

Leo D. Hymas

Tape 1 of 2

Question: Let me start again. Your name and how you spell lit.

Answer: My name is Leo Dean Hymas. L-e-o D-e-a-n H-y-m-a-s.

Question: ok. Just in case we lose the tape, here. To start with, were you from Washington State originally?

Answer: No, I was born in Southern Idaho in the Bear Lake Valley. When I was 12 years old, my parents moved to Cache Valley, a town near Smithfield to work on a farm. My father owned a 365-acre dairy farm so I worked milking cows and feeding calves, and hauling hay and thinning beets, and harvesting grain. All the things that farm kids do.

Question: And you were going to school. A small one-room school.

Answer: Well, no. It was a little bigger than that. I went to Summit School in Smithfield, and then to junior high school in Smithfield and then to North Cache High School, and that would have been in the 1940s. I remember Pearl Harbor Day. It was a Sunday.

We were coming out from church, and my father turned the radio on in the car, and we learned that Pearl Harbor had been attacked and we were at war. I was 15 years old, and I remember thinking. Where's Pearl Harbor? And my father explained, and it was so far away it didn't have much meaning. So I didn't really understand much about the fact that we were at war. But some of the young men, as they graduated, were drafted into the military and some left to join the Air Force or the Navy or the Marines, and you know they came back with some of the nicest looking uniforms, especially the Marines, and I thought, Wow, if that happens to me I'll get a date with a real pretty girl, 'cause they were all going for all these wonderful good-looking uniforms. I really thought that would happen.

Things were rationed in those days, because the war effort required most of the gasoline. We had an A card that gave you 8 gallons of gas per week. We had an old '41 Chevrolet. Couldn't go very far with that much gas, but we had a separate account for our tractor so we could do our farm work. Meat was rationed, but that didn't really effect us too much, 'cause we raised our own beef, and shoe leather was rationed. You got 3 pairs of shoes in one year. Sugar was rationed, and you had little ration slips that you went to the grocery with to buy your goods, and we all had to register for the draft when we were 18 years old, and we did that, of course, and I was a senior year in high school. My birthday was in February, and I registered, and two weeks before I graduated from high school, and this would have been one month before D-Day, so the war had been going on for quite awhile. We knew there was a bad guy over in Europe, his name was Hitler, and we knew there was a bad guy in Japan, and his name was Hirohito, and we made fun of them and laughed about it, and down on our little town there was a big poster with all the names of the young men who had gone off to war, and we would go down there and say, Well, I knew him, and maybe he'll be back. And then my mother told me about these little flags that were hanging in everybody's window. It was a serviceman's flag. White with a blue star, red around it. I said to Mom, what is that? She said, Well, it means that someone from that house has gone to serve in the military. I can remember seeing some with two flags, sometimes two stars, and I thought oh, that's really interesting. One day there was one with a gold star, and I asked Mom, What did that mean? She said, well, their boy's not coming back. That's a gold star mother. I didn't fully understand that.

One day a knock came on the door and I went to the door and there was a man delivering a telegram addressed to me. I'd never received a telegram in my life

Leo D. Hymas

Tape 1 of 2

before, and my folks stood around as I opened it, and it said Greetings. You are hereby directed to report to Fort Douglas, Salt Lake City, Utah, for induction into the United States Army, and the President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, signed it. Now I know now that he didn't really sign that. We had a draft board in our little town, and they had these forms, and it was their job to select those who were to be drafted and send this form to tell you, you were going to be inducted and that's what happened. That's how I, how it came to be that I was inducted into the Army. So the day came...

Question: Do you remember what your Mom's reaction was to that telegram coming to your house?

Answer: Yes, she, she shed a few tears, and my Dad looked at me very soberly, and they looked at the date when I was to go, and it was after graduation of high school, and there were several of us from that graduating class. My dear friend, Ken Weiser, and I received telegrams for the same day. So the day came when my Mom and my Dad and my younger brother and my younger sister came to the train station to say Good-bye. I wanted to take my dog and my pony, but that wasn't allowed. And my Dad, you know how Dad's are. He put his arm around my shoulder and Son, remember who you are. My mother she cried a little bit, my sister cried a little bit, my brother who was two years younger than me blubbered and I said good-bye and I got on the train and went to Salt Lake City to Fort Douglas, and they took away all my civilian clothes and gave me a new uniform, and I thought, This isn't a very pretty uniform. I won't get any dates with this! It was the OD and the fatigues that they give you. They put us on a train and sent us to a far-off place near Dallas, Camp Wolters, Texas, located next to a little town of Mineral Wells, Texas, and I was in a training group to learn to be a soldier for 17 weeks. With all those guys I'd never met before living in this big barracks, and we had the meanest, rottenest old sergeant. He cussed us, and yelled at us, and made us stand at attention in the hot sun. He made us run everywhere we went and we had to hike with full field packs, and he was a mean, old tough guy, and I thought, How can I stand all this, and I got so homesick. I missed my Mom and my Dad and my sister and my brother and my dog and my pony and I wanted to go home, and I was stuck there for 17 weeks.

