

The Ghost Army
DICK SYRACUSE

[GA 425]

Q: Your name, rank and unit.

A: Richard Syracuse, first lieutenant, platoon leader, the 4th platoon of the 31st-32nd Signal Company Special.

Q: How did you get into the Army and the 23rd?

A: Man, that's a story. I was called to active duty as a chemical warfare officer, after having received a second lieutenancy through ROTC in the infantry. And the Army in its infinite wisdom decided that as a chemical engineering student, I would be— better serve the military in the chemical warfare. I joined the chemical— I reported to duty in June of 1942, and I don't know, I was at Edgewood Arsenal maybe for about 6 weeks. And to my amazement, I was ordered to take a cadre, form a company at Camp Landing, Florida, Chemical Smoke Generator Company. And to my amazement, when I met my cadre (these were the non-commissioned officers, first sergeant on down to corporal), 14, I discovered they were a colored group. And we used the word “colored” at that time, and we didn't use the word “black.” I was somewhat pleased at the un-in-unusual responsibility I was being handed, fully unaware of what I faced in the South as a-an officer commanding a black unit. And .. the trials and tribulations, you might call them, occurred very quickly. The night that we left, myself and two other officers with their cadres to report to Camp Landing, Florida, we took a-a regular train out of Edgewood. And the agreement with the conductor was that we would wait until the civilians had eaten, and then the-the three officers and 42 enlisted men, non-commissioned officers, would then go down to the—the dining car. And I've been a— We had meal tickets, they call them. Typical traditional

Army method of doing things when there was a small group of organized troops moving.

Well, we entered the dining car, and the three officers naturally sat down at a table, the first sergeants sat down at their table, and (you know) and they were organizing themselves in rank. And out of the corner of my eye, I saw the dining room conductor busying himself with a white sheet. And he was hanging the white sheet up between us and the troops, the men. And I im- politely asked him what he thought he was doing. He said, "Well, son," he says, "in- We just passed the Mason-Dixon line in the South." He said, "White folks don't eat with black folks." So I said, "Well, you may be making a mistake here, sir." I said, "'We' is not white folks and black folks." [He] says, "We are members of the United States Army, these are soldiers in the Army, and we are officers. And we eat with our men." Now, the rest of the conversation is, in deference to the audience, is censored.

Q: You don't have to.

A: Be-because I-I advised him in no uncertain way that he was going to take the sheet down, or he would be wearing it in a very embarrassing way. And .. I- And the other officers agreed with me, but I became, in a sense, a spokesman. And that was my first introduction to the wonderful world of-of the United States of America in 1942, in-in the South.

And in spite of the fact that I trained and was able to develop a company that passed its overseas shipment tests, and it was the only company in this black training regiment that did. This is very important. Twenty-eight. We did some great things. We-we were a cohesive unit. And- At that time, I and some other white officers were leaning on the War Department and representatives of the War Department for the purpose of having black officers assume commanding officer roles. Up to that point, a black officer in the United States Army could not

command troops, black or white. They were always in the subordinate. They weren't considered qualified. So it-- with heavy pressure both within and out of the Service, they finally changed the regulations, and the local commanders were advised to appoint black officers qualified to--

So who do you think the first white officer relieved to be replaced by a black officer? Was me. And as my first sergeant said, "You can fight them, lieutenant," he says, "but you can't beat them." He says, "The Army's too big." He was regular Army. And it broke his heart, and a lot of the men who had gotten to know me and respect me, wrote to me afterwards and the outfit slowly went down the drain. And the last they had heard, Smitty, my first sergeant, was a corporal in an outfit in England, .. and the company commander was a white officer that I knew from Camp Siebert. And he said Smitty was doing very well, and "Like a lot of the other of your men, they all miss you."

And, well, at that point I was kind of floating around. Went out to Dugway Proving Grounds, and then finally came back to Edgewood Arsenal for battalion officer school. And that was an interesting situation, which doesn't bear upon the history. ... But while I was there, then I got orders to report to Pine Camp.

