



Fort Smith Historical Society Oral History Center
World War II Project
Interview with Orville Bittle



Orville Bittle

CB: We'll ask you to state your name and your birthday and birth place and parents' name.

OB: I'm Orville M. Bittle and my parents' name was George and Gladys Bittle, and my birthday is
(DELETED CONTENT)

CB: What was your mother's maiden name?

OB: Fox.

CB: And did you have brothers and sisters?

OB: Yes, ma'am.

CB: What were their names?

OB: My oldest sister's name was Roxie Ann, my brother's name was Harvey T., and my youngest sister was Katherine.

CB: Where were you born?

OB: I was born between Barling and Jenny Lind on Fort Chaffee.

CB: Really? Your family have a farm there?

OB: My great-grandfather. My father's name, Bittle, was German. He brought an Irish lady to America and settled in upland country at Fort Smith, Arkansas, in Sebastian County.

CB: When was that?

OB: Story was that he could have had all of the bottomland he wanted in Fort Smith but he chose to come out here, and he was an upland farmer and he didn't like that bottomland. So that's how we wound up out here, and we had that farm until I was born. I was born in the same house my daddy was born in. So I'm a native here, I guess you'd call me, right here.

CB: What was your grandfather's name?

OB: My grandfather's name was George, my great-grandfather's name was Emanuel.

CB: When you were growing up, where did you go to school?

OB: Well, my daddy was a railroad man. He was a section foreman for the Missouri Pacific Railroad, and we lived in company houses in Charleston, Fort Smith, Van Buren, all around, Sallisaw, I don't know. So I went to school, mainly, I went to Charleston. I went to Fort Smith schools a lot more than anyplace, but I also went to school in Van Buren. I never did go in Sallisaw.

CB: Did you graduate from high school or did you join the Army right away?

OB: In the ninth, I finished the ninth grade and I got the mumps from one of the girls in the class, that made me very sick. Then I developed colitis, that's lower intestine. And I was out of school for over a year because of that illness. I liked to died, they said. When I got healed of that, then I tried to go to work, do something, and actually, I joined the CCC's.

CB: Oh, really. Where were you stationed in the CCC?

OB: I was stationed in CCC's in Ontario, Oregon.

CB: What year was that?

OB: Oh, Lord. In the Thirties, I don't know what year.

CB: Okay. What did you do in the CCC's?

OB: I drove a bulldozer, RD-7.

CB: RD?

OB: Yeah, that's one of those that has to have a gasoline engine to start it. It was a big, big cable lift. The bulldozer lift was cable, so it was a slow thing. I transferred back to Lock, Arkansas.

CB: What was there? 2

OB: I drove a CAT there, it was a smaller Caterpillar. I can't remember exactly. It was a gasoline Caterpillar, had a bulldozer blade and it was hydraulic, so you learned to do those by the seat of your pants, to keep those blades level.

CB: What did you build there in the Lock Camp?

OB: We built that lake up there, north of Mulberry, what's the name of that.

CB: I can't think of it.

OB: I can't think, either, maybe Bette can. It's north of Mulberry, probably the easiest way to get in there.

CB: I guess you made the same thing, about twenty dollars a month?

OB: Yeah. Well, they fed us, too, you know, clothed us, too. That wasn't too bad, I guess. But out in Oregon, the Captain of the camp, he asked me to stay there and I was trying to get transferred back here. And he told me, said, "I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll put you in the laundry. You'll be in charge of the laundry." And I knew that was a money making thing. So I chose to stay another six months out there in the laundry because I could make extra money, quite a bit of it. I used to put those bell-bottom in those OD's that we wore, we wore OD's in CCC's, and I bell-bottomed the trousers for them, made a lot of money.

CB: How interesting.

JW: What was there to do with your money out in Oregon?

OB: Well, they had a lot of things, dances and roller rinks and all kind. We was right on the Snake River, across from Idaho, and we'd go to Boise. I played a little basketball, I played basketball for the team, and we'd play in Boise, Idaho, against schools over there and stuff, and we'd do a lot of things like that around that town. Ontario wasn't a very big town, but they were a fruit growing area. What we did out there was build irrigation ditches. We built irrigation for all that.

CB: Were you in the CCC for two years?

OB: Well, no. I just stayed six months, come out and went to work for the county. Worked out there in the county shop for about a year.

CB: What, Sebastian County?

OB: Uh-huh.

CB: What did you do there?

OB: Well, I quit and went to work for the Solid Steel Scissors Company.

EO: Solid Steel?

OB: Uh-huh.

CB: Where was that?

OB: Kelly Highway and 32nd, I guess, somewhere along there on Kelly, just off of Midland Boulevard on the north side of town.

JW: Was that a door-to-door salesman job?

OB: No, I worked in the plant. I got a foreman's job before I left.

CB: Actually making the scissors there?

OB: Yeah, we made them, yeah. I ran a first class shop for them after I come back from the war, actually, for a little while. Then I went into sales because they'd promised me a sales job. They had told me that I was going to sell to wholesales, go take orders for all the cutlery that H. Boker and Company made. It turned into H. Boker and Company. 3

CB: How do you spell that?

OB: H B-o-k-e-r, and Company, Incorporated, is what it was when I come back from the service and they moved down on Poteau River.

CB: Down on 1st Street?

OB: Well, yeah, 3rd or something like that seemed like, right on the bank of the Poteau, by Coke Hill there.

CB: Oh, really. Still making scissors?

OB: Still making scissors, yeah. And the first class shop made surgical type shears for the military, for the Army, and they put me over that plant. I run the whole thing through the outside of forging. I was over all of the making of that shear.

CB: For the Army?

OB: Yeah, for the Army. Well, for all military, federal grant that we had. Then when they closed that plant, I went into what they called the finishing department. They had promised me to sell that wholesale, be the factory rep to wholesale companies. And for cutlery, they had a cutlery plant, pocketknife factory and several other types besides these, scissor manufacturing. So I quit and went to work for Prudential Insurance Company, become salesman of the month many, many times, for about two or three years. Then I went with State Farm Insurance.

JW: All this is after the war?

OB: After the war, yeah.

CB: Well, tell us about how you got into the service.

OB: Well, I think it's in that thing I gave you there, something about it. When my cousin, some friends came, I guess it was some time in February or March, they came to the plant and tried to get me to leave with them to join the Navy.

CB: This was in '41?

OB: Yeah, early '42. It was actually '42. And there was five, five of them, of the boys, and I told them I couldn't leave. I felt obligated to the plant to let them know and I had some things that had bought that I needed to get squared away. Several things like you just can't get up and leave, you got to prepare it. I think that's what they did and then they had to pay for it. But they went ahead and joined the Navy that day. They took off and they'd already been down and talked to a recruiter and all that. It was in June, I guess. I got things where I felt like I could go. And so I was down on Garrison Avenue one day, just kind of, well, I was really thinking about finding an enlistment station. And there was a Sergeant walking along and I saw him, and I started talking to him about this. And he said, oh, yeah, he told me, and I said I'd like to get, I think I want to go in the Army Air Corp. He said, oh, I know the place, I can take you right there, and he did all this and I found out then that he was a recruiter.

