

Franklin, Ben C.-5-6-98-1.1 of 2

[Speaker 1]

So 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. And my future, the most I could have ever become, 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 World War II started, this was an escape for me.

This was an outlet. Opportunity to see the world, to have some adventure, and perhaps to be somebody. We all, all children had that outlet.

So I enlisted the day after Pearl Harbor. I joined my regiment in New York, 16th Infantry, 1st Division, in April of 1942. We went to Europe, we went to England in August of the whole 1st Infantry Division.

We loaded up on the Queen Mary on August the 2nd, 1942, and we went to Scotland. So had you done any trading up to this point? Well, yes.

We had been constantly training, taking invasion maneuvers, and, of course, field training, and I was in the machine gun company. So we got from Scotland down to England by train to a place called Tidworth Barracks. Perhaps, if you ever get to go to England, Tidworth Barracks 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 London.

So already the world is excited, you know. I'm really seeing something. I'm 17 years old by now.

How did you manage to, did you have to get any special waiver or something? No, I lied. Which is not a very bad vocation.

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

So do those people who are proficient in being untruthful, from politicians to presidents down to street sweepers. Good liars are unique 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 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, and 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, and I asked him, and he said, what are you going to do? And who to sign?

He said, I'm drunk. And he said, I'll sign them if you promise to kill a Jap for me. I'll never forget it.

And I said, okay, I'll kill a Jap. 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. But let's get back to England. We went down to Tidworth Barracks, but we only stayed there for a few weeks.

And we went to Scotland, back up to Scotland, and took maneuvers. What does that mean? What is that?

What were you doing? Did 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 hung down the side of the ship and get into small Higgins boats. A Higgins boat is what they called a LCVPT, Landing Craft Vehicle 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 hit land and go in on maneuver, you know.

And one of the requirements was we could not eat, sleep, or smoke for 48 hours. 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 a British regiment, 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.

It's been 50-something years now. Then with 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 Arzoo, which is just east of Oran in Africa. We were supposed to land at 1 o'clock.

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 they would be very receptive to English 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 Oran. Here is a little town called Saint-Lô.

And here is Saint-Loup. And here is Arzu, where we landed. We landed at Arzu.

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, third regiment of the 1st Division, landed to the right of Oran and was coming in from the west.

So it was a two-painter 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 put them in sand because they would make us sunk up in sand.

You know, a machine gun, a heavy, water-cooled machine gun, which is what I was, weighs about 96 pounds and gun itself and water. Was that your responsibility, the machine gun? Yes, I was the gunner, and I was to carry the tripod when we walked.

But we put them on these little carts, so when we started pulling them, hell, it was harder to pull them there. So we moved straight inland, and we got to a little town called Oran. Now,

we landed at 1 o'clock in the morning, and by that evening, we were at a little town called Oran.

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 hit land, we probably traveled 10 miles and probably 30, 35, 40 minutes. Don't worry.

But we received no fire. No one shot us, no. Now, on the other hand, the 1st Armored Division, which was part of the invading force, had an armored infantry regiment.

The 13th Infantry Regiment was part of the 1st Armored Division, and one of its battalions 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 them. They didn't know.

The destroyers, as soon as they come into 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 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 around and take the objective. Well, that all sounds good, but when you don't have anything to maneuver around when they're 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 LaGrande the first evening, and I laid down, and I'll never forget it. Now, remember, our clothing consisted of OD trousers, OD shirt, field jacket, cartridge belt, and pistol, and all of this, and steel helmet. And we had shoes with leggings.

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

Of course, the rifle troops were patrolling down into the town, but machine guns, weapons troops. I lived through the war. I was in a weapons company.

Had I been in a rifle company, I would have been killed very quickly.

[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 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. America with 168. At the end of the war, they had had 1,893 replacements.

One company commanded by a man. When I was attached to it, it was commanded by a man named Captain Richmond, an extremely fine, courageous soldier. But that's an example.

My company, a weapons company, we had maybe 142 in those days. At the end of the war, I would say we maybe had 600 replacements come around. There was eight of us that was left for D-Day.

From the original, they had gone through Afghanistan. Then after D-Day, they started coming down. At the end of the war, there was only two of us that was left.

But this is normal. This is normal combat. Your rifle troops, they suffered the worst inhumane living conditions, the worst treatment, the worst of everything, is your rifle troops.

