Interview with Rayburn Martin

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Interviewer: Richard Schachtsiek

A Note to the Reader

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Schachtsiek: This is Richard Schachtsiek, Wednesday afternoon, February 25, 2009interviewing Rayburn Martin, a World War II veteran, who served in the 84th Infantry Division. He is showing me on a map of Kentucky where he was born. If you would tell me when you were born, in what county, and approximately where you were born.

Martin: I was born October 7, 1916 on a Friday after midnight at Iron Hill, Kentucky, out in the country. Eleven miles from Marion, Kentucky, a town of 300.

(pause – turning pages)

Schachtsiek: You're south of Henderson, Kentucky.

Martin: Yes.

Schachtsiek: In Webster County.

Martin: Yes.

Schachtsiek: What did you do before you went into the military?

Martin: Well, when I was a youth in my younger ages, say ten, twelve, I was fourteen I worked on the farm—that was during the Depression—for fifty cents a day. When I was sixteen years old, with a meal. For three or four summers, that was the work that I did and then in the spring I did go to school three or four months out of the year through the eighth grade. I had taken the eighth grade and I was told three different times, I never did pass with a passing grade.

And then after I was eighteen to nineteen, I had my uncle, my mother's oldest sister's husband, Albert Horning gave me the opportunity to go to high school if I worked for my room and board by milking five cows night and morning and during the farm work. And we had two old mules. I did the plowing in the spring, corn planting and discing with the two horses in the implement we had that was horse-drawn.

In July, the school started in Webster County, and it come October. I don't remember exactly how it came about, but my uncle Albert Horning said I ought to go to high school and get a diploma. And my background, and what I was doing, I was raised with a rifle and a fishing hook—about all I knew.

So he'd take me to Blackford, Kentucky, which was two miles from where we lived, the farm. On highway 132. It's as straight as an arrow from his house. The house was on a creek bank and the highway was just right over the bank, what now is a black-top road. His youngest daughter was in high school, too. So we walked together and I started mid-October, and I don't remember what year it was. I'm thinking I'm about nineteen, or in that category; I know I was overage. But I was never big for my age. I only weighed about 128 or 129 pounds.

Mrs. Madalingo (??) was the Superintendent of Blackford High School and she kept me on the seat. I asked if I could sit on the front seat because at my age and my background, I didn't want to miss nothing because all of my life, I have had trouble understanding what people was talking about. And she sat me on the front seat in Blackford, Kentucky. Behind me was W. T. Madanee (??). Fifteen years old. He helped me get my homework done and when I'd read a book, he'd help me to make book reports. So I went to school and on the weekends we'd do my homework at Blackford.

Now, my junior year in my high school education, they transferred us Leadman(??), that was to Wheatcroft, Kentucky. That's another coal-mining town of about 300 population and it was about three miles away from where we lived. So instead of a school bus, they had a guy in a wagon with two horses that picked us up and taken us to school and back in a wagon. It was drawn by two horses.

So for two years, that's the way I went to that school. So on April 20, 1938, I graduated. They give me the test for graduation, and not one test I could pass. And Mrs. Madalingo(??) called the county superintendent—his name was Virgil Wagner—and they had a meeting; they decided that I worked so hard and tried to so hard, the least they could do was to give me a diploma. And that's the way I got my high school diploma.

Now, then, about eight or nine months later there was a representative come from Jones Business College in Paducah, Kentucky. And so, they decided I should go to college. Maybe I could pass the test. So they sent me to John's Business College. I forget the year—in the twenties or '21 or whatever it is. And I was out two years. And for my room and board, I slept with Irving Cobb, third cousin. She had an old Nash; well it was new then, about a 1941 model Nash. My job was to take her to the fortune teller to get her fortune told, and keep the car clean, and cut the grass in the backyard for my room and board there. To go to John's Business College on Kentucky Avenue, I only had to walk up three blocks.

I was there about a year, or two years. Almost two years, if I remember right. And I had taken general book keeping, penmanship, and if I remember right, I had taken a little mathematics because in mathematics I did remember the multiplication table. I knew that pretty much by heart. And in algebra, I knew that Pi plus radius equals the circumference.

But penmanship: Mr. Matthews was my professional teacher in penmanship. I always remember him. He was the neatest guy, had a blue suit pressed and trimmed. He showed me how to hold my hand and how to hold a pen. I did learn how to write that you could read it. And my book keeping—I had help in that.

There was a young lady from Chicago; her name was Jessie LaBall(??). She had taken a liking to me or something, seeing that I was struggling. She was an A student and she tried to help me to get bookkeeping under control. I never did learn what debit and credit.

With all of that going on and me being from the country, I was overwhelmed with Cobb Motel. Walk about eight blocks and there was the Ohio River right off of the (unintelligible). I was beginning to think about what's on the outside world. I had no idea what was what.

