

interviewee: Gerald Heaney

interviewer: Thomas Saylor

date of interview: 21 October 2001

location: sitting room of the Heaney home, St Louis County, MN

transcribed by: Linda Gerber, October 2002

edited by: Thomas Saylor, December 2002

Gerald Heaney was born 29 January 1918 in Goodhue, MN, and graduated from high school there in 1935. He then attended the College of St. Thomas, St. Paul, and the University of Minnesota Law School, graduating in 1941. He volunteered for the US Army in July 1942 and, after basic training at Camp Croft, TN, was selected for Officer Candidate School at Ft. Benning, GA. Commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant, Gerald was serving with a reserve unit in South Carolina when he volunteered for the Army Rangers. He trained stateside with the 2nd Ranger battalion until the end of 1943, when the unit was sent to England as part of the buildup for the invasion of France.

The 2nd Ranger battalion landed at Omaha Beach on D-Day, 6 June 1944, and 1st Lt. Gerald Haney was there. He stayed with the unit for the remainder of the war, participating during action in the Hürtgen Forest (November-December 1944), the Battle of the Bulge (December 1944-January 1945), and further engagements in Germany and Czechoslovakia. In June 1945 Gerald was re-assigned to the Office of Military Government in Munich, Germany; as a lawyer, he worked with a group re-writing the Bavarian labor laws. In October 1945 he was finally rotated back to the United States and discharged.

Once again a civilian, in December 1945 Gerald got married (wife Eleanor); in January 1946 the couple moved to Duluth, where Gerald practiced law for twenty years. In 1966 President Lyndon Johnson appointed him a judge on the US 8th Circuit Court of Appeals, a lifetime appointment.

At the time of this interview (October 2001) Gerald and Eleanor Heaney lived on Pike Lake, in St. Louis County, MN, several miles outside of Duluth.

Interview Key:

T = Thomas Saylor

G = Gerald Heaney

TAPE 1, SIDE A, COUNTER BEGINS AT “000”

T: It's the 21st of October 2001 in Duluth, Minnesota. This is the interview with Judge Gerald Heaney. First, Judge Heaney, thanks for very much for agreeing to take time from your afternoon and sit and have a conversation with me.

G: You're welcome.

T: Let me ask first of all, just some basic biographical information, for example, when and where you were born?

G: I was born on January 29, 1918 in Goodhue, Minnesota. That's a town of about five hundred people. By Red Wing. Fifteen miles south of Red Wing on highway 58.

T: That's a small place. Did you have your own schools there in Goodhue?

G: We had a public high school in Goodhue. There were only five students in my high school graduating class.

T: That was my next question. Five students. I take it sports teams must have been a little difficult to put together?

G: Yes. We had a basketball team and we had a softball team and that was the extent of our interscholastic athletics.

T: It would have taken most of the high school male population to fill a football team.

G: Right. They do now. Now they're a consolidated rural school with a rural community. Now they have football and basketball and wrestling.

T: But this consolidation makes for a larger student body.

G: Larger student body. And at that time not many farm girls went to school and a lot of farm boys didn't go to school. They had to stay home and help on the farm. Now practically all the farm kids go on to high school.

T: That's a real difference. What year did you finish high school?

G: 1935.

T: When you finished high school, where did your path take you?

G: To St. Thomas College.

T: Here in St. Paul?

G: Yes.

T: What did you study there?

G: Pre-law.

T: Did you go right to law school after you finished St. Thomas?

G: I went right to Law School after I finished St. Thomas.

T: And when did you finish Law School?

G: 1941.

T: Now that was at the University of Minnesota.

G: University of Minnesota.

T: What prompted you to go into law?

G: From as long as I can remember I wanted to be a lawyer.

T: Do you come from a family of lawyers?

G: No. I had an uncle that was a lawyer but I liked it. I liked what I saw and that was what I wanted to do.

T: Did your folks support you in that, too?

G: Yes. My mother died when my youngest sister was born. So my dad was supportive of whatever we wanted to do. We didn't have much money but it wasn't expensive to go to school then. I had a Knights of Columbus scholarship to St. Thomas and then when I lived at the University I worked under the NYA student work program at the library as a research assistant.

T: You finished in pretty good time, from 1935 to '41. Four years for a bachelor's degree and two years for Law School.

G: That's the way it was then. You could go two and four.

T: You finished in spring of 41, is that right?

G: June of 41.

(1,A,64)

T: You went right to work then, is that right?

G: No. I had been drafted. I had been deferred until I finished school and took the bar exam. As soon as the bar exam, I had completed the bar examination, I reported for induction at Fort Snelling [in Minneapolis].

T: Did you go into the military then?

G: No, I was rejected because they said I had a heart murmur. I was classified as 4-F.

T: That was all before the U.S. got involved in the war.

G: That was all before Pearl Harbor.

T: Let me ask about Pearl Harbor, the 7th of December 1941. What were you doing when you first heard that news?

G: On December 7th Orville Freeman and Jane, the woman that he was going with at that time, and Eleanor and I, we drove down to Zumbrota [Minnesota] to Orville's grandparents. They were from Zumbrota. They owned a farm down there, and we went down and took a look at the farm and then we drove to Goodhue [Minnesota] to have dinner at our house. When we got there they had the radio on, and President Roosevelt was on the radio saying that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor.

T: How did you react to hearing that news?

G: Within the next week Orville Freeman and I and Bob Johnson, who was Anoka County Attorney for a long time, and another young man by the name of Bob Mussman, we all went over and volunteered for the Marines. I was rejected because I was colorblind. They were accepted. So the three of them went into the Marine Corps, and then the next July I volunteered for the Army. July 5, 1942.

T: How did your dad . . . Did you have any siblings, by the way?

G: I had two brothers and two sisters.

T: What was their reaction, if you can recall? Your siblings or your dad?

G: My two other brothers were in the Army.

T: Already in the Army?

G: My younger brother went in. He was drafted at the same time I was. But he passed the physical and he went into the Army. My brother Dennis went in after I did. He was older. He had a lower draft number than I did.

T: Do you recall how your dad reacted to hearing the news?

G: We ran a meat market and a grocery store and then they bought and sold cattle. Small town operation. If that was what I wanted to do that was fine.

T: In July of 1942 you did go into the Army.

G: Yes.

T: What was your feeling to finally going, after several false starts?

G: I wanted to go in, and I had no problem getting in. I went in with a fellow by the name of Bob Dunlap who was later State Senator from Rochester. Bob and I were high school friends and we went over there and we thought we would be together. We never saw each other in the war.

T: Really? Once you got in that was it?

G: He went one way and I went another way.

T: That seemed to happen frequently.

G: Yes.

(1,A,127)

T: Were you attracted to the Army as opposed to the Navy for example?

G: I couldn't get in the Navy because I was colorblind.

T: The Army didn't care about that?

G: The Army doesn't care about color blindness.

T: But the Navy did?

G: The Navy and the Marines did, because something about signaling and all that kind of business.

