Interview with Marvin Farmer

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Interview # 1: March 3, 2012

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Friday, March 3, 2012. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. And today I have the pleasure of interviewing Marvin Farmer. Good morning, Marvin.

Farmer: How are you, sir. Mark?

DePue: I am very good. Now, I want to explain one thing upfront. Marvin, you're a little bit hard of hearing, aren't you?

Farmer: Very hard of hearing.

DePue: But as we get into your military story, we'll discover why you're hard of hearing, okay?

Farmer: Okay.

DePue: But that will be why that this sounds like we're talking a little bit louder than normal.

Farmer: Okay.

DePue: I always like to start, Mr. Farmer, with when and where you were born.

Farmer: Okay, Mark. I was born on a farm near Waverly, June 19, 1924, and I don't know what time it was. (laugh)

DePue: That's precise enough. Do you know how your family ended up in Waverly, Illinois?

Farmer: No. I think they are originally out of Kentucky, and they came up to, if I recall, a very small farming community called Roer Station. And they lived in that general area, probably four or five miles from Waverly, for most of their life.

DePue: What was your father doing for a living?

Farmer: Well, as far as I can remember, from like for years on, he farmed. And this was, of course, during the depression, probably about 1930, something like that. And I think he had about four or five horses, maybe a couple of cows, and maybe eight or ten hogs, and a few chickens. That was about it. But the economy was really at an all-time low. And if I'm not mistaken, I think corn, at that time, was selling for about eight cents a bushel. So it wasn't long till, you know, he just couldn't exist on a farming income no more, so he forced himself into having a closing-out sale. And I remember that closing-out sale. The thing I remember about the sale, I was eating wieners, and I thought they were really good. (laugh)

DePue: Do you remember the year that he had to sell out?

Farmer: Oh, as I say before, I think it was around 1930, possibly 1932. I don't know.

DePue: Well, 1930, you would have been just six years old at the time.

Farmer: Yeah.

DePue: Is that one of your earliest memories?

Farmer: Well, probably one of my earliest memories was sitting on a storm cellar outside the house. I had a dog named Bob, and I was looking right at him, and I was kind of tantalizing him. I was looking right at him in the nose, and my dad says, "Don't do that." But I sort of ignored my dad, and did it anyway, and that dog bit me right in the nose. So I do remember that pretty well. (laugh)

DePue: Was your father's farm foreclosed, or did he sell it?

Farmer: No, I really don't think he owned the farm. I just think he was probably renting it. And the animals that he had, he just sold those at public auction, but it wasn't a foreclosure.

DePue: So he does that right at the height of the depression. What did your father do after that?

Farmer: Well, we moved then to another farm where my dad went to work for a farmer; the farmer gave him $30 a month. He also had a house to live in. He had two hogs for meat for the year, and he could keep two dozen chickens, and he could have the milk from one cow. So that was what he did for the next couple, three or four years, as far as I can remember.

DePue: Thirty dollars a month.

Farmer: Thirty dollars a month.

DePue: How many children did he have at that time?

Farmer: He had four children, three daughters, and I was a baby.

DePue: So you were the youngest of the four?

Farmer: I was the youngest of the tribe, yeah.

DePue: Was your father, by chance, a World War I veteran?

Farmer: No, he was not. My two uncles were. My mother's brothers were in World War I. He was expecting to go anytime, but he didn't go.

DePue: What do you remember about those very early years of the depression? Any stories that you recall from those times?

Farmer: Well, I do remember that very seldom would we get to town to buy any groceries. And there was one grocery story that was in a small truck out through the countryside, and you could buy from that truck. You could buy stuff like coffee and salt and canned corn, stuff like that. And if you didn't have the money, they would take your old hens, or spring chickens, or eggs, or anything. They would take that in payment of the groceries that you bought.

DePue: Where did you go to school in those early years?

Farmer: Well, my first school was a school called Gourdneck, That's G-o-u-r-d, Gourdneck. And I went to school 'til the second grade. And then when we moved, I moved to another school and it was called Chapman's Point. I guess it was probably about two miles from where we lived. I do remember my dad one time hooking up a team of horses and taking me and my sister to school on a sled. And it was colder than the dickens, but he got us there on a sled.

DePue: Does that mean most of the time you walked to school?

Farmer: Oh, yes. Nine times out of ten, if not more, we walked to school, yeah.

DePue: And this was a one-room school?

Farmer: Chapman's Point School, yeah. (cough)

DePue: How many grades in that one class?

Farmer: I think in my particular class, I think we had six, but in the whole school, there was only probably about fifteen. So you were in there. You were exposed to all the classes. If you didn't want to do any homework, why just listen to see what's going on someplace else. (laugh)

DePue: When you were getting older, did that mean you were helping to teach the young kids?

Farmer: I'm sorry, sir.

DePue: When you were a little bit older, were you helping teach the younger kids?

Farmer: No, no, I never did help. I do remember one incident in the springtime. The first one out of school at recess saw a small snake. And someone said, "Oh, let's see his legs." And another one of the kids says, "Well, a snake don't have no legs." And this other kid says, "Oh yes it does. If you get him hot enough, his legs will come out." So we got some sticks and had a little fire going, and somebody held that snake over that little fire. But you know, that snake never did get his legs out, but we finally burned him to a crisp. (laugh) (cough)

DePue: Did you have to do chores at the school?

Farmer: Well, I didn't have to do chores, except maybe cleaning the eraser, something like that. But us small boys, you know, you're always looking for physical activity. And this schoolhouse was on a corner, and the roads by it were all mud. There was no oil on them. Somebody got the idea that we should drag that road down and make it smooth. And somebody made us sort of like a drag, and then they recruited horses. They recruited all the young boys to pull that (laugh) drag. We thought it was fun, but they were really making slaves of us. (laugh)

DePue: Was there indoor plumbing at the school?

Farmer: No, no. As far bathrooms, there was none. There was a toilet outside on the far corner of the back of the school lot; of course, one for boys, and one for girls. And I remember one time we had a Halloween contest. I took my clothes out to the men's restroom and dressed like a woman. I come back in, and I won the prize that year for Halloween. (laugh)

DePue: I assume you had no indoor plumbing at home, either.

Farmer: No, I never had no electricity till I think I was a sophomore in high school. It was all by kerosene lamps. Then we finally got a little bit of electricity in the house, and what that was, was just one lamp hanging down in the middle of each room. And there was no wall switches, or nothing like that. We didn't have any other electrical things.

DePue: Did you eventually move to town?

Farmer: Yeah. When I was in the fourth grade, I moved into Waverly, and then I went to the Waverly grade school. It was around Christmas time. Then we lived in that house until I went into the Army.

DePue: Do you think you got a good education in that one-room schoolhouse?

Farmer: Well, I can't remember really what I learned, but I guess it was sufficient, because when I eventually went in the Army, I had a very high IQ score. And I had to get that education from someplace, so I guess some of it came from that grade school. (laugh)

DePue: And some of it came from where you went to high school.

Farmer: Oh, yes.

DePue: And I assume that was Waverly High School?

Farmer: Yes.

DePue: Was the family religious? Did you go to church?

Farmer: Well, I'll say this. My mom and dad wasn't particularly religious, but I found that if you wanted to meet girls, you better go to church, so I went to two or three different churches. I went to Baptist Church. I went to Methodist Church. I went to a hard-shell Baptist Church, and the girls were all pretty there. (laugh)

DePue: What, at the Baptist Church, or all the churches?

Farmer: All the churches, yeah. So really, I can't say, as I didn't belong to any one. I just kind of made the rounds. (laugh)

DePue: Did you have some chores growing up, while you lived on the farm?

Farmer: Well, I can remember some of the chores. Because coal was so expensive, you just couldn't afford very much of it, I would go out in a hog lot where they fed the hogs whole ears of corn. The hogs would eat this corn off the ears, of course, and leave the cob there. Then I would pick up these cobs

and probably take them back to someplace where they could dry out a bit more and, eventually, get them in the house where we could burn them. And, of course, one of the things I really liked to do was to hunt for hidden hen's nests out in the barn. Of course you could turn them into money, next time the grocery truck come by, (laugh) so I liked to do that.

DePue: Were you selling the hens, or were you selling the eggs?

Farmer: Selling the eggs, yeah.

DePue: Any other stories about the depression that stays with you today?

Farmer: Well, I can say this, that my dad, when we lived in town, he had about the equivalent of almost four lots. And he had a big garden. He had a lot of potatoes. He had between 12 and 20 swarms of bees. He was always trying to think of some way to make money, and so he would sell that honey. Now, it may not seem like much, but if you could get 50 pounds of honey from just one hive, you were really doing good. And you could really sell that honey. That was no problem. He also sold produce to a store downtown, out in Waverly. Sold a lot of vegetables. And of course, he always had a lot of potatoes to sell.

DePue: What was your father's first name?

Farmer: Edward, middle name White, Edward White Farmer.

DePue: We haven't talked about your mother much. What was your mother's name?

Farmer: My mother's name was Myrtle Belle. Her maiden name was Colvin, C-o-l-v-i-n. (cough)

DePue: Which one of those two had a bigger impact on you growing up?

Farmer: Well, I can't say as one had more of an impact than the other. I really admired my dad, and I really admired my mother. I can remember that, I'd say two times out of three every day, she made bread, whether it was biscuits, or light bread, or cornbread. But for two meals, you could expect to have fresh bread. And I'm sure that was hard on her to keep those (laugh) bread loaves and biscuits coming.

DePue: It sounds like the family was very

poor, but you never went hungry. Is that right?

Farmer: That is correct. I can't ever recall going to bed hungry. Never. I can't remember what year, but the WPA, the Work Progress Administration, gave a grant to Waverly to install water and sewer. And my dad, he wasn't the healthiest, but he got a job there as a night watchman. And what he would have to do is go out, as soon as he got to work in the evening, and set out flares where there was deep ditches and piles of dirt. And then in the morning, before he went home, he had to collect those flares. I do remember manys the time I'd go with my dad and keep him company during the night. It was a little guardhouse, probably about 6 by 6. It wasn't very big. (laugh) But it did have a little stove in it. Maybe it was 8 by 8. It wouldn't be any bigger than that. But manys the time, I've gone with him. And I don't know how long I stayed out there.

DePue: Do you remember the year that you guys got electricity?

Farmer: I can't remember the year, but I think it was probably around 1940.

DePue: Did the family have a radio?

Farmer: Well, when we were in the country, my dad got a battery operated radio. It might last for a week, and then the battery would run down and you'd have to go someplace to get your battery charged up. So it really wasn't very effective (laugh) as a source of entertainment. And then it wasn't 'til, I'd say, 1940 we had electric radio, yeah.

DePue: Did your dad have a car?

Farmer: Well, most of the time, he didn't have a car. I'll take that back. When we was on the farm, he had a Model T Ford. And I do remember he didn't feel like he could afford to put antifreeze in it. I think they called it alcohol in that time. So he would just leave water in it, and then drain it out if it was going to freeze. And I do remember that it was hard to start, especially in the wintertime. He would jack up that back wheel, and then he would crank it. And somewhere, that back wheel would move. And then eventually, he'd get so tired of cranking that doggone car. (laugh) But I remember one time, he said he was going to go to town shopping, and I just wanted to go to town so bad. He said, "No, son. You can't go to town this time." Well, I went out and I hid in the car. I got in the back seat and hid down on the floor. And he got about halfway to town, and I raised up and I said, "Dad, I'm here." (laugh) But he didn't beat me. (cough)

DePue: So you got away with it that time.

Farmer: Yeah. (laugh)

DePue: Were you the type who would be paying attention to what was going on in Europe in those late years of the 1930's?

Farmer: No. I would say no. I was not paying attention to it at all.

DePue: You started high school in 1939. Is that right?

Farmer: Well, it was probably about '38, yeah, '38 and '39.

DePue: Do you remember the day Pearl Harbor happened?

Farmer: Oh, yes. I remember I was going to one of my churches to a Vesper service. We had been practicing for this Vesper service and, when I got home, that's when I learned that Pearl Harbor had been attacked.

DePue: Did it mean anything to you at the time? Did you know where Pearl Harbor was?

Farmer: Well, not really. You know, it just took a while to soak up. Back in those times, 90 percent of people weren't really aware of what was going on, whether it was Japan or Germany. I don't think that 90 percent of the people were aware of it. We're here. They're there. So let it go.

DePue: How did things change then, after Pearl Harbor?

Farmer: Well, shortly after Pearl Harbor, and when the United States declared war on both Germany and Japan, all the efforts of everybody in America, it seemed, was to win the war. And as they would say, we just want to do our part. And whether it was feeding a serviceman on leave or working on a defense plan, it seemed like what they would say is, we just want to do our part and win this war.

DePue: Did your father have a different job once the war started?

Farmer: Well, truthfully, I can't remember what he did after I got in the Army. I just don't know. I assume he went on like he had been in the past with his garden, and with his bees, and stuff like that.

DePue: Do you recall rationing during the war, before you got in the army?

Farmer: Well, I'll tell you one thing. I've mentioned a couple of times that he had bees. What you could do, as owner of beehives, you could take almost 90 percent of the honey away from them. Then you would be allowed so much sugar for those bees to eat during the winter. I do remember my dad.

I think he was allowed something like 50 pounds of sugar, and that was a lot of sugar. I don't think the bees got it all. (laugh)

DePue: That's interesting. You had to feed the bees sugar in the winter.

Farmer: Yeah. (laugh)

DePue: So they could produce honey for the rest of the year. How about metal or rubber drives, or anything like that?

Farmer: Oh, no. I can't remember being involved, or they being involved in any of those. (cough)

DePue: Did you have any extracurricular activities while in high school?

