. It looked like we were going to get hit awfully hard, but actually we weren't. We were lucky in that, except for a lot of little fights. We were lucky until we blundered into the Siegfried Line, the switch line. That's the line between the Moselle and the Saar. We didn't know anything about it. Apparently nobody else did or at least it never got to us anyway. We just blundered into that and took a lot of casualties. Pulled back out of it and it was a very tough situation there. And we got pretty damn familiar with that Siegfried Line and we had a plan to break it, as a matter of fact, that Division didn't accept. We thought it could be done. We thought if they helped us with some things, the battalion engineers, for instance, all the demolition guys and so forth, we thought we could break it. But nobody ordered us to, so you don't just volunteer for something like that. [Chuckles] Then I mentioned this attack, this fight we had with the Second SS Mountain. That was quite a fight, too. Most of the time it was the small unit actions, though. We never, for instance, had a troop wiped out or anything. We got nibbled at all the time, which wasn't so bad because you could replace people or they'd get wounded and come back and that sort of thing. I found out the hard way that people seriously wounded are not much good, and I don't blame them. If they'd gone back as far as evacuation hospital and stayed there a while and get some penicillin and clean up their wound and brought 'em back up, they kind of felt that they had paid their debt. And so I was very sympathetic with them. My solution finally was that they must be given a safer job than the one they had. So as little as, for instance, ...if a guy had been in the recon platoon and he went to the mortar

platoon or went to troop headquarters, he felt safer. I had an MP platoon and by the end of the war they were all wounded veterans, and I'd just send the MPs up with the recon troops, you know. They weren't trained MPs; they were just our MPs. We didn't have authorized MPs. And my headquarters company was pretty much the same way. Some, of course, you've got to keep, like the good radio operators and that sort of thing. But the cooks and everybody else. So if we ever came under fire, artillery fire or something, the whole troop collectively shook, you know. [Chuckles] So I learned that one. And it worked very well, so the morale was maintained pretty high.

S: How bad a blow did the Battle of the Bulge deal to morale? Your own letters reflect the general sense in the fall of '44 that the war well might be over.

P: Yeah. So it was a bitter disappointment in that respect. Yes. That's true. And again we were lucky we were involved in the middle of that one because I learned later... Well, the second evening of the battle the 62nd of corps called me up and said the 11th Panzer was going to hit me on the nose the next morning. And I said, "What help are you going to send up?" And they said, "We haven't got any." I said, "You better get that corps headquarters mobile if what you say is true 'cause we're gonna go right on by you." No way we can stand off 11th Panzer, but I found out later that they were reading German codes and that Rundstedt had issued such an order and he was overruled by Hitler. Said, "No, I don't want to broaden it that much. I want you to go deep not broad." And so I was sort of grateful to Hitler. [Chuckles]

S: That must have made for quite a sleepless night.

P: Yes, it was. [Laughs] You bet you. You know recon people don't dig

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much. They don't ever like to dig, but they were digging that time.

S: When did that confidence that the war, that the end was near, begin to revive?

P: When we crossed the Rhine, that surely was it. Although we were worried; I was personally worried because we were in the heart of Germany by that time and stories were out about werewolves and they were going to be sniping at us and all that kind of thing. So the 5th Division crossed the Rhine and we went into a perimeter and we came across behind them and then punched out in front of them going up towards Bamberg, in that area. And we thought that we were going to get a lot of resistance. A lot of those villages they had a stockpile of panzerfaust and they had made barricades at the street entrances of those little stone villages, you know. They never put the barricades in place. They left the panzerfaust stacked there beside the barricade. Nobody shot a one at us I don't think. So you know, they'd quit by that time. SS didn't quit. So the only thing you'd run into would be an ambush or a rifle company that had two SS sticking their guns in their neck, you know. But they came in very fast and the SS would get out. Very hard to catch them.

S: Where did you find yourself on V-E Day?

P: In Austria, at a place called Dillengen. We had led the corps all the way to ???, but it was kind of a picnic. It was fun. We had several ambushes, but that was about all. I never will forget... we lost... just about two days before that, we actually stopped fighting, reached our objective about the 5th of May. But the day before that, going down the road, and the first two platoons made a wrong turn and the troop commander was following the second platoon and so he put the third platoon in the right direction and told the others to turn around and

come back and follow. Well, turned out that this lieutenant commanding the third platoon had been there about three days. You know, put him in the back and with bad luck he all of a sudden got in the front. Well, he got ambushed and the whole crew got killed, and it never would have happened, you know. These guys could smell ambushes when you've been around there very long or they'd be dead. It never would have happened with either one of the other platoons. I always felt awful bad about that. Just bad luck. You feel bad about a lot of things like that that stick in your mind. Like a guy named George Swanson, Major Swanson, came to us from 3rd Army. He wanted to get mixed up in the fight. And a splendid officer, and by God he'd been there about three days and he was standing, watching some engineers repair a bridge, and one shell came in and killed him. I had to phone back to 3rd Army and say, "I'm sorry to tell you, but Major George Swanson's dead." Just funny luck like that. Bill Darby was killed that way, you know, standing around a crossroad. You should never stand around a crossroad, as a matter of fact. And he, I don't know ... he had no business standing around there watching those engineers fix that bridge. Go up and take a look and get away from it, you know.

S: The impression I get from your letters is that your heart was hardening toward the enemy. The terms you use characterizing the enemy become a little, uh ... stronger.

P: I'm sure that's true, yes. [Smile in voice]

S: But I guess your heart never hardens toward your own casualties.

P: No, you can never get used to that, no. Never can. You remember the nice things or the funny things, 'though, when you get together with some other guys you know. We had this reunion of the 3rd Cavalry up here, you

know, and it was all funny stories, funny events, things like that. Almost always. Like we reviewed our lieutenant colonel getting captured on the Moselle by a spy patrol. That was Les Cross; he was at the reunion, so he reviewed it for us. [Laughter] I do a lot of reading. It still interests me, and a lot of times I disagree with the authors. Sometimes they get things wrong. I don't bother ...unless I'm doing a book review, I don't bother to do anything about it. Next question.

S: O.K., sir. Was the relief unmitigated? Was there any sense of anti-climax? Any sense of being cut adrift when it was all over?

P: No, not really. I got sick personally, I got sick. I got pretty sick. I ran a fever and everything, and sick about two or three days. I was down to about 140 pounds and not eating very much. I couldn't stand the C rations at that point or the K rations either. And so when I recovered all right, I asked the doctor what was wrong with me, and he said, "You were just emotionally drained out. It was all over, and you were free of this awful responsibility and you just, you just cracked up a little bit, to tell you the truth." But one of the odd things was that on the 19th of May we got orders to clear the mountain passes to Trieste and they attached an infantry battalion to us and an artillery battalion and a tank destroyer battalion, and the company engineers loaded us up. In other words, they expected trouble. And I thought that we might have some discipline problems. I was worried. Particularly that infantry battalion. I wasn't too worried about my people. It was funny. The funniest thing was that everybody sort of welcomed it. You know. They are tired of laying around. It was the funniest thing. Everybody was kind of joyous about it. It was the funniest reaction in the world. I totally didn't expect it. So off we go. Actually we didn't know; we had

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very funny orders. We didn't know if we whether we were going to hit Titoists or ... what is the other guy? Begins with an M anyway.

S: I'm thinking Mikhailovic.

P: Something like that. Or Germans. We didn't know who the heck we were going to run into. Well, it turned out the passes were pretty clear. There were German refugees coming back, soldiers, so we picked up a number of them. And then we met the British, and they had a whole brigade of Germans camped and they had some guards around them. So we took over the guards for awhile, took over guarding these guys for a while until the British could get straightened out. And I was told later by a German officer, he said, "You know, I couldn't believe the way your guys were guarding us." Said, "I was sitting down in a chair and the officer of the day would come up and they'd slouch up and talk for a while. And then the officer of the day would go on to the next one. Nobody was saluting anybody. Nobody was checking their weapons. I thought it was the sloppiest guard I ever saw. But I will say this: I was afraid to make a run for it because they'd shoot me dead." [Laughter] That was the attitude, you see. Still combat attitude. Nobody salutes anybody in combat or actually stands at any kind of rigid attention or anything. Talk things over, something like that. But he said, "I could tell they knew what they were doing." [Laughs] But that didn't last very long actually, and we turned around and came back into the 3rd Army area.

S: You didn't have any contact with Russians?

P: No, we never did because we were pulled back from the Steyr River, back to Gemunden and the 70th Division took it over, ...some numbered division, again I can't remember. I did go up and see the Russians later on and talk to them and so forth, but... General Walker invited me to go

to a party. You know there's another legend that goes around that's simply not true and that is that the 2nd Cavalry captured the Spanish Riding School; and they made it into a movie! My 3rd Cavalry ran right past the Spanish Riding School; we didn't even know it was there. The idea that George Patton had sent this task force out to get the white Lipizzanos. That's a lot of stuff. The 2nd Cavalry believes it. It always irritates us in the 3rd Cavalry to hear them talk about that thing. And actually after the war was over, General Walker invited me back to the Spanish riding school. They hadn't been bothered. They'd moved out of Vienna and moved west, in some little town. Anyway, they put on a drill just for me! Count Padarsky led them around, and the Countess sat up in the stands with me. Just the two of us, and they went through the whole drill. She was a very charming woman. Spoke very good English, and she had on one of those pretty Bavarian hats and had a lot of silver medallions and things on it. I said, "Gee, that's pretty. Where can I get something like that?" She laughed and took her hat off and said, "Well, that's for winning the downhill at Garmisch." She was a ski champ, which I didn't know. [Chuckles] She had all these little things on her hat. And I said, "Well, you better be careful driving around here with that hat on or walking around, 'cause one of my soldiers will snatch it off your head just as sure as the world." Going by in a jeep, 'cause we'd had some complaints about that, that soldiers were snatching these Germans' hats. [Chuckles]

S: That was all with a view to the great homecoming. When did that happen for you?

