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[Speaker 2]

May 6th, 1998. This is an interview with Mr. Benjamin Franklin.

[Speaker 1]

You signed up when you were 16, is that right? Yes. I was not a very good student.

And I was raised during the Depression. My future, the most I could have ever become, considering that I was not a good student, I was not overly intelligent, the most I could have ever become, I would have been very successful if I could have been a clerk in a grocery store, because I was a delivery boy for a grocery store, starting at age 13. So when this was an escape for me, this was an outlet, this was an opportunity to see the world, to have some adventure, and perhaps to be somebody.

We all, all children have that. So I enlisted the day after Pearl Harbor. I joined my regiment in New York, 16th Infantry, 1st Division, in April of 1942.

Went to Europe. We went to England in August of 1942, the whole 1st Infantry Division. We loaded up on the Queen Mary on August the 2nd, 1942, and we went to Scotland.

Had you done any training up to this point? Oh, yes. We had been constantly training, taking invasion maneuvers, and, of course, field training, and I was in a machine gun company.

So we got to Scotland, and we went from Scotland down to England by train to a place called Tidworth Ferries. Perhaps, if you ever get to go to England, Tidworth Ferries is about 60 miles northeast of London, and it's near Stonehenge. So anyone who goes to England, of course, should go to Stonehenge.

Absolutely. And this is where I got my first pass through London. So already the world is excited, you know.

I'm really seeing something. I'm 17 years old by now. How did you get a special waiver or something?

I didn't know. I lied to you. Which is not a very bad vocation.

It gets you a lot of women. It gets you money. It'll get a lot of things in life if you are a good liar.

So do not criticize people who are proficient in being untruthful, from politicians to presidents down to street sweepers. Good people. And I was a good liar.

I went into the recruiting office, and they asked me how old I was. I said 18. And the sergeant said, you don't look 18.

He said, here, take these papers and go get your parents' permission, and that way, if they agree, we'll enlist you. So I went up on Market. Market Square used to be different than what it is now.

They used to really have baskets of fruit and potatoes. Farmers came in on Market up there, and bums hung out there. And I still think homeless people hang out.

I'm not sure. But I went to Market right out of the recruiting office. It was very close to Market Square.

I went out there, and there was some bum. I asked him to sign the paper, and he said, what are you going to do, and who to sign, or some drunk. And he said, I'll sign them if you promise to kill a Jap for me.

I'll never forget. Okay, I'll kill a Jap just for you. I never got close to a Jap.

But anyway, I joined a very, very good infantry regiment, and a very good infantry division. The Big Red One. And I stayed with the Big Red One.

Well, let's get back to England. Okay. We went down to Tateworth Barracks, but we only stayed there for a few weeks.

And we went to Scotland back and took invasion maneuvers. What does that mean? What would you do when you say invasion maneuvers?

Well, we would go out on a big ship. We lived on a ship. And we would get, we'd climb down these rope, that rope that hung down the side of the ship and get into small Higgins boats.

A Higgins boat is what they call a LCBPT. Vehicle, Personnel, and Tank is what it was called. Well, later they just called it a Higgins boat, an assault boat.

It would carry 42 people on the boat. It was commanded by a sailor, a coxswain. But he was really in charge of it.

From the time you got on that boat until you hit land, you did not tell him what to do. I don't care what your rank was. So we would go in and we'd go in on maneuver, you know.

And one of the requirements was we could not eat, sleep, or smoke for \$48. Prior? No, from the time we hit land.

Once we hit land. Well, we did this for, I would say, most of September of 1942. And then part of October we maneuvered against the famous British regiment of the Black Watch Regiment, if you've ever heard of the Black Watch Regiment.

We maneuvered against them. And later, later in life, my regiment was again close to the Black Watch Regiment. In Germany, they were on occupation duty and we were on occupation duty.

And I was Sergeant Major of the Regiment and we got together again, you know, and recalled all these past things. But anyway, one night the boat just slipped out and we were on our way to Africa. And we could tell by the sun that we were going southeast.

You know, they won't tell you anything. And I think the name of the boat we were on was Warwick Castle, HMS Warwick Castle. I think that was the name of the boat.

We spent 50-something years on it. Then we had a convoy coming from the States and went through the Straits of Gibraltar. Now we know where we're at.

When we go through the Straits of Gibraltar, there's only one Straits of Gibraltar you can't miss. And my regiment, the 16th Infantry, was supposed to land at a place called Arzu, which is just east of Oran in Africa. We were supposed to land at 1 o'clock in the morning.

And we did. We landed about 1 o'clock in the morning. And, of course, they taught us French on the boat going over.

They taught us French. And the French they taught us is Je suis ami, je suis américain. I am a friend, I'm an American.

This is all we know. And the reason for that is when the Germans took over France, the French fleet escaped from France and went to Oran, Africa. And the British battleship Rodney and a few other big battleships went into Oran and tried to sink the French fleet.

And there was a lot of casualties. And so the higher headquarters knew that the French would not be very relieved with troops landing. So that's why they made us learn this.

And we had an American flag on our arm. And we kept hollering, je suis ami, je suis américain. And we spoke good French.

So we landed. And, of course, the 18th Infantry, which was just to the right of us. If I'm going too fast, stop me.

It was just to the right of us as you look south. Here is a little town called Saint-Lô. And here is Saint-Loup.

And here is Arsoult where we landed. We landed at Arsoult. And we're going to go deep inland and come around and come in behind Oran.

The 18th Infantry, which was a sister regiment in the 1st Division, landed at Saint-Loup and was supposed to go directly into Oran. And the 26th Infantry, which was the third regiment of the 1st Division, landed to the right of Oran and was coming in from the west. So it was a two-pincher with a 16th coming into the rear.

And on paper it probably looked good. And it was quite successful. We got shot at, and we did some shooting.

We had little carts to pull our machine guns in. And whoever invented these little carts never pulled them in sand because they wouldn't look the same. You know, a machine gun, a heavy, water-cooled machine gun, which is what I was, weighs about 96 pounds for a tripod and guns and water.

Was that your responsibility with the machine guns? Yes, I was the gunner, and I was to carry the tripod when we walked. We put them on these little carts, so when we started pulling them, hell, it was harder to pull them than it was to carry the guns.