Of course, us uneducated, dumb southerners make very good rifle soldiers. And I'll tell you why. Because we were used to hardship.

We were repression. We knew what it was to be hungry. We knew what it was to work without food and be tired.

And so when these conditions were endured, the southern riflemen, it was not that big a thing to get. They had done this at home, but back to the city. Well, that's a good point.

I wonder, that's interesting, in the training, what you think about, Mr. Franklin, when you're 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 trainings involved, what would you say a typical day of training, even before, say, you got to Scotland, in the very beginning of life?

It's kind of interesting to sort of add, well, 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. 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. 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 tactics of a 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, well, you had a squad leader. You had a squad leader who at that time was only a corporal. Later he'd become a sergeant.

You had a squad leader and squad leader. The commander of the Alpha team, the recon team, was actually the assistant squad leader. So he fulfilled one mission, but if the squad leader got killed he'd become the squad leader and he appointed someone else to be the point.

And 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. Scouts to encounter the enemy, a base of fire, and a maneuvering element. Now, four platoons make a company.

Again, the same basic principle. Scouts found out where the enemy is, how strong he is, the fire on the enemy, and your maneuvering element. Now, once you get up to company level, now we introduce the machine gun platoon that is 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, 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 to pin him down. And maneuver in order to capture.

All from individual squad, 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 squad leader, 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 run in an office, or like Dr. Johnson running a 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. So you guys, you wouldn't look, you wouldn't look at them as leaders.

[Speaker 2]
Absolutely not.

[Speaker 1]
No. Although, this does not detract from the fact that they are very oftentimes courageous and good people. But they are just not leaders.

That's a distinction.

[Speaker 2]
That's an excellent distinction.

[Speaker 1]

And most people don't realize this. Later as a 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. His duties are inconsistent. As far as him being a leader, very few of them.

They were leaders when they had a squad or when they had a platoon. But once they graduated to a company, once they become a captain, they're now commanders. They're no longer leaders.

I hope that don't throw you off. Not at all. No, this is excellent.

[Speaker 2]

That's exactly, that's very much what I'm interested in. What was, 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? I mean, because you've gone from civilian life, you were in high school, and then you've got that, is it a sudden shock to the system, or is it, is it, what was that like?

How did you feel, I guess?

[Speaker 1]

The Army, these business people in Washington, set up a system whereby they could take a person out of the civilian lab 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, your whole squad suffers for it. And if the squad doesn't, 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 cut you down from being 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. 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, particularly boots that are always too, shoes that were a little too big.

They put you on a scale and they put 90 pounds on your back. And you're very fit. 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 shoes they give you.

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 the rifle.

How to break it down, how to disassemble, clean up. When I went in the Army we had O3s. O3s.

O3, yeah, Springfield O3 from World War I. Then, after about four weeks of basic training, we got the M1, the Garand. So, now we've got a new rifle and we've got to learn how to fire it.

But, to show you how unprepared the American Army was for war, we had a rifle grenade launcher that would only work on an O3. It would not work on an M1. So, squad leaders later had to carry an O3.

The rest of the squads carried an M1. The Garand. But that, if the squad leader lost his grenade launcher and nothing to shoot, that would even knock out a jeep, you know.

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

When I started out, a 10 mile hike then a 15, then a 20, then a 25 with equipment in Georgia in April, May, April 6th. That 30, 90, 100 degrees.

[Speaker 2]
Yeah, yeah.

[Speaker 1]
And 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 do. And if you goofed up the slightest 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 and again, everybody's looking at you and they know that you did something wrong.

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

[Speaker 2]
No, no, no.

[Speaker 1]
It's very funny. 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, 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.

Both of those things are 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, 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.

Because you must act instinctively, you must obey without question, you must do things that are inhuman, you know. You're a damn fool who 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, go out there and do so and so knowing that you're going to get killed. You get up and go. You've been psychologically brainwashed.

And those two, when I went in the army out, if someone would have come with those words, I'd say, how the hell do you spell it? I don't even know what you're talking about, you know, but now later I don't know what to do. But they really brainwashed us and it was necessary.

So you would say it was effective? Very effective. Very effective.

Now the part that was not effective, now I'm going to move back to Africa. Okay. After we took a round, which was a trip, and we had some casualties, and the first thing that I remember we were in a desert and in and we were in a desert and we were in a desert and we were in desert desert and the we had some bad luck we would be shot by a weapon come out with what they call a gas cape.