Q: [not recorded]

A: So I was ordered to-- I was ordered to Pine Camp as a-- as a smoke officer. At that point in time, the-the thought was that they would use the deceptive qualities of smoke, area smoke, along with sonic, to enhance sonic operations. So I was sent up to Pine Camp to service. I met Col. Railey on the-- a-an extraordinary figure. I mean, I--I had not been terribly impressed with the senior officers in the United States Army while I was in the South, but this guy had style, he had grace, and he was certainly a leader. And I can-can remember so well his-his greeting to me was that, "Lieutenant," he said, "the mission of our-- of your company will be to draw enemy fire." So I said, "That's rather interesting." What he actually meant, but it

would not been as dramatic, was that we would, in a sense, draw enemy attention away from the real effort and, in effect, were drawing the enemy fire. And I suggested that as a kid from the— New York, from the Bronx, I said, “You know, I— I certainly respect the role that we have to play, but I reserve the right to kick a little ass myself, if I get the opportunity.” And he roared. He says, “I love that.” He said— We-we hit it off right away. And he-he— After a little while (I don’t know how long, was very short period of time), they-the— Railey and the rest of his staff agreed that they weren’t going to use smoke as a corollary, and that if it was ever needed, there was enough smoke operations in the Army to serve the purpose and could be called upon. But he—he— it was suggested that the 31st sonic units, highly secret, should be protected, cloaks in, and my platoon was then designated for reconnaissance and security.

Q: So you’re protecting the guys who are doing sonic deception.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: In France, at times people thought there was a real armored division.

A: Well, it-it was classical. The— At-at that particular point in time, there had been enough publicity about dummy tanks and— and the GIs were pretty much aware of deception. They were not aware that there had actually, for the first time in history of United States Army, or maybe any army, a unit organized as 23rd Headquarters Special Troops would, for the specific purpose of tactical deception. That was their mission. And sonic— I mean, for all of us, I know certainly for myself, I had heard a little .. about wi— wire recording and— but I never dreamt that this could be incorporated in-into a combat arm, (you know) in the— And the people we worked with were astounded.

And one classical moment was during an operation along the Mosel River, you know. And we had a screen of-of cavalry. And I believe it was the 5th cavalry

that— They—they were involved in sort of a jumping match with the infantry. They would cross and get a bridge head across the Mosel. The infantry would then come in and take the position. The Germans would push the infantry outfit, which was relatively inexperienced, push them out, and the cavalry would come back and [push on]. And we would be in there to tactically deceive and make— because we were light— The Mosel in Luxembourg was very thinly held, and much to our regret later on, with the (you know) with the Bulge. But they had certain— the-the 12th Army group had X number of men, X number divisions, and they were deployed for the best strategic manner that they deemed (you know) appropriate.

This one particular night, we're playing a concert (as we would refer to it), and I was on— We had a perimeter between us, then the cavalry, and then the river and the Germans. And all of a sudden comes storming up the road, this guy looked like a monster because he had a flak jacket on, and there were hand grenades hanging, and carrying a Thompson submachine gun. And after we stopped him, (you know) sign, counter sign and the usual recognition, you know, and he sees, "Lieutenant?" "Yes, sir?" "What the hell's going on here, (you know) son?" I said, "Well, what do you mean, Colonel?" He says, "Well," he says, "what are them tanks doing here?" I said, "Well, there-there aren't really any tanks." Well, some [expletives] suitable to the occasion, and he says— (you know) The gist of it was, "Don't tell me. I know what I hear. (you know) There are tanks out there, and nobody told me there was going to be a tanker." So—so I said, "Well, it's—it's— wasn't intended, but this is what's-what's going on." And I explained to him about the sonic vehicles and what they were doing and-and why. And as it developed, he had been away at the staff— at the briefing, and he— and his aide, who had been to the briefing, had been called away before he had a chance to report fully to the colonel, and it was often the-the occasion. A lot of the ground people did not take s- deception seriously. So he wasn't told. So his parting words is, "Well, son," he says, "you certainly could have fooled me." And I told him, "I'm sor— It was not our intention, sir." [laugh]

Q: Not our intention to fool you, but we're trying to fool the other side.

A: Well, well, you know, that's obvious. That's what it was for. And then of course there were other moments, not as benign.

