

**Transcription: John McFall**

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*Today is July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008, and I am Joan Kilpatrick. I'm interviewing Mr. John Francis McFall. The interview is taking place by phone. I am at the General Land Office in Austin, Texas, and he is at his home in Georgetown, in Williamson County, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. OK, well let's start at the beginning. When is your birthday?*

**John McFall:** January the 11<sup>th</sup>, 1924.

*And where were you born?*

**John McFall:** I was born in Des Moines, Iowa.

*Oh, a long way from Texas.*

**John McFall:** Yes.

*What were your parents' names?*

**John McFall:** My parents were Martin Esaw McFall and Inez Wood.

*And where were they born?*

**John McFall:** Dad was born in Levinworth, Indiana, and mother was born in Corinthian, Pennsylvania.

*So your family has kind of traveled across the country.*

**John McFall:** Yeah right, that's it.

*Well, what branch of the service did you join?*

**John McFall:** I was in the Army.

*And when did you join the service?*

**John McFall:** I was inducted in September of 1943. I don't know the exact date.

*And what made you want to join the service?*

**John McFall:** Well, when I was, when World War II started and they were making people sign up or register for the draft, I was a member of a religious order, Brother of the Christian Schools in the Catholic Church, and I was classified, I was given a classification of 4D for that when I had to register when I got old enough. But then I took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience for two straight years, like one year at a time, and then I decided I'd leave the order and I came home to where my mother lived, and the war was going on, and I thought that I was really healthy and everything, and so I went down to try to enlist in the Marines and they wouldn't take me because I had a bad eye, and I went to the Navy and they wouldn't take me because I had a

bad eye. I found out that I was born with a congenital cataract in my right eye and I didn't know that at the time.

*So it hadn't put you until then, had it?*

**John McFall:** No, well I could see 20-20 with both eyes open without glasses even though the side and that I was like 22-100, on the right eye. So I figured then that well, I'll go see if I can volunteer for the Army and if they won't take me, why I'll just probably go back to college and finish my education. So I went to the Army and they took me.

*Then you stayed in long enough they must have been quite happy with you.*

**John McFall:** Yeah, right.

*Well what were your initial thoughts on joining the military?*

**John McFall:** Well, I thought I was kind of excited about it. I don't know if that's the correct word or not, but World War II was going on and I was a young, single man and I thought I was really healthy and I just thought I was going to, when I found out that I was, they were going to accept me, why that was OK. I figured well, I'll get into something, even I could get into military intelligence or something that would really be good, you know, for the Army and it wouldn't be too much danger to me, although I wasn't really concerned about that too much. I didn't want to get killed, of course, but I mean that thought kind of crossed my mind that I thought that I would get some kind of a desk job or some kind of a job where I could, I spoke, I kind of spoke French and being a Catholic brother and all, I was really good at Latin and I had a little Spanish, and I thought maybe I, the Army could make use of some of my language like interrogating prisoners of war or something. I was fairly optimistic about it. In fact, at that time, I thought maybe I could become a pilot or an officer, you know, and so I was kind of excited about joining, frankly.

*And where did you sign up?*

**John McFall:** I was sent to Fort Levinworth, Kansas, which was an induction station there for that part of the country. I was from Kansas. See, I had lived in Kansas City, Missouri, then, and so they called me up right away and they sent me down to Camp Blanding, Florida, and they gave me basic training as a rifleman. I want to pause there because I couldn't get in any other services because I couldn't see out of my right eye, so they made me a rifleman in the Army.

*Which requires good eyesight, doesn't it?*

**John McFall:** Yes it does. And not only that but it was my right eye that was bad, so I couldn't fire a rifle with my right eye because I couldn't see the sight, but they let me fire left handed down in basic training, so -

*You got through that -*

**John McFall:** I got through basic training. It was 13 weeks and I was a pinup corporal. They put, I was a recruit or a private, but I was a squad – they made me a squad leader and they gave me corporal stripes to wear around and I had the charge of a squad in basic training.

*So what did they pick usually one person from each squad to be the corporal?*

**John McFall:** Yes, that's right.

*Well, was basic training pretty tough?*

**John McFall:** Basic training was not tough for me. I was in pretty good physical shape except for that eye and I did well in basic training. I mean I shot expert with the rifle and I did something on a night compass problem that excited everybody about my ability and so I gloried in that. That was about the only thing that happened in basic training. I don't know if you want to hear about that or not. It didn't amount to much.

*Well, if there was anything there about the people that you met or anything that stands out, well go ahead and tell me.*

**John McFall:** Well, no, my reaction to that was the life itself was a tremendous change for me because I really up to that time in my life, I didn't have like sex and alcohol and gambling. Those were not things that I did, and there was a lot of that in basic training and I didn't like that especially, and also I found out that there were a lot of people in basic training that weren't very intelligent or very highly educated. And so I was a little bit more educated than probably everybody there because like I scored high on the Army general classification test when I was inducted, and they called me out for officer candidate school and called me out for flight training in the Air Force because the Air Force was part of the Army at that time, but then they'd get down to my physical profile where I had the bad eye, so then they'd kick me out. They said no, you go back into the – so that was kind of frustrating for me. It really was, you know. So I knew I was gonna start out as a rifleman. I was gonna go overseas as a rifleman which is exactly what I did.

*Did you have further training before you went overseas?*

**John McFall:** No. The 13 weeks of basic training at that time, the war was like the North African thing was finished and Sicily was finished and the 36<sup>th</sup> Division was the Texas National Guard had landed at Salerno, so things were going, things were heating up for our Army over there in Europe a little bit and I figured that's where I was going.

*So what was your first duty assignment?*

**John McFall:** My first duty assignment was, there were 36 of us came in as replacements to one company of Company E, the 141<sup>st</sup> Infantry of the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division which had really been clobbered at Casino, and probably lost half their regimental personnel in the Division in two attempts to cross the Rapido River, and so there was a massive replacements came in and there were 36 of us came into this company and so I, there was one opening in the mortars and I said I wanted the mortars. So I was a crewman on a 60 millimeter mortar in the rifle company of an infantry regiment.

*And so did you get any formal training on that?*

**John McFall:** Just, well I had a little bit in basic training. We had all of the basic training in all of the basic weapons in basic training, but I might sound a little bit prejudiced here, but I went into E Company of the 141<sup>st</sup> Infantry and it was part of the Texas National Guard which was

activated with all the National Guard divisions in 1940, and they came from El Paso, Texas, and every man in that company had a Spanish surname. There was 100 percent Mexican and the Army was keeping it that way, but just before I got there, the Army said we're not gonna fool around with this anymore. We're just gonna send replacements in irregardless of color or race or anything, and because we just can't fool with the paperwork and it's too much trouble. So I was one of the first Anglo's they called 'em that got into the 36<sup>th</sup> Division as a replacement and we really had some reverse discrimination. They would talk to us in Spanish. There was very little English spoken in the company and most of it was in Spanish and then when we'd go out and practice on the mortar, like I would, they were off the lines when I, they weren't fighting when I came in as a replacement. They were taking replacements and training them so that they could go back up on the lines, and I could, there were five men in a mortar squad. There was the squad leader, the gunner, the assistant gunner, the second ammunition bearer and the first ammunition bearer and the second ammunition bearer. Well I was just a brand new guy, so I was a second ammunition bearer, so I was at the tail end of all of the things, but then when we'd practice, we'd all practice on the gun. We'd practice and see how fast we could put up a mortar and get it ready to fire and go through all that and do through all the stuff that you're – and I always was first. I always did it better than anybody else, but that didn't make any difference. I mean I was gonna be the second ammunition bearer and I didn't get a chance to fire the mortar probably until I'd been through three or four campaigns. That was very frustrating and I was very unhappy about that.

