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AN INTERVIEW WITH STEPHEN SALLEY

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INTERVIEWED BY
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CHARLES JOHNSON: The following is an interview done with Mr. Stephen Salley of Kingsport, Tennessee. The interview conducted by Dr. Charles Johnson, the history department, the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. The interview was done on November 28, 1989.

(Tape Paused)

JOHNSON: And uh ...

STEPHEN SALLEY: Well, I was a—made up my mind that I was going in the army, ‘course well my brother, um, got mad at me and told me to, to leave and he never want to see me no more, why ...

JOHNSON: Was he mad ‘cause you didn’t go to the mines, um?

SALLEY: Yeah, he was mad ‘cause I wasn’t working in the mines.

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: Yeah, he thought that, ‘course, at that time, well, where I’m at, ‘bout the only thing was, for any of ‘em had to do ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... if you had a job, ‘course there weren’t too many of them jobs then.

JOHNSON: Not in the late ‘30s.

SALLEY: Well, oh, open at that time—but any how, when he got mad at me and, and cursed me out, why, he didn’t know that I’d done been to Norton [Virginia], and signed up to the Army, and, uh, he was my guardian, and I forged his name.

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: I didn’t even, I didn’t even bother about going to him and asking him to sign my papers so I could leave.

JOHNSON: You think he probably wouldn’t have signed them?

SALLEY: Um, yeah, he probably would have I guess ...

JOHNSON: Huh.

SALLEY: ... ‘cause that got rid of me ...

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: ... but he was—(Laughs) uh, I went on in the Army and, and, uh, I'd been in, well, this was in '40 and I never did write any letters, never did that.

JOHNSON: ...

SALLEY: ... I hardly ever wrote any of my sisters or my other brothers.

JOHNSON: You come from a pretty good size family?

SALLEY: Yeah, there was ten of us and, uh, not counting my half-brothers and sisters. Counting half-brothers and sisters, there's sixteen of us. But, uh, but I was actually the youngest.

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: But time went on till I got into North Africa in '42 ...

JOHNSON: Where did they, where did they send for your basic training before you ...

SALLEY: I went to Fort Jay, New York [New York City, NY]. Now, ah, back when I first went in the Army in 1940, they didn't call it basic training. They called it recruit drill ...

JOHNSON: Okay.

SALLEY: ... it took four weeks, recruit drill, and then you were turned for, for duty ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... You know, you could pull guard duty or other, uh, duties in the company. And we were at Fort Jay, New York 'till, uh, January, 1941, and then we moved to Fort Devens, New York, or, ah no, Fort Devens, Massachusetts ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... They, uh, built a lot of new, uh, barracks and things in Fort Devens, and, uh, we were the, the first troops in those barracks ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... at Fort Devens, and used those barracks that they built up there, but we had to do a lot of working. I must've taken a few, two or three pictures I'll show you of the, the work crew out when we was working the grounds up and around there.

JOHNSON: Were you part of the 1st Division then ...

SALLEY: Wha?.

JOHNSON: ... 1st Infantry then?

SALLEY: Yeah, yeah. That's, uh, I went in. See, when I first enlisted, I asked the recruitment sergeant, I said, "I'd like to go to Fort Belvoir, Virginia" because I knew, and heard, about an engineering, uh, uh, company that had, that was stationed in Fort Belvoir, and I had, I guess I had sense enough then to realize that I should try to learn me some kind of a trade, and I figured if I was with that engineering outfit...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... I could learn to operate a bulldozer or some kind of ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... heavy equipment.

JOHNSON: Heavy equipment.

SALLEY: But, uh, that recruitment sergeant told me "Yeah", said "I'll send you there," but see, at the time, and, uh, they didn't, they didn't tell us all of this stuff. They lied to me really, (Laughter) and, uh, me and another boy from Norton [Virginia], a boy by the name of Flanders. And we didn't know each other before joining the Army, but we got acquainted when, when they put us on the train to Norton and sent us to Roanoke [Virginia] to be sworn in. And, uh, he and I kind of made a agreement with one another that—he was an orphan too, and we'd stay together and try to stay together through our Army career and, uh, service, and we'd become almost just like brothers. When we got to Roanoke, got there to where they were swearing us in, and we were sitting there waiting for the Army guy to come along and swear us in, and then the (Laughs) Navy man come by. He said, "What are you boys doing?" I said, "We're waiting to be sworn into the Army." He said, "Come on over" and said "You can just join the Navy." I said, "There ain't no way I'm going to join the Navy. I can run faster than I can swim."

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: So, he tried to get us in the Navy, but we decided to stay with the Army and they swore us in and put us on a train. There were ten of us left out of Roanoke and, uh, we went right on by Fort Belvoir, Virginia. We never did stop there ...

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: ... they took us right on in to New York City and took us over to Governor's Island. They were building up the 1st Infantry Division at that time, and I guess that's the reason why they sent us up there, because they was, uh, uh, short on a lot of men, understrength, and, and, uh, they were building the 1st Infantry Division up and, 'course they knew, I guess, what was going on and we didn't, but, uh, they did, but from then on it was—uh, we soldiered for, maybe, maneuvered, and, and landing maneuvers, and trained, and got ourselves in shape, you know, uh, for the next year, year and a half.

JOHNSON: Were you in an infantry company, or, um ...

SALLEY: No, I was in a, to start with, I was in the anti-tank company, and, uh, I wasn't in one of the light outfits, rifles, or heavy mortars. I was in an anti-tank company to start with and, uh, what we were, we was, well, we was support company for, uh, for the light companies...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... for the infantry companies. Dog companies, we'd call 'em. Never had to do so much walking. Well, we done a lot of walking too, but we didn't have to walk as much as the others, the others did, but we were, uh, put through some pretty heavy training in those years, and then in 1941, the fall of '41, we come into North Carolina. During the summer we went on several landing maneuvers, uh, down the coast ... in North Carolina, and then that fall we—I guess it was one of the greatest, biggest maneuvers that had ever been pulled off in the United States, uh, North and South Carolina, which, which started in, uh, September, October, November. Three months. The fall of '41, and there was several men got killed on them maneuvers ...

JOHNSON: I know, Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... and I know a boy that, in the airplanes, used to drop bags of flour on us. For bombs they used flour for the bombs.

JOHNSON: Did you have 37 millimeter anti-tanks guns [37mm Gun M3], or what were you using then?

SALLEY: We had, uh, yeah, we had 37s to start with, and then they switched us from 37s to 57s [57 mm Gun M1, the US variant of the British Ordnance QF 6-pounder].

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: That thirty seven wasn't much more than a pea shooter. I once picked up there, uh, when we was on a 37mm range out in Massachusetts to fire the, uh, 37mm gun, but them things wasn't no 'count. I guess, they realized, uh, little later on that, uh, oh, they'd knock out a tire or a truck or something like that, but they wouldn't do nothing to them big German tanks. Now, the fifty sevens, they was no account, other than knock the track off of one...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... but, uh...

JOHNSON: You needed something with a little more punch to it.

SALLEY: (Laughs) Yeah, and, uh, we got back to Fort Devens on December the 6th, on Saturday, off of our maneuvers, and, uh, I had a fifteen day furlough scheduled to come home.

I'd, I hadn't been home. It'd been a year, and, and, uh, that's something else that the, that that recruiting sergeant lied to me about. He said I get fifteen days every six months and thirty days every year. But I hadn't gotten anything. They kinda run, I think, us Southern boys around. They, they give us a raw deal, really, and they kinda discriminated against us, or something. Of course, we didn't know any better. I didn't, anyway. I was young then. I was just a, well, a seventeen year old boy. Don't know nothing, come out of these old hills, never been educated, you know...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... but I could shoot.

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: And that, uh, that attracted, uh, a lot of the officers about us Southern boys, the way we could shoot. I remember we were on the firing range there in Fort Devens and me and the boy from Jackson, Mississippi was side by side and we were firing rapid fire sixteen shots standing going to, from standing to prone position (sniffs).

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: And, uh, I got one hundred and, I think it was about 195 out of 200, and the other boy did and we raised up and there was a major standing behind us, and he seen what we done, and said, "Where are you from?" I says, "Well, I'm from Southwest Virginia ...", and I said, "This boy here is from Jackson, Mississippi." Well, he says, "Ain't no wonder you can shoot so good." He said, "You, you, you boys were born with a rifle in your hand down there in them mountains." But anyhow, we got back to Devens on the 6th of December, and woke up Sunday morning and the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor, and, um, that was the end of the furlough.

JOHNSON: Mm hmm. I was wondering, something you said that interested me, that, that you had the feeling that they didn't treat people from the South as well as they, you know, might have when they treated other people. Um, why do you think that was? Just ...

SALLEY: I guess it was because they thought we was ignorant, and we didn't know nothing.

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: See, they didn't even think that, that we, we wore shoes down here. A lot of them boys, a lot of them boys from the New England states and the northern states, you know, they said that they'd, they'd, uh, kinda tease us that us boys from the South, they said, "You boys had to put rocks in your shoes before you could get used to wearing shoes," you know and, uh, they, they thought really, that we lived and was like Snuffy Smith family. And I had, I've had 'em to tell me as much, you know! (Laughter) But, of course, they was all good, good friends. I've been talking about some of the Yankees, my wife's a Yankees! (Laughter) She's from Massachusetts. But, uh, we, uh, we soldiered together and we, uh, we became a, a, a close-knit outfit, the whole 1st Division did. We had several men in the, uh, well, we had two in my company that went through World War I with the 1st Division. Plus ol' General Roosevelt [Theodore Roosevelt Jr.].

He was with the 1st Division in World War I. And I remember one old sergeant, staff sergeant, out of F Company, that went through World War I with the 1st Division. Him and General Roosevelt were big buddies, and, uh, every once in a while they'd get, golly, lit up, you know and get in a fighting mood, I guess or something, where they'd call a pep rally and they'd talk to the troops and tell them, you know, about what a good outfit the 1st Division was and, and try to make us a good fighting unit, I guess. 'Course, we were, um—some of the boys tried to get me to, to, to come back home because I wasn't of age. They told me to put in, you know, they found out how old I was and they'd try to get me to come out, and I could have, but I said no. I joined up, and I'm in here. I'm gonna stay, for good or bad ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm. After a while did you find yourself being as close friends with northerners as you were with southerners ...

SALLEY: Oh yeah.

JOHNSON: ... or did you tend to run with southerners more?

SALLEY: No, I had some of the best, the best buddies, and some were the ones that I got the closest to wound up from the North.

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: But, uh, that's the sad part about living in fort, you know. Later on, you know, after we had gone overseas and everything, um, they didn't get to, they didn't get out, most of them ... but we went on, they moved us out of Fort Devens, Massachusetts in, uh, February, um, of '42. Went to Camp Blanding, Florida. Spent a few weeks in Camp Blanding, Florida and they brought us up in to Fort Benning, Georgia. Stayed there for two or three weeks, and then they brought us to Maryland. Up to Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, of course, Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania was our disembarking point. Then they loaded us on the *Queen Mary*. I think there was over 10,000 of us on the *Queen Mary* ...

JOHNSON: Big ship and a lot of people.

SALLEY: We left out to, we sailed out of the harbor, New York, August the 2nd, 1942. Now, we were the first combat troops in Europe. This is all this first stuff again.

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: The 1st Infantry Division is the first combat troops to, in, uh, England ...

JOHNSON: You went to England first, um?

SALLEY: We, we sailed into Gourock, Scotland before we, um, where we went in at, and, uh, they had a, a train station over there and, and, um, they had these, uh, trains parked there waiting on us, to load us on the trains to take us to different locations in England. We went to Tidworth, England.

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: But it was a drizzly, rainy, foggy day when we got off of that *Queen Mary* and went over to that, took us over to that railroad station and put us on that train, and they had a Scottish bagpipe band to play, welcoming us, and I'm telling you what, the truth that was the awfulest music I ever heard in my life.