Question: Had you ever been out of Utah before?

Answer: Never been out the little valley I lived in.

Question: Now when you were in training there for 17 weeks, did you, were you always on base or did you get..

Answer: I got one or two passes to go into town, and

Question: Was there segregation in that part of Texas?

Answer: We had no, we had no black soldiers in my training division. There were a few in town, civilians, families, and that sort of thing. What I remember about that one pass was I had to learn to swim side stroke so I could carry my pack and my rifle out of the water, and I didn't know how to do that and I couldn't get a pass till I learned how. So when everybody was going to town on pass, I was learning how to swim out in the swimming hole. Near the end of our training, they took us in what we call Hell's Bottom and we learned house-to-house combat, and all we learned how to use the bayonet and we learned hand-to-hand fighting, and it was very realistic because they had props of men who had fake wounds lying around

Leo D. Hymas

Tape 1 of 2

indicating this was what might happen to you. Now I didn't know at the time, but those young men who were not yet 18 years old were not permitted to go overseas, although they had been sending them, there was some responsive feedback about that, so the President directed that 18-year-olds would not be sent overseas until they were 19. I wasn't quite 19, so they sent me to Camp Maxi at Texarkana for additional advanced infantry training, and then they sent me to Camp Gruber?, Oklahoma, for more, additional advanced infantry training. Then I got a short leave at home, 10 days. And you know, I didn't get single date with a pretty girl, and I was ordered back to Camp Cook, California, which is now Vandenburg Air Force Base. It was right on the water near Santa Maria, and I was assigned to the 97th Infantry Division, which was training as an amphibious division to go overseas and bring Douglas MacArthur back from Australia where he's gone after the fall of the Philippines. But I was only there just a short time, and what I know now is the Battle of the Bulge took place in Europe. All we knew then was, the Sergeant said, Turn in your summer uniforms. Take winter uniforms we're going to give you and go get on that train. Where are we going? They never told us. So as the train headed eastward we'd look out the windows and we'd ask the people when it stopped, where is this? And it was someplace in Colorado or Arizona or maybe Nebraska or Ohio or Pennsylvania. We finally ended up at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, and it takes quite awhile, I guess, to get a whole division together, and so I got a one-day pass to go to the big city of New York, and I got there I saw those people and all that traffic, and it scared me. I'd never been in a big city with all those tall buildings before. I found the Stage Door Canteen, which is a place where you can write letters to home and there's a library where you can read magazines and newspapers. And very highly chaperoned would come and dance with us to music they played on a record. And there were nice ladies who served cookies and milk and whatever. So I was dancing with this young girl, and she said, Well, where are you stationed? I said, well, I'm sorry I can't tell you. It's a military secret. She said, Oh, I know. You're at Camp Kilmer, and you're going overseas very soon. She was right. They loaded us in a truck, went down to this great big ship. I'd never seen a ship before, but there it was, tied to the dock, and there was a gangway to go up, and they had these steel bunks, with rope-lacing canvas on this ship. It was a former cruise ship converted to a troop carrier with bunks clear to the overhead in every compartment. There were 3,500 bunks on that ship, but they loaded 7,000 of us aboard. Two to a bunk, and we set sail that night. In the North Atlantic in 1944, the waves were huge. That old ship just went this way and then it went that way, and I think everyone on that ship got seasick. They gave us only two meals a day. They started feeding at 5 o'clock in the morning. That was breakfast or brunch, 12 noon was lunch or dinner, 10 o'clock at night they quit. And everybody was seasick. You know what happens when you get seasick. You upchuck, and everybody did, and the vomit down in the lower companionways was up to your ankles and smell was horrible. So I put on my sweater and jacket and my cap and I took my little book of scriptures and I went up on the deck. Tried to find a place out of the wind where it would be a little warmer and I looked and we were in a double row of ships in a large convoy that stretched from horizon to horizon, and there wasn't a light shone anyplace. The portholes were all covered. The hatches were all covered. We were in submarine territory, and I thought, Where am I going? What's gonna happen to me? I don't want to do this? Will I ever see my family? My home again? I'm only 18 years old, I'm just a kid. I don't want to do this. I would have been 19 when we got there, probably. That's how they worked it. I started to cry, and I thought my mother had taught me to pray, and I did on that ship. I prayed, and I thought, That mean old rotten sergeant made me into a soldier. I'm an American soldier. If I do what he do what he taught me to do, I'm gonna be ok. And I made up my mind I would be the best soldier I could be, and I would follow all the rules and regulations, and I would do my