Out at Brest, one of our first operations, we did a very successful sonic imitation of the assembling of tanks. And for some reason or other, the commanding officer of this tank battalion sends his tanks right down the ravine that we had played for dummy's sake. And the Germans, in response to what we did, overloaded that area with 88's. And before the tanks got [almost what they call the line of departure, 5 or 6 tanks were blown out. And it was a serious error, but lack of coordination on a higher level, and-and unfortunately a lot of ground officers (armored infantry, so on) did not take tactical deception seriously. But as time went on, they began to. And then they began to ask for us. And- We had to prove our metal. We had to- We had to train, and in a limited period of time, equip, develop the tactical capabilities, and then convince our own people.

Q: Didn't have a manual for this?

A: No. No, no manual, no training manual, no table of organization. We played it by ear.

Q: [inaudible]

A: We- Example. I came up with a list of what I felt was necessary for my platoon for security's sake. And one of the big items was, get bazookas, because the most serious threat would be armored vehicles (see). And I remember, we-we-we didn't- We didn't get the bazookas actually until we were overseas. We never got them in the States. But I remember Railey on the phone, Col. Railey on the phone,

calling this general commanding a regional supply depot. And it was very interesting.

Q: A heated phone called? [repeat]

A: He had the phone tapped. He told-told the-the general that his- that this conversation was be re- being recorded. And I could hear the general on the other end of the phone say, "What the hell does that mean?" He never heard of recording a telephone call. [laugh] This is 1944, '43.

Q: The equipment you're using for deception is state-of-the-art for the time?

A: Well, you know, we- we had working with us up in Pine Camp, we had this civilian corps of experts in sound from Bell Laboratories, the big automotive company that made truck bodies and all, and special mounts and cradles for the sound equipment. And .. Railey and his staff organized Pine Camp, the Army Experimental Station, very carefully, and relied- called upon and utilized the advice of-of people who had been previously involved, like Doug Fairbanks, Jr., in the Navy, and of course the civilian people who were specialists in sound, like Bell Laboratories and others. So we had a kind of an interesting- It wasn't as-as off-the-hook, so to speak, as you would think. It was really conceptually organized very well. But we didn't have that much time. And then all of this information had to be filtered down. And I-I think- I think Lt. [Manza] and the- and the sonic people did a hell of a job.

Q: The guy who recorded the sound?

A: Yes. And they were brilliant. I'm going to tell you, as-as often as I be out there between them and the bad guys, and I'd be listening to that sound, that's as often as after a while my eyes were beginning to tell me what my ears were hearing,

and I began to see tanks. [laugh] And it was fasc— it was— It was absolutely— Psychologically it was the most un-unnerving thing; I would actually begin to see in the dark, see tanks. [laugh]

Q: They weren't there.

A: They weren't there. They were in my ear, but they weren't— [laugh] It-it was an extraordinary experience. And of course as we went along, we rapidly got better at it. I mean, getting in, getting out, positioning ourselves effectively, and then of course the recordings were brilliant. I mean, if-if the tanks had to— If there was a road leading up, tanks had to be— the music had to be described, “rum-bum-bum,” the-the change of gears. The tanks going up, tanks going down, tanks assembling, and background noise and men (you know) shouting commands, and— it was— It was quite-quite an operation.

And-and the-the— I think [that] made-made most of us most proud after a while was that we-we took it from-from zip, from zero, and we turned it into something. (you know) And we did it ourselves. I mean, without the help of others, but we organized it and coalesced it and brought it to fruition. And most-most of our operations, the people we worked with said they were— they were convinced that we-we did accomplish what our mission called for, to make them believe there was something going on, that wasn't.

Q: Well, it seems—

A: So-so as—as a sort of a— I was noted for my frivolity at times. I used to refer to us .. as the Cecil B. DeMille warriors. [laugh]

Q: Say that again.

A: Well, I-I used to refer to our-our 31st, 32nd, and the rest of the 23rd headquarters as the Cecil B. DeMille warriors. [laugh]

Q: You're putting on a show.