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: I'd never heard no bagpipe, no, uh, bagpipe music. You know, I didn't know nothing about it, and I said, "Now them guys are playing a funeral march." Sounded like a funeral march to me, you know ...

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: ... but anyway, they put us on them trains and finally got us loaded on and late in the evening, just before dark, the train pulled out. Now, we traveled all night on that train, and it was, everything was blacked out. Now, at that time, England was a being bombed ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... and, uh, we were a bunch of, of curious, like a bunch of cats, you know. Curiosity was getting the best of us, and they had the shades pulled down in the coaches on them trains where if you lit a cigarette or, uh, match or something other, you know, there wouldn't be no light going out, and, uh, the train was a moving along somewhere and, uh, there was an air raid started, so they stopped the train.

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: Everybody started raising shades, you know, and trying to see the airplanes, and, boy, you talk about driving somebody crazy, they drove them train men crazy, them English crazy, you know, trying to tell us to pull those shades back down ...

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: ... they didn't want them, them airplanes to see those lights. We was just a bunch of, of greenhorns, you know. Didn't know nothing about air raids or anything like that, but, anyhow, we made it on in to Tidworth, and we stayed in Tidworth for a few weeks ...

JOHNSON: Was the bombing raid close enough for you to hear the bombs or, um?

SALLEY: No. Uh, they didn't, uh, they went all over us, they, the airplanes did. I don't know where they dropped the bombs at, but we didn't hear the bombs that night, but, 'course, later on, uh, during the stay in England—I was in England three different times during World War II, but, uh, we sit around Tidworth there for a few weeks, and then they took us back to Scotland, uh,

just outside Glasgow, Scotland, where we landed to start with, and, uh, we maneuvered and, and, uh, trained with the English troops there. Now they had, we had some air raids there, and they had, uh, they had women, uh, in their army that, uh, manned their Ack-Ack guns [anti-aircraft guns], uh, and that was strange to me, you know...

JOHNSON: Hmm.

SALLEY: ... we weren't used to seeing women in fighting positions like that or doing things like that. Never even heard of it. But, uh, we were, we maneuvered there and trained with the English for, aw I don't know, I guess two or three weeks, and then they pulled us out and took us to Liverpool [England]. We loaded the ships in, in Liverpool, 'course we didn't know where we were going at, you know, they wouldn't tell us, you know, I guess—Well, we figured that we was going somewhere to fight, by that time. We found out, we, we sailed out and, well, the night that we went through the Strait of Gibraltar going into North Africa. Boy, it was so dark you couldn't see your hand before you and, uh, the German subs had got after us two or three times and, and I just about broke my leg, uh, that night, one night. Well it was the night that we went through the Strait of Gibraltar, a sub was on our, on our tail and we got, uh, a warning to go to our, uh, lifeboats, uh, by the side of the boat to a certain lifeboat. It was so dark I couldn't see where I was going and I run into one of them steel rails on that ship and 'bout broke one of my legs, but we got to the life stations and boats and, finally it was over, when we went through there, we could see Spain, 'cause Spain was lit up. 'Course, Spain was neutral...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... they didn't have no blackout, and that was the only, uh, light, the only light that I seen in the nearly three years that I was overseas. The night that we went through the Strait of Gibraltar. We'd see the lights over in Spain.

JOHNSON: Did you know by that time what you were going to be doing? Had they told you...

SALLEY: No sir. We didn't know, uh, until we, uh, started hittin' the beaches, and that was the next morning, I guess it was. By six o' clock, now, we had the, the English and the Canadian Navy landed us in North Africa ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... and, uh, if we'd a had very stiff resistance to start with where we landed, we'd never have made it because we lost so much, uh, equipment and so much, so many men. Uh, they wouldn't run them, uh, ships and landing craft up on the beach. They dropped us off so far out in the water that, my gosh, you couldn't swim with all that equipment on you. It was lucky that we, we when we got in that the only resistance, really, the most resistance that we hit when we first landed at Arzew [Algeria], 'course, Arzew was eighteen kilometers from Oran (Algeria), and Oran is a big seaport town in North Africa, and that was a, that was our objective: to take Oran ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... to get, uh, all our supplies in, I guess, a beachhead established. (Sniffs) The French Foreign Legion is what we was a fighting really to start with when we landed in North Africa, and that was the funniest sight that, one of the funniest sights if ever I saw, that day after the day we landed. That morning, high up on the—we took the high ground, the hill, above Arzew and, uh, me and the old boy from New Jersey was a sitting up there ...

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: ... and, uh, there was some planes come in and, German planes, two or three German planes come in and they were strafing the beach, and, uh, there was a railroad down below us, and that was the funniest lookin' railroad, there was a little, old, dinky railroad cars that they had, you know, and them Arab, them Arabs, the way they, uh, dressed with them baggy clothes on and all them big hoods and robes and stuff they had on they and, uh, I sat and just laughed at this. It hit me funny, you know, to see them people dressed like that and, uh, I always did like geography and history, but I, I never did see nothing like that in a geography or a history book, you know ...

JOHNSON AND SALLEY: (Laughter)

SALLEY: I laughed at them people, but now, after we got all around and, and then got a beach established, got straightened out, and jump started across North Africa, the laughing part stopped.

JOHNSON: Mm hmm. You didn't have much resistance immediately ...

SALLEY: No.

JOHNSON: ... coming ashore.

SALLEY: Not to start with. When we got there, we didn't have hardly any resistance at all. Like I say. Uh, well, I guess there was a few German officers with the French Foreign Legion that were, uh, overseeing things.

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: They had their, uh, their headquarters there, the French Foreign Legion did, in a town called Sidi Bel Abbès [Algeria]...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... was the headquarters of the French Foreign Legion. And then we had it pretty rough, the first Thanksgiving was there in North Africa, and, and I ate—they, they got us turkey out there. They brought us turkey for Thanksgiving dinner. And, uh, and then Christmas. I spent the first Christmas and the first Thanksgiving in a foxhole in North Africa in 1942.

JOHNSON: You were running into pretty heavy German resistance then?

SALLEY: Yeah, yeah. After, yeah, after we got to moving up towards Algiers [Algeria] and towards the desert, and going on towards Tunis [Tunisia], uh, we got in some bad fighting. We, we had, we had a lot of tough battles in North Africa. In North Africa they had—‘course, some of the hardest fighting, I guess, well, two or three, uh, battles are, I guess, are nationally known, but, uh, I was told, I don’t know, that, uh, that they were put in *Life* magazine, you know, shortly after the battle ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... Kasserine Pass [Tunisia] ...

JOHNSON: Oh yeah.

SALLEY: ... and then, uh, Hill 609523 [Tunisia]. Uh, I didn’t, I didn’t get shot at lot at the battle. I was there, and I didn’t and the Manassa [Possibly referring to El Alamein], Stuka Valley [Egypt] and oh, we were moving up when we, we went five to the right, I guess, in towards the, the desert, down in, what they call, a place [called] El Guettar, [Tunisia]. It was an oasis. We were, well, when we was going through this country, we went over this, this, knoll, we weren’t no big dense, just little, old brush stuff, and, uh, we seen this green vegetation and green palm trees and things way off in the distance, and when we finally got there, it was a, a, well, I call it an oasis and some of the other boys did. There was running water and it was lying around, I guess that’s what some oases look like ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: Well, we was on, way on past it, uh, El Guettar, this oasis place where they saw on, on down next to, uh, I guess about three or four miles right past it, and dug in, and we stayed there in the defensive position for (sniffs) I guess about two weeks.

JOHNSON: Did you run up against a fair number of German tanks? Were you, was it that kind of a mission? Were you doing anti-tank, um...

SALLEY: Yeah ...

JOHNSON: ... anti-tank stuff?

SALLEY: ... in, uh, well, uh, at this time, uh, there wasn’t too many German tanks while we were there. We had the 1st, uh, 1st Armored Division with us at that time ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

SALLEY ... and, uh, they, uh, they gave us, um, more tank support than, than, uh, we had with our guns, hard to tell either one. While we was sitting in defense position, I laid in a little, old grove, where the bushes were. We stayed, um, part of my company did for six days. On the night

that, um, on the eve of when we moved out, moved on up, that night there were 250 pound bombs dropped around the holes we laid in, and we moved on up on this hill, and we took this hill, and we was sitting in the defensive position, and I guess every war, probably—I don't know how you feel about "Bed Check Charlie" and all these airplanes ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... coming over at the, right about dusk or dark in the evening, but we had 'em in World War II. Several of 'em. In this particular place, we had one. He'd come over whenever he—just, and, drone along though. The kitchen crew had brought us supper up in—it was down in a big, uh, ditch, like, and we were up on the side of this hill, alone, dug in. Well, I was staring now to get for something to eat, and I hear this plane coming. I was about half-way between my foxhole and the kitchen, and I decided, "Well, I'd be safer if I was to turn around and go back to my foxhole. He may see all that bunch down and around that kitchen truck and drop his load down there tonight." So I went back to my hole and I went hungry that night, but I was saved, or I felt like I was. But anyhow, I was sitting there on this, uh, hole after they had passed, had been up and down, and some old boy they have--We had an ammunition dump, uh, I guess, piled up. We captured a lot of ammunition, uh, German ammunition, Italian ammunition, uh, this boy, was sitting right in the middle of the ammunition dump, with one of those Berettas, I guess, or rifles kinda like our, uh, Browning automatic. He had a, about a quarter of a moon clip on it that held twenty rounds, an Italian rifle, and he had it loaded all with tracers, and he had no better sense than to sit there in the middle of that ammunition dump and start shooting them tracers at that airplane. ... and that guy didn't do nothing but just get dropped the whole load on him, and there was ammunition and shells and bombs going off all night long. I mean it was a mess, of course they didn't find no part of him after that. But during the time I was in there, one of the boys in the company, and this is one of the saddest ...

JOHNSON: Even though it was a long time ago, it's still there.

SALLEY: One of the saddest things that a man could ever see, old buddy losin' his mind.

UNAMED THIRD PARTY: ...

SALLEY: He went crazy.

UNAMED THIRD PART: Don't cry. Don't...

SALLEY: He'd beat his, he'd beat his head against that firearm till his skin and his forehead were just a hanging in strings, bloody and all, foaming at the mouth, just like a mad dog.

JOHNSON: That's hard.

SALLEY: Now these things is something that the generals don't write about. They don't know nothing about it 'cause they ain't there.

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: And, uh, these stories like this is ...

UNAMED THIRD PARTY: ...

SALLEY: Yeah, Okay. These stories that is hard to tell, and, and, and the reason why they're not told, and, and, to begin with, I guess, and I've talked to many, many veterans, uh, people don't believe it. It's not—but, I guess, during the African Campaign, too, and during this time, I believe that one of the boys, I didn't see it myself, but I was told about it later on. (Clears throat) He was a sergeant, got hit with a piece of shrapnel and cut his throat, and, uh, we didn't have doctors with us, you know. We had first aid boys. First aid kits, stop the blood from, pain killer, or something like that you could take for it. And this sergeant got to howling, and the medic got to him, and he's trying to shoot him, put him out of his misery. Didn't have his medicine ... but he happened to have a fountain pen in his pocket. He cut that fountain pen in two and he stuck it in that man's windpipe and made him an air passage. Saved him. I don't know where that story has ever been told or not, or whether anybody would ever believe it, I don't know whether the medical professionals would ever believe it ...

JOHNSON: Oh yeah.

SALLEY: ... but it happened, and it has to. Incidents and, and things that happened then, like that, that's, uh, so hard to follow. She's got dinner ready for us.

(Recording Paused)

SALLEY: I believe we'd long ... there. (Laughs)

JOHNSON: Yeah. One of the things I was thinking about, um, after we turned off there: do you, um, do you have a clear memory in your mind about the first time you realized that somebody was shooting at you?

SALLEY: (Laughs) Yeah. Yeah.