Leo D. Hymas

Tape 1 of 2

best to serve my country honorably. And I made up my mind I would never be taken prisoner because I knew we were going into the combat zone. We landed after about 8 days at Le Havre, France, and we were loaded into trucks and moved to a large tent camp called Lucky Strike after the name of a cigarette that was popular in those days. It was raining and wet and muddy and cold and I can recall thinking, This isn't what I thought war would be like, but we weren't at the front. France had just barely been liberated. Belgium, Holland had barely been liberated, and the front line was right down the Rhine River. The Battle of the Bulge, which we headed for to help out, was already over with, so they loaded us into railroad cars just like the ones like the Jews were shipped to the camps in, although I knew nothing about that. They didn't put us in like two or three hundred of us and lock, nail the doors shut. There were only 10 or 12 in each car, and I understand they used the trains to ship us because the bridges were all out and bombed and the rails were still operating, so we went along in this train going through Holland, and I knew nothing about anybody like Anne Franck. And the train was going kind of slow and it stopped and I was sitting in the open doorway with my feet hanging out and a little girl came up to the train, and I looked at that little girl. She was maybe 8 or 10 years old. She had on a little pink dress. No coat or no hat. Her arms were so skinny and tiny and her legs looked like little broomsticks and she had her feet wrapped in some kind of rags and she held up a little piece of money, and I looked down at that sunken little face. I'll never forget that little girl's face. That's the first time in my life I'd ever seen a starving person. She held up a little piece of money and she said in English, Chocolate. I had a piece of candy in my pocket from my ration and I handed it to her and she gave me that piece of money and it's a one-guilder note. It's worthless today, but to me it's priceless because I'll never forget the face of that little girl. She went only a few steps and looked at the candy and then she turned and waved to me and I waved to her, and I resolved once again to do my best to overcome whatever horrible force had caused that debilitating effect on that sweet little girl. I've never seen her since. I don't know who she was or anything about it. I sure hope she survived. The train arrived and we unloaded and we took our positions on the west side of the bank of the Rhine River at Remagen There'd been a steel railroad bridge across there and we'd gotten a few men across and then the bridge was finally blown up. And one day they said, We attack at 5 o'clock tonight. Back at Camp Kilmer I'd met a dear friend. His name was Jerry DeMarco. He came from Boston. He and I were assigned to be Machine Gunners. Heavy 30 caliber water-cooled machine gun. I was the gunner. He was assistant gunner. I didn't like him when I first met him. He talked funny. He would say things like about paakin' his caar in his gaarage, and brushin' his teet wit a toothbrush, and takin' a baath in a baathtub. I thought he was puttin' on airs. Well, he didn't like me either, because where I came from we would say things like, Put our harses in the barn and feedin' them carn. See he was a city kid and I was a country bumpkin, but we became fast friends, and we decided we would be the best machine gun operators there were. We could take that thing apart and put a new barrel in it and we could hit the target and we were a fine team. He was my best friend. We loved each other, just my age.

Question: Was that the first, when you got up to the front, is that where you first were disembarked from the train was Remagen

Answer: No, it was at Cologne.

Question: So you actually

Answer: We went by truck down to Remagen?

Leo D. Hymas

Tape 1 of 2

Question: And that was the line then.

Answer: There was a unit there on position and we replaced them one night.

Question: So they were just...

Answer: They were pulled back for rest and rehabilitation. We took their place. I put the machine gun in the tripod marks that they had had their machine gun in and it faced out over the Rhine River.

Question: So when you were going from Cologne to Remagen on a truck, you were going forward toward the line, did you see vehicles coming back from the line?

Answer: A few. Not too many.

Question: Was it just troops coming back?

Answer: There was no fighting. There was no shells that I could see. We just set up a position. It was all quiet. And it was quiet on the other side of the river.

Question: And the Germans were on the other side of the river.