*Wow. Well, you said that you had studied Spanish, so did that help you at least -*

**John McFall:** A little bit except most of the words were swear words.

*Those weren't in the text books.*

**John McFall:** No, that's right, but I tell you what, after we got in there, particularly after we saw our first action, but even after we were in there and living together, things kind of, they opened up to us and we kind of you know, were assimilated and we were just part of the group that nobody cared if you were an Anglo or a Spaniard. I mean those were the two classes in the company, but there was more Spanish spoken than English. I mean that's true.

*So you joined the existing company there in Italy?*

**John McFall:** Yes.

*And where were they when you joined them?*

**John McFall:** They were in an apple orchard down around Batapaglia. Now I can't, they had made the invasion of the Salerno. They were the first troops on the beach at Salerno, on Europe after we took Sicily. Then they went clear up Italy and they had a terrible time. I mean they had tremendous casualties and all of the Americans did up there and it was very bloody fighting, and when they got to Casino then they just got wiped out practically and I mean they lost half their people, and so they pulled back and went south for some reason, that's down by the Terranean Sea where you used to go, where you used to be able to go in swimming in there for a while. I can't, Batapaglia is a little tiny town that was by there. I can't tell you where it is.

*So were they still in pretty heavy combat when you joined, or had they pulled back far enough?*

**John McFall:** They'd pull back, they'd pull back to assimilate. They probably, there are 200 men in a rifle company and this was a rifle company. It was E Company and they probably lost half their people at Casino. So there were 36 of us replacements came in that day with me, you know, just in one day. So they probably all in all got about 100 guys in there and so they figured down in Italy is the way the American Army worked that they would assimilate us in with these other people so that we would have a certain teamwork when we got on the front lines and could work together, in squads and platoons and that, and that's what they were doing.

*So did you get there in the summer time?*

**John McFall:** Yes.

*If you were swimming in the ocean –*

**John McFall:** Yes, it was in the summer time.

*How were your living conditions?*

**John McFall:** We lived in parametal tents.

*Did you say parametal?*

**John McFall:** Well yeah, I don't know why they called 'em that. They were five- and six-man tents. We had cots, we had folding cots and we lived in a tent.

*And so did that continue after you began to move, too?*

**John McFall:** Like when we moved into combat?

*Yes, were you able to take tents with you?*

**John McFall:** No, no – no, no, no, no. When we went into combat, we had nothing. We had nothing except what we could carry on our back and we had a shelter half, we had half of a pup tent and a raincoat is what we carried on our backs, and then we were supposed to be able to put two of those shelter halves together and make a little tiny pup tent, and some of us could do it, but if you were on the front lines and you had to dig foxholes and things like that, then you just dug a foxhole and slept in the foxhole. And once in a while you could go into a building or a barn or a hay mound or something like that, but this was very, you couldn't go into a house – well once in a while you could. Once in a while if the civilians had left and there was anything left of the house, you could sleep on the floor of a house maybe or a schoolhouse, say, and stay warm and stay dry, get out of the rain. I mean we had no way to get out of the rain or anything else. I mean if we were in combat and we were in combat most of the time.

*So ya'll didn't stay down there in the south very long. You moved up pretty quickly after you got there?*

**John McFall:** Well, when they figured that they had given us enough training to where we could function as a division, the 36<sup>th</sup> Division, which was 13,000 men, you know, they sent us back into combat, and the first combat that I was in, we went up to the Anzio beachhead. I don't know if you know about that -

*I've heard of it, yeah.*

**John McFall:** The Anzio beach had the Americans and the English dropped off – a lot of soldiers on the Anzio beach and Anzio was a town that was only 17 miles south of Rome, and it surprised the Germans. The Germans didn't know it was coming or anything like that and when they found out, the way they found out about it was when the Americans and English unloaded and got there. But Hitler sent a whole bunch of Panzer divisions down there to contain the Anzio beachhead because he didn't want Rome to fall. Rome was the big, would be the first big, you know, capital that would fall to our troops, and so they flew around there with Anzio and we lost a lot of men and so we came in to be the extra division to break out of the Anzio beachhead which we did. We broke out of the Anzio beachhead and then on the same operation where we broke out through the beachhead, we punctured or the final protective line that the German army had south of Rome, and we went right in and took Rome. So now I say we, the 36<sup>th</sup> Division was one of them. By that time, all of the people from Casino and all of the people from southern Italy, everything, they all went into Rome and the Germans started running. Rome was declared an open city and we wouldn't fight in Rome, and so OK, so that's that part. That was my first action.

*So I guess the Romans, what were their reactions?*

**John McFall:** Oh they were excited that we were there. At least the ones that really were excited, everybody give me cigarettes. I've got an uncle in New York City, and da-da – I mean you heard all of that, everybody was just so happy to see you. But I'm sure there probably as many Fascists there, you know, as people that really liked us, but they're not gonna show that. We were pretty impressive going through Rome.

*Well, were your supplies holding up well and did ya'll still have good clothing and plenty of weapons and things at that point?*

**John McFall:** Yes we did. We had suitable clothing in fact except for one thing. We had, it was extremely hot in Italy. It was in the summer and it was very hot, and we had winter uniforms, and the summer uniforms, United States gave them to the English and the people down from North Africa that were in countries that were owned by Britain and France and that. I can't think of what to call 'em. And so those guys got all the good uniforms, and the English in fact, well the English had their own uniforms probably, if they were sensible they had short sleeves and short pants and real cool, and we had winter uniforms and it was really bad. But we, the Americans always had good equipment, and they had a lot of equipment, but that one thing was just kind of a mistake and I don't know why we had to wear winter uniforms in the summer, but because it was really tough. And we were just wringing wet when we'd march or go someplace or just stand around actually. Fight, why we'd be soaking wet at night and then we'd dig this foxhole and climb in and you'd freeze to death at night because you were all, your clothes wouldn't dry out and it's a wonder we all didn't get pneumonia, but we didn't, you know.

*Ya'll were young and healthy.*

**John McFall:** Yeah, exactly. You had to be 18, 19, 22 years old to be where I was at that time or otherwise you couldn't hardly survive.

*So you didn't have extra clothes that you could pull out of the drawer and change into.*

**John McFall:** Just what you had on your back. You had a pack on your back when you started out. You had three days' rations, you had all your weapons, you had first aid kits, you had that shelter half like I was telling you about and the raincoat, and you had an entrenching tool. You had a shovel to dig a hole with and a lot of ammunition, maybe hand grenades. I mean you could go on and on and on and you can't believe how a guy would carry that. You carried that with you all the time in the rifle company. When you got back further with bigger companies, why they'd have trucks and trailers that they put that stuff on 'em and you didn't have to carry it, but we didn't have that.