JOHNSON: What that, what that felt like?

SALLEY: Uh ...

JOHNSON: Like where it was or anything?

SALLEY: It felt, uh, like you was all alone that, that, yeah, it was, it was in Africa, the first time it, uh, uh, we got shot at, and it was, uh ...

JOHNSON: Daytime? Nighttime?

SALLEY: Yeah, it was in the daytime, and, uh, I can't recall. It was outside of the, the Oran there. Um, between Oran and, and, uh, Arzew, Algeria and, I guess it was the French Foreign

Legion who's shooting at us. I don't know that, uh, they didn't, uh, do too good a job at that. Man, I didn't want them to shoot...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... too much at us, you know. They's just putting up a front more or less, I guess. But anyhow, when you hear the bullet fire around you, you get kind of scared and, and it makes you get a little closer to the ground.

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: And, oh, I don't know the foxholes that I dug across North Africa, and, uh, but anyhow after we left El Guettar, and we went on to, up, up in the after, they pulled us back out of there, and, now this is a—while we was there at El Guettar one night, we was sitting on this low rock I was talking about...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... where that boy, uh, lost his mind and beat his head bloody ... side of the foxhole. Uh, there was one of the tanks out of the 2nd Armored Division come up with us, and we was sitting there that night and that guy switched his radio on the tank, and that was the first time I heard of "Axis Sally" [Mildred Gillars, American broadcaster in Germany who disseminated Nazi propaganda], and, oh, she was playing some beautiful music and all the latest hits and some of the songs that, I guess, that had come that we hadn't heard since we'd been over there. I don't know where they got, where she got a hold of 'em at, but anyhow, she'd play the latest music, you know, and, uh, 'bout everything she'd do was to try to make us homesick, I guess, (Laughs) but we'd, we'd really enjoy it, and, uh, we listened to her, I guess, for about an hour. Well, during the time to our right, where the 29th Infantry Division was, the Germans had counter attacked it, and they were calling for tank support, and this tank crew was sitting with us, had their radio on and was listening to her, and when they turned it back off, boy they got their butt chewed out when they, they pulled out of there and went over there. Part of that outfit, part of the 29th, they just disintegrated, I guess, or, or left. They, they got confused or something. They picked up some of the boys a thousand miles behind the line. Some of 'em, uh, one of the outfits lost their colors. Um, I don't remember which regiment it was, but one of the regiments out of that division lost, lost their colors ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm. They got out of there in a hurry.

SALLEY: Oh, we pulled out of there, but this is a, uh, story I want to tell you, too. This is, this is kind of funny, in a way, uh, goes to show you, I guess, that some of the things, maybe, that goes on that a lot of people don't know about, but this captain, O'Brian, he was a Irishman from South Boston, and, uh, he had been—in 1932, he made corporal, and, um, but he worked his way up to captain, at this time, and he was an artilleryman. He was in the 7th Field Artillery, he was over, well, he was commander of the 7th Field Artillery. And, uh, he was sitting on the observation post with us, uh, and, and this country we was in, after you got through these hills, it flattened out. I mean just like a roller, just for miles, it seemed, and he had seen a German on a

motorcycle, and he called back to all artillery units that he could get on the line, the phone, and started firing at that guy on that motorcycle. One German on a motorcycle. He fired one hundred rounds of, of 105, 155, uh, artillery rounds at that guy before he got him. He got him, and after he got him, he said, “Cease fire. Mission accomplished.” (Laughter) At that time, they didn’t know what in the world they were firing at, but in this same area, a good friend of mine out of F Company (Sniffs), he was a—if there was ever a man that, that I could say that, that never got scared, it was him. He was born in Pennsylvania, and he told me, he said, uh, pretty sure he said, “My daddy got a lot of medals in World War II—or I.” But he said, “I’m gonna make him go sick.” He said, “I’m gonna get every medal. I’m gonna...” And, uh, one platoon was, F Company, got cut off, and they run out of ammunition, and they radioed back to Company CP [Command Post] that they was out of ammunition and they was surrounded, they was cut off and needed, uh, some ammunition, and this old boy got a hold of a jeep and one of them little old trailers, quarter ton trailer that they pulled behind ‘em, and he loaded that thing down, that jeep, trailer, down with ammunition, and the company commander told him, he said, “You ain’t going up there.” He said, “Yes I am.” He said, “You can’t get through.” He said, “I’m a going to take that ammunition up to them boys,” and he says, “We’re gonna get back out.” And he called that captain everything under the sun, thought he was, he didn’t wanna—and he he threatened a court martial, he said, “If you go,’ he said, ‘I’ll court martial” for, for, uh, for, uh, you know, uh, for refusing a direct order. Well, he says, “You, you just get your court martial papers ready.” Now, I sat on the hill, on the top of this hill, and I watched him go through there, and the Germans had that road zeroed in. Every time a speck of dust would fly up, they cut loose with them 88s. Well, I don’t know how to this day how that boy got through, but he got through it, and, and you couldn’t, part of the time, you couldn’t see the, the jeep and the trailer at all through the dust and the, and the smoke and then ... and he got into that platoon with that ammunition and they fought their way, and they got back out, he brought ‘em back out. ‘Course, the captain decided not to have him court martialed after that.

JOHNSON: Either give him a medal or a court martial, one of the two!

SALLEY: He didn’t get a medal, but if, uh, in, uh, in, all through the African Campaign, every time they’d take prisoners, he’d volunteer to take ‘em back ... and shoot them ...

JOHNSON: That’s such a waste, too, because ...

SALLEY: ... and finally he got, uh, the company commander got wind of it and realized what he had been doing, and put a stop to that. He threatened to court martial him over that, but he didn’t do it. But now, in the same spot, this El Guettar spot where we, uh, we caught thirty two Arabs that were spying on us, giving our positions away. We rounded ‘em up.

JOHNSON: How did you know they were doing that?

SALLEY: Well, I caught ‘em crossing the lines ...

JOHNSON: Oh. Mm hmm.

SALLEY: They were crossing the lines, and, uh, we rounded ‘em up and tied ‘em all up, and when we’d—well, we made ‘em dig their, dig their graves. Lined ‘em up, some of them, and shot ‘em. Wasn’t no trial. Well, I don’t know, I don’t guess anything like that really (Sound of microphone moving), but, now, if some of these stories I’m telling you don’t sound real in some way, you know, didn’t happen right, you tell me now since you ... And we went on and, and, uh, by the way, we, we got a chance to go back to that oasis before we finally pulled out of that place, and they had a big, we call a big spring, a big swimming pool right in the middle of that little old village around that, in that oasis, and the water was just as clear as crystal. Clearest water ever I saw in my life. It come up out of the ground, and we got to take a bath. It had been, oh, I don’t know how long it had been since we had took a bath, and took our old dirty clothes off, you know, and they just about stand up by themselves.

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: But anyhow, we, we come out of there, we started moving towards Tunis then. The British was a coming the other way, and, uh, we was a moving up one night when we moved into old ... what we call Stuka Valley. We nicknamed it Stuka Valley, and spent, uh, I guess we, we was there for about two weeks in that valley, and during the time we’d, uh, complained a lot about our food, you know. You know, we weren’t getting enough food. We’d support, basically, living on getting C-rations and, and some K-rations and, and, uh, we just figured we weren’t getting fed good enough, so I guess they decided to, to, the high brass decided that they’d, they’d show us how well off the American troops was or how well off we were, and they’d swapped rations with the British. They give us the British rations and give the ...

(Recording Interrupted)

SALLEY: ... I lived off of, of, of hardtack and, and tea for thirty days. I couldn’t, uh, the main rations that they had were, was steak and kidney pudding and oxtail soup, and, and if you ain’t never eaten out of that, you’d miss something. So, we couldn’t eat it. Can’t nobody eat it. They had those big pans the kitchen crew would bring out. Big pans full of that stuff, uh, to us, and, and they’d just throw it away. We could smell it from over yonder to that street and, uh, tasted it. I think it was rotten, and they had them tin cans with that, uh, uh, fit square that was packed with little, round, thin biscuits about that big around (Gestures with hand) and was hard as a rock. You couldn’t even soak ‘em in anything! They wouldn’t get soft in tea!

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: They had, uh, little, old balls of candy about the size of marbles. They had about, I think, I guess there was about fifteen to twenty of them in these cans of, of, uh, uh, uh, of biscuits, and I thought I lived off of them for thirty days. That’s all--well, uh, we all lived off of ‘em for thirty days. They just served that steak and kidney pudding. But now, them C-rations, K-rations did taste pretty good when we got back to ‘em.

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: And, uh, I don't know of, of any other troops who got treated that way. I (Laughs) I don't know if there ever was or not. But anyhow, we had, had been in this place, we'd, what we, when we first moved in there, the night we moved in there, uh, there was a colonel that led us in, uh, trap. We didn't know it was a trap. He read the map wrong, and he took us in the wrong place, and the moon was, was, the moon was shining bright that night and it was just, boy it was a beautiful night and we'd moved up on the side of this hill and harvested some olive trees. Apparently the French had been in there, and the Germans had trapped them in there just like we was a being trapped. 'Course, we didn't know it at the time, but there was several French soldiers, dead soldiers still laying on the ground that we found that night. I go warn the sergeant, and he was kinda scared of, uh, the dead anyway and he found these two, uh, run up on these two, uh, French soldiers laying there dead under this tree, and the moon was kinda filling down to where you couldn't see too good, and we had a couple of boys in the company that was kinda brash and, and thought that these old boys just lied down and went to sleep, and he walked up, kicked their feet, and...

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: ... just told 'em, "Get up", and when he found out they were two dead soldiers...

JOHNSON AND SALLEY: (Laughter)

SALLEY: ... he about fell over, but, uh, anyway, the next morning, soon as we got done, the Germans really zeroed in. They was a, a bunch of Arabs right around the hill from us in an old hut, and they had a, a piece of white cloth laying on top of their, their, uh, house, their shell, whatever it was, and as soon as they got daylight, they went out there and pulled that cloth off, and that told the Germans that we was in there. 'Course they had, they, they had a place underground. They got in there, and, they, uh, dug out, and, uh, they kept us pinned down three days. Though we were likely to starve to death and, uh, lieutenant told me, said that ... getting shelled pretty hard and the lieutenant didn't really ... He said, "You gonna dig you a good hole," and I said, "I ain't digging my own grave." I said, "If I get killed, somebody else is digging a grave." I ain't diggin' it. I just laid down and on top of there. But anyhow, once this was over with, uh--we didn't get 'em. The French went back in there and got the Arabs ... But anyhow, we come out of there and headed on towards, uh, Tunis. We headed up this valley, going in towards Tunis, late in the evening, and, uh, Johnson, boy from, uh, New Hampshire, was in the truck with me, bunch of us, and he made the statement. He said, uh, he said, "This is my last battle." He said, "I won't make it no further than this." And just before dark, there was a, uh, a red ball. Looked about as big as that fireplace over there. To our right, they come right up out of the ground. Scared the life out of all of us, it was so bad. In fact, two of, two of, two of, three of the boys jumped off the truck. They thought it was a, an 88 shell from, from something destroying an 88 shell. That's what they, they thought it was. And we watched our thing, and it went straight up into the air, into the heavens, and they got up there and they was just as red as blood, I mean blood red, and we couldn't figure out what in the world it was, and we thought, well, maybe it was one of the, uh, weather, uh, men with the outfit that was a sending up one of those weather balloons. Well, we checked around the next day and asked questions and there was no weather men around us. Nowhere close. And, uh, this had been while we were moving up to the bottom of Hill 609523, and, and, uh, the next morning, we'd moved up inside that, on the

side of that, uh, hill, and, uh, the Germans, they woke, woke me up. The shells had fallen off. I'd go look in the bunker where the shells were at, and then, uh, the shell and field artillery moved in. They was back down in the valley, and there was about seven or eight of them artillery men that was just standing around a little, old fire they had built up, and heating up some C-rations for breakfast, and, uh, them 88s, boys, they was really dropping 'em on us that morning. Now, I saw, I'm a happening be a looking at them boys when it happened. There was a shell go right in the middle where that fire was, and it was a dud. Two out of every three shells that come over that morning was duds ...