T: So color blindness kept you out of every service except the Army.

G: Right.

T: Where did you go for basic training?

G: To Camp Croft, Tennessee.

T: Was that a new part of the country for you?

G: That was a brand new part of the country.

T: What was that place like down there?

G: It was hot. It had red clay soil. We were busy most times from morning until night doing the things you do in basic training, calisthenics and close order drill, digging foxholes, and camping out over night.

T: All the good stuff.

G: All the good stuff. (laughs)

T: Was there a time when you were able to have an evening off and go to the local town?

G: Sure. I would say that we got two-thirds of the weekends off.

T: What was the local town, the closest town?

G: (***) We used to go up to Asheville, North Carolina when we could on the weekends. That was east of us in the mountains. It was cooler and it was more like home.

T: What about these little towns? Any memories of what these places were like? Asheville or the local town in Tennessee?

G: The local town in Tennessee what I remember most about that was when we'd go on these marches. We'd be marching along and they had the orchards. We'd take a break and have an apple or a peach or whatever.

T: Because it was late summer by that time, wasn't it?

G: It was late summer.

T: Was that your first time away from home for an extended period of time?

G: Other than going to college.

T: Was that an adjustment for you?

G: Yes. But not too much.

T: More of a positive adjustment or more of a difficult one?

G: Not difficult but negative.

T: Because of it being basic training?

G: Because of it being basic training. Doing the same thing over and over again.

T: Did it occur to you then trying to figure what basic training was all about?

G: Yes. I knew I had to know how to handle small arms.

T: Was it a physical training or more psychological?

G: It was physical. I wasn't in very good shape. It wasn't psychological very much. I mean there was none of this yelling and hollering that you see on the TV about the Marines and others. It was just get up at five o'clock in the morning and have calisthenics and eat breakfast, and then whatever was scheduled for the day, whether it was small arms training or it was close order drill, or whether it was some kind of an exercise.

T: Did guys wash out of basic training? Guys who couldn't make it?

G: I don't think there were very many that washed out of basic training. I don't remember any.

T: The Army was keeping people there.

G: The Army was keeping people there.

T: Once you left basic training in Tennessee, where did you go next?

(1,A,190)

G: I made application for OTS, Officer Training School, at Fort Benning. I was accepted and I went to Fort Benning.

T: Were you encouraged to apply?

G: No. I just wanted to.

T: How was the OCS, how was that different from basic training that you'd just been through?

G: It was more intensive. We worked harder. And you got additional training in small unit tactics and in handling a platoon and that kind of thing.

T: Was it more classroom or more out in the field?

G: Both. I would say two-thirds out in the field and one-third in the classroom.

T: Did people wash out of this particular training?

G: There were a few. Not very many.

T: This was ninety day training.

G: Ninety-day training.

T: Do you have a particularly positive memory or negative memory of basic training that you can recall?

G: No, neither one.

T: Really?

G: I just went down there and did what I had to do.

T: Were you happy to be there or more just there because you needed to be there?

G: When I went in I went in with the expectation that I would be an officer so I was happy to be there. To have that opportunity.

T: When were assignments made for where you would be going after Fort Benning?

G: Just shortly before the ninety days ended.

T: Were options made available to you or were you assigned?

G: We were assigned.

T: Where were you assigned?

G: I was assigned to Colombia, South Carolina, to the National Guard Division. I was a platoon leader. An infantry platoon.

T: Did that suggest at that time that you would be spending the foreseeable future Stateside with this National Guard unit?

G: No. I mean everyone's expectation was that all these units would eventually be deployed to Europe or to Asia.

T: And that was your expectation as well?

G: That was my expectation.

T: Is that indeed what happened then?

G: No, what happened was that I didn't think that the division was a very well led division. I wasn't very impressed with the quality of leadership either at the battalion level or the regimental level.

T: These are officers above you?

G: Above me. So then they published a notice on the bulletin board that the Second Ranger Battalion was accepting volunteers. I put my name down and went over for the interview.

T: Was that on the same base?

G: On the same base.

(1,A,233)

T: How long had you actually been on this base now before you saw this announcement?

G: I went in, in July [1942]. July, August and September at Camp Croft. I spent October, November and December at Fort Benning. I was there for maybe January and February. In March [1943] then I went to the Second Ranger Battalion. I was only there for maybe sixty days.

T: Didn't take you long to figure out you didn't want to stay with...

G: Didn't take me very long to figure out there were other opportunities.

T: What about this opportunity with the Second Ranger Battalion? What was entailed there?

G: It was an all volunteer unit. It had a reputation for being well-led. I didn't think so much about wanting to be a hero or anything it was just to get out of where I was. It was very difficult to transfer out of the infantry company. They wanted a certain number of college graduates to be the platoon leaders. But they couldn't resist you going you into the Ranger Battalion so that's what I did.

T: Once you got there, where did your path take you with this unit? Did you switch locations for example, for a base?

G: We switched locations and we went to Camp Forest, Tennessee. That's where we trained. We trained there until October. About six months of training. I was made the assistant G-3. I was operations and training officer. It was essentially a staff job. It was essentially to assist in the scheduling and training.

T: Had you been promoted to first lieutenant by now?

G: I had been promoted to first lieutenant when I got to the Ranger Battalion.

T: Was the expectation with the Rangers that the unit would be posted overseas in the foreseeable future?

G: Yes. We assumed that we would be training to take part in the invasion of Europe. That turned out to be the case.

T: At this point in time you'd been in the military for a year, almost a year by the time you joined the Rangers. Six, seven, eight months. Then in Tennessee it was more than a year before you actually left. Was there a perception in your mind at this time about who the enemy was? What this enemy represented?

G: I was always someone who read a lot, listened a lot, so there was no doubt in my mind, particularly after Pearl Harbor. What the cause was and who the enemy was.

T: Did you feel yourself wanting to avenge things against particular peoples, or was it simply a duty you had been asked to do?

G: It was a feeling that you had to do your part. That you had lots of advantages that you had to protect. There was no feeling of revenge. I detested Hitler and what he stood for, and figured it was my job to do my part whatever I could.

T: Would you have been just as satisfied being sent to the Pacific theater as the European theater?

G: I hadn't really thought of that. (*pauses three seconds*) I suppose. I went where I was told to go.

T: Your unit was moved from this base in Tennessee, and what was the next step?

G: In October [1943] Colonel Rudder sent myself and three other people, another officer and two enlisted men, to England as an advance party to make arrangements for housing and so forth for the Second Ranger Battalion. So we went over in October in convoy and we landed at Bristol, England, and from there I went to London. I was in London maybe for ten days to two weeks. I was waiting to be told where we were going to be assigned.

T: Who would do the assigning?

G: It was done by the S-4 of the Army and just how it was passed down. But we were assigned to a little town called Viley in Cornwall, England.

T: Down in the southwest?

