CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEWER: JAMES M. DENHAM
PLACE: LAKELAND, FLORIDA
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M= James M. Denham (Mike)
H=Homer Hooks

M: Today is June 21, 2005aand I am in the home of Homer Hooks in Lakeland, Florida. We are here to discuss his World War II experiences. Homer, good morning.

H: Good morning, Mike.

M: Homer, we have your biographical information from the other tapes that we did. Could you tell us, before we actually get into your World War II experiences, a little bit about your knowledge and awareness, I guess, of the growing threat of fascism in Europe and also in the Far East, and what you thought as a college student and maybe even a high school student in the late 1930's, 1936, 37, 38, I think you entered University of Florida when?

H: 1939. I was there from 1939 to 1943 and, of course, that was right at the beginning of the war in Europe and as a student, well, I guess the first impact was that our student body suddenly dwindled down to less than 5000 students at the University of Florida. I believe it's maybe over 25,000 today, just to give you a comparison, and the reason of course was that at that time it was a boys' school and the draft into the service, in the Army and Navy and Marine Corp and others certainly decimated our student body. So my service actually in military began in ROTC at the University of Florida. I went through two years of intensive ROTC training. Because of my enlistment in ROTC, I was permitted to stay on the campus and graduate with my class in 1943. I went from there to Fort Benning.

M: Did you get a sense in 1939-40 that there was the likelihood that there would be a world war? September 1939 was the outbreak of World War II. Did you get a sense that, even though the United States was not in the war yet, in 1939, September, that there was a likelihood that this may happen, that things could degenerate to that point?

H: Yes, Mike, I think all of us, even though we were green freshmen in September of 1939, every newspaper we picked up was war oriented and we were not excluded. We saw many of our friends at school leave and go into the service, volunteer service. Many of us, as I said, stayed in ROTC in the Reserve Officers Training Corp of the Army and thereby were able to get our degree before we entered active service. But yes, to answer your question, there was a cloud over the campus for four years.

M: Also, you worked for *The Alligator*, correct?

H: I was editor of *The Alligator*.

M: Well, you would have editorialized on some of these events.

M: So, walk me through your progression in school. You began in 1939.

H: I was a resident of Clermont in Lake County. I had no money. I borrowed $100 from my aunt and got to Gainesville a week late as a green freshman and went on from there. I was very fortunate to be able to finish the four years and graduate with high honors and Phi Beta Kappa, and the editor of *The Alligator*, and the Campus Hall of Fame, and other honors that I'm too modest to relate. I was very lucky to have that opportunity to graduate from that school.

M: What was the extent of your duties in ROTC? What were the kinds of things that you did those four years?

H: We met, I believe, maybe twice a week. My memory is a little vague on that now, but I rose to the rank of Major in the Infantry. We drilled and had exercises and went to summer camps in Georgia or somewhere and practiced the arts of infantry.

M: December 7, 1941. Do you remember that day?

H: I remember it vividly. I was studying in my dormitory room in Fletcher Hall when the word came down that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. I leaned out the window and shouted to the first acquaintance I saw go by, who happened to be Raymond Ehrlich, a law student from Jacksonville, who later served on the Florida Supreme Court with great distinction. I hollered to Ray that we had been attacked by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor, and of course the news spread over the campus like wildfire because we were all vulnerable. We didn't know that maybe the university would close down and we'd all be sent into the service. We had no assurances of anything. But I do remember that Sunday.

M: What was the next day like?

H: The next day was looking out for yourself; "what does this mean to me personally." I'd like to say that we sat back and studied the strategies of Omar Bradley and General Eisenhower, but I was worried more about the strategy of Homer Hooks and was I going to be able to finish school, was I going to be jerked out of the Army, was my ROTC any kind of a shield or protection for me. It turned out it was and a very fine one, but I had no assurances of that the next day.

M: That would have been around Christmas break, I would imagine. Did you go through the rest of the spring semester?

H: Yes. Of course, the university stayed open and continued to hold classes as normal. Of course, many classes were decimated because students were leaving to volunteer. As I said at the outset, this was probably the lowest enrollment point in the history of the University of Florida. I think we were down to something like 3800 students, 3794 men and six women. This was before coeducation.

M: What was that summer like? What were the things that you did that summer as far as your ROTC? That would have been the summer of 1942.