JW: Just happened to be out walking around?

OB: Happened to be walking around. And he got me and signed me up for the Army and I wound up going in the Army then, wound up with the field artillery. I was actually a medic, but I did so many other things besides that, with the artillery, like driving those vehicles and running up and down the line, carrying messages. They had me doing all kinds of things.

CB: Where did they send you for your basic? 4

OB: Camp Bowie, Texas. I believe that's the name of that place.

CB: Out of Fort Worth?

OB: Yeah, somewhere out that way. I know it was very sandy terrain and all.

CB: And then after your basic training, where did they ship you?

OB: They shipped me to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I joined the 9th Infantry Division there, the 9th Infantry Division, 26th Field Artillery, A Battery, or headquarters, I guess at that time, I was in headquarters.

CB: What kind of training did you get there?

OB: Well, we got to walk a lot. We done them night marches and all kinds of stuff. And at that point in time, 82nd Airborne was there, also, and they gave us an opportunity to join the 82nd Airborne. I had made Sergeant by that time and I guess I thought maybe I wanted to do something a little more exciting than what I was doing, and I volunteered to take some training under them. So I went over to the 82nd Airborne for, oh, I guess a month or so and worked with them. Jumped off those towers and learned a little bit about parachutes and stuff like that, and I decided that the extra pay wasn't quite worth.

CB: The danger?

OB: Yeah, so I come back to the outfit, I joined my outfit back. And 82nd Airborne actually went over with us. They were going overseas, too, at that same time.

JW: Where did they teach you to be a medic, where does that come in?

OB: Well, from Bowie, we went down to Abilene, Abilene, Texas. I believe they had a clinic or something down there and I was trained in that thing.

EO: So you had double training?

OB: Yes, ma'am.

CB: Did you like the medic duty?

OB: Yes, ma'am. It wasn't anything that bad mostly in the artillery. I mean most of the time we didn't have a lot, give people aspirins and fix blisters and stuff like that. But yes, we'd have a death or two, and it got bad someplaces, it wasn't no fun.

CB: Well, after you were in Fort Bragg with the 9th Infantry Division, you shipped out and where did you go then?

OB: Well, we went to Fort Dix, New Jersey, Fort Dix. While there, we weren't there too long; but while there, they did have some civilian people that invited the troops to go into New York and they'd take care of me. I was privileged to go as one of them into New York City and I enjoyed that. Went to Macy's and all kinds of places they took us, and to a show, and then we wound up in a canteen, one of those USO places, the night before they took us back to Fort Dix.

CB: Got a chance to dance with some girls?

OB: Oh, yeah, yeah, we got to dance. I was a pretty good dancer in those days.

CB: Were you? Did you have a ballroom?

OB: Yeah. Yeah, I played a bass fiddle in a band for a little while when I was a teenager.

CB: Well, after you were there at Fort Dix for awhile, were you then shipped overseas from Fort Dix?

OB: Yes, ma'am. We went directly overseas then.

CB: How did you go? 5

OB: By ship.

CB: What ship was it, do you remember?

OB: USS SAMUEL CHASE I was on. How'd I remember that.

JW: It's all still there somewhere.

OB: I tried to remember that for some time, USS SAMUEL CHASE.

CB: Where did you go on the CHASE, where did you land?

OB: All over the Atlantic Ocean. I think so. It seemed like ages we were on the water. But where we wound up was in Belfast, Ireland, the first landing we made.

EO: Did you feel like you were home?

OB: Well, in a way, being Irish and so much Irish, until we had to reload our ship, combat-load it, they called it, and I was privileged to be down there. And so I could go into Belfast about every night if I wanted to while we was doing that. And I'd go in, drink a little suds with them and that black beer, whatever it was.

CB: Did you all set up camp around Belfast or did you move on?

OB: While we were doing that to get most of the people off, we stayed in Quonset huts there, the whole division actually. And we'd move back on ship and then we went to Scotland and invaded Scotland. We didn't take equipment naturally, it was just practice run for us. We had to climb a bluff, believe it or not. Now, it was almost straight up. And when we got up on top, you know what we found? A marsh, a marsh on top of that mountain. We couldn't believe it. It was night we were doing this and I waded in water up to my neck sometimes.

CB: Isn't that something.

OB: We were going against the Scottish Black Watch, they were guarding the airport there. We finally invaded. When we invaded Africa, we went and took an airport, is what we did.

EO: So this was in preparation for the invasion in Africa?

OB: Yes, and they said we were successful. But we thought then, boy, we're going to Iceland or someplace with that kind of training. But it turned out we went all over the Pacific, I mean Atlantic Ocean, and joined a convoy from there after that. We immediately started out of there forming that convoy and heading for, well, we were heading for Africa, really, is what we were doing, but they went all over the place. We were probably hundred and fifty miles -- no, it wasn't that close, but we were pretty close to the United States a few times.

CB: When would this have been? What would the date have been approximately?

OB: 1942.

CB: Late 1942?

OB: September, I guess, somewhere in that area, September, October, September, I guess.

JW: When you talk about going everywhere in the Atlantic, was this because of a zig-zag maneuver?

OB: Well, it was, yes. I don't know. It was probably to confuse the enemy and it also was to maneuver them. We had escorts and we didn't get attacked. I recognized the Azores as we went by. And by the time we got into the Mediterranean Sea, through the Gibraltar, they had announced that we had landings going on in Morocco and Oran and all up that coast into Algiers, Algeria. And we were headed for Algeria, actually, where we were going. 6

JW: So you didn't go to a lot of ports, you just did a lot of moving out around in the middle of the water?

OB: Yeah, yeah. And that's where I learned to smoke. They gave us cigarettes, but I'd give mine away. I always thought that it's better to save my money for good whiskey than to buy cigarettes. But

we had a band, and I loved music, and we had some guitars and stuff. And we had a black-out deck on the main deck and that was where they all could go smoke. And in that area, why, there was always some singing and picking and grinning going on, so I would go in there and sit. Well, it was black in there, other than the cigarette that you had in your hand. So one day, a guy fell over me and he come back and said, "Bittle, take this cigarette and hold it in your hand so we know where you are." So I held the cigarette and first thing I knew, I was taking a drag on it, keep it lit, I guess, but I started smoking. But I quit after I got back home.

CB: Well, then you reached Algeria?

OB: Yeah. We were the STONE, the ship called the STONE was part of, well, it carried the 60th Infantry and Artillery and all of that on it. And it was about two days out from, as I recall, about two days out from where we were to land. Actually, the 60th was going into Algiers, their objective was to take the Port of Algiers. They got the rudder blown off of their ship by a German submarine. And our destroyers attacked that submarine with all they had, ash cans and all that stuff, and blew it out of the water finally. But we stopped all things while they were doing that so we got to watch the battle. But then we moved on and went on. We had to go, I don't know what the distance was, it wasn't too far east of Algiers, in Algeria, that we made our invasion; and that invasion was nothing like what we did, it's almost laughable. That was like a picnic beach compared to what we went up in Scotland to do.