G: No, on the west coast. Not south. Although Cornwall runs all the way down to Land's End, we were in the northern part of Cornwall. So we went over there. Part of the Ranger philosophy was that we wanted to teach people to react on their own and to be independent, so we were to be billeted in individual homes. Myself and the other officer went to the village constable and we went house to house seeking people to house. They were to have a shilling a day which was twenty cents a day.

T: Were people receptive to this offer?

G: Yes, they were receptive. They knew the fact that we had come to help them. It was really amazing. They were only permitted to keep one room for each member of the family and that included every room in the house except the kitchen and the bathroom. We didn't have to push them quite that hard, but it was a rare house indeed that didn't have at least one Ranger.

T: Were there other units in this town as well or just your own?

G: There was another unit in the town in addition to our unit that had taken over a couple of hotels. They lived in the hotels but not in the individual homes. We were the only ones that lived in the individual homes.

(1,A,319)

T: Can you describe the relations between the local civilians and the Ranger Battalion?

G: It was good. All of the guys were, there were kids in the family, and they were bringing chocolate and food home to the families. They became very close to them. They were close to the families.

T: That one on one relationship.

G: Yes. One on one relationship. Many of them went back there after the war was over to visit the families.

T: You were there for a number of months, is that right?

G: We were there for most of the time from . . . the Battalion came over in November. I was there from October until shortly before D-Day [in June 1944].

T: That's more than six months then?

G: Yes, and during that time we were there most of the time. We went over to Isle of Wight and we did some cliff climbing and we did some amphibious training there. There were a couple of other places we would go for a short time but our headquarters was in Viley until shortly before D-Day when we were moved to [the port city of] Southampton.

T: The activities you describe clearly suggest that the Army was really preparing this unit and perhaps many others for this invasion many, many months ahead of time.

G: Yes. In Butte there were also cliffs. We did a lot of training on the cliffs. We did a lot of night training. A lot of live fire training. Then a couple months before D-Day we got information as to where we were going to land. They didn't say where it was except that we got maps that showed where the houses were, where the barbed wire was, where the mines were.

We didn't know if it was in Calais, or whether it was in Normandy. Or whereabouts in Normandy. The colonel knew but, all we knew.....so one of my jobs was to build sand tables so everybody knew exactly what they were to do when this would take place.

T: There was a clear knowledge well ahead of time of exactly where you were going.

G: We knew we were going to be part of the D-Day invasion.

T: That being the case, what was the, how would you describe the *esprit de corps* of the men?

G: It was good. There was nobody in our group that had any prior combat experience. Nobody at all.

T: Did that make you as an officer nervous at all?

G: No. We had a very good group of people. We were all, we couldn't get in unless you had at least a high school education.

T: Really?

G: You had to be in good physical condition.

T: And all volunteers, you said.

G: All volunteers.

(1,A,358)

T: There were no disgruntled people there who didn't want to be there?

G: There were a few, but we got rid of them.

T: Really?

G: Yes.

T: Some people that didn't seem to be keeping up with certain....

G: The colonel would get rid of them.

T: Just transfer them to a regular Army unit then?

G: He transferred them and I don't know what happened to them. Our group was volunteers, all young men.

T: Good morale.

G: Very good morale.

T: After many months there you did move to Southampton. When was it exactly that you learned where you were going to land?

G: We learned where we were going to land when we got to Southampton.

T: The whole unit was told then?

G: Yes, the whole unit was told. Then we were confined. And we couldn't go out, couldn't write any letters or anything.

T: Did the mood among officers and men change once it became clear exactly where it was going to happen and it was going to happen soon?

G: There was some apprehension. Everybody was aware of the fact that there was a certain amount of danger involved. But I wouldn't say there was any essential change in the mood. These people were here—they were volunteers. They had volunteered to do this, and we were prepared to do it.

T: When you landed in France, did your unit land on the 6th of June?

G: Yes.

T: You were on a large liberty ship to go across?

G: No. We were on two English ships. The *Prince Charles* was the one I was on and I think the other one was *Prince Arthur*, I'm not quite sure. Our battalion consisted of about six hundred men, split up on these two ships. Three of the companies, A, B, and C, were to land on Omaha Beach, and three of the companies were to land on Point de Hoc, which was up the coast about five miles.

end of tape 1, side A—side B begins at counter 382

I was to land, I was part of Headquarters Company, and Headquarters Company was split between these two groups.

T: So half one and half of the other.

G: I was to land with the A,B, and C group. I was in a boat with Company A. The plan was that we were to land in the second wave, immediately behind elements of the 29th Infantry Division. And you've probably seen the film *Saving Private Ryan*?

T: Yes.

G: That was the story of our group.

T: Of Company A.

G: No, Company C. That was C. I landed right along side of them. The theory was that we would land in the second wave, and we'd be behind the 29th Division. Well, everything, anything that could go wrong, went wrong. First, the Air Force was supposed to bomb the beach. They dropped their bombs, but they

were a mile inland. Secondly, the Army had built huge barges, and on each of these barges were hundreds of mortars. The theory was that when we were about a thousand yards off shore, that they were to fire these mortars and that was to lay down a deadly fire on the beach. Unfortunately they landed in the water about two hundred yards ahead of us. Thirdly, as I said, we were to land behind the 29th Infantry Division, but because of the intensity of the fire they drifted off to the left, so when we landed we were the first wave on the beach. Then the final problem was that we were supposed to be landed on the shore, but for some reason or other the explosive charges that had been placed on—if you saw *Saving Private Ryan* you saw those iron crosses—they hadn't been detonated. So when we approached them and our coxswain saw that he says, "That's as far as I go, lads." So we got off in the water.

T: Was this the Navy delivering you or was it Army?

G: No. It was the English Navy that was delivering us. They had a lot of experience with mines. They had landed at North Africa. They had landed at Sicily. They were very good.

T: It would have been suicidal for the boat to go in.

G: Definitely. You hit one of those the whole thing would explode.

T: So they had to drop you in water that was up to your neck.

G: Yes. Up to our neck.

T: Take us, as listeners, take ashore when you're in this boat and you get out.

(1,B,446)

G: I'm in the boat and the front end goes down, and Joe Rafferty, he's the captain of Company A (*emotionally*), he's the first man off the boat and he's shot, and he goes off in front of the boat. So I told the men, "Over the side!" So we all went over the sides. And we're in the water and we have these heavy packs on. And these packs became water soaked. I'm not sure what the others did, but I ditched my pack because I couldn't move. Some of the others did and some of them . . . (*trails off*) so we made our way in the water. That was a short distance—maybe fifty, sixty feet from the edge of the water up to a seawall. We all hit the ground at the seawall. Most of them hit the ground and the Germans had us zeroed in with mortars. Boom! Boom! Boom! We knew we couldn't stay there. So we leapt over the seawall across the road and started to make our way up the hill, where the German installations were.

T: How many men from the boat to the situation you're describing now, how many men had made it as far as your talking about?

G: I'm not sure. I do know that at the end of the day, see it took us about, until about noon to get to the top of the hill, before we were all on the top of the hill and had those trenches and everything cleared off on top of the hill. Then we started to make our way into this little town of Vierville sur-Mer. By the time we got there we had lost more than sixty percent of our people.