So, one day, at lunch, I was kind of down in the dumps a little; I don't know just what happened. I met a young guy. You know, I was looking at this sign and it said, "Uncle Sam wants you," and it looked like he was pointing his finger right in your face.[1]

[1] This is a good description of the famous Armed Forces recruiting poster, first painted by J. M. Flagg in 1917, and also used throughout World War II.

So we went in and he said, "I backed you out," of going in the Army. I said, "No, I don't think you're backing me out. Let's go right in." I went in and the person I saw was just a recruiter, he was an Army recruiter. He wanted to know what service I wanted. I said, "I want to join the Army because I'm not doing too well in school and I hear they've some benefits in the service."

So, he sat me down, and he gave me a color test, the first thing. Oh, I told him that I wanted to be in the Navy because I knew they got a place to sleep. They were turning the pages so fast, I missed three of them. Because in 1940s they was choosy on who they wanted to recruit. I mean, they could pick of what they wanted, more or less. Today it's different; they'll take anything in the Army—almost. So, I failed out. So that leaves the Army. So I joined the Army, and he asked me all of these questions and everything, you know. And he explained, "You're going to get twenty-one dollars a month and you have a place to stay and you get medical benefits." And in my situation he said that's the best thing that can happen to you because of your background. Because you will be educated by these old sergeants will get a hold of you.

Schachtsiek: Where did you go for your basic training?

Martin: So, this was on June the tenth. About ten days later, or a week, or whatever, I got a big letter, about a half-inch thick, from the War Department. "Report to Fort Knox, Kentucky." And I reported to Fort Knox, Kentucky. I got there about noon with all of my orders. And that's when they give me all of the shots and all. And then they asked me one thing you never forget. "Private Martin, is your serial number." I never, never, ever forgot it. Seven-zero-four-one-three-three-three. Then they asked me what branch of service I wanted in. I said I want to be a doctor. So they said, "That's the medical corp." So they kept me at Fort Benning for three or four days, you know, until they had—

Schachtsiek: Fort Knox or Fort Benning?

Martin: Fort Knox for three or four days, you know. Until they had a load going to Fort Benning. So they sent me to Fort Benning with all of the orders. I got there. And here I am checking outside the depot, you know, for nobody coming to get me. And I just thought I'd stay because I had my old straw hat on, and my overalls, and shirt, but I did have some shoes, because down home we went barefooted from May to October. And I did have a pair of old shoes.

And, finally, there was an officer, I thought he was an officer, but he turns out to be somebody looking for me. You know, he knew that there was some private coming down, and he ought to be picked up to go to the 4th Armored Infantry Division, Headquarters Battalion. Well, it was Lieutenant Morris, Dr. Morris. So he was already in the station wagon.

He take me and we went out to Fort Benning where they had their camp of some kind, you know, where they was starting out 4th Infantry Division. We learned how to pitch a tent. We learned how to set up one. We learned how to make up a bed. All of them, he showed me, and we worked together with all of that. And it come time to whenever I got my recruit training, and being a medic, I didn't have to go through all of the other infantry training with guns, because I already knew how to shoot, and they didn't. And when we'd go to the training with the rifles, I had a marksman medal. I hit every bulls-eye they had.

Schachtsiek: Do you remember, did you shoot with a bolt action 1903 Springfield at that time?

Martin: No, I shot with a bolt action M-1.

Schachtsiek: Okay.

Martin: Oh, yeah. And in '45, the pistol, I did very well on that. But that was beside the point. Then they put us through all of the tests, and the last test we went through was, it come to my mind just now, they'd shoot over you about two feet. You got to lay on your stomach and crawl under all of these wires and all of that.

Schachtsiek: Obstacle course.

Martin: Obstacle course. Well, that was nothing, too. But we went through and there's one guy from somewhere, he stuck his head up, and they just shot it right off. He couldn't get them. I learned one thing, when these Army officers and these sergeants who've been in the service, you listen to what they say or you're in trouble.

Well, I passed all of my training, and I had to learn how to exercise—calisthenics. They put me on a platform and I had to do two hours of drilling to pass this sergeant test. That's what it was coming up. And they was quite a few soldiers taking that—PC's and corporals, you know. I remember that had a couple or three stripes, yeah. I don't know how it happened, but anyhow, I was the one that made a buck sergeant[2] back in peace time. And I forgot what year this was.

Schachtsiek: When did you start getting your medical training?

Martin: Well, medical training, I got that as it's going along, because since I was in Quartermaster, I didn't have to know how to shoot pills. I did have to know how to give shots, and that's not too bad. Morphine was a little tube with a needle on it. And I had bandages and all of that. See, they put me in

[2] Buck Sergeant is the colloquial term, not the official term, for the lowest or beginning level of sergeant.

Quartermaster.[3] But a lot of these men that we got, recruits, you know—and the war was declared—they were technicians. In other words, what I'm saying is, now all of this happened before Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. Or '51.