Farmer: Well, I went out for track once, a couple years I guess, the junior and senior year. And I was in chorus all four years. We participated in various contests in the area, Beardstown, or whatever.

DePue: Well, this is an embarrassing question, but how tall were you in high school? How big were you?

Farmer: Well, I guess it could be embarrassing to look at it this way, but I was one of the smallest boys in my class. And that was not only in grade school, but it seemed like it extended into high school, too. I was always really small. I don't know when I got my growth. (laugh)

DePue: So you weren't playing a lot of sports then.

Farmer: I didn't play a lot of sports, but I did enjoy non-varsity sports. Matter of fact, I lived on the very east side of town, and the high school was on the very west side of town. And manys the time I would run home, all the way across town, eat a bite, and run all the way back, just to play touch football for 20 minutes, a half an hour, or whatever. But I would do that day-in and day-out.

DePue: Did you have a job in high school?

Farmer: Oh, yes. I had two different classes of jobs. One was at a drugstore downtown. I was sometimes known as jerk, because I guess I was a number one soda jerk. And I could make sodas, triple lime phosphates, or all kinds of milkshakes, malts, sundaes. In the wintertime, we served chili, ham, and chicken salad sandwiches. During the school year, a lot of times I would go back there and work during my lunch hour, and get a bite of sandwich on the way. Then my other job was in the summertime, when I was taking care of the Wemple brothers. The Wemples owned the State Bank in Waverly. They had about six big houses in a row on the street behind my street, and I would mow all their yards, hoe all their gardens.

And I would get 25 cents an hour if I took my own lawnmower. And they didn't want it mowed every week. They wanted to wait. That grass got about that high. And of course, at that time, there was no motor. I was a motor. You had to push it with your own energy. And then about every other week, I'd take my little notebook down to the bank. I'd go up to the bank teller, Mr. Wemple, and he'd say, "Can I help you?" He knew damn good and well I'd come in there for my money. (laugh) He said, "Well come on back." So we'd go back to his little office, way in the back of the bank. He had an old straight pin. I'll never forget. He looked at one of those hours, thirty-eight. Then he'd do it again, to make sure he didn't make a mistake. But do you think he'd ever give you a two-bit tip? Never. Then I'd have to go back up to the bank teller again, and they'd give me my money.

DePue: Were you able to keep that money you were earning, or did it go towards the family's budget?

Farmer: Well, I could do with it what I want, but most of it went to buy the clothes that I used. Except one day, I met kind of a town no-good, right after I got paid. He says, "Farmer, could you lend me a quarter?" Well, I really didn't want to, but being as I'd been paid up like I had, I lent him a quarter. And that was the best investment I ever made. I never got that quarter back, but I learned one thing. Don't loan money to a friend (laugh) or enemy. (laugh)

DePue: While the war's going on, can you describe the mood of Waverly and the mood of the country during those early years of the war?

Farmer: Well, I really don't think I can, other than my experience at my graduation. One of the speakers, I'll never forget. He made a statement during his speech. He said, "And don't forget. There's no atheists in foxholes." And I came to relive that time and time again, and I always thought back to what he said. There are no atheists in foxholes. But overall, whether you were in the service or not, it seemed like people were out to help anyone in uniform. In line with that, as soon as I graduated, I got a job at a plant in Jacksonville called Nesco. And if you want me to explain that a little bit, I could, or I could do that a little bit later.

DePue: No, please, go ahead.

Farmer: Okay. Well Nesco, at that time, one of the things they were making was 500-pound flares that were dropped from a very high altitude. And these

flares, when they were ready to be shipped out, they looked like a bomb. They stood up about five feet high. They were probably close to 18 inches in diameter; looked just like a bomb. And they had a fin on them. And because these were somewhat explosive, they had these various buildings where they collected and assembled them, and so forth, and filled the bomb. And I'll never forget that one day, one of those buildings caught on fire. And I do remember I was about as far — oh, I'd say about 150-250 feet from the building. It was the brightest fire, by far, that I've ever seen. I've never seen anything so bright in my life. Well, what they determined from that fire was that the fuse, somehow, I guess it got engaged, and it set this fire off. So somebody had the bright idea that we should tape these fuses down. But the worst part, they give that job to Farmer, and I had to tape those fuses down. And it wasn't too long after that that I got a draft notice. And actually, I was kind of glad to get away from taping those fuses down. (laugh)

DePue: Was this just a matter of time, that you knew when you were in high school, and you knew while you were working at that defense plant, that you'd be getting your notice pretty soon?

Farmer: Yes, yes.

DePue: Was there a particular age when you had to be…

Farmer: Well, when I got out of high school, it wasn't long 'til I was 18. And at that time, you had to register when you were, so I was just ripe for the draft, and it wasn't long then 'til I got that Dear Friend notice from Selective Service system.

DePue: I'm sure a lot of the people you knew were enlisting, instead of being drafted. Maybe they wanted to go into the Air Force, or the Navy, or something else.

Farmer: Yes.

DePue: What was your thought?

Farmer: Well, I don't know about that. One of my very close friends, Junior Gooden, he enlisted in the Air Force, and it seemed like he was happy. And he was stationed out at Jefferson Barracks. And I do know that his folks, knowing that I was a good friend of his, invited me to go with their family. So one weekend, we drove down to Jefferson Barracks, and saw him when he was in the Air Force. But I don't know. I still didn't have no desire to enlist. I guess I just thought, I'll just wait and see what happens. I guess that was my attitude.

DePue: What were your parents' views about you going into the military? You're their only son.

Farmer: Oh, of course. I know it broke my mother's heart. She just hated to see me go in the worst way. And the bad part about it was, I only got to see her on two furloughs. And the last furlough, that was the last time I saw her. So she died while I was in the service. But I do know that it broke her heart to see me go to service. And later, when her sister died, my family didn't let me know, because they thought it would worry me, because I was in combat at the time. So they didn't want to tell me about my aunt being dead. (cough) But then, what happened was my mother kept getting much worse, and so they could see the end. So then I got a cablegram that my aunt had died, and then two days later, I got another one that my mother was very sick. And the next day, I got another cablegram. She had died.

DePue: We'll pause for just a second here.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Okay, we took a very quick break. Did the military allow you to come back home for your mother's funeral?

Farmer: Well, I thought it wouldn't be no problem at all, because I believe the war ended on June sixth, something like that, in Europe, and I think it was in July that she died. So I didn't think it'd be any problem. My company officer stayed up all night, working furlough papers, and working transportation for me back to the country. They got it cleared where I would catch a jeep to Orin Field in Paris. I would fly to New York and then, from there, I would catch a plane to Chicago. But shortly thereafter, my commander got a communique from the Army that said my furlough had been denied at the highest level. Now, that caused some concern for me, because I figured the highest level had to be the President. And I don't know whether it was a coincidence or not, but at this very time, President Roosevelt had a dog named Fala, and that dog was flown from New York to California about the time that I was due to fly to Chicago. Well, whether that dog bumped me off, I don't know, but I've always kind of accused him of it.

DePue: Well, that would mean that it was a couple months earlier, because Roosevelt died, I think, in April. Was he still President at the time?

Farmer: I thought he was. I may be mixed up on my dates.

DePue: Ok, that's fine. Let's go back to first getting in the military then. Where did you go through your physical?

Farmer: I guess I went to Passavant Hospital in Jacksonville, and we were inducted into the Army down at Scott Field. When we were at Scott Field, we got a few shots, and got our clothes, and got on a troop train and headed out; they said we was going to dress warm, because we're probably going

north. Well, we went south. We went all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico, down to Camp Hulen, Texas.

DePue: What month was that?

Farmer: That was in February, February or March.

DePue: So this is March of 1943 now, when you went?

Farmer: '43, yeah.

DePue: What did you think about being drafted in the Army, instead of the Marine Corps, or one of the other services?

Farmer: Well, frankly, I was kind of happy to be in the Army. For some reason, I didn't want to be in the Marines, and I wasn't very hopped up about being in the Navy, so I was just as happy. I would have rather been in the Air Corp. I kind of liked the Air Corp, but I was happy to settle for the Army.

DePue: Did you have a girlfriend at the time?

Farmer: Well, I had a girl I saw once in a while; I saw her at a few of these church meetings. But I guess you'd call it — it wasn't a heavy relationship. It was just – she was just really a good friend at that time, yeah.

DePue: Okay, so no complications at home.

Farmer: Yeah. (laugh) (cough)

DePue: You said you went to Camp Hulen in Texas?

Farmer: Yes. Now, Camp Hulen, Texas is, as far as I know, a completely anti-aircraft camp. They had quad 50's mounted on a half-track. They had 40 mm's that was towed, and they had 90 mm guns that were towed. And I was assigned to the Intelligence section of the Headquarters Company, a 40 mm Company. Later, I was asked if I wanted to go to the ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program] program or if I wanted go to Officers Candidate School, and I guess I made a mistake. I volunteered to go to the ASTP Program. I went to the University of Louisiana Induction Center, and we slept in the stadium there at LSU. We were there about two weeks, and then I guess about 200 of us took a train trip to Lawrence, Kansas, where we was going to the University of Kansas. And that didn't prove out too good. One of the courses they were

pretty heavy in was chemistry, and that's one course they don't teach at Waverly, so I didn't know what they were talking about when it come to chemistry. And I flunked out. So I go back to an anti-aircraft unit, by way of Camp Walters, Texas. I was only there about three weeks, and then back to Camp Hulen again. This time, I'm placed in a Quad 50 mounted on a half-track. And we became pretty proficient in that group, and we'd go out and shoot the tow target down. We just thought we were pretty good, even though we were hitting a cable, instead of the target. (laugh)

DePue: The aircraft was pulling target behind it?

Farmer: Yes.

DePue: Do you remember much about Basic Training? Normally, there's stories about how tough it is.

Farmer: Well, I'll tell you about Basic Training. I had three of them, so. When I first went in, I had that at Camp Hulen. Then when I was transferred to Infantry, I went to a second Basic. Then I go back to the Quad 50's, I go through Basic again. So I had three Basic Trainings. (laugh)

DePue: Well, maybe it was just the Army didn't know what else to do with you at the time, huh? (laugh) Normally, that's a pretty rugged experience. Did you do okay at Basic?

Farmer: Oh, I did okay in Basic. I think our longest force field march was 33 miles, with full field pack and rifle, and I made that, no problem. One time, in the obstacle course, we were to run at full speed, grab the rope, and swing over a little creek. And some way or other, I missed that rope and I wound up in that water. I was up to about my waist in water, cold, muddy water. But you don't get a chance to dry out. You keep walking with your slushy shoes the rest of the day. (laugh) But I didn't have no trouble at Basic Training. I never fell out on a force field march, or anything like that.

DePue: We should mention that you've written a book about your Army experiences called *Angels in Combat Boots*. One of the stories that I remember I read about was going to the machine gun range. Can you tell us about that experience, something about the machine guns and snakes?

Farmer: Oh, well, this was in Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi, but we were probably actually in Louisiana, because this camp was right on the border, and it was known as the hellhole of the south, tar paper city. Anyway, one of the obstacles this time was to crawl up a little mound. And then, when we got to that mound, a target would fly up, supposedly the enemy, about 25-50 yards, and we were to shoot live ammunition at that enemy, at that target. And in this particular instance, that's what we did. We crawled up on the right side of this, got up to the mount. The targets flopped up. We shot. Then we come back to the left side. And as we're walking back,

somebody said Stop! And there was a copperhead snake. I would say it was probably about 5-6 feet long, probably an inch-and-a-half in diameter, maybe a little bit more. It was really a pretty snake but, as I understand it, they're deathly. So somebody put their bayonet on the end of their rifle and killed him. But if we'd been over another 20 yards, we'd have been crawling up on that darn snake.

Now while I'm talking about that, I'll refer back to the obstacle course we had back at Camp Hulen. It was right on the Gulf. And I guess this was more than an obstacle course. It was an infiltration course with live bullets overhead. I guess actually, those bullets were probably about three feet, but when you're crawling down there, you think they're like about three inches. (laugh) So the story goes — I can't confirm it — but while some GI's were going over this infiltration course, they happened upon a rattlesnake. And it scared them so much, they just jumped up. And when they jumped up, they were killed with these bullets, the live bullets. (laugh) Now whether that's true or not, but I could believe it.

DePue: But it's just the kind of story that they like to tell to make a point to the people who are in the training, right?

Farmer: Yeah. (laugh)

DePue: You talked a little about the ASTP Program. What was that for? Is that to become an officer?

Farmer: Well, it's called the Army Specialized Training Program, and the best I can get is that it wasn't very effective. I think what they wanted to do was to really develop engineers, and possibly doctors. Now, on the doctor side, it might have been. I do know one of my classmates actually went through ASTP, and when he got through the Army service, he kept with his medical field, and he turned out to be a medical doctor. But the best that I can come up with — and this is just my personal opinion — is that probably 90 percent of the ASTP program just went to pot. And I do know I have read where several ASTP people — and I'm talking about engineers in an engineering program — were shipped straight to the infantry to be infantry replacements. And so that gets you back to where I started a while ago. I just don't think that AST Program worked out very well. I never heard anything.

DePue: One of things you talked about already was getting to fire the Quad 50s. That's a lot of fire power. Was that fun, the Quad 50?