So we moved straight inland, and we got to Le Grand. Now, we landed at 1 o'clock in the morning. And by that evening, we were at a little town called Le Grand.

What was it? Excuse me. What was, when you, so how long did it take you, how long were you on the Higgins, the Higgins assault boats when you landed, from the time that you, how long were you on those actual assault boats, would you say?

From the time we left the ship to the time we hit land, we were probably in miles and probably 30, 35, 40 minutes. Don't worry. But we received no fire.

No fires. No. Now, on the other hand, the first armored division, which was part of the invading force, had an armored infantry regiment.

The 6th armored infantry regiment was part of the 1st armored division. Italians was on a destroyer that was supposed to go right into the dock, land, jump out, and assault the fort. Well, they got hell knocked out of it.

They didn't, the destroyers, as soon as they got to the harbor, they opened fire on it and just eat those people up. It was a very stupid plan. But we Americans at that time, we were so inexperienced.

We were taught by the school at Fort Benning which had a very simple philosophy of shoot, one part of you shoot and the other part of you maneuver and take the objective. Well, that all sounds good. But when you don't have anything to maneuver around, when these people over here are getting shot at, what the hell do you do?

So it's a problem. But that was the tactical philosophy of the American army at that time. It didn't work.

Anyway, we got to Legrand the first evening and I laid down, and I'll never forget it. My clothing consisted of OD trousers, OD shirt, a field jacket, and then a cartridge belt and pistol and all of this and a steel helmet. And we had shoes with leggings.

We didn't have boots at that time. We had leggings. And that evening we'd come up to a stone wall overlooking this little town of Legrand.

The rifle troops were patrolling down into the town with machine guns, weapons troops. That's why I lived through the war. I was in a weapons company.

Had I been in a rifle company, I would have been killed right away.

[Speaker 2]

Why do you say that?

[Speaker 1]

Because 87% of all casualties are in rifle companies. 87% of all casualties. Now, take away from that the artillery, the armor, the Air Force, the quartermaster, whatever else you have and you can see who gets killed in wars.

87% of all your casualties are in rifle companies. I was in a machine gun company. That's why I lived.

One company in my regiment, my company of the 16th Infantry, started out with 168 men. We left America with 168. At the end of the war, they had had 1,893 replacements.

One company, commanded by a man, when I was a magistrate, it was commanded by a man named Captain Richmond, an extremely fine, courageous soldier. But that's an example. My company, weapons company, we had maybe 142 when we left the States.

At the end of the war, I would say we maybe had 600 replacements come on. It was eight of us that was left for D-Day. From the original, yeah, they had gone through that consistently.

Then after D-Day, it started coming down. At the end of the war, there was only two of us that was left. But this is normal.

It's a normal combat irritation. Your rifle troops, they suffered the worst inhumane living conditions, the worst treatment, the worst of everything, was your rifle troops. Of course, us uneducated, dumb southerners make very good rifle soldiers.

I'll tell you why. Because we were used to hardship. We were raised during the Depression.

We knew what it was to be hungry. We knew what it was to work without food and be tired. So when these conditions were endured, the southern rifleman was not that big a danger.

He had done this at home, but back to the south. Well, that's a good point. I wonder, that's something I'm real interested in, in the training, what you think about, Mr. Franklin, your training as far as the effectiveness, I guess, of your training, how effective it was. You talked some about tactics earlier, and as far as your training was involved, what would you, if you step back just a little bit, what would you say a typical day of training, even before, say, you got to Scotland, in the very beginning, was like, sort of that as well? The Army runs on a cycle, on a yearly cycle. They start out with individual training, and individual training is, if you're a rifleman, you go to the range, and you qualify with a rifle on the range, and then you have squad.

Twelve riflemen make one squad. Then you have squad tactics. What does a squad do?

At that time, they had an Alpha, Bravo, Charlie team, and a rifle squad. The Alpha team was two men, and they were the point, the scouts. The Bravo team was the base of fire.

Those people were the ones who laid down and put a base of fire on the enemy, and your Charlie team were the ones who maneuvered around, and this was part of the rifle squad. Did somebody assign you to, I mean, did you sort of choose, or did somebody say, okay, you're going to be Alpha, you're going to be Bravo? Oh, we had a squad leader.

We had a squad leader who, at that time, was only a corporal. Later, he'd become a sergeant. You had a squad leader, an assistant squad leader.

The commander of the Alpha team, the recon team, was actually the assistant squad leader. So he fulfilled, if the squad leader got killed, he'd become the squad leader, and he appointed someone else to be the point. And ever, it's more technical than people think.

The individual duties of a rifle soldier. Now, the individual duties, if you've got four squads, make a platoon, and the platoon operates on the same philosophy. To encounter the enemy, a base of fire, and a maneuvering element.

Now, four platoons make a company. Again, the same basic principle. Scouts, find out where the enemy is, how strong he is.

Your base of fire on the enemy, and your maneuvering element. But once you get up to company level, you have, now we introduce the machine guns attached to your company, the mortar platoon that is part of your company that can lay fire on this objective, and the machine gun platoon that can fire directly at it. So it gets a little bigger.

So in the beginning of the year, in the beginning, you start out with individual training, then squad training, then platoon training, then company training, then battalion training, and then regimental combat training. It's all the same principle. Recon and find the enemy.

Lay down a base of fire, pin him down, and maneuver in order to capture. All from individual squad to regiment. But I'll bring up a point here.

You hear often people say that he is a good leader. General so-and-so. You have two leaders in the army.

You have the squad leader and the platoon leader. They lead. Everybody else commands.

They tell other people what to do. But a squad leader and a platoon leader are your only two leaders in the army. A general is not a leader.

He's a business administrative man who tells other people what to do. It's like you running an office or like Dr. Johnson course over there. He says, well, Professor so-and-so, you take that, and Professor so-and-so, you take that.

The same way with a general in the army. They are business administrative people. They are not leaders.

So you wouldn't look at them as leaders.

[Speaker 2]  
Absolutely not.

[Speaker 1]  
Because they need to be leaders. Although this is not detractment from the very oftentimes courageous and good people. But they are just not leaders.