Schachtsiek: Forty-one.

Martin: So that's when I did all my training in medical. See, I was in Headquarters' Battalion 4th Armored Infantry Division then. That's when I was taking care of the laundry. That was a big job, you know. Supply for the division headquarters. I had taken care of all of the medical supplies the doctor wanted. But all these company give me requisitions, and all I had to do was consolidate them. And when I consolidated them, I'd take my orders—because when I made sergeant, they gave me a station wagon—and that's the way I went to get my supplies. I'd take off laundry and all of this stuff, you know. Anything they wanted. And what made it easier for me, I didn't have to account for alcohol. There was a general in G-4 that liked this alcohol, and I could give him a quart without having to account for it. About every month. That was a help because that way I got what I wanted, if I needed it on my requisition. And on top of that, since I was a country boy and listened to people, and give everybody a smile with no lip even though I was a buck sergeant during peace time, I had no problems anywhere I went. I got everything that I was asked for. Even the men in headquarters, I kept them in uniform, new shoes. The officers, but I kept them in uniforms.

Well, anyway, I didn't let nobody wait for nothing. If they needed something—I knew what was going on by then—I was already ahead of it. And me having that experience helped me because of my knowledge wasn't the greatest. But there's one thing you got to always learn. Three things that you have to do in this life: honesty, a good attitude, and willing to work. And it was those three things that I can do even today. That's what put me through life on that.

Schachtsiek: How long were you at Fort Benning?

Martin: I can't remember exactly. Let me see. (pause…, thinking out loud) 1936. I would say that I got married at '31 and I was in the service five years, and five from '31 is '27, isn't it? Twenty-seven? I would say I was between twenty-five and twenty-seven, in that age bracket. The best that I can remember. I got all of my training.

Now, to be honest with you, I really enjoyed my time with Fort Benning Headquarters Battalion during peacetime. I was a sergeant, and I got promoted to staff sergeant. I'd taken care of medical supplies. I'd taken caring of laundry. And food. Now, the food, I'd go, have a truck. I'd send someone aboard to get a truck load of food. And then when we got back with the food

[3] The Quartermaster Corps in the U. S. Army specializes in distributing supplies and provisions to troops. Later the term logistics came into use.

to the division, that's when it was broke down to all of the divisions, you know, that's in the 4th Armored Infantry Division, actually the 4th, 5th, and 6th. I don't remember the divisions they had, but I just remember the headquarters battalion. That kept me busy. I got orders from them. Now, briefly, that takes care of my peacetime.

Schachtsiek: What do you remember about Pearl Harbor? Where were you and what do you recall when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Martin: Here's comes December 7, 1941. Back then, before this date happened, I can wear civilian clothes. I went to church in civilian clothes in Columbus, Georgia. Here I'd just come out of church. About one minute after twelve, I come out of the Greyhound bus station from having a light lunch. The broadcast was, "All soldiers report back to camp immediately." Pearl Harbor was born, and that knocked the socks out of me. I couldn't believe that. But it happened. So, I got in the car, and went back to the camp. Now, then, after in the camp, it wasn't long 'til the 84th Infantry Division was activated.

Schachtsiek: But that was activated October 15, 1942.

Martin: Yeah, that's when it was activated. Now let me see where's my book. Now, when it was activated, I was sent to Fort Knox to Fort Benning to Camp Howze, Texas. At Camp Howze, Texas and it was close to Gainseville [Texas].I can't remember. That was an old camp of some kind or something, I can't remember. And it was close to Gainesville. Not too far from Dallas. It's all coming to me now. I'm at this place and now then I guess I was on my records, you know, with my training, and that's when we organized. We were on a cadre, they call it. You know a training. Since I was a staff sergeant at Fort Benning, my situation, they sent me to train somebody, you know, and supply sergeant for the 373rd division. I mean, 84th Infantry Railsplitters. That's where that got it.

Now, the recruits that we got were people that was in the medical field, more or less. Like the privates, they would be some kind of technician, you know, like you're going to get a memo or (unintelligible??). They specialized in some kind of machine, you know. They do the blood work and whatever. That's the way it was there. And I remember my first load ever (unintelligible) In November. Now what year what that? Nineteen—

Schachtsiek: Forty-two. November 1942.

