

# King, Avery P. Interview pt 1, 8-3-95

[Speaker 5]

The following is an interview with Dr. Avery King, A-V-E-R-Y-K-I-N-G-M-D, conducted at his house at 138 Cumberland View Drive, Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Interview conducted by Dr. Charles Johnson, Center for the Study of War and Society. Today's date is July, correction, is August 3rd, 1995.

Yeah, I'd like to start with just asking kind of what your life was like before you went into the military.

[Speaker 1]

Well, I was born and brought up in Vermont, about 20 miles from the Canadian border, and my father was a country practitioner, and I grew up with him practicing medicine in our kitchen, and he used to sew a lot of farmers, and they had a lot of lacerations, and he used to sew them up there in the kitchen, and my mother was very good at crocheting and other things. So this was all... So you started early.

I started early. I went to the University of Vermont, and then I went to the University of Vermont Medical School, and graduated in 1942, and then I interned in the Army. Of course, the war was well underway then, and I got an Army internship at Brooke General, which was then Station Hospital, Fort Sam Houston.

Was this common for people getting out of medical school in 1941? Of course, everything was in a turmoil then, and I had been active in the ROTC and had a reserve commission, so I went in the Army as an Army intern. I don't know.

It wasn't common, no, because there were only ten interns at Fort Sam when I was there.

[Speaker 5]

I was wondering, in your graduating class, did you think most of the people ended up in service?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, most all did, because most all of them were in the reserves, and they were called up to active duty when they finished their internship. I finished my internship in 1943, and was immediately sent to Carlisle Barracks, which is where the Army Field Medical School was.

[Speaker 5]

The Military History Institute is up there right now.

[Speaker 1]

Yes, we went back there and visited just within the year to see what it was like. It had all been built up with the history and stuff that was there. It's still pretty, though.

Oh, it is.

[Speaker 5]

I enjoy working up there.

[Speaker 1]

You've been there, have you?

[Speaker 5]

Yeah, I've been there a number of times.

[Speaker 1]

Well, I spent about a month and a half on the medical field school. Well, I had been there at ROTC for six weeks in the summer after my sophomore year, so I was familiar with it. What were they teaching you?

Oh, how to be a soldier, how to salute, how to find your way with a compass, and important things like that. We were out on a march, and a jeep pulled up and said, Erwin, Jordan, and King. I picked the three right out of the middle.

We went back, and we had to report to the New York Port of Embarkation within the daylight hours of the next day. Needless to say, it was very upsetting to my wife.

[Speaker 5]

I was going to say you were married then.

[Speaker 1]

Yes, I married when we went for the internship. So I drew all my uniforms, and I guess it really sunk in on her when I came back with all this junk and a helmet. She looked at that and it kind of broke her out in tears.

Well, anyway, we went to New York, and then I went to Camp Shanks, and super secret, and within two days I was on the ship in a convoy going to North Africa. And I was assigned to the 33rd Field Hospital, which was the major unit that I was with over there.

[Speaker 5]

That was in Tunisia?

[Speaker 1]

Well, we went to North Africa. At that time, they had already made the landing at Salerno.

[Speaker 5]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

That was in August or September of 1943, yes. And we went to Oran in Algeria for staging. We were a big convoy.

The battleship Texas was right next to us. Not too much happened on it. We went through Gibraltar, and the Germans bombed us.

The Air Force bombed there. I was hardly aware of it because it was way in the back, and they did hit a destroyer. But anyway, we went into Oran, and we were there about a month while we drew our equipment.

And then we sailed.

[Speaker 5]

How big a hospital are we talking about?

[Speaker 1]

What size? The field hospital, we had three platoons, probably five officers to each platoon, and probably 120 enlisted men, and about five nurses, maybe six. Five nurses.

How many doctors? Four or five. Four or five.

Four, I guess, really, because some of the others were M.A.C. officers. M.A.C.? Medical Administrative Corps. That was M.A.C. That's what we called them then. M.S., I guess they call them now. Well, anyway, we went to North Africa, staged there, and then we went in a convoy into Naples, which had just been taken the day before we arrived. The problem was pretty much of a mess.

Oh, the harbor of Naples was just full of half-sunken vessels, and it was the worst disaster I've ever seen. So we filed through there in the ship. We were on a cargo assault thing.

I can't remember. It had been a former banana boat, but it was a cargo assault thing. Well, anyway, we went to Bagnoli, which was a little north of Naples, and there was a landing thing there they'd had for seaplanes.

So we pulled in the harbor there and unloaded, and it was not without some excitement. We had the mines in kind of a beach area, and we had some character that wandered out of where the tapes was. These were all green, you know, and this landmine went off, and I'm telling you, he went 60 feet in the air.

And that shook everybody up, I'm telling you. Yeah, that would make you careful. Yeah, and then we went to a Mussolini school there or something, and that's where we went.

And I was a junior junior officer. I was the last one to arrive in the outfits. I'd just been there just a week or so or two, so they made me motor officer of all things.

I thought it was terrible, but I didn't know anything about motor officer. But anyway, it didn't bother me any. But the best part was I had the vehicles.

Had a vehicle, and you'd find a good sergeant. Yeah, we had a vehicle. We had about six ambulances.

We had two for platoon, and we had some. So anyway, we parked theóand I was kind of leery of this school because I figured they'd mined it, and sure enough, they had. They took caróthey took bundles of dynamite out of there while, you know, the engineers did while we were there.

So anyway, one day theyówe needed gas, and gas was difficult, and so we drove into Naples and see if we could get some gas. And I drove up the Via Roma in Naples, which is the main street of Naples. And if you know anything about Italian cities, they justóthey're crowded to the gills.

I drove up the Via Roma, the whole distance of it, and never saw a soul. There wasn't a single person on the street. The shops were all closed, everything.

And we got partway up there, and there was a British tank that was going along on the opposite street, and a guy with a turret turning around back and forth. It was an English guy. He was sitting watchingóapparently there'd been some sniping.