P: Uh, actually I got home on my wedding anniversary, November 7. Yeah.

S: How long had it been?

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P: Well, a year and a half, I guess. A little more. Almost two years. I left in January and got back in November. Two years less three months. But after the war we got a territory to sort of watch over. Military government teams which actually did the ... tried to do the running of it, but we were the security and made sure everybody behaved and picked up weapons. We'd pick up people and process prisoners and all that sort of stuff. But one of the most onerous jobs I got was looking after a Jewish DP camp, and I'll tell you that's a story in itself. I ought to write a book about that. In the first place the people were kind of crazy and they were starved. And we had about 5, [or] 6,000 in this Hitlerjungen Camp, very nice camp as a matter of fact. Not only a camp. It was a beautiful brick sort of campus. And so the reason it started there was that a trainload of them going to Dachau were strafed by an American airplane. Knocked out the engine, and somebody finally turned 'em loose and they were right by this Hitlerjungen camp, so that started it. We had about 11 rabbis, and the head rabbi told me, "There isn't a decent person in this camp. We are all felons or we wouldn't be here. We've all lied, cheated, stolen. I'm amongst them."

S: I don't understand.

P: To survive.

S: Oh, I see.

P: To survive the holocaust. They were the survivors of the holocaust. We had to be felon almost to survive. Liars, cheats, steals. So he said, "You must forgive some of the things they do here." And it was a very mobile population because there were about four or five such camps in Germany, such rendezvous, and they were all looking for their children or their relatives. We never knew on any given day how many people we had.

They were free to go any place they wanted, and a lot of 'em had walked or they'd get some cars. The trains started to run slowly.

S: Where had they originated? You said they were on their way to Dachau.

P: I don't know where the train had started. I can't remember, but it wasn't far from Dachau. It was only about 30, 40 miles. But that was right at the tailend of the war, but we weren't allowed to impose any discipline on them. And, for instance, I had my MP platoon, which I mentioned earlier, outside the gate, and you know, tried to control things in a nice way. But they were undisciplined and food crazy. We were feeding them about 5,000 calories a day, and they'd puff up real fast, get fat very quickly, but they were very prone to diseases, particularly pneumonia and colds and that kind of thing. A lot of them died. We had a hospital with American personnel in it, but we had pneumonia problems and measles and things like that. They weren't cleanly. I'm not saying that I'm against them at all, just trying to try to make you understand what kind of people we were dealing with.

S: What kind of guidance did you have to cope with this?

P: Well, we had just to get 'em healthy and feed 'em up and house them properly and get them things they needed like sewing machines and carpenter tools and shoes, shoe machines to make shoes with, and so forth. This group I found out wouldn't do menial work. Wouldn't dig. So we had to get Germans in there to do the hard digging work. You know you'd bust a pipeline or something like that, stopped up toilet. They wouldn't fool with them. But they were great on cabinet work and weaving and shoes and that kind of thing. I talked to to the rabbis about that and they said they never had dug.

S: What was their native language?

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P: Mostly German or Yiddish. Language wasn't much of a problem. And I had a lot of soldiers that spoke Yiddish. Had 'em speak German. If you can speak German, you can get along pretty well in Yiddish too. I didn't realize that, but there are many common words. I didn't realize 'til then. But we had General Patton and General Eisenhower came to visit the camp one day. And that wasn't a happy occasion either because as I say I was not allowed to have anybody inside the camp. So I had my camp MPs - we had about 50 of those guys, trying to keep order and so forth, their own people. They had arm bands. - The camp had a ...you drive in and came around a circle and there was a flag pole there. And so all the 5,000 Jews would gather, assemble around the flag pole and the MPs were holding the circle. And in drives an MP jeep and then an open Mercedes with General Patton and General Eisenhower in the backseat. Well, the Jews gave an animal roar. It just sounded like a bunch of wild animals. And broke the lines and all and came in on Eisenhower. Threw me right up against his car. He turned to me and says, "Can't you control this rabble?" And it frightened him badly, and then he realized I knew he was frightened and then he realized General Patton was not frightened and that he knew Eisenhower was frightened, and then he got mad. And he stayed mad. Oh! I couldn't do anything right. Boy, I really got it. I thought I was going to get reduced to a captain. All he had to do was a stroke of the pen, and I was going to be back to my permanent rank. Then they finally left, leaving some orders. I got plenty of guidance that day, I'll tell you. But when they left, General Patton turned to me aside and said, "This has been one of the most distasteful days in my life."

S: I wonder whether there wasn't a double meaning to that?

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P: I think so, too. Yeah. But then the sequel to it was about four days later my MPs, outside the gate of course, caught the head rabbi and the #2 rabbi with a truckload of hindquarters going up to Munich to sell them. We'd set up a slaughterhouse there, or whatever you call it, for the kosher people. I can't remember whether they don't eat the hindquarters or the forequarters. I think they don't eat the hindquarters.

S: They don't eat the hindquarters.

P: Yeah, I guess that's it. Anyway, had a truckload of hindquarters going up there to sell them. Well, stopped the truck and saw what it was, and then they started giving the rabbi a hard time and he starts sassing them. And so they jerked him out of the truck, pushed him around a little bit, and one of them drove the truckload of meat back to the camp 'cause they weren't all orthodox at all. And the other one drove the rabbi, put him in our little jail. We captured a little German lock-up in one of these little villages. And so the word got out awful fast because there was great sympathy for these Jews and Eisenhower was very sympathetic, quite conscious of the political problems involved which probably I wasn't. But anyway, so we got orders right away from SHAEF to release him and not to pursue any charges. So we released him. So then the next day the inspector general of SHAEF, Brigadier General, Inspector General of the whole damn American outfit, arrives on one of those little trains they have, in the railroad station they have there at Grafelfing and I'd lined up my 30 MPs. They were going to finger the two that had done this. So they got the rabbi and this Brigadier General and my MPs looked magnificent. All wounded veterans, big tough guys, and you know they had white faces and oh, they looked so pretty, yellow scarves. And so the

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Brigadier General said to me, "Colonel Polk, can you identify the two men who did this?" I said, "No, sir, I haven't tried because there are not going to be any charges filed so I didn't try to find out who it was." Well, he said, "We will." So he gets the rabbi and he goes down the line and he says, "That one?" Said, "No." "Was it that one?" He says, "No." "Was it that one?" Says, "No." [Laughter] Went all the way down the line. Finally that rabbi knew this wasn't going to be good news for him. [Laughs] So the rabbi says, "Must have been some other MPs." And I said, "Yeah, it must have been." I knew damn well they were my MPs. And so the Brigadier General gets back on the train to go back and he said, "Well, apparently it wasn't your MPs but let me tell you something, Colonel Polk. Don't you let it happen again. You understand?" [Laughs] I really had a time with that crowd, I'll tell you.

S: How long did that last?

P: Well, I left in November. My exec ... the 3rd Cavalry headquarters or what was left of it was responsible for it. So a guy named Logan took it over when I left. It was a problem, gosh.

End of Tape #3, Side 1

Beginning of Tape #3, Side 2

P: Practically none of them wanted to stay in Germany. And you know, there was some inhibitions about going to Israel at that time. They were sneaking down there, you remember? So they couldn't go to Israel, and if they couldn't go to Israel they wanted to go to the United States. So they were disgruntled about staying there in that camp. And they

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couldn't see any immediate end to it nor could I promise them any immediate end to it. Although Eisenhower kind of inferred that he'd get 'em out of there, but I don't think he ever did anything about it. I don't know. But it was a very difficult problem for them. They were kind of state-less people. They'd lost everything in Germany or Russia or Poland or wherever they'd been. I found another thing, too, that kind of surprised me was that the orthodox didn't like the reformed who didn't like the just plain Jews, the ...third

S: The conservatives.

P: The conservatives.

S: Yes, sir.

P: And there were some Jews who just didn't have any religion and they didn't like each other very much. And then the Polish Jews didn't like the German Jews very much. Are you Jewish?

S: Yes, sir.

P: Well, you know all this, but I learned it the hard way, you know, the real hard way. These poor people. I'm taking it over. They wouldn't cooperate with each other. Pretty soon we had to have one big [council with representatives]: one was conservative, one was orthodox and ...

S: Is that right, sir?

P: Yeah, and we had to build a ritual pool for the orthodox.

S: That's awfully accommodating, it seems to me.

P: Well, we had to do everything we possibly could. As I say we set up a slaughterhouse. The orthodox were the most difficult. It's very hard to be an orthodox Jew. I didn't know that. It really is. Their food is so special, and their habits are different and everything. I was very sympathetic. We all were sympathetic, but it sure was ... We tried to

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run 'em through their rabbis, you know, but the rabbis didn't agree with each other. There were different kind of rabbis, so they didn't get along very well. I thought, "Hell, it'll be just fine. Get the eleven rabbis together and run it that way." It didn't work.

S: This sound like useful experience in civil-military relations for you.

P: Yes, it was. It was a tough experience, I'll tell you. So I was glad to get home.

S: I'll bet. For more reasons than one.

P: Yeah. That's right. But there were about five of those camps in Germany, and they were all about the same. Universally they were very, very difficult to manage, and those people had been through such terrible experiences, you know.

S: What did you see as your prospects, sir, upon your return home?

P: Oh, I was ordered to ...

S: You didn't consider leaving the army then?