*I guess everybody came out with strong legs.*

**John McFall:** Yeah, right.

*When you came over from training, were the guys that you had trained with, did they end up being in the same groups - ?*

**John McFall:** A lot of them were in the same groups, yes, and they wanted me to come over in the rifle platoons with them and I said no, there's one open in the mortar. I wanted to do the mortar because that's more fun and I think I'm better at it and I knew it was safer. I mean the rifleman would have to be out, what I wouldn't have to do, I wouldn't have to go out on night patrols, I wouldn't have to do a lot of things like that. I was back a little bit from the riflemen. A mortar is a little tiny thing like a little artillery piece that you shot a little shell up in the air and it went up there and it went out 200 yards or whatever you wanted to fire at and then it would come down, and so I wasn't really out there with my rifle. Like if I was gonna kill a guy, I'd have to draw a bead on him and fire a rifle between his eyes and see the blood spurt out and I didn't see the guys that I killed or wounded because I was back just for 50 to 100 yards because I had this mortar that was firing little 6-lb. shells and we needed a little bit of space to operate and places where guys could bring ammunition up to us and things like that so it was safer, and that's why I'm alive today. I mean I was a mortar man through the whole war. Well I stayed in that company until the end of the war.

*Wow, so you must've had friends that you really made and stayed with.*

**John McFall:** Well that's right, and I, of course even we have a lot of 'em where I'm going down to a military reunion at Corpus Christi we're gonna have the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> of September, and most of those guys are dead though that I knew. I'm 84-1/2, and I didn't get wounded and most of 'em had multiple wounds or you know, the 36<sup>th</sup> Division which I was in had one of the highest casualties in the war I think, especially in the European theater I think they had something like 18,000 or 19,000 casualties in the war, and there's only 13,000 in the division, so they had more casualties than they had people in the division because they would keep getting replacements. They were kind of unlucky. They had some tough siting, and we did. I mean I say they, I was part of them. When I got in there, well I was part of it.

*Did you have special recollections of friends that you fought with for a while and were some of those, did they make it through the whole war or did you lose some?*

**John McFall:** There was one, my closest friend was a boy by the name of John Krause and he was from Bark River, Michigan, and he had been in the 36<sup>th</sup> Company before I was in it, and where the 36<sup>th</sup> had the big problem was on trying to cross the Rapido River at Casino, and he

brought an officer or a captain, a company commander or something back across the river because he was a really good swimmer, and I think the guy was hurt or something, wounded, and Krause got him back across the river and Krause was in the mortars with me all the time when we finally got up there, when the other boys that were there for one reason or other would be gone, probably wounded or killed, and we took over the mortar section. And then we both went back to officer candidate school together right at the end of the war, but that's a later story I guess.

*So is he still living?*

**John McFall:** Yes he is.

*Oh wonderful.*

**John McFall:** I don't know if I'm gonna see him at this reunion. I've been to many, many reunions since the war with the 36<sup>th</sup> Division. I've been to all of the big cities in Texas like last year, we had a big reunion down in San Antonio, and I came in and bought this house. I came into that reunion and I bought this house in Sun City when I came in there, but the first of those reunions that I went to was at the Shamrock Hotel in Houston and there were 900 people on the dance floor at the end of the reunion and I'd say this reunion in San Antonio last year we may have had 60 on the dance floor as opposed to the 900 that we had, so it's really low key now and downgraded because everybody's dying.

*Yeah, must be hard to lose old friends like that.*

**John McFall:** Yeah it is really, but you see, I saw two or three and that's just like, that's so wonderful to just see one, you know, and you reminisce, you just can't help it, you're just so excited to see 'em.

*Yeah, would you like to mention the names of some of your special friends in the military and where they were from?*

**John McFall:** Yeah, but I've got a bad memory on something like that, on names it's kind of hard for me to come up with.

*Well what were your immediate supervisors like? Were they all pretty good at what they did?*

**John McFall:** No, no, my squad leader was bad, and what was I gonna say – we had, in the rifle company that I was in, it's a small, there's 200 men in a rifle company and in a rifle company you have three rifle platoons and a heavy weapons – and a weapons platoon, and the weapons platoon you have three mortars and two machine guns. And so our company commanders were very good all the time that I was in there, but I'll tell you frankly, we'd always get the worst lieutenants. When the lieutenants, it was the Army's and that's just the way it was. It was the Army's feeling that these riflemen are the guys that really need the leaders and really need the brave guys and need the aggressive men, and when they'd get a milk toast type of an officer in there they'd always throw him in our platoon because we had to take care, we weren't immediately exposed to that kind of danger that they were. We were just a little bit safer and I'm not saying the machine gunners were safer, but the mortars were safer, and so we had a poor quality in general of officers in our platoon. I'm sad to say that and that doesn't make a very good record, but I know it's true because I lived through, you know, a year of it.

*Well, you know, it's got to be true that they all weren't the best.*

**John McFall:** Yeah, we would've liked to have – I understand or why it happened that why because we'll stick him down in the 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon, we can't do any harm, you know, so and we had to live with that.

*Well, so how long were you in Rome?*

**John McFall:** We went right through Rome. See we hadn't had, the 36<sup>th</sup> Division hadn't been on the lines very – they were off a long time before I came in as a replacement because they had lost so many people and so it was our turn to be on the lines kind of. That's the way they did it in Italy, and so we just went right on through Rome, and there was another division that had been on the Anglo beachhead and really suffered a lot of casualties and they got to be the garrison of Rome and the rest of us, we just kept pushing the Germans right on out of Rome. And we chased 'em for a long ways. We chased 'em clear up to Pisa, way up in the Po River Valley, where they were gonna make their next big defensive line, and we finally got to that and I almost got killed up there, but so -

*Well what time of the year was that? Was that still summer?*

**John McFall:** Yeah, it was still summer. The ground was hard as a rock. And we had been, the funny part about it is we were deployed properly, we weren't just walking in single file on both sides of the road like we were out in the field and crossing a field and we had like five yards between us and the guy ahead of us and behind us and five yards to the left and the right. We were all spread out so that, but there wasn't much happening. The Germans were just, every once in a while I'd stop and fire to slow us down, but it wasn't anything that bothered us too much. We just kept going. We could overrun 'em real easily. But they decided, this one day came when they decided they were gonna stop us or try to, so we were out going across this field and all of a sudden some artillery shells start firing in the middle of us, and well I mean the artillery shells started landing in the middle of us, and so one of the first shells came in. I heard it come in, so I hit the ground, and I put my head down and I put my arms around my helmet so that my face would be kind of protected as much as possible. I was just lying on top of the ground and this shell came in and I thought it was gonna hit me right in the head, but it went right over me and hit my buddy – well it hit between me and my buddy who was on the ground behind me, and it really hurt him bad, so I picked myself up after that shell, and smelled the corrodite and the smoke comes and everything and I looked around, I said well I'm OK, I wasn't hit, but then I saw he was hit real bad, and so I stayed there and we each of us had a first aid kit, so I used all of his first aid kit and all of my first aid kit on him, and we had some medics along with us and so they were fixing guys up and I thought that I was gonna get killed there, but I didn't. I didn't even get scratched, I mean you know, the fellow that he was like the first ammunition bearer and I was the second ammunition – I was still a second ammunition bearer, and he got, he died later. He didn't die then. They fixed him up and sent him down to the hospital and he went down to North Africa and he had some kind of a thing happen, set in trouble, result of one of the wounds later on and he died.