CB: In Algiers?

OB: It was so level and easy, quick, we moved fast. We were able to move real fast.

CB: Now, were you encountering the Germans and the Italians, both, or just the Germans?

OB: We didn't encounter a thing until we got to the airport.

EO: Really? You mean on the shoreline there was nobody?

OB: Now, they were having a battle at the port in Algiers at that time but we didn't encounter anything. And we went right in and took that airport, they just surrendered, they didn't fire. We didn't fire a shot to take that airport.

CB: Who was this, the Germans?

OB: No, it was Vichy French.

CB: Is that right?

OB: Yeah.

JW: Did this airport have a name?

OB: Maison Blache, Maison Blache Airport.

JW: And y'all just walked in and took it over?

OB: Yeah, we lost nothing; but their shore batteries were firing on our ships. And about a day or two, I don't know what, I think I said it in that note, but couple of days after we'd taken that, we took half of a battery of guns, which is two guns, and went up there and went into Algiers and zeroed in on the shore batteries, and dropped 7 some 105s in there. And, buddy, they quit right there, they quit, they surrendered then.

JW: So you went from the airport to join the battle going on in Algiers?

OB: Yeah, yes, I did, and that battle was over. Then they'd begin to bring troops in. We went from there, we went to a staging area, well, I guess it was an area to wait for orders, actually, and we billeted on a farm outside of Algiers. I can't think of the name of the village that we were close to. It might have been Maison Blache, I'm not certain but somewhere in there. This French man by the name of Bisbald owned this orchard, it was an orange and tangerine orchard, and he had a big barn. He housed all the officers in the barn, I mean in his house. We stayed in the barn. We had to clean the barn up and then we made us some stacked bunks out of wood we got and stuffed our mattress covers with hay and made us a pretty nice bed in there, cleaned that barn up. But we found in that barn, a steam motored car, old car, it's in there so long. So we asked the owner if he cared for us trying to get that thing going, and we did, we got it going.

CB: Run by steam?

OB: Yeah. It had a big old tank on the back of it and you put water in that and put wood under it to heat the water, and it run, it would run on the steam.

CB: Didn't go far, did it?

OB: Well, we could go down to the village and run around in it and get back. We had a lot of fun. We drew a lot of attention with that old car. It was a lot of fun. Got a lot of girls to ride, you know.

JW: That's the most important part.

OB: In those days, it was.

CB: So you had girls and tangerines?

OB: Girls and tangerines.

CB: How long did you stay there?

OB: Honestly, it seemed some time. The 39th Infantry, I found out later, was not with us; but they called us up, I believe it was in February, to Tunisia, the artillery. And we supported an infantry, I think it was the 60th, possibly, along with some English troops in Kasserine Pass.

CB: Where was this?

OB: Kasserine Pass. It's a pass that's near the city of Bizerte, in Tunisia. The 60th actually stayed up there in that area. That's why I think it was them that we were supporting, along with the British. We had a British General at that time over all that stuff, and he mixed our troops pretty much. I don't think he thought the Americans could fight so he put the British with us.

CB: Do you remember what general it was?

OB: I can't think of his name, no. But he got relieved by Eisenhower probably after that, because Patton was over us in El Guettar, we went to El Guettar. We got our butts kicked, if that's a good word, in Kasserine. But we got against Rommel and his tiger tanks, and we lost a battery of guns there. We were firing point-blank at the tanks with 105 split tails. That's shooting down low with a 105 and directly at them.

JW: And nothing happened? I mean it didn't stop them?

OB: Oh, yeah, it'd stop them. When we hit them, we stopped them. 8

CB: Were you firing? What was your your duty there?

OB: My duty was to just help wherever I could. And I was, at that point in time, I was at a gun, I was helping.

CB: Really? What kind of gun was it?

OB: It was a 105 Howitzer, 105 split tail Howitzer. That's a good piece, they're still using that gun.

EO: That just shoots one shell?

OB: At a time, you have to load it every time. And you put the projectile in and then you cut your charges and put the casing in and close the breech; and when you got your elevation and everything set, deflection set, you fire it. And you get that from an observer. I did some observation with my Lieutenant, quite a bit to that.

CB: What does that mean, what were you doing?

OB: Directing the fire, directing on targets.

JW: Did you do it using mathematical computations?

OB: Oh, yes.

CB: Or did you just go, no, a little more to the east?

OB: Well, Lieutenant Sapp was one whale of a director, boy. Two shells, and he'd have that on target. And he didn't use the book very much, I'll guarantee. It was all in his head and, buddy, he could do it. I'd put him up against anybody directing fire. His name was Sapp.

CB: S-a-p?

OB: S-a-p-p, Sapp. I'm a Christian today. I wasn't then, so I'll tell you. He'd furnish us his rations that he got of his drinks. And when we got cognac or anything like that, we furnished it with him, we'd trade, we did that with him. So he was a buddy, he was really a soldier's leader.

EO: Did you stay with him through the war?

OB: Yes, ma'am.

CB: You had to pull back then from this position?

OB: Oh, yes, ma'am. We sent part of our unit back and dug in, dug our placements in. And that was to be the line of the last retreat when we dug those in, we did that. And we retreated back to that point before we stopped. And I still don't know whether we stopped them or they just run out of gas and couldn't come on. But we did, we had trucks and everything burning on the road. I saw a 1st Sergeant get his head blown off.

EO: How did it end? I mean did the fighting just stop?

OB: Yeah, they stopped. They just run us out of Kasserine and then they turned back. I think they got orders to go because the 60th was putting so much pressure on them, on what would that be,

the north side of that pass, that they pulled those tanks back to go up there, what they had left of them. Rommel had split that tank division up. I don't know whether he did or the commander over him, but they kept half of those tanks that we fought later down in El Guettar. We knew they had a lot of tanks, but there wasn't that many; but there was a lot of tanks anyway, and they were powerful tanks. Our tanks didn't have a chance against them face-to-face. There was no competition at all. They could blow them out of the saddle; but if we could get behind them, they were vulnerable behind. But the 105 would knock the turret off of one, it really would, at point-blank, it would really do it. We could knock the track off of one with that bazooka gun; but we'd just got that bazooka in 9 Kasserine, and funny story there. We were learning how to shoot that thing and you had to wear a gas mask at that time to fire it, it was a rocket propelled thing. You know Bob Burns bazooka? Have y'all ever heard of that? Well, that's where it got its name, just an old piece of pipe and they put that rocket in there and then you fired the rocket and aimed it at whatever you were shooting at. So we were standing up on this hill looking down and there was a little old Arab shack down there in the valley, so we decided that would be our target. There wasn't supposed to be any civilians in there at all. And so we started, each one of us would fire one, they were training us with it and we only had that one. And we finally hit that shack after about three or four rounds, we finally got right on the thing and laid it right in there and hit very close anyway, right close to the shack, did some damage to it. And an old Arab come running out of there, screaming and hollering. He was running down the valley. We didn't even know he was there, but he sure got out of there. That's something I can remember, I guess. It's funny, I thought it was funny.