Answer: They were on the other side. When the order came to attack, we were, we a machine gun squad in those days was 14 people. Two machine gunners and the rest carried these little green cans that had the ammunition in it. And we had a jeep and a jeep driver. So when the order came to attack, the engineers had built a floating bridge across the river and the trucks and the tanks and the half-tracks and the jeep with me in it with the machine gun sitting on the dashboard. I sat in the front seat beside the driver. We went across. Then we had to jump out and take cover along a... it was kind of a hillside. And then the shells began to come. And I could hear the mortars dropping and the artillery, and I could hear the men scream with pain and call for the medics, and there's gonna be an order for us to go over the top. I know it's coming. And when it does, I hesitated, but my best friend, Jimmy DeMarco, did not. He was killed at that moment with a 20 mm anti-aircraft shell. The Germans were, had depressed their anti-aircraft guns and were using them against ground troops. I lost my best friend that first night. I was so angry, so sorrowful, so afraid, so frightened. All those feelings. I can hardly remember what I did after that. I must have reacted cause a solder would, because I remember attacking a large munitions plant in Düsseldorf. There was a pocket and we had surrounded it. And there was a lot of fighting, and we finally captured it. The Germans inside surrendered, and I was guarding two prisoners who were sitting in the corner with their hands behind their heads like this, and suddenly there was a counter-attack. Now we're surrounded. We've got to fight our way out. My lieutenant came running to be and said, Hymas, shoot those two. I need you out front. What would you do if you were me? I said, Sir, they've surrendered. He said, I know. I don't care. Shoot them, that's an order. I thought about a higher authority. The one I'd prayed to. And I said, Sir, I will not. I knew that disobeying an order in combat could cause me to be court-martialed, perhaps with a death penalty. My lieutenant grabbed my little rifle and shot those two and said, Come with me. I did. We had a firefight. He said, You're on report, but he didn't live to make that report. He was killed in that battle. I have thought about that over the years. I'm so glad I didn't obey that order. If I had, wouldn't I have been just like the Nazi's, only doing that which they were ordered to do? Well, the fight continued clear across Germany. We went from town to town, from village to village. Our machine gun

Leo D. Hymas

Tape 1 of 2

was used to support the ground troops as the fighting went on. It was hard to shoot that machine gun without a partner and without the tripod, which was eventually, I found another machine gun group that had lost some of their men. We put ourselves together to make one group, and we fought our way through the Black Forest. We were assigned to General Patton's Third Army, the 97th Third Infantry Division, 303rd Infantry Regiment, Company H, Heavy Weapons, assigned to General Patton's Third Army, so I got to ride on the tanks. We were going through the Black Forest, and the Germans would put a roadblock up in front and the tanks would use their guns to blow the roadblock apart so we could move forward. My job was to look all around to make sure there was no rocket launcher or Germans prepared to shoot the rocket launcher to try and blow the tracks off of the track. We were going along and the tank commander had the hatch open and we came to a roadblock and sure enough, I saw this rocket launcher come up aimed at our tank. I slapped the commander on the shoulder and pointed and he brought the gun around and fired. The concussion was so strong and we were so close that I was nearly blown off the tank. I jumped down with him and we walked over and there were two headless German soldiers and an arm lying over...and this sergeant pulled the ring off the finger and stuck it in his pocket. He said, Thanks, Hymas. They nearly got us. I remember that well. We were going through a village, and there was a sniper up ahead. I couldn't see the building he was in. The riflemen couldn't show themselves and they were calling for support, and I asked them if they could tell me where the tracers were going. I'd provide support, and I did. I was shooting over their heads into a house. Something inside said lie low. I thought I heard a voice, but I didn't see anybody. Lie low, and I did. I flopped flat on the ground behind the machine gun, and a sniper bullet smacked into the wall right where I had been, and the rifleman saw where that sniper had fired from and we took him out. Very close call for me.

Question: Could we go back to something here about um, was it Jimmy was your assistant machine gunner?

Answer: Yes, he was.

Question: When, um, that was your first day of combat. Was that when he got killed?

Answer: In the first 20 minutes of that fight, yes.

Question: Had you, in the time that you had been together, you must have talked about families and friends back home and dreams and...

Answer: It was about 3 1/2 months we were together.

Question: Do you remember like sitting up there the first day, facing something that you had never envisioned facing. Did you talk about your thoughts, about what was going on and what was anticipated?

Answer: What's ahead of us, we didn't know. We looked across the waters of that river to that hillside. All was quiet. We knew the enemy was there. We knew we had a few Americans across. We knew that we would be called upon to support the riflemen with covering fire. And we had trained to do that. We knew how to do that. We would shake hands and say, I'll take care of you and you take care of me.

Question: So you talked about life and death and the possibility.

Leo D. Hymas

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Yeah. He was a good Catholic.

Question: Was he worried.

Answer: Yes, he was. But he was a tough kid. He grew up in the streets. He'd been in fights like I never had. I grew up on a farm. I'd never even heard many swear words. We were just as different as we could be. He had bright black flashing eyes, dark hair, swarthy complexion. Before my hair turned gray, I was blond, blue-eyed. We made an interesting pair, but we loved each other.

Question: That must have made an interesting situation because 60 years ago and being a Roman Catholic and you being a Mormon that both your institutions. Things were, people were a lot less understanding, especially the Catholic Church, that they. In this upbringing, he probably would have assumed you were ...