And it was a plastic thing that, like a poncho, you kept 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.

It kept, and the purpose of this gas cape was if a German plane 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 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 from the British?

Is that right?

[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?

[Speaker 2]

Yes.

[Speaker 1]

Then, after we took Oran, my company moved back to Le Grand, a little town of Le Grand. 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're going to give them American equipment.

And I had to go to the show. What were they like? What was your...

[Speaker 2]

The Foreign Legion?

[Speaker 1]

What was your... Well, we followed them on the... And they did put up some resistance?

They did put up good resistance. And they were capable, 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, back to Germany. We moved a thousand miles from Oran to a place where my regiment first went, to a place called Asalida, up in Tunisia. And we were part of the French Nineteenth Corps.

The French were... How did you get that one? How did you travel?

We traveled by truck, by walking. Two battalions would go by truck, and one battalion would walk. One battalion would go by truck, and two battalions would...

We just alternated, overlapped like that. Was that difficult, or was that hard to do, or was it... At that point, were you physically...

No, no, it was a normal mode of moving for infantry. First, when you're in a weapons company, and you're carrying a fifty-eight-pound tripod on your back, and you're carrying two boxes of ammunition, and you're carrying... You've got about ninety, ninety-five pounds on you.

You've got to be... Some people have got to relieve your effort 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're quicker, too.

So, you know, if you're carrying a little more to live a little longer, it's worth carrying. It's worth it. Now, on the way, we were concerned about German paratroopers dropping and having us take the wrong road in the desert.

Had you heard something? Yeah. And, of course, we had mines to worry about.

German mines. But other than that... And when we got up near Konstantin, 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 Stratas, and bombers. But nothing serious.

And then we got to Ossoleta, and we went into a holding position in Ossoleta. And now December, November, by the part of November, December comes, and it's, and it's cold. And we had no equipment.

We had thrown our overcoats away, because they're too bulky to carry. We did not have bedrolls at that time. So what were you sleeping on?

Well, some of us found, stole from hospitals or anything, any quartermaster truck that went by that we rode with. Those truck drivers had blankets, and we stole the blanket. Well, you have to steal.

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

Chickens, hogs, whatever, cows, anything, we'd steal. And we'd tell it made it. The thing that you like to take in North Africa, was there, I've heard oranges, I've heard a lot of oranges and eggs.

We, we had a, we had a problem with honeydew melons. One time we run up on a whole field of honeydew melons, not too far from a place called Mactown. And we all just went crazy over these honeydew melons, because we were eating U.K. rations and C. rations, nothing fresh. So anything fresh, like a honeydew melon. But it 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, depends on where you're from.

If you're from Colorado, Colorado trots, or Georgia trots, or whatever. Honeydew melons was a thing that I don't remember eating many oranges in Africa. We, 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, one tank division, armor division, 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, my regiment, and attached it to the French 19th Corps, which was part of the British 1st Army. So we received British, what they called fabrics 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 issue an oxtail suit. What the hell do you do with a can of oxtail stew?

We had no idea. You know, this is an example. Or a tin of biscuits.

We used to C-rations or A-rations or D-bars, you know, a D-bar was a candy bar. Well, we stayed in to the winter in the valley. And this was a holding position.

Really, we were not very aggressive holding. That was the French 19th Corps. Who were you?

Was that in the opposite of your position? Or the Germans, the German Directly in front of us was a part of the German 90th Light Division. See, the Afrika Korps had four divisions.

It had the 10th Panzer, the 15th Panzer, the 21st Panzer, the 90th Light Division. Now, notice the difference. We had three Infantry Divisions and one Tank Division.

The Germans had three Tank Divisions and one Infantry Division because they're operating in tank country. But we are not that smart. Our high command, either they are not that intelligent or they were not wise enough to understand what is going on.

Now, our Army initially had the old M3 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 rotated all the way around, had a 37 millimeter gun.

On the right of this chassis was a 105 bouncer that was 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.

No. The Germans had what they call the Mark V, which had a 88 millimeter gun and a turret that rotated three inches that fired 2,000, 21,000 yards, the 88. That's racing fire.

It went boom, clack, boom, clack, just like that. That's how fast it fired. And our gun would go boom, wow.