Farmer: The Quad 50s, oh yes. You could imagine how much lead one machine gun will spit out. Well, if you multiply that times four, and you've just got a steady stream of tracers going out. I think all of us enjoyed shooting that. It had a small, little handle, twin handles, about the size of your fist, about

six inches apart. And you could raise it up if you wanted. You could lower it if you wanted. You could turn it to your left. You could turn it to your right. You could throw lead any way you wanted to. And it was really fun to get in there and pull that trigger, and see those tracers going out. And you could get on a target, behind it, and then just come up to it. And if you want to be real smart, you get up a little bit ahead of it, and try to hit the cable, (laugh) then the target. (laugh)

DePue: Did it ever occur to you that you're sending a lot of Uncle Sam's money downrange?

Farmer: (laugh) Didn't worry me the slightest. Now, one objection we did have of that was, sometimes, these pilots that were piloting the tow plane, the tow plane pilots, they said we're getting too close to them. (laugh) And I could appreciate that. That wouldn't be much to be up there and getting shot at. (laugh)

DePue: No, that's not their idea of what they signed up for, probably. Did you get a chance to go on leave or furlough to go back home?

Farmer: Well, I didn't get my first furlough till I had been in the Army 11 months, and then that went all too fast. The next furlough I got was just before I shipped out for overseas. So I had two furloughs. I guess the second one was about two weeks, I guess, something like that. I'm not sure of the time.

DePue: The Army sent you to the ASTP, and that didn't work out. The Army had you training as anti-aircraft artillery, but you ended up in the Infantry. How did that happen?

Farmer: Well, I think I told you a while ago, we thought we were pretty efficient as an anti-aircraft unit. I guess we were kind of proud. We were kind of proud of that double-A, anti-aircraft, on our shoulders. But what I guess was that other anti-aircraft units, along with the United States Air Force, was also most efficient. And what they had done, they had rid the air of most German and Japanese effective aircraft. So what they decided was, they didn't need any more anti-aircraft gun. There's nothing to shoot at, so to speak. And we do need Infantry replacements. (laugh) So we'll just transfer you guys to the Infantry. That's how that came about.

DePue: Why did they need Infantry replacements?

Farmer: Well, I can give you an example. An Infantry man's on the line in combat. I'd say his average day is probably three days. I'm talking about actual combat. My unit went up with about 30 guys, and we come back with 6. The next time, I go up with about 29-30 guys. We come back with 4. So that gives you an idea there of the number of replacements that you need. They just go.

DePue: My question then for you, Marvin, is, when you got transferred to the Infantry, you must have known the reason was that the Army was going through Infantrymen way too quick.

Farmer: Yeah.

DePue: So what's your feeling about becoming an Infantryman now?

Farmer: Well, I didn't like it, (laugh) but you've got to take it. You've got to do it. (laugh)

DePue: Where did you get the training in Infantry then?

Farmer: Well, the final training was at Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi.

DePue: Camp Van Dorn?

Farmer: Yeah.

DePue: Named after a good Confederate General, it sounds like.

Farmer: Is that right?

DePue: Yeah, I believe so. And that was another Basic Training for you?

Farmer: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, yep, three Basic Trainings.

DePue: How good was the training you received?

Farmer: Well, I guess from transforming an old country boy into a soldier, I'd say it was good enough.

DePue: Did you ever in your training go out on squad level maneuvers, or platoon level maneuvers?

Farmer: I can't recall, as a squad, going out on extended maneuvers. When I was anti-aircraft, we would go out as a unit, and be in various tactical situations. But as far as squad training, I can't say as I could ever remember one.

DePue: During the time you were in the United States going through all this training, were you ever assigned to a combat unit?

Farmer: No, no. I wasn't assigned to a combat unit until I got to Holland.

DePue: Okay. Well, let's get you over to Europe then. When did that happen? When did you ship to Europe?

Farmer: Oh, gee. You got a date there for me?

DePue: Well, from the book, I think you said September 19, 1944 that you shipped out. Does that sound right?

Farmer: I shipped out from Camp Kilmer, okay.

DePue: Camp Kilmer, New Jersey?

Farmer: Yeah.

DePue: You were just moving through Camp Kilmer?

Farmer: Yeah. Well, first off, we were at Fort Meade for about — I think we were at Fort Meade for about six weeks, and then we went to Camp Kilmer. At Camp Kilmer, you're just waiting there. What you're waiting for is a ship to get you in.

DePue: What was the ship you went over on?

Farmer: Well, the ship that I went over was called Isle, I-s-l-e d-e France, *Isle de France*. And at that time, it was the third largest ship in the world. The two Queens, the *Queen Mary* and *Queen Elizabeth*, were larger. And these three ships were the only ones that could go unescorted across the Atlantic, because they could outrun a German submarine.

DePue: In other words, before the war, it was your cruise ship, and then they converted it to a troop transport?

Farmer: That's exactly right. This was supposedly a fancy cruise ship from France. I don't know how many tourists they would have, but it was reported, and I assume it's correct, that we had 16,000 troops on our ship and I think 1,200 British seamen operating the ship. I think it only took us four-and-a-half days to go across the Atlantic.

DePue: Was that better than being on a regular troop ship?

Farmer: Well, I can only compare it to what I know. I came back on a little victory ship. I think there was only 1,200 there. And we had a lot more freedom. Actually, we kind of enjoyed that trip coming back. It was in very early

spring, and it was taking a southern route. It was just kind of like being in Florida, nice sun, getting rays, and all that kind of stuff.

DePue: Well, on the trip over to Europe, though, you're thinking about, I'm heading to combat. I'm an Infantryman. I wonder how I'll do. I mean, that's what's going through your brain.

Farmer: Well, I guess maybe I was kind of lackadaisical about it. I can't say as I really worried too much about it. I could give you an example of a guy that come up to my unit. I can't think of his name. But while we were on a rest period, rest break, he came up to me. And knowing that I'd been in combat, he wanted to know what I would do in a certain situation, and I told him to the best of my ability. First thing you know, he was asking me another situation. Well, all during that time that I knew him, he wasn't overbearing, but he seemed like he wanted to always get more information on how to react in combat. And the bottom line was, he really didn't get a chance to react. He and I started across the street, as close to him as I am to you, and we hadn't gone no farther than that wall, and he was dead. So all that information was no good. You just can't explain it.

DePue: Well, let's go back to shipping over across the Atlantic Ocean. Did you find out you had a pretty good stomach for the ocean?

Farmer: Going over, if I remember right, it wasn't too bad. You get the waves, but it wasn't too bad. I could tell you an incident that I wasn't aware of that was happening, but I learned about it a week later. I had a friend from Decatur that I was with, and he come to me. This was when we were at a replacement depot in France. And he said, "You know on that ship, I made a little money. I just come back from the post office, and I bought three $500 money orders, and I sent them to my mom." Now $500, back in those days, when you're making $30 a month, and then you multiply it times three, that is one lot of money. That's like about $300,000 now, I would say. (laugh) And then he remarked, you know, "I got loaded dice." I've since thought many times that if that had been found out sooner, he'd have been the first casualty overseas. He'd have been overboard and going nowhere. (laugh)

DePue: Do you remember much about the food on the ship?

Farmer: Oh, yeah. Most of it was terrible, but I remember one thing that was very good. One of the guys had discovered that if you go down about four levels down, there's a bakery down there. And from that bakery, they'd take hot bread out of one room, and go down the aisle way and take it into another room where they cool it and they slice it. Well, he had happened along the aisle way, and he just grabbed one of those loaves of bread and took off. It kind of burned his hand a little bit, but he give me a bite of that bread. It was sure good, fresh baked bread. So we decided we'd go

down there again! We all took our OD [olive drab] hankies, and slap it on that bread, and take off. The next day, they called "off limits" down there, nobody else down there. (laugh) But that was the only good thing I found to eat on that ship, hot bread. Two meals a day is what you got.

DePue: Did you spend a lot of time in line waiting to eat?

Farmer: Yeah, fairly so. Of course, no matter where you go, there was lots of soldiers. I think the room that I was in was probably about the size of this room, and then they're stacked five high, cots five high. The first guy's about this [far] off from the floor, and the second guy's about that high from the ceiling. (laugh)

DePue: Were you happy to get off the ship then?

Farmer: Oh, yeah, yeah.

DePue: Where did you land?

Farmer: Well, I landed someplace in northern Scotland. And we no more than got off that ship, and walked, it seemed like about half a mile, then we got on a troop train. Then we got on a troop train, drove all the way down through Scotland, down to Southampton, England. Got off of this troop train onto, let's say, some sort of a ferry. I don't know how many would be on it, but I wouldn't say there would be any more than a thousand or so. And then, during the night, we're across the channel, and the next morning, we're at Idaho Beach.

DePue: Omaha?

Farmer: Omaha Beach, I mean. Yeah.

DePue: So you didn't spend any time in England?

Farmer: Not at that point. (laugh) I came back to England twice more later. (laugh)

DePue: During this whole time, did you have all your combat gear? Did you have an M1 rifle, everything you needed?

Farmer: No. No, the only thing we had was our personal clothes. Even when we were coming up through the replacement depots in France and in Holland, we weren't even issued rifles. I wasn't issued a rifle till I was ready to go in combat.

DePue: Did you know what unit you were going to be assigned to?

Farmer: No, had no idea. And I was sort of surprised to find out that I was going to be in the 116th Infantry Regiment, the same regiment that landed on

Omaha Beach. Where I came up to Omaha Beach, it was the very same area. (laugh) I was really surprised that it was. I thought that was quite a coincidence.

DePue: You knew what the 116th had done at Omaha Beach then.

Farmer: I'm sorry.

DePue: Did you know about the history of the 116th at Omaha?

Farmer: No, I can't say as I did, not like I know now.

DePue: I wonder if you can tell me. You did a very good job in the book, but tell me your initial impressions when you landed at Omaha Beach.

Farmer: Well, the initial impression was all the activity. From sunken ships, with their balloons that had steel cables dangling from them, to the many boats going here and yon in the bay, to all the activity on the beach, it seemed like there was just a steady move of troops just going up the beach. I later learned, probably at that time, that was one of the busiest ports in the world.

DePue: Now, when did you land there? Was that early October?

Farmer: It was earlier than that.

DePue: September, late September?

Farmer: Yeah.

DePue: Of 1944?

Farmer: Yeah.

DePue: What happens after you leave Omaha Beach then?

Farmer: Well, after we left Omaha Beach, we went over to the first replacement depot, probably in some French orchard. And that was followed by a succession of repo depots all the way up to the front line. You might stay at one for a day. You might only stay at one for a few hours, move up to another replacement depot. Most of that was on two-and-a-half ton trucks. But at one time, we probably went 100 miles on a 40 & 8 train, a French train.

DePue: What does 40 & 8 mean?

Farmer: Well, I think that's a term from the First World War. That means 40 men and 8 horses they put in little French (cough) boxcars. And I will say this. There's an awful lot of play between the cars, so it's really a rough ride.

You get jerked, and you get jerked back. It seemed like there were like chains that connect the two. It was just very rough, going back and forth. (phone rings) It's better than walking, but.... (laugh)

DePue: Okay, let's take a quick break here while it's ringing.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Marvin, at what time then did you find out the unit that you're going to be assigned to? Was that after going through several replacement depots?

Farmer: Yeah, it was the last replacement depot, yeah. I didn't know about it before then.

DePue: While you were in France, were you guys hearing anything about how well the war was going?

Farmer: Well, it just seemed like while we were in France, it seemed like most of the time, I was in transportation, riding in a two-and-a-half ton, or in a 40 & 8. And it seemed like, at that point, the war was really going fine, because the French were just so happy to see us. They would just throw flowers at you, throw kisses at you. They just seemed like they overwhelmed us. So it seemed like to me, we'd advanced quite a bit by the time we got to Omaha Beach, way up where I was. So I thought the war was going good.

DePue: I think at the time that you would have been moving forward to the front lines was the time when Patton's third Army was moving so quickly, and the whole Army was moving pretty quickly at the time. And about the time you got to the front, everything seemed to slow way down, didn't it?

Farmer: Well, to me the thing didn't slow down, I guess, until the Battle of the Bulge, and that only happened because I happened to be in a hospital at the time. But it seemed to me that we were doing as well, if not better than expected. We had captured Aachen. We had moved up to the river, which is another 40 miles. And it seemed to me like we're doing okay. But of course, the bad thing was, on this side of Aachen, things weren't going good. That's when the Battle of the Bulge started.

DePue: Yeah, south of Aachen. We jumped a little bit ahead of the story, so I want to take you back to the initial assignment to the 116th Regiment. Do you remember the company and the battalion you were in?

Farmer: Oh, yes. That was Company C, the 116th Infantry of the 29th Division.

DePue: Were you in a line platoon, an infantry platoon?

Farmer: Oh, yes.

DePue: So you're just your average, every day infantryman.

Farmer: That's exactly right.

DePue: Did they have machine gunners in that unit, or grenadiers?

Farmer: We had a BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle], I guess, in our squad. But basically, when I was in combat, I was just with my squad.

DePue: What was your rank?

Farmer: My rank, probably at that time, was a PFC. (laugh)

DePue: Okay, that sounds about right. Tell me about your first day in combat then.

Farmer: Well, that happened to be either in Aachen, or a suburb of Aachen. You couldn't tell one from the other. I guess it was about, I would say, 10 o'clock or so in the morning, and we had to go across an open field. It seemed like this open field was about half the size of a football field, something like that. I hadn't seen a shot fired up till this point. And when I'm about halfway out in this field, there were machine gun tracers coming every which way. So that was my first impression. And so I lay flat on the ground there, and I tried to look around and see where in the world I can go, because I don't like this at all. And I finally decided there was some bushes, or small shrubs, about 30 or 40 yards to my right, and I thought maybe if I can get there, I can get a little protection and dig down, dig a hole, or something. And so I thought, I can't just run straight. I've got to zigzag and go as fast as I can. I don't know whether I said a prayer or not, but I was probably thinking about praying. (laugh) And I just got all my strength, and all of a sudden, I just jumped up and zigzag, and ran over to that little shrub there, to those shrubs over there. And I later learned that a lot of the guys didn't make it. And I don't know whether it was really a smart move or not to get up and be almost a full figure in front of machine gun, but I guess those are just the chances you take sometimes. (laugh)

DePue: Do you remember how that incident ended? Did somebody take out the machine gun?