P: Oh, no. No, no. No, no. I thought I had a fine future which turned out I did. I was ordered to Fort Dix on a board to take people into the regular army. And that was a very interesting experience too. We had two Air Force and three Army, you know, air force part of the army, and so these mostly lieutenants or captains who wanted to be in the regular army would come up before the board. And our purpose ... You had to take a test and a physical and all that. And our purpose was just to sort of get a reading on them. What sort of person he was and that sort of thing. And try to get them to talk. Get them to relate some war experience or something like that and see if they were enthusiastic and interesting and so forth. And a funny thing that after a while ... one of the ways to get them to talk was to ask them if they ever had a commander they

admired and what did they admire about him. And it struck me - and I've used it ever since - it struck all of us very forceably that fairness was the word that came up most often. We got to the point that if the guy didn't say fairness, we [chuckles] thought something wrong. I've used it very often. You know, it's easy to be fair. But if you have a teacher's pet or you know, you start helping people out. Fairness in combat is very important. You don't leave that poor guy in the point all the time. You rotate the bad jobs and the good jobs and share the food and share the combat, share the weather and everything else. And we had one man that had been a prisoner of war, a colonel of this group, and he invariably asked, if they'd been prisoners, what they did in prison. And if they didn't do anything, he'd black ball them. Absolutely. He'd say they're not worth a damn if they didn't do anything in prison. If they learned German, even that. They didn't have to be part of the escape organization or part of the clean-up crowd. If they did anything. Some of them apparently just sat there, read books. Boy, he'd black ball them. Said we don't want those guys.

S: So the fact was that you were turning away folks who aspired to remain part of the army.

P: Yes. That's right. We'd turn 'em out, turn 'em away. We accepted a lot of them. Although we didn't have the final say on it because the bureaucracy went over the tests and the physical exam and all that, but we could give them a nice character reference or a bad one, which usually settled it for the bad ones, I mean. No, I was in that... that took us quite a while. I was on that job about two months at Fort Dix and then I got on to Fort Riley, back at Fort Riley as chief of the tactics department. So we all got settled down again and got in the routine of

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army life again and had a marvelous commander. I.D. White, Major General, who had commanded an armored division and we were all friends from before the war. And we just had a great time.

S: But there were changes taking place in the army?

P: Yes, there were. And I.D. White's attitude. You know this report about the officers' corps being ... who did that? Rickenbacher? No, some aviator. Doolittle. The Doolittle Report said there was a caste system and that the officers had all these privileges the enlisted men didn't have and all this kind of thing. So that infuriated I.D. White and so he said, "Well, if he thinks so, I'm going to prove it." [Laughter] Boy, I'll tell you. If you had a drink with an enlisted man, you were going to jail. So he straightened us all up, 'cause we'd gotten pretty damn ragged by that time, you know. No, sir. No hands in pockets. Hat on straight. Salute. You bet'cha. He ran a tight post, and he got criticized for it, so he invited the editor of the Kansas City Star out to the post and took him all around and showed him what was going on, and the editor of the Star wrote a beautiful article and an editorial. Said I.D. White was straightening out the army. [Laughs] That was the end of the criticism. Oh, man. We had a lot of characters. A lot of my lieutenant colonels ... my tactics department were practically all lieutenant colonels, practically all battalion commanders, so we had a wealth of combat experience there and nobody to teach hardly. So they broke it up shortly after I left. I was already in Japan. No. I was ordered to that school in Norfolk, Armed Forces Staff School I guess they call it at Norfolk, and then I went to Japan.

S: What did you find when you arrived in Japan?

P: Well, I was startled that I was assigned as General Willoughby's exec for

intelligence, as I'd had no intelligence experience, although people seem to think reconnaissance and intelligence sort of go together, but I didn't know about aerial reconnaissance and I didn't know about spies and all that kind of stuff. So I was surprised by that assignment. And I had to learn the hard way again in this business, but the intelligence thing ... they use so many cellular organizations that I was really the exec for military matters, intelligence of Korea and Vietnam and China and all that kind of stuff. They had another exec, Sam Koster who later got in trouble at My Lai - remember the major general [that] got relieved. A great guy. He really got rooked on that one, I think - but anyway he was the exec for all the clandestine stuff, CIC and CID and all of that, so I didn't get mixed up in that part of it. And so we got a beautiful house out in Shibuya-Ku, got the family over. House had belonged to the head of the electric company of Tokyo. We had a staff of servants; we had three girls in the house and a yardman and a houseboy. And so we lived in a grand manner. We had a lovely house with a little pond and a little miniature garden and a lot of friends around us in Shibuya-Ku. We socialized a lot. There wasn't a lot to do because the town was so beat up, but we gradually got going again.

S: Did your intell work bear on the question of the purification or democratization of Japan?

P: No. Not my side. That was the other side. That was the CIC, and I wasn't very much into that. But I wasn't in that part of it. You know, MacArthur really wasn't much interested in military intelligence at all. I don't think he read the reports. He was very much on democratizing Japan so that, for instance the G-3 of the command, Far East Command, told me he'd only seen MacArthur twice in the two years that he was

there. That was the military side, you know, and I kind of blame MacArthur. I think that's one reason those divisions were allowed to run down so low. You know, they had such a hell of a time in those early days in Korea because everybody was having a good time around there, you know. Having Japanese girls or bring their families over and living well. Not training much at all I don't think.

S: But was there, notwithstanding the Cold War, the thought that war was unthinkable or so remote as to not be worth preparing and training?

P: I don't think they thought about it. I don't think that was a conscious thought. It was just that the war's over and we're all right. Actually Korea was not a responsibility as far as command. It was treated as a sovereign nation and so we had an army occupation there for a while, for about a year I guess, not much more than that. And then we turned it over to Sigmund Rhee and his crooks and then they just had an ambassador and his staff, regular embassy and staff. When I was there it was Ambassador Mushio. And they had a joint advisory group, trying to train an army for them, an American advisory group and a very modest air force group and a modest navy group. And so the only plan we had was to evacuate the dependents in the event of trouble, which we did without losing one. So that the war broke over the collective headquarters heads as a surprise, and looking back on it what we didn't pick up was the North Korean army moved further and further down to the parallel but they didn't do it all at once. They'd move a division down and a month later they'd move another one down, you see, so it never gave us a warning sign. And we weren't trying to penetrate the North Koreans. It wasn't our job. The CIA was just beginning to get organized and MacArthur wouldn't allow them in his command. There was no CIA there. Wasn't any

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CIA until ... oh, six months before the war started I guess. Sent a couple of guys over to set up a station, but they didn't have any ?cannel coals? or anything. We weren't reading the North Korean codes; weren't trying to for as I know.

S: I wonder whether it wasn't hard to take even the rumor of such a threat very seriously.

P: Well, old Willoughby was a character in his own right and he made his reputation because they were reading the Japanese codes you know, so it's pretty easy to be a good G-2 when you read these codes. We were reading them faster than they could; we had a better machine by that time, by the end of the war.

S: Was MacArthur's presence felt strongly.

P: Yes. I got very interested in his schedule. Is this beside the point or should we put it [in]?

S: I don't think so.

P: I got interested in what he did, just how he lived and so in talking to his warrant officer or his aides or something like that, sort of paste it together. It was fairly well known I guess, but anyway it went like this: He woke up in the morning about 7 o'clock and got dressed. No, stayed in bed, stayed in bed, and the cables of all night were brought over to him on a clipboard, and so he read through the cables and made some notes maybe. Do this. Do that. Then he had breakfast and played with his son a little bit. And leaned this out until about 10 o'clock. And then he came to the office with a great cavalcade, you know, and stop all the traffic. The Japanese police would stop all the traffic. Everybody [would] go to the sidewalk, clear the road. He'd come roaring down here like a fire engine, you know. Lord God Almighty. Get out of

the car with his hat and up to the office. He would see the people that were busy in democratizing Japan like the head of the legal section, the head of the economic section, the head of the education section ... uh, what else? The head of the transportation section. There were about five of them that had immediate access to MacArthur, or he'd call them. This Korea book that I just reviewed said Willoughby was in the inner circle. He wasn't. He wasn't in the inner circle. But he would see MacArthur. But anyway MacArthur would then go back home about 2 o'clock and that's when he would entertain anybody from the United States or something like that, Congressmen or Senators or Generals or visiting people from the Pentagon or some bureaucrats. But the way he had 'em to lunch was that Mrs. MacArthur, a very charming and gracious person, would serve sherry in the living room and MacArthur wasn't there. And then they'd all be going to the table and be seated and MacArthur would come in and sit down at the table and be very entertaining and very charming and run the conversation ... dominate the whole thing. Then after they had dessert, he'd get up and say, "Thank you very much, gentlemen," and depart. And then Mrs. MacArthur would see them all out and make sure they got the right hats and this kind of thing and he'd go take a nap about 3 o'clock. And about 5 o'clock he'd come back to the office and then stay until about 7:30 or 8:00, which is very hard on the staff because, you know, they've got to stay. So we kind of ran a roster on who stayed in the intelligence section. But anyway then he'd go home and have supper with Mrs. MacArthur and their son, and then he would see a movie, of all things. He saw a movie every night except Sunday night. And he invited the MP guards to come see the movie or whoever was on duty around there would go to the movie, too. And the only difference between Sunday and

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the rest of the week was that he didn't see a movie. And he flatly refused to accept anybody's invitation. Like when Secretary Patterson came over there, circulated all around town, Patterson invited him out to dinner at the Majestic Hotel, and he refused. Said, "No. I don't go out at night. Thank you very much." Told the Secretary of the Army that! [Laughs]

S: It's also not a way of influencing the local dignitaries. I mean I would think that there would be a necessary element of social intercourse to achieve one's ends. That kind of confirms the imperialist MacArthur.

P: Oh, yes.

S: It's also kind of interesting in that it's not a very hard work schedule.

P: Oh, no. It's the Oriental work schedule. Sure. Well, he'd lived in the Philippines a long time. I think that set him in his work schedules. But he's a fascinating man and I think did a superb job in straightening out Japan. Now they are beating the tar out of us, you know, and they are very democratic.

S: Yes.

P: And this self-defense force has got us horse-collared a little bit because they won't send any destroyers to the Persian Gulf or anything. It's not in their constitution. But it seemed like a good idea at the time.

