SEQ CHAPTER \h \r 1Ghost Army
JOHN JARVIE

[Tape 407]

A: My name's John Jarvie, J-a-r-v (as in Victor) i-e.

Q: And you were in the 603rd?

A: 603rd Engineer, Camouflage Battalion.

Q: What did the 603rd do?

A: Well, they were basically laid out as an engineering camouflage battalion. That-that should answer, that we started out painting funny sides to make things disappear. Course it never worked, but that's what we did. And doing flat tops, camouflage nets—you know, the big nets they put over the guns, and weaving them—building a flat top by driving the stakes in the ground and hanging the flat tops on the-the wires to keep them elevated. Then we had our regular routine of rifle work, marching, arguing, eating and drinking.

Q: Your job changed when you hooked up with the 23rd headquarters troops?

A: Yes. It changed in 1944, the beginning of 1944. We had basically done our training in Fort Meade, Maryland. And the entire unit came together in Fort Meade, Maryland. That's why we in 603rd had all been together for the full war. Same guys, same experiences. And in 1944, I believe it was February or March, we were moved down to Camp Forrest, Tennessee, still by ourselves. We didn't have the special troops with us. But we got inklings that we were going to be united with several other organizations. And we had to start honing up on new dummies (as we called them; we called them dummies) and how to work with them. And the next thing we knew, we had a big warehouse full of rubber tanks, rubber airplanes, rubber artillery, compressors. Everybody had to learn to use the compressors, which became quite an experience later on in our little game. But that's how we started. And we got into much more rigorous outdoor work, foxholes and training in the mud, and all those little things that a soldier goes through.

Q: In Europe, you put on a show with the German army as your audience?

A: That's how it was supposed to be thought of, I think. Yeah.

Q: How did it work?

A: Well, it worked simply by laying out a plan of what we wanted to do next, and what effect we wanted it to have on the enemy soldiers: whether we wanted to attract them to one spot so that there would be other weaker spots in the line, or any other little thing just to distract. And that's what we did.

Q: Did you find it striking that you spent the war inflating and deflating—

A: You bet. We complained all the time. I hate to tell you what kind of language we used, but all the time complained. (..) Well, you can understand what we would go through. You know, it wasn't guns and guns and guns. It's pretend and make-believe. And they were a bunch of bright guys, kind of a high-I.Q. outfit—everybody but me. And they just thought they were being wasted, and especially at– since we-we all felt we were smarter than the officers. To tell you the truth, we were. And we thought the army was wasting our time. But we didn't get the overall picture of the whole thing. And very often the overall picture didn't really play out until pretty well along in the– in the war.

Q: Looking back now, do you still have that feeling?

A: No. I realize how important it was because it was important. It was-was very important. And it was, when I think back on it, more than I did then, it was dangerous. We were very lightly armed. I think that largest weapon we had was a .50 caliber machine gun. We had small platoons. We didn't go out in– en masse, so to speak. We went out two or three platoons at a time, or maybe two coupled with another company, and maybe all of us were doing the same job from a different angle. And when I think of that, we were– we were pretty much exposed. There were times when we went out, the compressors made an awful lot of noise. The-the– Forget the fact that sometimes the dummies would deflate, they would puncture. But to go out at night, for instance to an area where infantry is foxholed, or behind trees or behind hedgerows, and then you go out past them at 1 or 2 in the morning, and you turn on a compressor that can be heard 10 miles away just to inflate these things, you get complaints from the American troops too.

And we got a lot of that. And I don't know what effect they had on the German troops who could hear, because I'm sure they didn't know what it was. However, our job was to– knowing what we studied and what we could tell about appearances of things, how we could position certain things so that they would be hidden, but kind of hidden in plain sight, so if reconnaissance planes came over, maybe they would just see the corner of something sticking out. And they know, if they can see one or two sticking out, there must be more that they can't. We did that, and had tank tracks, for instance, run in by half tracks to the dummies that went in. And we did similar things with artillery. You lay phony artillery shells around and make it look as if they had been firing. They had flash stuff. And most of that was done by the sonic, the flashes. And– but we-we did the visual stuff. Knowing just how to hide something or how to expose something is– It's not tricky, but something comes, I guess, pretty natural if you're in the right business.

Q: You have to bring artistry to that too?

A: Yeah. Well, that-that's the thing. They– As they-they had said to us, if we want somebody to tell us what something is going to look like from up in the air, and we're down here, we need artists who were pretty good at concept. They can imagine it, and they imagine it pretty well. And I [should] think that's true. So that played a lot.

Q: You also changed markings on uniforms and equipment?

A: Oh yeah. That was almost a given all the time. We were– Sometimes we had no markings on at all. Other times we had phony markings on. And at other times we had the phony markings on, and we did a lot of ride-through with two guys on the back of a truck, to make it look like it was full, and the truck would go five miles and it'd go around a circle and come back, maybe two other guys in the back, or maybe three or four trucks would do this, to make it look– And they would have markings on those trucks. It's to give the enemy—or not necessarily the enemy but enemy observer, civilians in town who were passing this along—give them the information that they're looking for.

Q: You would even do things with the shoulder patches?

A: We made a lot of them, sure. We make a lot of shoulder patches that were put on, and we were– Very often, at the-the time I told you that– I was telling you before: To get

out of town, they–the combat command was coming down, well, we had gone into that town, I think, one or two days before.

Q: Tell me that whole story.