A: Yeah, we put on a damn good. [laugh] And I mean, we— At the very end, the last major operation, crossing of the Rhine River, we received a letter of commendation from the commanding general of the corps, Simpson, thanking us for our role in contributing to the success of the operation at Viersen. We covered, in a coordinated effort with other units, the movement into position of a corps. Now, a corps represents almost 200,000 men. You're talking about 3,000 men and some additional troops, covering a movement of a corps? And the-the results were evidence. When the— when the— When the real operation took place, there were only 17–17 casualties. In the crossing of a river under combat conditions? Unheard of. Absolutely unheard of. And some of the nay-sayers said, “Well, the Germans were on their last”— There was still a lot of fight left in them. And the-the reality was, their-their maps showed the elements of the corps in locations where we wanted them to believe— the cover plan called for, and not the actual locations in-in which the at—crossing took place.

Q: So it seems to you, that was a big success.

A: Oh. Not only to me. I mean, I was a lousy platoon leader. [laugh] Not lousy. Pretty good one. But I mean, to a lot of the staff officers and guys up—

(you know) I can remember, as an aside, I had a friend who, after the war was over and it was— I think it was after the Korean War, he went to City College to finish his education in sociology, and he took ROTC while he was there. Frankly, he took it because you got paid a couple bucks (you know) for like reserve officer training. And he had heard me talk about what we— what I did during the war. And while we had some thought about top secret, actually I don't recall to the same

extent that John Walker did that we were— they laid it on that heavy. In any event, in the— in the manual that he had (it wasn't classified, it was no "confidential" stamp on it or top— or "secret" stamp), there was— the-the story of the crossing of the Rhine, as an example of combat deception. And he mentioned to his instructor that his friend actually served in the army that was (you know) in the— in the organization that was involved in the operation. And wouldn't it be great if he came and he talked to the reserve officers about what happened on the ground? So I got up and I went there one afternoon—

Q: [inaudible]

A: And (you know) I told them about it, and nobody-nobody said, "Hey, this is really top, top [secret]. // I really believe what happened, there was so much classification and so— the Army was so big, and then it was suddenly condensed, that (you know) there was things that happened that were just passed by or forgotten, until [Enderlein] and some of the others went down to Washington and finally got-got the story declassified.

Q: Bureaucratic

A: So that we-we became legitimately able to talk about the-the epic. [laugh]

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Q: As you went along, you started doing more special effects.

A: Well, early on, we— it became apparent that in order to reasonably conceal the op— the movement of a real regiment or division, we had to— they had to remove their bumper markings on their vehicles, (you know) which indicated the-the organization they belonged to, and the patches, shoulder patches, which inevitably (you know) showed the headquarters or the organization they were with. So our people—and-and Bob Conrad can tell you, the— Fred Fox was instrumental, along with a few others, particularly the design people in the 603rd, that another good way was: It's one thing to take off the dummy— the real markings, but what happened to them? I mean, did they just disappear? So make them come alive now on the dummy.

So we began to put on their patches and put their bumper markings on, and we as— physically assumed the role. Only for every hundred of them, there might be ten of us. So in order to demonstrate to the world at large that there was a actual unit involved, what we did— And one of the ways intelligence was able to determine the strength or the activity or the intention of a unit in the field, was by the vehicular traffic. And we had the jeeps and half-tracks and command cars racing around. [laugh] And again, we were play acting. [laugh] And we would go to— If there was a town nearby, we would go into the town and we'd—we'd find out if like a division or a special unit had a particular song that they liked to sing, we'd get blitzed and then sing their song. [laugh] Might just as well sing their song [as] somebody else's. So it-it-it became— You could say it was-was somewhat theatrical. You know, we were— And again, this was— We were improvising this. Of course there was— there was drawbacks to this. I don't know anybody ever told you this story.

Q: I don't know which story you're going to tell me.

A: But when we were in-in Luxembourg, there was an officer's club at the 12th Army Group headquarters.

Q: Luxembourg, officer's club?