S: Yes. In some respects it even seems like a good idea today although it's not always convenient for us. Where were you when you heard the news of North Korean invasion.

P: [Chuckles] I was in the chapel, 'bout 11:30 that morning, and curiously enough Colonel Sterling Wright was the #2 advisor in the JUSMAGE and he was our houseguest. He was a very dear friend. And he just put Tillie

and his two children on a transport and was going back to Korea the next morning and the General, whatever his name was, he'd gotten on the same transport. So the #1 and #2 guys of JUSMAGE were one on a transport and one in Japan. So the way we heard about it was that some officer came in and tapped Sterling Wright on the shoulder, said, "MacArthur wants to see you." [Chuckles] Says, "What in the hell goes on?" And so Wright rushes over to MacArthur's headquarters and MacArthur told 'em they'd just invaded and he'd had an airplane standing by at Anita to take him back. [Laughs] Sterling went back. But a guy named Pinkey Greenwood, who's a good friend of mine too, he was the G-3 so he was in command the first day. Oh, boy! That shows you how much ready we were! And how much they were.

S: Yeah. How long did it take to recoup some military bearing and organization?

P: Well, you know, I think General [Walton H.] Walker turned the war around, you know the general who wore the hand grenades. He gets all the credit for that, [but] you know Walker was killed in an accident. But Walker had it turned around and I say in this book review as a matter of fact that anybody that thinks that a four-star general that's running around with two hand grenades on his harness was going to instill morale in soldiers is crazy. They don't know the American soldiers. They looked at him with a bit of cynicism and sarcasm. He didn't restore morale. [Chuckles] He did have his senior commanders afraid of him, I'll say that. Almond was afraid of him. What the hell's his name?

S: I was just reading about him yesterday.

P: I can see him perfectly. It will come to me.

S: Well, we've come to the end here, sir.

Polk

P: Yeah, I think we've done about enough.

End of interviewing session, January 7, 1988.

Polk

Beginning of interviewing session - April 18, 1988

Failure of tape recorder caused the loss of the first portion of this interview.

S: Sorry for the disruption.

P: We were talking about the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

S: Yes, sir.

P: The thing was that we had seen the Soviet divisions move down on the border of Czechoslovakia, not once but twice. And it was just part of maneuver, and we thought they were trying to scare Czechoslovakia into behaving themselves. You remember we were being accused of causing a lot of trouble and what was the man's name, Sernek or ...?

S: Dubcek.

P: Yeah. Dubcek. And the Russians were accusing us of subverting Dubcek and letting them get out of hand and all that. The first we knew that the Soviets had finally decided to invade Czechoslovakia was when [the] Associated Press in the capital, Budapest, fired a dispatch saying that the Soviets had landed on the airfield in the capital city, and then later on we got a message from the embassy confirming it, and then we put some airplanes up and saw it. Well, they had advanced on radio silence and so our intercept didn't catch them at all. The only thing was, the dumb thing was that the big radar station on the Wasserkop which watched East Germany, they saw all these airplanes coming from around Leningrad with paratroopers in them, - actually landed, didn't jump. But they didn't report it, just a couple of dumb guys up there watching the radar screens, because their orders were not to report anything that was more

than 200 kilometers away. And here's a most unusual situation and they just followed the orders. Said, "Well, it's more than 200 Kilometers away, don't bother." So that's how bad our intelligence was. It was terrible. Then we were very concerned because we didn't know whether the Czechs would decide to fight the Russians or that the Czech army would desert, a lot of them come over to our side or that there would be a mass exodus of civilians or hot pursuit even. Well, it turned out the Russians apparently were equally worried about that because they threw four divisions right down the border behind the Czech border guards, facing both ways so they made the border guards stay on duty and they didn't permit any civilians or military to leave Czechoslovakia into West Germany, on that border. And as I said, this was all very disturbing and it took the Council of Ministers three days to declare military vigilance. We were forbidden to increase our patrols [for fear that] we'd be accused of causing more trouble and so forth. Our aircraft, our Mohawks, we were not allowed to put out any more than we usually did. We were not allowed to patrol the border anymore than we did. They even said, "No digging slip trenches along the border," you know, ridiculous stuff. They were so afraid of being accused of helping this revolt. And curiously enough my soldiers came in from leave without being ordered back, lots of them. I thought it was great, particularly the border wranglers, they came back almost 100 percent, guys who were in school or on leave or something like that.

Well, then I called up the German corps commander, I guess the third German Corps was down there, and Lt. General Tillo, just a great guy, a mountain man, I called him up and said, "General Tillo, I can't give you any orders because you're not under my command, the NATO alert

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is not high enough, but I think it would be a good idea if you loaded your ammunition in your tanks and trucks and things." He said, "Jawah! Herr General." And I said, "Wait a minute now. Wait a minute. This is just a suggestion." He said, "I understand, General. I understand perfectly." So he loaded his ammunition. So I said, "I think it might be a good idea too if your divisions didn't let all your soldiers off on the weekend." He said, "Jawah! Herr General." [Laughter] So he kept all his soldiers on the place, too. And we kept ours there. And [Helmut] Schmidt, who was then Minister of Defense, called up our ambassador George McGee and said, "General Polk is giving orders to General Tillo. He's not supposed to do that." [Chuckles] George McGee backed me up, said, "It's just a suggestion. He called me up and told me about it." He said, "He's got a funny way of making suggestions. They sound pretty forceful to me." [Laughter]

S: This points up an interesting dilemma for any soldier, one that you faced repeatedly, and that is the question of political restraints on military action preparedness. It's a problem you had to deal with undoubtedly all the time as 7th Army Commander but something at which you evidently became skilled. Your bio speaks of the soldier-diplomat. It's a difficult situation to be in.

P: It is difficult, and it's worse than it used to be because communication is so instantaneous. In other words, the national command center in the basement of the White House can pick up the phone and call almost anybody in the world. You know, they're running that show over there in the Persian Gulf from the White House. I know it. Nobody told me that, but I'm sure they are. They can get instant communication. From my desk in Heidelberg I could talk to anybody in the United States quicker than I

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could get a hold of my corps commanders. That military communication, that stuff we had, was old and unreliable. It's been replaced now. It's pretty good, I understand, but ours wasn't very good.

I think one of the craziest things that ever happened: There was some trouble in Jordan and this was about '69 I guess. They were afraid that the Jordanians were going to raid the U. S. Embassy, and so they alerted my parachute brigade, part of the 8th Division, to prepare to jump in there and rescue them. That was a U.S. only alert. So they got all ready and packed all their stuff, ready to put on the airplanes, parachutes and all that, to make an equipment drop and personnel drop. Then things sort of calmed down, so they kept them on alert and decided to send a field hospital. There were alot of people getting shot down there, so they thought it would be a very humanitarian, fine thing to do to send. I had the hospital all packed up. Then I got a message from the White House that they didn't want them to go in uniform. No explanation of why, 'cept that it just looked too military or something. So they said to go down to post exchange and get sport shirts and slacks for all your medical people. I said, "All right, we'll do that." Said, "Couldn't they wear their greens, you know, their medical operating gowns." "No, we want them in sport shirts." So they were the most strange-looking bunch of soldiers you ever saw. They thought it was funny. Then they said, "We want the Air Force to have some part in this, so we'll send you a surgical team from the Air Force Hospital." I said, "O.K. Bring them up." Eight guys with their suitcases of instruments, and they were skilled surgeons, glad to have them on the part of the hospital. We got them fitted out and then we started painting red crosses on the airplanes and unpainting red crosses on the airplanes and

they didn't know what to do about that. They painted them on and then they said it was illegal because, well anyway, so we had to unpaint them. Then the hospital all flew down to the Athens airport and then some genius then said, "It's dangerous landing down there, so we want one Air Force airplane to take the Air Force detachment down there and land and see if it's safe to land." We said, "Wait a minute. Hold on. They don't have radios; they don't have jeeps; they don't have anything." Said, "Do as you're told." O.K. Do as you're told. So this airplane goes down there and landed on this field and the airplane wasn't very anxious to stick around so they dumped this eight-man surgical team with their kit out on the end of airfield, at the end of the airfield, not the airport, and took off again. So these poor guys were sitting down there. Didn't even have a gun. No radio. No nothing. [Laughter] So all these Arabs started collecting around them, you know, wondering what is this curious thing here. And these guys are scared to death. Naturally. I think they should have been. The airplane came back and said it was all right, so we moved the whole hospital in. And they did a lot of good. But we had to evacuate these guys. They were having a nervous collapse. You know, this is how to manage things from the White House. The dumbest thing in the world. That's called micro management.

Like one time I was in Berlin and we had some trouble on the autobahn and they stopped one of our convoys and so just to mix up things, we got out of the trucks and camped right there on the autoban. So General McConnell, who was Lemnitzer's deputy - Lemnitzer was gone some place - so McConnell calls me up on the clear line and says, "Jimmy, you know that big white house at the end of the street, down at the end of Pennsylvania Avenue?" I said, "Yeah, I know." He says, "You know the

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guy that lives there?" I said, "Yeah, I know." He said, "He wants to know if the men are getting dry socks and hot meals." [Laughs] I said, "I don't know, Mac. I think they are. I don't want to make any mistake about this, so I'll find out and call you back." I said, "It would be better if we were on the scrambler." He said, "Scrambler be damned. The man wants to know right now." I said, "All right. Tell him they're well taken care of. They are getting some hot meals and I'm sure they have dry socks." [Laughter] Isn't that ridiculous?

S: It's kind of reminiscent of an earlier war under much different circumstances, Lincoln attempting to ride herd on his generals.