It took it that long to go there, the velocity of the shells. So that tank, I don't know what happened to it. Then we got to Sherman.

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

It would be like me jumping in the ring with Holyfield, you know, just about the same thing. And that's what irritates me when this damn patient said, I'll take a tank and go fight while he... Nobody was that stupid, even him.

And he was notoriously stupid. Even he was not that stupid. He knew what...he couldn't get within 5,000 yards of a German tank, so he would be knocked out. Anyway, we got the

Sherman. How did that make you feel, knowing that you're a tank? It gives you a very inferiority complex.

The one thing that an infantry soldier at that time was the word tank, because we had nothing, nothing that would knock a tank out. And a whole infantry in 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?

[Speaker 2]
Well, no.

[Speaker 1]
They trained us to stay in a hole and let a tank run over us, you know. That doesn't stop it, right? That's not going to do anything to the tank.

Hell, down in Georgia and in Pennsylvania, I've been in holes and had the tank run over me. That's not...you know, the 8 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 in the moment that it's unpleasant, but that's not stopping a tank.

Now, they moved us back to...they moved us by night, and I'll never forget it. It was cold, 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 German Panzer Division, we had absolutely nothing that would stop a tank, and they'd run over us. I'd run with that machine gun until I couldn't run anymore. And I'd 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 Tabassa, 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 difficult to rally the troops after such a...

No, no, no, because once we got to where the Germans were all over chasing us and shooting at us, we stopped. There was no use in running 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 to get organized.

A few people were missing. We were killed and wounded after. 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 prisoners and were taken to Tunis and kept at Tunis.

And later, when the British liberated Tunis, they liberated our prisoners. They came back to us. One of our battalion commanders, 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 1st Battalion.

I was in the 3rd Battalion. So now we realize that these German soldiers were really good soldiers, really, really good. 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 what our... But he meant how much equipment we had, not the quality of the equipment, but the quantity of the liquid 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 either Macedonia 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 they pulled the 18th, which had been down at Fade Pass by itself, they pulled them back.

And the 26th, which got really heat up in Kasserine, 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.

Well, you kind of didn't really... Yeah, it was really to get back under our command. And, but this is 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 the 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, you know, where he can tell them what to do. He can't just give them away, you know.

We stayed there, and this is where Patton come to visit us, the idiot. And we... 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 phony. He was an absolute phony. You know, you can tell.

When you've been walking and fighting and going hungry and cold and hadn't had a bad 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 in Constantine, and he's telling you how many people he's killed and how tough he is. You know, you can't bullshit a bullshitter.

You know what I'm saying? And we were good folk. 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 old ruins, and we went into a pack, and we took a town called Gaspa.

What kind of opposition did you face, German opposition, in Gaspa? In Gaspa, it was an absolute picture-perfect coordinated attack. About three miles up west of Gaspa is Awadiyah, which is a dried-up riverbed.

We all assembled in that dried-up Awadiyah. 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 Awadiyah, and our riflemen behind the tanks, walking behind those tanks, and machine guns sitting back there firing overhead. I don't think we had 10 people wounded in the whole regiment. Absolute perfect attack.

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 lice, we had malaria, we had sores.

We called it the African rot. We had sores on our body where we'd scratch, and they'd become infected. And now, here we are in these springs.

Boy, that was worth dying for, you know, in the springs. 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, and I forget what all they had.

The little stuff that you needed. But without water in the desert, you know, anything worth a shit, 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 coast. Now, the British Army is pushing the Germans north, and if we go and cut them off at Gapis, 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. Machine guns.

[Speaker 2]

Carrier. Propel. Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

And we go through a cut in the mountains into a valley called El Gatari. And, of course, the infantry gets in the high ground. Always.

It's required. We go up in the high ground. So, you went up in the high ground.

We went up in the high ground, overlooked in the valley. And, of course, the tanks stopped. The artillery set up back there.

And the Italian, the Arata. I don't remember how you pronounce it. The King's Regiment of the Italian Army was dependent on these things.

And we were fighting the Italians. The Italians, these were probably the best troops. And they were good.

That's why Ronald put them there.

[Speaker 2]

Did they fight? Were they aggressive?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. Those Italians fought very effectively. They stopped us.

What did they do that was so effective? They had good fields of fire, which is, it's hard to talk to someone who's not a soldier. It would take me an hour.