H: I had a job in the dormitory system. I was a building monitor, so I stayed on the campus and worked as monitor of one of the halls. Incidentally, it was the women's dormitory. That's part of the story that we won't talk too much about!

M: You were the most trustworthy person on campus I guess; the straightest arrow of the bunch.

H: Absolutely. I had many of the young women come to me later on and say "thanks for letting me come in late". But that summer was uneasy because in the first days of the war, you know, it didn't go very well. The Japanese were in full attack and we were losing in the Pacific and we had not yet mounted a strategy in Europe. I think in Africa we were fighting but not on the continent certainly. So things were kind of tense that summer. We were all wondering about our own future, selfishly speaking.

M: Okay, into the fall of 1942, can you remember chronologically how things developed?

H: My memory is not too clear on that except that this was getting into the serious phase of ROTC because we could read the headlines and we knew that's where we were headed, either the Pacific or the Atlantic, or somewhere else. We knew that our service at that point was not doubtful, it was certain. I think all of us began to grow up rapidly.

M: Then you graduated in 1943.

H: I did, and after a couple of months of leave, I reported to Fort Benning, Georgia, I think it was November of 1943, and then proceeded with the 13-week course there. I was commissioned Second Lieutenant on graduation.

M: Roughly how many folks were at Fort Benning when you were there?

H: I don't think I know that figure. It was pretty crowded because they were grinding out second lieutents

M: Five thousand?

H: Probably less than that. I'm thinking of the Officer Candidate School, which I was in. I'd say between three and five thousand.

M: And that was you!

H: That was me, Second Lieutenant Infantry.

M: Were you assigned right after the 13 weeks?

H: I was assigned to the 102nd Infantry Division which at that time was located in Camp Swift, Texas. Three or four of us who were similarly assigned to the division got in a car and motored across, me from Clermont, others from other parts of the State.

M: Besides Al, did you know anybody else?

H: Oscar Herman Lewis

M: How many people were there at Camp Swift, Texas? And what were some of the different kinds of things you did from Fort Benning?

H: Camp Swift, which was located not far from San Antonio, was a traditional Army base with training facilities primarily. There were probably two or three regiments.

M: Did you have any idea at that time if you would be deployed to the Pacific or the European theatre? Did you have any hunch at all?

H: No, we had no indications where we might be sent.

M: It was all a matter of where the 102nd was sent. And 102nd didn't even know.

H: Exactly. It was a matter of war planning and the contingencies of war. If you remember, at that time we were losing. Europe had been overrun, the Pacific was under assault, Manila had fallen, and things didn't look good.

M: How long was the Camp Swift experience?

H: I was in Swift through the rest of 1943 and then in 1944 they moved us to New Jersey, to Fort Dix. At that time of course we were headed for Europe. That was clearly understood.

M: At Camp Swift were you all put into platoons at that time?

H: Yes. That's where the 102nd Division was organized. I was assigned as I said earlier to the
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H: That was the goal, but the contingencies of war could reduce a platoon to three overnight.
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H: I have a specific example. A West Point officer was in charge of one of our units. When he went into combat the first time, he completely collapsed. He sat in the bottom of his foxhole with his hands over his face. He could not go forward.

M: He was an officer, I guess?

H: He was a First lieutenant and a graduate of West Point. The point I want to make here is that nobody condemned him. Nobody blamed him for this because this is just another illustration of how much the human body and mind can take in the horror of war. So we lifted him out and got him back to the rear area and took care of him because it could happen to any of us. In his case, he just wasn't prepared mentally for the shock of combat.

M: And then perhaps on the other side of the fence, some of the ones that you didn't expect much out of perhaps –

H: My friend, Al Cone, whose story I just recited for you, in college was just a hard-working Joe studying Business Administration and my God, he got to Europe and he was a killer, a very shrewd and smart guy. He operated that raid in back of enemy lines like a professional soldier. And for that, he got the Silver Star. We were all very proud of him. But your point is well taken. I don't know of any institution in life that offers a broader range and scope of human emotions, abilities, sensitivity, than infantry combat. You see all kinds.

M: One of the things I want to ask you, and we can pick up on this as we go along while we're going across, is about African-American service in World War II. Obviously at this point in your service, they were very much marginalized. When you went to Camp Swift and when you went to Fort Benning, did you ever see any African-Americans and what kinds of roles they played, maybe as domestics or whatever?

H: No. I don't recall seeing any in the active platoons. I recall seeing a few doing barracks duty, kitchen duty, things like that.