Martin: It was a cold, rainy day. And here I got one of these big trucks, you know, that holds about seventeen men, or eighteen. I had a driver, McConnelly. He couldn't read nor write, but he could drive anywhere you wanted to go. I picked up these men, and that was the first batch I picked up of recruits, draftees. And I felt so sorry for the draftees because they were there because they were put there. And I remember some of them were undertakers. Some

owned a funeral business. And a lot of technicians. And we got a lot of doctors. Four, five doctors. They were drafted. They're rank was captains and lieutenants. Now, then, the Company Commander of the 84th Infantry Division, named Railsplitters, in charge of the three divisions, you know, that we had. The company C 84th Infantry Division Medical. Oh, the 309th medical battalions. Colonel Bernstein. Now, he was a heart surgeon from some town in Pennsylvania. He was in charge of the whole battalion. He had three battalions, about 15,000 men. And in between, you know, whenever we got rid of training, my job was to take care of the medical supplies, take care of the uniforms, take care of all of the odds and ends, take care of the food. Take care of the clothing, and a place to sleep, you know. That was my job in Company C, and of course, we had the 1st Sergeant, and he was in charge of it. There were about 101 men in that battalion. And let's see, his name was Sergeant Burg. And Sergeant Perry, he was a technical sergeant. I remember all of these guys. What made it easy for me was that my attitude was always willing to do whatever had to be done. And we trained and worked from Camp Howze. We went to Camp Claiborne.

Schachtsiek: Louisiana.

Martin: Yeah, Louisiana. Now, I didn't realize it, but that's where we got our final training—on maneuvers, out in the woods, cold and frosty. It was very rough. Because I remember three or four times I rode forced marches, I even blowed the whistle and we set up our tents on a rainy night. And it happened to be a ditch. And it wasn't too long when the rain hard enough the water was coming down and here I got all of these men in there and all of my supplies. So we had to move. That was just what a mistake. See, when we're on maneuvers, and I take all of these guys, I had a hard time keeping up with all of my supplies because, they moving so fast. The food was a big problem. Our mess sergeant was Sergeant Stanford. He was a draftee. He owned a restaurant. He was a friend of mine. I don't remember what date. Our food and cook was very popular because all of the different companies and officers, they liked to come over and eat with us because of his expertise in cooking. And then he had a baker, you know and that was Victor Rosenberg. He was a professional gambler and he was a cook, and so he can use cooks. Whatever your field was, the draftees, they'd put you in that location. That's where we got our technicians and certain drivers, and on down the line. I was trained in supplies. So, I had a book that told me everything. By then, I was getting pretty well educated enough to get by. I knew what we needed and what we didn't need because this book told me how much you had to have or what, according to how many men you got. That come under the Quartermaster Code 821, back then.

Now, we get our training at Camp Claiborne. And I remember at the camp, I don't know how it was, God forbid, I happened to be one that never, ever drink, and I was a kid on the farm, I smoked grape vines, corn cobs, wheat, whatever that burned. But when I get older, it didn't turn me on. We

raised tobacco, that didn't turn me on. So, I just happened to be one. I think they called me a teetotaler or something like that. So I got the orders instead of Sergeant Perry, because he was a good sergeant and you had to care of his. But since I was one of the men that they could depend on, you know what I mean, I had the orders. And these orders, after we got our training at Camp Claiborne we were to report to Camp Kilmer in New Jersey.

Schachtsiek: Camp Kilmer?

Martin: Yes. New Jersey. And I remember we gets there about noon. Of course, we get to Camp Kilmer. I have to back up a minute. I led 101 men on that ship, down to the hold we're supposed to go. How it the world I ever did it. It absolutely blows my mind. But I got that job done because half of the men didn't know where they were or what they were doing. So I got all of the men on the ship. Now, then, when I get all of the men on the ship, here I got to pack my medical supplies, you know, my morphine. I had eighteen cases of morphine. I had fifteen men on my staff, but everybody went to New York, regardless of what, they just went, period.

Schachtsiek: How did you get from Louisiana to New York? By train?

Martin: By train. I remember the train. Half-way from Camp Claiborne we had to come out of our fatigues and put on our dress uniforms. I never did tell them where we were going. I remember one of the sergeants, he couldn't find his dress pants; Sergeant Burg was his name. So, accidentally, somehow or another, I did find him a pair of pants—a uniform that we could work out. Now we get to Camp Kilmer off of this train.

On this train there was this whole battalion. If I remember right, it may have been the whole division. And General Bowland (??) I believe was one of the generals in charge of that. They went up and left me and here I had all of these ambulances, even the ambulances. I got my packing done. Then I walked down beside the ship to see about my ambulances. I think I had eighteen ambulances I had to get on the ship. And who did I run into? Colonel Parker. I didn't know if I met him, but I didn't pay any attention to Colonel Parker because I'm a medic. And he made me salute him fifteen times in the circumstance. I said, "Colonel, I'm a medic. And if I see you on the battlefield, you'll be the last one I pick up." That didn't go over so good. Well then I get back, and there's a lot of conversation, I don't remember all the odds and ends. But I get my medical supplies. I had TAT on there, whatever that means, on all of my boxes. On the ship they had a special place for all of that. Now Sergeant Stanford, I don't remember how he got his admiralty food and all that, I don't remember how. I had my hands full with medical supplies and getting these guys on the ship. That was enough for me.

Schachtsiek: What was it like on the ship going across the Atlantic?