A good defensive position to use. 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 high.

And any deflated position, which is more than six feet, you have this belt 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 taught them how to do it. The Germans were excellent at this. They really knew how to set up a defense.

So the Germans did this pretty much standard? Pretty much standard, except for the American army. We were not trained in defensive positions.

We knew 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 First Infantry Division so good, is that we copied the Germans in just about everything they did.

We never attacked in daytime, because in Africa you couldn't. The minute you moved in daytime, the German airplane was on top of you, or the German tank was shooting at you. You could only move at night.

So we learned to attack at three o'clock in the morning. You hit what you call the IP, the initial point at two, and the LD, the line of departure, you cross at three. And you go into the attack, and you want to attack in a column.

And you go right into the enemy position, and then you spread out and take in from the rear. We learned this from the Germans in Africa, the First Infantry Division. You can read the history of my regiment, and you'll find Colonel Gibbs or whatever colonel we had ordered an attack for the 3rd Battalion at three o'clock in the morning.

Always at three o'clock in the morning. This is when troops are the sleepest. If you're on guard, and you sit there until 12 o'clock at night, about three, you're pretty well ready to go to sleep.

And we found that out. 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 the radio. But the one thing that the Germans did not have was the fire direction center.

We did not have it either. But some 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 is there and this Sergeant Franklin is looking he's on this hill over here.

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 from point of, we used to, what we call from point of origin from point of origin three right two five, left two five is an enemy tank.

Well the company would call the 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 got a battery of guns here, they fire here and they can lock it up. And it all went to fire direction center.

Germans didn't have that. We did. And we, not only could they fire one gun, they could fire a hundred guns or a thousand guns to one fire direction center.

Because they had some smart boys in there who knew mathematics. You don't learn anything else in college but mathematics. Learn that because it'll save some rifleman's life.

We we established that in Africa with the fire direction center. So that was established in Africa, 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 infantry division. The first infantry was the first to do and it was called again fire direction center.

Of course it's standard in the army now. Thanks to the first division. It started with the first division.

[Speaker 2]

So it sounds like to me that that the American that your regiment and division were really picking up quickly, learning very quickly from the Germans.

[Speaker 1]

Your own initiative isn't good. We've got an order from the division headquarters which goes against all of the American philosophy as to how you treat soldiers. 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 in the American army.

That does not happen in the American army, division. And you think that that word didn't get out to people who wanted to run? That if you run, this damn sergeant over here is going to shoot you.

So don't run. You better, 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 heard they were told verbally that this is the order.

And they and that copy, it's a natural reaction for a human to try to run from danger.

[Speaker 2]

That's a key question. That's one of my key questions. I really, 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. But then you have people who you've been living with.

People who have endured exactly what you have endured. People who have gone through the same thing that you went 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 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 we are all cowards. I have done the cowardly things in the world and it looked like I was doing it because I was brave. Absolutely not brave.

I was scared. My ass was scared to death. That's my daughter.

I had a rich chef one time. She came to eat at night and I set her down at the table and gave her a glass of wine. My family, we lived in France and they were raised with wine for dinner.

And it's nothing. Neither one of them drank or smoked. They sip wine or a sip of drink.

They don't smoke but I smoke and I drink. They didn't. Fortunately they did.

I said, honey, why are you getting a D in mathematics? You're a pure smart girl and your mother is a mathematician. She does physics.

So certainly you didn't take everything from me. You must have got something from her. 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 freezing and cold and nothing to eat and 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 yes.

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, you've seen people when a fight starts pull the coat and the other one will do the fighting. You've seen that.

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 the poor Southern boy because of the... and this is how they circulated this. 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. First Air Force artillery tanks.

And then when you got down to about B5, 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 blind and the officers had one eye.

So we would go ballistic. 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. But yet you guys picked up the German tactics.

That's right. But we had done we had learned how to survive as always. We went to work way over 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 to 16 my family lived off of what little money I made.

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, kill him. 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 a fight on your hands.

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

We learned how to fight. We really learned how to fight. And people say, well, I've had a lot of people say, how come the first infantry division would be so good?

We were so good because we learned from the masters. And the masters were the Germans. They'd been fighting for three years and we hadn't had a, we'd been fighting for three days.