It's a distinction. And most people don't realize this. Later when I become a sergeant major of the regiment, and I had a colonel, well, I had many colonels of course, then I could really see what duties a regimental commander had.

And very little of his duties required leadership. Most of his duties required decision making relative to the careers of junior officers. This is extremely consistent.

As far as him being a leader, very few of them. They were leaders when they had squad or when they had a platoon. But once they graduated to a company, once they become a captain, they are now commanders.

They are no longer leaders. I hope that don't throw you off. Not at all.

No, this is excellent. That's exactly, that's very much what I'm interested in. What was, so what would you say, if you go all the way back just to the very like the first month when they're doing that individual training, what was that like?

Because you've gone from some civilian life, you were in high school, and then you've got that, is it a sudden shock to the system?

[Speaker 2]

Or is it, what was that like?

[Speaker 1]

How did you feel, I guess? The Army, these business administrators, set up a system whereby they could take a person out of civilian life and put him into a training center and give him basic training. And this consisted of dehumanizing you to no longer think as an individual.

You now become part of a team. And this is overemphasized from the first day you get there. If you do something wrong, the squad suffers for it.

And if the squad does something wrong, the whole platoon suffers for it. But they start off by cutting off your hair, by keeping you in detention, by making you crawl on your stomach, by calling you every name you can be called, from son of a bitch on down, you know. And how dumb you are and how stupid you are.

And this is to break you as an individual to recognizing, to force you to recognize that there's something greater than you. And that's the organization you're assigned to, the squad or the company and so on. And that everything you do has got to be in concert with the other members of that group.

And that your individual wants and needs are unimportant. This is the way to break it down. And they start out by giving you clothing that don't fit.

On purpose? Deliberately. Clothing that don't fit.

They give you equipment, and particularly boots that are always too, shoes, shoes that were a little too big. Because when you, they put you on a scale and they put 90 pounds on your back and you're barefoot. And of course your feet spread out when you get, and they draw a circle around that where your feet spread out and that's the size of shoes.

But they don't realize you're not always carrying 90 pounds on your back. But that's an example of how they work. Then they start training you with a rifle.

How to break it down, how to disassemble. What kind of rifle? When I went in the Army, we had 03s.

03s. Yeah, Springfield 03 from World War I. Then after about four weeks, we got the M1, the Ram.

So now we got a new rifle and we got to learn how to fire. But to show you how unprepared the American Army was for war, we had a rifle grenade launcher that would only work on an 03. It would not work on an M1.

Squad leaders later had to carry an 03. The rest of the squads carried an M1, the Ram. But if the squad leader lost his grenade launcher, then you had nothing to shoot that would even knock out a jeep.

I'll get into that later. Then they took you on hikes. How far did you go?

When they start out, a 10-mile hike, then a 20, then a 25 with equipment in Georgia in April, May, 90, 100 years. If you fall out, you've got to go back and do it again the next day or on Saturday or Sunday. You as an individual?

You as an individual. They put the equipment on you and make you, well, they have people to check you to see if you're good. And if you goof up, they make you wear a pack, full field equipment, everything you had, and then walk around the quadrangle, we called it.

And you maybe have to walk four hours around. It is punishment. And again, everybody's looking at you and they know that you did something wrong.

Maybe minor, but that's the way they discipline you. Would people yell stuff at you?

[Speaker 2]

No, no, no.

[Speaker 1]

The other people realized that that could very easily be them. So they were sympathetic. Yeah, they were sympathetic, yeah.

But they didn't show sympathy. Sympathy, and I learned this very quickly. In fact, I learned it very quickly in the Army.

Sympathy is a word you'll find in the dictionary between shit and syphilis. So they told you that right quick in the Army. But not very good.

Don't play this in front of your mother. But that's the way the Army was. They were blunt and they wanted to make, they didn't want to make a man out of you.

They wanted to make a machine out of you. And later, when I got into combat, I realized how important that was to be a machine rather than a man. In fact, instinctively, you must obey without question.

You must do things that are inhuman. What damn fool would go get killed because some sergeant said, go out there and get killed? Who the hell is this sergeant to tell you to go get killed?

They've got to condition you mentally to be prepared to become a machine so that when a sergeant said, Franklin, do so and so, know that you're going to get killed. You get up and go. Because you've been conditioned.

You've been psychologically brainwashed. And those two words, when I went in the Army, if someone had come up with those words, I'd say, how the hell do you spell it? I don't even know what you're talking about.

But now, later, I don't know what they did. But they really brainwashed us, and it was necessary. They were effective.

Very effective. Very effective. Now, the part that was not effective, now I'm going to move back to Africa.

After we took Oran, which was a three-day campaign, and we had some casualties, a lot of casualties. And the first thing that I will never forget, the first thing that most people did was throw unnecessary equipment away. Gas masks.

[Speaker 2]

For example, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Gas masks, yeah. Throw away anything that you couldn't eat, sleep with, or kill somebody with. You throw it away.

You don't need it. Didn't they give you a desert kit or something? No, no.

When we left Scotland, this is how they fooled us. One day, they would issue us a mosquito bar to go over us. And the next day, they would give us a wolf start.

You know, we thought, well, we're going to, in fact, the rumor in the regiment was that we were going to Madagascar. And I had no idea where Madagascar was, but I knew it was in the south. If we had a mosquito bite, then they issued us overcoats.

Now, what the hell are you going to do with an overcoat? In the same climate, you use a mosquito bite. But this is the way they did it.

And of course, now, one thing we kept. The English come out with what they call a gas cape. And it was a plastic thing that, like a poncho.

You've seen a poncho, except it was bigger. And it folded up into a little round package about that wide and about that big around. You could roll it up and put it right on your belt.

It kept you warm. And the purpose of this gas cape was if they came over and sprayed mustard gas, like they did in World War I, this gas cape would keep this mustard gas from landing on your skin. This is why they call it a gas cape.

Well, we used it to sleep under. We used it for a raincoat. In fact, that's about all we kept.

That's about all we had. We used it to keep us warm. It was one of the greatest things of World War II, was that English gas cape.

And you received that?

[Speaker 2]

Yes.