Martin: Before when I get there. Now, then, I get my packing done, and I'd never been to New York. And I was going to go to New York because I still had about seven or eight hours left. I take a taxi and I run to New York. I go to them bar buildings and I look up and down the streets and saw that. My eyes stuck out on stems. I couldn't believe it. Me, being from the country, I couldn't be on the Empire building. It was weaving. I couldn't… It was unbelievable.

I looked at my watch and it was almost time to be back at Camp Kilmer, because we were leaving at midnight to get on the ship, you know, to go to England. I couldn't get a taxi. I stepped in front of a taxi because I had no choice. I said, "You can run over me now or whatever. I might get it anyhow in combat." And somebody in the back seat of the cab said, "You pick that guy up, that soldier, and you take him where he's got to go." And I told him, "I got to get back to Camp Kilmer, and I have to be there by twelve o'clock." They sent me there. And this man said, "I'll even pay for it." He paid for it. And that got me back to the ship.

Well, we loaded up. I think we loaded up at midnight or sometime, you know. And it was raining and all of that. I never saw nothing like it. I could see guys on the ship. I'd been in the Atlantic about two days or twenty-four hours, and we run into a storm. A submarine was chasing. It would go this and we'd go that way to get away from the submarine. Instead of landing in England where we're supposed to land, we landed in Sweden.

Schachtsiek: Scotland.

Martin: I mean, Scotland. We landed in Scotland. I get the men off, you know, and everybody's taken care of with all of their officers, you know. I get my responsibility done, and I never saw such big women in one country in my life. I never saw nothing like it. We got on one of these little railroads. And they take us to England. Cheltenham or whatever it is. It's close to the jumping off place. I don't remember the exact town. And we did some more training before we go over to go to combat. I remember our last march we had. Since I was a staffer, whatever my situation, I had to carry the battalion flag, and we passed in review. I was the only one and I … (laughs under his breath. Now, the company commander, he almost had a fit.

Well, we run into a storm and everybody got seasick. I think me and about three more guys, we didn't get seasick. I couldn't eat. I couldn't go nowhere but somebody was vomiting. Everything was full. So much vomit. And the odor was very, very pungent. You just couldn't stand it. So I just went outside during the storm. While I'm outside, going up and down, the captain of the ship saw me. And man, did they get after me quickly and got me back inside. I almost got court-martialed for that.

Well, now, then we get everything already and packed up, parades, and all that, and the 309th medical battalion. Our time comes. Are you ready for the overseas trip? The weather back then in England was damp, cold, frosty, and whatever. I forget what month we went across the English Channel. It was—

Schachtsiek: September 1944.

Martin: Yeah. It was a very, very bad, bad night. So about three o'clock, our time come. You know, they had the number one wave start at midnight. Well, I been around a little bit seeing some sights. But, never in my life, did I ever see the sky full of airplanes. Everywhere you looked there was a tank or some weapon. All of the noise and the going on, you've never heard nothing like it. They were jumping parachutes behind the enemy; that's the way it started. All this started at midnight, on a night that you couldn't see your hand in front of you. I don't remember what wave we was on, even. But I know there were three or four battalions ahead of us. But when our time come, I know one guy, he drove his fine Mercedes boat right over. He didn't stop. He just kept on going. See, they drive it up to the (unintelligible??)you know, keep from going in the channel. Now, the channel was about twenty miles wide. I didn't know it was that big, even. When our time come, I don't remember what wave, but the beaches was still (unintelligible??). I never saw nothing like it.

We went across. I don't remember, I think I think I was in a jeep. I don't remember if it was a jeep or... I didn't have to wait. I remember driving across, I think.. But the water come up to the running board. But the beach was just hard, and from there we went on the path, because we had one heck of a time to keep up with General Patton and his company, because the Air Force, St. Lo and all of these towns, they just mowed that St. Lo to the ground. There was nothing.

And then after we got out at the pass, we looked up and we hear something coming, you know. Big noises. And it was called buzz-bombs. I remember seeing a buzz-bomb. I bet that thing was fifty feet long driving fifteen, twenty miles an hour. It looked like at about 400, 500 feet moving along going to England. And I was told with all of the buzz-bombs, if they come so close to winning the war with buzz-bombs, that the Royal Air Force, they were even damaging the field, you know, their runways. The Spitfires.

With all of that going on, now somehow me and my company—I don't know how it happened—but I had a compass and a map and I was in the front row. And I led this company the first morning, first night. About midnight, we stopped for rest. Because there were some colonel or somebody come up to me, wanted to know who we were. And I just punched my driver, because you're not in that (unintelligible??) The next morning, we picked up fifteen soldiers that were killed already. Here we're in the middle of a combat, not even expecting to be. You know a company of Germans. The way it looked

like they'd have the German soldiers, they'd have companies at different spots, and that way the Americans on the… because they didn't know what they'd be or where all they'd be. So that was taking care of that.

Schachtsiek: You said you were in Paris for a while?

Martin: Yeah. On the rest period.