I don't know. But anyway, we gotófound the gas dump, got our gas, and we started back over Bagnoli. And it was a beautiful place, you know, there.

The road along there around Naples is just gorgeous. And so we stopped just to look at it. And I turned around, and I looked back toward Naples, and all of a sudden I saw this great geyser go up from Naples.

And a guy, a jeep driver, was in there. I said, what in the world is that? And we looked at it a minute, and all of a sudden a sound hit, boom, just like that.

We both automatically drove up to the jeep. I mean, it was coming, but we didn't realize. That was the post office that blew up.

Some 300 paratroopers were killed in it.

[Speaker 5]

I've read about that. I've seen photos of what was left of it.

[Speaker 1]

Well, that, again, unnerved us anyway. Well, we finally got our equipment, and we moved up tooó So you weren't in operation. No, no.

You were still in process. We were just living there. We just got off the ship, and then we had to go down to the harbor.

And some of our equipment came in, and we drew theóoh, you know, the stoves and the cots and all the other medical stuff and everything else. And, see, we didn't have anything for equipment. We had never had any equipment.

They just furnished it all, and we got over there. And we went to Caserta, and Caserta is where the palace is, you know, a gorgeous place up there. And at that time, the 36th Division was making their first try across the Rapido.

And weóso they wanted us in a hurry. So we stacked up there and took off in a big rush, and then we moved up across theówe crossed the river, but I don't rememberóit was not the Rapido. It was up further in the mountains, more or less, and set up the hospital.

[Speaker 5]

Did you have problems with German aircraft?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. Let me tell you, this is the part. Of course, we were green as grass.

We were riding, and it was beautiful. This was September, and September in Italy is gorgeous. The sun is out and everything.

So we drove up this road in a convoy, and then they had selected a site for us, and so they started putting the tents up and everything. And so, again, the motor officer was sent out to see if we could find some water because we needed to fill our water tank. So I had seen this tanker go by, and I figured it was water, so I went out and cornered him, and, oh, yeah, he said he could fill the tank for us.

So he brought his tanker in, and we were all standing there getting this water into the tank. You know, they put it up on an elevated thing so you could draw the water out. All of a sudden, I heard this plane just coming down.

So, geez, I went diving under the damn water tanker, and the 36th Division Clearing Company was there. And, of course, they'd been to Salerno. They'd been to North Africa and everything else.

So they all looked up, and they said, oh, that's a Spitfire. They said, look at these dumb guys all diving underneath the trucks and everything else. That's a Spitfire.

Well, it went over our truck about probably 200 feet. I mean, I could see the lines of the tires on it, you know, when it went by. And all of a sudden, the whole front of that thing opened up with gunfire.

I mean, just the whole front wing just started. And with that, they went under the trucks. Well, we had come overseas with the 100th Infantry Battalion, which was the Japanese, you know, the Japanese battalion.

It came from Hawaii and all that. And they were moving up that day. And within, I'd say, five minutes, here they come with bodies hanging off of Jeeps and everybody.

Of course, we really weren't set up, but we had enough set up so we could at least administer some care. And, of course, again, it was a terrible blow. I mean, we thought this was a big lark up to this point, you know.

We just had a big time getting out. And here was all this blood and guts all over the place. I mean, I couldn't believe they were bringing them down.

Of course, they were green, too. They had just gotten there, too. And they had been up at a—they had a bypass thing up there where the bridge was at.

This guy had caught them at the bypass with the thing. Turned to come to find out it was a German, of course, flying a Spitfire that they had captured. Lose the gear.

Oh, that was a—what a terrible beginning that was. Well, anyway— Suddenly in it. Suddenly in it.

And we just weren't—we really weren't too well set up. We did get some emergency work done, and then we evacuated them to an evac hospital.

[Speaker 5]

Then the next— Just trying to stabilize them.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, yeah. We had the tents up and stuff, and we had some medical equipment to stop bleeding. It was really first aid almost.

Do you remember the first one you worked with? Oh, gosh, I don't remember that. In fact, again, I was out there running around trying to get some ambulances up there to help them and that sort of thing.

I didn't really get into the medical thing that first day. Well, then our assignment became to split our hospital up into three units. Platoons, they called it.

We went with the 36th Division Clearing Company, and then they sent us the 2nd Auxiliary Surgical Teams. They were the ones that did the surgery. We did just pre-op and post-op and housekeeping.

The 2nd Auxiliary Surgery Group was—Colonel Churchill was the head of it. He was the chief of surgery at Harvard. A surgical team was a surgeon, assistant, an anesthesiologist, and two nurses and, I think, two technicians.

That was a team. They would come up, and they would send us usually three teams or four teams. We were stationed with the Clearing Company, and what we did is what they call the bellies and the chest.

Those were the ones that could not be evacuated and major amputations. So we did the major surgery. Of course, it was—a lot of them were—our mortality was about 25 percent.

Terrible. But it was really the start of the Nash Hospital. We were usually within two or three miles of the front line.

I mean, they just—a lot of times the Clearing Company, the ambulance would bring them in, and they'd just send them across. We set up right in the same field with the Clearing Company. And we worked slowly up the valley there toward Cassino.

We were up in the mountains, more or less. And then we—the Fifth Army was made up of quite a group of people. We had the Americans.

We had the English. We had the Australians. We had the North—we had the French North Africans.

We had the Goons and the Singalese and God knows what else. It was a real— It was a real conglomeration. And up on the right flank where we went, way up in the mountains, we had—the French, the Goons came.

It was rather exciting because they carried all of their meat on the flesh. They kept the cows in the back of the trucks and stuff. They didn't have anything else.

They also kept the whores there, too. And so they'd go by with a whole GMC full of these women. Well, it was kind of exciting.

It was kind of interesting. Let's see what happened in the long there on that line. One day, I went down to headquarters.

I was always—I liked to get a shower. It was hard to get a shower. And we had some showers in our unit, but they never worked very well.