[Speaker 1]

The British issued it to the Americans, and they issued it to us. And they issued it to you when you were on the ship before you got on the amphibious? Yes, before we went to Africa.

Then, after we took Oran, my company moved back to Le Dran, a little town of Le Dran. And we stayed there. In fact, I had to go over to the 64th Foreign Legion Regiment to teach them American machine guns for a week, because we were going to give them American equipment.

And I had to go, what were they like? What was your foreign legion? Well, we fought them on the invasion.

And they did put up some good positions. And they were capable, disciplined soldiers. Again, with poor equipment.

Now, we also were capable, disciplined soldiers with poor equipment. But we did not realize how poor until we got to Tunisia. In fact, the Germans.

So we moved 1,000 miles from Oran to a place where my regiment first went, to a place called Assalida, up in Tunisia. And we were part of the French 19th Corps. The French were in Tunisia.

How did you get that? How did you travel? We traveled by truck, by walking.

Two battalions would go by truck, and one battalion would walk. And then one battalion would go by truck, and two battalions... Alternated.

Was that difficult? Was that hard to do? At that point, were you physically...

No, it was a normal mode of moving for infantry. Of course, when you're in a weapons company, and you're carrying a 58-pound tripod on your back, and you're carrying two boxes of ammunition, and you're carrying your equipment, you've got about 90, 95 pounds. So some people have got to relieve you every once in a while.

So you're carrying more than the typical, more than the... The weapons company carries more. More than the rifle company.

Rifle companies carry less, but they get killed off quicker, too. So, you know, if you carry a little more to live a little longer, it's worth carrying. Now, on the way, we were concerned about German paratroopers dropping and having us take the wrong road.

Had you heard something? And, of course, we had mines to worry about, German mines. But other than that...

And when we got up near Konstantin, and Konstantin sits up on top of a mountain, beautiful, beautiful city when you're way off looking at it. The German airplanes came over, and Stukas, and Stratis, and bombers, but nothing serious. And then we got to Ossoleta, and the holding position in Ossoleta.

And now December, November, by the part of November, December, it comes, and it's raining, and it's cold, and we had no equipment. We had thrown our overcoats away because Chubot couldn't carry them. We did not have bedrolls at that time.

So what were we sleeping on? Well, some of us found from hospitals or anything, any quartermaster truck that went by that we rode with, those truck drivers had blankets, and we stole a blanket from them. Well, you have to steal.

In order to exist in Africa, you've got to steal. In fact, there's not a farmer from Africa through Sicily to France and Germany that I have not stolen all their green onions and tomatoes. Whatever they had they would grow, I would steal it from them.

Chickens, hogs, whatever, cows, anything, we'd steal. And we'd kill it and eat it. Was there a favorite thing that you liked to take in North Africa?

I've heard oranges. I've heard a lot of oranges and eggs. We had a problem with honeydew melons.

One time we ran up on a whole field of honeydew melons, too far from a place called Mactan, and we all just went crazy over these honeydew melons because we were eating K rations and C rations. And you can imagine, nothing fresh. So anything fresh like a honeydew melon.

But they gave us the worst Tennessee trots you've ever seen. And once you get on the front line and people are shooting at you and you've got to get up and go through another hole to defecate, you've got a problem. So you don't want Tennessee trots is what they call them.

Of course, it depends on where you're from. If you're from Colorado, they call them Colorado trots, or Georgia trots, or whatever. But the honeydew melons was the thing that I went to.

I don't remember eating many oranges in Africa. We just perhaps wasn't lucky and got near an orange grove. But the overall picture, let me carry you back a little bit.

We were later, or initially, we were part of the American 2nd Corps. And the 2nd Corps had three infantry divisions and one tank division, armor division. They had the 1st Infantry Division, the 9th Infantry Division, and the 34th Infantry Division, and the 1st Armor Division.

That was the American 2nd Corps. Now, they took the 16th Infantry and attached it to the French 19th Corps, which was part of the British 1st Army. So we received British, what they called five-in-one rations from the British Army through the French down to us.

And it was a completely disorganized, screwed-up affair. You cannot believe how ineffective an American soldier is when you're doing oxtail stew. What the hell do you do with a can of oxtail stew?

We had no idea. We had no way of cooking it. You know, this is an example.

Or a tin of biscuits. We used to C-rations or K-rations or D-bars. You know, a D-bar was a candy bar.

Well, we stayed in Ocelita in Nevada. And this was the holding position. Really, we were not very aggressive.

We were just holding. That was the French 19th Corps was just holding. Who were you?

Was that in the opposite of your position or the Germans? The Germans, yeah. Directly in front of us was part of the German 9th Division.

See, the Afrika Korps had four divisions. It had the 10th Panzer, the 15th Panzer, the 21st Panzer, and the 9th Light Division. Now, notice the difference.

We had three entry divisions and one tank division. The Germans had three tank divisions and one entry division because they were operating in tank country. But we are not that smart, command.

Either they are not that intelligent or they were not wise enough to understand what was going on. Now, our armor division initially had the OM-3 Grant tank. Now, I'm not sure you know what I'm talking about, but the Grant tank was the same chassis as the Sherman tank.

But it had on the top turret, the turret that had a 30-cent millimeter gun. On the right of this chassis was a 105 howitzer that would only move about 100 mils right or left. It would only move like that.

So you had to turn the whole tank around to shoot over here. It had a range of 5,800 yards. How does that compare to the Germans?

Not very good. The Germans had what they called the Mark V, which had an 88-millimeter gun and a turret that rotated 360 degrees that fired 21,000 yards, the 88, at bracing fire. It went boop-clack, boop-clack, just like that.

That's how fast it fired. And I was going to go boom, wow. It took it that long to go there, the velocity of the shells.

And so that tank, they got rid of it. I don't know what happened to it. Then we got the Sherman.

Now, the Sherman had a 75-millimeter gun. Again, its range was nothing compared to the German 88. So when it comes to a tank battle between an American tank and a tank, there was no battle.

It would be like me jumping in the ring with Holyfield, just about the same thing. And that's what irritates me when this damn Patton gets up and says, I'll take a tank and go five minutes. Nobody was that stupid, even him.

And he was notoriously stupid. Even he was not that stupid. He couldn't get within 5,000 yards of a German tank until he would be knocked out.