JOHNSON: Hmm.

SALLEY: ... and they found one (Clears throat) that, brushed it open, the dud had busted open with pack of sawdust that had a note in it that said, "Good luck to the Allies." That's not believable either, but again, it did happen. But, if we hadn't had so many duds that morning, then a lot of us wouldn't have made it that morning. When that shell fell in amongst them boys, the aim from that shot, well they just scattered like dogs.

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

UNAMED THIRD PARTY: Oh well ...

SALLEY: They didn't, uh, bunch up any more like that. But during that evening, when, late, we, we started in on that hill, taking, and that was, uh, that was some of the roughest fighting that, that we had that night, and we lost a thousand men ... on those two hills, and that's two days, and uh, they sent back to the, to the cooks and all, all the rear echelon boys to, to get ready to come up, they were going to go up as replacements. But, uh, it so happened that, that during this time in this place, uh, one of my sisters, they got word that, and I don't know who sent it to her or how she got it or where it come from, but she got two notices during this time. She got one notice that, uh, I had both my legs cut off, and, uh, she got another notice that, shortly after that, that I was missing in action, and, uh, company commander, uh, they sent word up to him. Now this is during the fighting, and this is hard to believe, too, but, uh, it actually happened, and, and the company commander sent his driver up to get me, brought me back to company CP, and he said, uh, "How long has it been since you wrote at home?" I said, "I don't know, I ain't got no home." Well, he said, "How long has it been since you wrote to any of your people?" He said, "You got some people back in the States, don't you?" I said, "Well, I got some brothers and sisters." He said, "How long has it been since you wrote to them?" I said, "I, I don't pretty much, I guess, anymore." He said, "You sit down there and write a letter." Now, there wasn't no mail going in, and we weren't getting any mail, but he made me sit down and write a letter to my sister. Tell her that I was alright and his driver, he made the drive, the driver made a special trip back somewhere to get that letter mailed out to them.

JOHNSON: Somebody was putting some heat on him

SALLEY: And he told me, he said, "I don't ever want that to happen anymore." He said, uh, He said, "If that happens again," he said, "you're gonna be in a lot of trouble." He said, "You write to somebody and let them know how you are." And, uh, (Laughs), you know, but probably

during the time I was sitting there in that dad burn shack writing that letter, I got a mess of donkey fleas on me, and if you've never had no donkey fleas on you, buddy, you ain't never been in misery. I mean them things liked to eat me up. There was welts all over my body as big as my thumb. After them fleas get on some of them little, old burros over there ...

JOHNSON: Never heard of them ...

SALLEY: ... and, uh, I got back to the, uh, the position and, uh, I was, uh, eaten up so bad. Now, we didn't have no extra clothes. All the clothes we had were just what we was wearing, and ...

(Telephone rings)

SALLEY: ... uh, if we, if your pair of pants got ...

UNAMED THIRD PARTY: Mom?

SALLEY: ... tore off of you and tore up, why...

(Telephone rings)

UNAMED THIRD PARTY: Telephone.

SALLEY: ... they'd try to get you a new pair of something, but I got a hold of me a, a five gallon of, uh, can of gas, and, uh, took my outside helmet off, poured it full of gas, and then, and I dumped my shit, my clothes in that gas and, and I run around naked outside in that field till my clothes dried to where I could get them back on. After all, I wanted to kill them fleas. I got 'em off of me! (Laughter) But I mean they was on my private part and everything, welts that big (Gestures with hands). I never, I'd been bit and, uh, and, uh—but Hill 609523, we finally tucked in and got them.

JOHNSON: Was that soldier, Johnson, right? The fella from New Hampshire?

SALLEY: The next morning that boy stepped on a land mine. Blowed him straight open long ways ... We had two men in the company that fixed land mines ...

JOHNSON: But, um, when you were in an anti-tank company, what sort of personal weapon did you carry? Did you have a carbine or, uh ...

SALLEY: M1 rifle (M1 Garand, standard issue semi-automatic rifle).

JOHNSON: M1?

SALLEY: M1 rifle. That was the best, uh, that was the best, uh, gun in the, in the Army in World War II. As far as I'm concerned, the M1 rifles were. But, uh, I got ahead of myself a little bit there, I guess. I was, there was a couple of stories I wanted to tell you about Kasserine Pass.

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: And, uh, the, the evening, well, afternoon when we moved into Kasserine Pass, uh, Kasserine Pass had been taken once, and, uh, when the Germans had retaken it ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... and during the time that they had retaken it, they'd capture some of the outfits and, and, they'd, uh, uh, put on American uniforms. They had American uniforms, and, uh, oh, the afternoon, up in the afternoon when we first moved in, uh, up on the, the hill, side of the hill, before we went over into the pass or the pass itself, uh, we was a sitting, we'd dug in and got our holes dug and got settled in, and, uh, late that evening, I guess maybe an hour or so before dark, uh, this, uh, company of Senegalese troops moved in with us, and they were some of the tallest, biggest, blackest men ever I saw in my life, and they had the longest arms, and they come right down by us, and, of course, we'd heard, uh, rumors and, uh, and heard about 'em, stories about these men and this outfit. They had, they had French officers ...

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: ... but, uh, now they was knife fighters. They didn't have no guns, they didn't have no rifles, they had knives. Big, long knives, and they was as sharp as, uh, as razors, and they had, uh, when they come down by us, uh, where we was dug in, we, uh, we'd heard the, uh, you know, the stories about 'em, uh, getting paid so much for every set of ears. Five hundred Francs, they got five hundred Francs for every set of ears they brought in. Plus they got two Francs a day and, and, uh, they told us they got five hundred, uh, Francs for every set of German ears they brought in. Well, we, uh, thought we'd try to get on the good side (laughs) good side of 'em, and we passed out some old C-rations and, and things we that had to give 'em something to eat because they didn't have, uh, didn't have nothing to eat—they had a mule, uh, pulling a, uh, two wheel cart with a great, big, iron pot sitting on it. I mean, this was, uh, the biggest darn pot ever I saw in my life. It was a big one. That's the only cooking utensils they had, and they had, uh, I think they had a goat, a sheep, and a few chickens, and stuff that they were carrying along with 'em. Well, they went right on below where we were at, and they, and they dug in. I don't know whether they dug any holes or not, and how they, they set down down there, and, and, uh, got 'em a big pot. They got that kettle set up and got 'em a big fire built under it, and they killed them animals that they had and, and, and were going to cook them up and eat them as their supper. But, uh, they had a, a roaring fire going by the time it got good and dark and, oh, you could see that dad blame fire everywhere. Well, 'course that drawed the, the German fire in on us, (Laughs) and, uh, they had French officers. He sent two of them guys out to silence them guns, and they did, but that one. They said that one of 'em, that, uh, he was shot. They said that guy was shot all to pieces before he finally got that last machine gun. ... They got the 88, and then, of course, they had some—shoot, I reckon the Germans had some machine guns set up around the, the 88, and they got all of 'em. Them two guys got all of 'em. I mean, they silenced 'em up. They, they, got 'em. But that was the awfulest mess I'd saw in my whole lif. And then the next morning, just before we moved on up in the pass, uh, there was four or five of us sitting there, kinda down in a little ditch, getting breakfast and eating breakfast and—the Germans had superiority in the air all through North Africa up until the last, I guess, the last month or two of

the—well, the last two or three weeks of the North African campaign. The Germans ruled the air, and, uh, they'd come in on us two or three times in, uh, that evening and that night and early that morning. Uh, tried to warn the sergeants out of my squad. He, he eased up over that bank to stick his head up—he'd heard something and he was trying to see what it was. 'Bout time he got up to where he could see across there was a big black crow coming right at him. He just threw his hands up and fell back down into that ditch. He said, "Lord, they got me!" He thought it was an airplane, you know.

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: We, we got a big kick out of that, but we went on in. We finally took the pass, uh, that day. Got the pass and, an, uh, the next morning, uh, after, on the other side of the pass and downhill, just another big plain just level, just rolling, just for miles, and they moved a lot of tanks in, American tanks, and, of course, the Germans had a lot of tanks on their side. Now that was the only big and, well, it was the only really tank battle that I saw in North Africa. It was right at Kasserine Pass after we took the pass the second time.

JOHNSON: You had a kind of ring-side seat looking down ...

SALLEY: I had a ring-side seat sitting right up in that pass, and, uh, while them tanks was a battling, the lieutenant come got me. He said, uh, He said, "Let's go over yonder and check on one of them, uh, them gun squads to see if they run out of ammunition." I said, "You mean we gotta go down through there?" He said, "Yes sir, we gotta go between our tanks and their tanks." And then he said, "That's the only way we've got to get over there." I said, "We'll never make it." He said, "Well, we're gonna try." I said (Laughs), well, I said, "I guess me and you won't be around too long." But we did, and them tanks was a firing over us, uh ...

JOHNSON: Were you in a jeep, or ...

SALLEY: We were in a jeep, yep, and we got over to the other squad and, and, uh, the squad where there was a gun section, the gun squad where we were going. Everything was alright there, and we turned around and drove back through that mess, and, uh, 'course, we didn't have no—we had close calls, but, uh, I don't know what, what kept us from it. But them tanks. I mean, they'd just line up. Of course, they were pretty far apart, but, uh, they had this ... After the battle was over, the tank battle was over, we moved on through the pass and moved out on that plain, and there was, there was a ditch that looked like a super highway. It was that big and wide, and I guess it was a good, a good eight or ten or twelve foot deep, just like a river bed. Well, that's what it was, really, and, uh, it come down off of one of them mountains. You could see it just like a highway. And, uh, we could pull, pull all of our stuff down in there. We was staying there for, well, we stayed there for two or three days, I guess, and one night, there must a been a cloud burst up on the top of that mountain somewhere, but then a wall of water come off of that mountain, and we'd left it. We didn't get anybody drowned or anything, but we lost a lot of equipment. Washed it away.

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: Just cleaned it out, but, uh, after we left there and then come on and that when we went on into Tunis, and this was another story that, that I, I don't think that anybody ever heard about, but I told, uh, Dr. Walters over at the VA [Veterans Affairs] about it. Uh, we talked about the Japanese having suicide squads and, and, being suicidal. Uh, after we took Hill 609523, we was, we was sitting on the outskirts of Tunis getting ready to move into the city itself to take it. Uh, they decided that they needed a, a few suicide squads to go in there and draw the, draw the fire at them, and I was picked and put in one of those suicide squads, but before we put it into operation, Tunis fell. The Germans give up, they surrender, and that was the awfulest bunch of humanity that I had ever seen in my life, when the North African Campaign was over with. People were coming out of there. Arabs, I guess is all nationalities probably, I don't know, people that the Germans had had, uh, working for them and doing things, keeping them there. There was every kind of a vehicle that you can, you can imagine: buses, cars, bicycles, motorcycles, three-wheel jobs. The highway a coming out of Tunis was just literally filled with going one way: out. I've never seen so many people. I don't know how many—a hundred thousand people must've been working their way out. When we was a sitting there, we had two corporals with, in, in my company, and they were bad about drinking, uh, well, a lot of 'em were at that time, but, uh, they was a heading to, uh, to hunt a winery to get some wine when it was all over with, and, uh, one of 'em was a driving the jeep, and the other one was a, uh, sitting there in the side, and then he had his, this helmet lying on it, and there was a hole where, probably, where that hole in that helmet lining. Well, you know, um, through the African Campaign, (Laughter) we'd, uh, took, uh, little ol' aluminum stars off Italian soldier uniforms. They had little, old stars just around on 'em, you know, decorations or some kinda, I guess that's what they wore but anyway, this boy has one of them stars right in the middle of his helmet, looked like a one-star general, and, uh, they had to go on down the road, and this lieutenant was a coming up and, and he stopped, and he seen this old boy, and he, with that, uh, star in his helmet, and he jumps out and saluted that the corporal, well wasn't no doubts, nobody had no stripes or anything. Anyhow, he was wanting to know, he asked these boys where, uh, a certain, um, company was, if they knowed where a certain company ... They wound up talking, and, uh, so, this boy that was a driving the jeep, uh, he said, "I'm simply a spokesman." He said, "This guy knows more on that."