Answer: We had differences. He went to his Catholic mass and I went to my meeting. He had his scriptures and I had mine, and we sometimes talked about those things, but the overriding, higher objective of being a good soldier and winning the war overcame all those differences.

Question: So personally, too, you must have. It sounds like your experience that you talked to up to the point of combat, that World War II in your training and your moving around, that you learned a lot about people, and yourself.

Answer: I tried. I really tried. I learned as much as they could teach me, but they can never teach you what you need to know when the bullets are coming, and the shells are exploding and the wounded and the dying are crying. You can never prepare for that. It comes as such a shock to your system, to your nerves. To your very being. To your memory, even. What I remember about that explosion that killed my friend is that his body was blown to bits.

Question: That must have been hard. One minute he's there, one minute he's gone.

Answer: He felt no pain. I'm sure of that. And the tripod he was carrying over his shoulders with the cradle that the machine gun sits in was blown to bits.

Question: Did you, did you pause, were you so busy that you...

Answer: There was no time to pause. I didn't even look back. There was no time. The shells were coming thick and fast, they were. I kept as close to the ground as I could. I carried that one part of the firing mechanism. I couldn't make it fire unless I could stand up, and I didn't dare stand up.

Question: That was probably the day you really understood what was happening.

Answer: Yes, and by the time we'd gotten to Düsseldorf I felt like I was a pretty good soldier. I knew there were enemy out there. I knew they were there to kill us and we had to kill them first, and.

I know now that it was a Wednesday. I know that it was April the, I think 5th. It was overcast. It had been raining. We were on a hill. We were preparing to attack the town of Weimar. We fought from village to village. This is in East Germany. We've come a long ways. My machine gun squad had lost a lot of men. There were only 4

Leo D. Hymas

Tape 1 of 2

of us left from 16. And as officers looked down their glasses getting ready for the attack, through the trees in kind of a forest glade to the side, there's barbed wire. They said that might be a Prisoner of War Camp. Maybe our friends are there. You 4 machine gun guys check it out. If we hear any shooting we'll turn and support you. So we went sneaking down through these bushes and trees very still? It was quite a ways. It must have been about 10 o'clock in the morning perhaps. 9:30, I'm not sure. When we got to the wire enclosure, it was huge. It was 12 or more feet high. The wires were, I knew that they were electrified and we mustn't touch them. Behind the wires there were large brown barn-like buildings. There was nobody around that I could see. On one side I could see a brick building with a tall chimney, and there was a strange smell in the air. I've never smelled anything like it before. I couldn't place it. I could see a guard tower, but there was no one in it. Well, we were supposed to check it out and we had a bangalore torpedo. That's a tube about 2 inches in diameter and about 6 feet long filled with explosives. You can screw two of them together and the purpose is to slip under barbed wire entanglements, and when you set off the explosive, the sharp metal shards cut the wire, then you have an opening to go through, and we did that, and when the explosion went off, a group of SS officers, and I want to be very clear. I know their uniform. They were indeed SS officers, came running and firing. One of my companions was wounded, but we captured or killed 12 or 14. I'm not sure how many. This was Buchenwald Concentration Camp. We had no idea what kind of a place it was. I know now that all the people, the prisoners were huddled inside, because the rumor was going around that these officers were going to blow up the camp, to destroy all the evidence before the Americans came. Many of the prisoners had been marched off into the woods on some God-forsaken trek where many of them died, were shot. We went around each of these buildings and opened the doors to see if there were guards in there. No guard would go in there. I cannot tell you the stench and the smell and the horrors we saw. Hundreds of skeleton people. That's what they looked like, with only a bucket in the corner, living in their own filth. There were no guards anyplace. One little starving face from the lowest rack wrapped his arms around my legs and I looked up at another face, sunken cheeks, looked like a skull. Little voice said, Amerikanas, Yes yes, we're Americans. You can come out. You're free. They didn't fully understand. There were hundreds of naked, rotting bodies, stacked around the crematorium like cordwood. The lowest row stacked east and west. Next row north and south. The next row east and west. Rotting, awful, the stench. I've seen the autopsy room where those horrible experiments were done. There were jars of human body parts on shelves around the wall. On the table. There was something I'd never seen before. I couldn't identify it. Then it dawned on me. Tattooed skin, stripped from prisoners. I'd never seen such horrors. When the shooting started, our own unit came to support us, but what could 4 men do for all those prisoners. What could 20 men do? What could 350 men do? What could 1,000 men do? We couldn't help them. We couldn't do anything for them. The orders came that we were to touch nothing, except help those who were still alive if we could. Our own doctors and nurses came. The only positive memory I have of that experience is the nurses and the doctors washing and cleansing these poor prisoners, wrapping them in blankets, trying to keep them warm, hoping to feed them. We were ordered to go into Weimar and march all the civilians out to see what had happened, and we did it at the point of a gun or a bayonet. They went with their hands behind their heads saying, Mir nicht Nazi, Mir nicht Nazi. When we got them all out there, we made them pick up and carry all of these dead, rotting bodies to place them, to dump them into a large burial pit that the engineers had dug. There was an inspection team that came from allied high command and from our own congress. General Eisenhower came, General Bradley came, General Patton came. We called him blood and guts. General Patton threw up when he saw