*Well there's a lot of things that can go wrong. Were you able to fix him up pretty quickly and turn him over to the medics?*

**John McFall:** Well I used up everything I had in my first aid kit and I really couldn't do anything with him except talk to him. I was scared. I was afraid that if I was gonna stand there, the next shell would probably hit me, but I did stay with him until a medic got there, and like I say, they took him back and but I went, when they got there I went someplace else. I was trying to find a place that would give me some protection like if there was a low place in the ground that I could get down, you know, but I didn't find anything else.

*So were you near your weapon?*

**John McFall:** No, the mortar was a weapon that was kind of a crew shared weapon and it was very difficult to use it effectively in the attack when you were moving toward the enemy. It was more of the defensive weapon. When the enemy was attacking us, we could really hit him with the mortar, but when we were going forward, we had two different people carrying parts of the mortar and two more people carrying the ammo and you can see where it would be really tough on a weapon like that up front, that stuff was heavy, to really get down and react in time to do any good with it. The machine gunners were OK. The machine gunners would act better in the attack, but we weren't good in the attack. We were like I say, we were mainly better on the defense because we could throw up a lot of shells and keep them from coming in on us.

*How long did that engagement last?*

**John McFall:** That engagement didn't last very long. We broke through them. I say we broke through, I mean you know, the whole division. They killed a few of us, but the overall picture, the 36<sup>th</sup> Division ran over them and made 'em, they still went back, and frankly, we were way north then, and that was about our last time in Italy anyhow. It was kind of unfortunate that that happened that way, but there were three divisions. The three best infantry divisions in the 5<sup>th</sup> Army of General Mark Clark in Italy were picked to make the invasion of southern France. This was after the invasion of Normandy up in France, but we also made another invasion down in southern France by the French Riviera, and we put three divisions in there, plus a paratroop brigade the first day, and then the second day a French infantry division and a French tank division came in after we had cleared the beach. So what we did there right after that – what was the question you asked me?

*So ya'll came in on landing craft?*

**John McFall:** Yeah, no, we came in on landing craft, but that's what I was, I've got a little bit ahead of myself. When this guy got really hurt bad next to me, we pulled, they decided that we found out right at that time that we were picked to make the invasion of southern France, so we went back down to Salerno to practice invasion training on the beaches of Salerno, and then we went up and made the attack of southern France. We hit that on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August and June the 6<sup>th</sup> was when they made the big invasion on Normandy in France. We had a smaller invasion, but we captured Marseilles and Toulon and we went right on up through France and that was kind of favorable to us. We had a lot of combat down south and here again we had some exciting times right after we got on the beach, but which I could tell you if you care.

*Yeah, go right ahead.*

**John McFall:** Well, OK, so let's jump up to when we made the beach. When we made the invasion, the beachhead there, and I said we put these three divisions on with the paratroopers, why I was, we were on boats getting ready to go in, and it was daybreak, and we knew that we

were gonna go in. Of course, about 8 o'clock I think some of us, we were scheduled to go in, so first thing we saw was the bombers come over, and it was like standing there in the middle of a movie. The bombers came over and dropped bombs on the beach. Then the paratroopers came over and flew past the beach and went back into the rear of the enemy so that they could goof up the enemy's rear, and then the big battleships and cruisers and destroyers had their great, big, huge Navy guns and they hit the beach, and then we stood there and looked at all this stuff and then we were right in the middle of it and there was a little American minesweeper that was crossing the beach ahead of us, and he was picking up mines as he was going and it was letting out a smokescreen behind him so that he would hide us from the beach supposedly when we got down in the little boats. And so then we finally got down on the boats and went in, and I had a special thing, I had what was called a Bangalore torpedo. It was special for the invasion and what it was was a long piece of pipe and it was full of TNT, of explosive, and the purpose of it was and you could take a bunch of these pipes and hook 'em together and blow 'em up and then it would blow a path through the barbed wire on the beachhead. In other words, the Germans had a lot of barbed wire on the beach, maybe a barbed wire fence of maybe it was six or seven fences deep or more maybe, and so when we'd run out of our boats and run into that barbed wire fence, it was hard to get through it, and so the Americans designed this Bangalore torpedo which I had one of 'em, so I was the first one off our boat because those guys had to be the first ones so we could lay the Bangalore torpedoes down and blow the holes in the barbed wire fence and that's what I did. We got through that real easy, OK, relatively speaking. I mean you think an invasion, my God, we knew it was gonna be easier than Normandy, but we didn't realize how easy it was gonna be, but that night, we got, they made us march someplace at night and we got to a place where the Germans didn't know we were there, and so about midnight, why a German gasoline tank truck came by with a jeep and we were all so tired that the guy on the machine gun, he was up at a road junction where this thing was coming in to us, and he fell asleep and then when he woke up, and then he went, by the time he determined that it was a German vehicle and not an American vehicle, he laid down on his machine gun and fired all kinds of machine gun bullets into this truck and it exploded the truck. Well, the truck probably had 800 gallons of gasoline on board probably, say 3,000 gallons of gasoline – it exploded. And all of our company was all asleep there -

*Not after that, I guess.*

**John McFall:** No, not after that. That woke everybody up. And we had a guy, a little fellow, little hillbilly by the name of Dixon in our company and he was petrified every minute he was in combat, and I felt so sorry for him, so I took care of him like a little baby, and so he was sleeping next to me and we were just sprawled out on top of the ground we were so tired, and when that thing happened, why he grabbed his arms around my neck and grabbed his legs and wrapped 'em around my waist, you know, and started crying, and I told him Dixon, I'll take care of you, don't worry about it, everything's gonna be OK. And I've got a lot of memories of that night. And then after that, so that all calmed down then. I mean the thing burned out and the Germans were killed and so we went back to sleep. That happened about midnight, so about daybreak, a German convoy came through there on truck, so we couldn't believe that they hadn't realized that something bad had happened to one of their people. You know, we blew up that tank truck. So in the meantime then after the tank truck incident happened, why battalion sent an anti-tank 57 millimeter anti-tank gun down there, so in the event any other trucks came down, well this tank gun would wipe the trucks out. So that's what happened. This convoy came down and it was light and these guys from battalion on the tank gun, they were alert and so they fired and they put about three or four of these trucks out of commission with this anti-tank gun and all, and the Germans that weren't killed jumped off the trucks and everybody started firing at everybody

else. And we had to run back across the road and get back with our troops on that side, and that was a real hectic night. The invasion itself was not too bad for me, but that night was pretty tough. We lost some men there.