A: Well, we were down in Martigne-Ferchaud. It's in eastern France. It's slightly below the-the Brittany peninsula. And we didn't know why they sent us there. I still don't know why they sent us there. But our job was to go in and, with our phony markings and phony stories that we were pretending to be officers and soldiers from another organization. And we were turned loose in town (little– a tiny French town) and go to the pub, order some omelettes, order some cider, some– and talk loose. And that's what we did. And we created a pretty good impression, I suppose. And I guess it might have been the third night that we-we were bivouacked. And as– It affected the French too, because they went through and cleaned their town out of collaborators. They took them out of town. Now, I don't know what happened to them, but they took them out of town. And I think we had gotten pretty close to the fact that we thought we had our job done. As I said, I don't know why they sent us there in the first place. Well, I suppose it was to make the Germans think we had strength down there. And it worked. But the Germans had more strength further down the coast, and we got the alarm in the middle of the night, around 2 o'clock in the morning, when somebody come driving in to our bivouac area. And we had a little story with them, not letting them in because they didn't have the password. But they had the message, and they finally got it across to us that the Germans were sending a combat command. I don't know exactly how big a combat command is, but it's a lot bigger than us.

Q: Tell me about the fellow—

A: George [Diestle].

Q: Tell me what happened.

A: We called him Golden Boy. You know Golden Boy? We were both out on guard duty. I was laying on one side of the road, and he was laying a little further out on the other side. And we just laid in the ditches, in the high grass on either side of the road, till we heard a jeep coming in. And this had to be around 2 in the morning. And as it got in close enough, George sprung up and he yelled, "Halt!" And the guy in the jeep started

stammering at him, and he said, "Halt, you son-of-a-bitch, or we'll let you have it." Something to that effect. That's what he said to him. And the guy said, "I have a-an important message." A little stammering going on, and he got his message across that the Germans were sending a combat command up. Now, we never got to see the combat command because we all loaded on our trucks and got out of there. We probably had 90 guys, tops, if we had that many. And we got out of there in a hurry.

Q: It's a good thing you didn't shoot the messenger.

A: Absolutely. I'm not sure George was a very good shot anyway. That wasn't his speed. [laugh]

Q: A lot of guys in your unit were artists, and you sketched a lot.

A: Well, it's just the fact that all those guys– Ninety percent of us were either working artists or were going to art school. And you have kind of an inquisitive mind. You-you want to draw everything you see. You know? You want to draw, namely, and if there's something interesting, you especially want to draw it. And any given opportunity, the guys would draw. Later on, we were able to get some watercolors and we worked with them. But we would draw, and guys would draw with a fountain pen and spit. You make the drawing and then you wet it, and it makes nice half-tones in there. So there was– Everybody was pretty good at that. And the watercolors, I must say that some were better than others. The older guys really had their profession under their belt, but I saw one–
One of our artists (I shouldn't call him an artist), one of our guys stood on guard duty with me—a while later, but this is one of the things I remember most. And I was trying to do a– We were out in the snow. This was at the time of the Bulge. And we were in a little town down in a touchy area that had been pretty well shot up already. Bitter cold, snow on the ground, we were freezing, but we still had to put our guards out and so on. He and I were at the entrance to town. I was on one side of the road again, he was on the other side, but maybe 200-300 feet away from me. And I was cuddled up to my chest, trying to do a little sketch. Well, he stood over there and he had his hands cupped in front of him. I couldn't tell what he was doing. And later, when I– when I got to talk to him, I said, "What were you doing, Keith?" His name was Keith Williams, a very wonderful man. He said, "I was doing a watercolor." I said, "What do you mean, you were doing a watercolor?" He says, "Yeah, I did a watercolor. See?" He showed me the watercolor. I said, "How did you do it? You don't even have a set of watercolors." And he took out

his watch, and he had a watch fob. The watch fob was made up of three little watercolor buttons. And his brush was the feral end of a watercolor brush with just the hairs. He did a beautiful watercolor with those three colors. I– I would have liked to have had it, but you know–

Q:	Wow.

A:	I couldn't believe it. And it was very matter-of-fact to him but– I mean, he-he was a real pro.

Q:	That can't be typical of units in the UTO.

A:	I agree. I agree. And there were many guys who were terrific. And I have some of their stuff, so I know. And I-I knew them personally, and have retained friendships with some of them.

Q:	Who were some of the people that you worked with, who you think of?

A:	Well, Arthur Shilstone went pretty far in the profession. He did illustrations for *Smithsonian* magazine. As a matter of fact, he did an issue that just told about our outfit, with some pretty nice illustrations in it. And I have a small collection of Arthur's battle sketches which he did in France.
Arthur Singer, bird artist, did all the United States stamps. He's one of the foremost bird painters in the world. And Art Kane. I don't know if you ever heard of Art Kane. He was a photographer and worked for– He worked for *Life* magazine, did a lot of contract work. And he became pretty well known in the jazz field, photographing jazz musicians. But he was an artist to start with, before he became art director for one of the New York magazines. I could name a dozen other people.
Belisario Contreras, one of my favorite people. He was of Mayan heritage, and he looked it. You knew right away he was a Mayan. And he would give up almost anything to draw. He– While we were over there, he wasn't doing watercolors. He did a lot of pen-and-ink stuff. And I have some of his drawings. And he came out and he got his doctorate in Washington and became an art critic and quite a prominent artist.
And there're a lot of guys whose names I don't remember, were very active professionals, and I know that guys who were on my level, I don't rate me up with them, but they were on my level and they-they were good.