Leo D. Hymas

Tape 1 of 2

what we had found. Most of the evidence that was used in the Nuremberg War Crime Trials after the war was gathered at that time. At Buchenwald Concentration Camp, just outside of Weimar. I was there I would say 4 or 5 days, and then I was ordered forward to the front line, where my main unit was. We continued to the, there wasn't really much fighting. There were a lot of prisoners taken. We made it to the Czech border, and the orders were that we would just hold there, and Patton really wanted to capture Prague, but it was reserved from some agreement made with the Russians that they would do that. However, he prevailed. On, General Eisenhower, who prevailed on, by that time, President Truman, we got the go-ahead. I was with a small group of recognizance who moved swiftly into Prague, Czechoslovakia, and we were going through the city. The riflemen were clearing all the buildings ahead to make sure they were clear. My new partner, named Arbazu, and I had our machine guns set up to cover all the roads in the intersection. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a German soldier run across the street, just, it was kind of up a little hill. He ran across the street into a house. And I said to Arbazu, Let's go capture that German. He said ok. Not too smart. We said, Watch our machine gun. We had pistols, 45 automatics. So we kind of sneaked up the street. The house was set back from the street and there was a wall around it about this high, and we were behind the wall, so when he went in the house, couldn't see us. Arbazu went around to the back and he could make a sound like a bird, and I waited for his signal, then he burst into the back and I went through the front. The doors were kind of like paneled French doors. I had, oh, I'll tell you how I was dressed. I had my steel helmet with some toilet tissue tucked in the liner. I had a pair of wool pants, a wool shirt, a field jacket, combat boots with a spoon tucked in the side. I had a pistol belt with a pistol, a trench knife, cartridges, canteen, first-aid kit, couple hand grenades.. had gloves, of course. I think I broke some of the panels as we went in because the procedure we'd been taught was to shoot the first thing that moves, and that would stop movement, and the surprise was genuine. There was more than one person in that house. We ran them all out. Some women, some men. They were all in uniform. They were in the process of changing into civilian clothes to fade into civilian life before we got there. We lined them all up, disarmed them. The one in charge seemed to be a SS colonel. I know their uniforms, death's head on his cap and lightning strikes on his collar, and as I disarmed him, I felt a bulge inside his tunic, and I pulled it out and it was an American-made Smith & Wesson semi-automatic. When I worked the slide, it had Remington rounds in it. I knew where he got that. From an American, possibly a pilot. I became so angry. I pushed my pistol up his nose and I pulled the hammer back and I came within that much of pulling the trigger, and then I remembered, a higher authority. He's my prisoner. He said to me in perfect English. American uniforms are not pretty. Well, of course, I'd lived in that for 5 months... Covered with mud and blood, and torn in places. He was my prisoner. There were 91 in that house. Two of us captured them all. We had a box full of guns and weapons, and he was very angry to realize that a private first class had taken him prisoner. There were other Americans came about that time and they were calling for us to move ahead, so we turned them all over to some advance artillery personnel and left, and moved forward. We were pulled back to Pilsen Czechoslovakia, and we heard that the war would soon be ending, maybe even tomorrow. We were very tired. My whole unit was trying to get some sleep and I was on guard. It seemed like I was always on guard, standing guard to make sure nobody bothered the ones when it was quiet. And it was quiet this night. There was no shooting, there was no fighting. Our unit was sleeping and Johnny Short and I were guarding a little road junction just outside of the town of Starý Pilsen, which it means the old Pilsen, little town. It was very, very dark. We were talking softly, and I heard footsteps coming, and I said, Shhh, quiet. We don't know who they are. Could be American, could be Russians, we're that close to the Russian line, could be