Anyway, we got the Sherman. How did that make you feel, knowing that you were tagged? It gives you a very inferiority complex.

The one thing that an infantry soldier dreads at that time was the word tank, because we had nothing, nothing that would knock a tank out. And a whole infantry and a rifle company or a machine gun company, you could do nothing to stop a tank. They hadn't trained you or given you anything?

Well, they trained us to stay in a hole and let a tank run over us. They didn't stop it, right? That's not going to do anything to the tank.

You know, I held down in Georgia. I've been in holes and had the tank run over me. That's nothing.

You know, the eight pounds per square inch on the track, it ain't going to push your hole in because it doesn't have enough pressure to push your hole in. And it just runs over you for a moment at some place, but that's not stopping a tank. Now, they moved us back out of Osceola, and they moved us by night, and on every hole, and it was raining and it was miserable, and it took us about two days and nights in a truck.

I don't know where they got the trucks from. They brought the trucks, they had truck battalions. They brought them back.

We moved back about four or five miles, walked back and got on the trucks, and then we went back and down to a place called Kasserine. Now, in Kasserine, the Germans hit us with the 10th Panzer Division. We had absolutely nothing that would stop a tank, and they run over us.

I run with that machine gun until I couldn't run anymore, and I threw the damn machine gun away, and I run some more because they were in the valley and we were up in the hills, and they're shooting at us, and we're running. Of course, they had already broken through us. This is Kasserine Pass.

We suffered tremendous casualties there. We withdrew almost all the way to Tobessa, which was back in there. How far would you say the distance was?

Forty miles, at least. And then we reorganized, and then we got some tanks, and we got some Spitfire fighter bombers, and we went back and retook Kasserine Pass. We got some tanks to go with us.

It wasn't dilly-dallying the troops after such a... No, no, no, because once we got to where the Germans were chasing us and shooting at us, we stopped. There was no use in running in the desert, in the mountains, actually, we were running in the mountains, and the tanks were down in the valley shooting at us.

And once they stopped shooting at us, there was no use in running. We just all sat down and rested, and, of course, there was no trouble getting organized. A few people were missing who were killed.

So you didn't take... Did your regiment take heavy casualties? Yes, 16 took quite a few casualties.

In fact, some of our people were taken prisoner and were taken to Tunis, and kept at Tunis. And later, when the British liberated Tunis, the prisoners, they came back to us. One of our battalion commanders, most of his, he and most of his battalion was captured, and they put him on a boat to go to Italy, and they mutinied, captured the boat, and run it up on the land.

And they come back to the regiment. These boys were in the first battalion. I was in the third battalion.

So now we realize that these German soldiers were really good soldiers, really, really fine soldiers. They had really good equipment. But the funny thing about it is, later, I captured a German, and I talked to him about what he thought of us, and he said, If we had your equipment, we could quit the war.

And I thought to myself, What the hell is he talking about? If he really knew how poor our equipment was, but he meant how much equipment we had, not the quality of the equipment, but the quantity of the artillery. We had massive loads of artillery, massive artillery we had, and the Germans, of course, didn't have that.

Then, after Kasserine, we withdrew, or we were pulled back to an old and made a Macedonian or Corinthian fortress. And we stayed there a couple of days, and the whole division becomes the 1st Division again. They pulled the 16th out from under the 19th Corps, and the 18th, which had been down, faded past that cell.

They pulled them back, and the 26th, which got really heat up in Kasserine, but they pulled them back, and we become the 1st Division, again, under command of the 1st Division, no longer under command of the French or the British. The 18th was under command of the British. We kind of got relieved.

Yeah, it was a relief to get back under our command. And just to show you how really inefficient our senior headquarters was, because no commander is going to let his troops be broke up into little parts under command of other units. A good commander, if he's took the business administration and got a C, is going to know that he's got to keep his people where he can command them, where he can tell them what to do.

He can't just give them away. We stayed there, and this is where Patton come to visit us, the idiot. And we never liked Patton.

No one in the 1st Division, 9th Division, 34th Division, or 1st Army ever cared anything about Patton.

[Speaker 2]  
Why was that?

[Speaker 1]  
Well, we knew he was a bummer. He was an absolute bummer. You can tell.

When you've been walking and fighting and going hungry and cold and hadn't had a bath since Scotland four months before, and a son of a bitch comes down with a necktie and shiny boots and shiny belt and starts telling you how many Germans he's killed. Now you've been up there doing the killing, and he's been back at some castle and he's telling you how many people he's killed and how tough he is. You know, you can't bullshit a bullshitter.

This is what I'm saying. And we were good. Well, we knew what the hell the war was about.

But he tried to impress us with a pistol on his hand and gave us a speech about what he was going to do and all this shit. But I will say one thing. We jumped off from this ruins and we went into the pack and we took a town called Gaspa.

What kind of opposition did you face, German opposition, in Gaspa? In Gaspa? Absolute picture-perfect coordinated attack.

About three miles outside west of Gaspa is a wadiah, which is a dried-up riverbed. We all assembled in that dried-up wadiah. Tanks, infantry, everything.

And here come our airplanes, 12 Spitfires. And they just knocked hell out of Gaspa. And our tanks come out of that wadiah and our riflemen behind the tanks, walking behind those tanks, and machine guns sitting back there firing overhead.

I don't think we had ten people wounded in the whole regiment. We get through Gaspa and here are springs, warm baths, where you can take a bath. Now, you've got to remember, we haven't had a damn bath since Scotland four months before, or five months before.

We had scabies. We had glaucoma. We had malaria.

We had sores. We called it the African rot. We had sores on our body where we'd scratch and it would come in.

And now here we are in these springs. Boy, that was worth dying for. And we took baths.

And, of course, we had the Red Cross issued you a little pack. They called it a Red Cross pack. And it had soap in it and toothbrush and toothpaste and a razor.

I forget what all they had in it. But all the little stuff that you needed. But without water in the desert, you know, you've got to have water.

Well, now we've got water in Gaspa. So for two days we stayed in Gaspa. Bathing and cleaning up and living it up.

We were in heaven. Then we move out. And from Gapis, the road goes directly to a place called Gaspa to Gapis.