Q: I have a sense of awe about those people. Do you?

A: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. They were great guys. (you know) It's something to watch a man sit down and do that, be so-so engrossed and so driven. But they never let it get in the way of their job. I just don't want them to lose pay by that, you know. But no, really. They-they knew their job and they did it.

Q: Tell me what those sketches are.

A: [overlap] These were some of the first sketches I did. They were not too long after the invasion, and this was is a church already bombed. It was one of the first crossroads bombed during the invasion. And this is a church—almost in the same place, a slightly different town—that we were able to get to from our bivouac area. We were sleeping in hedgerows, in foxholes, but nothing kept us away from going someplace to do a watercolor.

Q: How did you keep these and carry them throughout 9 months of war?

A: Well, up to a certain point you can carry them, and after that you send them home. And my– most of my stuff got home.

Q: You mailed it home?

A: Oh yeah, yeah.

Q: Who were you mailing it to?

A: I mailed it to my mother. I cared more about it than she did, but I mailed it to her. And this was one of my favorite spots because it was the first that came along the line. Pictures, and in the remains of this church—it was in Trévières—we might have had three or four guys in there, sketching. I would say, at least four. And the little kids would come in, and they'd stand and gawk over your shoulder. The little boys wore aprons; little girls wore aprons, but different colors. And very often the little boys had a bottle of cider. You know, little kids, five years old. But they didn't have chocolate. And they'd hang around and then they'd hold up a little piece of stained glass that came out of those windows when the place was bombed. Some of them were intact. And we'd bargain

them for the little pieces with a piece of chocolate. And I brought some of that home with me and I have it framed. I– With the back lighting, looks good.

Q: Wow.

A: But those little kids were there, and there're a lot of pictures of them in the albums too.

Q: What else have we got in this album? What are you laughing at?

A: I'm laughing at– I remember taking these pictures.

Q: Tell me about it.

A: (Yeah.) We had a– If you wanted a bath, you put water in your helmet, stripped down, and you took a bath in your helmet. We all took turns, and sometimes all at the same time. So nobody had any privacy. And that's what these pictures are, and that's why I laugh. [laugh] I laugh every time I look at them. Nobody cared (you know). [laugh]
This was one of my closest buddies, here. He died last October. But he was at more of these reunions than I have been. He came to the first one with me. And things happened in between, so he got back to more than I did.

Q: What was his name?

A: His name was Fred [Schmidt]. He was German and proud of it. Schmidt! [laugh] Big fellow. Big fellow. Hard worker.

Q: Flip back a page. What's the story here?

A: [overlap] Oh, that-that's a girl coming down the little roads between the hedgerows. She rode a donkey. She was one of the native girls, and she's offering wine. And that was very easy to come by. They were always giving us wine or cider. The cider was terrible, but the wine was great.

And this is a couple of guys bargaining for eggs at one of the houses. We'd go up, maybe one or two and, "Avez-vous des oeufs?" [laugh] "Avez-vous des oeufs?" And they knew what they wanted. And we would bargain for eggs. And it was delicious. That's all that is. That– There are little things you do sketches of, that– to remind you later.

Q: I see your marking here. I don't know what that is.

A: I do. This is the foxhole that Ned Harris and I slept in for maybe a month, on and off, when we didn't go out on– And it was in the top of the hedgerows. The hedgerows were very high and very heavily overgrown with very sturdy trees. And they were quite an impediment, but they're also good to dig your hole in. Put a pup tent up over it, and you had a snug little house. So that's Ned and I sitting in that. You can only see my legs. And this is a bunch of us– We had been sent down for a shower. [It's a] quartermaster. They had opened up a shower, and the troops lined up, and you could have a shower for a minute. So you'd have a line of maybe 500 guys. And you go in and there's somebody taking care of the shower, and you got one minute to shower, and then the next guy. So that was it. But something happened in the middle. We start to hear the hum, loud hum over our heads. Now, we all knew what fighter planes sounded like, and one or two bombers. But this hum, we weren't used to. And we got out there, and that's this picture of us, out looking at one of the first 1,500 plane raids that came down on Saint-Lô and the area around it. And when you've seen 1,500 planes in the sky at once, you never forget it. The sound is so high, it's just a hum. And the planes, you just see a little white speck when the light hits them. Sometimes you didn't see them; you just saw the contrails through the sky.

[Tape 408]

A: That's just a little caricature I did of him. I don't think I even had him there when I did it. He had a face you won't forget. And I have several other sketches of him someplace in here. But I thought: I've got to put Belisario down on paper. So I did this. And he-he was some guy. He was married before he went overseas, but he liked the ladies when he got there. And the ladies liked him for some reason. I'll never know why. But he was a great guy, and very talented. Very talented. I have several sketches by him, all through these series.

Q: Tell me who these people are, and why you sketched them.

A: These are all Russian girls and guys. There's a mixture here. And we were in Luxembourg. We got to Luxembourg in September, and I think it was in October, probably late October, that we found out that the people of Luxembourg had Russian escapees billeted in a– like a schoolhouse behind the cathedral in Luxembourg City. And we went down to see what was going on. And the first night I went in there, I saw: My God, they've got young girls in here (well, they were as old as I was, but I think of it now when I say "young girls") and-and guys. And they were just jammed into these rooms, maybe four-high bunks, and the bunks were side by side. So I did these sketches. And their different characteristics came out in all of them. You know, some of them– This one was polished in beautifully– She had fair skin and all scrubbed. Her hair was gorgeous. And this was Mama. Mama kept those girls in line. And you can tell, that was Mama. This was a young fellow that– He was just friendly, but he couldn't speak English. But I had them all sign their names on here. And the funny thing is– Here's another girl, and she was– I mean, I would say she was of questionable character. Figure it out for yourself.