*Well, did ya'll end up taking prisoners there?*

**John McFall:** Yeah, well they took some prisoners. I frankly didn't take any prisoners or didn't see any, but you know, they either had to be killed almost or taken prisoner. There was no place for 'em to go. They came in to us and didn't know we were there obviously, and you know, neither the tanker truck nor this German convoy. And then we were right along a road that would lead right into the French Riviera and they were going down in that direction. I don't know what they were doing. And they certainly must have known about the invasion that morning because that was a big deal. I mean we put three divisions, hell, we had probably 70,000 men that we hit the beach, with the paratroopers probably more. So it was kind of a thing that telling about it, I can't figure out how it all happened that way, but that's just the way it happened in combat sometimes.

*Well I'm sure there must be a lot of confusion and a lot of gaps in the line of control.*

**John McFall:** Yes, that's right, particularly you know when this was all new and the invasion was just, there was just no American soldiers down there the day before, you know, but you would think that information would be transmitted by – of course, communication today, you're in it right now and you're doing a good job with it and you know how good it is. It wasn't quite the state of the art back in those days.

*That was yeah, it was quite different then.*

**John McFall:** There's a lot of difference.

*Well, did Mr. Dixon make it through OK?*

**John McFall:** Yeah, I think he did. Yes, isn't that something, yeah I think he did.

*Did you see him more later on?*

**John McFall:** I didn't see him after the war. I lost contact with him. I stayed overseas after the war for a year and a half, and when I came back, I don't know where he was, but I stayed in contact with quite a few people, you know, there, but not him.

*So was this still in August, or was this getting down into September?*

**John McFall:** That was the 15<sup>th</sup> of August was when we made the invasion and that incident was on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, and we didn't do too much then. We held our position – I say we – I'd say the 36<sup>th</sup> Division was just kept there on the flank and just held our ground and we didn't do anything for a while, and then we started going inland. We started going into France and freeing the French people from the German occupation actually, and we had some tough times, not too long after that. We went so fast that the Germans had an army occupying France down towards Spain, down in that part of France, the southwest corner, and we were going, and we were east of that and we were gonna cut them off, and so the Germans, the German high command told that army to get back into Germany before we cut 'em off. And so we met them

at a town called Montelemar, and we had a really big battle, and a lot of 'em got through, but a lot of 'em didn't, and I got my helmet smashed in there, but I don't know what it was. I was behind, I had, I was firing the mortar and I was behind a stone wall and a German tank hit the wall and either a piece of the shell hit my helmet or a piece of I don't know if a rock out of the wall hit my helmet, but it really dented it and so I was really proud of that, and I wore that dented helmet – hey, it saved my life. I go to officer candidate school at the end of the war, they took it away from me and said hey, you know, you can't have that. We'll give you a new one. I lost my souvenir, yeah.

*Well so when you were in France you said that you spoke some French, did you get to use your French some?*

**John McFall:** Yeah -

*Did you have much contact with the French people?*

**John McFall:** Yeah, at \_\_\_\_\_, right there we did yes, going north from there I did, and the French people that all come out, I'll tell you one thing about this big battle where I got my helmet and all there, we won that battle but we had to withdraw. Our outfit had to withdraw. We went through a French town anyhow and it was a very serious offense for the French people to have an American flag or even a French flag or a surrender flag or a bed sheet or something out at their window when the Germans were occupied. They would've probably killed everybody in the house. But we saw that, when we came marching through there heading for Montelemar and all the French were out kissing us and giving us apples and eggs and wine and stuff, and we felt pretty good about that because they'd been under the boot heel of the Germans for about five years and so when we got into, we had go overrun – our outfit, our part of the 36<sup>th</sup> got overrun by some tanks, the Germans, and we had, and we went back through this town and that was a very embarrassing thing to see, and these people cheered us and here we're going back through that town. But we won, we finally won the battle. That was one of the things, and yeah, in answer to your question, I'd dance and sing French songs with the little school girls and then I would, one of the big things that I really would like and anybody would like in our condition is we were dirty all the time. We couldn't get cleaned up. I mean it's not like having a bathtub or even a wash basin to where you can get your soap and your towels and clean up and shave once in a while and we'd be out on the field maybe in a hole and you'd just look awful. So I'd ask a Frenchman could I come in and clean up in your house? Oh yes, oh yes, so I'd go in there and then I'd wind up having dinner with them probably. They'd invite me in. They were really excited and nice to us because we were liberating them you know, at that time.

*Yeah, so I guess you got to see a little bit more of the French families than some of the other people, and got to communicate with them better. Well, so did you keep on moving so quickly and moving on up in France or did you all get to a place where you got to stop for a while?*

**John McFall:** Well we'd get stopped for a while, but we moved pretty steadily. We got up to, there was a, we had a big river crossing, or the Mosel River, and we got through that. That was a big run around up and all, and -

*How deep was it?*

**John McFall:** I think that was fordable. I think where we crossed it I think it was fordable, but a river crossing was always kind of a tough thing because it's easy to defend, you know, for the

enemy if he's on the other side, but I'm trying to think what we had some battles up there. We had a real tough time a little bit further up. We went way up to the Voj Mountains, and they never, there was a country, there's country between France and Germany, a section called Alsace Lorraine, it's like the Germans took it from the French in the war and then the French took it back after World War I, and so it was kind of a deal half French and half German, and we had some trouble up in there, but so right north of that was where we had that thing of the lost battalion. You probably heard about the lost battalion? Or maybe there was more than one of 'em, but -

*What part were you in that?*

**John McFall:** Well I tell you what had actually happened, I was at rest camp in Paris, and but -

*You got to go down to Paris for a few days?*

**John McFall:** Yeah, they had to let us, they give the combat troops, they had rest camps here and there and by that time, why we got to go to Paris, a truckload of us, every so often, yeah.

*I guess that was a nice refreshment.*

**John McFall:** Well it was, yeah, it was really good.

*So was it still warm or was it beginning to get cool by then?*

**John McFall:** It was still, it was not winter. No, we moved pretty fast up through southern France, but the tough thing, what happened, we were going across the Voj Mountains and the first battalion of our regiment got out ahead of the second battalion which was our battalion. We were, there developed a distance between the two battalions going across the mountains, and the Germans ran in behind the first battalion and cut it off. And I was in rest camp that time, so when I came back from rest camp, the truck, we came back and he said hey soldier, we won't go up to your company tonight. I'll wait in the morning and take you up there and take you back to your company. Well the reason for it was because this lost battalion had already happened and they didn't want to drive up there at night.

*He didn't want to become one more of them.*

**John McFall:** That's right, so the next morning I went up there and I found out somebody said hey, McFall, get in the hole there, and I didn't even have a rifle because I was a mortar man, but there was a rifle there from some guy that had been killed and so I jumped in the hole and that was something else again, too. But it was really tough and we saw a lot of action going across the Voj Mountains and finally we went all the way through the mountains and debauched on the plains of the Rhein River and we went into an area called the Kolmar Pocket which I probably did my best work in World War II.