There's Gaspa. Gapis sits on the... Now, the British Army is pushing the Germans north.

And if we go and cut them off at Gapis, block them, now they can't retreat. See? So we're going along the road toward Gapis.

Tanks, infantry, artillery, airplanes, everything. Are you on foot yourself? We're on foot, yeah.

I know. Machine guns.

[Speaker 2]

Carriers.

[Speaker 1]

There you go. And we go through a cut in the mountains into a valley called El Gatari. And, of course, the infantry gets up.

And always the infantry gets into high ground. Always. We go up in the high ground.

So you went up in the high ground. We went up in the high ground overlooking the valley. And, of course, the tanks stopped there.

Artillery set up back there. And the Italians, the... I don't remember how you pronounce it.

The King's Regiment of the Italians, I think. And we were fighting the Italians. Of all the Italians, these were probably the best troops.

And they were good.

[Speaker 2]

That's why we're all put in there. Did they fight? Were they aggressive?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. Those Italians were very effective. They stopped us.

The next day... What did they do that was so effective? They had good fields of fire.

It's hard to talk to someone who's not a Soviet. It would take me an hour to explain a good defensive position to you. But to explain as briefly as possible, you want to have grazing fire with all of your automatic weapons.

Grazing fire means that the maximum ordnance of your bullets are no higher than six feet. And any deflated position which is more than six feet, you have this already mapped out for your mortars to fall into. Now, any big gullies or anything, you put mines in.

You see? And this is what the Italians had done. The Germans had told them how to do it.

The Germans were excellent at this. They really knew how to set up a defensive position. So the Germans did this pretty much standard.

Pretty much except for the Americans. We were not trained in defensive position. We knew absolutely practically nothing except to dig a hole, set up your gun, and shoot.

This is about what we knew. But this is what made the 1st Infantry Division so good is that we copied the Germans in just about everything they did. We never attacked in daytime.

Half of it you couldn't. The minute you moved in daytime, the German airplane was on top of you. Or the German artillery was on you.

Or a German tank was shooting at you. You could only move at night. So we learned to attack at 3 o'clock in the morning.

You get what you call the IP, the initial point at 2. And the LD, the line of departure, you cross at 3. And you go into the attack, and you go right into the enemy position, and then you spread out and take it from the rear.

And we learned this from the Germans in Africa, the 1st Infantry Division. You can read the history of my regiment, and you'll find Colonel Gibbs or whatever colonel we had ordered an attack at, or the 3rd Battalion at 3 o'clock in the morning. Always at 3 o'clock in the morning.

We always did that. Because this is when you set up your own guard, and you sat there until 12 o'clock at night, and by 3, you were pretty well ready to go to sleep. And we found that out.

And of course, we picked up a lot of tricks from the Germans on how to lay out lines, how to set up a good defensive position, how to use flares as signals, how not to use radio. But the one thing that the Germans did not have, direction center. We did not have it either.

But some smart person, smarter than I, realized that we had to have a fire direction center. Now, a fire direction center is some boys who are intelligent who went to university and took mathematics that can sit down and look at a map and say, well, the gun is here, and the target, and this sergeant, Franklin, is looking, he's on this hill over here. So what is left for Sergeant Franklin is actually from the gun target line is short.

And they could figure it out mathematically. I could pick up a phone. I could call the company and say, well, at checkpoint, we used what we call from point of origin, from point of origin 3, 2-5, left 2-5, is an enemy tank.

Well, the company commander could call fire direction center and say from so-and-so-and-so-and-so is an enemy tank. And they sat down and said, well, here we've got a battery of guns here. They fire here, and they can lock it up.

And it all went through fire direction center. Germans didn't have that. We did.

And we, not only could they fire one gun, they could fire 100 guns, or 1,000, through one fire direction center. Because they had some smart boys in there who knew mathematics. So if you don't learn anything else in college but mathematics, learn that.

It'll save some raffle and slack. We established that in Africa with the fire direction center.

[Speaker 2]

So that was established in Africa.

[Speaker 1]

That wasn't something that had been taught back at the training.

[Speaker 2]

No, no.

[Speaker 1]

It was established in Africa, yes. The first interdivision. The first to do, and it was called again, called?

Fire direction center. Fire direction center. Of course, it's standard in the Army now.

Thanks to the first division. It started with the first division. So it sounds like to me that the American, that your regiment is really picking up quickly, learning very quickly from the Germans, and doing it on your own initiative.

This is good. We got an order from the division headquarters. Which goes against all of the American philosophy as to how you treat, but we were having trouble with people running.

You can't blame it. I had a 42-year-old man. I had a wife and four children in my squad, and the Germans started shooting at us, and he got up and ran.

He just lost control of himself. The order came down from division that anyone in grades sergeant and up could shoot him. Now, you don't do that.

That does not happen in the American Army, but it did in the first division, and you think that that word didn't get out to people who wanted to run? If you run, this damn sergeant over here is going to shoot you. So don't run.

For sure, he's going to get you. Maybe the Germans might miss you, but he ain't going to miss you. A written order, too.

Of course, I could never find a copy of it. But you were told verbally that this is the order. And that caused a lot of people...

It's a natural reaction for a human to try to run.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, that's a key question. That's one of my key questions. I haven't been in combat, so I don't understand why don't people run?

[Speaker 1]

They do. Most of them don't. Well, initially, everybody wants to run.

But then you have people who you've been living with, people who have endured exactly... people who have gone through the same thing that you have gone through, and they didn't

run. And you look at them, and they look at you, and if that son of a bitch ain't going to run, I ain't going to run either.

Eventually, you form that cohesiveness where it's better to die than to let this friend know that you're a coward. This is what it boils down to. Because I have done the cowardliest things in the world, and it looked like I was doing it because I was brave.

Absolutely not brave. I was scared to my ass and scared to death. That's my daughter.

She came home with a deed in that manner. And I sat her down at the table and gave her a glass of wine. Family, we lived in France when our children were little, and they were raised with wine for dinner.

That's the tradition. And it's nothing. Neither one of them drank or smoked.

They sip wine or sip a drink. They don't smoke, but I smoke and I drink. Fortunately, they picked up.

I said, Honey, why are you getting a D in mathematics? You're a pure smart girl. Now there's a mathematician.