Leo D. Hymas

Tape 1 of 2

Germans. All of a sudden, Johnny jumped up, pulled out his pistol, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, and they shot back a few shots. All of a sudden things are quiet. Johnny's out of ammunition. What do we do? He said, I'll go back and alert the troops, so on his stomach, he went crawling back. I'm there alone. I don't know what's out there. I know some bullets came at us, but missed. I'm flat on my stomach. I can hear breathing. If the moon would come out, or if I could have a little light. I don't dare turn on my flashlight. That would give my position away. I can hear deep, heavy breathing. Maybe someone has been wounded. I thought if I could get just a little bit closer, perhaps I could see who it was. I got my pistol up ready, I pulled the hammer back and it clicked and the voice said, Kamerad, nicht Schießen. It was a German soldier. Ah, Amerikaners, Hans, kommen sie here. Amerikaners. There were two of them, trying to find the American lines to surrender to. What do you do with two soldiers that you capture the night before the war in Europe ended? I didn't know, so I locked them in a chicken coup. I hope they're still there. The war ended shortly after that. We went into the big city of Prague. I was riding in the jeep. We set up our machine gun to cover the second largest Jewish synagogue in Europe. It's located on the main street. It's called the Great Synagogue. It had been taken over and desecrated by the SS and by the Gestapo, and we covered all the exits while the riflemen went in, little bit of shooting, a few grenades, and they brought out 40 prisoners. And then the war finally did end. These men were still fighting after the surrender was signed. We had to clean out the cathedral tower. There were snipers in the top of the tower, and we did that. And it was so different, because the German civilians were sullen and hated us. The Czechs civilians were wonderful. They loved us and tried to help. I didn't get to stay very long there. My unit was ordered back to. Across Germany, back to France to another tent camp called "Old Gold", also another popular cigarette, and we waited there for a ship. I'm going to go home. I can hardly wait. They loaded us on the cruise ship. There's lights all over the place, there's movies, ice cream and cake, steak dinners. Oh, I wanted to see my homeland so much. They said we'd soon be able to see the Statue of Liberty, and I went up to the bow of the ship and I watched all day. I didn't see a thing. I made my bed up there and slept there all night. The next morning I began watching, and I watched again all day. Just as the sun was going down and the sky was all red, I made out that tiny little figure of the Statue of Liberty on my homeland. I'm coming home. I'll never forget that welcome. There were tugboats and fireboats and blimps, and dancing girls, and my mother cut out the picture in her hometown paper of the 97th Division coming home on that ship. Got on the train, arrived in Salt Lake City with my friend, Ken Wiser. Ken was in my division, but he was in a rifle regiment, so I only got to see him just once in awhile, but we arrived home on the train together. I called my Mom. It's 120 miles from Salt Lake to my home. She answered the phone and she said, Dad's out in the field working. Stick up your thumb. We'll see you when you get here. I was somewhat disappointed they didn't come and get me, but I've forgiven her. We did stick up our thumb. Everybody gave people rides. We got home. I had a short 10-day leave. I went down to the field, the sugar beet field that my father had, and guess what? There were German prisoners of war working in that field. Well, they weren't working, they were sitting over in the shade of a tree drinking cool water. When they saw me coming in my uniform, they jumped up and I said, Achtung! And they stood right at attention. I said arbeiten sie get to work! Mach schnell do it quick! And all I saw was rear ends going down the beet row pulling the weeds and doing the things they were supposed to be doing. I wasn't home very long. They ordered me back to Ft. Lewis, Washington; however, no that's wrong. They sent me to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, to take some training to assault beaches, or be an amphibious assault force. But when we got there, the orders were changed and they put us on the train to Ft. Lewis, Washington. As we traveled across country, I remember the