T: When you got to the top, did you have to climb up rocks to get there?

G: No. Other companies did, when they climbed Pointe du Hoc. Ours was a bluff. It was a grassy bluff, so you could scramble up that. You didn't have to pull yourself up with ropes or anything like that. The others did. This was just a question of making your way up to the top of the hill.

T: When you got to the top of the hill, were you among some of the first to get to the top of the hill?

G: I'm sure. I don't know who was there first. But we were all up at the top of the hill between eleven and twelve. You know, it was, this, this, this, and you're working your way up to the top of the hill.

T: Is there a semblance at moments like this of time?

G: I would have to say, first of all, it was the only time in the war that I really was not scared to death.

T: Not scared to death?

G: No.

T: Why is that?

G: I think it was because, first of all, we didn't know what to expect. And secondly, we were so busy that we didn't have time to sit down and think about it. If you were going to survive you had to make your ...everybody knew, and this is where the training came in because all these guys, you know. A lot of the officers were killed, so you had sergeants taking over platoons and companies. It was a question of a lot of individual leadership, down to squad leaders, corporals, and sergeants.

First of all, as far as I was concerned, I wasn't, this was about the only time during the war I wasn't scared to death, because I didn't know. Secondly you were so busy—you didn't have time. You didn't have time to think about it. You didn't have time to think about it. The first I knew, the first time I knew, realized how difficult it had been and how terrible it had been, was that night about eight o'clock. I took five of my men and walked down to the beach because a lot of the people were just about out of ammunition. Some of them

had guns that weren't working properly. So we went down to the beach to pick up what we could. I figured there would be stuff. Then they had gotten the wounded off the beach, but those people that had been killed were still lying on the beach, some on the beach, some half-way in the water. (*pauses three seconds*) Then you realized how difficult and how serious that had been.

(1, B, 531)

T: Did that bring an emotional response from people at that point?

G: It did with me.

T: Could you describe that?

G: You just realized how lucky you were. To have survived. And to not have been wounded.

T: You used the word lucky. How much did luck come into play?

G: A lot. You've got the Germans on top of the hill and they're firing mortars and you're firing your artillery and firing small arms. How do you know? You and I are going up together, and you get shot and I don't. There was not any skill on my part. It was just what was to be.

T: Does that make it easier or more difficult to deal with?

G: Deal with it. The next morning we had, all night we were shelled. The next morning we had to take off to try and reach the people that were five miles up the road. It took us two days to get there, fighting all the way. You don't sit around and think about those things, you just do. You just do what you have to do.

T: When you got to the top on that first day, were there Germans still at the top or had they fled their positions?

G: We had captured a lot of them. We had captured a lot of them. Some of them had fled back into town. They had a system of tunnels and trenches that ran back into the town.

T: They'd been dug in there for quite a while.

G: They'd been dug in there for a long time.

T: Can you say a word about the treatment of Germans captured on that first day?

G: By and large I think that Germans that we captured, we sent down to the beach and they were evacuated. There may have been a few in the heat of battle that on the way back were killed.

T: Known to you or you suspect that may be the case?

G: I just suspect that may have been the case. Most of our people were well trained and notwithstanding that, the pressure, I think really they did the right thing.

T: Had there been discussion ahead of time about how to treat POWs?

G: Yes. Sure.

T: What was the party line for this?

G: The party line was that when we captured them, you brought them to the rear. Sometimes you brought them into the intelligence officer for the battalion, so he could question them.

T: From the top on that first day, that was June 6, you finished the war in May [1945] in Czechoslovakia. That's a period of eleven months. During this time was the Second Ranger Battalion constantly engaged?

G: We were. After we reached Pointe du Hoc we had a couple weeks where we weren't engaged. Where we'd take replacements. Then we had that two week period to integrate the replacements into the battalion.

(1,B,687)

T: Had they been trained as Rangers?

G: They had been trained as Rangers. So we integrated them. From there we were sent to the Pres Peninsula. The Germans had evacuated the Pres Peninsula to move back across France and into Germany. They had left these anti-aircraft battalions in place to slow the American advance and we were given the responsibility along with the Fifth Ranger Battalion of taking those positions which we did. In most of those there would be a short firefight and then they would surrender. We took casualties. That lasted maybe three or four weeks. By that time the Germans had broken out at St. Lo and were moving toward Paris. Then we caught up with them. We caught up with them in July and we moved across France being assigned to various units until October. Then we entered Germany, in [the city of] Aachen.

T: As an officer, how were your relations to the men under difficult, stressful situations?

G: I don't know what they would say. I would say that they were good. We got along. We never, in our outfit, we didn't pull rank. While we were in combat we never wore any insignia.

T: Was that different that regular Army units?

G: I don't know. Some of them did, and some of them didn't. We never wore insignia. I had a relatively small group that I was in charge of because I was in the staff. My job was operations. We were off the front lines for a short time it was in training. I had a group of eight or ten. They were all very good.

T: Did you have to integrate replacements as well into your small group?

G: Our casualties on the staff were not as great as they were in the line companies.

T: When you entered Germany did anything change as far as being, did the Germans, that is the military or our military, when the Germans around them?

G: That was the worst part of the war as far as we were concerned. Because after we went through Aachen we were deployed in the Huertgen Forest. We were in the Huertgen Forest from November up until the break through. We were used as a regular battalion rather than in special missions. We were used as a line company. We were really not trained for that, and didn't have the personnel. So it was a very, very tough. Culminating in the worst day of the war as far as our battalion was concerned. The worst days.

T: Do you know when that was?

G: Yes. That was December 7th, 8th, and part of the 9th [1944].

T: Can you describe what happened during those three days?

(1,B,637)

G: We were in the relatively town area of the Forest, kind of recuperating. One of the things I did was when we had those kind of lulls I would go around and I would brief the men in the battalion as to what was going on in the rest of the war. And I would do that in small groups. I was doing that on December 6. The very last group, I was out in the woods. I have twelve or thirteen guys sitting around the squad, sitting around in a semicircle. I've got a blackboard up against a tree. For whatever the reason, whether the Germans knew there was somebody there or whether it was just a lucky shot, the shell came over and hits a tree and knocks me to the ground. Doesn't injure me at all but kills three of those men and badly injures a couple more. That was the most difficult thing that

I had to overcome in the war because this is the time that you ask yourself “Am I personally responsible? Could I have done it differently to have avoided this?” I didn’t have much time to think about it because just about that time we got orders that we were to take this little town of Bergstein which is in the Forest.

T: In Germany.

G: In Germany. Then there’s, just outside of the town really part of it, was this high ground that they called Castle Hill. From the top of that hill you could see for miles and miles and miles. Everywhere. The Americans had tried to dislodge the Germans from there on a number of occasions and had been unsuccessful. We got orders that the Ranger Battalion was to take that. We loaded up into trucks and moved to within about six, eight miles of that town. Then we got off and we walked into that town, and the next morning attacked that hill.