Q: Popular, huh?

A: All the way through. Yes. And– But they were all in the same boat. You know? They were where they were free.

Q: Do you have any idea what happened to them?

A: Well, as it came down through the grapevine—and I read it someplace later, so I believe it: When the war ended, they were sent home to Russia, and they were shot for having worked for the Germans. Now, that may or may not be true, but I got that from several sources. And it's too late now to check on it, I'm sure.

And this is something coincidental. This was a sketch of me, done by my friend Fred, at a separate time. And he sent it to me about a year ago. He said, "John, I came across this sketch," and he says, "I thought you might like to have it." I said, "Sure, Fred." And I turned it over, and who's on the back of it but a sketch Fred did of this girl, only she has a gun over her shoulder. Now, I never saw her with a gun.

Q: Maybe she was more scared of Fred than you.

A: Yeah. But you know, it was a coincidence because it was so many years later. And I said, "Hey Fred, I didn't even know you went down there to see those girls." So that's the story of the-the girls in the—

Q: Several people painting the same theme. This was in [Trier]?

A: That's Habay-la-Vieille. As a matter of fact, that is the town—

Q: Let's put this in your lap. Look at me.

A: This is Habay-la-Vieille. Now, it's the town that I told you I stood outside on guard duty, and my buddy across the road did a watercolor with a little three dots. Well, this is where it was. And these are sketches I made there, just to kind of get the atmosphere. I wasn't even sure how I wanted to draw it, but I got a picture out of it. And this little girl lived behind the church in Habay-la-Vieille. She was the midwife's daughter, and she posed for me. And the thing is that– And this is the town. And Belisario and I were out on the road. We were standing maybe 300 yards apart. And I was doing a sketch, which was this, and he was doing a sketch of the same thing but further up the road. And he later mailed it to me. And I was thrilled to see it, and I said, "Yeah, I didn't know you really had finished that off, Belisario." But that's what we did. This town was very well shot up by the Germans.

Q: How did you have any time to do your job? This is a lot of work.

A: I know. Yeah. I could have left the army behind and did all this work. But when we finally got back to our barracks, we had nothing to do but lay around. And if you want to read or write letters, the guys drew or painted all the time. Arthur Singer, the bird artist, if we– they put us in some place that we were going to be in for two weeks, sure as shooting, one wall of that place would have beautiful birds and animals on it, done by Arthur. He'd do the whole wall, think nothing of it. And he never penciled it in or– He just took his brushes and painted it. He was good.
And these are photographs of Habay-la-Vieille and the coldness of it.

Q: How do you spell Habay-la-Vieille?

A: H-a-b-a-y, L, apostrophe, capital V-i-e-l-l-e. Habay-la-Vieille. Very often it just goes under the name of Habay, because there's a Habay-la-Vieille and a Habay– I don't know, Habay-le-Old, I suppose. I don't know how they say it.
But it was cold. And here's a guy out on guard duty, like Keith was when he did his work.

Q: Was it—

A: Bitter cold.

Q: Was it hard, operating the compressors, inflating the tanks, in the cold weather?

A: Yes. Sometimes it was hard to start them, and sometimes the equipment would puncture or God knows what. But we always made do. The guys really knew the compressors inside out. But we had enough compressors. If one failed, we start them– start a couple more. We have like four platoons in a company, and each platoon had a– had a compressor.

Q: Calvados. Did the fellows in the unit have an appreciation? Any stories?

A: Oh, any time they could get it, they had appreciation for it, but it was hard to get. And I wanted to send a bottle home to my father. And we were billeted in a seminary in Luxembourg. This seminary was a piece of work. It was like five stories high. And we had the top rooms in the seminary. The Germans had had it before us, and all the nice polished floors were ground up with the boots, and they had big Superman murals on all

the walls. So that's where we were staying. However, I still wanted to send the Calvados home to my father. I finally got a bottle, which I nursed till I had a chance to send it home. Everything had to be censored. Like all the letters in here have censor marks on them. So I said, "I'll go down to the censor and I'll–I'll do it. He'll be surprised. Probably knock him on his butt. But I'll send it to him." So I went, and on my way down the five stories– The censor was down on the bottom floor. And I hid it under my jacket so the guys wouldn't see it. Very carefully walked down those stairs, and I got to the bottom flight, and I let it slip and it fell out the bottom of my jacket and smashed. And you could smell that Calvados all over that seminary. Down the halls, up on the top floor you could smell it. I was broken-hearted. My father never knew the difference. [laugh]

Q: What's the unfolded sketch in front of you?

A: This is Briey, France. One of the most interesting towns, visually. That's why I did this, because this my– was my impression of it. The streets go down– They should have steps instead of streets, but they have streets, cobblestone streets. You step on wrong, you go down three or four flights before you can stop. And it's a wonderful town. And this is a drawing that Belisario did of the same spot, at a different time. He sent it to me later. I love this drawing. I love that town. I had a dear friend there. I don't know if she's in– She's here, yeah. But I guess the–that probably one of the reasons I like that town so much, because I met a friend. And—

Q: Is there a picture of her?