Farmer: I can't remember what happened then. I can't even remember what happened to the rest of the day. I can't remember. I cannot remember.

DePue: That was your first combat experience?

Farmer: Right, right.

DePue: Did combat get any different, or easier, after that first experience?

Farmer: Oh, I don't think combat ever gets any easier. You've always got that fear that the next one's going to get you. Of course, with fierce field artillery, something like that, you soon learn if one's coming in, if it's going to be close, or if it's going to be way out. But I guess you could say, I don't think I ever felt comfortable being in combat. You've always got that fear.

DePue: Before that first incident, did you have concern about how well you'd be able to perform, once you were in combat?

Farmer: I can't say as I did. I don't know. I guess I just took the day the way others take it, as it comes. I guess if it's my turn, it's my turn.

DePue: A lot of times, you hear people talk about young kids that age, they felt invincible. Did you feel invincible, or did you feel like chances of being a casualty are pretty darn high?

Farmer: Oh, I always felt that casualties were going to pretty high, you know, because seeing all those guys you lose, you just got to feel, my luck can't last forever, you know.

DePue: Okay, while you were still in Aachen, one of the stories you did such a good job of talking about in the book was this house-to-house fight where you went through the alleys and that. Can you tell us about that experience in some detail?

Farmer: Well, first I'm going to tell you about another experience. One of the first houses that we took in Aachen, we found two old men down in the basement.

DePue: Is Aachen a German town?

Farmer: Yeah, oh yeah. That's the first major German city. First off, these two old men thought we were going to kill them. They thought that we would just mow them down. Well, we had no more trouble communicating, because one could speak perfect English. And he said he had been to the States twice, which really surprised us. And then what really surprised us was, he wanted to know how bad Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, and New York City were bombed. He was just as sure as I'm sitting here that they'd been bombed but good. And we said no. I don't think he ever believed us. He really believed that. And a peculiar part about these two old men, another reason they thought were going to kill them was because they had hid a can of petrol down there with them in the basement someplace, and I guess that was strictly a no-no in Germany. You can't have that stuff. And so they thought if we found that petrol, we really would kill them. (laugh) Of course, we didn't care about it. But what was that other incident you was asking me about?

DePue: The patrol where your squad was moving through the alleys, through these houses. And this is going to lead up to the tank story, I think.

Farmer: Okay. Well, I guess we start out probably about 8 o'clock in the morning, and our objective was a couple of blocks of houses in this small town. The first block we take in probably less than an hour. And we've only found one German soldier, and we took him prisoner, and we brought him along. And we're halfway into the second block. And as you mention, we always come in through the alleyway. As we're in this second block, somebody decides to look out their front window. And down the street: nothing; up the street: nothing. But right against this house that we're in is a German tank, as close as that arbor is right there, if not closer. It was against it. (laugh) Now, you think that won't put the fear in infantryman to get a tank two miles away, so you can imagine what it would be if he's two feet away. (laugh)

So I guess we kind of gathered together. I'm just a little bit hazy right now on exactly the sequence of events but, as we gathered together, we suddenly find that we've got three more guys than we started off with. Now, that's very unusual. You usually have three less guys. (laugh) And to make matters more interesting, two of them were officers: one of them was a Second Lieutenant, and one was a Tech Sergeant. Very unusual for an infantry. Now then we're faced with a couple of problems. One was, we had just been advised that the Germans had disguised some of their soldiers as American soldiers, and infiltrated our lines. So this looks like, hey, I bet these guys are Germans. (laugh). It just kept getting worse. And they kept saying no, we're not, so I don't know. We got talking about some rules in baseball and football, and we know what their answers would be, we can tell whether they're Americans or not. So we finally determined, hey, they're Americans. Now, they're not only Americans, but we're subject to their authority. (laugh) (cough) Now, by this time, not only is there a tank out in front, but there are foot soldiers all around our house.

DePue: Did they know you were in the house?

Farmer: Oh, yes, they knew. Well, they soon would learn. I can't remember exactly the sequence of things. Maybe this is the way it was. I guess the next sequence was when this lieutenant learned of this tank, knowing that we had a bazooka team with us, said to go up and shoot that tank. Now, a bazooka against a German tank with heavy armor is like throwing a pea at that plate. You're not going to hurt that plate. But that was the order, so we went up. And I went up with a bazooka team. A bazooka team was only guy, and a bazooka man. And of course, he couldn't miss. (laugh) He was like shooting duck in a pond. And I was supposed to be guarding these guys, but a German down the way run out and motioned to the tank,

and pointed up to our window, before I could get a shot at him, and he run back in. And I'll just never forget that old German tank.

DePue: Elevating its tube.

Farmer: Right. Now, when it got about this angle, I go back to the wall of the room I was in, and I no more than get there, and bam, bam! He took two shots at that wall. Now, what I could see was, it looked like there was two holes, about that big around, fairly close together, fairly close to that window. So I just knew that those guys had had it, you know. Then there was so much smoke and plaster dust. I can't think of the smoke that I'm trying to think of, anyway, a lot of smoke. And I run back downstairs, down all the clutter in the stairway. And I no more than get down the stairs and boom; he shoots the corner of the house off, (laugh) on the first floor. (laugh) So can you imagine getting shot three times point blank with a 88 mm? (laugh)

Well, I thought that I heard one of the guys say that they thought down in the basement there was a hole in the wall that you could get to the adjoining house. I don't know whether they had been down there or not, but that's what I kind of remembered. So I thought I'll see if I can go down there. But there was so much crap on the stairs and so forth, trying to hold onto your rifle. Glass jars, crud all over the place, and pitch dark. You couldn't see your hand in front of you. That has to be one of the scariest times of my life is crawling around on your hands and knees, trying to find that hole in that wall. (laugh) And I don't know how many times I went around there, but I would guess I was down there at least 45 minutes, maybe longer. I don't know. You just had no feeling as to how much time had passed. Then finally I found a loose brick, and then I found another one. And then I found a hole, and I crawled through that with my rifle, barely could get through it. And I thought I heard some men talking. I go a little further down that way, and I find out they're upstairs, and they're Americans. So I guess I'm following where they went.

And then I remember the lieutenants discussing what they would do next. The first lieutenant says, "Well, I would suggest that we surrender, because we've got no" — I can't think of exact words right now. I thought I could. We've just got no recourse whatsoever. And I do remember the second lieutenant saying, "Hell no, we're not going to surrender. We're going to show them that we're Americans, and we can fight." He says, "We've got quite a bit of ammunition, so what I want you to do is, the first thing is to open up fire power. I don't care if you see anybody or not. You shoot out that window. Shoot out that window. Shoot out that window, and build up some fire power. But don't use all your ammunition." And I guess, if I was looking at the time, this was probably about 11 o'clock in the morning by now. And so that's what we did. And this went on, with them shooting at us, and we shooting outside till 4 o'clock in the afternoon, something like that.

DePue: In the book, you mentioned that you guys had moved so far forward that you were kind of completely surrounded by the Germans?

Farmer: Completely surrounded. Matter of fact, one come in the front door in a room where this Tech Sergeant was, and he had this potato masher. A potato masher is a grenade on the end of a stick. And he come in with this potato masher over his head, and this Tech Sergeant, he said, "Drop it, you son of a bitch. Drop it, you son of a bitch." I don't guess he knew what he's talking about. Maybe he did, but he just threw it, and run back out the door. And it went off, and really did do bad luck, really fractured his — I think it was his left knee. Well, that was one. Another younger German was out in the yard, and he's begging us to come out and help him. He'd been shot in the rump, and he wanted us to come out and help him get in. We said no, if you don't come in, we're going to finish it right now. (laugh) So he come in.

While I'm waiting around, boom, there's a grenade right there on the floor. Someone had lobbed a grenade in our room, on the floor. (laugh) Well, my guess is we've only got about two options. One, we could pick it up and throw it out. Another, you can try to get away from it. Now, I think in our grenades, once you pull the pin, I think you've got eight seconds before it goes off. I had no idea how long he'd pulled the pin, or how long they are. So I went out, I'd run around the next room and hit the floor, and it went off, but it didn't do any damage. And then one of our guys said, hey, I know who it was. I saw that damn guy lob that grenade from the window upstairs. And I guess it was kind of like this, a building like that, and he had a window over here, and he lobbed it in our window down here. So this GI goes up in our room, and he's just ready to throw another one in, and he killed this German (laugh) as he was leaning out the window. He got him. (laugh)

DePue: Was this in the same building you were in?

Farmer: Oh, yeah, yeah. All this happened in one building. (laugh) Well, another guy, I told him we had a BAR, and he had an oil can. And he would shoot that. And he went stone deaf up there, and he couldn't hear nothing. But if you wanted him to shoot that way, you'd shake his shoulder and point that way. He'd get his oil can out and give it a squirt, and then he'd shoot. (laugh) So this carried on, although it seemed like the intensity kind of decreased to, say, about four o'clock. And this lieutenant I refer to as lieutenant B, he said, "We'll send a patrol back, and see if we can get back the same way we came." And I don't remember many names, but I do know this. The guy that was going out first, his name was Fink, and I think he's from Chicago. And my name was Farmer, and I'm going to follow him. And he told Fink, "When you get to that wall out there, give Farmer a high sign, and he'll follow you up, and then you'll both go out as far as you can."

So I'm standing there with my gun, waiting for Fink to give me a sign to come out, and he don't. He's making some funny movements I don't understand. Well, he was told to go to the right side of that wall. I guess he forgot and he went to the left side of the wall. Now, if he'd have gone to the right side, he'd have been captured. But he went to the left side, and he was in back of them, and he captured three Germans. (laugh) So he sent those back in. And then I go back to Fink, and we go down, and it looks like we can get out this way. So we or somebody made a litter out of an ironing board, and we made two of these Germans carry this tech sergeant. The German with the rump, he could walk it by himself, and I think we had three other Germans we were taking back prisoner. We all got back that night by about 5 o'clock. Nobody got killed. And the two worst guys was this guy with a bad knee, and him losing his hearing. Can you believe that? (laugh)

DePue: That is an amazing story, and you remember an incredible amount of information about that day. How many days had you been in combat when you had this experience? Was this your second or third day in combat?

Farmer: Oh, no. I'd say, if I remember right, I think that's probably my second time up. But you know, you just never know (laugh) what the next second will be. And I forgot to tell you one thing about this thing. After I'd gone through this hole and been up back there, I was with these guys about 20 minutes or so. Here comes a bazooka man and his ammunition carrier. They had come the same way I did. They were *merely inches* away from that idiot then. Not a scratch. I forgot to tell you that.

DePue: And the irony of this, and the fate that's involved. This Fink had gone one direction, versus another. How could things be different then?

Farmer: I'm sorry.

DePue: If Fink had gone one direction, instead of going the other, would it have turned out different?

Farmer: Oh, absolutely.

DePue: So because he went the wrong way, he…

Farmer: He went the wrong way. He captured them. And he'd have been captured, so we couldn't have got out. They'd have had us cut off in the back. They had us cut off in front. (laugh)

DePue: Wow. You took several Germans prisoners. It sounds like when they're in combat, they are very good, determined soldiers, but once they're captured, they were ready to say that's the end of the war for me?

Farmer: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Do you think some of those Germans were relieved that they had been captured?

Farmer: Oh, absolutely. I felt that. Maybe I'm wrong, but I felt that. I'll skip a little bit, but when I was back in England later, we had German prisoners of war. And there was one of them that could speak pretty good English, and was a young kid about my age. I kind of became, I guess you would say, friends with him. And then one day, we got talking about war, and what unit he was in, and where he was in. Well, come to find out, our lines get closer together, closer together. And I finally determined, hey, he could have been shooting at me. (laugh) You know what? I didn't have quite the love for him after that, that I had before. (laugh)

DePue: Do you recall, when you're in this incident that you just talked about, were you just working on instinct? Were you able to overcome your fear?

Farmer: Well, it's peculiar. I guess so. We realized we're in, you know, a super bad situation, but I don't think fear rules supreme. It seemed like we just went ahead and did what we're supposed to do. But I just never had any fear of being captured. Maybe I should have, (laugh) because it looks like that have been a smart thing to do.

DePue: Did anybody think about surrendering, instead of fighting your way out?

Farmer: Well, when this one lieutenant says, what shall we do, we're completely — I can't think of that term, but I remember him saying that. You know, I think about my memory on some of these things, and I think the reason I can remember some of these things is because it was such a radical change from my life before I went into the Army. My life before I went in the Army, more routine. I hadn't been out of the state once, except when I went down to Jefferson Barracks. And going overseas, different countries, different people, all was so different that I think it just left a big mark in my memory.

DePue: After you got done with that, I want to have you tell us about the guy you called Pop, getting replacements.