CB: It take two of you to fire the --

OB: Well, yes, it took two to fire it at that time. They really improved that thing later. It got so it's a good gun now.

CB: Why did you have to wear a gas mask?

OB: That thing when it went off, it'd burn your face.

EO: Burn your shoulder?

OB: Oh, yeah. Oh, it did, it had a fire flame behind it.

EO: A real rocket?

OB: It was a rocket. Y'all got me worked up here.

CB: Well, you learned how to shoot the bazooka and you could knock the tracks of a tank with that.

OB: Yes, you could. Yeah, it would do that.

EO: Did you encounter Rommel anywhere else in Africa, or did you leave and go?

OB: When we pulled out of Kasserine, we went and regrouped. We were really battered and we had to get guns issued and trucks issued, we had to rebuild. And we did that, then we went to El Guettar Valley, which was south of there. And that's where we encountered Rommel again, but Patton was with us.

CB: Oh, he had taken over?

OB: Uh-huh. And Patton was up there to watch that battle. That's where I first saw him.

CB: Did you ever talk with him?

OB: No, never got chance to do that.

CB: What was it like, to be under him?

OB: He was a very strict man, he was not too pleasant. We didn't have enough water to drink. We got orders to shave. We got orders to wear a tie.

CB: He ordered that?

OB: When Patton took over.

CB: Did you get some more water?

OB: Yes, ma'am. We got water, but we had to go thirty miles to get it. The evening that I was wounded in El Guettar Valley, Wilke, a Tennessee boy, and I had gone back with a truck to an oasis, little 10 village town, to get water. We loaded, we'd take GI cans, water cans, and go back there and fill them all up and bring that whole truckload back so we'd have a few days of water, that's the way we got it, and so it wasn't no easy thing. And I'd just gotten back. I think that was early in '43, I don't remember the month or day. But I'd gotten back and we'd unloaded the water and all, and I was headed for my tent. And these planes, German planes, come in from the west. It was evening sun, you know, in from the sun and attacked us. And they were attacking us and I walked by a Jeep and they had a BAR laying on that Jeep, that's an automatic rifle. And I picked that gun up, and those planes were flying low enough and dropping those personnel bombs on us. So I braced myself against that Jeep and locked and loaded that gun and was aiming at that tail gunner in one of those. That's the last thing I remember. I was aiming at that guy, and his eyes were that big around, and he saw me down on the ground there. I was expecting him to turn his machine gun on me, but he didn't, I guess, I don't know. But I was blown up by a personnel bomb at that time, was hit just a little ways from it, they said. I didn't know. I come to in a hospital three days later.

EO: That's a personnel bomb?

OB: Yes, ma'am.

CB: What is that?

OB: Well, they were small bombs and they were loaded with shrapnel and all that, to kill people on the ground.

CB: It's a wonder it didn't kill you.

OB: Yeah, that's true. But you know, the Lord had something for me, because my back was all cut up, I had flesh wounds in my legs and arms. My back's still got shrapnel in it from all that. And the nurse told me when I first come to, I said, "Boy, I've got a headache." And she said, "You sure have. You got a jolt, brother." And said, "You been out for three days." I didn't even know, I didn't know what was going on. But I said, "Man, I need something for my head." That's all I could feel at the time, but then I learned that I had all these other things. But they flew me back, I guess, I was back in Oran at that time, at the general hospital back there.

CB: Iran?

OB: In Oran, yeah.

CB: Are you saying O-r-a-n?

OB: Yeah, Oran, yeah.

CB: How long did you stay in the hospital?

OB: You know, I don't recall; but I stayed there until everything healed. And I don't know then if I could have gone home or not, I never tried. My thoughts were to get back with my unit. And so therefore, I worked that in. And when I got able to do some things, I helped them there in the hospital. And I was put on with a whole bunch of other guys and shipped by train in box cars, back to the front.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

EO: Box cars?

OB: Box cars, yes, ma'am.

CB: How long were you in a box car, how long was the trip?

OB: Oh, it was probably a week going back up there.

CB: Where did you stay? 11

OB: Slow train, slow train.

CB: Where'd you stay at night?

OB: Stayed in that box car. We only stopped for toiletries and stuff, and they'd give us stuff to eat.

CB: Was the box cars for camouflage purposes, or all that they had?

OB: I'm not sure why they did it, but we were in box cars. It was probably, maybe that reason, that they were camouflage, to be like supplies. But I found my unit, they weren't even expecting me. I had to hitch rides from where I got off the train and find out where my unit was through people, connections, talking to various stations. And finally, I got back to my unit. They were surprised to see me.

CB: Where were they?

OB: In Sedjenane Valley. That's in the valley, I think that valley was north of Kasserine, in that valley where we had a big battle there in Sedjenane. When we took that, when we took Sedjenane, that was the end of the African War. We went into Bizerte.

CB: Now, at Sedjenane, you were still fighting Rommel?

OB: Yeah. Well, Rommel had disappeared by then. He had gone somewhere, I don't know. They'd gotten him back to Germany or something, I don't know.

CB: Well, were his tanks there?

OB: No, we'd pretty well annihilated his tanks by then in Africa. We won that battle, finally, in El Guettar. And they had some up on the coast there, I think there's another commander, Rommel had gone, and he was commanding it. But when they surrendered, we took Bizerte, and then Tunisia was taken by the British and at Tunis, port city of Tunis. There wasn't hardly anything left of Bizerte, it was demolished practically, just very few useable buildings at all. We camped on and made on the beach there, they took us out of town a ways and bivouacked. That was in case of a counterattack or something, we were there and waited. And then they moved us back to, oh, I guess we went maybe two hundred miles back down in the desert area to an oasis wooded area, nice

water and all that. And stayed there for, I don't know, several months, couple of months maybe. I don't know how long we were there, but we didn't know what was going on, naturally. Our commanders, no doubt, were meeting and conferring. They were getting ready to invade Sicily, which we didn't know that. We still thought we might go home. That was a rumor around that we were going to go back and train troops.

CB: You were there for several months. Did you see any action while you were there?

OB: No, ma'am. The war in Africa was over.

EO: So you were getting ready for the invasion of Sicily?

OB: Yes, ma'am.

CB: How did that take place? Were you still with the 60th?

OB: No, I was with the 39th Combat Team. I never was with the 60th. I was with the 26th Field Artillery when we supported the 60th, but the 60th had its own units, but it was part of the 9th Division. But I was with the 39th Combat Team, which was part of the 9th Division. Trying to think how it goes. I hadn't thought of this in years, but I think it was three battalions, I mean three divisions. To make up a division, there was three battalions, I believe. And the 60th, I can't remember the other one, the 47th, I believe, Infantry, and the 12 39th Infantry.