M: But at this point in your service, you hadn't seen any evidence of that.

H: No.

M: Okay, so you arrive at Cherbourg. That must have been a real frightful experience because you didn't know what to expect.

H: Well, it was well under control by that time, but just barely. I mean, the advanced parties had already been there and set up a semblance of order. We arrived in Normandy; Cherbourg is in Normandy, in the fall of 1944 and set up our tent operation there.

M: I have September 22, 1944. Does that sound right?

H: That sounds about right, yeah.

M: September 23?

H: That's right.

M: What went through your mind the minute you stepped on shore, the minute your group deployed? And by the way, how many people were on the ship with you?

H: I don't remember.

M: It was a gigantic huge ship.

H: Well it was not a huge ship, it was a converted passenger ship, and I'm going to guess maybe a thousand.

M: How many ships did it take to bring the whole division over?

H: I don't know that number, but a lot. I was in the advance party by the way. I came over to Europe with, I don't know, maybe two to three hundred.

M: Were you concerned and informed, as you were crossing over, of submarine attacks and that kind of thing?

H: Oh yes. We didn't have any fortunately.

M: You don't remember any incidents?

H: I don't recall any incidents of that nature because there was good intelligence about where the submarines were, and of course we traveled in a convoy of many ships and we had battleship protection with our crossing, but we didn't have any incidents.

M: What went through your mind the first time you stepped onto European soil in hostile territory?

H: I would like to say that I made some wonderful quotable statement like "Lafayette, we're here", but I was probably looking for a restroom. No, I don't recall anything memorable about it except that we all had a lot to do.

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vulnerable. Their bellies were vulnerable to enemy fire, so we literally had to dig passages for tanks to get through there.

M: As you arrived in Cherbourg, how far would it have been, how many miles would it have been before there would have been a strong likelihood of combat? Let's say, you're in Cherbourg, how far would the, I guess the lines of Germans –

H: I think the enemy at that time was maybe 75 miles away. The Army prudently didn't run any great risks. Having established the beachhead, Omaha Beach, and the others and pushing inward, they consolidated the positions and defended them well so that the enemy was by that time not in panic retreat but in an orderly retreat toward Belgium and Southern Holland and back on into Germany. But I don't remember actually, Mike, whether Paris was liberated. I don't

on September 3, 1944, and then, as I said before, we went into Normandy, landing September 25, and then there were the hedge rows, the nuns at the slit trenches. The Red Ball Express was organized to move supplies to the front lines and the 102nd Division was assigned the duty of running that. I was not personally involved in it but a lot of my friends were who learned quickly how to drive trucks and deliver supplies to the front. We went across France and Belgium into Holland and our first major engagement with the enemy, and now I'm up to the same schedule you were on before, was on the Roer River, where we met the Germans head on. I have many, many memories about that.

M: Can you describe some of your first experiences or feelings about combat, what it was like?

H: Yes, it was strange. It ran all the way from absolute terror to lulls that were almost peaceful, and then suddenly it would pick up again. There was not a continuous burst unless you were in attack mode. It was in that first engagement when I was run over by a tank. I was deep down in my foxhole. The tanks had just advanced our lines and were firing on the enemy and when dusk came down, the tanks would customarily come back into the village behind us. Well the tank commander waved and I waved back, but it turned out he wasn't waving at me, he was waving at somebody else. He did not see me in my foxhole with my Sergeant so the next thing I knew was a hell of a rumble and the tank tread ran right over our foxhole and packed both my Sergeant and me under six feet of Dutch soil. Some of my friends on either side in their foxholes had seen this happen so they jumped up to come dig us out. Well when they jumped up, the Germans saw that action and laid down some heavy machine gun fire at ground level. So my friends who came to dig us out had to lie on their backs and dig with one hand with shovels. I remember vividly that they finally got a semi-loose dirt opening, so then saw tc i the handle of the shovel down to create an air hole. Well the handle of the shovel hit me right on the back of the head. They thought then had hit a rock, so they just saw tc i harder. Finally maybe they heard me holler and scream or whatever and they finally dug us out and the firing ceas i from the enemy because they couldn't see in the dark. I never saw the Sergeant again. He was evacuated with a badly sprained back from carrying that load of dirt on his back. I had the good sense, I guess, involuntarily to go into a hunched position and spread the load. He was on his side and took all of that pressure on his ribs.

M: So the tank just continued on, I guess.