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: And that lieutenant realized then that he wasn't no general, you know! (Laughter) and then he got hot under the collar, he threatened to, um, to court martial for impersonating a general and all. Turns out, they just walked off and left it. (Coughs) Well, North Africa fell, and, and, uh ...

JOHNSON: Quarter of a million prisoners.

SALLEY: I would assume—I have never seen the lack of, uh, of people in my, my life, that, that was a coming out of the city of Tunis. Well, that was the third day of May, I guess it was in, uh, in 1943, and then they pulled us back. We started moved back, and we went all the way back to, to Oran.

JOHNSON: All the way were you started from ...

SALLEY: All the way back to, to, uh, Arzew, where we landed, first landing, and, uh, during the trip back, part of us went back by convoy and, and, uh, parts of us went back by train. Now, I was, uh, in the bunch that went back by convoy, and, uh, we stopped and spent the night in, uh, Constantine [Algeria], which is just outside of Algiers, and, um, we got to go into the city of Algiers that night, uh, that evening, that night, and, uh, that was the first time I'd ever seen an, uh, American WAC [Women's Army Corps]. I know we'd heard about the, the, the WAC, but we'd never seen any of them. We heard later on that the, the captain of that WAC company had given—they wouldn't speak to us. They wouldn't have anything to do with us, the WACs wouldn't, and, uh, we were wondering why, you know, and, come to find out, the captain, we were told that that captain of the, the WACS had told 'em, to give 'em orders to not have anything to do with any man in an OD uniform [Olive Drab], 'cause we was, we was like heathens, we'd just been in, we'd just come out of the front lines and, and, uh, just like a bunch of heathens, wild people, you know, it didn't want anything with to do with us. They thought we was crazy and reckless. Now maybe, maybe not, ...they didn't want anything to do with us. Of course, that didn't bother me, but, uh, you know, it was kinda odd that ...

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: ... you know, that nobody ever wanted to have nothing to do with a fighting man. A day later, I had some of the boys to tell me coming back on the train, they tell me about this old boy. Um, you know, there's somebody around that was a, uh, doing something to make a little money, you know. Extra money. Them Arabs over there, why, they were crazy about any of piece of cloth, especially white cloth, you know. And this old boy got a hold of a mattress cover somewhere there, some way, and he had it on that train, uh, right around Tunis before he got on, and he said, "Every time that train stopped, of course, them Arabs was always a gathering around the train," you know. He got to dickerin' with one of 'em about selling that, uh, sheet...

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: ... and he dickered with him until the train to start pulling out. He got his money then he jerked the sheet out of his hands, and, you know, keep it (Laughter). I don't know how many times that boy sold that one mattress cover, by the time when he left Tunis till he got back to Oran. But, uh, we stayed in, uh, this was in May, and, and we stayed there in, in Arzew, uh, up until, um, about the middle of June, I guess, the last part of June, and they took us back up to Algiers and, uh, we stayed there for, uh, a few days, loading the boats and getting everything loaded for, uh, the Invasion of Sicily, and, uh, I got to go into the Kasbah (Citadel and walled-in old city of Algiers). Walked through that Kasbah. Now that's a scary, uh, place to be and to go in to, and we were, we wouldn't go in by ourselves. When we went in, they had to be at least a half a dozen of us going through it, into that place. I mean all kinds of riff-raff and criminals and everybody else in that place, and they'd had a, well, they'd warned us about it, you know, going in there. Never go in there by yourself. But, in the end, I got to see it, and that was a, that was one good thing, and when we were loading LSTs there in, uh, Algiers, getting' ready to go to Sicily. Uh, one of the boys there, he said—I didn't see it myself, but he said he was down there—They have auctions there on the dock, down there, and the Arabs would auction linen off." They would auction off linen, and, uh, so we asked the skipper of that LST if we could

bring some wine on us. He said, “No,” that they wasn’t going to allow no drinks on his boat. So we all went together and bought us a bottle of wine and emptied the water cans out. Poured the water out of the water cans and poured the wine in the water cans and got them on the boat.

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: After we left the dock and we went up to—sailed from Algeria on up to outside of Tunis again and anchored down there and waiting for, I guess, the rest of the convoy and everything getting over there to get ready to go into Sicily, and, uh, we got to give that wine to the sailors, and, well, we got pretty well lit up on drinking that. The captain that night went crazy looking for that wine. He didn’t know where it come from, and he didn’t know how them sailors got drunk! (Laughter) And, uh, the petty officer, um, the, you know, the one that was over the galley [Kitchen] on that LST, uh, he told our first sergeant. He said that, “How long it’s been since you guys had a good, square meal?” And he said, “I don’t know.” I said, “We’ve been eating Army rations and stuff. I don’t know whether you’d call that a square meal or not.” He said, “Y’all look like a bunch of starved-to-death rats to me.” And then he said, uh, “If you give me two men to help my cook in my bakery,” he said that, “I’ll bake bread for everyone on this LST. Y’all too.” And, and, and he said, “I will give you all of our rations.” And he said that, “If we were on shore,” he said, “then these sailors could get your boys’ rations for a while.” He said, “That won’t hurt.” And then he said, “They’ll realize, uh, how well off they are.” And, oh boy, he fed us steak and ham and, and everything, and, and, and, uh, the last breakfast we had on that LST before we went in, well, it was, it was called breakfast, since it was before midnight, and we said, “You’re supposed to have, uh, beans this morning.” And he said, “You don’t want no beans.” He said, “I’m gonna give you boys half an egg this morning.” And he really did give us a, a, a good breakfast before we started landing about one or two o’clock that morning. Um...

JOHNSON: Chances are you’re going to really need a good breakfast that day.

SALLEY: He said, he said that, “Probably be your last.” The day before we landed, that night, started landing that night. We had a boy in the company, a little short feller, never could get an overcoat to fit him, it was always too big or too long and we nicknamed him “Overcoat Charlie”. He said, standing on the deck of that ship that day, he said “Well,” he said, “This is my last one.” He said, “I’m not gonna come through this one.” And, uh, we hit the beach that night. Started landing about one or two o’clock. Now this is something I never could figure out. Old General Patton come out in the stars and stripes, said that, uh, we were the assault troops, showed him standing on that beach with those two big pearl-handled pistols strapped on ...

UNAMED THIRD PARTY: ...

SALLEY: ... And it was so dark and black ...

UNAMED THIRD PARTY: ...

SALLEY: When we went in that night, started in there, that you couldn’t see a hand before you. In Gela, where we landed. And, uh, we followed everybody in to I guess about two miles inland. The second day, charged right up, he got shot ... and we were calling for, for tank support. The

2nd Armored Division was supposed to have been, uh, giving us tank support, and the, the tank, the Germans took to using them big Mark VIs and Mark IVs against there, uh, in fact, two of 'em broke through our lines and got down plum into the beach and that Savannah cruiser ship [USS Savannah, *Brooklyn*-class light cruiser], knocked them out but, uh, when then the anti-tank company which I went in just shortly after that, I transferred into ... knocked out twenty six German tanks in one spot. Was—there were four half tracks and two full tracks, four 75s and two 105s, full tracks had 105s on them and the half tracks had 75s on them.

JOHNSON: Boy, that's good shooting.

SALLEY: Knocked out 26 guns and won the Presidential Citation, but during this time, they was, uh, finally did get some of the 2nd Armored unloaded, and, and one of the Second Armored tanks got up to where we were at, and when they got up there and seen what was going on, the tank crew left their tanks and, and hit the ditch, they wouldn't fight, and the captain called them everything imaginable, and, uh, I think there's—'bout, must've been about the fourth or fifth day, um, before this happened though, the second night on the beach. I guess you've been told this, or at least you've heard about it. We were seven transports, uh, C46s and C47s. Paratroopers shot down that night. Um, we settled down maybe about two-and-a-half, three miles inland, and when we heard all this shooting and, and looked around down there, boy, the sky was purple. I tell you. Right, there was a fuming plane Every boat on that beach had been warned not to, not to shoot, not to start 'cause our paratroopers were coming in that night or that evening, but then, uh, one of them "Bed Check Charlies" tried to fly over the base to strafe everything down there. They said what started it was one of them young boys on one of them LSTs down there, a sailor that was on one of those the 20mm, he decided he was going to shoot that German plane down, and, and he cut loose on everything on that beach ... 'Course Paratroopers was above them and then they shot down all seven planes and boy, that was a mess, and, uh, and we got to go, 'bout four, five days, I guess after landing, got to picking up the dead and trying to take care of them. They went to get "Overcoat Charlie" and, and, one of the boys told me, they never could figure this out, because there was a sergeant with him and, uh, when he got killed, and he said, "You talk to him, look around, and as soon as you seen Charlie was shot right between the eyes." Now, when we went over there and got him, 'course he'd been laying out in the sun for two or three days like that he was all bloated up and swelled up and then they rolled him over, and in his right hand, he had a German swastika. Oh boy, nobody could ever figure out, because he didn't have that swastika in his hand when he was shot, and nobody could never figure that out. Strange things happened at, at this beach. You just can't explain, the things that don't feel, seem real or seem possible. Things like that could happen, but they do, but we never could figure that out, but, uh, "Overcoat Charlie" and the Johnson boy—both of 'em predicted their death, and, and, and it happened, just the way they, they said. Well, we were moving on, got to moving on into Sicily, and the Germans had retreating back and, um, uh moving back as fast as--we couldn't hardly keep up with them, and, of course, built up on them hills and valleys, it wasn't a level country in Sicily. One night. we were moving up and, uh, come to this bridge that the Germans blowed out, and, uh, they set back up, the engineers, and the engineers were coming up to fix up the roads across ... where we could get across, and while we're sitting there waiting for the engineers to get enough room fixed to cross and get the vehicles and things across. His radio turned, this guy turned his radio in his tank and he got "Axis Sally" again. Oh, well, she said, "All you boys in Sicily," said, "You're getting slaughtered." She said, "You're getting

mowed down.” And said, “You’re getting shot up and, and killed and wounded over nothing.” Said, “We’re going to win the war.” Said, “Why don’t you just come on in and give up? Make it easier on yourself.” She said, “Besides all that,” said, “Well, you all got sweethearts and wives back in the States.” Said, “4Fs were taking them over.” And on, ... Boy, she had the propaganda, but, uh, I did enjoy listening to the music, you know, that she played. I didn’t care for what she said, but I liked the music, but, uh, the Germans had tapped out and were retreating so fast that we couldn’t, we couldn’t keep up with ‘em. I think that it was the next day, or two days, one or two days after that, we pulled up on the side of this hill, and there was a railroad going around the side of the mountain, and a tunnel went through it, and, uh, there was a railroad car sitting in a little old depot over there, but the Germans had, uh, I reckon the Germans, they’d hadn’t been using the railroad much of anything cause they had a lot stuff stored back in that, uh, in that tunnel. They had a lot of ammunition, and, and, uh, other stuff stored back in there, and while we was a sitting there on the side of the hill, uh, two or three of the boys went down and, uh, uh, broke into that box car, see what was in there. It was loaded with accordions. Brand new accordions. And I mean good. Pretty things. ‘Course, we had one guy in my company that could play one of those. He was the only one out of the whole bunch that could, could play anything at all on the, on the accordion, but everyone made a dive down there and got ‘em an accordion.