A: Yes. Here's a picture of her. I'm not sure what it says. Something about sending it to me on her 20th birthday. But that's her.

Q: Can you tell me anything about her?

A: Pretty-pretty blonde. Pretty blonde. She's– I guess she was 19 when I met her, and I was 20. And she ... during the war how you meet someone. She was very shy, and I wasn't that forward, as a matter of fact. But we met, and we became friends, good friends. And she took me home to meet her parents, which is– That's a good girl. Yeah. That's what French fathers like. And (you know) that kind of impressed me too. So I spent several nights at her house. And we sat and listened to "le jazz" on the

underground radio, and danced, and talked, and communicated in my bumbling French. She has–had no English at all, so we got along—but we got along, that's all. You know. I had a-an interesting story, which happened the last night I saw her. At that time the Germans were putting on American uniforms and coming through the lines and trying to stir up trouble. So there was a curfew. US Army put a curfew on. I think it was 9 o'clock. And I was at her house this night. The next thing we know, her father says, "The curfew was– It's past curfew time." You know. "We're in trouble." And he said to me, "[Charlene], you better take John out and show him how to get through the lines." So she did. Took me up through back yards. And a lot of the French have barn entrances on the street, and a back entrance into the barn and out the front. And eventually, when we got to the edge of town, we were cutting through one barn, which was next to a pub or a bistro or whatever you want to call it. And we could hear people in there laughing and– they were laughing and I– just having a neighborly thing. And we stopped in the barn to kiss one another goodnight. It was pitch black. Next thing happened, a bright light went on, and the bolts on half a dozen tommy guns or rifles all clacked into position. Bright light was shining on me and her, and all the voices had– were around us. Couldn't see any of them, but could hear them. And I couldn't understand them, but they were after me. They thought I was a German. And to be caught by the French underground, if you were a German at that time, was deadly. That's how close I came. If I hadn't had her with me, I wouldn't be here today. I know that, because it was no secret. So I screwed up. I shouldn't have been out after curfew. But that's a little story that not many people know.

Q: How did you get out of that situation? What did you have to do afterwards?

A: Oh yeah. Well, when they finally decided to let me go, they talked to her and then she talked to me. They wouldn't let her come and show me, so she said, "You go out the door and you turn and you go to the edge of town," which wasn't too far from us at that point. She said, "And you get in the ditch. And you stay in the ditch until you get back to your barracks." Now, my barracks was probably 3-4 miles, maybe 5 miles back. And it was up a mountain one way, and then along a road. It was very edgy. Kind of miserable, but I did it. And I never thought twice, either. Got back and got through a hole in the fence, which we all knew there was a hole in the– in the ..... fence. So I knew how to get in there. But that's as close as I'll ever want to come. (What else can I tell you?)

Q: Who's that?

A: You shouldn't ask. [laugh] This is one of the towns that was on the way to this house I was leaving. But that's where all the soldiers went. Need I say more?

Q: Can you be more explicit?

A: And .... these are pictures of the local whorehouse, if you want to– for want of a better name. I'm sorry.

Q: I understand.

A: Yeah. And it was a busy place, I'll tell you. And we went down there to sketch. But we also had a combat engineer unit in our outfit, the 23rd. And most of the guys down there were combat engineers, a big rough-tumble bunch.

Q: Not sketching?

A: No sketching. They thought we were queer. They said, "What are you doing here, sketching pictures?" And they were busy and waiting their turn and fighting, fighting for turn. And I know one night we were there, there was a corporal beat the stuffings out of a master sergeant who jumped the line on him. I mean "stuffing" literally. The floor was covered with blood, and that place emptied. And the master sergeant must have been 6 feet 3, and-and the corporal was about 5 feet 4, but he was tough and nasty. But they waited in line, generally, and that's what these drawings are. There's one guy was propositioning the madam who ran the place, but he couldn't afford her. What else can I tell you? That's the story of my life. And these are guys sitting pretty dejected. I guess they're– been waiting too long. And this is the madam. And she was a hard number.

Q: Yeah?

A: Yeah. She was—

Q: In what town?

A:	Homécourt. It's between Briey and Joeuf. Joeuf is the town that mad– Michelin lived in. This was right in the middle.

Q:	Spell the name of this town.

A:	This town is H-o-m-e-c-o-u-r-t.

Q:	Is that—

A:	And they pronounce the "e" in the middle, Homé, Homécourt.

Q:	Why do you say she was a hard number?

A:	Well, so far as I could tell, she was a hard number. She ran the business. She ran the business. I guess she ran it pretty well. But she– She just came across to me as a hard number. That's how she treated—

Q:	[inaudible, overlap]

A:	—the guys. Not the girls. The guys. You know. Keep them in their place, I– I guess she was right. I'm not saying she wasn't. She– tough baby. But the girls were just making a living. They'd go out when they left at night, their husbands would wait outside the door for them and take them home.

Q:	Tough times.

A:	Yeah, it was tough. The local– The side of that hill was also the local dump. And there was always a dozen people in there, foraging through the dump for whatever they could find. And some of them were looking for food; others were just looking for things, I guess, that they could sell. It was tough, tough on them.

Q:	. . .