And they'd been fighting for three days. They were absolutely salute masters at everything, particularly war. They are can you believe I'm sitting on a hill in Sicily and out in front of me not only me, but the whole people here comes a little toy tank comes up out of a creek bed where they had a bridge, a little bridge over this creek.

This little toy tank comes up out of that thing and comes across the field with us and everybody's looking, hey, look at that toy 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 a thousand pounds of TNT in it.

And it was remote controlled. The Germans were going to guide it up into our position and detonate it. Well, hell, we didn't even have a rifle grenade.

And here they got remote controlled tanks, remote controlled bombs. They could guide it down, 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. There's an old saying in the First Sector Division that God is with the First Sector Division because we had more damned artillery than anybody else. That's why God is with us.

If we told you God wouldn't be with us, he'd be with the other people. But that's an old First 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 had, we've always had the best artillery. We had the most artillery.

Of course, you have to be careful. Our own artillery would shoot at us. Really?

[Speaker 2]

How would that happen?

[Speaker 1]

On Mother's Day 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.

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. So the battalion commander, 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 time, 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 come through my battalion has taken this little village in a column. My battalion commander is right behind there, Colonel Horner. And we started getting two quarters.

Excuse me. It's around about like that. One of them knocked a house down.

We're in this little village and this 240 has landed on us. And the only reason I know this is I could hear the battalion commander talking on the radio. He was very calm, very quiet.

He'd been with us so long. He said, Sieber, Sieber, 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. Sieber, lift your fire.

You're firing in Blue Battalion's area. Blue Battalion. First battalion was red.

Second battalion was black. Third battalion was red, black, blue. And so everybody knew what battalion.

And we were just good troops, good soldiers.

[Speaker 2]

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?

[Speaker 1]

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 mean anything. Initially, initially it does. But once you get on the front line, once you get actually in combat and this doesn't happen until 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 colonels, captains, majors, sergeants. They will be relieved.

Who will take their place? And this happens 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 I would say it's human to crack but you can't crack if you're a battalion commander. 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 one of those weapons to get this job done. Now once you find the man who is that calloused 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 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?

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 graded 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.

The coolest part of this is some people justify their existence by getting other people killed and we always understood this and fortunately machine gun companies, machine gun

platoons do not have to participate in this. There are three kinds of patrols. There's a reconnaissance patrol that grapplemen go on.

There is a combat patrol and there is a contact patrol. Three kinds of patrols. Most people on patrols get killed, get wounded or get captured.

Now, a reconnaissance patrol say, okay Ben, you and Todd go up that hill and find out what's out there. You and I got to walk out there until somebody shoots at us and then we got to say, well, there's a machine gun there and mortar fire is coming here. Now, we 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, capabilities of the enemy, we have a battalion in front of us who has obtained 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 reconnaissance patrol and quite often you get killed and if you and I get killed then somebody else goes out and find out what's out there because that information is a regiment or a battalion.

Battalion is the same way they have an S3 officer. We always resent it down in the infantry headquarters people because their sole motive is to justify their position by getting our asses shot off and we never like that. We always hate it.

Everybody that's behind. This is a haggard truth 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 in.

You really respect them for some things but other things, you hate them for it. To distinguish, to answer your question, I think it's an unanswerable question. It's almost unanswerable.

The situation will dictate those who are true survivors. D-Day is an example. D-Day took away some of my company.

Twin Brothers. They were in machine gun squad in the second platoon. They joined us in England before the invasion and they were absolutely nothing to no way of saying it.

Skinny little boys from Pennsylvania. Nothing outstanding about them. 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 wouldn't let them advance and both of them got the DSC.

Two heroes. But you had no way of knowing what they ever would have given. That situation dictated that they were survivors.

One of them got killed by the way. And later he deserted. He just got up and walked off the front line and we never saw him again.

How common was that? There was quite a few deserters. I'll tell you why.

You know, in Africa we were really learning, we were really 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. Sicily was quite different. Sicily was a very difficult on the individual.