H: They continued on. They didn't know that then had run over us. Only my friends on either side saw that suddenly our foxhole had disappeared and they dug us out.

M: Was that the first day of your combat?

H: It was probably the second or third. It was not the first. But it was very vivid.

M: If I understand this correctly, your battalion was trying to take the bridges. Were the bridges that you were trying to get control of over the Roer River at that point?

H: Yes, they were over the Roer, and they were heavily defended. But before we even got to the bridge, we had to eliminate the resistance in the little towns before the river. Some of the heaviest combat that we ran into was on the banks of the Roer River and just before the banks, little towns like Apweiler and Geronsweiler, Geilenkirchen. I wrote an incident for which later the *Saturday Evening Post* paid me a hundred dollars in which my Sergeant had lost his rifle for some reason and the only thing he had with him was his radio with the antenna sticking out, so we came upon a German foxhole or embankment and we yelled in German for them to come

M: Would it be correct to say that the Roer area was the heaviest combat that you had fought so far?

H: Yeah.

M: Did you have combat in Holland and in –

H: Well to the extent that Al Cone's raid was in Holland. There was some resistance there, but by far the bitterest fighting was between the Roer and the Rhine.

M: How many miles would that have been roughly?

H: Oh, 10 or 12 miles I guess. Interestingly enough, I had occasion after the war, I guess in 1947 or 1948, to go back to Germany on business. I was in the citrus business then, and one day I rented a car and I drove to the exact spot where I had dug a foxhole and found it. It was just –

M: Where you were run over in the foxhole?

H: Not the one where I was run over.

H: Yeah. I mentioned the Christmas tree thing. I have another short story. I'm not even going to swear that this is accurate or truthful but it's so funny that I have to put it in. We were called on almost daily to take raids behind enemy lines and capture prisoners. Of course this is a terribly hazardous thing because nobody wants to be captured, so we ran into a lot of resistance to this.

M: As far as participating in these operations. Nobody wanted to do it.

H: Oh no, but you had to do it. I mean this is part of your job. But it was something that was very hazardous and dangerous. So one Lieutenant, or maybe it was a Sergeant, came up with a beautiful idea. He took a team across the German lines and captured 25 or 30 Germans at one swoop but instead of sending them all back to headquarters for interrogation, he sent three or four of them back, and he kept the others in a basement. He kept them fed and took care of them, but when the word came down that we needed to make another raid, he'd take another three or four prisoners out of his pool. Now I want to emphasize up close that I do not stand ready to swear under oath that this happened.

M: And you're not ready to swear under oath who it was either, I'm sure.

H: I'm not ready to swear anything on that story.

M: It's a good story and probably did happen. It was a pretty enterprising guy.

H: A good postscript to it would be that this Sergeant was so enterprising that he briefed himself on what was happening so that he could tell the Germans what to say. Now again, this may be pure fiction, but it's such a good story I couldn't help but relate it to you.

M: Well, go through with us a little bit of the logistics of crossing. For example, help me understand how you were able to push the Germans far enough back from the other side of the river to actually execute the crossing.

H: Well, there were assigned assault troops of course who with all engineer built boats would cross the river in raids and gradually push the Germans out of position. When they got them far enough back, then the engineers would build a pontoon bridge and a main body of say a battalion could cross over and push the Germans further back.

M: At this stage of the war, were paratroopers still being used?

H: Not in our section but I think up north of us, north Holland, there were paratroop operations, but we didn't have them.

M: I also want to ask about air cover and air combat. At this stage in the war, were there still German Luftwaffe coming over all the time, or was that pretty much knocked out by then?

H: We didn't see any significant air combat on either side. One reason was we were so close together.

M: Even if you go back to when you first landed for example. Was there significant air combat or air strafing or anything like that?

H: I'm sure there was, and we could see the red light flashing in the cities back in France, but we were not ourselves involved in air strikes. In some combat situations I recall as we moved into Germany, we called down air support but that was rare. And again part of the reason was, Mike, we were so close to the German lines and they were close to us that it would have been difficult for an air strike not to hit our own troops.

M: We were talking about the Christmas tree and we were talking about Christmas. We know what went on south of you around that time, and that is the big Ardennes offensive, the Bulge.

H: Battle of the Bulge.

M: What kind of effect or impact did that have on you, if only just to scare you a little bit?