Leo D. Hymas

Tape 1 of 2

train had a big delay in Minneapolis, and all the servicemen spread out going to the stores, buying food, talking to the girls and the civilians, and when the train said Toot, Toot! They all came running as fast as they could 'cause the train was pulling. I was on the very last car and a young man, soldier, was running as fast as he could with a watermelon under one arm and a case of beer on the other, and we were trying to help him. All of them were trying to get the beer aboard, and just as they were successful and were doing that, he stumbled and fell. I remember seeing that soldier sitting in the middle of the tracks with a broken watermelon and his beer on the train. We arrived at Ft. Lewis. I got one pass to come to Tacoma, went to a movie, and then. Now the war had not ended in Japan, and then we boarded a ship, a troop ship, to go to invade Japan. I remember the band was playing Sentimental Journey as we went up the gangway. This time, we were combat veterans loaded on a troop ship, and the Navy was operating a ship, but they had one small squad of Marines who had just gotten out of basic training and they were supposed to be the guards to make sure the Army personnel didn't go into officers' country. And on the deck, one of our soldiers was sitting up on a lifeboat, I think, and he was reading, and for some reason one of the Marines...we called them white sidewalls because of their haircuts, said to this soldier, Get down from there. Soldier was writing or reading a book, I can't remember which, he looked down at the Marine. Make me. So the Marine pulled gun on the soldier, but before he could make a move he was hanging over the side by his feet, and all the soldiers were shouting and yelling, Let him go, Let him go. He was outnumbered thousands to one. The lieutenant in the marines came running out, ordered all of the rest of the squad out with fixed bayonets to quell what he thought was a riot. They were disarmed in minutes. The Marine got spit in the face. The Navy captain came on the horn and ordered everybody to their bunks to lie at attention, two in each bunk. We did that, and that's how they solved the problem. We had our own guards to make officer country free from enlisted men. The Marines were not allowed on the deck the rest of that voyage. About 6 days out we heard on the radio that the atom bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. Why Hiroshima? Because it was a military target. There were 40,000 Japanese Army regulars waiting for us to come. This was the Army that invaded China and committed the atrocities against the civilians that we now refer to as the Rape of Nanking? I would have had to fight those soldiers, but that Army was wiped out. But as is true in all wartime, many civilians suffered as a result, and then the bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Why Nagasaki? Because it was a military target. It was the largest munitions plant in the world in those days, making guns and bombs and tanks, and airplanes. Mitsubishi. We know the name now. That munitions plant was destroyed, and the Japanese surrendered, but our ship didn't return. We sailed on to the Philippines and dropped anchor, and then I have learned since there was some kind of discussion about who would occupy the Philippines or Japan, and our division commander, whose name was General Halsey the same as the Admiral. He had two stars, and he pulled rank, and he wanted to go to Japan, so we didn't get off the ship. We sailed on to Japan for a total voyage of 31 days from Tacoma to Cebu Philippines to Japan, where we disembarked at Yokohama and I was assigned as a military policeman, and our assignments were to search out anything that could be used as a weapon against us. All the weapons must be turned in to the Japanese police who, in turn, were under the control of General Douglas McArthur and the United States Army and those of us who were military police. And I was stationed in Yokohama and Sendai and Kofu, which is near Mt. Fujiyama, and in Nigata which is a seaport on the West China Sea. While I was in Nigata, I had a very interesting assignment. My job was to go to a warehouse where all of these arms had been turned in by the Japanese to their police and they were stashed in this warehouse. It was filled with hunting rifles and shotguns and samurai swords and hari-kari (seppuku) Knives and daggers and ceremonial swords, and there were 5

Leo D. Hymas

Tape 1 of 2

Japanese civilians who were paid by the U.S. Army, and my job was to bring them to the warehouse. I had a girl interpreter, lock them in, and they were to destroy these weapons. And they would sit crouched down and take one samurai sword and cut the trappings and the handle off of the other one and all the medals were placed in a box to be melted down, and all the wood and cords and finish work that would burn would be burned, and they sat their with tears running down their face, while we destroyed what I now understand to be much of their heritage, their culture. We were allowed to send home one box of souvenirs. It was one way the Army was able to get rid of military weapons and weapons of war. That box could not exceed 48 inches. It was a wooden box. I was able to send 3 boxes, one each month home, including kimonos in silk, which my wife later made her wedding dress from, and a white horse hide, and a pistol, and some samurai swords, and some daggers and souvenirs, and that's how the Army disarmed Japan. I went on a Jeep patrol with a lieutenant, a Jeep driver and a Japanese interpreter. We called him Nisei. He was born in the United States, but spoke fluent Japanese, and we went clear up to the town of Shibata?, looking for weapons. It had been reported there were some there. I was the guard, and when we arrived, we were there most of the night, so we took over a geisha house to find a place to sleep, and I had a small revolver tucked in the shoulder holster inside my shirt, which I always slept with. I had my rifle and I had my pistol was nearby. In the middle of the night, there was a great terrible crashing noise, and it was necessary, I thought to shoot who was coming. Turned out to be a North Korean, who had come to the town. There were about 3 or 4 of them. They got stinking drunk on ski. They had a girl they were dragging by the hair, who they tortured and she was unconscious. He learned that we were there. He thought that he was an ally, that the Koreans were an ally against the Japanese, and after beating up the girl and getting drunk, they came over to be friendly, but I thought they were attacking. We called the police, the hauled the drunk Koreans off to the pokey, and we took the girl to a first aid center to be treated, and that was an incident in occupation that caused a certain amount of excitement. When I was in Nagata?, it was in the wintertime. There was a lot of snow on the ground. We were based in a school building. Each of the school rooms had several of us with bunks and a coal heater to keep warm and we stood guard and we did occupational duties and military police duties, and when we had a little time off we went to a movie, and they had hot communal baths, and one of them was taken over by the Army, so the Army personnel could use them, and we had done that and gone to the movie. And three of us were walking back in a snowstorm to our barracks, and I was speaking to the man next to me. I don't remember his name. I didn't know him well. He was from Texas and his father owned a ranch and he was quite wealthy. He hadn't been in combat. He'd been a replacement come to our unit to Japan. I started to say something to him and he was not there. And I looked. I couldn't find him. We looked all over. It was snowing heavily. It was a blizzard. What happened to him? We hurried on to the officer of the day in our regiment office and told him about it. We got as