A: We-we were- We were at a briefing of the 12th Army Group Special Troops operation. And I-I passed by this officer who I had seen on several different occasions, who I got to know pretty well, and- (you know) in-in passing (you know) . So at the club he came over to me. He said, "Dick," he says, "you're with the 83rd infantry division now?" That was the patch of the day for us. He says, "Weren't you with 5th armored there? And if I'm not mistaken, in-in England you were with a-another outfit, the 23rd." So I said, "Well, (you know) I hate to admit it," I said, "but I've been fouling up quite a bit, so I mean, they- I-I guess they're looking to get rid of me, you know, pushing me around." So he says, he said, "Well, you better watch yourself." (you know) He says, "They're liable to bust you down and put your- put a rifle in your hand and make an infantryman." I said, "Well," I said, "that probably wouldn't be the worst thing could happen, you know." So that kind of talk. But this was very interesting. Here was a guy who suddenly caught on to the fact that in 5 or 6 months I had been in 3 different outfits. [laugh]

Q: Where did that happen? [repeat]

A: That was in the officer's club in the 12th Army Group, in Luxembourg.

Q: Tell me again about the special effects, how you guys added a new wrinkle.

A: [overlap] Well, what- (you know) It was one thing to have a unit that was moving into a tactical situation, to remove all signs of-of their origin or identity, and so as to cover their-their-their tracks. But the question then was asked: Well, where did

the real— Where did they go? So somebody had to take their place. And-and what happened was that we recognized that what we would do is, while they removed their shoulder patches and their bumper markings on their vehicles, we would adopt their shoulder patches and their bumper markings, and then now the dummy became the real, and the real disappeared. (See.) So that this little g- development became an in-intrinsic part of our operation. So in any given 2 or 3 weeks, we might have been 3 or 4 different [laugh] organizations. (you know) And it was— it was crucial, for example, in the Viersen operation, that-that we establish that the two infantry divisions were not where they were going to be to make the crossing, but where we wanted the Germans to think they were, which was 35 miles to the south.

Q: Are you driving around? What are doing to—

A: Everything. Driving around, hanging our wash out on the line, sound at night, radio— some of the— We would take over the radio nets and— It was enormously successful because the Germans would be eavesdropping naturally on the radio. And our people were so skilled at imitating the-the operators for the people we were taking over (you might say). And so the combination of-of all of the factors, again, as the Cecil B. DeMille story line. I mean, you know. The guy had to have the right uniform. (you know) He couldn't come and play an Egyptian warrior (you know) with-with a— wearing a-a bluejeans. [laugh] (See.) So we-we-we had to totally take over the role of the— of the people we were trying to screen, cover. And—

Q: You went so far as to go to bars and cafes, and sing somebody else's song?

A: Oh yeah. Well, that-that was— We pulled that off once in-in a town that had a-an oper— a going by. In other words, very rare, but it wasn't that close actually to the-front, to the line. But in any event, there were a lot of civilians. And we knew

that-that the chances were that there always were what they call line crossers. And they were eavesdropping. You know, that old admonition, “Seal your lips and save the ship,” or that-

So what- One of the gags we came up with is: Division we were emulating, making believe, they had a popular song. So this night, we were in this bar, we got a little blitzed, and we [we’ll] singing this song, [laugh] like [laugh] the songs of the division. Now, I’m sure that any guy that was there taking notes (you know) about what the Amerikaners are up to, or the-the-the 1st infantry division, they must be here. [laugh]

So (you know) again, what we were doing, we were leaving tidbits of information here, there, and-and-and what happens is, it was- (you know) You cor-corroborate: radio (okay), physical evidence, sounds, people walking around, the vehicles (you know). And the guys we worked with who were in on the secret (sort of), they-they really marveled at it. They thought- They knew, .. certainly at the beginning, we had the Germans outclassed complete- out-manned- I was- I was in- From Normandy to the end, I don’t think I saw two German planes, in all that time. So the-

But-but when the GIs found out what we were up to, particularly the sonic, they loved it, because we were just (you know) beating them by bull strength; we were (pardon the expression) screwing them too. [laugh]

Q: You were innovating all the time. [repeat]

A: I-I- You know, it’s-it’s true. I mean, we were in and out of so many operations. I think formally, twenty- 28 separate- not just of- not just // 31st, 32nd, but the operations of the- of the member units of the 23rd headquarters, sometimes in concert together. (you know) We were the engineers or the signal people and so on. But we were always like Peck’s bad boys. We were always up to something. [laugh]

Q: Tell me about Bob Conrad.