T: Were you at full strength, your battalion?

G: We were at full strength. Maybe ten percent down. So we were at full strength. We launched an attack at daybreak. We took the hill but then the counterattacks came. The counterattacks lasted for the next sixty hours. We held out through all that time. At the end of that time we were finally relieved. But we lost, again we lost more than sixty percent of our people, either killed or injured. By this time you knew about the dangers. We knew about what could happen.

T: How did that make a difference?

G: As I said, you were scared. But you did what you had to do. Because of your training, because you didn’t want to let the guy next to you down.

T: That mattered.

G: That mattered.

T: Having a guy next to you.

G: Yes.

T: It’s interesting how you say that having one experience behind you now.....

G: Oh, we had others but this was the worst, worse than D-Day.

T: Really? Worse from your perspective.

G: It was cold and wet and snowy and all these other things and then you hadthe Germans wanted that observation post very badly.

T: Their units were obviously ordered to take it as yours had been.

G: We were ordered to hold it, and they were ordered to take it.

T: Was most of this fighting still at a distance?

G: No, at this time when they counterattacked they were hand-to-hand. Not me personally, because I was in the battalion and I was down at the bottom of the hill in the church, in the command post. If you were on top of that hill, I can't....there were very few people that didn't escape with some kind of injury or being killed. I wasthere were people being hurt down there but I wasn't in that immediate danger that you were if you were right up on top of the hill. Every four or five hours you were getting a counterattack in this woods.

T: Now by this time, had the treatment of German POWs changed at all?

G: Not in our unit I don't think. I don't think so.

T: Into 1945. Those couple days being the worst, 6, 7, 8, 9 December. Where did your unit move from there?

G: From there we moved into a little German village on the front line, Zimmeraft. We were there in that village over Christmas. We were there for the rest of the winter really. We were moved and we were given, for example, on Christmas Eve we got orders down that we were to send out a group to go over the German lines and capture a prisoner. I thought about that today, when we had that raid in Afghanistan where the Rangers had been and they said they got intelligence. I'm sure the intelligence was, they were going in there and try and capture some prisoners and see who was manning the post and what their strength was and that. So we were there in the Huertgen Forest until the spring push.

T: That was in March or April?

(1,B,717)

G: That was in March [1945]. We were assigned then to the cavalry outfit. We would ride with the cavalry and we may run into a German outfit and we'd get off and we'd be the infantry. In any event, we were the crossing the Remagen Bridge and that was early in March. You've heard about the Remagen Bridge?

T: Yes.

G: We weren't the first ones over. But we were over very, very early. That night I hadn't been feeling well so the doctor sent me back because I had hepatitis. I suppose I got careless.

T: Did you have hepatitis?

G: Yes. So they sent me back to Liege, Belgium, to recover. When we got into Liege, Belgium, there were about two hundred fifty people who were sick and so forth. We came into this hospital and there is only one guy at the desk admitting people. As far as I could tell I was the only officer in the group, and I went up and talked to the guy and said "Can't you speed this up? Get some people to help you?" He said, "No, you'll have to talk to the officer of the day." I said "Where's he?" and he showed me where he was, and I rapped on the door (*knock, knock, knock*). I had a growth of beard, no insignia.

T: Still a first lieutenant?

G: Still a first lieutenant. Looking like hell. He said, "You raised hell with the desk keeper out there." (***) So I went back and told the men to go and find a bed. Everybody went to find a bed.

T: This thing run by the Army?

G: Yes but the joke was on me, because the next morning at five o'clock I got a tap on my shoulder and the nurse says, "You're being sent back to Le Havre."

T: In France.

G: In France. So they took me down and put me on the train, one of these European cars that has the little compartments. I couldn't hold down food. I was sicker than a dog. So I crawled up in the hat rack and it took us, to go from Liege to Le Havre, France, it took us three or four days, I'm not sure. I couldn't eat anything, hold anything down. When I get back to Liege I weigh about a hundred and nineteen pounds.

T: You went to Le Havre and back to Liege?

G: I went to Liege, then back to Le Havre. So I'm in the hospital for almost a month. They cleared it up and I'm feeling fine. An officer comes in one day and says, "We're going to release you tomorrow." I said, "What are my orders?" He said, "Your orders are to report back to the United States. You're going to form a cadre to train another Ranger Battalion to go over to the Pacific." So he leaves, and I get up and get my clothes and take off for the airport at Le Havre and I hitchhike a ride back to Frankfurt, Germany with some of the Air Force there.

T: On your own?

G: On my own, yes.

T: Why were you so determined to not go back to the States for that assignment?

G: The last thing I wanted to do was to train a new battalion and go through all of that. Red tape and all of that.

T: What was it? You preferred...

G: I preferred to stick it out. If our battalion was going to over as a whole that would be fine. I didn't want to go back....

END OF TAPE 1. TAPE 2, SIDE A BEGINS AT COUNTER "0"

T: Was there a bond with your unit at that time?

G: Oh, sure. Sure. So I went back to the unit. After Frankfurt then I just trucked. Found out about where our unit was and hitched a truck and found my way back in to the unit, and then I stayed with the unit until the end of the war.

T: This was probably April that you got back to the unit?

G: It was, I think it was, yes, April.

T: What about the orders for that assignment back in the States? What ever happened?

G: I don't know. They never checked.

T: Was it hard to keep track of people in those days?

G: Oh, very hard.

T: So you just....

G: And they weren't going to do anything with somebody who was a combat veteran, had landed on D-Day. They weren't going to mess with me.

T: And you'd gone back to your unit anyway.

G: I was going back to my unit.

T: That last month of the war, what did you notice about the German resistance?

G: We captured thousands of prisoners. Just our unit. And they were all saying, "You've got to join with us to defeat the Russians."

T: Did they say that?

G: Oh, yes.

T: Did they really, do you think they really believed that was a possibility?

G: I'm sure they did.

T: You spent a number of months in Germany. Your unit. How much contact did you have with local German civilians?

G: Very, very little.

T: Even in that first village, you stayed in for several months?

G: Yes. We had very, very little. We didn't stay in the village for several months. We were in the Huertgen Forest.

T: But not near a settlement?

G: Not near a settlement. We were out in the boondocks.

T: So you didn't have much contact with Germans.

G: Didn't have much.

(2,A,38)

T: When you did, do you recall what that was like?

G: They were severely beaten. They just surrendered in mass.

T: How about the civilians you came into contact with?

G: We didn't come into much contact with civilians. At least I didn't. I didn't come into much contact with civilians until I went to work for the military government in Munich.

T: And that was, well, you finished the war in Czechoslovakia. Your unit was pretty far forward then.

G: Yes. And we were held up. In [the city of] Pilsen. We could have gone into Prague. But that was the deal that had been made by Roosevelt and Stalin and Churchill that we weren't to go beyond Pilsen.

T: Were guys in the unit frustrated by that or pleased?

G: They were frustrated. They were frustrated.