And so the engineers—I'd been down to headquarters, let's say, the day before or something, and I had seen this nice shower set up, beautiful. You know, where the engineers had set up where you could go take a shower and put clean clothes on. So I thought, I want to go down and get a shower.

So we got a shower, and the jeep and I were coming along this road north of Ben Afro. And it was right out in the open, and I'm sitting there. Of course, we had the windshield all down because it was covered up because of reflections and everything.

And I looked up, and I saw an airplane squadron. It was probably 15, and it looked like they were B-26s or something. I couldn't tell, but there were some clouds there, and they were going—they were above the clouds, and I could see them once in a while.

Every once in a while, they'd go out. You could hear them up there. And it was our Air Force.

So I'm sitting there looking at them, and all of a sudden, I see something fall out of one of them. And I looked at it. God, what is that anyway?

And I looked at it. I said, well, it was a string of bombs. I said, where in the hell was that going?

Of course, he was up there quite a while. I figured maybe it was going. So I said to the jeep driver, I said, I don't like what I see up there.

And he said, what did you see? And I said, I think I saw some bombs come out of one of those airplanes. And he looked at me kind of quizzical, and the cars were going by.

And so he stopped, and we were right on a culvert, and, you know, water underneath. And I said, goddamn, I don't know what this is. So I went over one side in the culvert, and he went over the other side.

And we could see each other, you know, head-to-head as we got in there. All of a sudden, I'll tell you, the concussion, and you wouldn't believe what happened. I mean, the dirt and all the dust and everything.

We came pulled out of there, and I'm telling you, see, that road had been full of traffic, and they were going over us as we were underneath it, just bodies everywhere. I mean, it was our bombers that bombed us, and we were within a mile of Fifth Army Headquarters forward position. I think of this when I hear the poor guy talking about the friendly fire thing.

Yeah, as though somehow it just developed in Vietnam. Yeah, you know, I think, geez, they must have killed 100 in that road because those bombs walked right down the road. And we picked up two of them and took them on up to the hospital, and both of them survived.

Both of them were double amputees. It's a difficult survival because they usually bleed to death before they get to the thing. Well, that was one experience.

[Speaker 5]

Let me think of what else happened to me. Just a kind of technical question. Did you have any problems over time getting things that you needed in terms of supplies?

[Speaker 1]

No, we did pretty well. The supplies were very good, and that's one thing somebody asked me one time ago, and that is I never went without a meal. Of course, I know the infantry did, but we were, of course, we always had food.

I never went without a meal. And you got the other stuff you needed, like medical supplies?

[Speaker 5]

Yeah, and we got a lot of blood.

[Speaker 1]

They bled the Italians down in Naples, and they used to pay them for it. But we had a lot of good equipment. And as I say, the surgical teams brought their own, their instruments and all that stuff.

And, see, they would come and stay with us and do surgery and then look after them for a few days, and then we'd evacuate them. And then if they pulled us back or did something, they would go back to their units. See, they didn't stay with us.

They would rotate around wherever they were. The surgical teams would. I was trying to think.

Oh, I guess the next thing that happened to me was I got the diarrhea. I got it real bad.

[Speaker 5]

That happens to everybody, sooner or later.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, geez, and I couldn't. My commanding officer was Bob Newman, and I don't know whether you ever knew Bob Newman, but he was a chest surgeon in Knoxville.

[Speaker 6]

I don't think so.

[Speaker 1]

Well, anyway, that's after the war. And Bob Newman was my CO, and we stayed in the same tent together. And he said, my name was Bud, Bud B.



He said, Bud, I'm sick of you waking me up at night going out to that damn latrine. He said, I think you ought to do something about that. He'd been in North Africa, and so he thought maybe I had amoebic dysentery.

So they sent me back. This was in December. Things were slowing down, and the mud and everything else was going on.

We had mules carrying supplies right up behind our tent, on up through the valley, and they were bringing the casualties back on mule trains. They had big, long mule trains. I mean, like 15 or 20 mules in a row.

And so I went back to the hospital, and I always have a good story on that one. They sent me down for a barium enema. You know, this is an appeal hospital in the tent.

And, of course, if you've ever had that experience, that's the one thing. And they filled me all up with barium, you know, and the guy punched all around and said, gee, I think everything's all right. So he left.

This is a doctor. So I got up off the table, and the technician said the latrine is down the street. Well, I went down the damn street, and I got in there.

There was about six or eight guys on one of these big latrines, you know, sitting around all reading papers and everything else. And I sat down, and this explosion went off.

[Speaker 6]

Everybody looked on. What the hell's wrong with this guy?

[Speaker 1]

Anyway, that was... But anyway, they decided that I had an ulceration or something in my colon, so they sent me back to Naples. And so I spent Christmas on 1943 at the 300th General in Naples, a beautiful hospital up on the hill with all the USO coming there, you know, and all the programs and everything else.

[Speaker 5]

You were a lot worse?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah, just beautiful food and everything else, just, I mean, like a luxury hotel almost. And I was on the officer's ward, and, of course, the minute I got there, all these other guys were there, and they said, You're an M.D.? And I said, Yeah. They said, Well, what are the symptoms of an ulcer?

So I told a few things, and then I'd sit there, and the major would come around on his rounds, you know, and he'd talk to me, and then he'd go to the next bed, and here would come this total recitation of just what I'd told him the day before. And I was embarrassed. I didn't know what to do, whether to not tell these guys or to tell them, or what the hell, because it meant life or death to them.

So, anyway, to make a long story short, this guy went down, and they x-rayed him, and by God, he had an ulcer. He came back up and just shouting, I've got an ulcer! Can you imagine?

I mean, anybody else would think, Oh, what a terrible thing it was. I'm going back to the States. Well, you couldn't get a million-dollar wound, but an ulcer would do it.

Just as good. Well, to continue that into this thing, later on, we got to Anzio, 36th Division was there, and I knew what company this guy was in. And so I had a patient from there, and I said, Do you remember Lutan, so-and-so?

He said, Yeah. I said, You know, I met him down at the 300th General, and I said, He went back to the States. He said, No, he didn't.