EO: And that's when you got on the landing barges and traveled that way?

OB: We traveled, you know, Mediterranean not a long ways over to Sicily from --

CB: Tunisia?

OB: From Tunisia.

EO: Tell us about the feeling when you're in these landing barges when you're going for an invasion. Do you think about anything?

OB: Well, yeah, you do. You pray a little. Yes, ma'am, you do. The worst thing in war is anticipation, waiting to do something. I believe that drove more people crazy than anything, lost their minds over it. I believe that. Another bad thing is when guys don't have sense enough to not eat chocolate bars and get on one of those things. That's bad, too. That don't add to any fun when they start throwing up because they get sick on that thing. And they always gave us chocolate bars to eat for breakfast, whatever they called them, but they were chocolate bars.

EO: Do you like chocolate bars today?

OB: Oh, yeah, I like them. I liked those things, but not to eat them when I was going on a barge.

CB: What was the length of that landing? How long did it take you to get to Sicily?

OB: Well, we left in the dark. Time wasn't one of the things I kept up with at that time, but it was in the dark and we landed in the morning, daylight. So that's how far, it wasn't that far, and those barges moved pretty good in the water, but they rolled, they rolled pretty bad.

CB: How many barges would there have been in this invasion, how many men?

OB: Oh, my. Let me tell you, the British, Montgomery, General Montgomery and the British, he had come up out of the east from Africa. But he commanded the British on the southeast part of Sicily, which would have been a direct route through those mountains to Messina, which is a coast town on the boot of Italy or in Sicily, off the boot of Italy. That was his objective. We were in the center of the island and our objective was Palermo, which was the capital of Sicily, largest town on Sicily, largest city. To our left was, well, I think the Big Red One was on our right, and then there was Montgomery and the British. We had the 82nd Airborne drop ten on us. They were to hit a target out, they were supposed to drop behind the lines, but they dropped on us, and these things are part of war. But then the ranger, Darby Rangers, were on our left.

CB: Oh, really?

OB: And I don't know what other division was involved there. But we covered the whole island from the south and come in, took that thing in days. I mean we had Palermo secured. And then the Big Red One and us, and I'm talking about the 39th Combat Team of the 9th Division, went to the east, went east. And we had no real opposition until we reached the mountains past Mt. Etna, that's a volcano that made Sicily. And we passed Mt. Etna on the north, and she was kind of spewing smoke and stuff. We thought, boy, that'd be something else if that thing blew right there while we were going by. 13 But anyway, our objective was Troina, a little village town in those mountains. Actually, it was on the border of the mountains, on the other side of the mountains and near the Messina Plain, you've probably heard of that. There's this Messina Plain, it was a flat plain area, not mountainous, not too much. And it extended all the way to the City of Messina, which was right on the coast of Italy. And so we took that town seven times before we could hold it. The Germans had the advantage on the hills and we couldn't knock them out of that there. Finally, we did, and took the town, secured it, took the mountains and secured them. Well, certainly here come Patton and his tanks. And you know what he said, he yelled at us? "Get out of the way and let some fighting men through."

EO: You really appreciated that.

OB: Yeah, but he was a good General. He made men do more than they could do.

JW: Was there a lot of destruction on this pass towards Messina when you got there, lot of buildings destroyed and things like that?

OB: Yes, there was, there was quite a bit destroyed. Not so much in Messina, itself. But Troina was blasted, that was almost like, well, it was, it was more like St. Lo than any other place I'd been.

JW: I don't guess you had much time to notice the beauty of Sicily?

OB: Well, I did notice. Those mountains were pretty, they were pretty mountains; but, no, you didn't observe that too much while you were in that battle. But I did, I made a mental note of Mt. Etna and being able to see that. I thought that was history for me, I guess, I don't know. But it impressed me, that mountain did. When he went, when he got out his divisions and all, he took that, he went right straight to Messina. If you know the history of that, he wanted to beat Montgomery; the plan wasn't for him to get there, it was for Montgomery to get there. But because Montgomery was so slow and wouldn't do things, he couldn't get through those mountains and, boy, I mean Patton went on. And the Germans had already left, they had gone, they were already in Italy by that time. When we took Troina, they abandoned Sicily, they got out of there. And we've got a graveyard there at Troina, 9th Division graveyard, that one combat team.

EO: You lost that many men?

OB: Yes, ma'am. And Troina, it was in the mountains of Troina where I won my Bronze Star. I didn't win it, I just did what they wanted me to do. The Captain asked me to go, we had a wire broke by artillery fire on a mountain side there. He asked me to go with these two other boys, they were younger, hadn't been with the outfit very long. And he asked me to take the Jeep and go as far as I could, and I did that. And we knew the terrain, had been over it a lot of times, and so I knew about this culvert. Well, I hid the Jeep and we went down and got on this ravine, went down and went through the culvert to the side we had to be on to fix the wire. So they were fixing the wire and I was standing there watching them and I heard these shells coming in, and I yelled, "Cover", and I run and jumped back into this culvert, and one of the boys went down the hill away from it. But this one come, and as he got to the mouth of that is what I think happened because that shell hit there and just blew him into that culvert. And he was 14 laying partially on top of me and I had to get out from under him. And when I did, I saw his whole back was all tore up and he was unconscious, he was in bad shape. So the other boy come running then. We'd fixed the lines, our job was done; but anyway, we took all the stuff we had with us, and then got his sulfanilamide and bandages and everything and we got him pretty well stopped bleeding, got him on the Jeep and we got him back to an aid station and they tell me he lived.

EO: Did you ever hear from him?

OB: No, ma'am.

JW: Do you remember his name?

OB: I don't remember his name.

CB: What kind of lines were you repairing?

OB: Communication lines with the front, back to the battery.

EO: So how long did you stay there after this battle?

OB: Oh, the invasion of Italy had started. And we were there, we come back to Palermo and cleaned up. And Patton had made his speech there in Palermo. You know the story about that, I'm sure, about slapping the boy because he was shell-shocked. And he was leaving for the United States and he was making a farewell speech to us. And he had a bad reputation with us right then. And stacking swivels on rifles, have you ever heard, I know you haven't, but a whole several divisions of men at attention or parade rest with rifles, all they have to do is move that thing just a little bit, that rifle, and that stacking swivel will start banging. And one, you can't hardly hear it; but, boy, when they all start doing it, it'll drown you out. And that's what happened to Patton, they drowned him out with those stacking swivels and he quit talking and left.

EO: He got the message?

OB: Yeah.

CB: You were there?

OB: Yes, ma'am.

CB: Were you there when he slapped the soldier?

OB: No, ma'am, I wasn't at that place.

CB: He was in a hospital, wasn't he?

OB: Yes, ma'am, yeah. You're wasting a lot of film there.

JW: You're doing just fine.

OB: You do edit this thing, don't you? I'm sorry. I get overcome with some of this stuff.

JW: You're not alone in that, that's fairly normal.

CB: You left Palermo then?

OB: Yes, ma'am. We were headed for England. We didn't know that, again.