JOHNSON: (Laughs).

SALLEY: Well, we was sitting there, holed up in the bay, and, and, uh, everyone was sitting around squeezing an accordion, and, uh, we heard a blast, the awfulest blast one off in that tunnel down there, and I was a sitting on a can of water, uh, squeezing one of them old accordions, and I admit ... a concussion, raise me up off of that can ... and, uh, two or three of our boys were medics run down there, and there was ...

JOHNSON: (Laughs)

SALLEY: ... there, uh, little Italian standing outside there, and he was dripping blood all over and, and beat up pretty bad, and, uh, but he wasn’t worried about himself. He went in that tunnel, I reckon, with his goats. He had two goats, and he got back in there and tried to salvage, I guess, some lumber or metal or some kind or something other, you know, and, evidently, he dropped a cigarette or something, on some of that powder back there and set all that stuff off, and you know, it was a wonder it didn’t kill him. But he wasn’t, wasn’t worried about him. He wanted them medics to go back in that tunnel, all that ammunition going off, to find his goats! (Laughter) He was worried about his goats, you know, but they didn’t go, ... I guess them goats got killed, but he was wanting those goats, and, instead of getting himself fixed up, they patched him up and fixed him up and he still wanted to go back in that tunnel and ...

-----END OF TAPE ONE-----

-----START OF TAPE TWO-----

SALLEY: (unclear until 2:59.3) ... we stayed there, uh, 'til they got ready, well, we was waiting on the ship to come back to pick us up. But during the mean time while we was there, Patton decided that, when he slapped that boy ... in the hospital, he was ... and uh, ... it ain't nothin' like that movie. I guess you've seen the movie and uh, Patton seen this boy, layin' in the bed and he wasn't bandaged, didn't have no flesh wounds, boy didn't know what was wrong with him and the colonel called him shell-shocked. And he called him an S.O.B. and smacked him in the face and told him to get out of that bed and get back to his company 'cause there ain't nothing wrong with him and that just ... we just about started ... Patton wasn't nothing but an S.O.B. hisself ...

JOHNSON: You guys felt that strongly about it too.

SALLEY: ... Every dog face, every man in that infantry hated that man. 'Course that's where he got his name, "Blood 'n Guts", your blood and his guts. He had guts enough to give the orders and then you spilled your blood carryin' 'em out. And, uh, but that, that just about ruined everything right there. Anyway, after the campaign in Sicily was over with and we got back down to Gila, he decided that he better do some apologizin' and he made it compulsory. He sent out an order that every man in the 1st Division, cooks, everybody, that included everybody to come listen to him apologize. And they built a platform up there and where it was at, it was just like a football stadium, oh it was land hollowed out with hills all around it ... the whole division was gather around him and he was sittin' down there. And uh, the man couldn't open his mouth without swearing. I don't care how tough you are or how, how much you been through, if you don't like to hear someone cuss every word they say and while he was there and starting to talk and apologize to us, uh, a boy in K Company was gonna kill him. He done had his rifle up and a sergeant happened to see him and grabbed the rifle, but if he had shot Patton right there, he'd of killed Patton right there. So, he made it compulsory to, to—we all had to go listen to him apologize and I don't think anybody thought too much of it, you know. But uh, he wasn't—I guess they was more infantry boys killed under his command than any other general as far as I know, far as I can guess. He didn't like the infantry, armored was his pet outfit and he didn't like the infantry at all. Then when they demoted him—they oughta hung him, they oughta done, but they didn't, they let him come out smelling like roses, I guess after all. Anyhow, they tried to get us a surgeon general and the other division and the ol' General Roosevelt tried to get us back to the States for a rest. Now this was in October, uh, September, in September of '43, well we done fought all the way through Africa to Sicily. I mean, we were a rag-tag bunch. We was wore out and they was a trying to get us another division back to the States for a rest.

JOHNSON: Was General Allen still in command or had he been moved out?

SALLEY: He'd been moved out at that time. That's when he, that's when he got shanghaied out. Him and Roosevelt and, and uh, the surgeon general, a big doctor, I guess and uh, they had told us that Montgomery told Eisenhower that the 1st Division didn't go into Normandy that there wouldn't be a bridge for them. So they, we—they put us on a boat, they was a British boat that come through from India through the canal around the Middleeast through there and picked us up in Sicily. A pretty good convoy of us. Part of the convoy was comin' back to the States and the rest of us was going back to England and I stayed in, while we was coming back through the

Mediterranean, them U-boats, and I seen one of them transports go down. But they got one transport and they got after us and they got after the ship that I was on. And then sub chasers was, was ringing us, going round and round and round us, droppin' them death drops and they finally got 'im. And uh, he come to the top of the water and the ship that I was on and asked the crew, they had guns mounted up top and opened up on the ship and they finished him off. They didn't take no survivors out of that sub. But uh, they brought us home back, back home.

JOHNSON: That must've been scary, you know, getting shot at on land and then get shot at at sea too.

SALLEY: Well, when you look at it, from the time I left the States in 1942, 'til I got back in May of 1945, I was under the danger of being hit, killed, bombed, shot, anywhere I was at. For nearly three years, don't matter whether it was on water or on land or what part of the world I was in, I was under really, the threat of being killed and uh but anyhow we come back to England. Before we left Sicily though, they stripped everything off of us. Stripped all of our insignias, all of our division patches, took everything of the world off us and after we got out in the Mediterranean, they told us, said "They ain't no more 1st Division." 1st Division was done away with. Well, we couldn't hardly buy that, but they did take all of our patches away from us, shoulder patches and all that stuff. We didn't have nothing to show what outfit we was in at all. We got to England and we wound up in a little ol' town by the name of Beaminster [Dorset, England]. And they, they took over private homes and made dwelling places for us, you know, barracks and things, put so many in each house and took over the city hall, where our mess hall and stuff in that little town. But we wasn't in that town two days when them people said, "Y'all been the outfit in Sicily, ain't you? Y'all the 1st Division." They knowed more about us than we did! Now, how in the world they found that out, 'course I don't know but they told us and what they said was true. And there we was tryin' to keep it a secret, you know, and they knowed all about us and oh we was a fightin' outfit and where we'd been and everything else. So, they put us through some pretty rough maneuvering and stuff. We trained the 4th Infantry Division after we got back to England and we got back in October of '43 and we started trainin' the 4th Infantry Division and we trained them, the whole winter, uh, all fall and all winter. We were training 'em, but I almost got killed a couple of times on a few maneuvers, we'd call land maneuvers out one day and there was a—some engineers were blowing out some road blocks, some steel, big long pieces of steel they had in a road and going through all this stuff, you know, like they was gonna have to do when they hit the beach and I was right above 'em, a rock wall about that high (gestures with hand) and they didn't holler that they was gonna blast that out or say anything and when I heard the blast, I fell right against the wall and there was a piece of metal about that big (gestures with hands) hit right by the side of me. It had ricocheted right around me. It didn't hit me or anything, and that shook me up pretty bad. But you know, something that I just read about here this, this past summer, about losin' all them troops right there off the coast of England ...

JOHNSON: (Unclear)

SALLEY: ... They never told us, we never heard a thing about that.

JOHNSON: They kept that real quiet.

SALLEY: They did. So many things happened over there, I guess they kept it quiet. ‘Course they did so many things that I told you that I just now remember over in Sicily, especially in Sicily, you know. One night, we moved up, we was supposed to take this hill, move in, we was supposed to take it the next day really, and they had—they called in air support and artillery, and the artillery was supposed to lay down a rolling barrage the next morning, and then the airplanes was to come in the next morning and was goin’ to soften it up for us. I don’t know what happened, but anyhow, we went in and got the hill that night. And the next morning, here come the artillery and they tore us up and got some of our men and then the airplanes come in after the artillery got done and wound up, forty seven men got killed, and many got hurt. And really, the major could have prevented a lot of it if he’d of been good enough to got out of the fox hole and went and got on the telephone and called back and said stop. He didn’t get out of that hole. We lost forty seven men that morning, killed and—and you talk about a man drawin’ up small. I drew up that morning. I didn’t have a hole dug when that P51s [North American Aviation P-51 Mustang] come in on us. I got behind a bush about that big around (gestures with hands) and I think I was hid behind that bush.

JOHNSON: Hiding behind that ...

SALLEY: Went in with them P51s down there and ... and we captured the, that morning or that day, we captured, I guess half a dozen or more German trucks that was machine shops, machine shops but they had red crosses painted on ‘em. To keep from gettin’ tore up. But them Germans, they pulled some bad tricks, unethical tricks, I guess, but ‘course I guess everything that goes on in a war is, you can expect anything in a war. But anyway, after we got back to England and we went on some—we went on many dry runs, we called ‘em dry runs. Whole maneuvers that everybody got to a point where they just, nearly killed us, and go on another dry run, We just knowed it was a comin’ sooner or later. We didn’t know when but we didn’t, we—they just wore us out on them maneuvers, them dry runs, they call ‘em dry runs, and finally, the time come and we loaded and I went to Newport or eh, Newport, Wales, where I loaded ship to cross the Channel. And the morning that we pulled out, they pulled out of the harbor and the ship they give us a little flyer, a little sheet of paper, ‘bout this long and that wide (gestures with hands) that Eisenhower put out. I’d give anything I’ve said many, many times that I’d give anything I had to get that, to have kept that piece of paper. But he was a wishin’ all of us the best and good luck and all that stuff wrote on it. And uh, we sailed out of there that evening and went across that night and the next morning, it wasn’t until daylight in plain view, the sky was solid black with airplanes, and I never saw so many ships and boats and different kinds and sizes, all such conglomeration of vehicles on the water that you could ever see, ever want to see. And then of course, the ship that I was on, well we was goin’ in and we wasn’t too far out from the beach, I guess, when we hit two mines. Right beside of it.

JOHNSON: Were you on an LST or?

SALLEY: I was on a, I was on a liberty ship [class of ship, freighter], a naval transport. Right beside of us, I don’t know where they hid a mine, but we was one of them big guns on the beach hit ‘em. But he got hit right in the—must of got hit right in the engine room. And they were, fire ... When we got hit, I thought that ship that I was on, I started to jump off of it. And one of the

boys said, “Oh, don’t jump.” Says “I don’t believe we’re sinkin’”. But you could drive a truck through the side of that thing once them mines hit that. They was nineteen killed, killed nineteen and I don’t know how many more got hurt but, uh, nineteen got killed, but this big transport right beside us was loaded, was loaded with infantry, I don’t guess it took that ship more than five minutes to sink. Back end of it went up and the front end of it went down, right down in the water. I don’t know if anyone got out of that. But we had—from then on out, buddy, it was, it was rough. I mean.

JOHNSON: Did you get off the liberty ship right into a landing crowd or?

SALLEY: Yeah. yeah, they got us off on one of them, they wasn’t—well, we call them tank liners or that’s what they called ‘em. I don’t really know what the—if that was the right name for ‘em but that’s what we ...

JOHNSON: Over there.

SALLEY: Wouldn’t hold more than two, three, two, three vehicles or vehicle or two and several men and the front end of it would let down. And now, that one that I went on, that thing made three trips to the beach before anybody could get off it and get too hot. And still tryin’ to get up on the beach and in to the part that ... The second time, we asked the captain, or I don’t know whether he was the captain, anyway he was in charge of the landing craft. He wasn’t up on the beach, set up, sittin’ up on the beach, talkin’ to people, decided to see how deep the water was, I reckon. He got a rope around this boy, this sailor and told him go over side of that thing and see how deep the water was. And it got so hot, they didn’t have time to pull that boy back out of the water, he passed out from ...

JOHNSON: Hard times. People make hard decisions, you know.

SALLEY: We lost a thousand men that mornin’, the 16th Infantry.

JOHNSON: But so... ?