I went 37 days and didn't take my shoes off and my feet were rotting and 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 our feet purple they put that purple medicine on the whole company and a rifle company too, right at the foot of Mount Etna and everybody's feet were rotten because we had walked from Geland to Mount Etna never taking off our 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 tough and colder and wetter and hungrier and more people were killed and killed and eventually with me one day me and my buddy, we realized we can't go on and eventually look we started out with 142 men and now there's 4 of us we had 8 at D-Day and now there's 4 of us left and people are just coming through you don't know their names, you don't give a damn they get shot eventually you're going to get it and then you come to the realization that they're deliberately keeping you here 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 give this some thought one time, can you imagine you're a young soldier you get drafted out of the Knoxville you're sent to basic train, you're sent to New York you're put on a boat, not with friends but 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 they knew he was going to get killed or something but this is another thing different with the first division when a replacement comes to the first division he was assigned a man who was responsible for him and that man taught him everything he needed to know now when you went to another division nobody taught you anything you're just there with the first division leader put a man on the front line was this a tradition in the first division you just did that because that was the way things were done in the first division somebody realized that here's a lonely boy maybe four of them came over together on a boat one goes to one division one goes to another division and here this boy comes down generally they come at night the company runner brings him up and here he is and he doesn't know nothing you can imagine how scared and lonely this person is and other units you're just getting out of hold first division assigned a man to you who was responsible for you and that man took you as his brother and he taught you everything you need to know and this is another way of making so you probably did you have you were assigned to so what was that do you remember any particular one no because I later when I got up to be a sergeant I didn't but when I was a young private in the PFC and another thing you don't have to turn

over in a machine gun company that you can rifle where we may receive you know 10 replacements after a battle a rifle company may need 40 because they get cut in a rifle company you take a machine gun company attached to a rifle company we were with I Company one time and we were trying to take a castle it's near a town called Hammack up not too far from Solberg in Germany and it took us a week to take that damn castle set up on top of a hill the top of the hill was here and the castle was here below the crest it was hard to get it with artillery and we had to go uphill to attack it they had perfect defenses I Company had 22 men left in it when we took the castle now we're talking 188 men that the company should have and they had 22 it's not unusual for a rifle company as I remember my platoon we were 27-28 men but that's a platoon where I Company is a company the turnover is less than that but it's and of course to be a good soldier is an art also there is an art to being a good soldier he's got to know and of course you found this in sergeants good sergeants he's got to know what likely route the enemy will use to approach you and what you should do you know how can you put up a listening post how can you put up booby traps the 1st Division was the booby traps we never laid down in our head booby traps and when we got relieved like in Chamont, Normandy we got relieved by the 5th Division actually the 5th Division got killed running up on our booby traps because we got relieved at night we didn't even know we were going to be relieved we didn't have time to show them

[Speaker 2]

were they home made?

[Speaker 1]

you take a grenade and you tie it to a tree you take a string put the string over here for anybody walking by that string pulls that pin you take a mortar round dig a hole lay it down let a tank run over it we learned all of that and this I call the art of being a good soldier now, the art of being an offensive soldier is quite different from the art of being a defensive soldier for those who need to know about the details it's a lot like football you know, it's two complete different entities I hope I didn't confuse you Tom

[Speaker 2]

you want another drink?

[Speaker 1]

I'm not boring you, am I? in Africa the 1st Infantry Division got a tank destroyer attached to it very close to Elkatat exactly when it was attached to us I don't know it had a the old M4 chassis but it had a 90 millimeter gun and an open top it had no turret 90 millimeter and they called it M10 tank destroyer that's what they called it and that son of a bitch would destroy now we're on equal footing with the Germans and this is by Elkatat but we had a battalion the Germans had 3 divisions so you're still not really now the problem is the American production of course again I'm not intelligent enough to understand the wheels of production but they were turning out 10,000 tanks a month but they weren't worth the damn if they would have turned out 10,000 M10 tank destroyers a month we'd have ended the war 2 years earlier you know I guess production can't just turn over you know like from M4 tank to M10 tank destroyer next one what was wrong with the M4 the gun was not big enough did not have enough muscle velocity the barrel was not long enough for it to carry very far and it was not a very effective weapon as far as tanks go

[Speaker 2]

how did this, I'm just curious I don't mean to interrupt but how from a psychological standpoint it sounds like you're really you're up against except for your artillery except for the American artillery which we had in numbers it sounds like there's a sense of the Germans having the advantage and how does that make you feel