P: But he'd go camp with them some. Well, I had another incident. McConnell made me think of it. We had a Pole, Polish airman, defect into Berlin with his wife and two kids in a little training plane, two-seat training plane. And he didn't have a map of the airfields in Berlin and so didn't know quite where to land. You know there are three, British French and ... in the American sector, and then there's a big airfield over in East Germany. So this guy didn't know where to land, so he flew all around looking at all these airfields from about 200 feet high. And of course, all the controllers got in an uproar about it, trying to wave him off or land him or something. And so the press got it. Naturally, there was not much trick to that. And this guy finally landed, and it got on the wires. We told them it was a Pole, a Polish major and his wife and two kids. And so that was all we'd tell them. And so I called up the Air Force and they had a C-47 there, and I said, "Get these people on a C-47 and get them back to Wiesbaden right now 'cause we're gonna get into a lot of political problems if we keep them here. Everybody's going to get in the act and they won't be able to go back commercial and I can just

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foresee all kinds of problems." He said, "O.K. I'll ship them right out." Which he did. And so McConnell called me up and said, "Who ordered my Air Force C-47 to fly these people back to Wiesbaden?" I said, "I did." He said, "I didn't know you were in command of the Air Force in Berlin." I said, "I'm not. But those people were my responsibility." He said, "If the Russians shoot down that C-47 'cause they know all about it 'cause it's been on the air, who's responsible?" I said, "I guess I am." "You're damned right, you are. Let me know when that airplane is, over the beacon, in safe territory." We watched it on radar all the way back. I was very careful to watch what was going on. The Russians never made a pass at it or anything. I called up McConnell. Said, "They're already pulled the beacon going into Weisbaden." He said, "Great work, Jimmy. Great work." I said, "You son-of-a-bitch." [Chuckles] He [out]ranked me. He was a Lieutenant General. I was Major General. I never was so mad at a man in my life.

S: Is that at all typical of the difficulties of working relations with the Air Force?

P: No. No. He was just a difficult man. He was just jealous of their command arrangements, that's all. But, you know, sometimes you just have to do things quick. Norstad, for instance, was a great commander. Great guy. But when I was given command of Berlin, he gave me some very interesting instructions. This was just after the Peter Fackler incident. I was kind of sent up there to ... uh. They didn't relieve General Watson. They left him there a little while and then eased him out before his time was up. They sent me up there and said, "For God's sake, you know, get this place calmed down again." There were enraged about this thing and wanted to change commands. So I went back to see

Norsted at SHAEF, and he said, "I want to tell you something. I know a lot about Berlin, and I know how to manage things there. I want you to think about time. First time anything happens, think about how much time do I have to make a decision, do something. If you've got time, call me up on the scrambler and we'll talk between us what's the best thing to do. I certainly want your advice so perhaps you want mine." I said, "Yes, sir." So then he said, "If you can't get me right away, leave a message that you're going to do so-and-so in an hour, or so-and-so in two hours, and that will activate my side of the outfit." And he said, "If you don't have any time, do something. You better by God be right, too." [Chuckles] That's good instructions. I've used that a lot since then because it's perfectly clear. That's not micro-management either; that's telling you: do it. That's unusual in the present day, I think.

S: Ever pine in those days, General, of the simpler days, of being a pure soldier? You are dealing with so many levels of authority in the NATO realm.

P: Commanding a division is just a great job. And I went from there to Berlin and got mixed up in all this political stuff. 'Cause you're not micro-managing a division very much, you know. And there's all kinds of talent in a division. You can find anything. If you want a baseball team, you can get one. Or a football team. You want a pianist. You want a band. You want actors. You want a play. You want to get everybody in the motor pool and get 'em all fixed up, paint 'em all green or something, you can do it. Nobody bothers with you, so it's a great job. It's a nifty job. And people are very responsive in that position. It's a fun job. And when I had a division, why we had all the stuff we needed. We had good soldiers and good equipment and plenty supplies and

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enough money to maneuver and all that. It wasn't like when I got back to U.S. Army and everything was drained out of us. That's a great job. So yeah, I'd pine for that kind of thing where people leave you alone.

S: Is that the best job you ever had?

P: I think so. Maybe it was commanding E Troop of the 3rd Cavalry or commanding the 3rd Cavalry in the war. I wouldn't call that the best job. It was a very demanding job, a very tough job. It's physically demanding and mentally terribly demanding. But I've talked about that earlier. You've got that stuff. You want to talk about what I did after I retired or are we going to keep on active duty for a while?

S: Let's stay on active duty for just a little bit longer. I've got a bunch of questions. Since we're talking about uh, what you saw as the most demanding but the job that offered you the most freedom, it struck me that you had relatively few pure staff assignments. Is that just a matter of luck or ...?

P: I came up the command chain. To some extent it's just a matter of luck. It's a matter of making a reputation as a commander more than anything else. In other words, I had a nice reputation commanding a troop of horse cavalry. I was a good captain. But I really made my reputation in World War II commanding the 3rd Armored Cavalry at that time. And General Walker recommended me be General. I covered all that stuff. But after that, as commands became available for my rank, I got 'em. You're right. I was in the Pentagon for two years only, in ISA which was a nice job. It was an unusual job because ISA - what does it stand for? International ...

S: Security

P: Agency, or something like that. Anyway, it's part of the Pentagon and

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they did all the military aid and a lot of that stuff, and they were input policy to the State Department. They were the closest to the State Department. And I was something called Policy Planning. I had about 10 guys working for me, most of them PhDs as a matter of fact. But we were kind of the nuts and bolts department. We weren't really making any policy. When something didn't fall in a nice peg in a hole, like it wasn't military aid, it wasn't geographic or something like that, they'd give it to us. So it was a very interesting job. We'd go down there and we never knew what was going to happen. Like when Kennedy came in, [Paul] Nitze was the ISA guy, the head of ISA, so he called me in and said, "I want you to give me a draft of international policy." I said, "Sir?" [Chuckles] "United States international policy?" "Yes." Because Eisenhower had such a document; he never paid any attention to it, but there was a document floating around like that. I said, "You want me to write it?" He said, "Well, use your ...". I said, "Well, what do I use as a guideline?" Said, "Well, just look at Kennedy's speeches." [Chuckles] So I went down to see the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Buzz Wheeler, and said, "Buzz, do you know what job I just got? Rewrite national policy." [Laughs] Buzz said, "All right. Give the guy some piece of paper. We won't pay a damn bit of attention to it anyway." So we made one. Oh, my God. You know, that was a fun staff job. We weren't doing all that nuts and bolts stuff, you know, and getting people to say no and getting coordinated. We didn't have to coordinate with anybody. That's the trouble with the Pentagon. Everybody's got to coordinate the paper, get everybody to agree, and if one person says no and it's just terrible to get it straightened out. I was intelligence too, as I told you, but that's about all.

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S: And after two years of that, you were back out of the Pentagon?

P: Yeah, that's when I got the 4th Armored Division, went to Germany and got the 4th Armored Division. I was promoted to Major General, you know.

S: Did you have any sense of who your particular supporters were in the higher reaches, when you were a one and two-star.

P: Yes, to some extent, uh huh.

S: Who?

P: Well, I mentioned Buzz Wheeler. He was a supporter of mine. We'd known each other a long time. He was chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Almond certainly was; Van Fleet was. Nitze to a certain extent was. I liked working for him in spite of that crazy job he gave us. Somebody told him to do it. Freeman, Paul Freeman very much so. Andy O'Mara. General Speidle. I was his G3 at Fontainebleau. A very good friend of mine. He said a lot of nice things about me. Those kind of things get around. So in the international community General Speidle was very supportive.

S: Did you feel comfortable in the political milieu?

P: Well, you got to do the getting along, so you never do feel quite comfortable. I don't think that's the right word. But you do build a reputation so people do listen to you after a while. You get to build a reputation in this area. If not, why then you've got lots of trouble. By and large people aren't too hard to get along with if you get to know them and know what they want and so on and it's not too screwy. I've had contemporaries and even seniors who I thought were just terrible officers, like Willoughby, that guy. He was a nut, just terrible to work for him. Most people are comfortable. I'm very comfortable. You've just got to learn your way around them, you know, that sort of morass. So many conflicting views. I got along very well with George McGee, our

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ambassador. The ambassador before him, I didn't get along with him at all. Cabot Lodge. He didn't like me, and I didn't like him. One time he said to me - you know I had that two car-train, and I offered it to him. George McGee would always use it quite often. The Air Force would use it. I wasn't picky about it. Well, Cabot Lodge says, "I'm going to get that train taken away from you. You're riding around Germany like a Roman Pro-Consul. What do you think you are?" Thank God he got moved right after that. But I'll tell you, I had known him earlier and he had just been through his Vietnam experience, and he was finished. They never should have sent him over there as ambassador. He was tired and sick of everything and give-a-damn, you know, and you just couldn't get along with him, that's all, that guy. He had been of great service to our country earlier, but I think Vietnam just finished him off.

S: The 50s strike me as anything but a golden era for our army. I wonder to what extent the Vietnam malaise crept into the European command. It was a time of short budgets. Europe in the 60s was increasingly going on the back burner. Decline of troop efficiency, drug problems, discipline problems.

P: That didn't come along in the 50s.

S: No, sir.

P: No, that was more the 70s you're talking about now. At least as far as the European troops were concerned. And I think the American army did a pretty good job in Vietnam as a matter of fact. They just didn't get the all-over command and support that I mentioned earlier, but individual soldiers ... The press did what I call aid-station reporting. When a man is wounded and gets to the aid station, carried back or walked back, he is at the low point of his military career. It's kind of "they're all

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dead but me. I'm the last survivor." They're in shock. They hurt. They're disoriented, particularly if they're seriously wounded. And the cameraman would take pictures of these kind of guys. And it's very seldom that you saw any kind of frontline photography, very, very seldom. And some of it was faked, like this movie "Platoon". That thing's a disgrace. Crummy, dirty, filthy, rotten guys. The army's not that way. I visited Vietnam twice, and both times I'd get a helicopter and go up to the little frontline infantry companies scattered around, these little temporary forts they built, and everybody was with it. In command in combat, I had a sense of what I was seeing. They didn't kid me any. And another thing I was doing. I'd try to find a patrol that had just come back from a long patrol, I'd say 8, 10 men, and sit down with them. And I'd run off the captain and everybody, and I'd say I'm not talking about whether you're a good captain or not. I'm not talking about whether it's a good company or not. I'm talking about equipment. My business was to see if the army was properly equipped.