Schachtsiek: What do you remember about being in Paris?

Martin: I remember I was on my rest period in Paris, at a rest area with my outfit and my supplies. Oh yeah, this time I stayed at a hotel. And I don't remember the name of it. They gave us free cigarettes. And since I didn't smoke, I taken what I thought I wanted, you know, just to give away. I'm on the first floor, and I drop a cigarette down and they would have a fight over picking it up. Boy, that was really something. Now, then, the French ladies saw me doing that and boy, she could speak English, you know. She raked me over the coals. She said, "You ought to know better than that." Well, it dawned on me that I should, that wasn't very nice dropping cigarettes and watching these people—

Schachtsiek: —fight for them.

Martin: Fight for them. And the food was good. I enjoyed it. I don't remember what I did. But I did everything, you know. I sight-seed more there because I knew that I wasn't going to come back.

Schachtsiek: Where did you go after Paris?

Martin: Well, we kept on going, following Patton. It's the Third Army, I believe it was. We drove into a town called Gelsenkirchen, Germany. I don't remember—it was a pretty big town. I can't remember the population, but it was pretty big. They had snipers in all of the big buildings, you know, shooting and all that. And our amputees—they killed the most of them. Now, while we're in Gelsenkirchen, I understand we run out of medical supplies. And who had to go get them? Me. Why here again, they gave me a map and my compass, and I found the place. I ended up on the Siegfried line. I forget how many miles it was even. At that point, supply depot had to go back. And that's when I hit the Siegfried line and they had these Long Toms, those big guns that shoot fifteen miles. And man, could they make a noise. That's where I lost my hearing, the best I remember. Because, they got us mixed up. One said go, and the other said don't and to wait. A little confusion there.

I got my medical supplies, my morphine and stuff. When I come back, at Gelsenkirchen, I can't remember just how it happened. But here we are, our company… See, our company was on aid stations. You know, first-aid stations. And somehow or another, our aid stations would pick the boys up. Well, at this aid station, you know, at the front line, me and Sergeant

Strodder(??)… I remember him, he was a real nice guy. We stayed together during the peacetime and on through. He was another peacetime sergeant. We laid this young lieutenant in a ditch because we were busy almost all day, you know, picking these guys up and taking them to the aid station. From the aid station, our ambulance drivers take them to the clearing station. And from the clearing station, the ones that really had to have treatment, they'd even go to the hospital someplace, or special care.

So about five o'clock, I don't remember what day it was, I reached down to pick up my end of the litter. And bingo, I got a shrapnel wound right in my neck, right behind my ear. They said an inch and a quarter in much neck. It hit my artery. And I was pumping blood. I didn't realize blood would come out so fast. I had just a brand new type sweater on. I almost bled to death before they run me to the aid station right quick. And from there they led me to the clearing station, and from the clearing station, within three or four hours, I was in Cheltenham, England. It was me and the infantryman with a machine-gun across the shoulders and across the back. I believe that's the most painful guy I've ever seen suffer from anything. He was machine caught on an angle, the bullet. And that's where I ended up in Cheltenham, England. That's where I got my Purple Heart.

Schachtsiek: Since you were a supply sergeant, how did you end up carrying litters and picking up wounded?

Martin: You know, I thought about that. I can't believe that… I guess when we were short of help we had to get the men in. Now, that's close to the front lines, you know that. I never thought about that. We had to carry the litters only about twenty-five or thirty feet. It was on just a little slope and laid this boy in a ditch, more or less. He was an officer, young officer. That's a good question. I don't know. But that's the way it happened.

Schachtsiek: How long were you in England, at Cheltenham, for your rehabilitation?

Martin: It take me about six weeks. I got better just before December something..

Schachtsiek: Nineteen forty-four.

Martin: Yeah. And of course they give me a Purple Heart, and man, talk about a ceremony. They really made one out of it. When I was recuperating, and when I did get well enough, I went to town to do my sight-seeing in one of these gas-burning things. Never in my life… I did realize being in the service, you can't make it. It can break you or make you. It's what you want it to be, really. I'd taken advantage of everything to get as much as I could. By this time in life, I realized that what life was more or less about, you know. The better educated you are, the better off you are in a way of making a living. Okay.

Schachtsiek: What treatment did you get in England for your wound? What treatment? And what were your accommodations when you were in England?

Martin: I think his name was Captain Rack(??). He put me in a hospital in Cheltenham. He worked on my neck, I think about three, four hours. He sewed up or something back there and tucked something in there and clamped my arteries or somehow. My artery had a hole in it. They fixed it up somehow. I don't know just how. But I know one thing I was in really pain because it hit my nerve. Then I was in that Cheltenham hospital for about, I'd say, three or four weeks. The six weeks. And I requested to go back to my outfit.

Schachtsiek: How did you get from England back to your outfit?