Farmer: Oh, yeah. Well, this goes back to what I said about our always attacking from the rear. I can't recall an alley, because it don't seem like there was much of a road, but just like more of a trail down behind the houses; whereas, we might have a blacktop alleyway. But it's just more like a trail, as I can recall. And most of them had an archway that led to their back door. And sometimes, there was little walls around. So at one of our breaks we got in combat, we had this replacement from West Virginia. I think he actually got elected state representative from the state of West Virginia when he was in the service. Well, he was 38-years-old. Now, 38-years-old, at that time, gee whiz, he seemed like a grandpa. Actually, he

was twice as old as I was, you know. So we called him grandpa. And then later, getting back to this combat situation where we're coming up from the back, grandpa jumped this little wall, and he'd come in this house. And he was kind of off over to his self. And we thought something was being a little bit unusual about him, and so we said, "What's the matter, grandpa?" He kind of garbled something, and wouldn't understand him. We said, "Tell us grandpa. What's the matter?" And then he finally blurted out that he lost his false teeth out there, when he jumped that wall. So, by darn, the next thing we knew, there's grandpa out looking all over for those doggone set of false teeth. He'd been out there only a couple minutes, and bing! He got shot in the pant leg, right behind his knee. And I think the bullet went through his pants, and just did graze the back of his leg, and that really wasn't bad news. So he decided he'd better come in. (laugh) And so he came in. And then the next day or two, we're back. They evacuated him back to the medical unit to get false teeth, and we thought, we wished we were grandpa, so we had false teeth. We could get out of here, too. (laugh)

DePue: So there's all kinds of ways of being a casualty, huh?

Farmer: (laugh) Another time I remember was, I can't think of this grandpa's name, but there was an Irishman that fought alongside of him named O'Neal. I think his name was O'Neal. He fought in Normandy, and then he had been back to the hospital, and he's coming back again. But he was noted for, as soon as we came into a house, if there was a bottle around, he'd drink it down. Whenever there was a bottle, he would take a swig of it, go about the house, clear it out, and come back. Then he would finish it up. He'd do some serious drinking then. Well, one day, he and grandpa were in this town, and we got amidst a battle. And the next day, we looked for grandpa and O'Neal. They don't show up, so they were missing in action, I think, for two days. And then another unit moved in, and they found them. They were hid in a room. They thought the Germans were in the rest of the house, and they were just staying there. (laugh) So that was grandpa and O'Neal.

DePue: This goes back to when you were growing up on the farm, but you have a story about finding a haystack out in the countryside.

Farmer: Oh, yeah. Well, you know, there's really more to that. I have later learned that there probably is more to that story than I realized, and why I say that is this. This time we're out in the countryside, and we're on this farm, and there is a straw stack out there. And it appeared that the cattle or the horses had gnawed away, chewed away around it. And there was kind of like an overhang over this straw stack. And then I looked in, and there was a hole in there, oh, about a couple of feet in diameter. And I thought, oh, that's just a place for a hen to lay to hide some eggs. And I just couldn't resist going to that and see if there were any eggs in there, because if there was

one thing you like in the Army, is fresh eggs. You never get them, you know. So boy, we could make out somewhere and get those eggs cooked. So I reach in there, and I don't feel an egg. I feel a gun. I feel a revolver. I pull it out, and it's not a German gun. It's a U.S. 45. Now, how did that U.S. 45 get in there? I've thought about that. And one guy says, well, maybe the Germans were here and captured that from an American officer, and they didn't want to get caught with that on, so he thought he would hide it there, and get it later. But how come that 45 is there, I don't know. Anyway, of course, I didn't have a holster for it, but I just linked my belt out, and I carried that 45 loaded (laugh) to the hospital. (laugh)

DePue: So you had that 45 for quite a while.

Farmer: I don't know. I think I lost it someplace in the hospital. There's one more thing I wanted to say, and that is, I'll go back to Aachen. It was initially on the border between France and Germany, the first major German city that the Americans took. But years and centuries before that, they built a fortress on the west side of that city, really to protect themselves from France. And down through the years, they'd improved it. And then later, Hitler formed it and made the Maginot Line.

DePue: You mean the Siegfried Line.

Farmer: The Siegfried Line, I'm sorry, the Siegfried Line, all the way down. And they thought, with all these fortifications, that they could withstand really an onslaught. But what the Americans did, they breached this line way to the north of Aachen, went around. And instead of going through the fortresses, they came on the east side. And they did that a lot. One day, I was in a combat with a guy named Scott. I think he was half Indian. I think he was either from Kansas or from Oklahoma. And we were upstairs in this house, and I looked out. I said, "Look out there, Scott. Right under that archway is a German soldier, standing with his gun, looking away from our house." He thought the force would be coming from that way. (laugh) We were behind. (laugh) And I'm about ready to shoot this guy, and Scott says, "No, let me shoot him." "Go ahead, Scott." And Scott shot at him, and I think he just hit the top of the archway, and it kind of splintered. I think that's what happened. And the German took off. But you know what little things. Why didn't we both shoot him, you know? (laugh) Things you never think about. But the point I was getting at, there he's thinking, and he's protecting his house. (laugh) He thought we'd be coming that way.

DePue: Do you know if you'd ever actually shot and killed the enemy, or hit the enemy?

Farmer: That's a hard question. That's a question about like shooting this soldier. It would have been kind of difficult for me to shoot a man in the back, but

that's your job. And if you don't shoot him in the back, he might shoot you in the back, so you've got to shoot him. I will say this. I made a lot of shots. I could have killed quite a few. I don't know. I really don't know whether I actually killed somebody or not.

DePue: Is that something you even think about much when you're in combat?

Farmer: Well, I'll say this. What you're thinking about in combat is trying to protect your skin, and you'll just do anything to do it. And if you've got to kill to do it, you do it. You've got to protect your skin. You've got to protect yourself, and protect your buddy.

DePue: The last thing I want to ask you about today is after Aachen — I think this is after Aachen — the unit got to go into a rest area for a few days.

Farmer: Yeah. (laugh) Yeah, the very first rest area. I remember it was a sunny day, probably a temperature of about like today, maybe a little bit warmer. And the good thing was the American Red Cross was going to come up with a truck, donuts and coffee. Now, you don't get donuts every day in the Army, and especially served by two pretty girls. They had a record player, and they put it on the hood of the truck, and they played records. They had these donuts. They had these cups of coffee, and they smelled good. (laugh) So it was a big time, everybody sitting around with coffee and a donut, and talking to the gals. They had moved up right in the middle of our bivouac area. We had already had our foxholes dug out there, and was already out there.

Well, this party went on for probably about a half an hour or so, and all of a sudden, planes, German planes. And somebody said, hit the ground! And everybody had a foxhole to hit the ground but these two gals from the Red Cross. (laugh) And this one guy said, "Get in the ground!: And she says, "I got no place to go!" He says, "Right here on top of me!" (laugh) So she jumped in. A little bit later, she says, "How long do you think this raid's going to last?" He says, "Oh, I hope about another half hour, anyway." (laugh) So that was the first rest area. Another day of that was, I don't know where the mess sergeant had gone, but he had located some German cattle. And they went out and they killed two of them. They cut the best steaks, or roast, or whatever, and they cooked it. And they made devil's food cake. I thought that was one of the best meals I ever had in my life. (laugh)

DePue: What were you eating before that time, c-rations?

Farmer: K-rations.

DePue: Tell us about what's in a k-ration.

Farmer: Well, k-rations, as I recall, are pretty much prepackaged. And c-rations are, I think, I guess maybe C stands for canned, canned pork & beans, all kinds of canned meat and stuff like that. But k-rations, I can't remember if there was any kind of meat. I think there was some chocolate bars in there. There was a package of four or five Chesterfield cigarettes. I just can't remember. There had to be something else, but I can't think what it was.

DePue: I would assume some crackers.

Farmer: Crackers, yeah.

DePue: Well, in the rest area, you get some better food. Do you get a chance to clean up a little bit?

Farmer: Well, I remember the first time. I guess there was some mining operations around Aachen. And the Americans had overrun this coal mine, so they fixed it up so they could bring in a whole bunch of — like a company of soldiers in. They could take showers en mass at this coal mine entrance. And that was really a good deal, because you'd get fresh water. (laugh)

DePue: So you didn't smell too bad after that, huh?

Farmer: Oh, no. You could only smell you for a half a block. (laugh)

DePue: How long before that time had you had any chance to shower? How long had you gone?

Farmer: As far as I know, I hadn't shaved, or hadn't washed at all.

DePue: For weeks on end?

Farmer: Close to two weeks. That's not a priority. (laugh)

DePue: Well then by the time you guys got to the shower, you were pretty well ripe.

Farmer: Oh, yeah. (laugh)

DePue: How about mail? Did the mail catch up to you then? Did you have mail call?

Farmer: Oh, mail was kind of sporadic. Because it seemed like I moved around quite a bit, mail had a hard time catching up with me. Now, if you had gone over as a unit and stayed as a unit, I don't think the mail would have been such a problem. But when you go from one replacement—replacement to a company, to a hospital, to a hospital—to England, back to France, it's pretty hard for mail to keep up with you. I remember one time. This is later, when I working in a post office then. I was kind of in

charge of that post office. Somebody said, "Hey, Farmer, you got a whole bunch of mail." And I went over there and picked that bunch up, a stack of mail all tied up. Marvin Farmer. And then I looked down farther. Some field artillery unit, so it wasn't me. (laugh) It was some other Marvin. (laugh) Then I had to forward every one of them. (laugh)

DePue: Well, I bet there was excitement, and then deep disappointment, huh?

Farmer: Yeah. (laugh)

DePue: I want to read a couple things from your book. You had talked about the USO girls, and you kind of illustrated your average GI sense of humor. And I wanted to talk about Fourth and Main. Do you remember Fourth and Main, the intersection in Aachen?

Farmer: Oh, yeah. (laugh) Yeah, this was one intersection. When I speak of Aachen, I don't know whether I'm in Aachen, or a suburb of Aachen. You know it's just like going to Chicago, you know. You don't know where Bolingbrook starts and Chicago starts, that kind of stuff. So this particular area, we'd been around for it seemed like three or four days. And it had some German names on the streets, but we couldn't pronounce them or spell them, so we just called it Fourth and Main, (laugh) so we knew what we were talking about. Well, right at Fourth and Main, there had been some mannequins, and they were women. And of course, by this time, the glass had all been broken out. There was a lot of comments by GIs. If they could find something to write with, they'd wrap it up and drop it in there. (laugh)

DePue: Do you mind if I read some of the comments you had in your book?

Farmer: No, go right ahead.

DePue: And again, this illustrates, I think, your average GI's sense of humor, in the midst of combat. "I asked her for a date, but she couldn't find anything to wear." (laugh) "I'll marry the Jane at Fourth and Main." (laugh) "What do you wear in the summer time?" "Is there a shortage of ladies' ready-to-wear in Germany?" (laugh) And "Honey, we'll raise Cain at Fourth and Main." (laugh)

This is farther into the book, and you had talked about this already, but I want to reiterate the amount of casualties, the amount of attrition, that this average infantry platoon would go through. You said, "Two occasions I remember specifically. Once, our platoon was down to a count of six." A platoon would normally have 30-40 people in it?

Farmer: Well, a lot of times you weren't no way near capacity.

DePue: Anyway, "The platoon was down to a count of 6, so we received 24 replacements. The other time, our count was down to only 4, so 25 were acquired. With odds, such as mentioned, one's continual stay in the extreme front line was next to impossible for any extended length of time. Twenty seconds to two months was about the average, thus one can understand the immense need for infantry replacements. With such a turnover, names of individuals, or members of squad, didn't mean too much. Buddy seemed like a fit for 'most everyone. If one stayed long enough, he might be called by his last name." (laugh) I've read and heard that so much, that people come and go, that you don't form these strong attachments.

Farmer: Yeah, yeah, that's right, yeah. There's just very few names you'll hear me say, and I could probably name them on my hand. Fink, the guy from Decatur, with the loaded dice, I'm not going to mention, because he still may be alive, I don't know. (laugh) Scott, and I can't remember what grandpa's name was. So those are about the only names that I can remember. I probably met hundreds, you know.

DePue: Okay, I think that's a pretty good way to finish up for today.

Farmer: Okay.

DePue: Part 2 will be in a week or so.

Farmer: Okay.

DePue: Thank you, Marvin.

Farmer: Very good.

(End of Audio File #1 File #2 continues)

Interview with Marvin Farmer

VR2-A-L-2012-003.02

Interview # 2: February 21, 2012

DePue: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Monday, February 21, 2012. I am in the home of Marvin Farmer. Good morning, Marvin.

Farmer: Well, good morning, Mark.

DePue: This is our second session. Marvin was a veteran of World War II. And what was your division and your regiment again?

Farmer: Well, my division was the 29th Infantry Division, and my regiment was the 116th Infantry Regiment. And to get a little bit more into that, I was in Company C of the 116th.

DePue: And you were just your average old rifleman, weren't you?

Farmer: Yes, sir. I was just a GI Joe. (laugh)

DePue: Those were the guys that ended up winning the war for us. (laugh) Last time, we finished off with you having gone through a lot of combat, and then going to the rest camp. So what I wanted to start with, then, is after you've been in a rest camp. You've seen some heavy combat, you had that experience with the tank right outside the window, and things like that.

Farmer: Okay.

DePue: What's your thought about going back into combat?

Farmer: Well, when you think about going back to combat, you think about going back to hell. And of course, one is really anxious, and like I said before, most concerned, always concerned about your own skin. And you know

what your odds are. They're just not good. So you are again, I'll say, anxious to get there, and mostly anxious to get away from the front. (laugh)

DePue: One of the first things that happened after you went back was, you had to take refuge in a barn. Can you tell us about that experience?

Farmer: Which incident was that you're mentioning, Mark?

DePue: You hid away in a barn.