*Did you do a lot of mortar shooting there?*

**John McFall:** Yeah, I'm trying to think of what to say. Well, anyhow, after the Battle of the Bulge, that really ruined Hitler and he didn't have any troops outside of Germany except one little place that they called the Kolamar Pocket. He had on the French side of the Rhein River, he had a lot of soldiers there and we were gonna go get them, and so we came down out of the

Voj Mountains and we came across a real nice ridge, a high ridge kind of like a hill that went all the way across the valley and it was commanding terrain. When you fight, you want to get on the high hill if you can and you overlook everything and the other guys' gotta climb the hill to get you, and we got on the hill before they did and we became under constant attack and we stayed – oh, but so we'd been on the lines for a long time. We'd been on the lines ever since we made the invasion of southern France without relief, and so they decided, we were up there on this ridge and we were under constant attack, night and day, by the Germans, we were holding them back, and they decided that well, they'd put a combat engineer battalion up there to hold that position for about two or three days and take us back into town and get us a couple of warm meals and we could sleep in a building for a night. So they did that. So we went back into this little town and the engineers came up and took our positions, and so the Germans pushed 'em off the hill that night, and we had to go back the next morning and take the hill again. I mean if you can imagine the morale buster. But we did it, and so we stayed on that hill and then it got pretty rough and -

*Were the men around you holding up pretty well?*

**John McFall:** Yeah, they were and it was really difficult for 'em to do it, too, because I was really worried about the riflemen getting any sleep because they were attacking them at night as well as in the day time. They tried to keep 'em awake all the time. So what I particularly did well at that time, they had a new shell for the mortar, and the shell was that I was trying my little mortar shell and it'd go up in the air and then it'd pop up in the air and a little parachute would open up and a light, a real bright, burning light would light up and that parachute would just float down to the ground so easy, and it would turn the night into day, brighter than daylight. It would just put your eyes out. I can't think of what they called it.

*A phosphorous flare or something-*

**John McFall:** Yeah, kind of like that. It wasn't phosphorous, but it was like it. It probably had phosphorous in it. But anyhow so if I'd hear firing out to our front, I'd fire one of those things at night, and then the Germans coming up, it just turns the night into day and they're just walking up, you know, and now they even have to hit the ground real hard or else they freeze like you think they're a tree or something and that's what you do when those things happen. So I'd fire one of them and then they'd stop or I figured they'd stop, and so I'd fire a whole bunch of high explosive ammunition out there in front after that, and I did that a lot. I did that probably for a week there, and man, I think it saved us from getting pushed off the hill, you know.

*Wow. So they did most of their action at night there, the forward movement?*

**John McFall:** Well, no, but they did it in this sense because they wanted us off of there so bad that they figured that they'd wear our people down by keeping 'em awake all day and all night, and you know, attacking all the time.

*Well, did you see, I guess you saw some real acts of bravery out in those times when you were in the thick of things.*

**John McFall:** Yeah, even hearing about some. Yeah, I know that would be a big thing, but you know, I can't think of anything right now.

*What were some of the most memorable experiences that you had while you were serving?  
Usually the battles are a part – some of the other parts.*

**John McFall:** Well, in the war, it was the battles. We had some entertainment. We had Red Cross come with coffee and donuts and we'd have some Hollywood people come in. I mean Marlena Dietrich was over there and -

*Did you ever see her?*

**John McFall:** I saw her, yeah, and I don't know how big the crowd was, probably 5,000-6,000 people, you know. And the guy that wrote *This Is the Army, Mr. Jones*, he was over there in Italy and we went to see him. In fact he, I can't think of his name either. He's very famous, very famous guy that wrote music.

*And so did you see, those would be when you were being pulled back for rest stops and things like that.*

**John McFall:** Yeah right, yeah. We unfortunately weren't able to get too much of that there.

*It sounds like ya'll were pretty busy. So after you were up there at Kolmar Pocket, how long were you up there?*

**John McFall:** We were up there probably, we were up there three weeks.

*Wow.*

**John McFall:** And then I can't remember where we went from there. I think we down into the Kolmar Pocket some other place, Haginaw and just kind of routine, you know. Well, I had one place down there in Haginaw, it was a big deal, and another big river ran through that town of Haginaw and so we took that whole town except on one side of the river, and then we had a platoon out of our company that was fighting the Germans on the other side of the river and trying to get the rest of the houses over there, and evidently they were running into some problems because the captain came asking for me and I went up to see him and he said McFall, he said Sergeant Crane is on the other side of the river with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon and he's trying and he might get pushed back here across the river and we don't know, but I'm gonna, he says we're in touch with him and they're holding out so far and I may need to take food and ammunition in particular over to him, and so you get your squad and the \_\_\_\_ and you take your \_\_\_\_ and go across the river and give this stuff to Sergeant Crane. Well, here the guy is, you know, you got a platoon of about 40 men over there not sure they're gonna hold or not, and I said yes sir, you know, and I went back and I got to thinking boy, I mean I don't know if I'm gonna get called or not, but I sure didn't want to go. And he never did call me, and those guys got back across the river except Sergeant Crane got killed and he got a congressional medal of honor for having saved the life of his platoon and held the Germans off while they came back, and I thought that – and that was another close call for me because I was just about, the captain was gonna send me over there right when that happened, you know. And I'm not saying I would have been killed, but I was better off where I was.

*I heard that you got some medals and awards, too. You got the Bronze Star and the Unit Presidential Citation.*

**John McFall:** Well, we got the Unit Presidential – yeah, we got both of those actually for that, when I had I was telling you we worked there on the hill and they had that stuff, the little parachute was coming down and I was doing all that firing and all, we got it for that because we held, you know, we held that position for under constant attack for a long time. But the Unit Presidential Citation, yeah, that came to our battalion and everybody got that. I was put in for two Bronze Stars and when I went to OCS, why I came back to the outfit and I said where's my Bronze Stars? And nobody could find 'em or nobody could find the paper and so they said well, you got, you went back to OCS so what do you care? I mean quit complaining, which is entirely a different thing you know, so but that, I didn't, I got a combat infantryman's badge. I got a bunch of stuff but the main thing that I'm proud of is what it says is that I saw a lot of combat and I did a good job, and that's what I care about.

*Yeah, that's something to really be proud of and for us to be grateful to you for.*

**John McFall:** Just lucky. I know, I mean it's nothing I – you can't be that good. \_\_\_\_ say well, you're a better soldier than everybody else. Well, that's not true. I mean there's guys, a lot of guys that were killed probably most of 'em was as good or better soldier than I was, and it's luck.

*Yeah, that's gotta be, but luck is on the side of the well prepared, but it's not everything that counts, is it?*

**John McFall:** Yeah, right.

*May I ask you a few other questions about some of your perceptions of things while you were – do you remember where you were when the war ended?*

**John McFall:** Oh yeah, I was at my first day of OCS. Well, it's not when the European war ended. I was – I had, when I had gone back to rest camp, they were talking about an officer candidate school up there outside of Paris and so I went back to the captain and said captain, what about this OCS class? And he said do you want to go? And I said well of course I want to go. And he said OK, I'll send you. So he asked me about one of my buddies like this John Krause or Jack Krause, and he went back to OCS with me also, and then there was another guy that I'll have to tell you about because it's unusual, and I just, the fellow's name was Chament, and he was the assistant platoon sergeant of the rifle platoon, of the first rifle platoon, and what his specialty was, mind you, the colonel would come down to our captain, the company commander, and say Captain Parker, I need some prisoners. We want to see what your morale is and where they've been and who they are and what they're made out of, and so go out and get me some, have your men go out and get me some prisoners tonight. So Captain Parker would go to this guy, Chament, and Chament, the colonel wants prisoners. Take a half a squad out and go get some prisoners tonight. And this guy would go out and he'd get prisoners like I go to the store and buy a loaf of bread. I mean what he had to do, he had to take his squad and go through our lines and tell them I'm gonna be back with some prisoners and so watch it. And then he'd go through the enemy line and go in there and then he'd get prisoners and bring them back and his men through the enemy line and then through our line, and he'd do that again and again and again, and he got a Silver Star for that. But he just did, I don't know how many he got, but he just did that and I'm amazed at that. But I know he did it and I was there, you know.