Martin: Somebody who knew where my outfit was. And they put me on what they called a replacement. If you lose so many men, you request so many men to replace the men that you've lost in combat or whatever. And so, I was on that truck. And so they had a way of getting me back to my outfit. And we was on a rest just before the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium. But, the Battle of the Bulge was right close to the Belgium line, in there some place. Colder than cold.

Schachtsiek: You mentioned that you served under Patton's Army. Did you ever see General Patton?

Martin: I've seen General Patton many, many times. At Fort Benning he had his boots, come up to his knees. In combat he never did pay any attention to me, really, me being a low-ranking man, you know. At Fort Benning I saw him a lot of times. They had to do a dress… . I just forget what they call it. But every evening, they did a dress thing.

Schachtsiek: Formation?

Martin: Oh, is that what you call it?

Schachtsiek: Did you ever see Patton in Europe during the war?

Martin: (pause) I can't remember if I ever did or not. I don't remember. I think I probably have. Now where were we at then?

Schachtsiek: You were right before the Battle of the Bulge.

Martin: Before the Battle of the Bulge—I don't remember the town—but on the front line he ordered his tank to go across the field to save about two miles instead of going around.

There was a German eighty-eight on this ridge over there. And this German eighty-eight, this guy knocked out five tanks. And I remember on this cold day, we had to pull these men out of these tanks. Now that's a job to take a man and get him out of a tank when he's wounded or in shock. The way that desperate (unintelligible) What they were doing, this man was (unintelligible)

and on these tanks and he knocked the tracks out. And by knocking out the tracks, somehow he would give that tank… Just to jolt it would knock you out—I mean paralyze you or something. And like you hit something, you know, you lose your (unintelligible). And he lost five tanks like that. And I remember we were so put out about it. Do you know, whenever Patton gave an order you done it.

Schachtsiek: What do you remember from the Battle of the Bulge?

Martin: (short laugh) I remember the Battle of the Bulge. My supplies were all behind me, and I did a lot of my running in the jeep, if I remember right. We go to the Battle of the Bulge and I remember our company going to battle. We behind a tank. Here again are these tanks. I saw a tank slide off of one of these hills. Snow was about three or four feet deep and that tank slid like you take a ball and roll it down.

And I remember, it was so cold and all of these guys, you know, to drink a cup of coffee… The snow was so deep. Now, I didn't pick up anybody because of my supplies, but some of the guys picked up Neal Higgins. Neal Higgins was another medic, only he was a private. And the privates, they usually do the dirty work for us. Neal picked up a man and I looked in this guy's wallet. He had, I think it's three kids. A real nice looking guy, you know. And this man died in his hands.

Neal, later when we were discharged when the war was over, you know. His dad was at International Harvester, where I made my living for forty years. His dad was a vice president of inventory controls, and Neal, he got a job in purchasing. I was in purchasing.

Neal, I understood his position, because he was a—back then they called it battle fatigue, if I remember. I think that's what I got now. I can't remember. We understood, and I don't know how it happened, but his dad… See, and I knew his dad and Neal. They transferred Neal out of purchasing and got him to be laid off. I remember a foreman got after him because they didn't understand his dependability, you know, his background. He just went home and closed the garage door and let it run until he... (pause)

Schachtsiek: You were in Germany at the end of the war?

Martin: Yeah. At the end of the war, it was declared, we were getting ready and my company—I don't remember a lot—but I remember snow was waist-deep and five below zero, you know. I was in a battlefield somewhere, and because I had so many points, if you wanted to go home, you had that option. And I wanted to get out because that barracks bag was packed all the time and ready to go. So I had enough points, when the end of the war was declared, you know, not the final phase of it, they sent me through the system. And in England and these places, and they're going and waiting, I usually ended up

with the Sergeant of the Guards a lot of times. They honored me, because I knew how to use a weapon, you know. You don't point a weapon unless you're going to use it. And I had my background there.

I only had to use my weapon once. There was an engineer trying to pull out the bus driver of these two-story busses—the little driver window—and I disarmed everybody. I looked, and he stopped the bus, went in front of it, and I run out of the restaurant as quickly as I could. Pull my gun and shot straight up and blowed that whistle where you could hear it all over town, to get some Bobbies, you know, to get this guy under control. So I got him under control. I didn't have to hurt him or nothing. But I waited until the Bobbies got there and the MPs, and they taken care of that. That's one of things that Sergeant of the Guard had to do.

Schachtsiek: What do you remember after leaving Europe and coming back to America? Where were you discharged?

Martin: I remember whenever I did get on the boat coming back. I don't remember when. I think it was April or somewhere in there like that. I was going to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. That's where they terminated me. The exact date I think is October the fifteenth, 1942.

Schachtsiek: Forty-five.