H: It had a very direct impact in that our lines were thinned out so that more troops could be sent south to the Ardennes. We were perhaps 15 or 20 miles north of the Bulge.

M: Is that all? That's not far.

H: Yes, that's not far. Had the Germans known that our lines were being thinned to go down to the Bulge area, they could have walked through between our lines, but their intelligence didn't show that so the net effect was that they were confronted at the Bulge by Patton and his people and destroyed. But German intelligence was not the best. To us it meant that our lines were thin. We actually had communication by telephone between foxholes because we couldn't yell that far.

M: So when you first learned of the offensive, was there a lot of chaos, a lot of concern?

H: No, I think our defensive posture was pretty well established that we had to get reinforcements in there, which we did. As I said, some of it was the thinning of our own lines. But that was handled superbly by our higher command in their getting General Anthony McAuliffe and his people, (and his saying "nuts" to German surrender orders), and they got things taken care of. But to us who were north of it, the only effect we saw was some lowering of our troop levels.

M: Okay, walk us through from your own personal perspective what crossing the Roer was like.

H: Well the crossing of the Roer, which is a very narrow stream, was not a significant problem. Crossing the Rhine was a big event. You remember the Bridge at Remagan?

M: Sure.

H: I'll have to say, Mike, that by the time we got to the Rhine, our regiment had been in a reserve posture, we crossed without any difficulty.

M: The Rhine?

H: Yeah. The engineers had laid the bridge down. Of course there was some sporadic enemy fire but nothing concentrated and we got into the main body of Western Germany without major difficulty. Our main fighting was around the Roer River, which the Germans would call, I guess their first line of defense before the Rhine. We didn't see any resistance to speak of at the Rhine because that had all been cleared out by other troops.

M: What about right after you crossed the Roer? Were there still Germans in that grid?

M: So that's a good way to go.

H: Because that's all the way across the North German plain. And I have a fascinating story, which I've told many times, tried to sell it, about my role in the ending of World War II. Tell me when you're ready.

M: We'll certainly get there. How would you describe the German resistance at that point? That would have been, I guess, February or March of 1945.

H: That's a very, very good question. I would describe it as intense and sporadic. It was not well organized. Mike, we ran into kids of 12 and 13 years old. We ran into old men all bent over but holding up a rifle. We ran into very little highly organized resistance, but we ran into a lot of pockets of absolute dedicated committed resistance.

M: Did you run into any SS Divisions or any SS troops at this point?

H: I personally never did. We were told that they were out there, but by that time they had turned most of the heavy fighting over to the Citizen's Armies they called it, the Wehrmacht.

M: You also mentioned that after you crossed the Rhine you began to see a lot of civilians that really had nowhere else to go I would assume.

H: Exactly. They knew the Russians were coming from the East, they knew we were coming from the West, and I can say right now that we got most of the surrenders because they were just dreading the Russian army, and with good reason.

M: Was there any evidence nearer the Elbe that there were massive numbers of refugees coming across the Elbe and then over into –

H: Yes, yes. Many, many, many hundreds, if not thousands, were fleeing from the Russian army and attempting to surrender to the West. This was a real problem because logistically these people had to be taken care of one way or another. At my level, wetheso t my2om(f no)5(t the w)2(ethes

H: Pictures in this book! Survivors…..

M: There is no other incident in history that is more documented.

H: Did you ever know a guy named Landwirth, here in Lakeland?

M: No.

H: He ran and owned the Holiday Inn on Memorial. He was a survivor; he and his sister were survivors of a concentration camp. He still had the numbers on his arm, and to hear Henry talk about his experiences, you just couldn't believe it, that a human being could do those things.

M: Yes.

H: But anyway, that was my experience with it. It was the camp called Gardelegen in April 1945 and then we went on to the Elbe River. We went right up to the Czech border and then pulled back into Bavaria where we occupied Bavaria. I was still a First lieutenant at that time, but I was given heavy responsibility along the border of Czechoslovakia. One of my Company Commanders raised the question, he was a Captain, and he said, "Why should I take the orders of a fucking First lieutenant?" So I said, "Well, sir, I'm just carrying out the General's orders". So I went to the General whose name was Biddle, a Philadelphia Biddle, and I recounted that and I said, "Sir, I've had a problem with Captain so-and-so down there who says he's not going to take orders from any SOB First lieutenant". The General picked up the phone and he said, "Get me Captain so-and-so". He said, "Captain! This is the voice of Biddle". I'll never forget his phrasing it. "This is the voice of Biddle. From this day forward, you will obey without question any order given to you by Lieutenant Hooks. Am I clear?" That was a funny incident. It's true.