Farmer: Okay. Well, I kind of think that the Germans called a farm building — we would say gut, but I imagine they say 'goot'. I'm not sure. (laugh) It's spelled g-u-t. It would be a large building that would be in the center of, I would assume, probably a few hundred acres. And this compound would be primarily for agriculture, but I'm sure that there was also a farmer, too, that lived in the building. And this one day, we were moving up, I would say, probably about four or five miles, and it was a very long march. However, the weather was great, the sun was shining. It was just a nice, shall we say, afternoon walk. And we walked and walked and walked across this farmland. And there was no activity of war, as I recall, in any direction. Probably about two or three in the afternoon or something, maybe a little bit later, we got to this compound. And it was a welcome sight, because we wanted to take a break and get a smoke. There was something like bales of hay around that we could sit on and make ourselves comfortable for a moment, and so that's exactly what we did. Of course, everybody was grabbing for a cigarette, because you just had to have that smoke. (laugh) Well, probably about ten minutes later, when we were in the midst of our relaxation, shall I say again, that all hell broke loose. They had pretty much foretold what we were going to do; they knew we were going to be going to this compound. And apparently they didn't want to fire on us when we're in a long line. They wanted to wait till we got all in one small group.

So, as I say, all hell broke loose, primarily with mortars. And I think some of them were close enough to even sling a few grenades our way. But anyway, the mortars were really the telling thing. We had to take cover the best we can. And of course, as we just got there for not too many minutes, nobody had had any foxholes to fall into. So we all run—most of us, anyway, ran to this barn and get as close to the ground as you could. It seemed like I was leaning up against something. But anyway, I probably thought it was a wall of the barn, but as I looked around a little bit later, I realized I was in a horse's stall, and probably laying in that horse manure. And not only that, I was lying real close to a dead horse. So I don't know too much more about that particular incident, but I will say this. Maybe that dead horse saved my life, because of all the mortar shells ricocheting in and so forth. So that's the way I remember about that barn. (laugh)

DePue: It illustrates just how disorienting sometimes combat can be, how confusing it can be for you.

Farmer: Well, I'm not sure of your question there, but I just find it hard to answer, Mark. I'm not quite with you on this. (laugh)

DePue: Okay, that's fine. What time of year was this? Was this October, November?

Farmer: Well, the time of the year was — I think I went into combat in late August, or first of September. And by this time, it was probably in early or mid-November, something like that. But I will say this. The weather really wasn't bad for me at the time I was in combat. A little bit later, particularly during the Battle of the Bulge, this particular part of Europe suffered one of the heaviest snowstorms in many, many years. But fortunately for me, I didn't have to fight, as snow is a problem.

DePue: That's a little ahead of our story. Tell us about finding this trench line, this very, very well dug trench that you encountered.

Farmer: Well, yes. Again, we were out in the open country. And what's normal for open country is to dig a foxhole, move up, dig a foxhole, and go on, and maybe wind up digging ten foxholes a day. But this particular day, we moved up to a low rolling hill. And it really was so flat that I hate to call it a hill, but it was just flat almost, but with a little bit of rolling country. And low and behold if we didn't happen onto a long trench. And we first thought this trench must have been made by a machine, but as we couldn't see any mechanical tracks, we finally come to the conclusion that this trench had been built by slave labor. Now, the trench was probably, oh, let's say four feet wide and a good five feet deep, and so there had to have been a lot of digging to make a trench like that. Because the trench, as far as I could tell, run at least a mile and a half to two miles. It could have been farther. It could have been less, but it was a long trench. And the reason they built that, they dug that trench, was to defend the town that was probably about a mile and a half or two miles behind this trench. And we moved in. This was great. Hey, we don't have to dig a hole. I think I referred to it as the mother of all trenches. It was the mother of all foxholes. (laugh) It was a great find for us. And to make matters better, I think we stayed there maybe three or four days, not advancing, just holding our line there.

Although, one day, we had some second thoughts about this trench. Because on a road to the right, and down about a half a mile, there appeared three or four German tanks coming up. And the way they were progressing, it was as if they were coming directly to us. So we wondered then whether this trench was a good deal or not. Are we going to get caught in it? As it happened, as these tanks got closer, they really pulled

into our field, and we thought this is really going to be bad luck. But they pulled in the field, and they got close together. And they sort of regrouped, and they got out as if they were looking at a map. And we wondered if they were trying to see where we might be. Fortunately, for our side, one of our group got in touch with a field artillery unit. And as we were at an advantage, as these allied shells came in, we could see where they were landing, and we could direct which way to go. First, they were falling a little bit shy, but later, we could see these shells getting very, very close to a tank. Well, these German tank men, as soon as the barrage started, they jumped and got back in their tanks. They hesitated there for maybe another minute. And all of a sudden, they took off, and they went back the same way they came. So we were greatly relieved then. (laugh)

DePue: So the artillery saved your skin.

Farmer: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, I've tried to, whenever possible, to give credit to what other unit in the Army or Air Force that was helpful to us. In this instance, it certainly was the Artillery. Another instance, I've spoken how the engineers helped us. I've spoken how the Tank Corp could help us. And I've certainly talked about how the Air Force was such a morale builder for us, even though it wasn't maybe in a direct operation. But just seeing the B24's, the B17's and the big bombers going towards Germany, it just was a big morale boost for the little, lowly infantrymen.

DePue: Do you remember any times when the Air Force was giving close air support, the fighters?

Farmer: Well, the only time that I can remember that the Air Force gave, shall we say, tactical help to us, was when there was fighting in Aachen. We thought that the Air Force dropped a 500-pound bomb only about a block away from us. To my knowledge, none of our guys blamed the Air Force because, especially when you're in a house-to-house combat, it can be a matter of minutes where you own a block or you don't own it. So it would be very hard to pinpoint where the actual frontline was. I do know that the Army started a procedure where they issued little colored flags that you could put to identify your position. But to my knowledge, especially with the fellows in my unit, not once did we use those colored flags, because we figured not only would the allied planes know where, but the Germans would know where we were, too. So that didn't work out very well. They soon discarded that idea.

DePue: Most of the time, did you move in daylight or at night?

Farmer: Well, I guess you'd say most of the time, we moved in daylight. But I can recall times that we moved at night. And I recall one specific one. I don't know how many was in this move, but I'd say it must have been close to maybe a battalion. I know there was just an awful long line, and it had to

be more than our company. But anyway, we were in a long line, and I'd say we were probably about, I was guessing, between nine and ten o'clock at night.

DePue: When you say long line, do you mean abreast, a line abreast?

Farmer: No, no, a single long line, maybe about five or six feet apart. And what we were trained to do, if we were ever engaged in a situation where there's a flare, is to freeze. Regardless of what position you're in, not to move a muscle. And in this long line of movement that we were in, lo and behold, here comes a German plane over, and he drops a flare right above us. And all of a sudden, your darkness just becomes daylight. And through your training, you just freeze. Whether your hands are extended, or whether you're standing, or whether you're halfway moving, or what, you try to freeze in that position. And I just felt that, in this instance, that we were going to really be doomed because, here we are in this open field, nothing but a long line of soldiers as far as you can see. I was satisfied that the pilot couldn't miss this long line of troops. But fortunately, I was wrong, and there was never any follow-up on that flare. And to this day, I'm grateful for that. (laugh)

DePue: You told about another incident where the unit is moving at night. And you'd stop and dig a foxhole, and then you'd go farther, and you'd stop and dig a foxhole.

Farmer: Oh, yes. Yeah, I can recall that one. That is an easy one. I've said before, every time you stop, its dig a hole. You move up 5 feet, or 50 feet, dig another hole. And this can get pretty tiresome, especially if you move very much at night. And this one instance, I think we had moved about three times. And this was probably before nine o'clock. We weren't too far from a town that was cut off, but…. I've got to stop for a minute. Oh yes, back to where we're moving up again, and lo and behold, we just got through digging a hole, and move up again. Well, this one night, as we moved up, my buddy and I started digging a foxhole, and another guy come up and he says, "Hey, I don't have nobody to dig a foxhole with," because two makes it a pretty good deal. One can be on guard, while the other one gets a couple, three hour's nap. So we said, "Hey, you might as well join us. We'll just make this hole a little bigger." So what the outcome was, we made a hole about two foot deep, about six foot long, and about two foot wide, something like that. And we got it that big, and we said, hey, that's great. One can guard, and two can sleep, and then we'll shift as the night progresses on a two-hour basis. So that's what we did. The night worked out pretty good. We got generally a little more shuteye than we normally would get.

Well, about, shall we say, six o'clock, or something like that, early the next morning, it was just starting to get a little bit daylight. And here

comes some GIs kind of creeping through our lines. And we said, "Hey, where you guys going?" They said, "We're on the attack." And they hadn't gone more than probably 30, 40, 50 feet ahead of us, and we were just met with heavy machine gun fire, just flying barely over our heads. And that kind of left us with a problem, because now we don't have two guys, but we've got to have three guys in this foxhole. (laugh) And so I think I was on the end, facing this way. Another guy was on the end, facing this way. And the third guy, he's just in there. I don't know how he was, but he was just in there in some way. And the bad thing was the foxholes that we had dug was plain old yellow clay. It was just like a diamond in the sky out there on that dirt. So the Germans knew exactly where we were. They could see the hole that we dug, so we couldn't get out. Now what we felt real sorry for was the troops that had just advanced through us. They didn't even have a foxhole to get in, so they were just laying there on top of the ground. After this small arms fire ceased a little bit, then they really did start meaning business, and started lobbing mortars in on us. They had this area very well oriented, and they could zero right in on that with those mortars.

So from six o'clock in the morning, till four o'clock in the afternoon, or somewhere along that line, we were captive in this field. We couldn't get up. If you had to go to the john, you had to go there. You had that as the option, or have a barrage of machine gun bullets coming your way. Now, if you wanted a little bit of excitement, just put the helmet on the end of your rifle, and stick it up, and you'll get an answer on that. (laugh) So we were there, as I say, till about four o'clock in the afternoon. And we were thinking maybe when it gets dark, we could kind of retreat back out of that bad position we were in. But about four o'clock, we heard some noise, the noise of a tank coming. You could hear the clatter of the tread. And, of course, the bad part is, when it was far away, you couldn't tell whether they were German tanks or American tanks coming your way. So finally we determined that they were from behind us and to our right, and they kept getting closer. The closer they got, there was no machine gun fire from what we previously encountered. So these tanks just kept on coming.

All of a sudden, they came within, let's say, about a third of a block to our right. And immediately in front of us was a hedge. And as these tanks approached that hedge, out come a bunch of German soldiers. And if I was estimating the amount, I'd say it had to be between 50 and 60 German soldiers come out with their hands over their head, surrendering to these tanks. And so, of course, that day was the day I give thanks to the armored unit there that came in. A peculiar part about this is, they came in and they left about as fast as they got there, and we never even got to say thank you to them. (laugh) They just come in, and we took over the prisoners.

But getting back to moving up, what we had done, we had moved up right in front of a German line of defense. We were probably somewhere less than 200 feet from this hedge row, or bushes, or whatever it was, and they were lined up behind that line of bushes. We couldn't see them. They could see us. And I guess that just shows that it's not always good to move up at night, because you don't know where (laugh) you're going, unless you really got that field oriented. (laugh)

DePue: I assume that this was the whole unit. Was there any talking back and forth between foxholes during the day?

Farmer: No. No, we didn't talk, although we might have been close. I can't recall of any communication with each other.

DePue: Tell me about the POW's. What did you do with the POW's?

Farmer: Well, as far as I was concerned, in the Infantry unit, once we captured them, I'd say we'd give them back to somebody in our higher headquarters. And I can't recall any of our soldiers accompanying them back any further. We just turned them on back to company headquarters, battalion headquarters, and let them take care of them.

DePue: Often, when you've got prisoners, that's a pretty dangerous time. Were you concerned about the prisoners trying to do something?

Farmer: Generally not. It seemed to me that the prisoners that we took were actually glad to be taken prisoners. We took a lot of, I would consider, young, probably 17 years old. We took a lot of prisoners that were older. I'd say probably in their 50's and 60's. And all through the time that I was with the prisoners, even later back in England, I wasn't concerned about their activities, maybe uprising against us. I'll say it again. They just seemed like they were happy to be taken prisoners. I think they felt that they would probably be treated better than they would even in their own army, with the food and the stuff that went along with the way we treated our prisoners.

DePue: From what I could understand, shortly after this incident, you went back to the rest camp again, to a rest area. Did you go back to a rest area after this?

Farmer: Well, I've been to the rest area twice. I can't remember. I really find it difficult to define one from the other, except the first rest period I could remember was outside of Aachen. And I remember when those planes come in, and the Red Cross girls come up. But it seemed like the second time I was in a rest area was probably when we were near some coal mine, and got our showers there. But I'm having just a little trouble distinguishing between the two rest times.

DePue: In the book, you talked about, in the rest area the second time around, your foxhole buddy was a lieutenant.

Farmer: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I remember that. I don't know how that worked out, but you generally just pair up with your buddy in the squad. But this time, I don't know. It seemed like he didn't have an officer with him and, for some reason, (laugh), I didn't have a GI with me, either. So he wanted to know if we could hook up, and I said that'd be fine with me. And as I think I mention in the book, apparently one of the duties of a line officer is to censor any letters that his subordinates might be writing. And at this particular rest period, or rest time, this lieutenant did most of his censoring, as far as I know, at night time with some kind of flashlight. I don't know how we got a flashlight, but we each had one. And he asked me if I would like to censor some letters. I said, well, if I can help you out, I will. After you read a few of these love letters and so forth, it soon gets boring, and you're just kind of anxious to get the job done. So I did help him with this censorship to the best of my ability. But I wasn't about to tell any of my fellow buddies that I was doing that. I just kept that a secret between me and the lieutenant. (laugh)

DePue: Did you have to mark it out, or cut passages out? How did you do that?