End of Tape #4, Side 1

No Tape #4, Side 2

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Beginning of Tape #5, Side 1

S: Continue, sir, please.

P: O.K. Well, I was just saying I found out some interesting things, and it was almost universal with almost any patrol you'd talk to. One was they didn't have big enough canteens. They couldn't carry enough water, and they'd all been asking for it. Well, it never got back to me. They didn't have enough cleaning brushes for their rifles. They didn't like the bayonet. The bayonet was useless. They wanted a good knife. The bayonet was a lousy knife. So I went back and activated those kinds of things, you know, and found out they'd been fooling around with these plastic half-gallon canteens and they hadn't done anything about it. Boy, I sure activated that program. Said, "You don't need to test those things anymore." Things like that I felt useful at least.

S: It was in what capacity?

P: I was Chief of Staff for Force Development. That was in the Pentagon, army staff. I was only there 9 months and then went back to Germany. My wife was furious.

S: Try getting a handle on the procurement process in 9 months, 9 years for that matter!

P: That's right. Well, I never did I was responsible for the Operations and Maintenance Budget for one thing, and I never did get a handle on that. I had a colonel that knew all about it but I wasn't sure that he wasn't kidding me. You know. [It was] one of the few times I felt helpless about the Operations and Maintenance Budget of the Army. It was a huge thing. How much do you give for gasoline; how much you go

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for spare parts? I was the one that was supposed to decide that kind of thing. It was very difficult. And the only reason I was ... I asked the Chief of Staff, [Harold K.] Johnny Johnson who was a good friend of mine, a real good friend of mine, I said, "Why did you bring me back here for 9 months? You knew you were going to send me over to command USAREUR in the 7th Army, didn't you?" He said, "Yeah." Well, he says, "I just wanted you to get a taste of what the army staff is like." [Chuckles] Isn't that funny? Before I went over to take this big job he wanted me to how the Pentagon worked. It was useful in that respect. Then I got a Chief of Staff over here, Frank Taylor - he just died, poor fellow - who had been director of the army budget. We beat the hell out of the Pentagon when that guy was Chief of Staff. [Laughter] He knew where they had money hid out, you know. Controllers always got some money someplace they can get hold of. He could get it. Call 'em on the phone and say, "What about that Fund 321? What are you doing with that?" [Laughs] They'd say, "We don't have a Fund 321." He'd say, "Don't give me that stuff. I know you have. We need \$5 million real bad over here for spare parts."

S: So from your vantage point you would take exception to the rather negative characterization that I put forward?

P: Of the Vietnam ...?

S: Well, of the whole, ...of the 60s Army anyway.

P: Well, we tried to make the best of it. Uh, I think we were always trying to do our jobs. We were still ambitious. We were still working. We were still trying to run a good outfit. I don't think there was any particular malaise. There was some dissatisfaction that we didn't get the things we needed. If you had only 80 percent availability of your

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tanks or something like that, it was very disturbing, but you just couldn't get the parts.

S: When you retired in 1971, the Army faced a fairly grievous hole in its inventory. Research and development had pretty much gone into abeyance. What did you see? At the time if you had to take stock of the Army in 1971, what would you have seen as the foremost problems it faced?

P: Well, the R&D account was really bum, although I never was in the R&D business very much. We had a terrible personnel problem starting about '70; it reached Europe by '70. The Army did a stupid ... it did two stupid things, three stupid things. The first place and I told the Chief of Staff of the Army, Johnny Johnson, that we had to stop this full course schooling. In other words the War College was still going on, the National War College, the Army War College, Ft. Leavenworth, these long courses, the Infantry School and all that. The same training cycle of schools went on whether the war was on or not, and this cost us a terrible number of people that we needed, and he wouldn't stop it. Said, "That's all that holds the army together."

S: Was that a political decision on his part? Business as usual?

P: Uh, no. I think he could have changed it if he had wanted to. He could have cut those courses. You know, cut them down. World War II I went to Ft. Leavenworth to the Command General Staff School for 11 weeks. That was enough. I got all I needed out of that. So that was a mistake. The second mistake was not calling up the reserves. I think that was a terrible mistake. That was a political decision. We tried, Johnny tried to get the reserves in, and they did succeed in a few cases, a very few cases. But that was a terrible mistake. And the third one, which affected me very seriously, was this idea that you had to spend the whole

two years in the army. You drafted for two years and you stayed two years. So what happened was they'd go through about 4 months of basic infantry training or something like that, they'd get a little leave, they'd get to Vietnam and stay there a year and come back and they had about 6 months remaining of their two years. The guys had been in combat for a year in Vietnam and I said, "Why don't you let them out?" Said, "Well, we'd set a bad precedent." So I got these guys for 5 months or something like that that were just p'd off. They were just disgusted. They didn't give a damn. All they wanted was an honorable discharge. So they just did absolute minimum. Some of them didn't even want an honorable discharge. So we had a terrible personnel problem. People went back to Vietnam some three times, did three tours in Vietnam. So the personnel policies were I think screwed up much worse than the materiel problems. We were making do. They were spending an awful lot of money on ammunition and stuff for Vietnam, an awful lot of money. They didn't lack for money for the simple things. But when I left to go back to Europe, Johnny Johnson, the Chief of Staff, told me, "I hate to see you go." I said, "Why's that?" He said, "'Cause you're the only principal staff officer that argues with me."

S: That's interesting.

P: Yeah. I used to argue ... Well, for instance, the Chief of Staff had a little group of so-called brainy guys, about 10 of them. You'd send in a paper. Well, one of the big ones was about the M16 rifle. And so we'd done a voluminous study, not just me although it finally came to me, and we had recommended against sending the M16 to Europe principally because the bullet tumbled at about 300 meters and we figured we were going to be shooting 300 meters over there. Jungle is all right; they don't shoot

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any distance. So we said, "Why can't we have two kind of guns? The gun we'd got over there is a beautiful gun, the M1." These brainy guys, they used to write a blue sheet on top of their papers, they disagreed with me and they didn't refer it back to me or anything. They just disagreed and sent it in to the Chief of Staff and said, "Equip the whole army with M16." I was in a rage. Said, "Who the hell these guys think they are. I'm responsible for the program. I'm responsible for the study and they just write this blue sheet on top saying what they think." I was really mad, and Johnny said, "Well, I'll straighten them out." I said, "You better straighten them out because if they write this blue sheet and disagree with the principal staff officer, a Lieutenant General, whatever his job is and don't refer it back to him, they are going to get in trouble. What the hell do they know?" They just give it the most cursory study and run through the paper and write this blue sheet. The purpose of blue sheet is to save the Chief of Staff time so all he reads is the blue sheet. It was a mess. Anyway, I got that straightened out. [Chuckles]

S: So another problem. The over-bureaucratization in the decision-making eschelons.

P: Well, McNamara had these wiz kids. What it resulted in was an increase in all the services' staffs 'cause you had to fight them all the time. And they were another group that thought they knew everything, you know. For instance, one of the guys on the wiz kid staff was Ben Shimmer who's now the publisher of the Army-Navy Journal. Well, he's a smart guy, smart ass guy, and so he turns down our tank program and gets a lot of false quotes and a lot of false information. I don't know where he got it from, but a lot of what he said was wrong. And he come prowling

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around, talk to action officers and get diverse opinions and all that and put it all in his paper. So I got ahold of him on the phone and I said, "I forbid you to come in my office and talk to anybody. You can't talk to anybody. I'm telling them all. If you want answers to some questions, you put them in writing and give them to me and I'll give you the straight answers." Well, that caused consternation. And so I don't know who called up ?, who was then Vice-Chief - somebody called him up - and he called me in and said, "You can't do that." I said, "I've done it." [Chuckles] He said, "You've got to change." So I called up Shimmer and said, "Come down here." He was about 30 years old, just a kid, and so I said to that I had been ordered by the Vice-Chief of Staff to relent about you coming in here. "You better be careful about what you quote around here." So he cried. He started crying. [Laughs] I was mad at that time, too. I was mad as hell at him. Loused up the tank program. So that kind of bureaucracy, that kind of stuff. Who was the head of it?

S: Of what?

P: Who was the head of this wiz kids with McNamara?

S: Uh, Bundy?

P: No. Uh. It began with an E. Eisenock? I forgot. But he was very difficult to deal with and McNamara listened to him. Another funny thing, you know, we finally learned that you must never mention morale or esprit or courage or anything like that to McNamara. He didn't understand it. He didn't understand it at all, and he thought it was a bunch of junk. He thought it was worthless. You know, what are these people talking about? About morale and courage and esprit. That's just a bunch of stuff. And he wouldn't listen to it, throw it aside. It had no bearing to him whatsoever. He put in that awful body count thing which

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just subverted the army. Terrible. Everybody started lying about the bodies they counted. Just got to be a mess. And you know it was one of those things you couldn't check on. Who's going to go up there and check? Nobody. You say, "Well, we killed all those guys, and the Vietnamese dragged 'em off." That was his idea. Trying to measure things all the time. Everything he wanted was some kind of hard measurement. Quarrel about all the ammunition they were shooting. He got information about how much ammunition they fired, stuff like that.

S: Somewhat say in 1971 was almost a low ebb.

P: Yeah, I'd say so. My last year of service was not very happy. I might have told you. I had about 5 class action suits against me.

S: Is that right?