M: Now this occurred after you had gotten to the Elbe, and after you were in the occupation.

H: We were in occupation at that point.

M: Well I want to go into that too actually, that occupation. So, as you move toward the Elbe, resistance is sporadic, there are extreme dangers still. Did you ever see, at this point, any German aircraft at all by that time?

H: No. In fact, I can only recall two or three incidents I could see them, as I told you before, when we were getting into France. I could see them off in the distance, but strafing our troops? No. We never had that. And I didn't see much enemy air activity at all.

M: Chesterfield Smith has that great story, you know, the jets flying over for the first time, and as Burke Kibler says, "You have to take a lot of what Chesterfield used to say as revisionist".

H: That much salt!

M: But you never saw any jets or anything like that?

H: No.

M: Okay. When you were on the way, of course, you're trying to survive and just make it through the day, but did you have a sense that there would be political fallout from the Russians

occupying Berlin and then incorporating all the territory up to the Elbe? Did you think at all about any of that stuff as you were going through the day?

H: Let me remind you, Mike, I was a First lieutenant.

M: Yes, exactly.

H: Company Commander, Platoon Commander.

M: It's almost a ridiculous question.

H: I wasn't thinking at – well it's a good question, it's a legitimate question. But as one soldier said, "That is above my pay level". In retrospect, certainly we were concerned, but at that time, we welcomed them because they were fighting the same guys we were and for every German they shot, we didn't have to worry about. So to put it as plainly as I know how, I would say that we loved the Russians at that point.

happier to see us than the Russians. This was the big demarcation at the end of the war. They were horrified by the Russians and the stories that they had heard, so by contrast, they considered us much more desirable people. But there were pockets of resistance, just unyielding.

M: What was the last day, the last shot that you heard fired in combat? That might be hard for you to remember, but what was the last day that you ever experienced any combat moving up to the Elbe?

H: Gee, that's a tough one. I don't know if there was a specific incident because after we crossed the Rhine and got into the North German plain, it was more a matter of continuous movement. We were in trucks for the most part so whatever shots were fired were from last ditch snipers and, you know, malcontents. To put it another way, a better way, there was no organized resistance to us for the most part in the North German plain as we went to the Elbe River.

M: Can you remember your feelings or your thinking on VE Day, when you found out about the surrender?

H: Yes, and I remember quite vividly, they were not entirely joyful because we were getting a lot of information that troops were being moved from Europe to Asia, that some troops would be redeployed from a combat area in Europe to staging areas in the Pacific and everybody wondered 'is it us'?

M: You were already thinking about that?

H: Yeah. So we were apprehensive about that and every time orders came down for a troop movement, you wondered 'does this mean us, are we going to San Francisco?'

M: So you had experiences or knowledge of people on a personal level that that was going on with?

H: I really didn't. I think it was more in the realm of rumor, but S*tars and Stripes* and other communications were full of news about the war in the Pacific so it didn't take a genius to figure out that if they're going to have one, here we are! We're well trained, combat ready, move us over. So we had to be concerned, and we were concerned about that.

M: Well walk us through, unless there are some other things that you'd like to talk about, up to the VE Day surrender. Is there anything more that you'd like to say about your combat experience up to that point?

H: Well I mentioned the 'Voice of Biddle' incident which is interesting to me.

M: But that was after VE Day, correct?

H: You're right. That was after VE Day. That was in the Army of Occupation. But before that, when we got to the banks of the Elbe, I was acting as a liaison officer between my outfit, which was the 406th Infantry, and division and Corp headquarters to the rear. We were poised to cross the Elbe and capture Berlin, and we were all ready to go; everything was set up. And I had an urgent call to report back to division headquarters, somewhere 25 miles behind the line. So I went back and I got a sealed envelope. I wasn't allowed to read it, in case of capture I

couldn't say what it was, so I took it back to my regimental headquarters and waited while the Colonel read it and the message was 'you will stand on the West bank of the Elbe River and not cross the Elbe River to capture Berlin'. I'm paraphrasing it. I'm sure it was put in more elegant military language.

M: And this was a Colonel who had received that.

H: Exactly.