Farmer: I can't remember of having to omit anything. To me, it was all okay, is the best I can remember.

DePue: What did they want you to take out, if you found something?

Farmer: Well, they didn't want us to particularly show what location we were with. They didn't want us to divulge any plans that we might have. And they didn't even want us to tell, as I say again, where we were, or really what unit we were in. All we had to say was our serial number.

DePue: How long did you stay in the rest area, just a couple days?

Farmer: Well, we would generally stay in a rest area about five or six days, something like that, maybe just a fraction over a week.

DePue: From what I can tell, the next time you went back into combat was late November, and you got to stay in a pretty fancy house, apparently.

Farmer: Oh, yes. I remember that house. And I'm not quite positive as to what town it was. It might have been Koslar; I'm not sure. (laugh) It was a nice brick house, I would say. On the outside appearance, it probably looked like that unit there, with a nice bright, red brick on the outside. It was just what I would call a very luxurious house. I think we stayed there probably four or five days, just in a holding pattern. We had a picture window. We could look down towards the river. And there was a bluff on the other side. We could watch what appeared to be a large movement of German

vehicles. And, as I recall, they were basically going from our left to our right, on the other side of the river. And we reported that back to our headquarters, company, or whatever, and there was nothing ever done about that. And to this day, I think that was one of the biggest blunders that I encountered when I was in the services. There was no follow-up on this. I don't know whether you read about my thoughts on that or not.

But getting back to the house, it was a very nice house. I do know that we were there on Thanksgiving Day. One of the ladies, an elderly lady, came back, and she got some butter or something out of the kitchen. So if she used the butter, we figured we could use it, too. And she also had some hens out in the back yard, so, lo and behold, if we didn't start a fire in the fireplace. We had smoke coming out of the chimney, we were cooking chicken. And we found some rice. As I say, this was a nice house. They had beautiful silverware. If I'm not mistaken, it was a black walnut table that we had. So we set that table up with the finest silverware and crystal ware, had fresh chicken with rice and warm air coming out of the fireplace, smoke coming out of the chimney. We were living it up on Thanksgiving Day, right on the front line!

DePue: Was this in Germany then?

Farmer: Oh, yes. Oh yes, this is in Germany.

DePue: The Roer River, R-o-e-r?

Farmer: Well, there's R-o-e-r. There's R-u-h-r. There's three of them.

DePue: I think you said in the book R-u-r, or something like that.

Farmer: Okay, yeah.

DePue: But this is the R-o-e-r River?

Farmer: I think I referred to it as R-u-h-r. But what I was surprised about is that, even though we were so close to this river, I never actually got to see it. As a matter of fact, I didn't get to see it till after the war was over. I went back there. And if I was comparing rivers, I certainly wouldn't be comparing this to the Mississippi. It'd be more like comparing it to the Sangamon River. (laugh)

DePue: You mentioned that the woman who lived there came back. Did she stay there a lot?

Farmer: Oh, no, no, no. She was just there for a short while. She come and got this butter and got back out. I don't know. She might have picked up an egg or two or something out in the back. But no, we just didn't want them. Of course, we weren't quite too happy with this situation, because we didn't

know whether she could be assessing our capabilities there, like whether we had one guy or 15 guys in that house, or something. So we weren't too happy. We kind of wanted to shoo her out, get her out.

DePue: What did the Army say about how to treat the Germans, how to take care of their property, things like that?

Farmer: Well, I don't know. It seemed like pretty much everybody, all the GIs, were pretty much on our own. Number one, we were told not to fraternize with the civilians. We were told, if we could, just to group them together and get them out of the combat area. And generally, that went along pretty good, although I do recall one incident where we were moving up in a block of houses, and we asked this one German couple was there any German soldiers in their house. They were out in front. And no, "No soldat. No soldat." But then, of course, we didn't take their word for it. Went in there, and they found one guy in there. So that really made us mad. (laugh) They weren't truthful with us then. You know it could have resulted in several deaths of our guys. But generally, civilians weren't a problem, as far as I'm concerned. I think they wanted to get out of the way of any combat operations. So it seemed like to me, they were generally out of the way and gone.

DePue: Were you given instructions to respect and take care of their property?

Farmer: I can't say as I was given any instructions on that. (laugh) Maybe I willingly forgot it, but I can't say that. And I will say this. Some GIs did have a yearning to, shall we say, loot and pick up something that they thought might be of value to them later. But I was not one to pick up any loot. Number one, I didn't figure I had a place to carry it, and number two, I was more interested in saving my skin than saving a vase off that table. (laugh)

DePue: From what you described, it sounds like what you were watching across the river was a lot of troop movements to the south.

Farmer: Right. I can't say as I saw a lot of soldiers, but it was so many vehicles. Now, of course, the soldiers could have been in the vehicles, but as I recall, it was mostly vehicles, tanks.

DePue: And if I got my timeline right, this would be just a few days before the Battle of the Bulge started.

Farmer: Yes. Let's see. I think the Battle of the Bulge was probably around what, the 16th of December, something like that.

DePue: Right.

Farmer: And this was — I already mentioned it was around Thanksgiving. So Thanksgiving would probably be about the third or fourth week in November. I'm as certain as I'm sitting here, that was part of the force that would later be known as the greatest military operation ever opposed against the United States.

DePue: Shortly after this, it sounds like you also ended up at the Jűlich Sports Palace.

Farmer: Yeah.

DePue: How do you pronounce that?

Farmer: Well, I think they just forget about the J and it's Ülich.

DePue: Ülich.

Farmer: Jülich Sportz Platz, p-l-a-t-z. It's kind of like that. And as the allies moved forward, they wanted to clear everything up on this side of the river. And commercially, the Germans wanted to keep a foothold on the opposite side, if they could. So there was a great concern about this area around us, the Sportz Platz. There was a swimming pool. There was the Sportz Platz itself, and maybe another couple of other facilities. The Germans just did everything they could to control them. And as I recall this operation, we moved up to one of these farm complexes, a guterg, or whatever. And our particular area that we were in, I remembered it was like a little chicken house, and that's where our squad, I guess you might say, that was our squad's command post. That's where we kind of congregated and operated from. And I guess because the Sportz Platz was one of the bigger units there at the sports area, the allies wanted to know if they could take it. So they designed a patrol to go there and see exactly what was in the Sportz Platz, or what was around it. I was the second one in this patrol. I think we might have had as many as seven, but between five and seven. I'm not sure of the amount. And I can recall, or I can show you in the book (laugh) the picture of this area, but there's a long forest area along the river, and then the sports area is to the left of that. And we went along this forest area, parallel with the river, till we got up to the Sportz Platz. We stopped for a couple seconds, kind of got organized again, and we thought we'll continue on around the Sportz Platz, between the Sportz Platz and the river, and come back to where we started from. The only thing that we saw of any significance was one German soldier, and we had captured him, so we didn't think there was much significance to this place.

And as we were standing at our original starting place, we soon had our minds changed, because all of a sudden, they just opened up on us with machine guns. They had machine guns, and burp guns, and maybe a few rifle fires. I mistakenly thought I saw a tank dug in there, too. And so

we left that area on the double and went back to our chicken house and reported what we had just seen. I piped up and said, "Yeah, they've even got a tank dug in there." Well, one of the lieutenants heard me say that, and he says, "Well, we'll have to get that damn tank knocked out."

Of course, I knew you're not going to knock a tank out with a bazooka. (laugh) But that was an order, and so I was given a bazooka man and his ammunition carrier, and away we go. So I get outside the chicken house, and I tell them that we've got an order to shoot what I believed to be a tank. "And that's what we'll do. But I just want you to follow my instructions, and when we get up there closer again, I'll tell you where that tank is. And then I want you to give me five seconds, because I'm going to get out there, because when you shoot that bazooka, with that flash back, they're going to zero in on you. So I would suggest, as soon as you shoot it, you better take off." So anyway, they went through with that plan. And we sneaked up there, and what I thought was the tank, I pointed out to them. I tiptoed up and pointed it out to them. Give me five seconds. And so that was the way it was. The bazooka went off and, as expected, the small arms fire went off. And on the way back, I can't tell you exactly what happened. I don't know whether I was knocked out with a concussion, whether by field artillery or by a B-2 bomb, a buzz bomb. Anyway, that ended my combat career. And somehow, I guess, I got back to the chicken house, and the next time I wake up, I'm in a hospital in Liege, Belgium.

DePue: Do you know how long you were out?

Farmer: No.

DePue: Several days, a couple of hours?

Farmer: No. I'd say it was a few hours, but I can't tell you for sure.

DePue: Okay and you said the hospital in Liege, Belgium?

Farmer: Yeah, I was there. That's getting back into after the Battle of the Bulge had started. I think that was one of the trophies that the Germans wanted was Liege, and they pointed their attack towards Liege. And the Americans were certainly aware of this, and they decided to vacate the hospital, to relocate it. On the day after Christmas in that year, we were told to pick up our belongings. We were going to go to the airport, and they were going to evacuate this hospital. We thought we'd fly back to southern France, to a hospital back there someplace. But as we got to the airport and lined up on what I think was a C-46, where the seats were along the side. We finally got on this plane. Its propellers were going. And the pilot said, "I'm getting the heck out of here." A buzz bomb just hit on the other end of the airport. And he said, "Shut the doors. We're leaving."

So that's the way it was. And one of the guys finally got up enough nerve to ask the pilot where we was going, and he said we was going to England. Oh, we thought we were flying to heaven. (laugh)

DePue: When you had this experience at the Sportz Platz, was that before the Battle of the Bulge started?

Farmer: Oh, yes, yes, yeah. I want to say something else about that Sportz Platz. I didn't learn this until several weeks later about this Sportz Platz battle. And apparently the reason I didn't learn about it was because I was in a hospital either in England or in Liege, and I didn't get the *Stars and Stripes*. The *Stars and Stripes* had a story about the Sportz Platz, and I learned about that story from a guy in the hospital from a 2nd Armored Division. And somewhere there I mentioned that, and he says, "Oh, you were there?" And I said, "Yeah." He says, "Oh, that was quite a battle, wasn't it?" I said, "Well, I just knew I was kind of limited. I went around that thing." He says, "The *Stars and Stripes* had a story on that."

After the initial patrol that night, another unit of the 116th attacked it, and they couldn't take it. Another unit, the 117th attacked it and they couldn't take it. And this was after daily bombings and strafings by the United States Air Force. They bombed that place. They strafed it. They knew they had everybody in there dead. They tried taking it the next day, and they couldn't. I'm not completely sure of the unit that did finally took this place, but it was two weeks after I had made that patrol around. (laugh) What they found out when they finally captured this was that the Germans had dug a tunnel, or probably had slave labor build a tunnel from the Sportz Platz to the river, so they could bring troops up that river, drop them off at the tunnel, come in there, fight. If they had an injury, they could take him out. If they're starting to strafe from the bottom, go back out the tunnel. That's the way they were able to hold onto that for so long. I thought that was really an interesting thing.

DePue: Yeah. Well, you missed the Battle of the Bulge, but I just wanted to mention a couple things here. The Sportz Platz is in a German town to the west of Cologne, probably 30 miles west.

Farmer: Yeah, that's probably right.

DePue: And you guys, the 29th Division, the 116th would have been north of the Bulge, itself, maybe on the shoulder of the Bulge.

Farmer: Oh, yes, yes. Yeah, we were north of Aachen, yeah. Well, I'll make one correction. Now all this while, we weren't fighting as the 29th Division. We were fighting only as the 116th Regiment. I don't know why we were divorced from the 29th Division at that point, but we fought just as a Regiment, and not as a part of the 29th Division.

DePue: Well, except for this one experience where you had 60 German soldiers surrender, it sounds like the Germans were still putting up very stiff resistance.

Farmer: Oh, yeah. If they had a situation where they could fight, and it looks like they were going to win, they were hard to come by. And they were very good at snipers. It seemed like they always could place someone in a particular spot that would prevent you to advance. So, as far as combat soldiers, I think they were good but, I'll say again, up to a point. And if they could see a point where they weren't going to make it at all, they were very anxious to surrender. I'll say that again.

DePue: Tell me about the time you spent in England in the hospital.

Farmer: Well, I can't say as I have any memories of the hospital in England. It was just sort of blah. I can't recall. I can't recall of any experience and so forth.

DePue: What kind of injuries did you have?

Farmer: Well, it all had to do with hearing, with my hearing.

DePue: Would they call this a concussion case today?

Farmer: I guess that's what they call it, yeah.

DePue: You had some hearing loss after that?

Farmer: Well, it came up gradually. First, I had a ringing in my ears. But this was sort of continuous from the time that I was in combat. First, it was ringing in the ears, and I complained about that as soon as I got out of the service. And I went directly to Hines Veterans Hospital in Chicago. They did several tests, and they said we can't say that this was caused by combat. It could be, or it couldn't be. And when do you notice the most ringing? And I said, "Well, when it's the quietest part of the day. Like going to bed at night when it's quiet, the ringing seems to get louder." And I'll never forget there was a Lieutenant Colonel that was a doctor, and he said, "Well, I'll tell you what you do. You get you a radio, and have it so that it plays 'til long enough after you get to sleep and that'll solve your problems." (laugh) And that's the way it went. So eventually, the ringing more or less subsided, and then the lack of hearing set in, and it just keeps getting worse. I've got no hearing at all in this ear and probably, right now, with the hearing aid that I've got, I've probably got about 10 percent hearing in this ear.

DePue: Were there any other injuries that you had?