I said, What do you mean? He said, He went to North Africa, and they healed his ulcer, and they sent him back to duty, and he was killed about a week or ten days ago at Anzio. So, well, anyway, the next step was the Anzio invasion, and we staged down in, well, up just north of Naples again, on a beach up there.

[Speaker 5]

Oh, so they pulled you back.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, yeah. Our unit came back while I was in the hospital and refitted again, got some new equipment, some new tents, and some other things, and we went out on the beach there, and we loaded our stuff on LSTs in the harbor there. I wasn't involved with that because I didn't get there until everything was loaded.

[Speaker 5]

That's nice. Oh, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

That was good. And I got to, we went out, I went out to the beach, and stayed there, and I think about a week, and we had another interesting thing. Joey Brown.

Remember Joey Brown? Joey Brown came, and he had a stage in the middle, and there was probably, I'd say maybe 100,000, maybe 75,000. It was just loaded with GIs, you know, on that beach around that stage, and he went through his act and everything else.

But what he didn't know was up on the bank, up on the hill behind it, there was a whore up there, and there was a line of GIs to it. Of course, everybody's sitting there with not too much to do. They were all, pretty soon they'd say, watch, watch.

The word was going through all the 70,000. And so, pretty soon, they'd start to yell, next! One would come out, and the whole crowd would yell, next!

And of course, Joey Brown didn't know what the hell was going on. Of course, it was inappropriate for what he was saying, and he couldn't figure out what the hell was going on in this outfit. And finally, somebody ran up on the stage and drew him down and whispered, and he turned around and he looked up there.

[Speaker 5]

Lots of sides to war.

[Speaker 1]

Lots of sides to war. Okay, the next thing, we went to Anzio. And we got on an LST at night, and all rowed up there.

I was with an English LST. You know, the crew was all English. And we had ammunition trucks and things much later, and some of our trucks is what I went with. And so, we pulled into the harbor in the morning, and it was a beautiful day.

It was in January, but it was warm, and the sun was out, and everything looked good. We had all these anti-aircraft, you know, they had to tie a balloon to it.

[Speaker 5]

Garage balloons?

[Speaker 1]

Garage balloons, yeah, and everything else, everything else. And so, and they started unloading, and you could see the beach. We were about a hundred, I'd say a hundred yards off the beach, not more than that.

And so, everybody started unloading, and then here come this air raid. And so, geez, you could hear them coming. They were dive bombers, and I could hear them coming a mile.

I don't know if they were Stukas or what they were, but anyway, I dove in behind one of these gunners. He had a kind of a compartment there, and I dove in there. And he fired all the way.

Boy, he didn't give up on that thing at all. And that guy let a bomb go, and it went right underneath the bottom of this LST. And I didn't, of course, know anything I was on it, but they told me on shore that it blew it out of water. The propeller didn't get out of water.

Well, I've never experienced it. It was funny, because it was an old, it wasn't a rust bucket, but the only thing that impressed me was there was a rust in the air. It just shook everything loose, and the air was filled with rust.

And, of course, the thing went skipping off. I saw him go on, and this guy followed him with a damn machine gun. Well, we kind of, everybody sort of recovered and come back from various holes and places.

And I had a couple of people that got some shrapnel in them that were on the aft end of the thing. So I put some bandages on that. They were all minor wounds.

These were sailors, English sailors. And all of a sudden, we got a column of smoke came up. So they all went rushing down there with the thing, and they found out that it was in the, where they had the clothes, you know, they sold to the people that had some extra uniforms in there, and they caught on fire.

So they tried to put it out, but it was smoking all the time. Well, this part, this is the reason I go into this story, is we sat there all day, and these jeep riders would come out and go right by us and unload a ship next door. So they kept going.

And finally, I said to the guy, I said, I could see my hospital going up on shore. You know, the tents were all going up. And, of course, we had about two or three more air raids.

We weren't fortunately involved in any of them, but they did hit a ship on shore and set it on fire and all this stuff. God, I wanted to get off of that thing so bad. I could really consider swimming ashore.

And finally, they flashed them signals on shore, and they said that they looked at our cargo manifest and we had all this ammunition on it, and they figured they'd just let us blow up. I said, to hell with that noise. I want to get off of here.

So they finally got the message to shore that we didn't have any serious fire, that the smoke coming up was from some uniforms that were burning. So they began to unload us. But this time, it's dark.

I mean, you know, they couldn't have gone. So I get on this thing along with a tank or something else, and I go ashore with it. And it's funny, the things that you remember, because I got on shore, had my big pack on, you know, a lot of stuff, a lot more stuff than I should have had.

And I started up the beach, and of course, it's the beach and the sand is, you know, a foot thick and everything else. And I'm staggering along, and of course, complete blackout. Not a light anywhere, you know.

That's all. And then you can hear the vehicles coming. So I'm trudging along in this path, and all of a sudden, I hear this clank, clank, clank, clank come along behind me.

And I didn't know where the hell he was. He kept getting closer, closer, closer, clank, clank, clank, clank. And I would move to the side and see him like, just follow me.

I thought that damn tank was going to run over me before I could, you know, I'm staggering in the damn sand. I'll tell you, it was the most frightful thing I've ever had. While they got on shore and everything.

[Speaker 5]

I said, tanks are scary.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, in the dark, you couldn't see a thing.

[Speaker 5]

Absolute blackout. I was down one time and had one, I was in the National Guard near the summer camp, and there was a tank that was passing below us on a road, and there were three of us on a hillside. And one came up behind us, and of course, he couldn't see when he was coming over the hill.

And we ended up, we rolled both ways, and he came down where we were. Tanks are real scary.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, that's scary, I'll tell you. Well, we set up our hospital there on the beach, and we really didn't have very much to do. You know, there was very few casualties in the first few days.

And we had a lot of air raids. And I always remember, see, we used to get to BBC, you know, and I'd sit there and this was Edward R. Murrow.