A:	This is Trier, Germany. When the Germans have it, it's called Trier. When the French have it, it's called Trève. But it was the largest city outside of Rome. This was

like the second capital in Europe, outside of Rome. So it's an old city. And it's all along the Mosel River, and it's got a lot of vineyards around. And this is where they had a home for displaced persons when the war ended. So we went into Trier, and that's what these sketches are. And– .. As a matter of fact, we pulled up in a square in Trier, and pulled over because we have–had a lot of radio equipment in our convoy, because of the sonic guys. And we pulled over as they were announcing that FDR had died. That's why I remember the– moving into that city. Trier was a shambles. It's a beautiful, what was left. We were up on the top of a mountain. It very mountainous. On the top of a mountain. That's why I did these sketches. And there was a tower up there that the Germans had used (I might have a sketch of it here; I don't know) for artillery spotting. You know? And we had a dis-displaced person's camp outside of Trier that– Finally the war was winding down, and they sent us back in there to guard that camp—not to keep people from hurting them; to keep them from getting out and hurting other people, because a lot of them were Russians and they really got out of hand very fast. And– So we had barbed wire around it. It was– It was quite a nice camp, as a matter of fact.

Q: It must have made a deep impression on everybody.

A: I guess it did. Yeah. It made an impression on it. I mean, these people were confined in there. We wouldn't let them out. And if they did get out, they would raid all the German homes, and people got-got killed. I mean, they-they got out, killed Germans. A lot of our boys killed some of them because they were out. The MP's would go after them. Very heavy. And they-they were just all deprived of everything. That-that's the best thing I can say. And then they– I can't say they deserved better. I guess anybody deserves better than that. But during a war, that's about the best you can do, is put them in and give them a nice place to sleep, and people to cook for them, and facilities to– for their sanitation. And pretty much that's how it was. But they were always trying to break out. So we were posted around the barbed wire, and we'd lay outside the barbed wire at night. And we laid in twos. And you would hear the slightest jingle on the barbed wire, and flash on a light, and you'd find some guy maybe 5 feet away from you, crawling at you. They didn't care if they killed you to get out, or just beat the hell out of you to get out. They wanted to get out, for whatever reason. And you'd throw a burst of tommy gun fire across—not to hit them, to push them back in. So that-that was going on all night. And so we did that for about a– not a month. I don't really know how long we did it. Couple of weeks. That was an experience that I didn't enjoy.

Q: Were they sent back to Russia afterwards?

A: The girls were. I don’t know what happened to these people.

[Tape 409]

A: Oh, that's Elaine. That was when the war ended, and of course all Europe had been blacked out. And I'd been in Luxembourg, among other places, for– since September, moving around here and there, but we ended up back in Trier there, which is not too far from Luxembourg. And this night, the lights were going to go on. Now, if you've been in the darkness for all that time, and your lights are going on, that's spectacular. And– They did. And the city was mobbed. The town square, you didn't see anybody until the lights went on, and suddenly you realize there's thousands of people here. What a feeling that– It's an absolute thrill to see the lights, all the blinds in the houses opened. The street lights went on, people cheered, they carried torches and– It was absolutely thrilling to see. I was with her that night. She was just a friend.

Q: It's good to have friends. ... Does that say "fragile"?

A: Oh, I think that's old stuff. You already know that. Just an old *Stars and Stripes*: "Germans Quit." That's all. That's the only reason it's there. It is fragile. It'll fall apart. This was my buddy Ned. Came back, opened a-an art studio in the city. Successful. This was a strip map. Did you ever see an army strip map? Tell you how to get anyplace you want to go. The army makes maps in a straight line, and they have a number at every point where you turn, because they have the road posted with– every road posted with another number. So if you're going down number 5, when you get to number 6, you follow number 6, whether it's a right turn or a left turn or whatever. But there're no names on any of the roads. It's all they had was numbers. And this was a strip map. I saved it because it was a strip map that was bringing us home. And it went from Germany all the way to [Le Havre], three jumps. So that is a precious souvenir. And that's how we got away. I was a recon driver during the war, so I got to see a lot of things that a lot of guys didn't. But that's why I'm familiar with the strip maps, too.

Q: What does that mean, a recon driver?

A: Jeep. Jeep driver. You go out– You go out with your platoon leader and do recon on where you're about to go, and you want to find out what's going on: who's there that might not like you, and so on and so forth. You know. That's a recon driver. But I put on thousands of miles in Europe. I have a-a note someplace in a letter home, told my mother just what my odometer said on the jeep when I turned it in. It was thousands, thousands

of miles. And hell, it's only about a thousand miles—not even a thousand miles—from the Normandy beach to where we ended up. You know?

Q: You ended up on the Rhine, the Rhine Crossing?

A: The Rhine Crossing with the 9th– 9th Army. Fortunately I wasn't there, I'm happy to say.

Q: Where were you?

A: [overlap] I was in Scotland, visiting my aunt. I– When we got to Saarlautern, the army decided they would take guys who had relatives in the British Isles and send them on a furlough. And after Saarlautern– That's–that's where Ruth's father got killed.

Q: [inaudible]

A: Yeah. And that's where I got word that I was going to be the first guy in the outfit, because I had Scottish relatives. And they didn't waste any time. I got packed up and shipped, and it was a one-week furlough but it took a month. I loved it. Stopped in Paris, going; stopped in Paris, coming back. Stopped in Leamington Spa because I had friends in Leamington Spa. We used to dance. They loved to jitterbug. And so I stopped there for a couple days. And I went to visit Aunt Bessie. so that was my furlough. I– That's where I was during the Rhine crossing. So anything you find out about the Rhine Crossing—

Q: I'll let you know.