T: Because they had to stop at a certain point?

G: So then we were in Pilsen, just for a short time. The Russians decided they were going to have a victory parade in Prague. So we got orders to have a victory parade in Pilsen. We can't be one-upped by the Russians.

T: Did this parade take place then?

G: We were designated to lead the parade. But we didn't have a flag. So the old man sent me out, Colonel Rudder sent me out to try and find a flag. Colonel Arnold it was, Colonel Rudder had left by that time. I went to the other units and asked to borrow a flag and none of them . . . They didn't like the fact that we were leading the parade to begin with.

T: They weren't going to give you a flag in other words.

G: No. So I went into Pilsen to see if I could find a seamstress that could sew me a flag. I couldn't, so I got in the jeep and I went into Prague. I found two ladies that ran a seamstress shop, that spoke English, who had a brother in Chicago. And they sewed this flag overnight. I still have the flag.

T: Really? They sewed it for you so you used that for the parade?

G: Right.

T: Were there Russians in Prague by that time?

G: Oh, sure. We stayed overnight and we went to this restaurant, and there were all kinds of Russian officers.

T: Did you come into contact with any of them?

G: Oh, you know. They knew I was an American. I knew they were Russians. They were having a good time and we weren't bothering them, and they weren't bothering us.

T: So you could move freely around without any problem?

G: Sure.

T: Did you have a driver with you?

G: Yes.

T: Just the two of you?

G: Just the two of us.

T: What about the parade? You had the flag.

G: We had the flag. I'll show you the flag before you leave. So we had the flag. We had the parade. And then very shortly after that this bulletin, well there's one other story that you should have. And that is, that even though the war was over, we kept our men busy. In other words we thought it was good for everybody to be busy. One day the whole battalion goes out on a long march. And while we're gone the local Communists come in and they arrest the person in whose home we had our headquarters. He was a former American ambassador. I mean Czech ambassador to the United States. His name was Dr. Berverka. They arrested him and his son, and they charged them with treason against Czechoslovakia. The reason being, they charged them with treason, and they could take over their land and everything without paying for it.

T: Right. And that's what happened.

G: So when we came back, the mother, the wife was crying and the granddaughter was crying and so the first impulse of the colonel was to take our battalion and go into the local jail in Pilsen, and we'll spring him. But he decided that he better find out from the American Consulate whether we could do this. So he sent me into Prague and I went up to the American Consulate and he said, "No. You tell the colonel that he's going to be court-martialed if he does that."

T: Was this because this was to be the Soviet administered zone after the war?

G: Right.

T: So we were as Americans essentially powerless there?

G: We were essentially powerless.

(2,A,121)

And so later the father and the son died in prison and the Russians said that they were natural deaths but we were convinced that they were killed.

T: You couldn't stay in that house any more I take it.

G: We were there. They couldn't move us out. That wasn't part of the deal but we just, the consul said, "You just tell the colonel, under no circumstances is he to go into town and free them."

T: It sounds like already in May of 1945 there was a open level of hostility between the Russians and the Americans.

G: There was. Yes.

T: Had you expected this ahead of time or hadn't really thought about it.

G: We were happy that the Russians were fighting Hitler and with every German that they killed or captured or wounded made one less for us. So we were happy with it. Everybody was very unhappy with what developed shortly after the war.

T: How long was it before you were forced to pull back out of Pilsen into Germany?

G: Our unit stayed there.

T: In Pilsen?

G: Until we came home. In this little town. We stayed there. And what happened was very shortly after this incident I transferred to military government in Munich. I was there from June until October [1945]. In the meantime the war in Japan had ended, so there was no longer a question as to whether the Second Ranger Battalion was to go to Japan or whether it was to be disbanded or what was to happen to it. I read in the *Stars and Stripes* one day that the Second Ranger Battalion was going to sail for the United States.

T: This was in October?

G: Yes. So I went to my commanding officer and asked to be transferred back to the Rangers so I could go home and he said, "No."

T: He wanted you to stay.

G: He wouldn't let me go. So I went to the next highest officer. I had just one place to go and that was to [General George] Patton.

T: Did you do that?

G: I got up early one morning and I went to Patton. I had learned that he came into their office every morning about seven o'clock and stayed a short time, and then he would go out driving around.

(2,A, 160)

T: Where was this exactly? Was this in Munich?

G: Yes.

T: He was in Munich too?

G: Yes. Just in the suburbs of Munich. So I get up and I went out there. I got there a little before seven. The adjutant asked me what I wanted and I told him. So Patton came in and I stood up and Patton says, "What's this officer want?" And he said, "He wants to be transferred back to the Second Ranger Battalion." And so Patton looked at me and says, "When did you join the Rangers?" I said, "In Camp Forest, Tennessee." He said, "Were you with them on D-Day?" I said, "Yes." "Were you with them in the Huertgen Forest?" I said, "Yes." Then he turned to the adjutant and said, "Give him what he wants."

T: Really?

G: Yes, really.

T: That's a pretty good story.

G: So I got transferred back and went back to Pilsen. And from there we were loaded on a train or truck to Le Havre. I sailed home on the USS *America*.

T: The liner.

G: The liner.

T: That unit stayed in Pilsen until October?

G: Right.

T: That's interesting to know too. What was it that brought you to the Office of Military Government?

G: One day this bulletin came through that said Military Government was looking for a labor relations officer for Bavaria. And then they listed the qualifications. Among the qualifications were a legal degree, with emphasis on labor relations, and then some other experience, kind of things which I didn't have. So at that time, this was before V-J Day, and we didn't know whether the Rangers were going to be split up into cadres, whether they were going to go as a unit. If we had known that we were all going to go together, I don't think I would have. But when you didn't know what was going to happen. . . I've had my war. I'll go into, I'll make application and sure enough, it only took a few days and I got ordered to go to Munich.

T: When you got there did you stay in Munich or one of the suburbs?

G: I stayed in Munich.

T: What was the condition of that city when you got there?

G: It was pretty badly bombed.

T: This was May or early June?

G: This was before V-J Day, and that was in June.

T: August.

G: So I think it was probably June by the time I got there.

T: Any contact with civilians here in Munich?

G: Oh, yes. I worked with them, because one of my jobs was to rewrite the constitution for the labor movement, because during Hitler's days they had these rules that characterized people. They had priority number one, was if you were full-blooded German who was a member of the Nazi Party, and then down the line until if you were a Jew, you got nothing. So we had to rewrite all of that. I worked with the German civilians in rewriting that.

T: The Germans civilians, had they been administrators or bureaucrats before the war ended, or were they drawn from underground movements or labor unions or what?

G: It was a combination of both. A combination.

T: Did you have interpreters working with you? Army interpreters?

G: Yes.

T: How satisfying was that work for you?

G: It was satisfying. Very satisfying.

T: What was most satisfying about it?

G: The most satisfying thing was that you had an opportunity to rewrite the labor laws, and to rewrite the constitution of the labor movement to eliminate the discrimination that had occurred in the past. Try to.