P: Yeah. The only thing was that the class action suits included Chief of Staff and McNamara [chuckles], so this was all racial stuff. And I was called a bigot and stuff like that, and I was breaking my back, literally breaking my back to accommodate the blacks. I was anything but a bigot. Really burned me up that I got called that. They had a Assistant Secretary of Defense for equal opportunity or something like that. He came over there to Europe and it caused a lot of trouble 'cause he'd get all the blacks in the gymnasium or in the theater, no white officers, nobody but just blacks, most of them non-coms. A few black officers were included. And he'd ask them what was wrong with this command, you know. Well you ask a soldier what's wrong with the mess hall, he'll tell you the food's no good. You say, "Well how much weight you gained?" He say, "Well, thirty pounds." It was that kind of question. Caused a lot of trouble, a lot of unrest. Haircuts and combs and soul food and all that kind of stuff. And no promotions. It was really a tough period. And my

successor, Mike Davidson, said he didn't get any new ideas to speak of. He just did more of the same of the programs I'd already put in. About the only thing he did was have an equal opportunity's meeting down at the ? garden every year and get all the equal opportunity officers in there.

I had Mike Wallace come over and look into the race thing. My PIO, fellow named Brennan, nice guy, very smart PIO, later went back as West Point's PIO, Mike Wallace gave him a series of questions he wanted to ask me. And so Mike Wallace and Brennan and I sat down in the office, and Brennan had told me the kind of things I had to ask this guy. So I said, "Twenty minutes. How much of that twenty minutes is going to be devoted to my answers?" And he said, "Oh, two or three." I said, "You ask ten questions. Are you limited to those ten?" He said, "Oh, no. That's not our format." Said, "You can ask me anything you want?" He said, "Yeah." And I said, "Do I get to see what you put in there." He said, "No." I said, "I'm not crazy. I'm not going to let you cut and paste on me. You can ask any questions you want. You can load the questions. You can cut pieces of my answers out so it suits you." He said, "Yeah, I can." I said, "You do that?" He says, "Yeah, sometimes we do." I said, "I'm not answering your questions. I'm sorry." So he got out in front of the headquarters, like they have a picture of the White House and the White House correspondents are out in front of it, well, he's out in front of my office. There's a big sign there: Headquarters, 7th Army, U.S. Army - Europe. He said, "General Polk is afraid to answer questions about his racial problems." That is the way the whole thing started off. 20 Minutes. So Bruce Palmer called me up, Army staff, he says, "Is it true you refused to answer questions?" I said, "It sure is. Let me tell you what he wanted to do." So Bruce

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said, "Well, that's smart of you. I'm glad you didn't submit to that kind of thing." You know Westie, they crucified Westie, cutting and pasting on him. They sure did.

S: Very recently local commander down here had a hatchet job done on him .

P: Is that right?

S: On "20-20", Geraldo Herrera, just a disaster. One of the grossest cut and paste jobs you'd ever want to see.

P: Is that right? On Infante?

S: No, Maloney.

P: Oh, on Maloney. About the Electric Company or something?

S: No, sir. About the York.

P: Oh. Well, I'll tell you, they can really mess you up. But I had some real good guys. I still deal with one. Jack Kohler, who was the AP reporter in Berlin, and he went on to do a lot of things. But he was in charge of Personnel for AP in the New York office and then he was in charge of assignments, sent the guys for hot news and stuff. He just called me up the other day. I see him in Washington when I'm there. He's retired from AP, sort of a free lance guy now. Just a great guy. But he would call me up in Berlin; he did it any number of times. And say I'm on to this story and I'm going to file it, but I'd complained to him that the newspaper reporters didn't have to check and they just fire off a telegram and put it on the ticker, where I had to check to be sure my information was correct before I fired off a telegram. So I said, "Jack, will you just hold that thing for about 6 hours until I can get my telegram?" He'd say, "Sure. Do you want me to read it to you?" I said, "Yeah. Let's hear it." I'd say, "Well, you're not quite right. Change this there." He was a smart reporter. And he got things sometime before

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I did that I didn't know about. He'd tell me.

S: Sir, when your retirement actually came, did you feel yourself at odds with the army leadership in any way? I'm thinking of the recent retirement of General Rogers and that he kind of went out in a blaze of publicity.

P: No, I didn't. I didn't particularly like Westmoreland. I didn't dislike him, but the point was that Westmoreland as Chief of Staff of the Army was totally oriented on Vietnam. He didn't even know we existed, and if it hadn't been for his Vice Chief, Bruce Palmer, I wouldn't have gotten anything. For instance, in his book he mentions going to Europe once. Doesn't mention anything about Europe to speak of. Says made an inspection trip over there or something like that. Just brushed it off. It didn't interest him at all, which made it very hard. But thank God for Bruce Palmer because I'd call him up and say, "Hey, look, something wrong here." He'd fix it. He wouldn't ask Westmoreland.

S: Westmoreland was rather too personally involved in self vindication.

P: Yeah, in that and in the affairs of Vietnam too, having commanded out there. That was all that really interested him. So didn't pay any attention. So that didn't go down very well. After all he had 300,000 troops in Europe. That's a pretty big bunch.

S: You betcha.

P: To take no interest in. But I wasn't sore. It was difficult adjusting to civilian life, I'll tell you, quite difficult.

S: Can you talk a little bit about that?

P: Well, to begin with, we bought a nice house in Washington and we were members of the good clubs, but you didn't have any sense of purpose and nobody was in a very big hurry to hire me for some reason. I don't know.

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I was controversial, always controversial, whatever I was doing. I don't swim with the pack very much. I have my own ideas.

S: Army officers were not national heroes in 1971, 72.

P: [Chuckles] No, they weren't. That's right. So I caught on with a couple of think tanks. I went out to RAC, Research Corporation or something like that, a big think tank in Washington. It's still big. They changed the name to BMW or something like that. No, I was wrong. BMW was one. BMW hired me as a European consultant, and they put me under this PhD who was about 29 years old and he didn't know what he was talking about but he sure thought he did. So I lasted about 2 days in that job. That guy's nuts. I quit.

S: The motor car people?

P: No.

S: I never heard of 'em.

P: I think I've got the wrong initials. Anyway, I was only there 2 days. I worked for RAC quite a bit. I liked them. Got along with them. Mostly on atomic business. They were doing some atomic studies. I helped them on them. Then I got signed on with LTV and that was a very unusual deal. They wanted me to move to Dallas and pay me a big salary and work fulltime and I didn't want to do that. So I said, "Well, I'll tell you what. I'll work halftime for half the salary." They said, "Fine." Nobody knew what halftime was. They didn't spell it out. [Chuckles] I just went to work when I felt like it. They were very interesting. I was sort of soldier proofing their lance and multiple rocket launcher. I did a lot of good for them. Then another thing I did for them. They were great on briefing people around the Pentagon on their products and so on. So I would hear them first before they went to the Pentagon and

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some of them would be so technical that nobody understood it but an engineer or maybe a flight engineer, so I made them [simplify it.] And then some of them would talk down to people. And I'd say, "That's not going to get you very far in the Pentagon." So I was a big help to them in straightening out their briefings and that kind of thing. I was very careful not to make any ethical mistakes. So I would never introduce them to ... They want to go see somebody, I'd say, "Well, you call them up and say you want to see them. You don't need me." I'd tell them who to go to or where the paper was stuck or who was driving it or proposing it or something, I could find that out. I'd say, "You go see them. I'm not going to try to influence anybody in the Pentagon. No way."

S: There seemed to be an understanding of that?

P: I think there's a pretty good understanding. I think it's violated sometimes. I didn't want anybody pointing a finger at me on that one. But anyway after I got some jobs like that, it got very interesting. I had a very happy 12 years. Plenty going on. I had other jobs. I worked for General Motors in the tank program, that tank that went bust. I had a lot of fun. They lost the contract. That was a crooked deal, too.

S: Is that right?

P: Yeah. Well, what happened was that we were going to make this M1 Tank, you see, and the General Motors didn't bid on it. Only Chrysler bid on it, so they begged General Motors: come on, get aboard. So they put a high class bunch of guys [on it.] General Motors got a lot of high class people, good engineers. So they got aboard, and the deal was that they had to make three tanks. One was just a running gear with just a weight on it. A track and an engine and that was one. The second one was armor that they just shot at. And one was an all-up tank that they could test,

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fire, and move and everything else. Well, about that time the interest was with the 105 gun and so they both submitted their bids and General Motors had the low bid. And they also had the recommendation of the people in the army staff that it was a better tank than Chrysler's, which it was. So then somebody in the Pentagon said, "All right now. We're not going to use that 105." They got scared of the Soviet armor, so they said they were going to make the first 500 with the 105 and then by this time the 120 German gun will be developed and we want to put the 120 gun in there. So they said, "Go back and redesign your turret so we can retrofit the 120 and then submit your bids again." Well, General Motors went back and it wasn't such a big problem. They just had to move some stuff around inside the tank, give them more room and so forth. Didn't have to redesign the turret.

End of Tape #5, Side 1

Beginning of Tape #5, Side 2

P: So Chrysler was in real trouble at that time. So they gave the bid to Chrysler. That was a political decision. That was really political. Went against the recommendations and the tests and everything else and gave it to Chrysler. Well, the president of Allison Division of General Motors, I know for a fact, came down there and said, "Look, we're not going to make another army truck; we're not making another army sedan. We're through. We're through doing business with the Pentagon." Allison Division was making the transmission. "We're agreed to make the transmission. We'll make it, but that's all we're going to do for you

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people, if you play crooked that way." [Chuckles] Well, and then you remember Chrysler sold it off, sold it off to General Dynamics. Well, it was really crooked all the way around. I said McNamara, I'm not sure about that, or if it was his successor, Weinberger.

S: Schlesinger maybe.

P: Yeah, Schlesinger. Could have been Schlesinger or Weinberger, I'm not sure which. Anyway it was a real crooked deal.

S: In retirement you became a rather prolific commentator on army development. You worked with contractors, kept in the defense world, but what of your feelings on non-material matters? The volunteer army? To what extent were you able to remain in touch with army matters?