SALLEY: Boy it was nothin’ but dry sand. We finally secured the beach and went in up on one of them bluffs. ‘Course we lost everything, all of our vehicles and most of it. We had to dump half our guns and half-tracks and pull ... Now I was in cannon company at this time. I wasn’t in anti-tank ... But, we lost—well I guess we lost everything but two half-tracks were lost. We had two full tracks and six mag tracks. And we lost four half-tracks and four mag-tracks. Rough water. They didn’t even get in on the beach.

JOHNSON: Did you have a pretty good idea from your briefings where you were gonna be landing and what it was going to look like or ...

SALLEY: No.

JOHNSON: ... were you pretty cold?

SALLEY: No, they never did brief us on that, what it was going to look like. They just said “There it is. Hit it”. And some of the other soldiers, from the other outfits, they might have been told but they never did tell us. This old boy that I was tellin’ you started out with me, ol’ Norton. Got killed up in ...

JOHNSON: Was he the same company you were in or was he?

SALLEY: No, he was still in anti-tank company. They was right beside of us, ‘course we were all bunched up together there really. More than sixty percent of the casualties in that landing that morning was on Omaha Beach. And there was really tough to ... Now after we got the bluffs secured and got the pillboxes [concrete dug-in guard post with slits for firing weapons] knocked out and got it and started inland. Started towards the town of Caen and I guess this was something that probably—I don’t know if you’ve ever been told or ever heard, but they talk about the Vietnam War and women and children being killed and that memoir. There was a lot of women and kids that had to be shot there that day ‘cause they were shooting at us. Ten year old guerrilla wars. That’s something that as far as I know is never been told. Nothin’ has been said about. (sniffs)

JOHNSON: Were they young German kids?

SALLEY: Well, I guess some of them belonged to some of the German soldiers. The German soldiers, they told us that some of the German soldiers that had been livin’ down there and married some of the women. Their wives and their kids ... I guess they decided that they’d get as many as they could, but you know when you’re in war, I told ‘em. Some of the Vietnam veterans, tried to help them through some of their problems. Self-preservation is the first law of nature. Now, a ten, eleven, twelve year old boy can kill you just as well as a twenty-one year old man. But a woman could either. And that’s what they think of. They’re trying to survive. Well, we made it through there and we started up through them hedgerows. Fightin’ from hedgerow to hedgerow.

JOHNSON: Pretty hard going.

SALLEY: And that was some pretty tough fightin’ the whole week. Brought home, I reckon it was German division that moved in there on maneuver, down there on maneuvers or something there. And we uh, we captured a whole bunch of them there on bicycles. I had never seen so many bicycles in my life as they had there. There was bicycles everywhere. And we captured some of their personnel carriers, their full tracks and it was made by Ford. Ford company had gotten into Germany and made all that stuff there. And we painted them, painted white stars on ‘em and black crosses and we used their vehicles there for several days ‘till we got resupplied ya know. And then we moved on in and we was a movin’—the 1st Division was so much further out there in front of the rest of the lines and the British was on our left. And they was havin’ a hard time. We had to go over there and help them out a day or two. And we moved on up and a little place by the name of Caremont, France. And they stopped us and we went in as a defensive position. Now, they put us in a defensive position. We could—I guess this was somewhere around sixteen, eighteen, twenty miles inland from the beach. I was on an outpost, there was four of us on an outpost there. With 50 caliber machine guns, and there was a pretty good sized creek

come down through this country. And there was some Frenchmans that would go down there and fish out of that creek. Well, we didn't have enough to fish with but one day, one of the boys told me, said. "Let's go get us a mess of fish." And I said, "What we gonna fish with?" Well, he said. "We got some concussion grenades and some hand grenades and we'll blast some out." Well, I said, "Well, now." Here's a nice warm day, just a fine day in June and it was a fine day and me and him got ... Didn't take no gun with us, didn't take our rifles with us. Didn't have a thing to shoot, we just had them grenades on. We had—I got about a half a dozen concussion grenades and three or four hand grenades. And then every big pool we got to, we'd just throw one of them things in there and we'd get one or two fish out. And we was walkin' up that creek. Man, I forgot all about the war. I was fishin'. I was havin' such a good time, you know, and first thing you know the if the Germans were real smart ... now they could kill me and him both and took us prisoners because we walked right into their hands first thing and brought us back into relation ... was one of them bird guns. I just knew—well, they sprayed all around us and we dropped what fish we had and took off down that creek. And as many times as I had been shot at like that, they got so close it was like a shield was around me. I still believe it was. I really do. It don't sound possible but there was something protectin' us. Keeping me from getting shot and tore up. Well, anyhow we got back and there was a barn at an old farm outside, but this guy had moved out and we had seen some chickens out there. And we decided that we most effectively have an execution We went out there and run two of them old hens in the barn and killed them. I skinned 'em. I didn't pluck 'em, I skinned 'em. And we got to cook the bones out of them in a couple of them gallon cans, big fruit cans. We cooked them chickens all day. And we though we was gonna have a real mess of chicken. We tried to eat that chicken, it was tough as shoe leather. I never seen a chicken as tough in my life. And one of the, some of the other boys, they got into the rabbits. And then there was three or four cows over in the, uh, across the hedgerows from where we was at. One boy from New Jersey, he said, they call me Rebel all the time. He said, "Rebel? Can't you milk?" I said "Yeah." I says, "Why?" He said, "Let's go over there in the mornin' and," he said, "We'll catch one of them cows and I'll hold and you milk it and we'll get some cream for our coffee." And brought that over, they'd bring over it over, black coffee every morning about four o'clock. Everybody had to get up at four in case the Germans decided to ... And I said "Alright." Well, we'd been warned not to drink that milk. But not to milk them cows and not to drink no milk or come down with tuberculosis. Well, we got up the next mornin' and we got the cook to get us a couple of brass cans and we went over there and I got to milk one of them gallon cans full of milk in one of them cans. And strained it through and put it into the oven and when they brought the coffee out, well, we had cream for our coffee. And they liked it and we drank the rest of it. Well, we got caught. We done that about two or three mornings in a row and a captain caught us. And he said if we wasn't in the front lines, he said he'd court martial me. There wasn't no court marital anyhow but then he didn't. He was about to court martial that ...

UNNAMED THIRD PARTY: ...

SALLEY: ... that guy that killed those rabbits. And we stayed there in that defensive position for—I know don't know, we must've been there for a week or two.

UNNAMED THIRD PARTY: Mom? ...

SALLEY: Or something like that, I guess. And they said, well, we're goin' to be relieved and we're going to back and rest there for thirty days. Well, we pulled back, I forget now what outfit it was that relieved us. I don't know whether it was the 45th or what outfit, but anyhow they come in and they relieved us. And we went back thinkin' we was gonna be back and rest and get rested up 'bout thirty days and we was back there and rested for three days and they said get ready to move out. So, they moved us over and behind the 9th Division at Saint Lo. We was a sittin' in behind the ninth division. This was when they figured up this share of blitzkrieg like the Germans, combing the infantry and the armor together. And the infantry right and the armor and all that stuff and blitzkreiging all up through France. And we sit there behind the 9th and I think two or three days. And I think where we was at, there was a farmhouse there and some of the boys got lookin' around and found a patch of taters and a patch of onions this guy had had. Got in his house and found a skillet. I guess that skillet was that big (gestures with hands) biggest skillet ever I saw ...

UNNAMED THIRD PARTY: Take a bath in the kitchen?

SALLEY: And he had a fireplace in that house and we told the cook to bring us out a bucket of lard, shortenin' or grease or whatever they wanted to call it. And they brought us out some of that and we got to fry onions and taters. And we just, we just 'bout dug all that man's taters and onions. We just kept onions and taters on that fire all the time, as soon as one man would come over, we'd just—we were feedin' every man around there onions and taters. And in the morning, the tactic—the breakthrough started. The first wave of bombers to come over to soften up the city of St. Lo [Saint Laurent] itself. As the old saying goes, we put it out and I guess you could stand up in the church and see the whole city, just leveled it. The first wave of bombers come over and dropped their bombs on the Americans on the date of June. That was the day that General ... got killed. And they was crippled up and got banged up so bad when the time come to start to breakthrough, they couldn't do it. We leapfrogged to 'em and went on and we started to ... and then, hell-bent on ... from then on out, the fourth day of August, we got into hand-to-hand combat that morning with a bunch of Germans. That's the first time that I know'd of in World War II that the Germans and the medics, the American medics, was workin' side by side, patchin' up the wounded. That was the second time in World War II that we was takin' prisoners. Takin' prisoners that day and that time that I was tellin' you about there, in Africa on Hill 609523, we didn't take no prisoners there.

JOHNSON: Fighting was just too hard?

SALLEY: You get to the point where you—well, that's really the sad part about it, they drill you and drill you and drill you about kill, kill, kill, kill. That's all that you learn is how to kill somebody and you go in there and you go through all this stuff for two or three years and then you come out and then, and then the public thinks you're supposed to forget about it and get it out of your mind. And live like it never happened. But you can't do it. You can't do it. But the fourth day of August, the next mornin' after the, the day of the hand-to-hand combat we was in—and during this time I was diggin' a hole, a fox hole by the side of a big oak tree. There was a German sit right across from me in the hedgerow and I never did see him. But he sprayed bullets all around me. He could have, he should have cut me in two. I got down—there was a big ditch about right in the backdoor of where I was at and I grabbed my rifle and shovel and went

diggin'. I jumped down in there, in the ditch and I guess there was a—I guess seven or eight of us down in that ditch and they got to puttin' them mortars in on us pretty bad. Droppin' mortars in on us and it just so happened that out of the eight or nine or seven or whatever it was that was there, 'bout three or four of 'em were Jews. And that particular mornin', they were the only ones who died. And we got to tellin' the rest of 'em that was comin' that they was the only ones that they was gettin' that day was the Jews. They weren't gettin' nobody else. We had a Lieutenant Gold and a feller by the name of Gold, and he got to talkin' to me. I guess I was pretty scared and I'd always had in mind that I had a round-trip ticket. When I'd left the States that I'd get back. But that mornin', I'd just about give up. I uh, they was puttin' it in on us and I didn't think I was gonna make it or get back. (sniffs) And he said, "I"—he said, "Them Germans ain't got no bullet with our name on it." I said, "I used to think pretty strongly about that, but I just about changed my mind." He said, "Naw". But then the next mornin' I dug back in the bank of that ditch and there was about three, three and a half foot of dirt over top of us. And inside the ditch, I'd lay there and them mortar shells, I guess it was mortar shells ... they didn't break the skin on 'em, they just all busted on the inside. When you open the inside, it's all swelled up and just pushed out and my head was just—couldn't see nothin' but stars and hear bells ringin'. I didn't hardly know where I was at. They got me and took me back to the field hospital and doctor looked at me. Said there ain't nothin' we can do for you, just send him on back. Well, they took me back to the next hospital, down on next to the beach. They didn't have no cots or beds. They had the stretchers, layin' on the ground. They had to give me a shot, I guess of morphine or somethin', I don't know what it was. Anyhow, it knocked me out and I slept through it. The next mornin' when they come through there. A guy woke me up and he said, "Did you hear that last night?" I said, "Hear what?" He says, "Well, the bombing. They bombed the hospital and the tent, around the hospital." I said, "No, I didn't hear nothin'." He says, "Look right above your head." I looked above my head and there was a hole about that big (indicates size with hands) around in the tent just about bed level. You know, if I had been over on the cot, standing up. But I was layin' on the ground on a stretcher. And they bombed that hospital that night. The whole tent was full of holes. And they brought me back down the beach the next day. They took me down there and put me on one of them LSTs. Had them LSTs rigged up like a hospital ships and they had frames and things welded all around the side of 'em, where they could lay them stretchers up on these steel arms stickin' out, I guess. And that thing was loaded down. It was goin' back to England to put us in a hospital and there about three or four weeks, I guess, I couldn't hardly eat a fly. I couldn't do nothin', just my head was a bangin' so bad, it hurt so bad, and I couldn't see too good. I didn't have no appetite ... But I did get back on my feet. To get out of the hospital, they put me in, they sent me to this replacement center just outside of Birmingham, England. They were asking them instead of orders back, they wanted all the men that had experience in combat, they wanted them back. (unclear) But this all happened ...