A: Well, Bob-Bob, as (you know) as he said, he was the message center officer, so he knew everything that was going on. I mean, he was privy to all the organization's messages. And he was also an—a— He was interested in the law, and after the war was over, here in New York he went to law school and became a very credible attorney. And we had a kid in my outfit, and I— how he ever got in, I'll never know. But he was something of a mechanic. And something happened to him. He went over the— over the edge. And all of a sudden he disappeared. He went AWOL.

What had happened was, when we had reached Paris, the infantry, 28th (I think it was 28th infantry ... marched through and out), and— And we were stopped at St-Germain-des-Prés, which is right outside of Paris, at the École de Militaire (I remember that). And some of us, we weren't supposed to, because there were still snipers and things going on in Paris, and— but we were sneaking in. And this-this-this kid, this soldier, met-met a Parisian girl. They've— as boy meets girl, they-they developed a serious attachment, so much so that when we left and headed out toward Metz, he disappeared. After a while, we had to carry him AWOL, absent without leave (see). About two-two weeks or more later, he shows up. And (you know) “What the hell's going on?” And “Well, you know, I— she didn't want me to go.” [laugh] It was almost pathetic. So 23rd headquarters had heard about it because of reports of— go up to headquarters. And the commanding officer was not the nicest of people. And of course we had a guy who was absent without leave during wartime. So he-he called for a court martial.

And Bob Conrad defended the guy. And as I remember correctly, he was— he did a very-very credible job and was able to get the guy off with practically minimum punishment.

So that's how I got to know Bob. And we became pretty good friends. We're both New Yorkers (see). He had a great sense of humor. He was charmed by our

operation. He— And we took a liking toward each other, and we—we were very friendly, and after the war was over, did a lot more serious drinking than was [laugh] was—

Q: I heard there might have been some during the war as well.

A: Oh yeah. Well, one of the famous stories is the-the story of Cognac Hill. I don't know if any of the other guys have ever told you anything about it.

Q: I want to hear your version.

A: But during the-the march from Saint Germain, south of Paris, and heading toward Metz, all of a sudden we're stopped. No gasoline. And the depots, the gas depots, had no gas to give us. At that point in time, all the gasoline that was available was going to the Allied operation at the-the huge air-airborne assault against the Rhine bridges at Nijmegen. They made a movie out of it, A Bridge Too Far. So that's— We were stuck. There we are. And about 2 days or 3 days sitting there, we get word there's a gas depot 40 miles up the road has opened up. Send your trucks up. So we send out 2½-tons trucks up to get gas, (you know) with the jerry cans and— And the next day, the g- trucks come back, they ain't got no gas. They're loaded to the gunnels with cointreau, calvados, brandy, man, you name it. They came across— I guess you call it a distillery or— let's— And was nobody there, and guys were helping themselves. We had a 500-gallon wooden cask of Mosel wine that we used to use instead of water. Because water, you had to purify it with lousy chlorine tablets and all, and it tasted like— As the GIs would say, everything tasted like shit. [laugh] And so that was called Cognac Hill.

Kids, I know some in my outfit who never drank that— anything more than 7&7. 7&7 was the drink of the day in the United States Army for the young GI, that was Seagram's 7 and 7-Up. To this day, it nauseates me. But that's another story.

Q: [inaudible]

A: [overlap] So that-that-that was our contribution to the– to the unsuccessful effort at Nijmegen, Cognac Hill. [laugh]

Q: [no question]

A: This story, I have to– ... Yeah, I know, but while he's getting ready. You'll like it, because it's a– it's-it's a lighter touch, and it's– (you know) The war was-wasn't always grim. And for some reason or other, what you do is remember the lighter things, (you know) and not the mud and the cold and– That was then (you see). But the lighter touches– This story, you'll like.

Q: I'm rolling. . . . Yes, tell me.