This was Edward R. Murrow in London. No planes appeared over the beach yet today.

Christ, we'd been in a hole all day long. I said, you gotta get it straight. No planes appeared over the beach yet today.

I said, well, let's see. We stayed there about a week or ten days, maybe two weeks, and I guess the most exciting thing was General Lucas, who was the commanding general, he got wounded in the shrapnel somewhere. I don't remember exactly where it was.

It was a minor wound, but relatively minor. But anyway, here come the whole damn staff in the hospital, you know, just everybody crowding around the bed. Well, of course, my job was to strip these people right off.

We gotta get the clothes off them so we can find out what was wrong with them. So we got his clothes on, and the way to get the clothes off was to cut them. Zip, zip.

So I got out my scissors, and he had these beautiful cavalry boots on, you know, like you would know a general. I was just gonna cut the strings down through that. God, he rose up on that cot, he said, God damn you, don't you cut them boots!

I thought, oh, hell. I said, I'm just gonna cut the strings. Oh, well, that's all right.

So that was my experience with General Lucas.

[Speaker 5]

But anyway, let's see what else happened. Anzio was, you were, you were, wherever you were on Anzio, you were close to the front.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yes, yeah, I was just looking at some pictures here. We were about three miles, almost anywhere around. It was a three mile radius is where it was.

And of course, we, we were away from the, Anzio and the tuna. We were out there on the beach a while, and then finally, some, I guess the surgeon, somebody made the, the thing that we should all move together to the hospitals. And we put out a lot of Red Cross and we hoped that they wouldn't, they'd stay away from us.

So we had to move over to where the major hospital units were. There was about three evacs and another field hospital. I think there were about six hospitals, maybe four or five all in one compound.

And, I guess the next thing happened on that was we, it was relatively, we had a, we had pretty steady casualties along. It wasn't too a lot of work, but we, at times we got where we

had to go on, the one I hated the worst was eight on and eight off. If you've ever done that, it's really terrible, you know.

But anyway, one night we were all sitting in there and the shells would come periodically. But most of the time they were going down over. And we had the, what we called the Anzio ante, you've heard of that.

That railroad gun was something. Oh, it was tremendous. And I got tuned to that thing so I could hear, I'm convinced that I could hear the muzzle blast of that thing.

So I knew it was on the way. And I could tell by the sound of that muzzle blast if it was coming anywhere near me. Now I may be, I may be crazy, but I just heard it just so, and I said, that son of a gun is coming pretty close.

Well anyway, this night, this is, we were early there and I don't know, I don't think it was a, it wasn't a big shell. It was probably an 88 anyway, but a couple rounds came in right in the hospital area. So we had a nice big hole dug and the MACI and I got in it and then two or three more rounds came in and then I heard a lot of the to-do outsides.

I went out and our chief nurse had a steak on the fire cooking that night and she went out to turn the steak and that shell come in and it hit, they had a big dental table there where they did their work, you know, for making prosthesis and stuff and that shell hit on that thing and just decapitated her. I never seen like it. This was our chief nurse and I was trying to think if there was another casualty on that thing too.

I guess it was one of the enlisted men that got hurt but not killed. But it was quite a blow to us, let's put it that way. I think this was the first nurse except for maybe, I don't know, in the Philippines that was killed.

[Speaker 5]

Yeah, they took casualties. Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Well, the other thing we got, then we got the daily air raids and that night and they used to barrage, they had all these guns, you know, all around so they would air any aircraft guns and so it was like a 4th of July demonstration every night. Only problem was that some of that stuff came down after they fired up it would come back down again. So, Rookie and I, that was the M.A.C. officer, we got tired of being in our hole and we couldn't see anything. So we dug a very elaborate hole out there and we put some things on it and we put some boards over and we covered it with some sandbags and everything so we had an observation. So we could sit in that thing and watch the going on. Well, the story I want to tell you was we had a M.A.C. officer, an M.D. that was named Max Benjamin and Max Benjamin was a German Jew who had come over from Germany just before the war to escape Hitler and then I guess he got picked up and he was sent in the army. Well, Max Benjamin was absolutely terrified. I mean, he knew what would happen to him if he, if we were, and of course we thought for a while that we were going to be all prisoners. And old Max was just absolutely terrified.

I've never seen anybody so chronically terrified like that. Well, we had an air raid one night and Max was in our tent and he used to lay there like this and just shake, you know, in the cot. And so, I came around and I said, let's go, let's go to our, and Max, he used to just lay there and shake.

So I said, come on Max, let's go. Well, he wasn't going to go. Well, anyway, the other guy and I got him out of the cot and brought him over and we put him in the hole.

And when we went back, after the air raid was over, a great big shell cone had come through the tent right where his head was and was so, was such force that it had gone right through the cot and all the blankets to the ground. Right where his head was laying. So Max, but anyway, I think Max made it out of there all right.

I think they, they gave him a psychiatric discharge. Well, let's see, Anzio.

[Speaker 5]

Do you remember reading Bill Mauldin's cartoons?

[Speaker 1]

Oh yes, I have, I have a whole book full of Bill Mauldin's, yeah. Because he was there too. Yeah, oh yeah, he was in the 45th division.

He used to come on, all those people, Ernie Pyle came by. They used to, they, especially when we got up further on, they always would come by and stop at a hospital unit because they could get a good meal on the road, let's see, on the way up. So Ernie Pyle came a lot.

We, we saw him a lot and so did Bill Mauldin, Stars and Stripes. And, we were very familiar with all of them. But you were there at Anzio until April?

Yeah, well, and then came the, we, and it got along toward the spring and the weather again and we were playing softball and this is another story, but we played softball every night. And my, it was the officers against enlisted men and somebody else, I don't know, we had teams. My place was first base.

And, so, we played every night. We played right after, right after we ate and we'd go out and play softball until it got dark. And, so then we got the casualties.

You know, so that stopped all the softball. So, I went out there one night and right on first base was a big shell hole. I mean, it was an 88 that hit right on first base and I don't know what it was, but it was, well, another thing that caught us was that a doll was a dentist.