P: Well, the Chief of Staff invites all the four-star generals back every summer in August, and they give us a briefing for about a day and a half on current projects. And then we sit down for another day. If you're an expert on one field, you sit down with that staff or something and you go over things. So that automatically keeps you up to speed once a year on what things are going on. And you have some impact. I'm not saying that these meetings turn army policy around but we have some impact. I only write or comment about things I feel strongly about. I just wrote an article for Army magazine. I'll give you a copy when I get it. I haven't got it yet. I just sent it out. But the whole idea is the importance of time in combat, something that has interested me for a long time. But what I'm complaining about is how computers have screwed up tactics because most computer war games are simply fire power war games. You can measure fire power. To some extent you can measure terrain. To some extent you can handle maneuvering a bit if you hand play the game and then use the computers. But it doesn't measure a lot of things, and

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almost always the side with the most fire power wins. Almost without exception they win. For instance, to give you a bad example. If the Soviets have ten tanks and you have five tanks, the battle ends up that you have none and they have five. But people don't fight that way. You don't fight to exhaustion; you don't fight to annihilation. You get the hell out of there. If you lose two tanks, you're going to back off or something or you know, throw up your smoke and get the hell out of there. So I used to talk to my division this way: "You think about this for a minute. Here you have a battalion in a defensive position and you're attacked frontally by a brigade, about 3 to 1. You might be able to stand them off. If you have your battalion here and there's a battalion right on your flank attacking you, you're going to get beat 1 on 1. If there's a tank company in your rear, enemy tank company in your rear, it's going to result in pandemonium. You're not prepared to turn around and fight a tank behind you. And so I just tried to give situations where numbers don't count. I think it's very important. And I think all these computer games have got us all messed up and that's one reason why they say we can't beat the Russian Horde and all this kind of stuff. That's pure nonsense. As I mentioned earlier if we get a little time and we're set, we can give them a real battle, a first class battle. There's a new book out I just read called Task Force Yankee. Have you read it?

S: No, sir.

P: It's very good. It's about a tank company, reinforced tank company in War III, and we win too. [Laughter]

S: What stock do you take in the army today?

P: I think they're pretty good. They are good. They all brag about the best people they're ever had. Every briefing you go to, everybody says

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that. And that's pretty much true because they're motivated and the education programs are a very good thing and they're physically fit. Big emphasis on fitness nowadays, running and all that stuff.

S: Do you like that?

P: Yeah, I think it's good. But when they tell that, I say, "O.K. You say these are the best soldiers. Let me tell you what happened to us. When we were forming up the 3rd Armored Division at Ft. Knox to go to Europe, we got all our draftees in in about August. We had 3,000 Ivy League graduates. Now you can't come close to that." It was very interesting with them, very challenging. For instance, the engineers we put in the engineer battalion. Signal people we put in the signal battalion. Electrical engineers we put in the signal battalion. Mechanical in the engineer battalion, and so on. I called in the president of this class at Princeton, and I said, "We don't know what to do with all these history majors. Why do we have so many history majors?" He said, "Don't you know?" I said, "No, I don't know." He says, "That's the easiest course in the Ivy League." [Laughter] That's what he told me. So I said, "What do we do with them? Issue them a rifle and put them in the infantry?" He said, "Yes." [Laughs] But those kids, about half of them, were just content to do two years and do nothing. They're perfectly content to be a private in the rear rank or be an ammunition carrier in the artillery. But the other half stepped right into leadership positions, and they were tank commanders and infantry squad leaders early on. They really challenged. It was fun working with them. So my feelings are mixed. I think it's a good army. They can discharge troublemakers so easily. That's another thing. I had an awfully hard time trying to discharge troublemakers. The incompetents. The idiots,

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which they don't have now. I think that's very helpful.

S: What do you think of the army's current doctrine, especially for larger-scale war fighting.

P: I think they're on the right track. They went off the track for a while, but I think they're back on the track pretty good now. So it's all right.

S: Do you think it's valid in its expectation of being able to reinforce the battlefield and overcome inferiority in numbers?

P: Yes, I do. And you know, there's a lot of this numbers game that's just ridiculous. Like they'll compare tanks in the Allied, NATO inventory and the tanks in the Warsaw Pact. Well, that's a non sequitur. I don't know whether they're counting all the tanks in storage or the reserve tanks. I know they count them on the Russian side. It's how many you bring to bear. How many battalions, how many tank battalions do they have? Now that's a valid measurement. That's all right. How many batteries of field artillery? That's all right. But to say they have 700 guns to our 300 guns or something is ridiculous. As I mentioned earlier, we're much better at gunnery than they are, much better. And our training is better too. I think so.

S: I guess our leadership is forced to play the numbers game. Budgetary.

P: Well, have you seen this book the Pentagon, that the defense puts out on the Soviets?

S: Yes, sir. Every year.

Polk

Polk: Very glossy, pretty thing. That's a disgrace. There's no vulnerabilities in there. There's not one single vulnerability in that book. I'd throw people out of my office [if they] come in and tell me about that. "All right. What are they bad at?" They don't mention that they have had an atomic sub blow up and a few things about that. That some of their ships go dead in the water. Things like that. That their tanks don't have night vision devices worth a damn. I understand they say now that the Soviets have a computer laser sight. They say that. I don't know how good it is. No. No. They say it's a one shot. That's no good either.

S: Yeah. There's something paradoxical about that because on the one hand we point up all these vulnerabilities in our force but our doctrine presupposes compensating superiorities.

P: Yeah. That's right. They have lots of vulnerabilities. For instance. They have a two-year draft but they bring in people every six months, so they've got a lot of green troops. That's another indicator. If they didn't discharge their two-year people it would make me very nervous. If they made 'em stay three years or something like that, that's a bad sign.

S: I wasn't aware that the army arranged these yearly briefings for four-stars. That's something that continues? You continue to attend these?

P: Yeah. I didn't go last year. I've forgotten. I had something else going on.

S: Has there been anything? General Vessey works with the Pentagon in a quasi-official way. He's got one foot in and one foot out. Have you done anything along those lines?

P: Have I?

S: Yes, sir.

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P: Not very much. I was called in as a consultant on atomic warfare. That's about all. Dutch Kerwin, retired four-star, he works all the time. He's found out some way that he can get paid without giving up his retired pay. But he's the great expert on mobilization.

S: Do you keep in touch with the armor folks?

P: Oh, yeah. I was just up there. I've been up there two years running now to a seminar. I was introduced as a living legend. [Chuckles] And I said, "Hold on. What are you talking about?" And they said, "Well, you're the only armored brigade commander we know of who's still alive and still got his brains." [Chuckles] I said, "I don't like to be called that." He said, "That's a fact." So they asked me all these questions about supply and things like how did you use your executive officer in combat. Who kept track of the ammunition and you know a lot of things like that. Did you do gunnery training in combat? Things like that.

S: Does that strike you as a reflection of priorities gone slightly askew?

P: No, it's just that most of the things are kind of controversial like how you use your executive officer. I never thought of it as controversial but it's kind of controversial in a battalion or a company. And things like that. They want to know how you get rid of incompetence. Uh, they wanted to know how long it takes somebody to wear out in high intensity war. Everybody wears out, but you watch for it. You watch for it. I tell them the example of Captain Tom Downing who commanded a troop in the 3rd squadron. Very handsome guy. graduate of VMI, splendid troop commander. And after about 8 months as the commander of the recon troop in the front line, he started wearing out on us. I was aware of it. So I got him a job back in 3rd Army; I traded him. They sent me a couple of

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captains. And he was a star back there. He became General Patton's briefing officer. I saved that guy. Just as an example. Get him a job. No use in leaving him because he'd sure done his bit. And so he later became a congressman from Newport News and was a congressman for about 10 years, very distinguished congressman. He wasn't having a mental breakdown, but he was pointing that way. You have to watch for it. Lot of questions like that. You know they'd never been in a war. The senior ones had been in Vietnam. It was kind of fun.

The 3rd Cavalry out here, I'm very close to them, too. I'm their honorary colonel, you know. And one of the squadron commanders, not so long ago, got all his lieutenants after supper drinking beer and got me out there and asked me questions about combat. Very interesting. And they asked good questions, you know. For instance, one of them said, "Was it your experience that when a tank got a catastrophic kill that usually one man was killed, one was wounded, and the other two got out all right?" I said, "Statistics prove that that's about true." It doesn't always hold, but it's more or less true. And so they said, "How about the two guys that got out. Are they any good anymore?" I said, "Yeah. They are, as a rule. The ones that get wounded, they're no good anymore." Guys shot through the shoulder or shot through the leg, goes back to the VAC hospital or goes over to England, stays there a month and comes back, they're no good. He's done his bit, and so he's got to find a soft job. For instance my headquarters troop. I think I've told you all this before.

S: Yes, sir. I wonder, "a living legend." How do you think folks with whom you served remember you now? How do you want them to remember you?

P: Oh, I'm very warmly received by most everybody. I have a little bet with

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myself that when I walk through an airport that somebody's going to recognize me, almost without exception. I have people come up to me quite often. For instance, I went out to a dedication of a LTV plant out here and there was a colonel out there that was the project manager and he came up to me, so glad to see me. Had been a captain over in my command in Europe. We got to talking about things over there. And they're all very good to me. They invite me to all these things.

S: That just means your career is still going on.

P: It is kind of, yeah. Some of my civilian friends say, "Why don't you quit the army." I say, "That's my life. Heck. I don't want to quit the army." They're very good to me. I had one guy call me up in Washington not so long ago. It was a Saturday afternoon. He was drunk obviously. And he said, "You ruined my career. You relieved me of the 14th Cavalry command." I said, "I didn't ruin your career, buddy. You ruined your own career. You were the most loused up commander there ever was up there." I haven't heard from him since. How are we doing?

S: I meant that as kind of [the end]. I do thank you very much. And I apologize. I don't mind having my apology on the record.

End of interview