Martin: I mean '45. (quick laugh) Yeah, '45, that's what it was. At Camp Atterbury, they discharged me there. They give me 300 dollars, my mustering pay. From there I went home to Kentucky and visited my mother and father. I wanted to go for make a living, only they made the little red tractors called cubs. And they had to hire me at tractor work in Chicago. They hired me on October twentieth, I think it was right, 1945 in the purchasing department, because of my background, you know.

I was in a purchasing department, and I started out a junior typist. Because John's Business College, I never did get no speed or nothing. But, I did get up to about sixty words a minute. So that helped me get a job as a junior typist on the second shift. I don't know what my hourly pay was, but it was about seventy-five cents an hour, or something. It wasn't very much. And from there, I worked my way up. Forty years later, I was a purchase procurement analyst making a pretty good salary.

I retired Valentine's day, 1982. And I had never such a big ball out of that. I had three vice-presidents and I don't know how many people I never saw. They gave me a send-off. I got everything from soup to nuts.

Schachtsiek: Did you join the American Legion or the VFW after the war?

Martin: Yeah, I joined the American Legion—or the VFW, that's what it was—in Hinsdale, Illinois. I was a member there. It was a real nice place. I sold car

(unintelligible)?? part-time for twenty-six years. I started that job in 1959. In 1963, that place burned down, and the sales manager for American Motors called me at home. He knew my background. And part-time Mondays, Fridays, and Saturday mornings, I worked. And sometimes Sunday afternoons back then. At American Motors.

Schachtsiek: But you belonged to the VFW for a long time?

Martin: Yeah. I don't remember; it was real nice. Oh, and I sold my last car June 10, 1982. Yeah, '82. I sold the last [Nash] Rambler. Then I told my wife, "Let's get out of Chicago. Wherever."

My oldest daughter knew someone here in Springfield. She gave me the name of a realtor and called him up and told him what I wanted. I come down to Springfield. I'd just bought my wife a new Oldsmobile, 1982, whatever the model was I forgot. And I liked the place. I went back, drive in a peg in the ground and put my house for sale. By the time we got everything finished, he couldn't finance, so I financed him.

October or the time we got ready to come down it was the end of December 1986. Now it's coming to me. Of course, I sold the last Rambler August 10, 1986. I had one left and I sold that one. And then I was called by the rental manager at the Railsplitter here, Lincoln-Mercury. And from there I've been working part-time, you know, from there to the HPR, they call me. For HPR, that job worked its way out; they sold it. Then Crossroad Ford, his son wanted a service representative, and he wanted a contract to service his trucks on the hill, you know. And so I was with him for him a couple of years. I visited all of the state departments. Every place that has a truck, I stopped. And that bring me up to the day that I finally quit not too long ago.

Schachtsiek: After the war, did you join an 84th Division Association? Did you keep touch with any of your veterans?

Martin: No. I didn't contact. I was done. Somehow or another, the soldiers that I was dealing with were ones that their life was more or less taken all of the time. And the cars, you know. And of course I had to take them all of the time to different places. I always had a car. That's the way my life was;

I spent more time in churches than I have anywhere else. It's taken about three years to get a hold of me, but at the present, I'm the state chaplain for the Purple Heart. I joined that three or four years ago. It's taken a while for them to get me into that. But since I've been in the VFW, I've been invited to join the Veteran of Foreign Wars. As a matter of fact, we had a meeting last Friday. He wants me to join. He's going to put me in, he said, at no charge. I don't know why, but quote, "That's what he said." So that's been kind of my life. Just easy-going.

Schachtsiek: So you haven't had any contact with anybody from your time in the service?

Martin: At one time, well I visited some guys when I got out of the service—say three or four years, say in the sixties—Ernie Powell and Victor Burg, and Corporal (unintelligible??). Ernie Powell, he was intoxicated when I found him. And Sergeant Burg, he was a doorbell captain. Their lifestyle was all different from mine. And so, about a year or two ago, the 84th had a nice little meeting. I went down and I didn't see nobody that I knew. As a matter of fact, the ones that I talked to never heard of the 309th Infantry Division.

Schachtsiek: Medical Battalion.

Martin: So, now, well I can't straighten my membership for post number thirty-two. I've been to meetings, but I plan on going. Me and my wife went for dinner. But I met some of the guys; I would say they're a pretty classy outfit.

Schachtsiek: What do you recall and what have you taken out of your service in World War II? If you could say something to a young person today, what would you tell them about your service in World War II?

Martin: If I was talking to someone that was really sincere and didn't have the training for an engineer or medical technician or lawyer or something, I would recommend to you to volunteer or join the service—either the Marines, the Navy, or the Army. And if you would join, and you apply yourself with truthfulness, honesty, integrity and willing to learn, you will go places. and you will have a job with a future. Now, it's dangerous. You have to remember one thing: if you're called for combat, you got to be prepared. That would be my recommendation to you.

Schachtsiek: Well, I wish to thank you for the interview. That's all of the questions I had. Do you have any last comments or things that you'd like to say?

Martin: No. I don't.

(end of interview)