And we went down to Salerno on rest leave. Not Salerno, but, what is the, Isle of Capri and the, what is the peninsula there? I forget the name of it now.

It slips me. But we went on rest leave and we had a wonderful time there. Did you go out by boat?

No, we went by car, we went by jeep around through Pompeii and all by that and out onto the peninsula. I forget the name of it. It was a nice luxury hotel.

And, we stayed there about a week and enjoyed it and came back. And this was, and then, after we came back, they started really with the big guns firing into the harbor, you know. And we could hear all this stuff going over.

It was kind of funny. It was going both ways. We had the battleship Texas out there and we had something else.

And that's another interesting thing. We'd sit, stand out there and watch and you could hear them firing you know, out at sea. And as the shell gets closer to the ground, it slows up.

And you could see these things coming through the air. Ball of fire going through. I mean, these great big 16 and 18 inch shells.

They were going on over toward the Germans. And the same way we were getting them back this way. But, they were all, they were crossing in the air and we were here and we wouldn't even seem by.

So anyway, the shelling went on pretty severely there and it got to where nobody wanted to go down to Anzio at all. In fact, we had a master sergeant who was, had lost all his stripes because he wouldn't go down to Anzio to get the mail. He just refused.

He refused. The CO said, if you're not going to do it, you'll lose your stripes. He said, I don't care.

I don't want to go. So anyway, I went back up to the bulletin board and the next thing and here was this, anybody wants to go to, not Salerno, but something like that. But anyway, now the Capri sign up.

So Dahl was there with him. I said, well let's sign up again. I said, I don't care about the shelling.

I said, we'll be all right. He said, okay, I'll go. So we signed up.

And it was about four or five days went by and there were no more signatures. The colonel called us up and he said, you know, listen, you bastard just got back from his leave. He said, are you going to go again?

And I said, sure, we'll just go again. And he said, well nobody else will sign up. He said, we've got a quarter of two to go so I'm going to let you go.

Well, you know, you get very superstitious about something and you think, well, now that's something I shouldn't have done. You know, I'm just, I'm getting, pushing the curve here. Well, it's very interesting.

We went down and we loaded in trucks in a railroad cut down at Anzill. It was a big, deep cut there, you know, where it was protected on both sides. And the LSTs came in and when they came in they were all backed on so they could drive right off.



And when they came back on again they drove right on. It was a minimum of time at the thing. So all of a sudden the truck starts up and I mean, he was going 65 to 70 miles an hour through the city of Anzill.

And down to the docks and on to the ship. And then, up we went to the harbor. Never heard a shell, never heard anything.

Same way, coming back. Came back in, never heard a shell. We were down there on ten days or two weeks again.

Sometimes you get lucky. I guess that was it. I was worried though.

I thought that was really that I was really pushing. Well, we broke into Rome. That was a great experience riding down there with thousands of people lining the road throwing flowers at us.

You know, guys were conquering heroes.

[Speaker 5]

That was nice to be a conquering hero.

[Speaker 1]

Oh yeah. I mean, you know. And we went down into Rome and as I say, most of Rome was a beautiful city.

But the streets were, I'd say they were 10 or 15 deep all the way. And they just lined right up on each side. And we went, drove through that thing down through there.

It was a real experience.

[Speaker 5]

Did you have time to stay in Rome at all?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, we stayed there about four or five days is all. And then, of course, they were moving fast up ahead. And they wanted our field hospital because it was much easier to move and there were no casualties.

So we went up to Piombino and a couple other places. We'd set up and stay overnight almost. And then the next day move on another 30 or 40 miles.

So we went right up to the Italian coast in a hurry. And all the way really to Florence. We didn't we had a they would be occasionally we'd get a few casualties but not very much.

And then we, went into Florence and that's all the bridges were down there but they had Bailey Bridges up and they didn't do much sort of damage to Florence. Now, Florence was saved because of the Ponte Vecchio and all that. They blew the houses on each side of it.

It was completely you couldn't use it but they didn't they didn't blow the bridge. And then not much happened until we got up to they started the winter line up there. And we had we took a lot of casualties there.

A lot of them. Oh, one more thing I should tell you maybe about casualties and I forgot to tell you. When we broke out of the beachhead it was Memorial Day.

It was right at the end of May and June. June 5th we went into Rome. Well, we were at the peak of the casualties.

And of course this was this aid on and aid off stuff. I'd been doing it a week or ten days and we were just loaded with casualties. We were getting behind where we were operating on them maybe 12, sometimes 18 hours.

We had a backlog and had to make a decision which one to work on. It was that bad. So I just got to bed and this enlisted man came in and he said the colonel wants you to go to get up and put on a first-class uniform.

Mark Clark is going to give a Memorial Day speech at the graveyard. And he wanted everybody who has a casualty there to have somebody there to represent them. Of course we had a couple of nurses.

I got out of bed and put on a first-class uniform and went down to the graveyard. The thing I want to tell you was they had a screen up there and there were 800 unburied bodies stacked like cord wood behind that screen. I mean you have to think of 800.

That is a hell of a lot of people. And every once in a while the wind would shift and it would be just awful. So Mark gave his speech and then this graves registration unit had been on the beach with me and they did not have an officer.

So if you don't have an officer you can't get paid. So this sergeant had come over to me and I was in the hospital and he said can I attach you so we can get some money. He said I'll bring the morning report and all that.

I said sure I'd be glad to do that. So for the week he came every morning with his morning report and I signed it so they could get paid. But I got to know him pretty well.

So anyway after this speech was over with I saw one of the guys there and I went down and I talked to him and he said don't you know about him? I said no. He said he was killed right over there.

The shell came in and killed him. He's buried right over there. Okay we got north of Rome to Florence and then we did a lot of work up north of Florence.

And then we casualties caused more mostly by shrapnel artillery fire and mines too. We had a lot of mines. We didn't have so many there later on.