She has a degree in physics. So certainly you didn't take everything from me. You must have got something from her.

And she said, Daddy, you don't realize the pressure we're under. And I said, Just a minute, honey. Don't talk to me about pressure.

You put a tank over there at 600 yards trying to shoot your ass off, and you're in a hole hungry and free soul and nothing to eat, and let him shoot at your ass. Now you're talking about pressure. You're talking real stress when a tank is shooting at your ass.

So don't ever come talk to me. Talk about something else. Say I'm dumb, I'm stupid.

But don't talk to me about stress or pressure, because I know what stress or pressure is. And she didn't. Her grades went up immediately.

She knew she couldn't be it. But anyway, it is hard to say what distinguishes one human from another human in a giving situation. Something that to you may not, you know, even in your life, when a fight starts, one guy will hold the coat and the other one will do the fighting.

It's simple. And you know there are those people. There are coat holders and there's fighters.

Well, it's the same damn way in the Army. You have coat holders and you have fighters. Now, this is good.

I have no objection to it. But it always seemed that we had a system in the American Army that they took something away because of his IQ. And this is how they separated us.

They took a certain IQ and you went to the Air Force. If your IQ was 113 or above, you went to officer's training. But if your IQ was 112 and down, then from there you went down to artillery, 1st Air Force, tanks, and then when you got down to about 80, 85, infantry.

They put the dumbest ones in the infantry. Now, maybe, maybe, they did this because they knew what they were doing. Because if you are not too intelligent, a one-eyed man is king.

And all the officers were one-eyed. We were officers who had one eye. So we would obey what they told us not to do.

Because our IQ was low. We did not have the benefit of an education. And this happened either purposely or accidentally.

It happened that we got, in the infantry, you got mostly dumb people. Me included. Now...

But yet you guys picked up the German... That's right. But we had done that all our lives.

We had learned how to survive in slow ways. We went to work way over at 13 and my pay at age 13 was \$1.25 a week plus all the old vegetables and fruit that were no longer sellable. Sure, my family could live off of that.

From 13, my family lived off of what little money I made and the potatoes and the cabbage and bananas and things that they couldn't sell at the store I got. That was part of my pay. That's surviving.

You learn to survive. And when you get on the front line, you learn to survive. Occasionally, you're required to do the unnatural in order to survive.

In other words, if the enemy is coming at you and if you don't stop him, he's going to kill you. So you do what you can to stop him, which may be classified as being brave. It absolutely has nothing to do with bravery.

Because the best... Never back a coward up in a corner. You back a coward up in a corner, you've got to fight him in your hands.

You back a damn dumb rifleman back in a hole, you're going to kill him. He'll come out fighting, I'll tell you that. And that's what we did.

We learned how to fight. We really learned how to fight. And people say, I've had a lot of people say, how come the 1st Infantry Division could be so good?

We were so good because we learned from the masters. And the masters were the Germans. They'd been fighting for 3 years and we'd been fighting for 3 days.

And they'd been fighting for 3 years. Absolutely, absolute masters at everything they did. Particularly war.

They are... Can you believe I'm sitting on a hill in Sicily and out in front of me, not in front of me, but in front of the whole people who were sitting there in the chamber, here comes a little pulling tank, comes up out of a creek bed where they had a bridge, a little bridge over

the street. Pulling tank comes up out of that thing and it comes across the field and it's coming up toward us.

And everybody's looking, hey, look at that pulling tank. Somebody said, let's shoot it. So we all started shooting at it.

And one of them, some bullet, hit the firing mechanism and it had 1,000 pounds of TNT in it. And it was remote controlled. The Germans were going to drive it up into our position and detonate it.

Well, hell, we didn't even have a rifle grenade. And we didn't throw tanks, remote controlled bombs. They could drop a bomb and they could guide it down.

And they did that in Sicily into one of our ships. They guided the bomb right into the ship. And we saw what masters they were at war.

Luckily, we were masters at having more than what they had. It's an old saying in the 1st Infantry Division. God is with the 1st Infantry Division because we had more damned artilleries.

That's why God is with us. If we didn't have so much artillery, God wouldn't be with us. He'd be with the other people, you know.

That's an old 1st Division saying. And we believed in using it. And we knew how to use it.

A sergeant could pick up the phone and a whole battalion of artillery would fire a tank because we knew how to do it. Other divisions had no idea how to do that. How to call it in.

How to call it in. They had no FDC. It was pathetic.

But in the beginning, of course, we've always had the best artillery. We had the most artillery. Of course, you have to be careful.

Our owner did us. Really?

[Speaker 2]

How did that happen?

[Speaker 1]

Another say of 1943, in Africa, we're on a hill and our whole division artillery opened fire on us. And I'll tell you what happened. They were supposed to fire on this hill and then we were supposed to attack the hill.

But we sent out a patrol and battalion and found out that there's nobody on the hill. Senator, his name was Stone, said, well, let's get up there quick. Well, the enemy's not on the hill.

They've withdrawn. So we go up there, but the word didn't get back to FDC and back to the artillery. So at the time the artillery was supposed to fire, they started firing and we're on the hill.

And this is how it happened. But another time in Germany, when we crossed the German border, you know, we were the first to cross the German border on 11 September 1944. The first village we got, a battalion has taken this little village in a column.

My battalion commander is right behind there. Colonel Horner. And we started getting 240.

Shooting. It's a roundabout like that. One of them would knock a house down, you know.

And we're in this little village. And this 240 is landing on us. And the only reason I know this is I could hear the battalion commander talking in the radio.

He seemed very calm, very quiet. He'd been with us so long. He said, Zebra, Zebra, lift your fire.

You're firing in blue battalion's area. Just like he was talking to his wife about a dinner engagement. The same, just as quiet.

Zebra, Zebra, lift your fire. You're firing in blue battalion's area. Well, blue battalion.

First battalion was red. Second battalion was white. Third battalion was white.

And so everybody knew what battalion. And we were just good troops, good soldiers. What made, that's one of the questions I'm really interested in.