A: As-as you may know, we were– after the war, the shooting had stopped. While we were getting organized to come back, the-the 12th Army Group had us doing guard duty or– We were running DP camps for the– for the– And we had a camp in Idar-Oberstein. And I was the security officer. So we had 6,000 Russians, 2 mil– 2,000 Poles, Italians, Czechs. These were all forced laborers [for the] Germans in the Alsace. They-this-the– They didn't come from camps like Auschwitz, but these were labor camps. And they were relatively in decent condition because they were working the farms. The Alsace is a big farm area for Germany and France, and without them, they would have nothing to eat. In any event, so what we had was two meals a day for the adults, and UNRRA, which was the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation, had milk and cheese and eggs for children. But the adults, everything went into this huge cauldron, this huge pot. And two soups a day. (okay).

And one day my first– Sgt. Beaver, who was our mess sergeant, he said, “Lieutenant,” he says, “maybe you ought to look into this. Something funny is

going on.” I said, “What?” He says, “The Russians are fighting with the Poles. They want to do KP duty.” I said, “What do you mean, they want to do?” “Yeah,” he said, “they’re battling. They want to work in the kitchen. I can’t figure it out.” I said, “Well, let’s see what the hell’s going on.” So as it develops after a little investigating, the Russians wanted to do KP duty so they could peel the potatoes. Now, they weren’t stealing the potatoes. What they were doing was taking these peelings and making instant vodka out of it. And I began— I realized that one of the reasons the c- people in the camp seemed to be getting along so well together, everybody was happy, was they were all blitzed [laugh] on 24-hour vodka. And (you know) it—

Q: Col. Reeder was not very happy that he was there?

A: Well, that-that’s probably— you know— See, for a civilian officer, I knew where- whence I cometh and where I was going. The military as a professional, the way to advance is to command a combat [unit] in the field. If you want to become a general, you better become a reg— a battalion or regimental commander before you—you make it as a division commander and you’re a general. So the only way to get that— get-get there is in combat. And Reeder, I think, resented the fact that he was with this-this group of actors. He was not— He was not a very happy guy. And he-his— I mean, while we were in the field, and not too pleasant, or in this cold barracks during the Bulge and all [there], him— he and his staff was at the Italian legation in Luxembourg. And we were pulling guard duty for— He-he—

The difference between him and Col. Railey, for example, is night and day. Railey, the men came first, their comfort and welfare. And they responded. I mean, there was a big difference. And it was one of the— [Ritter/Reeder] represented the old caste system in the Army. Railey represented the new attitude. And-and Railey was a-an incredibly intelligent human being. He was— He [had] great background.

Little is known of the fact that he was called upon by the War Department and the Secretary of War to do a study of the United States Army before the war started. And-and— Because the draftees after their year was up, they were talking about over the hill in October, and the morale was— So he developed out of his study of what was going on— He was working for the *New York Times* then. He developed a program called *Why We Fight*. And his recommendations—top, top, top, top secret—went to President Roosevelt, General Marshall, Lesley McNair, [Secretaries] of War Stimson, and I think he-he kept a copy, and the publisher of the *Times*. Six copies. And (you know) it was phenomenally important. The morale of the Army before Pearl Harbor was down the tube.

Q: Any final reflections, looking back? [repeat]

A: (Oh yeah. That's a good question.) [laugh] [pause]

I-I think in-in a final reflection— I had many recalls or— But I think, interestingly enough, I read Brokaw's book, that coupled with a book by Ambrose about the citizen soldier, I put that together and I realize that given the proper motivation, the American citizen will serve the country well. And-and we-we came up in a time of great peril, and we produced, we trained, and remember, we were not professional. [Our] professional army was not that big. But we had outstanding leaders where they had to be: Marshall, Bradley, McNair, some-some great-great people. And I think, putting it all together and giving reason, a real reason, the American can be trained to defend this country like no one else. And this I believe. And the mistakes we made in Vietnam, we're making in— we made in Iraq, was that we were do— looking to do something that we were not either trained for or psychologically prepared for. It was a tremendous error in both cases. And all we're doing today is compounding it. And in compounding it, we're making our country look bad in the eyes of the rest of the world. So that's in reflection.

In-in further reflection, let me say, I look back with great pride on the role I played with the 31st, 32nd, and particularly .. the memories of serving with a great bunch of young men in the 4th platoon. For that I'm really proud. And I thank you for the opportunity to talk about it.

[End of Interview]