[Speaker 1]

it did not make you feel good we came I forgot to mention something there when the division came back together at that Corinthian old fortress they finally come out with something that would knock a tank out it was a 2.36 bazooka that is where the first time we ever saw it and they issued it to us no training well we just went out and shot it and had an old tank and shot the tank and if you shot in the back of a German tank and hit the motor you could knock it out hit into the treads of the tank, you could knock a tread out that would make the tank turn around, become immobile it doesn't mean it still could shoot at you it was immobile the Germans had a Panzerfaust which ever rifleman had one and that damn thing had a thing on that part cough cough and had an impact type of fuse that when it hit an object and the fuse was charged blew everything through where it hit, it didn't explode like our 3.2.36 bazooka, our 3.2 bazooka would hit and it'd explode but the German Panzerfaust would hit and explode through it had what they call an impact type fuse, it's like cough if you took a stick of dynamite and laid it and let it go off but you could take it and lay it down on the floor and lay a magazine over it, one of those magazines and it'll blow hell out of that floor that's hard to believe but it's true just a little bit of mud or a little bit of dirt or a stick of dynamite makes it blow down but otherwise it goes towards the least resistance but put something on top of it and makes it blow down well that was the German Panzerfaust it was an impact type and the fuse came, the fuse detonated and penetrated through our tank but the next thing excuse me, the next thing is when you're behind a tank, that's a rifleman and a machine gun they're going to enter an enemy position you have no way of communicating with the tank no way the tank is closed up I hadn't thought of that the tank commander has a little thing here he can see up there, but a rifleman behind him or an infantryman machine gunner can see a German tank here or an allied tank gun, but he can't tell the tank so we tried to get them to put a telephone on the tank so they could talk to the commander they wouldn't do it they would not do it until the war was almost over and tank destroyers came out with a telephone where we could talk to the commander, but it took three years, how many lots, how many German lots were saved by that lack of application of a sound belt to a sound value but that's how stupid we were we were again, we're the best at moving supplies in the world, nobody can compete with the Americans, we're the best at moving artillery, and shooting artillery, nobody can compete with us, we're the best at calculating everything but we're the worst at getting information from the bottom up why is that?

well, you go to your school and see it at your school all institutions in America are top heavy and they absolutely refuse to accept excellent ideas from the bottom up they think they should originate from the top and unfortunately I'm not denigrating the intelligence, or the intelligentsia of America, but unfortunately, some dumb rattlemen have good ideas well, it makes sense

[Speaker 2]

because actions take place, that's where the ideas would be generated, they're realistic

[Speaker 1]

that's right, you've got it

[Speaker 2]

it makes sense to me

[Speaker 1]

now, next thing the Germans went into Poland September 1939 their commanders on the ground had a pilot with them, who had contact with the German Air Force and he and the Air Force stoopers what the bomb you know how long it took the Americans to come up with this?

just in September of 1944 now we're in war from 1941 and in September 1944 I saw my first fighter pilot Adolf, what are you doing? my first fighter pilot in an extra battalion in September 1944, we run into a column of German tanks trying to get back to Germany and he knocked those things out with P-47s, we had 36 P-47s over us about in 5 minutes and they eat that column up alive I'll bet you they killed 3000 people and knocked out 20 tanks in 15-20 minutes because he could talk to them but it took us from 1941 to 1944 to land back, but we finally learned it we're very slow learners it was just a bias I guess, from ideas coming up from the I think so there's an old first division saying it's not your job to question why it's just your job to do or die so obviously expect much from the ranks but what we learned in Africa and Sicily, we spread among the ranks we didn't necessarily spread it to higher echelon, we spread it among the ranks, you know how to set up your defensive position the booby trap position there are three, Germans were famous for three types of defense they have the boat type of defense they have the stationary type of defense and they have the stop defense the defense that absolutely stops you if you go along in a column, particularly with tanks and they wanted to stop you and not let you go this way they put a few tank guns up there and a couple of tanks, and say you stop you've got to deploy, spread out get your fire going, call artillery and all this stuff, and they hold you up, they delay you and then they just they fight you until you overpower them then they had what they called the boat position and they'd set up a couple machine guns and maybe one tank or an ammo tank gun, and when you run up dead they would start firing at you and the minute you start firing they'd just bolt out back a thousand yards and set up another position say this is their boat position then they had their stationary defense where they laid it in by the boat and when you hit a stationary position you had problems, always they were masters they learned that in Russia most of them most of the people that we fought in Africa had fought in Russia and Portugal so it's like like any other field of expertise the more experience you have the better you become

[Speaker 2]

what would you say Mr. Franklin what would you say