T: Where were you quartered when you were in Munich?

G: In an apartment house. There was another officer that was in public relations, and I that lived in this apartment.

(2,A,223)

T: Were there civilians in the house too? Or was it all military?

G: All military.

T: Do you feel like there was pretty much contact between military administration and the provisioning of local civilians?

G: I think so, yes. You were working with them every day.

T: Was it a positive relationship for you?

G: Their attitude was, they didn't have any alternative but to say yes. But it was always, "If you think this is what we have to do." It was not, "We think this is the thing to do. You say it, we'll do it." Yes.

T: Do you feel you had a pretty good rapport with people?

G: Pretty good. Yes, I think so.

T: Let me switch gears completely here and ask about individuals, about if you remember or recall an individual who had a positive impact on you? Someone you looked up to?

G: You mean in the Army?

T: Yes. I mean during the time you were in the Rangers.

G: I certainly looked up to Colonel Rudder. There was the executive officer. His name was Duke Slater who was a hell of a soldier. Then there was LaMell who was Company First Sergeant of the Company D. They were just top notch.

T: What made them good people for you?

G: They were dedicated. They were courageous. They were careful with their men. They didn't ask the men to do what they weren't willing to do themselves and they always weighed the risks of what was to be done. They were just first rate soldiers and first rate people.

T: The Army at the time you were in it was still segregated.

G: Right. No women, no blacks.

T: Did the Second Ranger Battalion have any minorities , Hispanics for example, or Native Americans in your outfit?

G: No Native Americans. We had some Hispanics.

T: Were the relations between the Hispanics and the whites in the Second Rangers normal, good, bad?

G: Good. We lived so close together. And if they weren't doing their job they'd be transferred out.

T: Same as anybody else.

G: Same as anybody else.

T: You had time when you were behind the lines sometimes for refitting or re-training, for getting replacements. How did you fill your free time when you....

G: *(laughs)* When you're out in the woods you don't have much free time. But there's...right after this December episode in Bergstein there were nineteen of us that were given a ten-day leave to go into Paris. So we loaded up in the truck and we drove into Paris. I got a haircut and a shave and a shampoo and went to the hotel and took a bath and we all went out to dinner that night and had a good time. The next morning we get up and we read *Stars and Stripes* and it said that the Germans had launched an offensive in the Ardennes and all American soldiers were to report back to their unit immediately.

T: The next day!

G: So we had one day.

T: Talk about luck. There's more luck for you, right.

G: Yes, it was funny.

T: At other times, was alcohol available behind the lines or in the unit at any time?

G: I came from an Irish temperance family. But there was usually alcohol available. First of all, you got it as a part of your ration.

T: Really?

G: At times, yes. I would trade mine. Not in the combat line. But then in France they had the Calvados, and in Germany they would capture something and the guys would rate. So there was always some.

T: Was it a problem?

G: I don't think it was a problem in our outfit. Occasionally somebody would get drunk. But usually they would be taken care of by their buddies or by their platoon leader.

T: What do you mean by taken care of?

G: They'd bring them in and take away whatever they had and put them in bed and tell them to stay there. Bed! *(laughs)* Crawl into their foxhole. But we didn't have any trouble with alcoholism in our unit at any time in combat.

T: Do you think that made your unit different from others?

G: I think we were better disciplined and had a select group of people. Not only that but in trenches, when we were in the Huertgen Forest, all around us were people who were getting trench foot bad enough that you would have to be sent back.

T: On purpose do you think?

G: Some. But in our outfit between the NCOs and the platoon leaders we rigorously got people to change their socks. I was always doing rounds with two pair of socks. I'd wear a pair. They'd get wet. Put them up here. Dry them off and put on a dry pair. So I don't think we had a single person that had to be sent back because of trench foot. The incident was running pretty high on some of the other infantry outfits.

T: I really get the impression from you that having an all volunteer unit made a huge difference.

G: It made a huge difference.

T: There were clearly guys in those other units who did not want to be there.

G: I'm sure of it.

T: Let me get toward the end here and ask about President Roosevelt's death in April 1945. How did you react when you heard that news?

G: At that time the war was drawing to an end. We knew it was drawing to an end. We didn't get a lot of information about his death. We knew that he had

died. We knew that Truman had taken over. But that was during the time that we were advancing very rapidly in Germany. Miles every day. So there was no big reaction.

T: One way or the other.

G: We were moving and we knew the war was about over.

(2,A,316)

T: That immediate situation took precedence over news like this which was far away?

G: Far away.

T: On V-E Day you were in Pilsen as you mentioned. You talked a little bit about the parade that was held. What was the mood among the men when the word came that the Germans had surrendered?

G: It's a practical matter. We had stopped fighting for ten days before that occurred.

T: So you were sitting in Pilsen.

G: We were sitting in Donde le Kovitse (spelling?) which is right next to Pilsen. And so we were just sitting there. We were playing softball, volleyball, and we were just keeping everything. There was nothing we could do.

T: You were forbidden to go further?

G: We were keeping the troops busy. We were having hikes.

T: So in a sense you knew the war was coming to a close. You couldn't move any more and so...

G: The war was over as far as we were concerned.

T: Did that impact how that news was received by the troops?

G: I'm sure it did. If we had been in heated battle at that moment it would have been much more significant.

T: Were people already thinking about the fact that they might get sent to the Pacific?

G: We didn't know what was going to happen. Some of the Rangers had enough points that they could get out and they wouldn't have to go. Others, most of them, were willing to go but if they wanted to go they wanted to go with their own outfit.

T: Were there a lot of rumors?

G: Oh, gosh. Every day different rumors. That we were going to the Pacific. That we were going to go back to form a cadre for additional Ranger battalions. We were going to stay as part of the occupation troop. All that kind of thing.

T: It sounds like A to Z. Everything was possible.

G: Yes. Everything was possible.

T: You were in Munich when the Japanese surrendered in August 1945.

G: Yes.

T: How did you react to that particular news?

G: I reacted with, Now I'm going to be able to go home.

T: Why did that make a difference for you? Because you wouldn't have to go to the Pacific with your unit?

G: I knew they'd begin immediately. They were going to demobilize.

T: That had impact for you then?

G: That had impact. Big impact.

T: How would you describe your emotions when you put those pieces together?

G: I was anxious to get home and get on with my life.

T: Was the mood similar among those military people you were working with then?

G: I'm sure they were all anxious to get home. They were married. To see their wives. If they weren't married, to get married. To find a job. To get back.

T: Let me ask you about the atomic weapons that were used. At the time, 1945, did you feel that the U.S. Government was correct to use atomic bombs on Japan?

G: Yes. We all did. At that time we figured now we're not going to have to go over and invade Japan. That was what we thought the most. Our most like mission would be to be in another landing. On Japan.

T: So there was a direct personal impact possible.

G: Right.

T: How have your feelings changed on the use of atomic weapons since 1945?