Church, at which my grandfather was the pastor, organized a communications and letter exchange with foreign students our same age. It wound up that I was put in touch with a young man named Rudolf Donner of Leipzig, Germany; exactly my age, say 16 or 17 years ago. So Rudolf and I corresponded back and forth for years and years, all the way through college. Then when the war came, suddenly he joined the brown troopers and he was so happy and proud about that. Of course I was in ROTC. And our correspondence just kind of petered out because we lost our common interests. Then, when I was in Germany in Occupation, in Bavaria, I took a jeep one day and went driving and we went to Leipzig, and I went to Rudolf's apartment.

M: You knew his address!

H: Yeah, I knew his address. And there was his name on the door, Rudolf Donner, but he was gone. Of course I had no way to communicate by telephone or whatever, so I just left a note on the door that Homer Hooks of Clermont, Florida, came by to say hello; never heard from him. But that's kind of an interesting story, melding the old with the -2(new6.011 0es)-2(t Td ( )Tj 0.005(l)-1*?hr)1(

M: What was it like, let's see you'd been overseas now about a 1-1/2 years, correct?

H: Nearly two years counting Occupation.

M: What was it like getting your gear together and getting ready to go back home? What was going through your mind?

H: Well, I was excited about it. Number one, I had a girlfriend I wanted to marry, not the one I'm married to now; that ended in divorce, but she was studying for her Master's Degree at Columbia University so it was very convenient.

M: Did you meet her at Florida?

H: I met her in Texas.

M: Oh while you were in Texas.

H: She was a Texan. She was at the University of Texas in Austin when I met her.

M: Did you maintain contact while you were over there?

H: Yeah. We wrote each other. Then when I got back, we got together again and subsequently got married. But I guess it was more a matter of just waiting. I was glad to get home. I wanted to embark on my career in Journalism for which I was trained at the University of Florida. I went to Tampa and looked up a dear friend, Jimmy Clendenin, who was State Editor of *The Tribune*, and he hired me, and I went to work writing for *The Tribune*. Then we can fast forward. I stayed in the Army Reserve and was recalled to duty in the Korean War. I think I told you that.

M: Yes. We can certainly get into some of that if you'd like.

H: Well, it'll be rather brief. I went into the Pentagon in Army Intelligence. I was promoted to captain by that time and I was assigned to give regular daily briefings and that's when that incident occurred where the G2 of the Army was the former commanding general of the 84th Infantry Division. I told you that story, I won't repeat it. He said, "Who took Krefeld", and I said, "For the purposes of this interview, you did". My job every morning was to go in and get a telecom message from Tokyo on what happened in Korea the day before. I would plot that on a Top Secret portable map which I carried under my arm and then go to the office of the Chief of Staff or the general who had troops in Korea, the Allies, to the State Department. It was a pretty high level duty. That would take all of the morning and then I'd come back in the afternoon and plot maps again about the situation in Korea. The thrust of the duty was that I was in charge of informing the ambassadors of the countries who had troops in Korea fighting alongside ours and our own command structure in the Pentagon, Chief of Staff, Chief of Staff of the Army, Secretary of Defense, and so forth, on an up-to-date accurate maybe 10-15 minute description of what happened the day before at Korea. It was interesting. And I met a lot of very fine officers, General Mark 15 0duty w Cl(k)]aipe. 0 Tw 9.852 0 .1539

H: Consummate gentleman. He could have held any office he wanted I think. He was very quiet spoken, unassuming. In civilian clothes you would not guess that he was a commanding general, but he had tremendous intellect and a certain gravity about him that commanded instant respect and admiration. I was very much taken with him. I also recall one time when one of my colleagues was appearing before all of these generals to give his report on the situation in Korea and he suddenly forgot everything. He forgot his notes. He forgot where he was. And he was an Irish boy and he said, and I'll never forget it, he said, "Gentleman, for the

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H: I was working for the Lakeland Highlands Canning Company here in Lakeland,

the general when my 18 months was about to come up, that was my tour, and I said, “General, it’s almost time for me to leave now”, and he said, “You can’t go”. I said, “Sir, what do you mean, with all respect?” He said, “Well our policy is that you can’t leave an assignment like this until you get a replacement for yourself”. And I said, “With the deepest respect, Sir, how do I get a replacement for myself?” And he laughed and said, “I’m kidding you, Hooks”, he says, keW(al)-1e(s)-2(6(tobpec)-2omv)4(eDw)2(i)-1erforof, Sals forDwal