JW: So you didn't go to Italy?

OB: No, sir. I would have gone to Italy with the Ranger Battalion if my good friend, James Kenny, from Fort Smith here, he was in the Ranger Battalion, he wrote me a letter there in Palermo. He was somewhere in that area, I don't know, that was after we secured Palermo. And told me to meet him on a certain street corner, that he had permission from Colonel, what's his name?

CB: Darby?

OB: Darby, Colonel Darby, had given him permission to get me and bring me to his major battalion and I had written him back and told him I'd accept. And I tried to meet them but I missed them somehow, and so I stayed with my outfit. And I didn't get with the Rangers or I'd have been in Italy instead of making the invasion at Normandy.

EO: So you were headed, though, for the invasion of Normandy?

OB: Yes, ma'am. The ship we got on was named Hawaiian Shipper. Does that do anything for y'all?

JW: It's not very pretty.

OB: That dude would roll in the water, in the harbor. They had us stacked on that ship where we had to take turns sleeping below deck on bunks that we had to share, share bunks eight hours on, eight hours off, for five days on that. And my guy that I was bunking, got sick in the harbor. I couldn't stand the smell of that where he'd thrown up and all that, so I stayed up on deck. I just took my stuff and went up on deck and found me a place to sleep. And I lay there one night and --

JW: Did this ship roll because it was old or because it was overloaded or because it was designed for it?

OB: It was a banana ship, a banana boat is what it was made for, and it was round-bottomed, and that thing just rolled. It rolled all the way to England.

EO: Hawaiian Shipper?

OB: Hawaiian Shipper was the name of that ship. And so I slept on that, but I did well, you know, things just happened.

EO: Did you have any idea where you were going?

OB: Not at that time, no, ma'am. When we pulled out of Palermo Harbor, I'm sure top brass knew, but that was about all that knew where we were going. But we thought, another time, they was going to send us home, that's a big rumor going on. But on that ship, the second night out, I slept in the sick bay on the ship, which wasn't bad, between sheets and showered in the officer's showers and ate the officer's food, and I had it pretty good. I got acquainted with the Sergeant, well, he wasn't a Sergeant, he was Navy.

JW: That's how you got to slip in there and do that?

OB: Yeah, over the pharmacy.

OB: Corpsman?

OB: Yeah, he was a corpsman. So he invited me to come in and sleep in the bed and eat with him and all. He ate officer's food and all that so it was pretty good all the way to England.

EO: A friend worth making.

CB: How long did it take to get to England, do you recall?

OB: I don't recall that, no, I'm sorry, I can't recall that, it was some time. We didn't go direct there, directly. It was one of those things where I'm sure it was a thing to try to deceive the enemy, but we landed in Southampton. We went to Andover, England, nice place.

EO: Andover?

OB: Andover, England.

JW: Do you have any idea of what year this would have been?

OB: Well, '43. Still '43, I'm sure.

CB: Was late in the Spring, wasn't it?

OB: Yeah. We went to Andover and we were there, I don't know, we began to prepare not too long after that for the invasion. My buddy, Don Woods, and I, we took a leave and we went to back to Southampton and stayed in a bed and breakfast and had a great time, went to all 16 kind of shows and ate a lot of fish and chips.

JW: Now, this isn't Don Woods from Tulsa?

OB: No, no. He was from Utah, Utah.

EO: When you say you prepared, do you mean you gathered your guns and equipment, or did you actually go through a physical preparation for the landing?

OB: Well, some of it was physical; but mainly, we got our equipment ready for an amphibious invasion. You have to do a lot of things to a vehicle to keep it going through that water and all. If you don't, it's dead in the water. And we had to do all that, had to get those things ready.

CB: Is that the LST that you're talking about?

OB: Yes, ma'am. We had huge LSTs for that invasion, they carried a lot of people. And it was, like I say, small ones, little ones, big ones and all the infantry. And the equipment was on larger type vehicles than the infantry had to ride on, and personnel. I was the only man in my truck going in that beach.

CB: Oh, you were in a truck?

OB: Yes, ma'am.

CB: On the LST, you drove it off on the beach?

OB: Yes, ma'am, I was driving the Jeep when we started. And the driver of the truck, he couldn't back that trailer. And the Captain looked at me and said, "Bittle, can you back that trailer?" I said, "I think I can." He said, "Well, get on there and do it." And I did it, and that's what I --

CB: How large was the truck?

OB: Two by four, what do they call them four by fours. And it had a trailer on behind it. Most of those, that four by four truck was four wheel drive and all that. It towed our guns, too, and ammunition on the truck, and all the ammunition; but this was carrying supplies, other supplies is what it was. And then they'd had to put a trailer on it because we were taking more in than what we had before and this boy just couldn't do it and so I got the job because of that. He took him and put him on the Jeep and he's the one that got hurt, the boy did. I felt sort of responsible, I guess, at the time about that; but it was something had to be done, I guess. Anyway, they lost that Jeep and I got the truck in anyway. And that was bad, just the elements were bad enough. But having fire, being fired upon going in made it altogether a terrible, terrible thing. When we landed, there were bodies all over the place.

JW: You landed on the first day?

OB: I landed on the second wave.

JW: On the second wave.

CB: How did you drive that truck? Had they had bulldozers in there to clear a path for you?

OB: Not at that point in time. No, we just hit the beach and kept going until we got as far as to a staging area we called it, to go on up the mountain and secure it, secure the beach. We had to get up there. And then by that time, they'd got their guns in place. Actually, we didn't have a bluff like some of those boys had. Really, where the slaughter was, was right there on that bluff; but there was plenty of people landing where we were, too. It was not an easy thing, bad thing. 17

CB: Were you on Omaha Beach?

OB: Yes, ma'am; right flank of Omaha Beach. We went up a hillside and got around behind the enemy. And that's when we got up there, we could turn our artillery on them. And they were in bunkers and stuff, but they run, they got out of there and took off, what wasn't dead. We started in trying to save as many people as we could that were hurt and all after we finally got little bit of control of things. Then from there, our next objective was the battle wasn't over, see. We took Omaha Beach and took Normandy, we had to take Cherbourg. Cherbourg was a port city on the peninsula of Cherbourg. Our Division Commander gave us this order that we were not to look back, that we were to cut that peninsula in two and we were not to look back at anything. We kept going forward, no stopping, no retreating, you're going to the other side. We'll keep your supply lines open with the 82nd Airborne so you won't have to worry about your supplies, but you keep going. They wanted us to get that peninsula cut off and capture all those people in Cherbourg and not let them get out to fight us again another day, and so that's what we did. We went right on across Cherbourg. Now, I told you about, as best that I could, and I can't describe what it was like on Normandy.

EO: We wouldn't expect you to.

OB: I'm sorry.

CB: Let me change my tape here while we rest a minute. You need to get a drink of water or something? (Took a brief pause at this time.)

CB: -- stop Hitler and the Japanese, we'd be speaking their language instead of ours, and I believe that would have happened.