A: The only thing that happened that mattered to me about the Rhine Cr– not that the whole thing didn't, but—

Q: [inaudible]

A: I had a jeep that was in great shape. Nobody drove it but me. When we went in on Utah Beach, the entire unit didn't go in. We left our residue behind. We left all our trucks and everything behind, and we went in on foot. And we went in, down the side of

the-the ship and so on, so forth. So the residue came later and brought the vehicles. And of course I had somebody driving my jeep that just didn't– A real army jeep is pretty tricky. He drove it off the landing craft into the deep water—for starts now; that's how we approached Europe—when he wrecked my jeep. I got it fixed up. Ordnance had it a long time. They had to do wonders to it. So when I came to Scotland on furlough, I had to leave it, the jeep– my buddy drove. Fred Schmidt and Ned Harris were in my jeep during that operation, and they drove it into a ditch and upset it. Almost got themselves killed, so I shouldn't laugh. But they knocked the bejabbers out of the jeep, and it had to be fixed again. So that's the only thing that I really remember about Viersen, which was that move at the Rhine.

Q: Is there anything I haven't asked you about?

A: No, I think we've talked about everything.

Q: When you look back at your unit's wartime actions, what is important to you?

A: Well, something that-that– I don't know how important it is to everybody else, but you think of it and I guess other people have thought of it too: that if you tell somebody you blew up rubber tanks, here we're back to the beginning again. And you were in the Ghost Army, and they'll say, "What the hell was the Ghost Army?" And you try to tell somebody, you can't tell them in five minutes in any-any way that sounds sensible. It still sounds like nothing if you say it fast, good fast word. And it just–
What would be a good feeling is if people realized just what we were up against when you take a truckload or two truckloads of guys and you send them out in harm's way, very poorly equipped, not poorly equipped for the job but poorly equipped to defend themselves. So the way they defend themselves is to get out of there. And it was all very close. It just– People don't realize that. And I guess you can't expect people to, not having been through it. But when I stop and I think about it, I-I think to myself, "Boy, you guys could have got yourselves killed so many times." And it didn't happen.
And I think it was in *Secret Soldiers*. I was reading a passage in that, and they were talking about awards for 23rd headquarters. And a lot of the records have been destroyed. And the guys didn't get a lot of awards. We got five combat stars, which is about as good as anything, because you got five discharge points for every combat star. And the most you could get was five. And that was good. But there're other-other wards– other awards, you know, just for– just for doing your job, nothing fancy. Not a silver star, not a diamond ring, just a citation. A unit citation was made, but we never got it. And like at

the first– the first reunion, we got a medal made up by the French. (you know) And a lot– a lot of soldiers who were over there got that, and they deserved it. But the unit citation was important, and we never got that. And they're still trying to track it down. And people just don't realize what the outfit was about. It would be nice if they did, but there's no way you can get that across. (I might have skirted the whole intent of my conversation. Oh.)
One of the– One of the generals had-had said something about, they-they didn't give out a lot of medals. A lot of men didn't die. You only got a medal if you die. You have to die to get a medal. You don't get a medal if you live. You know? And I thought to myself, "He's right about that." You know. Everybody can't get medals. All the guys that lived through the war came home. We were just happy to get home. (I think.) But at least give us our unit citations. All those guys in that room would like to have that. You know? And that's not much. I'm sure there are other things involved too that-that John Walker knows about, that I don't. And they're still working on it, but they're running out of time, because the guys are disappearing. That's all.

Q: Where the Battle of the Bulge started, you went where the SS had been resting.

A: Oh, in the Hotel Borg.

Q: Tell me about this.

A: And I don't think a lot of the guys in the outfit realized this, but some of us found it out later. We went into Hochscheid. An officer and I went up on recon, and we went up through Bastogne and checked it out. We had to stay overnight in Bastogne, and got up to Hochscheid, which I'd never heard of but a lot of people haven't. Met the priest. I showed you the picture of the priest, Martha, right? And he took us in and– We slept in the bishop's bed that night. That was hot stuff. But anyway, then our units came up the next day or the day later. And all we were doing was trying to attract Germans to our locale. Now, there was supposedly– I don't know if it was a training camp for German recruits on the other side of the woods, but the Germans did start to come. And all along the line, there were four towns all the way up in there, that we were supposed to take the place of the 75th's infantry, and rest. And we were. We were doing good job of resting. Well, it turned out that the other side of the woods, that we thought the German recruits were in, and never would notice an increase in troops, Germans coming in, because that's what we wanted. We wanted to attracted Germans. The Germans were coming in, getting ready for the Bulge. They were putting all their heavy hitters in there, and we

didn't know it. I mean, not just we didn't know it; the army didn't know it. And they had indications that that was going on, but they didn't know it and the Bulge broke through. And we got pulled out of there, and the troops all up around the Luxembourg front got moved back. And we got moved back into Luxembourg, first step, because this was pretty close to Luxembourg, as it was. And everybody got stationed in foxholes all along the roads into Luxembourg. All the cooks, everybody. And that happened one day, because the Bulge started. That's why they-they knew it was starting then, and they pulled us out. And then they stationed us in Luxembourg and then they pulled us out of there and shipped us back to Verdun, because one thing they didn't want was anybody to find out about our unit. And that started another chain of events, which we've gone through already. But that's how it happened.

Q: Is there any one deception that stands out in your mind?