We went up in the mountains up in the mountains and set up over in there and a couple of episodes there we set up in this hospital a nice little field and were there for about a week

or ten days. Right out in the middle of this field lay this big bomb just laying there. There wasn't any cat or anything just laying there.

And so everybody kind of walked around and looked at it.

[Speaker 2]

I'm telling you if you get in a concussion you couldn't believe it. It was a 500 pounder. Imagine sitting on it getting pictures taken.

Then of course winter came and we were up there and way up there in the mountains and the Germans were all down in the valley where it was nice and warm so they really screwed us on this thing good. And they stopped us within probably four or five miles of the valley. So here we were everything was up in the mountains in the snow and mud.

And that's when I went with the 248th Field Artillery. Their medical officer had his time was in or something anyway and he left and so they put me on temporary duty with this 248th Field Artillery. And that was quite an experience for me because I hadn't ever been with a line outfit and Colonel McBride was there and he was a West Pointer.

He was a commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel and he was a West Pointer and boy he knew his stuff. And it was great because he knew what I was supposed to do and I damn well better find out what I think so I had to check the kitchens and all this stuff you know. And we were 155 howitzers you know and it was kind of interesting because let's me say it was, well we had one bad day.

We used to get chilled you know and had a lot of incoming rounds and we used to always, it was a tradition that the medical would see in the artillery, in the infantry evacuate your casualty to the first aid station. In the artillery the first aid station goes out and picks you up. That's the difference see.

That means that the height of the shelling guess who's out there on the day of the ambulance going to the gun pit? Me. Well I still think of this because the shells would start coming in you know we had a nice big house with a big wall on it so we were pretty safe.

We were all sitting around on the floor this was the this was the unit you know the medical unit and we were all sitting there watching that damn field phone because if that son of a bitch rung we knew we had to drag our ass out and go. Well then one day it rung and I had I had

[Speaker 4]

never

[Speaker 2]

been I had never had the experience of arriving on a situation just as it happened I mean within seconds of the hell that happened and I had a hard time with my enlisted men because they were some people who were you know besides their chest torn out but they were wide awake you know and they wanted me to start to do work on them I said there's no point working on him just give him a big shot of morphine and let's go on to somebody else I had the triage thing was the important thing and you for Christ they knew see I mean

that's what I mean can't I go do something for him I said you can't do a damn thing for him and he was wide awake conscious of it give him a big shot of morphine and that's it you know we had this morphine stretch you know they just hit him and squeeze each other and the triage was so and then we would then we have somebody with a leg or something where you put a tourniquet on him regress it stop the bleeding and that sort of thing but the getting on that scene I'll never forget that scene you know the the guy's still wide awake and perfectly conscious and the major parts of their body torn off it's just it's unbelievable it's horrible how you can survive that even for that long yeah it's amazing you know they just the whole side of the chest gone and here he was talking to us perfectly conscious well anyway that was that's the son of a monster really oh that is hard that was zero for 50 years yeah um compared to anything in surgery or anything I've done there's nothing this is just wild stuff a lot of little funny things that probably drive us as a stickler for for discipline and and you you were supposed to do what you did and of course this 240 field out here where the old the old the old the the old the the old old the old the old the old the old the old the old the old old old the old the old the old old the old the old the old old old the the the the old the the the the the they had set one gun one behind the other and uh all the criminal advisers you gotta move that thing around all the company commanders oh that's a hell this morning I don't care who's firing one over the other you gotta get, you gotta change that well we'll do it tomorrow well anyway at the same time I was having, I hadn't had any sick call at all so called sick call you know when somebody would come down with a cold or something else that's what I meant, I didn't have any all of a sudden I got all these big long lines out there and they all there was a core order that you wore a helmet everybody had a headache for wearing a helmet I didn't laugh but I was just 10 guys standing there all got a headache so I gave them a few aspirin well can't we take it back? no sir, you keep that helmet on well that's to be honest to say first thing they got was a muzzle blast that was that and fortunately it was far enough out so I didn't get anybody but it blew up you know right at the end of the barrel right over the next gun pit so all the shot went fortunately off of it that was the last call I ever had anybody who didn't want to wear the helmet everybody else had a hell of a hard time I had to hooker everybody he just laughed and killed himself you cured all the headaches the command well anyway let's see where were we I went back to the hospital for the last push and by the way Bob Dole was in our hospital he was he was badly hurt in that first push going out and going out of there we had the mines and they had these mines that were about that about that square and about that deep and they were all wood except for the fumes and they were very difficult to find those things and these guys when this infantry started out through there it was the most horrible thing because they'd step on a mine and it would go off their foot it wasn't big enough to blow a leg off it blew off their foot and then it streaked up through and got both eyes and I had a roll of them in that thing I can remember at least 10 or 15 all with the same injury both eyes gone and a foot off from these mines you see the dirt would come up and just hit their eyes I just couldn't believe I mean I had 10 or 15 in a row there in that thing we were cleaning them up getting the face cleaned up and trying to do something about their eyes maybe one eye would still be there but most of the time both eyes were gone well I guess that was that was about the end of the course the push went on and we had care for these and nothing new about that then we pushed into the coal valley and then a very interesting thing occurred the last as the war came to an end there in the spring beautiful weather a lot of strange things happened one of them was we had the so called red brigade I don't know whether you ever heard of that probably you never have but the red brigade was a bunch of