CB: I do, too. They had it already divided up, they had a plan.

OB: Yes.

CB: The Italians, the Japanese and the Germans, had it all divided up. Well, when you finished, you did take the peninsula?

OB: Yes, ma'am.

CB: And the port of Cherbourg. What happened there? Did you take a lot of German prisoners?

OB: We turned our attention then -- I have one story, I guess, it's a horror, not a horror story to us, to me, it wasn't. We were in the hedgerow country going, moving, and we had been stalled by a German force that was fighting World War I tactics. They were behind hedgerows and they would come over the hedgerows and attack us. Our artillery was on the road when this started happening. So we had to use mortars as best we could and we just sat up a line and just shot them people down when they come over, those Germans. We piled them up in a field, huge field there. I imagine we killed probably altogether, by the time we got they started attacking and we got our guns on the road, got zeroed in, started dropping those things in on them on the other side so they couldn't attack, but I imagine we killed five or six hundred in that field, one field there alone that I saw, that was stacked up. You know what I said? "That pays you for what you did to us on Omaha." So at that point in time, I could step on a German uniform and not even think anything about it, he was nothing to me.

EO: Did you take any prisoners during that time?

OB: We took prisoners when we went into Cherbourg. But the Free 18 French were there and we didn't have anyplace to put them, so we just turned them over to them, and you know what happened there.

CB: Well, they didn't live long, did they?

OB: No. And the brass wanted to interrogate people in high places they kept. But the whole average -- We got some Japanese in there.

CB: Oh, really?

OB: Yeah. We got them out of a bunker down there and it surprised us.

JW: Surprises us.

OB: So they must have been there for some reason, observing or whatever, I don't know.

CB: I've never heard that.

OB: But we secured that place and then we moved to St. Lo, we started to move to St. Lo. And that Battle of St. Lo was like I told you before, the greatest armada of airplanes I ever saw and bombers that bombed that place and yet we had to fight our way in. It was crazy Germans, blown, disoriented because of running and everything else. But there was those that still had their mind and they got in the bomb craters and waited on us. That's how bad it was, even had to fight our way in. But when that was over, we took off north, headed for Paris. And we hardly got stopped by anything, the Germans had gone. And all we ran into mainly was some stragglers and French people all over. But when we got to Paris, they sent us around Paris. But we saw the reason, we saw the parade troops that they were sending into Paris, cleaned up, shaven, clean uniform, marching; and we were dirty, nasty people.

EO: But you did the fighting?

OB: Yeah. So, we said, "Well, we're not parade troops."

CB: Who led the parade troops?

OB: I don't know who it was that was in charge of that, but that's what they did to make an impression on Paris, all planned. We went on from Paris and just kept going, rolling, rolling, rolling north. And when we got close to Chateau Thierry, you all have heard of that, I'm sure. We had to go over where we were going, we were about five miles from there. And I was very sick, I was driving a Jeep and me and the Captain went over there, Captain and I, and we saw Chateau Thierry and we saw Flanders Field. And I'm sick with malaria, malaria hit a lot of us, and I was really having a battle with malaria, taking quinine and all that stuff. But I did enjoy going over there and seeing that. But by

the time we got to Germany, you know how malaria is, it'd come on in and leave you. And we went to Brussels, Belgium, and we crossed the line of France into Belgium. Have any of been there?

CB: I've been to Belgium.

OB: You know how clean Belgium is and you know how dirty France is. That's the way it happened at the line. I mean it was that way. The change of appearance was something else to us, we noticed it. But we went around Brussels and went on, headed east then into Aachen. We captured the first German town was Aachen, Aachen, Germany. We had an interpreter, American/German, that come to America in 1939 and we called him Pop. He was older than us and he did lot of interpretation for us when we captured somebody and he was from Aachen, so he got to see some of his relatives when he was there. Then we went into the 19 Hurtgen Forest of Germany.

CB: Which forest?

OB: Hurtgen Forest, we crossed the river went to Hurtgen. That was terrible, we tore the Hurtgen Forest up. Before that time, though, what really, I think, caused the Bulge, was that we had the Germans trapped there in France and Belgium. And Montgomery was to bring his troops and cut them off in a valley. We sat up on this mountain and watched those Germans go through that valley. And Montgomery, because of his tea drinking and assembling of troops, he let them get out of there. We had orders, we couldn't go. It was kind of a stupid war in a lot of ways. Our orders were to go to there and stop, and Patton had a lot of trouble with that, but we saw that all. They went to Germany. And when they got there, they began to prepare for a counterattack on us and that's what happened.

EO: Just because of following protocol?

OB: Yeah, yeah. I'm going to have my tea or else, whatever, you know, that's what we think, our Americans think that.

CB: That's what I've always heard, that it was his fault.

OB: But anyway, when we went over the Hurtgens, blew that territory up. I got to kill a deer in the Hurtgen Forest, though, my first deer of my life. Got it and skinned that dude out and we had it, ate it up, the whole Battery.

CB: Good fresh meat?

OB: Yeah. But we crossed the river, we were on the Cologne Road, I believe it was Cologne Road. And it was in September, I believe September '43.

CB: What river did you cross?

OB: What is that? The Seine, one of those rivers there. I can't remember what it was now. I knew then, but man, I don't know. I'm eighty-five years old almost.

EO: You'd never know it.

OB: I'll be eighty-five in August. That's hard on my brain, places and things or names of people. You're going to cut that out, aren't you?

JW: You never know what I'm going to cut.

CB: You crossed the river and where'd you go?

OB: We were headed for Cologne. And we got our first snow, began to snow that afternoon. I'm telling you now I got hit there. We were moving toward Cologne and we had moved up and our Batteries weren't set up. They'd pulled into positions and we were moving on up there to get a bead on stuff. And we had stopped and I think it was about maybe four something in the evening. And it was snowing and we were talking about how cold it's going to be tonight and all that stuff and worrying about how we were going to stay warm because it looked like it was going to snow on us good. And an artillery round come from somewhere, they started shelling us anyway, and a round hit somewhere out in front of me as I was running for shelter. I was trying to get to something to protect me. I'd bent over running, and piece of shrapnel hit me in the knees, which I didn't know about. But this thing went through my shoulder, I'm over like this and it went through my shoulder without breaking a bone. Can y'all believe that?

EO: No.

JW: Mighty lucky.