*The kind of thing that just sounds impossible.*

**John McFall:** It does. I don't know how you could do it, get by all those people on both sides and especially bringing prisoners, getting some of them, come with me, buddy, and then taking them through his own lines, my God.

*I mean it's one thing to creep quietly, but creep quietly dragging a prisoner is another thing.*

**John McFall:** Yeah, I know it, but that's, yeah, well that was, I don't know why I brought that up, but it just, something I just had to throw in there.

*Oh, that's a great story.*

**John McFall:** That was a guy that I really say was a hero.

*Where was he from?*

**John McFall:** He was from California. He was from Napa Valley, California, and I think after the war he had some wine out there, but he's dead, and I can't think of – a really handsome guy. I got his picture in uniform because he went back to OCS with us, yeah.

*So do you remember where you were when you heard the atomic bomb had been dropped?*

**John McFall:** Well, I was overseas. I stayed over there in occupation. My officer candidate school was only two months, and we were the last class. They closed the school down when, well they didn't close the school down, but they didn't take any new classes and they let us go ahead and graduate. I was lucky because I got into that last class and it took quite a while for them to send me there anyhow. I wasn't sure that the time would run out that I would've lucked out and got commission. So I wanted to stay over in Germany for some strange reason, and my 36<sup>th</sup> Division came home and they gave me, the Army gave me a job, I became the commandant of a German prisoner of war camp.

*Oh my.*

**John McFall:** I had 450 German prisoners and six officers, had 80 Polish guards guarding them. I had about 10 GI's just truck drivers and stuff. My Polish guards guarded the prisoners, and what I did, I confined the prisoners and guarded 'em and fed 'em, and an engineer battalion worked them. They worked my prisoners during the day out on fixing roads and bridges and stuff that was damaged during the war, and so I really had, I was really living high on that job.

*Really?*

**John McFall:** Oh yeah.

*It sounds like it would've been hard, but I guess combat's a lot harder, isn't it.*

**John McFall:** Well this was, they gave us everything. We were having, well we would finagle it a little bit, but we all lived, we lived in this great big house, a great big mansion that a guy had. He had some boats going up and down the Neckar River that he owned, freight boats, the Army requisitioned that from him. I'm sure he was getting paid for it, and we all stayed in this great big house, but oh well, what led us to having – we had movies in my bedroom. We'd throw it up against the wall. He had three first-run movies every week, and then we'd go in and we'd get

rations, we'd go and get rations for the prisoners and then we'd get stuff for ourself. We had to eat, too, and so we got stuff, and we gave the prisoners a bar of soap and a can of Prince Albert smoking tobacco, one per prisoner per week. So we got that for them some other place, but we had just anything we wanted that was available in Germany at that time.

*And when was that?*

**John McFall:** Right after the war. The war was not over in Japan, but that's where I was. No, no. Yeah, I think I was there when we had the atom bomb, yeah.

*So I guess ya'll heard about that and how did everybody feel about that?*

**John McFall:** Well I think everybody was happy, you know, that that was, that was a tough part of the war over there and everybody was happy that that happened because we were all kind of a little bit worried about having to go over to Japan. We think that that's why they made that officer's school over there in Paris or outside of Paris. They were gonna give us all commission so we could be brand new second lieutenants to take platoons into Japan because we knew nothing about this atomic bomb and it just looked like the only way you're gonna go in and beat Japan is make a big invasion, and they were tough fighters. Like suicidal almost, and so they're gonna make a lot of casualties. But we were happy about the bomb.

*Good. And so that was a relief to have that come to a faster conclusion.*

**John McFall:** Mm-hmm.

*Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked? I guess you were still in school then.*

**John McFall:** I was. I was listening to a radio program on Sunday afternoon. I was a student in college and it was some big program that came on about 3 o'clock Sunday afternoon, a musical program, really beautiful music, and that was a big surprise, yeah.

*Were there other people there with you?*

**John McFall:** Yeah, there were a few guys in the common room like and listening to the program.

*What was your reaction?*

**John McFall:** Well, you know, it's hard for me to describe it. I'm not sure I know. I was – I thought it was terrible, but I don't think we really knew at that particular time how bad it was.

*Oh yeah, I guess it did take a while to -*

**John McFall:** Yeah, I mean we didn't know at that time that they said OK, there's a war started and they didn't tell us about the just about ruined the whole fleet, you know, and they did a terrible amount of damage at Pearl Harbor. And I think it was strange. Over in America, nobody can do that to us, you know, and it was done, and it was kind of surprise and sadness.

*Yeah, that must have been. Well, I've talked to you for an hour and a half and I really appreciate your time. I'm sure you're probably getting tired. I wanted to ask you just a few more questions if you don't mind.*

**John McFall:** No, go ahead.

*Do you remember some of your officers? Who were some of your favorite officers?*

**John McFall:** Yes, Captain Parker was our company commander and we had three company commanders I think while I was there, and he was a favorite of mine and he was a very nice man and a good company commander, and then we had a great battalion commander. Naturally, I wasn't very close to him, but I knew him and knew what he looked like and knew what he did. Colonel Critchfield was his name. I can't think of his first name. The lieutenants in our platoon, here again, they'd always give the guys that really weren't aggressive or whatever and give 'em to the 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon because they saved the best ones for the rifle platoon. I got to tell you, that's a fact and it makes sense. I mean I would've done, if I was a company commander, I'd have probably done the same thing. And you say well, the enlisted men will take care of themselves and the mortars and the machine guns because the riflemen really, see, had three platoons of them and just one platoon of us and we were just a little bit of an extra heavy weapon thing for 'em when they needed it, and so -

*Was your equipment always good? How did that compare with the enemy's equipment?*

**John McFall:** At the beginning of the war, the German equipment was very far superior to our equipment, and one guy, General George Patton was the guy that told America you're gonna have to get us better equipment, and he'd capture German tanks and field pieces and everything else and send it back to the United States and say here's the kind of stuff we want, and we copied them. We copied their entrenching tool. They had a better shovel. Now you think well, that's not a weapon, but to dig a hole in the ground is pretty important for riflemen and we had a terrible little shovel that could break and bend and they had a good shovel and they had good tanks. They had better machine guns. They had a better rapid fire, the – see, they prepared for war a lot more than we did.

*So was there much change in the equipment while you were - ?*

**John McFall:** Yeah – it got better, yeah, it got better.

*Did you start out with the bad shovel and get the better ones?*

**John McFall:** Yeah. I had a bad shovel. But the mortar stayed the same and it was a good mortar as far as our concern. Our machine guns didn't fire as fast. The German machine guns were the metal belts and they fired 600 rounds a minute and we fired 450 rounds a minute, so you can cut a guy in two going 450 bullets a minute out of a gun as well as you can 600 I guess, but the Germans also had, their weapons were designed to bring fear to the people that they were shooting at. For example, they had mortar shells that we called "screaming meemies" and these mortar shells would make noise as they were going through the air, make a scream, so I guess theoretically you're supposed to be shaking in your boots there when you hear this scream. You know it's coming at you but you don't know where it's gonna land. And they had, some of their fighter planes had that on 'em, too, and they were strafing people and the Germans had a lot of psychological warfare and they had really good equipment, really good weapons. They had their

88 millimeter canon was developed as an anti-aircraft gun, but they used it on the ground against us and they put it on their tanks, and their tanks could knock out our tanks. Our tanks couldn't knock out their tanks at the beginning of the war. We improved enough to where we could but those type of things, the Germans were much better than we were, and by the end of the war I'd say we got pretty even with them.

*How would you compare the American servicemen with the enemy men?*

**John McFall:** Well I don't know about – I've gotta, what can I say about the enemy? You know, I didn't live with them. I know they were tough, but we had tough guys, too. No, we did. We had a guy that well, not a guy, but we had men that would love to fight and I'm thinking of a guy that had a reputation that if a fire fight started, he had to fire, he had to kill somebody or just about kill somebody to be happy, and he just fired just like going crazy. It just did something to him.

*I wonder if those men are just made for war or \_\_\_ soldiers or if they get out of control?*

**John McFall:** I don't know. Most of the ones that I would look at and that's the ones you'd concentrate on are the guys that aren't up to par, you know, the guys that are scared. No, we're all scared, we're all, nobody wants to die, but you could control your fear to the average guy. I thought I could perform to the best of my ability all the time. I wasn't so scared that I would hide my head or run away, but guys did that, and I suppose maybe Germans did, too. I can't tell you about the German guys. They seemed to put up a hell of a front, you know.

*Did you ever see any acts of cowardice, the men running away, were any of those men that you were needing to depend on?*

**John McFall:** That's a hard one for me. I guess not. It seemed like there would be because I was in it so long and I know there was a bunch of guys that were scared – there were guys ran away. There was one guy that took basic training out of Kansas City with me, went to Camp Blanding in basic training and went all the way through all of that and he got about halfway to where I've been telling you and he ran off. And I understand he got killed in the rear area by somebody else told me that, that a mutual friend that knew us had said that he'd been taking a shower or something. I guess he didn't remove his uniform. I guess he still was in a uniform and probably was, you know, just said he was somebody else or something. I don't know how you'd do that. But in war, you could probably do that. There's enough confusion that you could get an American uniform and get back behind the lines and just live there without people – that's what he was doing, and someone said he was taking a shower and a long range shell hit the shower and killed him. Now I don't know if that's true or not. That was just what somebody told me. But that was a personal friend that came all the way across the ocean and into this company the same day I did and everything, and he ran off.

*Well, I'm sure that you saw very many brave things, too. That Mr. Ch-*

**John McFall:** Oh, Chement? Oh, I don't know how you could be any braver than that. But I saw a lot of brave men, yes.

*Well, were there humorous events while you were serving? I guess not in combat, but maybe in the break times -*

**John McFall:** Well I don't know, I had a good time. We had a bunch of sharp people in officer candidate school and we put on plays and stuff like that, and they were pretty funny. These guys were sharp.

*How long was officer candidate school?*

**John McFall:** It was only 8 weeks. Well I knew, I don't know if I learned a hell of a lot in officer candidate school because I knew everything, you know, I'd been in combat for so long and I don't know what I was gonna learn really, but now that sounds terrible to say that, but after the war and after I came back from overseas, I was in the Reserves in the National Guard and I got, I became a student in command in general staff college and trying to get promoted to lieutenant colonel and I almost finished it but I didn't make it. My wife had a nervous breakdown and was losing a construction company and I told 'em I couldn't go to camp and they said well you're out of the program, and I knew that I had some military retirement locked in, but I'd have to wait until I was 60 to get it, so I didn't go to camp. I should've gone because my wife still had a nervous breakdown and I still lost the company. But that was a mistake I made, so you know.

*Well, one can't judge everything ahead of time. Looking back, how do you think military service has affected your life?*

**John McFall:** I think it probably did me a lot of good. I think I learned a lot about human nature and about fear and peoples' different reaction to fear, and I learned that there are a lot of wonderful people that performed very well under adverse conditions, and I like the Army. I like the military service and I was in it a long time when you figure all my National Guard and Reserve time, and that's one of the reasons I stayed in. I wanted to stay in for promotion and retirement, but I stayed in for that, too.

*What was the toughest part of your experience?*

**John McFall:** Of the whole military experience?

*Yes.*

**John McFall:** Well you know what, I think it was at the very first when I couldn't go to officer candidate school on account of my eye and I had to start at the very bottom-bottom-bottom, and where they didn't care what your IQ was or anything else and I felt that I wasn't used properly, that I should've been working in cryptography or some intelligent thing that I could plan stuff, and that, and I was a mortar man, was in a rifle company which was about the lowest echelon you really could be, and I think that was my biggest disappointment, frankly.

*If there was one thing you could tell the current group of soldiers serving now, what would you tell them?*

**John McFall:** I think what I'd tell the soldiers serving now is that I really appreciate what they're doing and their job is so much harder than my job was because I had an enemy that was in uniform and was organized and I knew who was my enemy if I saw him and I knew what he was gonna do, and here these guys have got ladies blowing themselves up and civilians blowing themselves up and doing terrible things and you don't know who's an enemy and who's a friend.

I think that we had it much easier from that standpoint and these guys got a damn near impossible job. I mean that's got to be really tough.

*That has to be.*

**John McFall:** I feel so sorry for those guys over there in Iran and Afghanistan. I got an idea about what it's like and I just, my heart goes out to 'em.

*You're right, the foggier the lines get, the harder it gets. Well, I really do appreciate all the time you've spent with me this afternoon. I've really enjoyed listening to you. Is there anything else that I should've asked you?*

**John McFall:** I don't know. I think I probably missed a lot of stuff that I wanted to tell you and I can't think of what it was and you know I'm a talker and I love to talk particularly about myself – but I enjoyed it and I think you did a fine job in getting stuff out and I'll probably remember 15 things that I wished I'd have told you, but I did the best I could and I appreciate your interest and I'm looking forward to getting what you're gonna develop from this.

*Right, well there was one thing, one other thing. I know I asked you about the atomic bomb. I think that the anniversary of that is coming up and I just wondered if there was anything else that you might want to add about your feelings about that or your thoughts about that.*

**John McFall:** Well, I'm glad it happened and it really saved maybe hundreds of thousands of American lives and ended the war, so I don't know, you know, now we've got a deal that we're not the only ones that have something like that and I don't know what's gonna happen there, but that's about all I can say about it.

*OK.*

*[End of recording]*