I'd call them criminals but anyway they had a word handkerchief around they were so called or they were supposedly helping the allies win the victory they were out there stealing what they could steal really what they were doing and we moved up the river there and we stopped so I went back with the trucks to get all the stuff we had left we had some tables and some chairs and some other stuff that we figured we probably didn't need so I said well I'll take the truck and go back and get them and it was probably a 60 mile trip so it was quite a ways back we got back and loaded it all up and then we come and as we came back it's getting dark and they have autobombs there you know and then they just like they do in Germany you know the day before we had heard that they had killed a nurse and they had killed those two or three other people and taken their chief you know the East Red Brigade somebody caught him you know of course this was freshening our minds so here it is just getting dark and we're in this GMC and we have about 10 more miles to get when we get to where the unit is and we came over this hill I'll never forget it I looked down there and then at the bottom of the hill was a car parked with about 6 of these guys with their bandanas on and as we started down the hill they started waving their guns in the air you know and sort of point pointing at us but just waving them more or less and the driver looked at me and he said what are we going to do and I said we sure ain't gonna stop so I said you let this thing I said shift this thing down to about 4th gear so it'll sound like it's winding down you let it slow down and just as we get within about 50 yards of the thing I said you shift that into high gear and let's go well that damn if you've ever seen a GMC they were you could hear them they were winding down and of course they thought we were stopping and just as we got there we came off and we took off and sure enough the bullets hit back on the damn picnic table and stuff but we were out of there but nobody knows much about that another thing they came on our unit they came to our into our unit and they wanted gasoline and they waved a machine gun around a little bit at our commanding officer but we didn't have any guns on or anything else and so I always remember Sergeant Soto he went and he got he saw what was happening at a distance and he got about 15 or 20 of our enlisted men and they just closed right in on this guy and he looked around and he saw all these guys and Captain Kennedy and I always remember you get the hell out of here he was pretty good in Italian and he left but oh you know what was going to happen and I always say VE day in Europe was my worst night that I spent over there we all had VE day the war was over all night long I laid in that cot and you could hear the bullets going everywhere bullets going everywhere and I thought god would it be awful to get killed on the last day of the war by some sort of big shooting in the air so I guess that's about it came back staged and I was sent to a it was very interesting because I got sent to the 13th 141st medical battalion and I was that's another interesting

[Speaker 4]

you had to have 85 points to go home and guess what I had I had 84

[Speaker 2]

and of course I was regular army I'd been a regular army intern they said well you're going to the Pacific so I well I guess I can't do anything else I'll just have to but anyway they transferred me over to a

[Speaker 4]

courting company I had about 40 ambulances and we went around through

[Speaker 2]

northern Italy there and these Italians had taken in these wounded Germans and looked at them fed them dressed their wounds and taken care of them and I saw something and it was

[Speaker 4]

just amazing because they were actually the Germans hadn't been too good to the Italians but this was a person who came to their door he was wounded and these Italians are Italians

[Speaker 6]

and come in

[Speaker 4]

we'll take care of you they had dressed his wounds they had fractured femurs that had been operated on and they couldn't get back to the Brenner Pass because there was so much bombing going on and so we had to collect all these guys from these Italian homes and there was tears spread when they left we couldn't pick them up and everybody was crying the German was crying and the Italians were crying it was a strange strange thing

[Speaker 6]

you know

[Speaker 4]

had you dealt with everybody who had been wounded before that?

[Speaker 2]

oh we had some yeah

[Speaker 4]

but they they weren't you know they were just sitting there this was quite a sensation and that's when I appreciated the C-47 at the airport because we would get a bunch together maybe a hundred maybe 150 and he'd say coordinate so and so on our military map he said we'll be there and this would be just a field just an open field the C-47 would come down land around this field we'd load them all on and off they'd go just amazing no airport just a pile of fuel got the pilots and good planes it was a hard hardest time did you ever have the feeling that you couldn't keep on?

[Speaker 3]

no no I never had that at all I will say that one night at ANZIO it was very flat and we had a GMC there that had a metal cab and so our trick was to get up on top of the metal cab you could see pretty good and I stood on top of that metal cab and I could see them firing tanks and stuff between me and ANZIO that was when that push got to the worst they drove a wedge way down in there you know and I was pretty convinced that we were going to be captured I just thought there was not much hope and in the 45th division we were getting captured they were at this overpass where this thing was a lot of them were coming in from that area where this overpass they called it and they said we're not going to be able to hold out and if we can't hold out they'll drive a tank right down into ANZIO and so we for I think two or three days there we thought we might not make it and of course at the same time we had a radio on and Hitler was saying we're going to drive them into the sea we're going to drive them into the sea and Hitler has commanded it well you know that that makes me

think of another thing that happened when they got on the truck this was just before the push to take off and it was in late May and we never knew these things were going to happen and all of a sudden one morning beautiful clear day here started formations of planes coming over and they were coming from Corsica you know they were twin engine 829s or something and they were going over and they were bombing and then a few fighters would come through 10 miles away to see what was going on and then they had gotten through that you could hear the bombs going and all that and all of a sudden here come the flying fortresses and I mean just thousands of them I had never seen anything like it just a stream of them coming and I stood on top of that truck and actually we were 10 miles away the ground shook where we were from those bombs it must have been awful and of course we were touring and some of these towns up there there wasn't a single building standing but they just kept coming and coming and coming along the stream of formation I guess if I were German I'd probably look over and think we lost the war there was really we had a couple dogfights one day there over us you know and then all of a sudden one of them would catch fire and they'd say we got it and it was all in American and the parachute would open up it was funny because we were all standing there watching this thing going on and we saw this plane catch on fire and start to come down and it kind of bailed out and started to turn and by the time it turned it was coming right at us and everybody started scurrying for a hole and that thing finally turned and hit it about 100-200 yards away but it was just crazy and it went into a hill it was a big P-47 it was a Thunderbolt it had a big engine and it went into the hill and again the same thing it took a minute to get here and we saw it go into the hill and all of a sudden we heard the sound and all of a sudden we heard the noise did you at your hospital have any dealings with psychiatric patients well we had a few we did not have a psychiatrist we had a surgical hospital I sat up there in the hospital thing I did a lot of medical work I took care of a lot of malaria and I had a medical warden and we had a few but by then at the end of the Anzio thing most of those people were good soldiers and that's how I got weeded out and George Patton had weeded a few about in Sicily one of the things I thought ignored me was that even good soldiers they're in the line long enough oh yeah now you've seen all the cartoons those guys used to come back and shave and they had been quietly scared for probably 72 hours or so they looked bad they did and that's a good quote you've seen what he did with it and that's the way they looked