(Tape Paused)

SALLEY: And I thought that I got all banged up like that. Well, that I got my ticket home, that I'll be goin' home. And they put me in that replacement center, and they was goin' to send me back but I think the rest of the 1st Division was back in Belgium at that time. It was a major that interviewed me and I don't remember his name. I got his name, but I don't remember it ... And he said, "Son," he said, "How long you been in the 1st Division?" I said, "Since 1940." He said, "You been all through Africa and Sicily and went into Normandy?" I says, "Yes, sir." He said,

“How’d you feel about goin’ back into combat?” I said, “Well, if I have to go,” I said, “Then ain’t nothin’ I can do ‘bout it.” I said, “I don’t care a whole lot about goin’ back.” I said, “I feel like I pulled my time in the front lines. I’ve seen enough.” But I said, “If I have to go back, I’ll go back. There ain’t nothin’ I can do about it.” He said, “Hold your hands out.” I held my hands out, and I was just like a leaf on a tree in the wind, shakin’ about this ... He said, “Son,” he says, “I am going to tell you one thing right here. You’ve seen enough for five or six years.” And he said, “There ain’t no way I’m gonna send you back into combat.” He said, “How does that sound to you?” and I said, “That sounds awful good to me, Major.” And, and they got crossed up some way or another and they had a bunch that they wouldn’t have been sendin’ back and they had another bunch that they was and they thought that we was the ones that was supposed to go back, don’t know how we was supposed to go back. But anyhow we got out of it and instead of sending me home, why, they sent me to an ordinance outfit. And I’d had more time overseas, including all the officers in that outfit then they’d had in the Army. Now, this was in November of ’44 and then of course the Battle of the Bulge come along and then in January, my—this outfit went back to France. So, we had to take a lot of vehicles and things back over, and tanks and stuff. That’s what they done. They repaired trucks in this ordinance outfit, repaired trucks and tanks and stuff. And we went to ‘bout eighteen kilometers, kilometers or whatever on the other side of Reims, France and set up shop there. And we was workin’ on vehicles there. We hadn’t been there, I guess over a week, a captain called me over and he said, “We’re startin’ to draw some prisoners and have prisoners at this camp,” says, “I want you to be in charge of it.” I said, “Well, I don’t care nothin’ about it.” And he says, “Well,” he says “you’re the only one here that’s got any experience fightin’ ‘em. So, I’d tell you that you’d be the best man to put in charge over a prison camp.” And I says, “Well, if that’s what you want,” I says, “I’ll do it.” I said, “That’s fine.” I try to do what I’m told to do. So, we took over a prison camp in a little old town by the name of Bazancourt [France]. And there was—it was out in farming country there, and of course it was in the winter time and they was about, I guess, ten or twelve inches of snow. Colder than the devil. And we took—there was a prison camp there that the Germans had had. Come to find out the Germans had kept them Senegalese troops prisoner in this prison camp. And there was eighty-five families of Polacks lived there in the village. That what there was, a village of Polacks, ‘course I guess there was ... there that—but the Germans had brought them Polish people in there to do the farmin’ for ‘em, to raise the food for the Germans. And we drew, we went back to the main prison camp and got 355 German prisoners and brought ‘em into that camp. And when we brought ‘em in there, we had, of course we had to bring rations in there to feed ‘em with. And I had—they give me a thirty-two French guard, part of the French underground during the time there, to be guards over the Germans in the prison camp. And I had three American soldiers and then there was a lieutenant. Me and a lieutenant and three more American soldiers and thirty-two French guards. One of the boys, an American boy, he was off with his brother and got killed and we took him out of there. They was in the same outfit together, but after his brother got killed and they shipped him out, put him in a noncombatant. And he just, he wanted to kill them Germans so bad, he couldn’t take it. ‘Course I did too. At the time, I didn’t care. If they was one of those Germans—there was a first sergeant in the Germany army and he could speak good English, good, well-educated man and we had him, and then put him in the office to make out the requisitions and fill out all the papers for the prisoners to draw the rations and everything, you know. When we first move in there, these Polacks, these Polish people comes to the stockade and I couldn’t understand ‘em. I didn’t know what they were sayin’ but it just so happened that one of the boys was an old Polish boy that was with me, and

he was from Scranton, Pennsylvania and he could talk Polish. And I asked him, I said, “What’s them people talkin’ about?” “What they want.” He said, “They’re wantin’ to go in there and get all that food that you’ve put in there for them Germans and make them Germans get out here and dig these here rotten cabbage stalks up out from under the snow and let them eat that rotten cabbage soup out of them stalks like they had to do.” Now, I said, “You tell ‘em, I can’t do that.” I said, I said, “If it were left up to me, I’d say yeah, but I can’t do it. I’ve got to follow my orders. And I can’t do it.” And we hassled there, I guess, for an hour back and forth. But they ‘bout ready to break the gate down and go in there. And I finally told him, I said, “You tell ‘em if they start in there, I’m gonna have to order them boys up there,”—and we had .30 caliber machine guns set on each corner of that stockade, and I said, “You tell ‘em, I’ll run ‘em up.” ‘Course I wouldn’t really open fire on ‘em. I was a bluffin’. I said, “You tell them boys to open fire if they start in on us.” And I said, “You tell ‘em that I’ll do everything in my power to try to help ‘em and get ‘em something”—There was a big barn right over from the stockade that was locked up. It’d had a big pile of coal in it and they was a short on fuel. And I said, “I got somethin’ else they can talk about.” I said, “You tell them locks been broke, been shot off that barn and they can get that coal,” I said, “I’ll try to get them anything else if I can.” Well, I did. I managed to get ‘em some sugar, some coffee and a few things, you know. And got that barn opened up and they carried that coal out there and they did burn that coal up and warmed themselves. Hell, they— one of ‘em made a calvados [brandy made in Normandy, generally from apples and/or pears], a liquor out of potatoes. And he told me, I was inquirin’ one evenin’, he told me, he said, he said, “If I could get the sugar for it.” He’d make the liquor and me and him would sell. Now, if I would have been a crook and done it, I could have made a lot of money there. But I, I wouldn’t do it. And I could have got the sugar, I could’ve worked around and got the sugar through them German prisoners. I could have cut all of their sugar ration off and confiscated it and got it but I didn’t do it. But there was a Polish weddin’ going on over there while we was there. They invited us to it and I think out of everything I saw, that weddin’ went on for a week. One old man and all that music. They had one old man playin’ the fiddle and he played that fiddle night and day. They like killed him.

JOHNSON AND SALLEY: (laughter)

SALLEY: But anyhow, we had thirty-two Germans that was worked in the shop as mechanics. And every day when they’d come in and out, ‘course the rest of ‘em are scattered around the area, different companies and KP [kitchen police/patrol] and stuff like that. But these thirty-two that worked as mechanics in the shop—‘course I’d have every one of them searched. I’d make them practice and search ‘em every time before they’d turn back into the stockade. And one evenin’, one of the Frenchmens found a pair of wire cutters on one of ‘em. Well, they was—they had a hole up there in the dungeon that they had tried to find ... Well, I put that dude down in that, give him seven days on bread and water. Well, during the meantime, this first lieutenant that was with me then, he was from Massachusetts and me and him got along great. He, he really thought the world of me and he was a makin’ captain. And he was—they shipped him out back down to a bigger prison camp where they have seven-hundred and some. Well, they brought in another little old second lieutenant ... fresh out of OCS [Officer Candidate School] down in Fort Daniel, Georgia. He didn’t know straight up and he—as soon as he got there, he found out I had that German in the dungeon, he’d been in there for ‘bout three days and he said, “Don’t you think you’ve had him in there long enough?” I said, “No.” I said, “I gave him seven days,” and I

said, "That's what he's gonna spend." I said, "And if he fools with me, I'll give him seven more on top of that." He said, "You're too rough on 'em." I said, "No, I ain't too rough on him," I said, "You don't know nothin' about these people. You just got over here." And then, just one word right after another, and he demanded me, and then direct orders to go down there and try and let that man out. And I said, "I ain't turnin' him. If you want him loose, you go and turn him." And while enough of cussin' him out, and callin' him everythin' but a lieutenant. So when it was all over with, he went in and turned the prisoner loose out of the dungeon and he went back down in the main company and told the captain what I had done so they could come up. He said, "Well, Sarge," he said, "You know what I'm up here for, don't cha?" I said, "Yeah." I was ready, put on my overcoat sleeves and jerk them staff sergeant stripes off and I told him. I said, "There they are." But I said, "I'll tell you one thing, I ain't stayin' here at this prison, ain't not another night. I'm a leavin'." He said, "Alright." So, I went and packed my stuff and left and I just went back down to the other prison camp where the other officer went, a lieutenant from ... And four days after I left there, there were four of them that escaped out of that prison there. Drove that little old lieutenant crazy. I don't reckon they did any harm but then down at the other prison camp we had—there was four there that tried to escape one night. And the French guard, they had a French guard down there and one of the Frenchmen that was on guard there on the corner there—well he cut one of them in two with a machine gun. The other two turn around and come back and we didn't drug them two around the front gate, laid 'em down in the snow right outside by the front gate. And let 'em lay there for three days to where all them prisoners come in and out of that field could see them two lay there. To give 'em warning ya know. They didn't try to escape anymore while I was gone, well it was shortly after that while I was told that I was gonna get to come home because I had spent more than thirty months overseas—and that I couldn't believe when I was first told that I'd done got to the point where I'd done give up ever gettin' nsvl.

JOHNSON: Mm hmm.

SALLEY: And I made it. When I got back, I landed in New York Harbor and we had done brought them 355 German prisoners back that was on that liberty ship. Sailed in the New York Harbor and it was one of the prettiest sights I've ever saw in my life, see the old Statue of Liberty standing there. When I first went in the Army, I could lay in my bunk on Governor's Island, ya know, see the Statue of Liberty over there.

JOHNSON: And you came back around again.

SALLEY: And come back around again. Where I started. Always happened, seems like that's the way it always done ...

JOHNSON: Sounds like a watch.

SALLEY: Told us we was gonna have to take those prisoners to California. I said, "I ain't goin' to California with no prisoners. I'm a jumpin' this ship. I ain't going. I'm on leisure." Told 'em, "I'm leavin' this boat. Goin' home" ... but before we could get started, they had changed orders again so it was different. Go up through the East River and through Hell Gate and goin' to Boston with 'em. And we took 'em to Boston that night. Next day and then the next night, I

stood out on the bow of that ship all night lookin' at them lights, that's the first lights I'd seen like that in nearly two years at this point. And then they took us off and run us through a ... apparatus and sent us to Camp Edwards. Fed us a big steak with french fries and all ... Sent us to Camp Devons and that's where I got discharged ... And my wife and I got married on the twenty-fifth of May and we just had our forty-fifth weddin' anniversary next May.

JOHNSON: Congratulations.

SALLEY: Lord willin'. There's a lot more, I guess, if I had to start going back and recollectin' and going back and tellin' it, little things happen, big things, tellin' all the big things that happened. But man, nobody will ever know or ever understand what it's like until, 'til they've been by themselves.

JOHNSON: That's right.

SALLEY: That war was a terrible thing and like I say, I—the only thing I'd like to do now, I'd like to visit that cemetery.

JOHNSON: Say goodbye to some friends?

SALLEY: Well, to a lot of buddies over there, good buddies. Soldiers there that ...

JOHNSON: Yeah.

SALLEY: ... They only had two years in the States. I don't know them too. I'll tell you 'bout that sergeant. Well, I know of three, four that got back, but I know none of them are livin' now.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----