What makes, if you had to pick some things, characteristics, attributes, what makes an effective, an effective combat soldier versus an ineffective combat soldier? Well, first you've got to realize that once, when a war is rumored, we always invoke patriotism and mother and apple pie and family values and a lot of bullshit that doesn't make sense.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, you hear a lot about that.

[Speaker 1]

Initially it does. But once you get on the front line, once you get actually in combat, and this doesn't happen until about two months, you realize that there are weak people and there are strong people. And the weak people will fall to the wayside.

I'm talking about colonel, captain, majors, surgeons, they will be relieved. And the strong people will take their place. And this happened, of course, this happens in all combat games.

The people who are no good, you put them in a very stressful situation on the front line, and they will crack. Now, I don't mean to denigrate anyone who cracked, because, after all, I would say it's human, but you can't crack if you're a battalion commander. You can't crack if you're a sergeant.

And you can't crack if you're a company commander. This just don't happen. You've got to have somebody in there who is almost cool-hearted enough to think that you are one of his weapons to get this job done.

And he uses you as weapons to get this job done. Now, once you find a man like that, who is that callous, that uncaring, then you've got a combat leader. That does not mean that he does not care about your well-being.

It only means that if he's told to take that hill, he will not hesitate in using you as his weapon to take that hill. First comes duty. Then comes personal lacks, dislikes, wants, and so on.

Now, they say a good leader will take care of his troops. Yeah, sure. But if everybody's hungry, what are you going to do?

What are you going to do without your food to give to him? If you don't have any, what the hell are you going to give him? Are you going to give him your blanket if you don't?

Everybody is unhuman. Everybody has been degraded to the status of an animal. He wants to survive, and to survive, you've got to do what the higher headquarters want you to do.

And the poorest part of this is some people justify their existence by giving it other people, and we always understood this. And fortunately, machine gun companies and machine gun platoons do not have to participate in this. There are three kinds of patrols.

There's a reconnaissance patrol that raffle and go on. There is a combat patrol, and there is a contact patrol. Three kinds of patrols.

Most people on the front hill get wounded or get captured. Now, a reconnaissance patrol, they'll say, okay, Ben, you and Todd go up that hill and find out what's out there. Well, you and I got to walk out there until somebody shoots at us.

And then we've got to say, well, there's a machine gun there and mortar fire is coming here. Now, we've got to get back and tell them. Well, you have a man sitting back at headquarters, right in the middle of headquarters.

His job every morning is to go to the colonel and say, well, the capabilities of the enemy, we have a battalion in front of us who has a team of machine guns and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And his whole job is to tell the colonel what's out in front of us. Well, in order for him to know that, he's got to send you and me out there and find out what's out there.

And that's called a recon patrol. And you get killed. And if you and I get killed, well, somebody else goes out to find out what's out there.

Because that information is needed back at regiment. Or battalion. Battalion is the same way they have in history, also.

We always resent, down in the infantry, headquarters people, because their sole motive is to justify their position by getting shot at. And we never like that. We always hate it.

Everybody that was behind us. This is not, this is a tag troop. Because deep down, we really respect these people because of their intelligence.

How can they say that, well, if you take a rifle company here and move it to here, how long is it going to take? They know how long. I don't know that how long.

They're intelligent. If you've got a rifle company here, they need so much ammunition. I don't know that.

We've got to have people back there that know that. So you really respect them for some things. But other things, you hate them for.

But to distinguish, to answer your question, I think it's an unanswerable question. It's almost unanswerable. The situation will dictate those who are others.

D-Day is an example. D-Day. I had two boys in my company, twin brothers.

They were in a machine gun squad in the second platoon. They joined us in England before the invasion. And they were absolutely nothing, no way of saying it, skinny little boys from Pennsylvania, nothing outstanding about them, nothing to say they were really good.

Well, they ended up taking a church steeple up in Colville, Samoa and set up a machine gun. And a damn tank shot that church steeple down from around them. And they loaded up that tank and six German soldiers.

They wouldn't let them advance. And both of them got the DSC. But you had no way of knowing what never would have given.

That situation dictated that they'd do that. And they were savages. One of them got killed, by the way.

And the other one. And later he just got up and walked off the front line with an excellent gun. Was that really how Colin was?

There was quite a few deserters. I'll tell you why. You know, in Africa, we were really learning.

Proud of what we were doing. And the next hill was an adventure. And the next hill was an adventure.

And what was there? And eventually there was going to be an ocean. You know, there was something.

And then in Normandy, of course, we had prepared. And Sicily was quite different. Sicily was a very difficult campaign on the individual.

I went 37 days and didn't take my shoes off. My feet were rotting. The whole company, at the end of the campaign, the whole company took off our shoes and rotten socks at the foot of Mount Etna and laid like that.

And the battalion doctor come down with all his crew and they painted their feet purple. They put that purple medicine on. A whole machine gun company and a rifle company, too, right at the foot of Mount Etna and everybody's feet were rotten because of Gila for Mount Etna.

Never taking off their shoes. Really, it was tough. It was tough on the individual.

But when we got to Normandy and went across France and we really thought the war was over and then we went into Germany and it got tougher and tougher and colder and wetter and hungrier and more people were killed and killed. And eventually, me and one day, me and my buddy, we realized that we can't go on. We just cannot.

Eventually, look, we started out with 142 men and now there's four of us. You know? We had eight at D-Day and now there's four of us left and people are just coming through.

You don't know their names. You don't give a damn. They get shot and gone.

Eventually, you're going to get it. And then you come to the realization that they're deliberately keeping you here. You know, the aggression army, the German army, will take a whole unit and pull it off, fill it up with replacements, train it, and put it back up on the front line.

But not the American army. They keep the unit on the front line and they send in one or two people at a time. Now, can you imagine?

And I get this sometimes. You're a young soldier. You get drafted out of Knoxville.

You're sent to basic. You're put on a train. You're sent to New York.

You're put on a boat. Not with friends, but alone. Remember, you're alone.

Did you make friends quickly or was it hard to make friends? Once you got to the front line, it was very difficult because people didn't want to become friends. They already had their little play and knew he was going to get killed or something.

But this is another thing different with the 1st Division. When a replacement comes into 1st Division, he was assigned to the man who was responsible for him. And that man told him everything he needed to know.

Now, when you went to another division, nobody tells you anything.