A: One of the first ones, yeah, but in Brest. Brest was a hard nut to crack. It was a– It was a seaport that the Germans wanted to defend because they wanted their own navy ships to use it. And we wanted it because we needed a port, because all the Mulberries got wrecked during the invasion. So there were a lot of troops in Brest. And I think that the army wanted to create an impression that we were going to really crowd them out by troops in there. However, to make a long story short, that was .. one of the first things we did. We went way out on the end of Brest. And the first– We drove for a couple days, getting out there. And we pulled up in– outside of Brest, and there was a small calvary– cavalry tank unit, I guess mainly recon but light-lightweight stuff in there. And when we pulled into that area, we came in and the guys knew. They said, "Oh, they've got heavy tanks. They're bringing heavy tanks in here. Just what we need." And they come running out and said, "Boy, are we happy to see you guys," because we couldn't let them get too close to our stuff. "Are we happy to see you guys!" And we spent .. a couple of nights going through all the rigamarole, the sounds effects and all that stuff, to attract attention down to that area.

Now, these poor guys are sitting there, and somewhere in their plans, they were intending to kick off an attack at– I don't know what day it was, but I even remember the time. It was one o'clock in the afternoon. They're supposed to get dive bombing for 20 minutes before that, and then they would kick off their attack. But after the plans got changed, that we got brought in to attract the Germans, their plans never got changed, so they still had their attack planned. And it kicked off and the Germans had overloaded that place with 88's, like hundreds of 88's, which are deadly. And it kicked off. Those guys never reached the line of departure, which is the point that they want to start their attack from.

They never even got that far. They got decimated. And– (What was I going to say? ... Now I forget what I was going to say next.)
But it was– It was really a– really tragic, because we-we pulled up on the hill, I remember. The officers of .... and I (his name was Lieutenant Andrews) pulled up on that hill, and the 88's started coming in. And we could see the guys going, these little light tanks and– going down and getting creamed. And the 88's are flooding the place. And I'm sitting in a jeep there, up on a hill, and they usually wouldn't fire at one jeep. If it's a truck full of men, they'll fire at it. I'm sitting in the jeep, and he's out standing. And I hear a couple shells coming in. And I thought, "Holy shit, I got to get out of here." And I tried to get out of the jeep, and my gun belt caught on the wheel. I couldn't get out. It jammed down in here. I couldn't get out. And those two shells slammed down into the ground, 50-60 feet in front of my jeep, dead on. Plunk, plunk. Dirt went up in the air and no explosion. That was one of my nine lives I got there. And that was– Thank God the Czechs were making their ammunition. You know? They had a lot of sabotage in their factories. They went through very heavy periods of sabotages, ammunition. And I'm glad. That's what I forgot to tell them.

Q: Did you think the guys who were launching the attack were expecting your tanks?

A: Of course. They thought we-we were their savers.

Q: Answer to Rick.

A: Yeah. We thought we were going to strengthen them. They-they weren't afraid to attack, but they wanted some of the heavy duty stuff that we had, because we had the group of combat engineers. They said, "We need some demolitions men here."

Q: It shows the importance of coordinating the deception with the reality.

A: Oh sure, sure. That was a screw-up. Was not our screw-up, but somewhere down the line, upstairs, was the screw-up, because the plans for all these things came down. You know. We just executed them, and did the reconnaissance on this and that. But we had no way of knowing they were going to kick off an attack. And they had no way of knowing that we weren't going to help. (you know) And it makes you feel lousy.

Q: I don't think of creativity in the army.

A: Yeah, well, we didn't consider it creative. [laugh]

Q: What did you think of it?

A: Well, once we got going, we thought of it as a job, and we knew what it was. The creative part was the guys and the things they did. This– The concept could be creative, but it's so fragile. It's extremely fragile. If one kink doesn't fall into place, it's tragic. And that was evidence of it right there. You know?

Q: I think of the army as the last place that the best and brightest would want to go.

A: The incentive is different there.

Q: But you had a group of gifted, bright people, and that changed some outcomes.

A: Oh, I'm sure. I'm sure. A lot of guys would have been killed. More guys would have been killed than were. And, you know, it's a question of, you know you saved lives; you don't know how many you saved. But you know you saved them. And you helped shorten the war, I think. I think we did that, at our level. I mean, there're different ways to shorten wars, but doing our job made some of the other jobs easier, and made them more successful. And that's all we were trying to do.
You know, the– A lot of these guys didn't want to be in the army. It was a big war. It was a big war, and everybody went. I enlisted myself. I was 19, and I had to write to this unit because I knew they were open. But you had to write to them and they had to accept you. It had nothing to do with the army draft at all. And then I had to wait, and I got accepted. I had to have a police clearance, all kinds of stuff. But the thing is that during the war, everybody went. The women went. You were down at the memorial. You know the women did as much as the men. And everybody went, and it was the thing to do. You wanted to do it. That's the difference. That's the difference. I can see, you don't get the proper reasons to want you to join the army, there evidently isn't reason enough to go. I mean, they had something like 13 million men in uniform. That ain't easy to do, 13 million guys who all want the same thing. I must say, there were guys who were drafted who didn't want to go, too. (Yeah.) I concede that. But the majority were bound to do their duty, and they did it. And that's what we were doing. We could gripe, gripe about everything— [rollout]

[End of John Jarvie Interview]

Tape 407 JOHN JARVIE Page
PAGE 8

Tape 408 JOHN JARVIE Page
PAGE 15

Tape 409 JOHN JARVIE Page
PAGE 21