OB: But it hit three ribs in my back and broke them, shattered one and went into my lower lobe of my right lung and landed on my diaphragm, that's what they told me later. I didn't know that at that time. And so when I went down, they came and they didn't think I was hit, Lieutenant Sapp and them didn't, and I didn't think I was hit too bad. I said, boy, my shoulder burns. And then all of a sudden, I'm spitting blood, and boy, that's when they got scared. And well, I did, too. I didn't know what had happened. And so they began to try to examine me, but they'd called for the aide to get an ambulance. I don't know. I passed out so I don't know really what happened, other than I'd picked up a .22 rifle I found, was wanting to take that home with me. But I didn't get it, I know I asked to save that for me, but nothing ever caught up with me, not even my personal stuff. I wound up in station hospital in Paris. They had told me there that I'd be operated on the next day; but that next day, they put me on a plane and flew me to England because the Battle of the Bulge had started, they had casualties coming from every direction. So I went to England and I was operated on there and stayed, I don't know, whatever time until I got well enough. They had operated on that and on my knee. Told me that they had taken one rib out, that one that was shattered, they went in there and got in there and told me that I'd have trouble with that lower lobe the rest of my life. I couldn't ever swim again. All this stuff which was probably normally true, I guess, normally; but I don't think I'm too normal. When I got home and got able, I built me a swimming pool to build that lung and that's what it did. I got to where I could swim, stand that pressure. But anyway, I got on a hospital ship, came back to a hospital, I think I was at Fort Dix, New Jersey, I'm not sure whether I was or not, but at a station hospital. The hospital there, I don't know whether it was Bethesda, Maryland, or where I come in at. But on the way, I know I was sitting on deck. And I've been in battle, been in combat for two and a half years by then. And you don't realize how you change, what happens to your mind and all. But sitting on that deck and heard a radio playing music and they stopped for a Pet Milk commercial. Could you believe I could remember that? But that commercial made me realize that I was an animal, that I had lost all concept of the real life. And I said, you know, that's what it's all about. But anyway, that's an indelible in my mind that brought me back to reality. Said, hey, that's life. And I think that helped my being able to overcome the torment that I was going to go through. But I got there and then a little later, they shipped me to Kennedy General Hospital in Memphis, Army Hospital there. And I took a thirty day furlough there and went home for thirty days. Had a good time, and then went back and then I was sent down to San Antonio, Brook General Hospital, San Antonio, and I was there a little while. This was in July or in June of '45.

CB: Well now, were you still a patient?

OB: Oh, yes, I was a patient.

EO: Imagine you had to have quite a bit of rehab, didn't you?

OB: Oh, yes, yes. I was going through all kinds of rehab then. And the point system had been developed, so the Administrative Officer of the hospital called me in and told me this: "You're not ready yet. I want you to know we need to keep you here two or three more months. 21 You need this rehabilitation. But I have to tell you that you have points to get out of the service today." That was the 3rd day of July, 1945. Well, that was the 2nd day of July, '45, and on the 3rd day of July, '45, I was put on a train to Fort Chaffee. At eleven o'clock, the 4th of July, 1945, I was discharged.

CB: Eleven a.m.?

OB: At eleven a.m.

EO: On July?

OB: July the 4th, 1945.

EO: You didn't want the rehab?

OB: And I paid for that. I got home and I was having a ball, and thought I was doing real good. And I hadn't gone back to work, I was just playing, enjoying things, seeing people. And all of a sudden, I'm so sick I can't hold my head up. I wind up in St. Edwards Hospital, was there five weeks before I got well enough to go to the Veterans Hospital in Fayetteville. And I was eight months in the hospital in Fayetteville, and a lot of that time on St. Peter's Row. I had, they called it foxhole-itis. I don't know whether you've ever heard of that. But I had pneumonia really, I think that started all of it, got in that lung and all. And they put splints on my hands and legs to keep my hands and all from drawing. But foxhole-itis, what the doctor said, I'd been on the ground too long, and that this come from that, made this drawing and all. And they put splints to hold my legs and my arms and all. And for eight months, I was up there. And then I got better and got able to go, and they dismissed me after eight months. But I come out of there with a total disability. And after I got well enough, I went back to work there at H. Cobern Company, and that's about the end of my story.

EO: What did you think about Truman dropping the atomic bomb?

OB: Lady, I was for that.

JW: What were you doing the day the war ended?

OB: Well, when the European War ended, I was in a car, it was at night when I got the message on the radio, and I had bought me a new hat, and I don't know where that hat went. All of Fort Smith, I was on 6th Street coming around there by the National Cemetery when I got that word over the radio, over the radio. And I just threw that hat and I never put a hat on for a long time after that.

JW: Imagine quite a party on Garrison broke out?

OB: Yeah, yeah. We went on up there and had a big time, yes.

EO: A little bit on the personal note, when did you meet your wife?

OB: When did I meet that gal. She was a little bitty girl, she didn't attract me in any way. Her aunt attracted me more than she did. That was before the war now. See, my uncle and her aunt were husband and wife, and so we got cousins that are, what, double cousins? But when I came back from the war and I come out of the hospital, I was over at her uncle and aunt's and my uncle and aunt's and she came.

EO: She changed?

OB: This is kind of joy, but she had really changed. She got my eye real good and we got reacquainted and we went out and partied, started dating. And first thing we knew, August the 6th, 1946, we got married.

CB: Where were you living? 22

OB: We were living in Fort Smith.

EO: So you've been married fifty-nine years?

OB: Yeah, in August will be sixty. We're going to have a celebration.

CB: How many children do you have?

OB: We have two boys. We have Larry, who lives in Fayetteville, he has three children, all grown. Randy, who lives here in Fort Smith and runs the agency that I started for State Farm. And he has two children, one in dental school right now and the other one getting ready to go to veterinarian school. She'll be graduating from Arkansas, Saturday, Arkansas University, Saturday. And so I'm very proud of my family, they're all very successful people. They tell me my son in Fayetteville is one of the elite. I don't know about that. But anyway, his son, my grandson, he worked for Arvest Bank, and he's the only one that graduated from another school besides Arkansas, he went to Ole Miss because he wanted to get away from Fayetteville. And he's with this new bank they've started up in Northwest Arkansas. I know they started several, but this one is called Signature Bank, he's a commercial loan officer with them. And I have a granddaughter, Larry's, one of the daughters, teaches over here at Howard Elementary. Randy's wife, my daughter, has been nineteen years or twenty now at Ramsey Junior High. And Matt, my grandson, Randy's boy, is in his last year of dental school, graduated from the University of Arkansas. And Larry's baby daughter, she's graduated from University of Arkansas and about to get married. I think it's October when they've set their date to marry, but she is a pharmaceutical salesman, she sells pharmaceutical stuff. And Megan, she'll graduate from University of Arkansas Saturday, she'll be in LSU, August, to become a veterinarian.

JW: That's a lot of busy people you started out there.

EO: I know they're all proud of you.

OB: My son, Larry, my grandson, Matt, really is the one. Well, I didn't want to talk, I couldn't talk about it like I've done today at all. You wouldn't have got this out of me forty years ago, thirty years ago. I couldn't have talked that way, I couldn't have told you these things. But he started it, Matt did. He came and asked me, he said, "Granddad, tell me about the war." So I began to try to. And then Bo got interested, and that's his nickname. His name is, gosh, I can't remember, William Robert Bittle, but he's called Bo. He was hardly out of the womb when his daddy called him Bo. But he began to want to know, and so one day Larry said, "Dad, why didn't you ever tell us about this?" Well, I thought I was pretty smart, you know. I said, "Just because you didn't ask."