G: I think they're really two different problems. One is the use of the atomic weapons when they did and I can't now, after the fact, say that I wished we hadn't done it because we were satisfied. We were pleased that we were going to be able to go home and that was the end of the war as far as we were concerned. Obviously there's also, you have to live with the fact that we're the only ones that have ever used an atomic weapon and we have to live with that. It's not an easy thing to live with. I can't now say that I wish we hadn't done it because we were all pleased at the time because that meant the war was over.

T: You shipped back with the Second Rangers in October. Did you arrive back in New York?

G: I arrived in New York and went by train to Camp McCoy.

T: Which was where?

G: In Wisconsin.

T: A discharge station?

G: Yes. And Eleanor and my sister were down there to meet me.

T: Really.

G: And I went home.

T: Was this November by this time or was this October?

G: This was November.

T: What was it like to see your family and loved ones again?

G: It was good.

T: It had been two years approximately?

G: Yes. I hadn't seen them. The last time I was home was when I graduated from Fort Benning.

T: End of 43 approximately?

G: Yes. A little over two and a half years.

T: Did you know they were going to be there waiting for you?

G: Oh, sure.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A. SIDE B BEGINS AT COUNTER 380.

At Christmas time we had a big family reunion. My father died during the war.

T: While you were gone?

G: While I was gone and while we were in the Huertgen Forest.

T: So you didn't get the news then?

G: I didn't get the news until two or three weeks after it happened and then I got a letter from Eleanor that said she'd been down to my dad's funeral and had stayed a couple days to help out. The Red Cross had been notified. I'm sure they tried to find us but the first I heard of it was when I got the letter from Eleanor.

T: How did that news impact you when you got it?

G: I was close to my father. We didn't have a mother. So we were all very close to my father.

T: Did you feel angry that you weren't home to see him a last time or sad?

G: Sad. The only one that got home was my oldest brother. He was in the artillery. He was in Europe, in southern France. My youngest brother was in Asia. He was in an infantry division, but he was in Auto Maintenance, in the motor pool. They all came out of the war okay. My brother was a little deaf from the artillery.

T: What was your initial reaction to being out of the military? To having civilian clothes on again?

G: Get to work. Get married. We got home on December 1. You get home in November, and married on December 1. In Duluth on January 1.

T: That's a whirlwind. A couple months. In Czechoslovakia in May, then Munich, then back home to New York to Wisconsin. That's a lot of stuff in a couple months. Was it a difficult adjustment for you to be a civilian again?

G: No.

T: Did you miss anything about the military?

G: No. *(laughs)*

T: Some of the questions are easy, aren't they? *(both laugh)*

G: Yes. I didn't really.... I was so busy that I really never went to the Ranger reunions until maybe fifteen years ago I started to go.

T: Because the reunions had been held for years and years. What prompted you to start going?

G: As you get older you begin to think about some of your friends that you had made, and you wonder what happened to them. Then when they had the forty-fifth anniversary and Ronald Reagan went over to Europe, I didn't go that time. But all the guys that I talked to afterwards (***) . So when the fiftieth anniversary came I went to Europe. That was 1994. We were really put front and center.

T: What about that in 1994? Was that a good thing to do for you?

G: It was a good thing. Yes, it was a very good thing. We went back and we went to Omaha Beach and Pointe du Hoc, and the people of this little town of Grandcamp put on a big celebration for us, and there was a band, and then the President. We had a ceremony at Pointe du Hoc and the President was there. We were honored at that celebration and we got a chance to see all these old friends of years gone by. And then after that was over a number of us got on the bus and we went back to Bergstein in Germany.

T: How was that to see that place again?

G: It was remarkable, because you'd never know that the war had taken place. The pine forest had been decimated during the fighting; there was so much artillery it looked as though a big lawn mower had come over and cut the tops off of all the trees. Those pine trees had been replaced by others, just like in the United States. And with the leaves instead of pine. All the towns were rebuilt . You'd never know. There was nothing there that would indicate that there had ever been a war. Even this little town of Bergstein—no monuments, no nothing.

T: And the actual high point, where the battle had been, nothing?

G: It had been converted into a park.

T: And so there was no way to tell anything unless you knew, or unless you had been there?

G: Correct. So we went to the top of that hill. Now they've built an iron observation post, stairs. We went to the top of that and we saw for the first time how vital that was, how far you could see. You can really see.

T: Was that the first time you'd been up to the top of this hill?

G: No, I'd been up there before. I made up my mind that I was going to have a plaque made. I had a bronze plaque made, and it just said, "In memory of the Second Ranger Battalion, who gave their lives in the Huertgen Forest." Eleanor and I went back a few years later, and I got some special glue from Minnesota Mining and we went back there and we put that sucker up.

T: You didn't ask for permission, you just did it?

G: We just did it. But the sad part was, a couple of years later my nephew went back and I told him to look, and it was down. I could go back and put another one up.

T: Gerald, what was the easiest thing for you in readjusting, do you think?

G: I was fortunate. I got this job in a law firm. I was a friend of Orville Freeman, and a friend of Hubert Humphrey. They got me involved in politics. I was as busy as busy could be.

T: Busy was good?

G: Busy was good. I got married. We built a house. We adopted two kids. I was very busy in my law practice and I was very busy in politics. Very busy in community affairs.

T: Did you find yourself thinking about the war much over the years?

G: I didn't until they started to have these reunions and to make these movies. And Stephen Ambrose's books. Then I thought more about it in the last ten years than in the whole time preceding.

T: Did you have any difficulty adjusting with things like sleeping at night?

G: I would say for the first year or two I would dream about artillery barrages, because laying in bed you would start dreaming about laying in the foxhole and having.That kept on for a year or two. Then it's only very rarely since then

that I've had.....When I saw the film *Saving Private Ryan*—that night I had difficulty sleeping.

T: How did that movie impact you?

G: It had serious impact, I guess. It made things worse than what they really were, and it was bad enough as it was. We didn't stop. We'd been trained not to stand behind those iron things, and so we didn't stop there. But the movie was a fairly good representation.

T: Last question. At the time, what did the war mean for you personally?

G: *(three second pause)* That you'd had an opportunity to serve. You'd accomplished your goal. And that you were fortunate to come home without being seriously injured.

T: What has changed in the way you think about the war now, after fifty-five years?

G: As I say, I thought more about it in the last ten years than I did in the previous forty. Because I've gone to these reunions, I read Stephen Ambrose's books, I went to these movies recently. On the History Channel they have movies of D-Day and so forth all the time. I've thought about it more.

T: In a different way or much the same?

G: The early years I was so busy with everything that I really didn't think much about the war. But now when you have all of this, I've got a grandson that's in the Marines, and so you're apprehensive. You realize just how difficult things are in Afghanistan. Just terribly difficult.

T: And then they mentioned the Rangers just on the news today.

G: The Rangers went in, and I'm sure they went to take prisoners. They say "to gather intelligence." That's a code word for getting people.

T: Anything else you want to add, Judge Heaney?

G: No.

T: Well, then, Judge Heaney, let me say thank you very much for your time today.

G: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW