

Voices of Veterans Interview with
Private First Class Leslie T. Rasco

Date: October 14th, 2004

Location: William R. Courtney Texas State Veterans Home Temple, TX

Interviewer #1: Paul Sturrock

Interviewer #2: Thomas Durnin

Interviewer #2: Now we are recording and rolling the tape.

Interviewer #1: Well, have you ever done an oral history interview before, Mr...

Pfc. Rasco: No.

Interviewer #1: ...okay, okay. And, uh, could you state your name please, and spell it for us?

Pfc. Rasco: Leslie T. Rasco

Interviewer #1: Okay, "c-o", okay, okay. So, we're about to interview Mr. Leslie Rasco and today is Wednesday, October 14th, 2004 and we're at the William R. Courtney Texas State Veterans Home in Temple, Texas. And, uh, first let me just ask you where were you born and when?

Pfc. Rasco: Limestone County in the country between Groesbeck and Thornton in 1923. I'm 81 years old.

Interviewer #1: Okay, okay. Alright. And what were your parents' names?

Pfc. Rasco: Turner was my daddy's name and Emma was my mother's name.

Interviewer #1: Okay, Turner and Emma Rasco.

Pfc. Rasco: Um-hm.

Interviewer #1: And, uh...

Pfc. Rasco: She was – she was a Rayburn before she married my daddy.

Interviewer #1: Any relation to Sam Rayburn?

Pfc. Rasco: Um-hm. I think distant. My grandpa Rayburn I think was a distant cousin somewhere.

Interviewer #1: And, uh...uh...did you uh...did you live there for, for most of you life – in that area?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, most of it. I left ... after the war I got married in '49 and moved to Corsicana in Navarro County.

Interviewer #1: Okay, okay.

Pfc. Rasco: And I lived there 19 years and then went to San Antone and...stayed there a couple of years and come back to Groesbeck and then went to work ... with a carpenter.

Interviewer #1: Okay, okay, okay. Um, so, uh, where and when did you enlist?

Pfc. Rasco: Well, I was drafted. I tried to join the Navy, but they wouldn't have me 'cause I one-eyed. I'm blind in my left eye – legally blind.

Interviewer #1: I see, I see. You were at that time?

Pfc. Rasco: Um-hm. I was born that way.

Interviewer #1: Okay, okay. So you tried to... so, uh so you were drafted into the Army...

Pfc. Rasco: Um-hm.

Interviewer #1: ...is that right?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah.

Interviewer #1: And, uh, okay. So, tell me, do you remember uh, where you were uh, when uh, Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, I was at home there in Limestone County...

Interviewer #1: And, and ... so you were with your family...

Pfc. Rasco: ...at the old homeplace – it was my great grandmother settled that place in 1854...

Interviewer #1: I'll be darned.

Pfc. Rasco: ...and my younger brother still owns the old homeplace. He built him a log cabin out of these landscape timbers and he's made a pretty cabin.

Interviewer #1: But your family's been there since the 1850s?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah.

Interviewer #1: That's amazing.

Pfc. Rasco: There was an old ... my grandpa come back from the Civil War – he got his leg shot off above ... about half-way between his ankle and his knee, and he built a log cabin there and he got married and raised a big family. I think he had about 12 kids.

Interviewer #1: Um, so when you heard about Pearl Harbor, uh, what was your reaction and the reaction of – of your family?

Pfc. Rasco: Well, the – my older brother had already joined the Army and another brother, he went into the Army and my youngest brother went to the Navy. And, we – we were all pretty shook up about it. 'Cause we were all very patriotic.

Interviewer #1: Okay. And, uh, so, um, so you were drafted in the Army, um can you tell me about your – your training?

Pfc. Rasco: Well, I went to ... I was drafted I believe the 24th of January of '43 and I ... they give me a week's leave back home and I went to Mineral Wells and Wichita Falls. I stayed there a week or so and they shipped me to Camp Roberts, California. And because I was one-eyed they put me in the quartermaster and they told me "you'll never have to go overseas". (Laughs) But they, uh they put me to washin' clothes in the laundry – the quartermaster laundry for about six months and then they transferred me over to the bakery and I was mixin' bread - mixin' dough – 700 pounds at a whack. Took 400 pounds of flour and 7 pounds of yeast and some malt and water, powdered milk. And sometimes I'd mix as much as, uh, sixty of those 70-pound batches of dough.

Interviewer #1: That's a lot of bread. How much bread does that make?

Pfc. Rasco: He-ha ha. It made a lot of one-pound loafs, I'll tell you. We fed the whole camp and I think they had a couple of divisions there on maneuvers and we fed them too.

Interviewer #1: Was it pretty good bread?

Pfc. Rasco: Um-hm. Then from there, uh, they uh, shipped me to uh, Camp Pickett, Virginia.

Interviewer #1: Camp Pinkney?

Pfc. Rasco: Camp Pickett.

Interviewer #1: Pickett.

Interviewer #2: Pickett.

Interviewer #1: Sorry.

Pfc. Rasco: Um-hm. I was in charge – they give me the meal tickets and everything. I had fourteen men with me and we went to Camp Pickett and stayed there about three months and went to Camp Shanks, New York.

Interviewer #1: Now why did they send you to Camp Pickett?

Pfc. Rasco: Hm?

Interviewer #1: Why did they send you to Camp Pickett?

Pfc. Rasco: Well, it's a little more trainin'. A little more infantry training. I didn't have but eight weeks at first. In California, I had eight weeks of infantry training – mostly marchin' and hikin' and shootin' and stuff like that. And then, uh, I went to, uh, Camp – after I left Pickett I went to Camp Shanks, New York and from there, I went to overseas.

Interviewer #1: So ...

Pfc. Rasco: They loaded us on the freight steam ship – the “Ile de France”. And we went over took us nine days to get overs to Europe. And we landed in Glasgow, Scotland and loaded into a freight train and rode it to Southampton, England. There we got on a little British ship and went across the channel. And something funny on that – I was walking along the little old ship one day by the - where they cook – and there was one of them Hindus in there. And he looked like he had on a diaper, and a turban on his head. He was barefooted and he was stirrin' them weenies and beans for breakfast. And he had athlete's foot and every once in a while, he'd reach down – he'd scratch his toes. *(Laughs)* I didn't eat none of that damned stuff, I'll tell ya!

Interviewer #2: So this was a Hindu – an Indian fellow?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, he's from India. He was in a British ship. He was in the British Navy, I guess.

Interviewer #2: Really? He had a – did he have a beard?

Pfc. Rasco: No, he didn't have a beard. He had a ... all he had on was a turban over his head and it looked like a diaper!

Interviewer #2: What the heck was that?

Interviewer #1: Mr Rasco, what – what was – what was the date when you, uh, landed in – in, uh, you landed in, uh, Normandy you said?

Pfc. Rasco: I went over – yeah, I went over in September. I don't know just exact date, but I went over in September of '44.

Interviewer #1: '44.

Pfc. Rasco: Um-hm.

Interviewer #1: And – and how did you land there?

Pfc. Rasco: We landed on Normandy Beach where they had all the trouble...

Interviewer #1: Right on the beach?

Pfc. Rasco: ...and out in the bay there they had scuttled some ships to break up the waves and I believe you could've got out of the ship we was on and walked on boats all the way to the beach.

Interviewer #1: So was – that artificial harbor, it seemed to work...

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-hm.

Interviewer #1: ...pretty well would you say?

Interviewer #2: So, the big concrete...

Pfc. Rasco: They had those pill boxes up on the cli – it was – the beach wasn't a couple a hundred yards maybe and it went right up like this for about a hundred feet and they had them pill boxes all along there...

Interviewer #1: Was this at Omaha Beach?

Pfc. Rasco: ...and them boys had hell, I wanna tell you, when they landed there on Omaha 'cause them pill boxes was lookin' right down on 'em.

Interviewer #2: Yeah.

Interviewer #1: This was at Omaha Beach?

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-hm.

Interviewer #2: So it was at the Omaha portion, then, where – where you...

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, that's where I landed.

Interviewer #2: Did you happen to see the big, floating concrete harbor that was towed from the – across the channel?

Pfc. Rasco: No. Mm-mm.

Interviewer #2: That was further down, towards the...

Pfc. Rasco: No.

Interviewer #2: ...was it Cannes?

Interviewer #1: I don't know. I know they used them on – on – they had the British Mulberry and the American Mulberry.

Interviewer #2: The Mulberry, yeah yeah.

Pfc. Rasco: No, I didn't see that.

Interviewer #1: Oh, and I wanted to ask you, when you were coming across the Atlantic – uh, can you describe that? Coming across on the – what was it, the “Ile de France”? Was that the name of it?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, “Ile de France” – we went over on it. We loaded in New York harbor and we took off and, uh, seaplanes came with us for two days and then we were by ourself. It took us – we were by ourself about five days and, uh, two English corvettes come out from England and escorted us into Scotland.

Interviewer #1: You were all by yourselves in the ocean – no other ships were coming...

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, out there for five days and we – zig – the ship zig-zags every seven minutes 'cause it takes a submarine that long...

Interviewer #2: Right

Pfc. Rasco: ...to get set up.

Interviewer #1: Was this ship...

Pfc. Rasco: And what was funny – one time – they had a six-inch gun on the tail of that ship and they didn't tell us they was having target practice one day. They let that thing go and we all come up on that deck just like a bunch of rats! (*Laughs*)

Interviewer #1: A little startling.

Pfc. Rasco: Ah, it scared the devil out of us, I'll tell you.

Interviewer #1: Was that ship – was it a, uh, converted, uh, um, passenger liner, or...

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-hm. Yeah. Yeah, It was a big steamship.

Interviewer #1: So it was pretty fast.

Pfc. Rasco: It wasn't as big as the Queen Mary. I came home on the Queen Mary.

Interviewer #2: Really? Huh.

Interviewer #1: What was that like?

Pfc. Rasco: I tell you what, it's a big ship! Those life boats are 90-foot above the water. And then there's a lot more that goes on up higher, and smokestacks and stuff.

Interviewer #1: Was it pretty crowded onboard? The Queen Mary?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, we had 15,000 men. *(Laughs)*

Interviewer #2: 15,000 people?

Pfc. Rasco: Had the whole 30th Infantry Division. And we got in New York harbor and everybody went over to see the Statue of Liberty *(Laughs)* and that old captain says "some of ya get back on the over side – they're gonna turn this thing over".

Interviewer #2: Amazing.

Pfc. Rasco: We were all glad to see it.

Interviewer #2: Man.

Interviewer #1: So...

Pfc. Rasco: I seen a lotta strange things.

Interviewer #1: And we wanna hear about it.

Interviewer #2: We wanna hear about it. So you arrived in Normandy in September, so that's...

Pfc. Rasco: September of '44.

Interviewer #2: ... three and a half months after the initial invasion.

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-hm. They'd June – they'd invaded on June the sixth.

Interviewer #2: June the sixth, right. So, things are pretty much under control right there on the coast.

Pfc. Rasco: Oh, yeah, yeah. Um-hm.

Interviewer #2: Where – what was your assignment once you got to Omaha Beach?

Pfc. Rasco: Well, they put me in the infantry and gone over there as a replacement and we landed there in France, and uh, I think they hauled us in some trucks to some town and we loaded on a train. Another old freight train. *(Laughs)* And we got to Paris, we stopped and about half of the boys and everybody went to town, but I sit and I stayed on the train. And, we pulled out of there and left about half of our people there in – in Paris! Even the train commander was...

Interviewer #2: Intentionally or not intentionally?

Pfc. Rasco: *(Laughs)* I don't know, but anyhow we went on up the railroad track several miles and here come a ammunition train behind us and there was all our men on it.

Interviewer #2: Ah!

Pfc. Rasco: And that engineer was having a fit. He said “they about half-drunk” and said “they're screwing the fuses out of the end of them shells and they gonna blow this damn train up”! *(Laughs)*

Interviewer #1: Oh my gosh.

Pfc. Rasco: We all got back together and went on – went on up through France and into Holland. And they assigned me to the 30th Division and a buddy that I'd been tentin' with – they put him in the 29th. They separated us.

Interviewer #1: Now, what – what was that like? You just – you were all by yourself, none of your buddies, just – you just...

Pfc. Rasco: No, well some of the buddies that I went over there ... they were assigned to the 30th, they took every other one, just...

Interviewer #1: So you weren't all alone when you went over to the 30th?

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-mm, mm-mm. Then we went from – went from – went from there – they hauled us up to – into Germany. There's a town called Altdorf.

Interviewer #1: Altsdorf?

Interviewer #2: Altdorf.

Pfc. Rasco: Altdorf.

Interviewer #1: A-L-T-D-O-R-F?

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-hm. Altdorf

Interviewer #2: Is that, uh...

Pfc. Rasco: It's a ... it's pretty good-sized little town and about a – not over a half or, or a little about a mile over there – there's another little town called Mariasdorf. And that's where I was in my first battle.

Interviewer #2: So...

Interviewer #1: And when was this?

Pfc. Rasco: Hm?

Interviewer #1: When was this?

Pfc. Rasco: That was in, uh, September of '44 – the last of September, first of October – somewhere along there.

Interviewer #2: So this is roughly – this is in the Rhine Valley? Somewhere – I...

Pfc. Rasco: I don't know – it – it's good...

Interviewer #1: I don't think you were in the Rhine Valley.

Pfc. Rasco: ...it's a good piece from the Rhine Valley 'cause we went through there later.

Interviewer #2: Okay.

Interviewer #2: When – let me ask you this – when you were in France and Holland, did you have any opportunity to get a sense of what the people – the French and what the Dutch people felt...

Pfc. Rasco: No, we didn't have...

Interviewer #2: ...had they been liberated from...

Pfc. Rasco: ...we didn't have much contact in France, but we talked to a few of the Dutch people...

Interviewer #2: Did you signs ...

Pfc. Rasco: We saw their...

Interviewer #2: ...and banners?

Pfc. Rasco: we saw their big windmills and the tulip fields – they were beautiful. All the tulips was all bloomin’.

Interviewer #2: Did they express, you know, gratefulness that...

Pfc. Rasco: Ah, yeah...

Interviewer #2: ...they had been liberated from the occupation?

Pfc. Rasco: ...the Dutch – Dutch people real nice people.

Interviewer #2: And was there a – a lot of signs of destruction from bombing and combat?

Pfc. Rasco: No, not no whole lot, not no whole lot there.

Interviewer #2: Huh.

Pfc. Rasco: The first town that I saw that was really tore up was Cologne. It wasn’t nothing but a pile of rubble. And they bull – they had to bulldoze the streets open – it was piled – you drivin’ like you was in a valley – the bar ditch wasn’t since it was up here and this’n that’s over here was up here. And I don’t think it was but three people still in that town and it was a pretty good-sized town.

Interviewer #2: It was very much one of the important targets for the 8th Air Force just blew it all to hell.

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, they tore that place all to pieces.

Interviewer #2: And the RAF...

Pfc. Rasco: That’s one thing the British did. We would shoot a few artillery shells and we would attack, but them British – they’d – boy, they laid it to ‘em.

Interviewer #2: My mother – I would not have been here if a V-1 had come about 300 yards closer to the house my mother lived in London.

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-hm.

Interviewer #2: Ran out of gas and it – “voooo”.

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah.

Interviewer #2: You know? So, my – I was born in England, but I lived in Texas most of my life. My – my grandfather was in the Royal Air Force, in Burma and India...

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-hm.

Interviewer #2: So – But, yeah, so...

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, we – we fought with the British. There was a British tankers assigned to our outfit one time.

Interviewer #1: What do you think about the British?

Pfc. Rasco: Hm?

Interviewer #1: Were they – were they good soldiers?

Pfc. Rasco: I'll tell you one thing. Yeah, and when they laid down a barrage, they laid one down – they didn't fool around.

Interviewer #1: So – so you think, uh – how would you compare their artillery with American artillery?

Pfc. Rasco: They about equal. But – but they shot a whole lot more shells than we did. For a one time there, we were – we was short of ammunition. We was only – we called back for artillery and they could only shoot so many shells.

Interviewer #1: So you think the British were getting more ammunition?

Pfc. Rasco: I think so.

Interviewer #1: Now, now you – at this time, did you already know you were going to be a – you were a Browning automatic rifleman? Is that...

Pfc. Rasco: Well, at first, they give me a, um, M-1, and I was a ammunition-bearer for the bazooka man. I had – I had six rounds of bazooka shells I carried and the M-1...

Interviewer #1: That's a lot of weight.

Pfc. Rasco: ...and the boy that carried the bazooka, he got his feet frost-bit or they froze and he had to go back and they tried to give it to me and I said "no – I don't want that"! (Laughs) I said I'll take that B.A.R. I wanted something that would shoot. And it would.

Interviewer #1: What did you think about the B.A.R?

Pfc. Rasco: It was a good gun. It was a durn-good gun. 'Course you had to keep it clean 'cause if you didn't it might jam on you.

Interviewer #2: Yeah.

Interviewer #1: But you wouldn't have traded it...

Pfc. Rasco: I carried – I had a shoulder harness and I carried six clips on this side and six clips here, and I had two M-1 bandoliers, I think they had – either six or eight clips in one – I had them around my neck. And I carried two hand grenades. That gun weighed 20 pounds and the ammunition weighed about that much. I was carrying about 40 pounds of weight all the time.

Interviewer #1: You were a pack mule!

Pfc. Rasco: *(Laughs)* Yeah!

Interviewer #1: That's what – 360 rounds?

Pfc. Rasco: And before you went in to attack, they usually pulled us back for a day or two. And they usually did load up and they just marched the devil out of you and when you got up to the front, you were ready to fight somebody *(laughs)* 'cause you just mad. They'd always hurrying you up.

Interviewer #1: What was that like living in the field?

Pfc. Rasco: It's rough. 20 degrees below in the Battle of the Bulge. And they had underground water. You'd dig a foxhole and water would seep in the hole...

Interviewer #2: Right. Yeah.

Pfc. Rasco: ...and get your clothes wet. And when you stepped out in the morning, well, your clothes froze.

Interviewer #1: What – what did you...

Pfc. Rasco: My old – my overcoat stood out like that when it drug in the snow – the snow's about hip-deep.

Interviewer #1: So what do you think about the equipment, the clothing – I mean it was – was it...

Interviewer #2: You didn't have adequate footwear...

Pfc. Rasco: We didn't get it. We wore them old combat boots in the Battle of the Bulge and as soon as we got through with it, they issued us those snow-packs. There's rubber up to your ankle and then leather up nearly to your knees.

Interviewer #1: What do you think about that?

Pfc. Rasco: (*Laughs*) They – they were good and warm, but them old combat boots was colder than the devil.

Interviewer #2: I know that...

Pfc. Rasco: The feet feels like a couple of blocks of ice all the time, you couldn't – didn't have no feeling hardly in them.

Interviewer #1: Were there many of your, um, uh, comrades that...

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, they got...

Interviewer #1: they had frost feet – frostbite?

Pfc. Rasco: ...got – got frostbite on their feet.

Interviewer #1: How about you? Did you?

Pfc. Rasco: No, I never did.

Interviewer #1: How – how did you keep from getting frostbite?

Pfc. Rasco: (*Laughs*) I don't know. I don't have any idea.

Interviewer #1: Did you ever have to stand in – in water for long periods of time?

Pfc. Rasco: No, didn't stand in the water. That water was froze – running streams had ice about that thick you could walk on. You could see the water running under the ice.

Interviewer #1: Oh, man.

Interviewer #2: 'Cause that – that was a pervasive problem with inadequate foot gear...

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-hm.

Interviewer #2: ...that just literally crippled an Army – you know, forces, just as badly as any other factor...

Interviewer #1: Sure, as the enemy had...

Interviewer #2: ...I mean...

Interviewer #1: ...taken out. So what – do you think your training, was it adequate for what you encountered?

Pfc. Rasco: Well, not really 'cause I didn't get that much. I got eight weeks. They just mostly marching, goin' on hikes, and 'course goin' to the rifle range and firin'. I done that for eight weeks and then I went to the quartermaster there for about a year.

Interviewer #1: Do you think they – they needed riflemen or infantrymen and they just kinda rushed you through training 'cause they needed replacements?

Pfc. Rasco: Well, I don't know, exactly, cause they shipped me to the quartermaster 'cause I was one-eyed. And, uh, they told me I would never go overseas. But I spent seven months in the front lines.

Interviewer #2: What was your rank when you were...

Pfc. Rasco: PFC.

Interviewer #2: You were a PFC?

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-mm.

Interviewer #2: What kind of command structure were you working under? You had sergeants and...

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, we had a sergeant – we had a squad leader and assistant squad leader and then we had a company commander, was a 1st Lieutenant – Lt. Edward Cope out of Colorado. He was one good man.

Interviewer #2: Did the – did these men stay with you for as long as you were over in Europe, or did they – were they...

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, we lost some. Our – my squad got shot up pretty bad one time and they put me and the rest of us over in another squad.

Interviewer #1: Um, what do you think about your equipment, overall?

Pfc. Rasco: It was good.

Interviewer #1: What...

Pfc. Rasco: It was good.

Interviewer #1: ...what was the best piece of equipment and what was the worst piece of equipment?

Pfc. Rasco: I'd say mine gun – my gun was about the best piece of equipment and, uh, I didn't get all that cold. My overcoat – we wore that big ol' overcoat and had the long

(unintelligible) underwear and, uh – oh, you get cold alright, but it wasn't all that bad till that water run in your cold and that's when it was rough.

Interviewer #1: Hm. What do you think about your officers?

Pfc. Rasco: They're – my company commander was a durn-good fellow, I tell you.

Interviewer #1: What was his name?

Pfc. Rasco: Hm? Cope. Lieutenant Cope. 1st Lieutenant. I saw him – we – our first attack we was in, we went from this Alfsdorf to cross this field to Mariasdorf and had some tanks in front of us. But there was a minefield out there and the minefields blow – I seen three mines blow up and I knew seen some soldiers hit the ground. But they got 'em all out except three. And that – we went to bed that night and they hear that boy hollerin' right out there about a hundred yards. He hollered all night long. And the next morning, the lieutenant went out in that minefield and loaded him on his shoulders and carried him out. And he – he got a stretcher and he come by and he hollered "somebody go with me" and so I went with him. I took the back end of the stretcher and we walked out there. And this one boy was layin' there – the other one of them was back over here – he was dead. But this one – it looked like his foot was blowed off. It looked like someone had taken a knife and just split up to his knee in about three places. That meat was just flared out like that on his leg.

Interviewer #1: And what was that like – walking into a minefield?

Pfc. Rasco: Another - well, it was scary. The only thing that saved us is the ground froze that night and it – we didn't – we wouldn't trip them mines.

Interviewer #1: How was this lieutenant's name spelled?

Pfc. Rasco: C-O-P-E. Cope.

Interviewer #2: So...

Pfc. Rasco: Edward Cope.

Interviewer #2: ...was this a...

Pfc. Rasco: He made captain in the field.

Interviewer #2: Really? Was this minefield a known field before you stumbled into it?

Pfc. Rasco: No, we didn't know what it was – well, of course we did when we knew it was there when we went out to get them boys.

Interviewer #2: Yeah.

Pfc. Rasco: But, uh, they didn't know – we had some tanks. None of them got blown up, but they'd set off some of them mines when they run over 'em. But those boys stepped on – that one boy I knows the way that foot was all mangled up. His foot was gone.

Interviewer #1: What about your non-commissioned officers, uh, were – were they good?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, they good. First attack we was in, I lost – I lost a assistant squad leader – was a buck sergeant. And the next attack and then we lost our squad leader was a staff sergeant. I saw him get shot. He was going through a kind of a gate. Is a big wall over here and I seen him – they could seen them machine-gun bullets hit – come across that wall and cut him down. And they took two men out of the squad and made one of 'em squad leader and the other assistant squad leader.

Interviewer #2: So, that – unfortunately, I, uh – my understanding of that – that was almost an everyday, very common thing.

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-hm. I was very lucky myself.

Interviewer #2: Yeah...

Pfc. Rasco: We were attacking one night – one evening late. After we'd been down in the Battle of the Bulge, we pulled back up. 'Course I think we was still in Belgium, I'm not sure. But, we loaded up on some tanks and I was ridin' the back tank – there's five men on each – back of each and every tank. We had about ten or twelve tanks. And we went up this road and there's a German tank over the hill, dug-in, and had that big gun about this high off the ground. And he knocked out our first four tanks. We all jumped off of the tanks and he pulled in behind some woods and we dug in. And that night, about one o'clock, they decided we'd take a bazooka up there and try to shoot that tank. And he let us get up to about 150 yards and he cut loose with that machine gun and that big gun and they turned – they had some 30 millimeter ak-ak for plane protection – and they turned that loose on us.

Interviewer #2: Then you were...

Pfc. Rasco: And I – as a boy, they had these hackberry trees planted on each side of the road, about ten foot apart, just – and they'd notch 'em with an axe and put a quarter-pound of TNT in there and they'd blow 'em up and them trees would fall across the road and tanks couldn't get through. They'd have to get down in them minefields on each side. And, we were layin' there and that guy – they were shootin' 'em tracer bullets were flyin'. One boy, he was layin' out in the middle of the durn road, and I just turned around and asked him, "Are you alright?" and I turned back around – that bullet went through my helmet, hit me on top of the head, almost knocked me out, but it didn't quite. If it had been a half-inch lower, I wouldn't be here. That's how close I come to getting' it.

Interviewer #2: Hm.

Interviewer #1: Is that how you got your, uh, purple heart?

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-hm.

Interviewer #1: Was that the only wound you suffered during the war?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, mm-hm. I got some near misses. I got three holes through my overcoat right here – while we were runnin', the tail would flare out...

Interviewer #1: My goodness.

Pfc. Rasco: ... I got three holes here, and one come across and hit my ammunition belt...

Interviewer #2: Jesus.

Pfc. Rasco: ...and cut a groove across that B.A.R. clip.

Interviewer #1: You led a charmed life!

Pfc. Rasco: *(Laughs)*

Interviewer #2: Did – did, uh – what type of German unit were you up against in that account that you described?

Pfc. Rasco: Well, the 30th Division whooped Hitler's 1st SS division twice.

Interviewer #1: Really?

Pfc. Rasco: I wasn't with them the first time they whooped 'em in France and then we whooped 'em again down in the Battle of the Bulge – we kicked their butt, I'm gonna tell ya'.

Interviewer #1: What was that like?

Pfc. Rasco: We hit 'em they didn't go no further.

Interviewer #1: See – so what was that like, fighting SS soldiers – were they...

Pfc. Rasco: Well, no...

Interviewer #1: ...were they good, were they...

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, they were – they were good soldiers. The SS were mean son-of-a-guns.

Interviewer #1: And what did they...

Pfc. Rasco: A little ol' German – a little ol' Belgium town there we – we come into it one morning and we got there – there was a house sitting there and the porch, and there was an old man and woman sittin' in rockin' chairs and them durned SS men had shot 'em – killed 'em both.

Interviewer #2: Hm.

Pfc. Rasco: Old people. They wouldn't harm nobody. And we all saw this fought – we was fightin' 'em one mornin' and it was so foggy you couldn't hardly see the man in front of you. And we run into a German machine gun nest.

Interviewer #2: Doh!

Pfc. Rasco: And two of the boy – or three ran – I don't know why they run forward, we all turned and run back, but they went forward and the Germans captured them and about a week later we was down on the railroad track in the house and it's a Belgium man told us it was some dead GIs down there on the railroad track. And we went down there and it was them three boys. They stood 'em up and shot 'em.

Interviewer #1: Jesus.

Pfc. Rasco: They was covered with snow and we had to – we took some old doors off a building for a stretcher and dug 'em out of that snow and loaded 'em up and hauled 'em up where a jeep could come get 'em.

Interviewer #1: So how did y'all treat the SS when you got your hands on 'em?

Interviewer #2: How close did you – did you come to where you were hand-to-hand?

Pfc. Rasco: No.

Interviewer #2: That – never really saw...

Pfc. Rasco: Not right – not up that close.

Interviewer #2: ...saw anyone personally?

Pfc. Rasco: Ah, we got – we got up pretty close. (*Laughs*) We even had a battle with, er, a other company one morning – the same morning them boys run in that fog and run the wrong way, well we got – somebody got to shootin' down there and we got to shootin' back, and our lieutenant says "That sounds like American gun – don't sound like

German gun.” And he hollered, and somebody answered him and he tried to get ‘em to come over and they wouldn’t. He said “Well, I’m comin’ over there.” And he went over and they was K Company I was in – we was in I Company. (*Laughs*) But that fog was so thick you couldn’t see nothin’.

Interviewer #2: Hm.

Interviewer #1: Did y’all ever get your hands on any SS soldier – prisoners?

Pfc. Rasco: Ah, yeah. We – we take one little ‘ol town one morning and there’s two boys out of another squad come by me and we seen some Germans run down in the cellar in that house and we got up there an I hollered for ‘em to come out, but they wouldn’t do it and I turned that B.A.R. loose on that concrete and they come out, I guaran-damn-te. (*Laughs*)

Interviewer #2: Do you know a little German? Do you know a few words in German?

Pfc. Rasco: Oh, a little bit.

Interviewer #2: Yeah.

Pfc. Rasco: Not much.

Interviewer #2: What did you – as replacements – how – how many of you were replacements in the – in the – you say in the 20th? You were assigned to the 29th?

Pfc. Rasco: I was the 30th.

Interviewer #2: 30th.

Pfc. Rasco: 30th.

Interviewer #2: Sorry.

Interviewer #1: Mm-hm.

Interviewer #2: So, how many was in your group were replacements?

Pfc. Rasco: Well it was – I don’t remember (*unintelligible*) but my, uh, my platoon – I think it was bout ten to twelve us went up. They had been shot up pretty bad.

Interviewer #2: How were you received – as a replacement for – by the veterans that had been there? Was there any kind of “Oh, these are greenhorns coming in, they’ll just be here – they’ll be...

Pfc. Rasco: Yes, they was...

Interviewer #2: ...you know, they're just...

Pfc. Rasco: ...there'd be a few comin' in all the time. We had one – one kid, he was 19 years old, come over to be a replacement. We had attacked this hill with three houses on it, and a big hay shed. And, uh, I lost my ammunition bearer. I had a boy that carried it – it's a Jew boy – he carried ammunition for me and he – well, his – his M-1, and we tapped this hill and we went in – I went around the house this a-way and he went around that a-way. He should've stayed with me. And there's a German tank down there about – oh, half a mile, maybe – shot that big gun and killed him.

Interviewer #2: Hm.

Pfc. Rasco: And they asked me, "Do you wanna go see him?" I said, "No, I wanna remember him like he was when he was alive. I don't wanna see him dead."

Interviewer #1: What was – was...

Pfc. Rasco: We got – we got cut off there and them Germans attacked us two or three times.

Interviewer #1: This was where?

Pfc. Rasco: But we – it just over there in Germany somewhere. A little 'ol town. We come across a airport that night and there wasn't nothin' on it. And about a day and a half later another company tried to get up to us and they had to fight to take that airport.

Interviewer #2: Hm.

Pfc. Rasco: The Germans had moved in behind us. (*Laughs*)

Interviewer #2: So you were – all this time, you know, forces had been closing in – you know, on the Germans, forcing them further back into the homeland.

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-hm. Yeah.

Interviewer #2: So it's a – it's a matter – it's a retreat campaign for them at this point.

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah. Yeah, we said that – settin' on top of that hill that we'd taken it, well on the next day, them Germans started retreatin' and they was filin' across this field all the time and that's when we was short on artillery. We called back for artillery, but they couldn't fire but two or three rounds. And we saw that – them Germans was pullin' back all day long, going back across the field up to a hill and there was another German tank sittin' up there on this road.

Interviewer #2: Do you see...

Interviewer #1: You just couldn't do anything about...

Interviewer #2: ...do you see a lot of abandoned German equipment as you moved in...

Pfc. Rasco: Ah, yeah.

Interviewer #2: ...stuff that they left?

Pfc. Rasco: Um-hm, um-hm.

Interviewer #2: Did you happen to be able to...

Pfc. Rasco: Oh, we went – we went...

Interviewer #2: Take up prop – you know, little souvenirs of any of that stuff?

Pfc. Rasco: *(Laughs)* No, I didn't pick up no souvenirs. He-he. What I did, I brought a pistol home, but it was a French pistol. I don't know whether they shot a .44, or what it was, but I brought it home and my stepdaughter later hocked it. *(Laughs)*

Interviewer #2: Oh, no.

Pfc. Rasco: *(Laughs)*

Interviewer #2: Oh.

Pfc. Rasco: I'd blow it up me up I tell you.

Interviewer #1: Where were you in, uh – wha – what do you remember about the, the Battle of the Bulge, like where were you when you realized that the Germans were mounting a, you know, a big counter offensive?

Pfc. Rasco: Well, I tell you what, when I first heard about that German break through, I was back in Holland at a USO show, Marlene Dietrich

Interviewer #2: Oh!

Pfc. Rasco: ...was puttin' on a show...

Interviewer #2: Oh, man! Ah!

Interviewer #1: *(unintelligible)*

Pfc. Rasco: ...and...

Interviewer #2: Oh.

Pfc. Rasco: ...about the middle of the show, somebody come up and announced, “The 30th Division men report back to your truck”, and we went back. And we loaded up, and they took off. And we went to Malmédy, Belgium. And we had black drivers drivin’ that convoy, and I betcha – well I guess the whole durned division went, ‘cause you could see just truck, truck, truck back up the road. And, uh, we got up there just before we got into Malmédy, we stopped. And they said “We don’t know whether the Germans are in here, or not”. They said “All you men on this side of the truck, face that-a-way, and all over here face this-a-way, and we gonna go through there”. And about that time, before we got started, it’s three – it done got dark. And three German planes come over and they was over to our left a little in the next street. And they dropped a bunch of a flares and just lit it. And all our black drivers jumped out and run off.

Interviewer #1: Boy.

Pfc. Rasco: Left us sittin’ out there in the street in them trucks.

Interviewer #1: What did you...

Pfc. Rasco: I ain’t thought much of them black peoples since. *(Laughs)*

Interviewer #2: That’s interesting that they did have black drivers doing that. To someone just – do y’all – does one of y’all just get in a truck and say “Move it from here”?

Pfc. Rasco: They finally found ‘em. They got ‘em rounded up, and we went on.

Interviewer #2: Jeez.

Pfc. Rasco: Went on out of Malmédy out in the area – a little ol’, uh, village – a little ol’ bitty village and, uh, we were on the left and K Company was on the right. And K Company was out in this field and they found all them Germ – them American soldiers that the Germans had killed, shot – the Mal – Malmédy Massacre. Comp – K Company found them boys.

Interviewer #1: So, when you learned about the Malmédy Massacre, how did that affect you?

Pfc. Rasco: It made me mad as the devil, I tell you.

Interviewer #1: And, so were you – were you seeing or were you treating American troops as the 30th Division was going forward? Were there some going to the rear as you were going forward, or...

Pfc. Rasco: No, there was others comin’ up behind us.

Interviewer #1: So, you didn't...

Pfc. Rasco: But, uh...

Interviewer #1: ...see any retreat of the troops?

Pfc. Rasco: No, uh-uh.

Interviewer #1: Okay, okay.

Pfc. Rasco: They didn't retreat down there, they didn't give up.

Interviewer #1: Um...

Pfc. Rasco: They caught the devil down there. They got a lot – a lot of casualties, but, uh, they held out.

Interviewer #2: Can I ask you...

Pfc. Rasco: 'Til finally the sun come out and show them where the bombers could come over.

Interviewer #2: ...can I ask this question – I should've asked this a while back. When you first – when you had your first, uh, taste of combat experience, what were your feelings going into that? Were you afraid, or...

Pfc. Rasco: No, not, not really.

Interviewer #2: ...did you feel like you were – you knew what the job was at hand and you just do it?

Pfc. Rasco: I guess we had – I – we hadn't realized just what we were getting' into. *(Laughs)* But we went across and took that little ol' town, but like I say, it's a big mine – coal mine – there, and that tunnel – and this – this – their squad leader was standin' up in the edge of that dang tunnel and I don't know why he was, and the Germans slipped up behind him and shot him in the back.

Interviewer #2: Jeez.

Interviewer #1: *(Answers cell phone)* Hey. Yeah, I'm in the middle of an interview here.

Interviewer #2: Um...

Interviewer #1: Oh, great. I'll – I'll call you as soon as I'm out of this, okay? All right. Thanks. Bye-bye. Thanks. Bye-bye. Sorry about that.

Pfc. Rasco: Another – another time down there in the Battle of the Bulge, the snow was up deep and...

Interviewer #1: Sorry.

Pfc. Rasco: ...we were attacking and got up to these edge of these woods and you some – we could hear German tanks were roarin' down there – hear the motors. And they were comin' up, and, uh, that's when my squad had got shot up pretty bad and they put me over in another squad. And this boy had a bazooka and his sergeant told him, he said, "You and Rasco go up there and see if you can get a shot at that tank". And we got up there, about 50 yards away from everybody, and I just happened to be lookin' at that boy's back. And, all at once – he had that little 'ol haversack pack – what you want to call it – on. And right between his shoulders there, I see that cloth move, and there's a hole come in it. That bullet went right straight through him. And he went down.

Interviewer #2: Hm.

Pfc. Rasco: Well, I turned my butt, and I got back, and time I got down, he was right behind me. I said, "Boy, you got hit"! "No I didn't". I said, "Hell you did". It was about that time, he just keeled over. I don't know whether he died or not. They come and got him in a jeep and hauled him off. But, I saw that hole come in that dang pack.

Interviewer #1: Amazing. And he was able to get up and run after...

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-hm.

Interviewer #1: ...that without even realizing that he...

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, he ran back about 50 yards.

Interviewer #2: Hm.

Interviewer #1: Is he...

Pfc. Rasco: And he didn't think he was hit. Or he – I don't know if he was scared like me. He – he didn't feel nothin'.

Interviewer #2: Hm.

Interviewer #1: So what...

Pfc. Rasco: But that's a hell of a feelin' – to be out there by yourself. They put me as first scout with that bazoo – with that B.A.R. one time, down in that forest with pine trees

and snow, and I was out in front goin' and I lookin' and lookin' and lookin' and finally I looked back, and I had this Mexican boy from El Paso as a second scout – hell, I was 150 yards ahead of everybody and I slowed down and let 'em catch up.

Interviewer #1: Seems wise.

Pfc. Rasco: That was a lonesome feelin'.

Interviewer #1: Can...

Pfc. Rasco: And he was lookin'. Them Germans wanted 'em B.A.R. men 'cause that was an automatic machine gun, you might say. You shoot 20 rounds just (snaps) like that.

Interviewer #1: They – they – you think they, uh especially liked to get, uh, B.A.R. men, you think?

Pfc. Rasco: Uh-huh. Or any kind of machine gun man.

Interviewer #1: Uh, was there – was there...

Pfc. Rasco: The life – the life expectancies they said for a B.A.R. man was seven minutes in combat.

Interviewer #2: Ah, lord. Man.

Interviewer #1: *(unintelligible)*

Pfc. Rasco: And I got by. *(Laughs)*

Interviewer #1: Was there any incident, or moment where – that you could say was the most frightening, for you?

Pfc. Rasco: Um, let me think a minute. It was all scary, but, uh, I guess the night I got hit – it knocked the devil outta me. It near – almost knocked me out. I saw stars that just floatin' every which way. But, uh...

Interviewer #2: Were you able to...

Pfc. Rasco: ...we got back, and the next day, I walked – I walked back to the aid station, back to the little village we come out of, about a mile and a half, I guess. And I took a little ol' German prisoner with me. *(Laughs)* And he was cross-eyed. *(Laughs)* I took him down there to that aid station and turned him over to them other soldiers. And they says, "Where did you get that ugly S.O.B.?" *(Laughs)* I don't believe he was sixteen years old. They'd done run out of men, just about.

Interviewer #1: Ah, so you're signaling...

Interviewer #2: They were using, uh, old – the saying, I guess, was that they were using children and old men...

Pfc. Rasco: Um-hm.

Interviewer #2: ...at that point. It was a last-ditch, desperation effort.

Interviewer #1: So you're seeing quite a bit of that – that by then?

Pfc. Rasco: Hm?

Interviewer #1: You were seeing quite a bit of that by then? The young, real young soldiers and...

Pfc. Rasco: Well...

Interviewer #1: ...and real old soldiers?

Pfc. Rasco: ...not so awful many, but it was quite a few.

Interviewer #2: Was he uniformed at all, in any sense of the word "uniform"?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, he was in uniform.

Interviewer #1: Can you think of...

Pfc. Rasco: They all pulled – they pulled them – when you captured, they'd pull them steel helmets on and they'd put that little ol' cloth cap on.

Interviewer #1: What'd you do, like a garrison cap...

Pfc. Rasco: Kinda' like our little ol' flap cap, you know?

Interviewer #2: Garrison cap.

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-hm.

Interviewer #1: (*unintelligible*) cap.

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah.

Interviewer #2: Um,...

Pfc. Rasco: They all – they all had one. When they'd throw their – throw them helmets and guns down and they'd put them little ol' caps on.

Interviewer #1: What was – what was eating like out in the field?

Pfc. Rasco: K-ration.

Interviewer #2: K-ration?

Pfc. Rasco: Did you ever see a K-ration? (Laughs)

Interviewer #1: Is that the can? No, that's the cereal.

Pfc. Rasco: No, it's a little ol' box about like this. Square kinda. And it got a little can of eggs, and, uh, it had a fruit bar in it, and it had some, uh, coffee – Nescafé coffee – you could make you a cup of coffee. And it had a fruit bar and the eggs and some of 'em had little ol' cans of ham in there.

Interviewer #1: Did you ever get – get some good, fresh food down there?

Pfc. Rasco: Well, I'll tell you, one time, we was in this little town, I forget what the name of it was, but this – one of them boys had caught six white leghorn chickens, hens. And there was an old sow come through the yard there one morning, had some white pigs about that high. I knocked one of them pigs in the head with a tack hammer I found, and stuck him with my pocketknife. And, uh, I heated some water, and I scalded and got the hair off of him. And we cleaned them chickens and we found some grease somewhere, and I fried up that – I rendered the grease out of the fat on the pig – and I fried them six chickens and that pig as fifteen of us eat every day five days. (Laughs)

Interviewer #2: Man. Time to turn the tape over.

Interviewer #1: Oh. Well, this is gonna...

Interviewer #2: ...and set – away we go. All right. Well, let me ask you – when you were hit, you – had the bullet graze the top of your scalp...

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-hm. And it didn't come- it didn't come all the way out. It made a tit stickin' out on the back of my helmet. Like you drive a nail in a ...

Interviewer #2: Yeah.

Pfc. Rasco: ...piece of tin, and it don't go through. It was a little point on the back of my helmet.

Interviewer #2: So, it was lodged in your helmet?

Pfc. Rasco: And I got a part of it. Part of it – it went away – I think it was a tracer bullet, I'm not sure. But, it went through that helmet, through the front.

Interviewer #2: Yeah?

Pfc. Rasco: And it didn't come out the back.

Interviewer #1: I'll be darned.

Pfc. Rasco: And I carried that for a while, but I lost it.

Interviewer #1: Oh, you had the bullet, a part of it.

Pfc. Rasco: Mm-hm.

Interviewer #2: So...

Pfc. Rasco: I had part of it.

Interviewer #2: ...did it – you say it – it grazed the top of your scalp?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, it just cut the top of my head, just – it didn't get the bone, but it cut the meat on top of my head.

Interviewer #2: Really? So you...

Pfc. Rasco: It, it knocked the devil out of me.

Interviewer #2: So did you – were you able to stand back up and walk out?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah. I did. Just a little bit later, we pulled back and...

Interviewer #2: You say you walked to that aid station?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah. We – the next morning, I walked back to the aid station. And the next night, we pulled out and loaded on trucks and drove around to another town that – that another outfit had took. And we come back up that road where that tank was, and,uh, I don't guess they had any gas, they abandoned the tank. Probably ran out of ammunition.

Interviewer #2: Was that a Panzer?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah. One of them big tiger tanks.

Interviewer #2: Wow. That's a ti – yeah. Wow.

Interviewer #1: What was, uh – can you remember what – what – was there anything you saw that seemed like the strangest thing – you saw – during the war – just bizarre, unusual?

Pfc. Rasco: Well, that old man and woman sittin’ in the rockin’ chairs was...

Interviewer #2: Did you know that they...

Pfc. Rasco: ...pretty...

Interviewer #2: ...were dead when you first saw them?

Pfc. Rasco: ...yeah, they were dead. I knew they were dead. They were set – ‘cause they – where they wouldn’t be sittin’ out on the porch in 20-below weather.

Interviewer #2: Yeah.

Interviewer #1: What about funny, I mean, was there anything you remember as being the funniest thing or a funny thing happening?

Pfc. Rasco: (*Laughs*)

Interviewer #1: More than one of them?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, we got a new recruit in one day. When we was cut off up on that hill, well, after they had...

Interviewer #1: Where was this?

Pfc. Rasco: ...it was in Germany, I guess, somewhere.

Interviewer #1: Okay.

Pfc. Rasco: And, that was after the, uh – the outfit had done got up there and we – and, uh, me and him was upstairs and I looked out there and I seen German soldiers comin’ up through some little ol’ scrubby bushes and stuff. And I cut down on him, but shootin’ from the shoulder with it’d be all you can’t control the durn – and it was shootin’ over another building and I shot all the top (*Laughs*) of the building. ‘Course them Germans started firin’ – that boy says, “Don’t shoot,” said, “they shootin’ back!” I said, “What the hell did you expect them to do?” (*Laughs*) He didn’t want me shootin’ at ‘em.

Interviewer #2: Wow.

Pfc. Rasco: (*Laughs*)

Interviewer #1: Any – can you remember any other funny things?

Pfc. Rasco: No, not too funny. Except that time they shot that gun off that tail of that ship. We come out of there like – we come up topside right quick. They had hammocks swung down below there, about five high. You just had enough room to get in there below the other guy.

Interviewer #2: Well, when you were, uh, you were in a – your combat for eighteen months – is that...

Pfc. Rasco: No, seven months.

Interviewer #2: Seven months.

Interviewer #1: Seven months.

Pfc. Rasco: I was only overseas eleven months and eleven days.

Interviewer #2: So, where did your tour on the ground in Europe end? I mean, wha – where did you end up in the end?

Pfc. Rasco: We end up in Magdeberg, Germany on the Elbe River.

Interviewer #2: *(unintelligible)*

Pfc. Rasco: We sit there a month, waitin' for the darn Russians to take Berlin. We could'a took Berlin a month before the Russians did, but Roosevelt and Stalin – I mean, and Churchill made a big mistake and let Stalin take Berlin and then you got the Berlin Airlift...

Interviewer #2: Mm-hm.

Pfc. Rasco: ...and the wall. It wouldn't a had that if they'd a let us take it.

Interviewer #1: Did you – did you guys want to go to Berlin?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah. I was ready to go, 'cause we wasn't hittin' no opposition. We were – we were ridin' on trucks and ride up to a town – we'd jump off and go through it...

Interviewer #2: Did you search it?

Pfc. Rasco: ...and wasn't hittin' no opposition at all.

Interviewer #2: What about townspeople? Were they – were they still there?

Pfc. Rasco: Ah, yeah, they were – the Germans were scared of us at first, 'cause Hitler had told 'em we gonna kill all the men and rape all the women.

Interviewer #2: Really?

Pfc. Rasco: And they couldn't believe we treated 'em nice, like decent people.

Interviewer #1: What was it like when you had first...

Pfc. Rasco: In fact, we stayed in Magdeburg – and we had ol' Colonel Johnson from Mazula, Montana, wore a big .45 pearled-handled pistol, and he didn't want the American GIs messin' with them women.

Interviewer #2: Hm.

Pfc. Rasco: He didn't – oh, he wasn't gonna allow that. What he didn't know – but we pull – when we left there to pull back, after the war's just about over up there, he drove in there – his driver told us – he drove in there and said all them girls, women was standin' out on the streets a-cryin' 'cause we was leavin'. And he says, "What the hell is goin' on around here?" (*Laughs*) He couldn't realize – oh, Lord!

Interviewer #2: Did – did you meet any Russians while you were there – at Magdeburg?

Pfc. Rasco: I got some pictures of some we liberated – Russian slave labors...

Interviewer #2: Ah, so I was gonna ask you...

Pfc. Rasco: ...I've got some pictures in my room down there...

Interviewer #2: (*unintelligible*)

Pfc. Rasco: ...of a whole string of Russians that we had liberated and we were carryin' 'em up the street. And, uh, to some place to where they were gonna pick 'em up and carry 'em back to Russia.

Interviewer #1: But you didn't meet any, uh, Russian soldiers coming from the – the East?

Pfc. Rasco: No. We – when – what – what we finally – they finally come to Magdeburg at the river...

Interviewer #1: Oh.

Pfc. Rasco: ...and we had a couple of our boys out of the squad went over there to talk to 'em and them damn Russians arrested them and took 'em back – and they was gonna take 'em back to Russia, but somehow they got loose – they turned 'em loose, but it scared the holy hell outta 'em, I'll tell ya. Them Russians crazy.

Interviewer #2: You'd mentioned liberating some slave labor camps, what – could you talk a little bit about that maybe – did you see any other kinds of camps...

Interviewer #1: Concentration camps?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, they had another one there and, uh – this one was in Brunswick, but they were all Polish people.

Interviewer #2: Hm.

Pfc. Rasco: It – a girl come outta her room there one night, about dark, and, uh – they weren't supposed to let 'em out – and she wanted to go somewhere. So, I thought, hm, I'll just go with her. *(Laughs)* And I went over there, and they was – them people was havin' a – they didn't knew we was liberated them – and they was havin' a dance and a bar – I stayed over there a long time and walked back by myself. And I got back, the ol' Lieutenant say – was a – fuzz – a formin' up a squad to go find me! *(Laughs)*

Interviewer #1: Which Lieutenant was this?

Pfc. Rasco: He says, "Rasco, that damn poorstown ain't been cleared!" I says, "It is now!" And they looked over there... *(Laughs)*

Interviewer #1: Were you – were you able to get away with more, uh, the longer you were serving – the more time you put in?

Pfc. Rasco: Ah, yeah. I had me a couple of fraulines. I stayed with one for about a month – all there in Magdeburg. And then we later moved back south down to somewhere.

Interviewer #2: Huh!

Pfc. Rasco: And I met this German nurse. She'd been a nurse in – nineteen years old – she was a pretty thing. And I stayed with her about a month and a half. I'd a brought her home if I could, but they wouldn't let you do that.

Interviewer #2: When you say you stayed with them, you meant while you were stationed, or encamped in that town – do you – just...

Pfc. Rasco: Well, this one – that first little girl, well she lived upstairs and we were downstairs...

Interviewer #2: Oh, I see...

Pfc. Rasco: ...and I'd just walk up the stairs and...

Interviewer #2: ...you billeted...

Pfc. Rasco: ...go to bed with her.

Interviewer #2: ...you billeted in the house.

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah! (*Laughs*)

Interviewer #2: I see.

Pfc. Rasco: Uh huh.

Interviewer #1: Very convenient.

Pfc. Rasco: And she didn't have a mother, she was livin' with her aunt and uncle and her grandmother and grandpa.

Interviewer #2: Ah. Uh, did they – so you were able to live relatively comfortably inside – in the towns?

Pfc. Rasco: Ah yeah.

Interviewer #2: And they fed you and...

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah.

Interviewer #2: ...what – tell us a bit about the beers. Did you have some good German beers?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah – had some dark beers, pretty strong, but we drink that darn buzzbomb fluid.

Interviewer #2: Buzzbomb fluid?

Pfc. Rasco: Like that – what they run them buzzbombs — At the rohlars on – it was 190 proof alcohol. And we cut it with water and them __ had a chocolate bar and we would twittle that up and make a chocolate drink and it was good, but it would knock you on your rear end. It killed some of them old boys. Some them drank it and it killed them.

Interviewer #1: So you crossed the Rhine.

Pfc. Rasco: Um-hm

Interviewer #1: Where did you cross it and how?

Pfc. Rasco: Out in a cow pasture. Wasn't no house or nothing. They had boats with motors on them. Like a rowboat. It would hold, I imagine — 16, 20 feet long big wide.

And they took us up there and we skidded and pulled them on the ground slide them and went up over that levee. They got a big levee on each side of the Rhine River to keep the waters in. We took them up and put them on the edge of the water. And then we pulled back and dug in.

Interviewer #1: So this was a combat crossing then.

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah. And we had artillery, them 105 long tongs back here, and a little smaller, and a little smaller and they got some up here to the 75s. And they started a rolling barrage that night about 12 o'clock. And I'm going to tell you the earth shook. So man they was firing so much and we was in foxholes and you could feel the earth moving.

Interviewer #1: And this was our artillery?

Pfc. Rasco: Our artillery, yeah. And we crossed the next morning. They crossed on them boats at night. And they had us in reserve and we went across the next morning in what they called a little alligator. Its like a little tank, but it aint' got no roof. Its hollow and it'll hold quite a few men.

Interviewer #1: What was that like going across in that?

Pfc. Rasco: Well me and old boy we was chewing beechnut tobacco and spitting over the side of that thing in the river. That Rhine River is pretty long and wide.

Interviewer #1: Did you ever cross any rivers under fire from the Germans?

Pfc. Rasco: No we crossed one little old creek one time. But it was — our artillery had caught a bunch of Germans coming across a little bridge. And I'm gonna tell you they tore them up. It was heads laying here and arms over here and legs over there and I bet it was 15-20 bodies there just tore all to hell.

Interviewer #1: At that point when you saw that, you were used to that.

Pfc. Rasco: You get used to seeing dead people.

Interviewer #1: Now tell me, by this time you were still feeling fear though right.

Pfc. Rasco: You were scared all the time. If somebody tells you they weren't scared he was lying.

Interviewer #1: Did you think this day might be your last day.

Pfc. Rasco: Well you didn't never know whether you were gonna see the sun come up or the sun go down.

Interviewer #1: Geez. Did you ever just resign yourself to — that you were going to die?

Pfc. Rasco: No. I always figured I was going to come home. I told my mother and daddy when I started overseas that “I’ll be back.”

Interviewer #1: What about mail from home — how often did you get it and how important was it?

Pfc. Rasco: Well we got it about once a month or so. I’d write back and answer. We had little old V-mail thing. I got letters from home. And my brothers; I had 3 brothers all in the service too; all four of us was in the service. One was in the Army; one was in the Air Force, and my youngest brother was in the Navy.

Interviewer #1: Were any of them in combat?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah my youngest brother was on a ship patrol over there and one brother was in Australia and New Guinea and the other brother was in India and several other places. He was in the signal corps. He stretched the communications lines.

Interviewer #1: Were the logistics pretty good for your units; did you ever run out of things — gasoline, food, ammunition?

Pfc. Rasco: No. We got shot on that artillery shells.

Interviewer #1: So you could have used more artillery like the British.

Pfc. Rasco: We called for artillery and they say we can just shoot so many shells.

Interviewer #1: What about close air support? Did you see much of that? Fighter-bombers...

Pfc. Rasco: Oh, yeah, we used to watch them. One thing funny happened one time — we was sitting up on this hill of this little old town. We had been there about a week. We stand down in a cellar under a little schoolhouse of a thing. We was sitting out there and one of them P47s was dive bombing down there about a half a mile. And we was sitting up on side of them foxholes and stuff looking at them. And one of them went down and strafing and pulled up. And when he turned around, to come around — one of them bombs the front end dropped down but the back end caught. And he circled out and was coming up toward us and he waggled them wings and that bomb started (*Laughing*). We went in them holes like a bunch of rats I tell you (*Laughing*). It hit down there about a hundred yards from us.

Interviewer #1: And what was it like when it hit?

Pfc. Rasco: (*Laughing*) After a little bit we could see it wasn’t going come up there real close to us. Another time we was down there in that same cellar under that schoolhouse.

Me and two more boys. We come up these steps; it was about twelve steps up to the ground. And they were ahead of me and they stepped out on the dirt and I was still on about the second step down. And a mortar shell hit the corner of the building about 20 feet. And they turned around and they knocked me backwards down that step. And the only thing that saved me — my helmet didn't come off till' I hit the floor. It caught all the impact. If I'd a hit the concrete I would have ruptured my skull I imagine. But I hurt my back and 20 years later, after the war I had to have a back operation.

Interviewer #1: I take it none of these injuries you sustained were enough to keep you out of combat?

Pfc. Rasco: No. The only one there that got it. My back was hurt, but it didn't bother me cause I got discharged and about a week later I got out with my back. And I went 20 years before I give up to have an operation. And they done a fusion on my fifth lumbar and my tailbone. And 20 years later that fusion started growing and they had to go in there again and take it out. And they didn't put nothing back. So I aint' had no trouble since. I had a quadruple heart bypass about three years ago. And I had a colon cancer operation and it took the right side of my colon out. And I've got prostate cancer too. But so far aint' none of it bothers me after my operation. I take female hormones all the time for this prostate cancer and it makes my breasts grow (*Laughing*).

Interviewer #1: Something to look forward too then.

Pfc. Rasco: And the stuff below draws up I guarantee you (*Laughing*).

Interviewer #1: Well you look really great.

Pfc. Rasco: I feel good.

Interviewer #1: You look really healthy and sharp.

Pfc. Rasco: I feel good. I take 8 or 9 pills every morning and 4 at night. And I get the female and I wear a patch on the back of my shoulder for pain and stuff. I have trouble with this shoulder because I fell. I used to fall; I'd be just walking along and all at once my knee just give way and down I'd go.

Interviewer #1: Is that from a war...?

Pfc. Rasco: I don't know what caused it, but I hurt it. I fell down here by the water fountain and this spot right here is real tender and I'm taking therapy again on it.

Interviewer #2: I was asking you earlier when you ended your combat in Europe — what did they tell you — that we're done here; that we're leaving? What were the circumstances?

Pfc. Rasco: We come back to France. They had them counts named Lucky Stripe and different things, Chesterfield. And we come back and we were out in this — I call it a pasture and them pup tents. And I had a darn tooth that was abscessed; one of them dang tooth. They sent me up to the first aid station. They had a dentist there and he got a hold to that tooth and he was jerking and it wouldn't come out. Another guy got me around the head and he fell jerking back and forth and they broke the roots off. And its still in there. Right now it's in there, right up here. It don't never bother me. But my face swelled up something awful. But I wouldn't go back to the medical because we were fixin' to come home. I say if they put me in a damn hospital I won't get to go home. And about 4 days later a big piece of bone worked out of that thing. But that root is still in there. And then when a dentist pulled my teeth he said, "You know you've got a root down there...." I said, "Yeah I know it real well."

Interviewer #2: What signaled the end of your unit's campaign in Germany?

Pfc. Rasco: Well we heard on the radio that the Germans had surrendered.

Interviewer #2: So, VE Day you were there.

Pfc. Rasco: Oh, yeah. But one time before that when we was outside of Brunswick, we rode up to the town and here comes Gen. Hodges. He told us that the Germans were going to surrender. They didn't surrender they give him a few minutes to get back and they come back by us. That night we went on into the town, but we was in reserve again and you could hear them shooting up at the street up there about a ½ a mile. They was having a hell of a battle. And we went into this German house and there was a bunch of German men and women in there and they had the BBC turned up on the radio. It said, "Fierce street fighting raging in Brunswick." We was listening too it on the radio and we could hear it up the street there that they were having a battle.

Interviewer #2: I guess what I'm trying to get at is what was the immediate reaction then when you find out it was...

Pfc. Rasco: Oh, we were real glad it was over with.

Interviewer #2: Was that was the first time you could really...

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah relax. Say that's it we aint' fighting no more.

Interviewer #2: Was there a sense you needed to stay around and stabilize the region?

Pfc. Rasco: They moved us back right quick. We went down on the Rhine River there and went down to Frankfurt and we pitched our pup tents. And they took all the high point men out of our outfit and put them with the high point men of another division. And sent there low point men over to us and we got new officers and everything.

Interviewer #2: When you say high point — those are the ones that had been there the longest right?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah they had the most points. My purple heart gave me 5 more points. When were there in Frankfurt and of course we got us some wine. This old German come down there with a keg of wine and we bought it off of him. Asked him if he had any more. And he rolled a 55 gallon barrel down there in a wheel barrel and we poured all the water out of our enlisted bags and put that wine in and the whole damn company got drunk (*Laughing*). And the next day we was up there and I guess it was them P47 — some of them pilots come over and they buzzed us — come down real low (*Laughing*). And I took off my helmet and I throwed it up there and I'd liked to hit that damn — if I'd a hit it I would have brought him down. I didn't miss a propel that far... I had that old strap and (*Laughing*). That would have been something else if I had brought that plane down.

Interviewer #1: Did you ever have to do first aid on another soldier?

Pfc. Rasco: No we had a medic with us all the time.

Interviewer #1: What did you think of your medics?

Pfc. Rasco: We had one that wasn't worth a darn. He'd run off when we'd get in a battle. But they got rid of him and we got another in. Boy that night when I got hit, I hollered medic and he was right on top of me just that quick (*he snaps*). I told him I realized. But boy for a minute I had my helmet and it come down; I got it and I just eased my hand up there and I knew I was going to find a hole up there because my whole head was dead. And it was a knot already up on top of my head about that high and I sho' was glad.

Interviewer #1: You mentioned you saw Marlene Dietrich. Did you see any other USO shows? Or where did you see her?

Pfc. Rasco: That's the only one I got to see oversees.

Interviewer #2: Where was that again that you saw her.

Pfc. Rasco: It was either Haarlem or Maastricht Holland — I forget which.

Interviewer #1: What about the donuts and coffee and stuff like that? Didn't the USO provide that sometimes?

Pfc. Rasco: Well the Red Cross come over one day and brought some coffee and donuts. And when I was in California, every time we got paid it was a man sitting there from the Red Cross had a pistol on him. He was wanting us to give money ya know. And we did. And we got overseas there and them Red Cross girls come up there and she charged us 15 cents for a cup of coffee and a donut.

Interviewer #2: They are charging you?

Pfc. Rasco: Yes Sir, we had to pay — we'd pay for it?

Interviewer #2: You are over there hanging your butt on the line, living in those conditions, eating those nasty little rations and they come over and have the nerve to charge you?

Pfc. Rasco: They sure as hell did.

Interviewer #2: How much money would you have had on you?

Pfc. Rasco: They never did get no more money from me neither after that. I give to the — what was it? I can't think of it now. Well that was it.

Interviewer #1: Did you ever see any famous generals?

Pfc. Rasco: Well that old General Hodges come up to the front there. Well I see him that day he come back that the Germans give him so much time. But he come up there one day and we had an old Lt. Col. Battalion Commander. He told him you better get your butt back down yonder. He said, "This is too damn close for a General to be up here."

Interviewer #1: Did you think that was pretty funny to see a General kinda embarrassed?

Interviewer #2: At that time was Hodges a Brigadier or a Lt. General?

Pfc. Rasco: I think we had always one star or two or what.

Interviewer #1: So this wasn't Courtney Hodges then?

Pfc. Rasco: But we had Col. McDell he was from North Carolina. The first division was North and South Carolina National Guard.

Interviewer #1: Oh really.

Pfc. Rasco: Old 45 Johnson was telling Col. McDell. He said, "Your men are the sorriest, dirtiest and all that." And Col. McDell said, "Yeah and they are the fightingest SOBs you ever seen too."

Interviewer #1: He didn't care about the spit and polish huh? Were you in the Hurtgen Forest at any time?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, the black forest and all down in there and the Rhine valley. That Rhine valley is beautiful country, beautiful farm country.

Interviewer #1: Was the fighting in that forest pretty bad?

Pfc. Rasco: Yes, it was pretty bad. The weather was mostly bad. We didn't do too much fighting because the Germans was pulling back. After that Battle of the Bulge they lost a lot of stuff.

Interviewer #2: Was the Hurtgen forest especially, it was very foggy a lot of the time wasn't it. Was it a psychological demon that you had to deal with trying to get through there?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah you couldn't see. I didn't know whether we knew where we was going or not because you couldn't see nothin'.

Interviewer #2: I mean there were just so many losses in that forest.

Pfc. Rasco: We stumble right up on that machine gun. It's a wonder a bunch of us didn't get killed. We didn't have no casualty, but them three boys run the wrong damn way.

Interviewer #1: What German weapons did you fear the most?

Pfc. Rasco: Well their artillery gave us more trouble. They had some big railroad guns that they would shoot and when they hit one of them towns they'd light up the whole country. And them old buzz bombs coming over. I was back in the hospital in a monastery up on top of the mountain. I got a boil on my hand that got infected; I had a red streak that went up, and they sent me back to the hospital. And we used to hide some of them buzz bombs and you could look down and they'd be going across there. And when that motor cut off it was fixin' to come down.

Interviewer #2: That's what my mother said!

Pfc. Rasco: When you heard that motor cut off, brother you better run.

Interviewer #2: This is just a little side story, but we grew up outside of Houston — the Northeast side of Houston. The Goodyear blimp was based in hanger in Conroe off I-45 and back sometime in the early 80s, especially around December or the cold of November, it would come over in the early evening. And I remember the first time it did that my mother got really scared. She could hear the sound of the Goodyear blimp coming and she said, "My God that sounds a lot like the buzz bombs in E-1." And it was like whew! What was I going to say? You had mentioned you had seen some heavy German artillery mounted on railroad cars...

Pfc. Rasco: Big old long barrel guns. I don't know...

Interviewer #2: Did you see them up close?

Pfc. Rasco: I saw a German tank it had a 380-millimeter cannon on it, but it wouldn't shoot but about a mile or so. That barrel on the tank — it was on the tank. And that barrel was I bet you that big around. And it was just as short. It wasn't four foot long.

Interviewer #2: So did you get to see some other...

Pfc. Rasco: I never did get to see where it was fired. It was knocked out. Our tanks knocked it out. It was sitting out there in a field.

Interviewer #2: The railroad guns were part of special trains.

Pfc. Rasco: I think so.

Interviewer #2: Did you ever see any of those trains?

Pfc. Rasco: Uh-uh. We rode some trains back in France, but I never did see any up in there. We was riding through France that one time and he pulled off to the side and stopped. There was a bunch of horses out there and I went out there and crawled over that fence. Somebody hollered, “Rasco ride that horse.” I jumped up on that damn horse and it took off a running. I rode about a hundred yards and I throw my right leg over and slid off on the ground and just run a few steps and stopped. And they thought boy that’s a real cowboy. I probably couldn’t have done it again in a thousand years.

Interviewer #1: Were there — how many other Texans were there with you?

Pfc. Rasco: Well we had a Mexican boy from El Paso and another boy from San Anton and I believe that was it.

Interviewer #1: So what did you think about German POWs? How did they act when they were captured in general?

Pfc. Rasco: Oh we didn’t bother them. They just — they loaded them up on trucks and hauled them back and they’d waive at us as they went by. They was getting a ride and we was having to walk.

Interviewer #1: Did your unit ever travel down the autobahn?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah a little bit.

Interviewer #1: What was that like?

Pfc. Rasco: Oh he had a nice road system — old Hitler did. If he’d have been a decent person, he could have been a wonderful person. Because he had built a road system in Germany that had them roads far apart — maybe 100 yards apart — one going this way and one coming this way.

Interviewer #2: I’ve been on it too, ha ha. Did you ever see any V-2 operations; any of these mobile V2 milerwandems was the name for the mobile device.

Pfc. Rasco: They have them buzz bombs. One was V-1 wasn’t it? And the other was a V-2. They were diesel them motors or something? Cause they go (*Rasco makes a loud noise*) and you could hear them coming.

Interviewer #1: Did you ever see any allied bombing raids or hear them or witness them? Ya know the big bombers...

Pfc. Rasco: I seen one one time. I forget we was fixin’ to go on a forced march to make some attack on some little ol’ town. And heard these damn planes. And I looked up and them B-17s I followed them and they was going towards Berlin and as far as you could see was planes going and I looked back this way and as far as I could see there were planes coming. I bet it was a thousand of them darn things. And it’d be one here, one over here, one over there — just a line of them. I said, “God I’m glad I’m not going to be on the ground when they drop off them bombs.” Some crazy fool over there got the idea one time that they was going to take them big search lights and shine them in the Germans eyes and we was going to come in behind them and clean them up. And they

was going to have a practice run. We got out there in that darn field and they turned the search lights on and about that time here comes some German planes. They started dropping bombs. And of course I got caught loose shooting up at them. And we was out there at that field and directly, all the stuff that went up started coming back down. Just look liked hail hitting on the ground. That ended that. We never did try that in an actual attack.

Interviewer #1: What was that like seeing all the anti-aircraft fire?

Pfc. Rasco: It was pretty some of it. Them quad-50s was something else. Them 50 caliber it was 4 of them right then in them barrels and every 5th bullet that come out was a tracer — pink. In fact one time we went in and attacked — the second attack was out at every end. We'd go across this field from that Mariasdorp to another little old town over there about a mile in a half. We stacking into the sun. The sun was shining in our face. They always told us you know keep the sun at your back and use all available cover. Well we come out of that Mariasdorp, one old boy says, “damn you could see for three days.” And we got a little farther and they started shooting them tracers; shooting them machine guns at us. And them tracers bullets are white. Them Germans ones was. And one old boy said look at them pretty dew drops. I says, “Do drops my butt, them are tracers bullets.”

Interviewer #1: Do you remember any other crazy things?

Interviewer #2: And what about the food you had in Germany. What type of food was it? Was it just regular like bread or...?

Pfc. Rasco: We eat K-rations mostly. And we'd trade — sometimes we trade some of them to them tankers. They had them 10 and 1 rations. And they come in a big box and there would be several meals in one box. Of course them K-rations we got a breakfast, a dinner, a supper.

Interviewer #2: What about the food that wasn't GI issued food. Food that you obtained once you were billeted in these towns.

Pfc. Rasco: We never did eat — only what we scrounged and cooked ourselves. I fried a bunch of French fried potatoes one time down there on that railroad we was in the Battle of the Bulge. We had a wood heater in there and a lot of pine fire wood. And somebody found some and hid it from the Germans. They found a big bucket of grease and about a 50 lbs. Bag of potatoes. And I peeled them potatoes and sliced them up and French fried em'. I fried potatoes all one evening and boy we was eating them things.

Interviewer #1: Did you ever go through the Siegfried line?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah we went thru part of it. They had abandoned it where we went thru. They had them pillboxes set up. They had them dragon teeth concrete sticking up. Them concrete things. I think it pride the tracks up off of the ground and the tanks couldn't crawl over or something. But they had them old big pillboxes. Lord them walls were that thick. They had them slots where they shot out them.

Interviewer #1: What do you think of the Germans just as soldiers? Were they good?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, but umm — they was fighting two battles. They couldn't retreat them damn SS men would shoot them. They were mean son of a bitches.

Interviewer #2: Did you happen to encounter SS prisoners, SS officers or prisoners?

Pfc. Rasco: No I don't think I ever seen any SS prisoners. I guess when their soldiers surrendered well they'd withdraw and take care of themselves cuz we done whooped them twice.

Interviewer #2: What about atrocities? Did you see any evidence of atrocities at these labor camps we liberated?

Pfc. Rasco: Not personally I didn't.

Interviewer #2: Did you hear — I took an entire course at UT on this — the Holocaust and the whole notion of Hitler's final solution? At what point did the public in Western Britain and the United States learn of or hear of these atrocities and these mass exterminations? What was the sense among U.S. troops in your unit? Did you know about it?

Pfc. Rasco: We didn't know about it until after the war was over. The prisoners we saw — the Poles and the Russians — they would use them as slave labor. They got those that worked in the ammunition factories — they got to not putting powder in some of them shells. And once in a while you would hear that shell coming and it would hit the ground and go "blump." You 'd draw up expecting that explosion and it wouldn't be nothin' — it was just a dud.

Interviewer #1: So it was a pretty good number of duds.

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, quite a few.

Interviewer #2: So the prisoners that you encountered were prisoners who had been used then as workers. Were they malnourished?

Pfc. Rasco: No, the ones I saw wasn't — the Poles or no Russians either. But I tell you we was marching them Russian people up the street and a German come by on a bicycle and he done lost that bicycle because they come get him and take it away from him.

Interviewer #2: I was fascinated by the BMW sidecar combinations the Germans had. Did you ever see any of those?

Pfc. Rasco: Uh-huh. No, everybody rode bicycles that I saw. They had park and rides where they could run that bicycle and set it in there and padlock it.

Interviewer #2: When you had gone back to the end of your combat service and you said that your unit went back to France.

Pfc. Rasco: We stayed there about a couple of weeks I guess and then they zipped us back to England. We got on the Marine Wolff and American ship and come back to England.

Interviewer #2: This is roughly...May of 1945.

Pfc. Rasco: The war ended May the 18th and that was after that. It could have been the last of May we come back to England.

Interviewer #2: Almost about a year after the initial landings of Normandy. What about 8 months after your first...

Pfc. Rasco: I was overseas only 11 months and 11 days. We loaded in South Hampton on the Queen Mary and we started home — they had to wait till the tide come in where it would float cuz it was sitting on the bottom. And they started easing out and I bet we wouldn't had made it 2 miles in 5, 6, 7, 8 minutes. It was more than that. We just eased — I said, "God its gonna take us a month to get home." And we finally got out to that open sea and they ride that thing back and it took off like a motorboat. Boy it just took off and we come home in 4 days — from South Hampton to New York.

Interviewer #1: So when did you hear about Hitler dying?

Pfc. Rasco: I think we were back in England by that time. I believe it was, but I won't swear to it.

Interviewer #1: And what did you feel when you heard he was dead?

Pfc. Rasco: Oh I was glad. I just wanted us to take Berlin. I wanted to see it, but I didn't get to see it. We stopped on the Elbe River in Magdeburg.

Interviewer #2: Did you think that Hitler had had some — Did you believe the news when you heard that Hitler was dead or did you think it was just another propaganda?

Pfc. Rasco: No, I believed it was.

Interviewer #1: What was it like when you came home? How did your friends and family react?

Pfc. Rasco: Well they were all glad to see me. I came in to a little town — Groesbeck. I had an uncle live over there in Groesbeck and I had 2 kids. And I got discharged in San Antone and I rode the bus to Groesbeck. And about 3 o'clock in the morning I went down to his house and woke him up. And him and his wife and 2 kids they all loaded me up and we went home. And my older brother had come home from Australia. We sat up the rest of the night and talked.

Interviewer #1: Did all your brothers make it back okay?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah. I was the only one who got a scratch.

Interviewer #1: What where your feelings when you saw — I guess the Queen Mary came in the New York harbor? What was that like?

Pfc. Rasco: It was wonderful boy. That's when we all run over to the side of the ship and liked to turn it over.

Interviewer #1: And did you get to spend some time in New York?

Pfc. Rasco: No we got off there and went to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey on a train. That liked to have scared me to death. We'd been riding them old slow trains over there. That electric train was moving boy. We went to Kilmer and stayed there. We stayed there about a week. And um — got on a train and come thru Tyler, down thru Hearn, and on to San Antone. And they gave me leave. I got 30 days leave. And I was home and they sent me a note saying they'd lowered the point system and I had enough points to get discharged. And they wired me 7 more days. So I took that and went to San Antone and they discharged me and I come home.

Interviewer #1: Were you worried about getting sent to the Pacific?

Pfc. Rasco: Now that's where we were going. They dropped the atomic bomb over there. We was in England when they dropped the atomic bomb.

Interviewer #1: What did you think about that?

Pfc. Rasco: I thought boy good deal. I didn't care if they blow em' all off.

Interviewer #1: Were you fantasizing about what you were going to eat when you came back to the U.S.?

Pfc. Rasco: No, I just got Mama's cooking.

Interviewer #1: What did she make you? Did she make you your favorite meal?

Pfc. Rasco: A little bit of everything. We started hunting — it was in the fall of the year. I killed a goose and a deer, and a bunch of squirrels. And we had turkey and dressing and deer and squirrel and goose.

Interviewer #2: When you first got back into Texas — and again this is before as you said before you were able to realize you could be discharged soon. Was your view of TX different? Did you think that there was a sense that things had changed since the last time you were in Texas?

Pfc. Rasco: No, not no whole lot.

Interviewer #2: What about the views or perceptions you had of people back here at home. Did you see them in a different light or do you think they perceived of you differently?

Pfc. Rasco: I didn't think so.

Interviewer #1: How did you change?

Pfc. Rasco: I think I matured a little bit. I was just a young green kid.

Interviewer #1: Did you feel more confident?

Pfc. Rasco: I was 20 years old I guess when I went in. Or I was 19 and turned 20 cuz my birthday was February and I was inducted Jan 24th and Feb. 17th I turned 20.

Interviewer #2: And when you were discharged, at what grade were you discharged?

Pfc. Rasco: I was still a Pfc.

Interviewer #1: So apparently even though you had just one eye that didn't affect your ability to operate a BAR.

Pfc. Rasco: Uh-uh. I didn't know no different. I can see outta this eye, I got peripheral vision, I can see my hands working. But when I cover this eye up well if ya'll are a little further back I couldn't tell which one is which.

Interviewer #1: Ya must have been a pretty good shot or you wouldn't have been able to bag that goose.

Pfc. Rasco: The test said I was 20/20. The test ending was 20/400. So its legally blind in that eye. I couldn't see how to shoot or anything with this eye.

Interviewer #2: The BAR that you had — did you carry that same exact weapon the entire time you were in Europe.

Pfc. Rasco: Uh-huh. The night I got hit I think I lost my weapon and they gave me a new one. I don't know where it went. It knocked me loose from it and it was dark. Just as dark as it could be.

Interviewer #1: How did it feel when you were firing a full automatic?

Pfc. Rasco: I mean on the shoulder you can't control it. But I got where I could hold it down here and shoot from the hip. I could hit a can out there sometime about 50 feet.

Interviewer #1: Did you ever do what they called marching fire? Where you'd just be walking in a line abreast firing as you go on?

Pfc. Rasco: No.

Interviewer #2: Did you come to know that gun and know how it physically felt?

Pfc. Rasco: We had to break that gun down in our infantry training. We had to break that gun down blindfolded or at night, clean it, and put it back together. But overseas you didn't have all that equipment to clean them things like that.

Interviewer #1: Would you have traded it for any other kind of weapon?

Pfc. Rasco: No, I don't believe I would, unless I used one of them sub-machine guns. Some of them squad leaders had some of them sub-machine guns, but they took that stop off of it and fired it like them little grease guns deal. They hold that handle here, the stop

was off, but the trigger was just in front of that. And they shot a 45 shell. It would knock something down when it hit it.

Interviewer #1: Did you ever use hand grenades?

Pfc. Rasco: No, never did, I threw some. Me and another boy could throw them further than anybody else. They teach you to lob it like this, but I throw it like a football. Me and another boy we could throw it further than anybody.

Interviewer #2: When they gave you that other BARF for you taking the hit. Was it an obvious difference in the way it felt from the original gun.

Pfc. Rasco: They all about the same.

Interviewer #2: When did you have to turn your weapons in? Before you got on the Queen Mary?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah they done take your guns away from us. I don't remember just when it was. We got that new officer in and he had us out there one day in France policing the area picking up stuff out there in that pasture. And we had a habit and somebody would say 48, somebody say 49, and somebody say 50 and all together now, not to loud some shit. He had us picking up that chunk stuff out there and somebody started that. He says, "Ya'll stop that or you gonna go on a 25 mile hike. It was still cold, clear morning and somebody says fuck you just as loud and it just rung and we went on a 25-mile hike.

Interviewer #2: You are referring to your new company commander?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah. He was one of the low point over in his company and they put him over and put him in charge. He even took our guns away from us up in Frankfurt one time. Somebody shot at him one night or at least he claims they did and we had to stack our guns up by his tent.

Interviewer #1: This is while the war was still going on?

Pfc. Rasco: That was after the war. That when they took all the high point men and put em' in one thing and the low point men in the other. And while I was home they lowered the point system and my purple heart gave me enough to get out.

Interviewer #1: That's an incredible story. Is there anything we should have asked you are that you'd like to say?

Pfc. Rasco: No, I don't think so.

Interviewer #2: Could you refresh my memory on the point system? How many points you had to have to be discharged.

Pfc. Rasco: I think they had lowered it down to 40 some odd when I got out. It had to have been — I think it took about 60 points you had to have there.

Interviewer #2: How would you earn the points? If you were combat wounded?

Pfc. Rasco: Combat, yeah. Purple Heart, combat and the length of combat and all that stuff. I had an infantrymen's combat badge in that blue thing with that rifle and that wreath. I got it down there in a room. I got my purple heart down there too.

Interviewer #2: When were you awarded the Purple Heart?

Pfc. Rasco: They gave it to me overseas. About a week or so after I got shot. It come in a little box and when I got discharged they called me and another boy up to the stage and made the official presentation of the Purple Heart.

Interviewer #2: How is your purple heart documented? In other words, you were hit in the field; you went to the aid station later on...?

Pfc. Rasco: I guess the aid station turned it in. It was on my discharge, when I got my discharge it had a Purple Heart Combat badge, Purple Heart and my campaign ribbons and stuff. It was a long time ago.

Interviewer #1: How long after hostilities ended until you started feeling — I don't know — normal again or like a civilian...?

Pfc. Rasco: It took awhile. I had to tell my family — if I'm asleep don't put your hand on me. I'm gonna hit you or something. You have those dreams or nightmares sometimes.

Interviewer #2: Does that still happen to you?

Pfc. Rasco: No, but it took me awhile to get used to — if I was asleep somebody could touch me.

Interviewer #1: Do any of your memories from the war still haunt you?

Pfc. Rasco: No not much. I wouldn't take from my experience, but I wouldn't want to go back thru it. I'd like to go overseas and go back the trail we went up. I'd always wanted to do that and see how the country built back.

Interviewer #2: Yeah, I think that's definitely — I know there have been a lot of documentaries I've seen on like the History Channel or public television of veterans going back. When Pres. Reagan appeared during the 40th Anniversary of the D-Day invasion and this June is on the 60th — there are a lot of side stories leading up to the week of the anniversary both in the print press and online and on television that I saw — where surviving veterans were able come back and ya know, they were able to come back and go to the villages of French coastal towns that they... All these were airborne and rangers.

Pfc. Rasco: Well before we left over there and they give us a sheet of paper. And it had a write up — it had my name, veteran of the 30th, coming home, been in Europe so long and all that. They sent it home to my newspaper and they printed it up in the paper.

Interviewer #1: Wow. How did people treat you? I guess you didn't live in a city right, but when you go into town or whatever.

Pfc. Rasco: Groesbeck got about 4,000 people now. Its got more now than Houston.

Interviewer #1: Did people treat you well?

Pfc. Rasco: Oh, yeah. I had a lot of boys. The neighbor boys went to the Army when I did. There was a Harris boy and a Bonds boy. They both did. We rode the bus together to Dallas when we were both inducted. We went to Camp Walters. But we split up and I went to California they all went someplace else.

Interviewer #2: This may be kind of a strange question but now Groesbeck is umm a ways away from Westphalia is...

Pfc. Rasco: It's a county seat. Groesbeck is the county seat of Limestone County — its 40 miles east of Waco.

Interviewer #2: Do you have any negative perceptions of German Texans? Cause I know...

Pfc. Rasco: Uh-uh. That's a German girl right out there at the desk. She was born in Germany.

Interviewer #2: A lot of people — I'm a musician and I play Umpa music. Mostly Chec and a little bit of German music and I studied the history of the music and culture in Texas. The Germans in the Texas Hill Country — a lot of them very uncomfortable, very low profile during the Second World War.

Pfc. Rasco: I'll tell you one thing — the German people and the Dutch people are the cleanest people in Europe to my notion of all the ones I come in contact with.

Interviewer #2: Cleaner than the French?

Pfc. Rasco: And the Belgians. You could sit in their dining room and their's a damn cow or a horse, right next to the thing. And I saw something over there that I never seen before. It had them big ol' carts and it had a big ol' horse — an old perching horse or something, one of them great ol' big draft horses pulling on this side and a cow over here pulling and have hammock swung underneath that thing and a calf was riding in it. I seen that.

Interviewer #1: Well it's about 4:30.

Interviewer #2: It is. It is.

Interviewer #1: Time has just flown here. This is the longest interview we have done since we started this program.

Pfc. Rasco: Well I'm glad I could help.

Interviewer #1: Well this has just been fascinating. I've never had a chance to sit down and pick the brains of someone who has been over...

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah I've been there. An ol' boy says, "I've been over the mountain and back."

Interviewer #2: Do you — have you been a member of the VFW post here?

Pfc. Rasco: No, I was a member over in Mexia but we had an American Legion post over in Groesbeck and uh, I joined both of them for a while, but I didn't know none of the boys in Mexia. And I knew all the boys there in Groesbeck. We have a breakfast every third Tuesday. My brother was one of the cooks. He'd make a big skillet of gravy and we'd have them Grand biscuits. And bacon and eggs and sausage and all kind of fruit juice and plenty of coffee.

Interviewer #1: Ohhh that sounds good.

Pfc. Rasco: We have it every third Tuesday of the month.

Interviewer #2: Have you ever had a chance to go to the Texas Military Forces Museum in Camp Mabry in Austin or?

Pfc. Rasco: No, I've never been there.

Interviewer #2: Or participate in any of the ceremonies on Muster day?

Pfc. Rasco: See I belong to this Purple Heart in Austin, Post 1919 I believe it is. I think they got one over there in Belton, but I didn't know it and I talked to Laurie there in Social Services and she called them up on the phone and they sent me an application and I sent them that and a copy of my discharge when I had the Purple Heart and it wasn't a week til' I got my Purple Heart. Got my membership.

Interviewer #1: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Pfc. Rasco: No, I don't know anything anymore interesting. We've about covered it all.

Interviewer #1: I bet there's a bunch more you just don't remember it all!

Interviewer #2: I meant to ask you again Marlene Dietrich — what did you think of her as a singer?

Pfc. Rasco: She was signing when we got interrupted and had to leave.

Interviewer #2: How much of the show did you see?

Pfc. Rasco: About half.

Interviewer #2: Did you feel jipped that you didn't get to see the rest of the show?

Pfc. Rasco: Well it didn't cost me nothin' so. They gives that old invasion money. I've still got some of it. A little old square notes about that big. Them people wouldn't take it over there. No they wouldn't take them. I found some German money and I gave it to some old gal. She was a housekeeper for some of them people. And hell I didn't have no

use for it and I knew she didn't have nothin' — I just give her the dang money. I don't know how much it was — so many marks.

Interviewer #2: But you say you've never been back over to Europe?

Pfc. Rasco: Uh-uh. I'd always wanted to go back. But I got married and moved to Corsicana. Do you know where Corsicana is?

Interviewer #2: Oh, yeah friend of mine is a former Municipal Judge of Corsicana.

Pfc. Rasco: What's his name?

Interviewer #2: Job Jones. He's from Chatfield.

Interviewer #1: I've been to the bakery there — Collin Street Bakery.

Pfc. Rasco: Collin. That's my first job — shipping fruitcake.

Interviewer #1: Really, the famous...

Pfc. Rasco: My mother died on my birthday on February 7th 1949. And I got married in October. I was going to college up there at Tehuacana — a little town up there on the hill. It lacked 3 votes from being the Capitol of Texas. And I went under the GI bill. I went a year and a half in the summer term and then I got married and I went to Corsicana and I went to work at Collin Street and when the fruitcake season was over they wanted me to stay on and drive the bread truck. So I did — I drove a bread truck for about a year and a half. And had trouble with my back and when I was home they fired me and I sued them. I didn't get much money, but I got a little.

Interviewer #1: I'm glad you got something.

Pfc. Rasco: And then I went to work for the Fire Department and I worked for the Fire Department for 15 years. And I got promoted to Captain and I was in charge of the Number 3 Fire Station they built 3 new Fire Stations. Me and the Asst. Chief, and a guy out of Tyler — he worked for the Seagrave Fire Fighting Company. And we went to Columbus, Ohio and got a 65 feet aerial ladder and 2 big 1,000-gallon pumpers and we drove them back. Before that I went to work for a used car dealer on the Dodge house there in Corsicana — Louis Territa. We went to Detroit, Michigan one time in an old Kaiser-Frazer car and got some 57' Dodge pickups — drove one and pulled one. All the way from Detroit back to Corsicana. We was gone a week. I've done a little bit of everything. And when I was working for the Fire Dept. I started carpeting. Cuz' two of the Fireman started contracting out and they used the other fireman on their days off as carpenters. And we built a whole bunch of houses. One time we had 15 houses going at one time.

Interviewer #1: You built it for other fireman?

Pfc. Rasco: Yeah, no. These firemen they built it — they was contracted from the outside and they would use the other fireman as laborers.

Interviewer #1: That's nice.

Pfc. Rasco: My Dad has been a carpenter and farmer too and I caught on pretty quick and I got pretty good. I built a lot of cabinets out of that ¾ inch plywood — Ash plywood — \$45 a sheet back then. I imagine its close to \$100 now.

Interviewer #2: How long have you been here?

Pfc. Rasco: I have been here 2 years. Dec. 11th will be 2 years.

Interviewer #2: Where were you living prior to coming to living here.

Pfc. Rasco: I was at home. I lived by myself the last 20 years.

Interviewer #2: Here in Temple?

Pfc. Rasco: No, in Groesbeck. Between Groesbeck and Mexia. I bought a fisherman's cabin out in a Ft. Parker. My front fence is the Ft. Parker estate line.

Both Interviewers: Oh. Wow!

Pfc. Rasco: There is a pent oak tree out in front of my house. Me and my brother measured it and its just lack a few inches of being 14 foot around it.

Interviewer #1: My goodness

Pfc. Rasco: The squirrels is all out in there. I got to feeding them pecans. And I got one trained and I put the pecan up on a fence post and that squirrel climb up there and eat it. And I rub it while she was eating.

Interviewer #1: You have your own paradise out there.

Pfc. Rasco: Coons. Lord there was a lot of coons. They got so bad I got some live traps. I got some coon hunting friends. And in about a week in a half I caught about 10 coons and I give them to them and they trained their young coon dogs. They'd turn one loose and let the puppies run em'. And we got some deer there now. I killed two or three deer there on my brother's place. Our old home place.

Interviewer #1: We better hit the road. I gotta get the rental car back.

Pfc. Rasco: Hmm. I got 25 til' 5.