Farmer: I never had a scratch, or a cut. There was a time in rest area that the Lieutenant said, "Does anybody have any cut, scratch, so forth? You can

get a Purple Heart. Just let me know." If you had a scratch on your finger, you could get a Purple Heart. He would sign you up. So it just shows that there's, I think, something lacking, especially in the way they treat Purple Heart or non-Purple Heart.

While I'm on that subject, I'm going to say something else. If you're a Purple Heart recipient, you got certain benefits. If you're a POW, you got more benefits. You could be hurt without getting a scratch. You could lose your hearing. You could lose a lot of things. I don't know. I find this hard to say, but if you were a prisoner of war, I mentioned that you got certain benefits. But if you **prevented** yourself from being a prisoner of war, that's it, nothing, nothing! And I say this because, at this one time, I mentioned before where we were cut out completely, around, on top of our house, all the way around our house, their tank outside our house, and we were told to surrender. And we could have easily. And I think I told you where that one lieutenant said, "We are completely at their mercy. Shall we surrender?" And so there is a place where could have easily been a prisoner of war, and there wouldn't have been any question about it. Because physically, it looked like that would have been a smart thing to do, to surrender when you're in a situation like that. But I'll say again. You can be in that position of not surrendering, you don't get anything. But if you surrender, you get more benefits. (laugh) You see what my point is? (laugh)

DePue: Well, maybe when you're a prisoner of war, you weren't looking at it that way.

Farmer: (laugh) Well, I'll concede. You know being a prisoner a war for months was no holiday.

DePue: But people in your situation, where you're average infantrymen, in combat all the time, what never happens is time for the lieutenant or the officer to write up the awards. That always kind of gets forgotten, it seems like.

Farmer: Excuse me?

DePue: That for people like yourself in combat, oftentimes, there's no time to write the awards that maybe should have been written.

Farmer: Yeah, yeah, that's right.

DePue: After you get done from the hospital in England, did you go back to Europe?

Farmer: Well, I will say this. At the hospital in England, all of us that were there were assigned to noncombat duty. And not only were they using a lot of infantrymen, and having difficulty keeping that supply line going for infantrymen, they were also losing officers. And higher command decided

to make an officer's training camp in Europe. And a lot of our group from the hospital in England was assigned to this officer's candidate school, which was in Fontainebleau, France. It was about 30 miles, I think, south of Paris. And it was a prior French army post. After that, it was a German army post. And then, finally, we used that as a place for the officer's training school. Now Fort Benning, Georgia, during the war, was known as producing 90-day wonders, but our camp there, we produced 40-day wonders! It was supposedly picking up noncommissioned officers off the front line that showed some success at being leaders. So they were the ones that were preferred to go to this school. They were given a commission afterward. I can't recall, but I would say we had between maybe 300 or 400 at one time there.

It might be of a little bit of interest to you that the First Sergeant in the academy where I was, his name was Herndon, and he was from Springfield, Illinois. He was quite a guy. Been in the Army 27 years. He had stripes up his arm (laugh) you wouldn't believe. So, I forget what year he was born, but it was way back. (laugh) I'll never forget this one class he had. He came out one morning, and somebody had gone to the toilet on his walkway to his office, and he was pretty mad about it. So he called these officers out, the officers-to-be, and said, "I want that person that made this mess to step forward." Nobody stepped forward. And he said again, "I'm asking one," and nobody stepped forward. So he restricted them all to the barracks for two weeks. And two weeks goes by. He asked it again. Nobody volunteered, and he restricted them again for two weeks. (laugh) He was a mean one. (laugh)

DePue: Well, he had a good reason then.

Farmer: Yeah. (laugh)

DePue: What were your duties at this school?

Farmer: I was mail clerk there, and I was in charge of that mail section. And we were there at the university, at this officer's training camp, till a little bit after June, when the war ended over there. And of course, they had no more need for officers, so they disbanded that school. And what the problem was at that point was getting the soldiers home from Europe. Somebody wanted to go send them on down to Japan. They had so many soldiers there, and only so many ships to take them in. So they decided to have a university in England where these soldiers waiting with lots of points could go to the school and get a college credit. So they sent the company that I was in from this officer [school] to this university in Shrivenham, England, which is about 80 miles west of London. And they sent over about between 200 and 300 university professors and gave them an officer's uniform, with no rank, just the uniform. As I say, these guys could go to school there and get college credit. It was a pretty nice place

for us. We had our own football team. We had our own radio station. It was just kind of like a vacation. I know I could sit up in my room and look out over the football field and hear the game being broadcast. (laugh) I remember we played a Canadian team one time. In one half, they played American rules, and the other half, they played Canadian rules. (laugh) I think they have one more man on their football team. I think they've got 12 men. (laugh) We had our own cheerleaders. It had some sign of a college atmosphere.

DePue: You stayed there for several months. Why were you there, when you had a lot of points already?

Farmer: I didn't have enough.

DePue: You didn't have enough.

Farmer: No. A lot of those, you know, they'd been over to North Africa, and then they went over to Europe, so they had beaucoup points. (laugh)

DePue: Do you remember V-E Day?

Farmer: No. I think that's one of the mysteries of my stay in the Army. I was in France at Fontainebleau, but I cannot remember, for the life of me, what happened on V-E Day. And I think, as I reflect on it, it must have been the fact that my V-E Day was when I left the front line. It was just like getting away from it all. To me, it was like the war was over, the war and combat; it's all, more or less, a safe job, shall we say.

DePue: They weren't going to send you back into combat?

Farmer: Yes. I forget what they called a noncombatant status. They had a term for it. I can't remember what it was.

DePue: Do you remember dropping the atomic bomb and the end of war in Japan?

Farmer: Not necessarily so. After the war was over in Europe, and we were pretty well satisfied that we weren't going to be going to Japan, it just seemed like the war was kind of over for us.

DePue: Do you think Truman made the right decision to drop the bomb?

Farmer: Well, I've heard a lot of comments on that, and I've talked to a lot of soldiers about that, and I've talked to soldiers that was on the troop ships, ready to go Japan. They are all firmly convinced that he made the right decision, excluding the fact that they killed hundreds, or maybe thousands, of Japanese in those two bombings. But it was their feeling that the deaths would have been of a much larger proportion if they hadn't have dropped them.

DePue: I know that you had some bad news when you were in France.

Farmer: Oh, yes. It was right after the war was over over there, and I had a cablegram that one of my aunts had died. And I felt so bad about that. But then, I think it was two days later, I got another cablegram, and it said my mother was very sick. And then I think another day, I got the third cablegram, and it said she had died. But being as the war was over, I didn't think I would have any difficulty getting an emergency furlough to come home for the funeral. I had a lot of support from my unit. As a matter of fact, the officers in charge, as I understand this, stayed up all night, not only preparing my furlough, but preparing an air flight back to home. And just when I was thinking about packing up and leaving, I get a call from the company officer, and they said they got some bad news for me, that my request had been turned down at what they referred to at the highest level. And to me, the highest level had to be the President of the country, the highest level. And I was aggrieved further in the next day or two, when it was learned that President's Roosevelt's dog was flown from New York to California, and I just wondered if I was bumped by his dog. Now, his dog was named Fala, F-a-l-a, (laugh) and it was a very famous dog. I have no proof that that was why I was dropped, (laugh) but it's always kind of been a concern of mine. (laugh)

DePue: I understand that back in Shrivenham, at this makeshift college where you were serving, they had German POW's there?

Farmer: Oh, yes. We had at least 200, if not more, and they just did everything. I guess I could almost say we made slaves out of them. (laugh) We had little potbelly stoves in our barracks, and they would start the fire. They would clean the ashes out. They would clean our apartment. They would make our beds. They would do our barber work. They would do all the cooking. As I say, it was close to making slaves of them. One time, I went to the barbershop to get a haircut, and I thought, gee, it'd sure be nice to get a shave. I'd never had a shave from somebody. So I asked this barber if he'd give me a shave. He didn't look like he was too happy with that request, but he proceeded. And then when I laid there, and I saw him have that doggone razor in his hand, (laugh) I got to wondering whether that was such a smart idea or not. Anyway, that's the first and only time I ever asked for a shave. (laugh)

DePue: Why weren't they sent back to Germany by that time? Do you know?

Farmer: Well, if we could use them, we might as well use them. I guess that was the idea.

DePue: Well, the other interesting part about this chapter of your story is what happened after all the GIs shipped back home. What group did you get after that?

Farmer: Oh, well, after they got the bulk of GIs out of England, they had this one more problem. They had, I can't imagine how many but hundreds, if not thousands, of GI brides in England, and some in France, that had to be shipped back to the United States. So we converted our staff -- still the staff that we had the officer's training school, and the staff that we had there at Shrivenham. Now then, we're still staying at Shrivenham, but instead of having students, we're going to have these GI brides. They would come in from all over in busses, private cars, or whatever, and get shots, go through customs, get money exchanged. Most importantly was to get their luggage stenciled and steel-banded, ready for the boat. And so their stay was from anywhere from like three days to maybe two weeks up there, depending upon transportation. My particular job there was customs, and I would go through the luggage that they were going to send to the states. There were certain things they couldn't take from England. Number one, which the English really wanted to impress on all of us, was **no silver could leave England**. And then, amongst other things, feathers, for poultry disease. Any GI clothing, they couldn't take that. And I recall one, I thought she was a rather elderly bride, but she had a big box of sterling silver. She couldn't take that to the States, so she had to get it boxed up and sent back to her folks. She was pretty upset about it. The English didn't want that silver leaving their country. (laugh)

DePue: What was your impression of the war brides?

Farmer: Oh, we kind of got a kick out of them. Regardless of where they were going, we would say, "You're going to Dallas, Texas? Oh, you'll hate it down there!" (laugh) No matter where they was going, Pensacola, Texas, Florida, "Oh, you'll love it! You will love it down there! It'll be so muggy down there." (laugh) We should have gotten fired from our job. (laugh)

DePue: Were they pretty excited about going?

Farmer: Oh, yeah. They all seemed to be pretty excited, yeah.

DePue: But their husbands were already back in the United States?

Farmer: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Here again, we had several prisoners of war there helping us. When we inspected their luggage, we had to do it in their presence. And then as soon as it was inspected, if they had a lock, we put a lock on it. But then it was steel-banded and stenciled to Dallas, Texas. There was stencil all over the place. But yeah, we used those German prisoners of war. And this is where I kind of got on the friendly side of one of them. I think I'll call him Hans or something like that. You know you see him every day. You work with him every day. And then the next day, you talk to him a little bit. One day, we got talking about the Army, or where he was, and where I was, and come to find out, it seemed like we

kept getting closer and closer, and then it seemed like it was a possibility that we might even be shooting at one another. And, for some reason, that kind of changed my attitude toward him, and I just didn't like him as much after that as I did before then. (laugh) I thought, you know, he could have killed me. (laugh)

DePue: I wanted to take the opportunity. Maybe if I could ask you to read what I have highlighted here, because I know you asked him what he thought of American soldiers, what German soldiers thought of American soldiers. Could you read this for us?

Farmer: Yeah. (reads) I asked him how the typical German soldier perceived the typical American soldier. His final answer to this question was, a soldier who we were most afraid of, a quiet, serious-minded person, one who wanted to get their job completed and get home. Okay.

DePue: And then the second part is what you guys, what Americans thought of German soldiers.

Farmer: Yeah. (reads) I would say that he was very good at playing war games. He was patient, set up many traps in which we became victims. He was good at fighting a hard battle while retreating. It seemed to me, however, that if they suddenly be placed in a very difficult situation, they were most easy to surrender. Right or wrong, I am of the opinion that surrender was a part of their strategy, both on offense and defense. I also believe they were really tired of fighting a long war. No doubt that they were filtered back to them that the American captors treated German prisoners very well. I believe that the average German soldiers were never as dedicated soldier to their cause as were the dedicated American line. The freedom and the American way had more to offer than what their country stood for, or they had to come home to.

DePue: Is that to say that you and your American buddies believed in what you were doing?

Farmer: Right, right, right, right.

DePue: No question in your mind?

Farmer: No question. (laugh)

DePue: I want to ask you a couple questions about off duty time in England. Did you get a chance to see a little bit of England?

Farmer: Well, I went down to Wales, Cardiff, Wales. I can't think of the other town, oh Birmingham. Of course, I went through Southampton two or three times, but I didn't go there on a pass. I went to this little town of Shrivenham, and that's where we got fish and chips and a beer.

DePue: Did you have a chance to date any of the English girls?

Farmer: Oh, yes. It's peculiar that for some reason or other, it seemed like the British girls really were more fond of Americans, by far, than they were of the British soldiers. That is what it seemed to me. You had no trouble getting a date, no matter what town you were in. If you just had that American uniform on, they just loved you. (laugh)

DePue: Were some of these girls trying to get to the United States, do you think?

Farmer: Oh, I definitely think so. I think most of them were, yeah, yeah. Yep, I believe that.

DePue: One of the things you mentioned, the story about cognac, I found that interesting.

Farmer: Oh, well, that had to be, of course, the first year after the war was over. And we were in England, and apparently, they -- wait a minute. We've got a time out.

DePue: Okay.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Okay, we took a very quick break. We were talking about cognac.

Farmer: Oh, yes. Well, as I say, it was the first Christmas after the war was over in Europe. The French government thought it would be a nice thing if they could maybe cheer up the GI's from the United States that was overseas, so they decided to give quite a sizeable amount of cognac to as many of the troops as they could get lined up. Well, we were aware of this. They told us probably about two weeks before Christmas that we would be getting — I don't remember whether it was a quart -- let's just say it was a bottle of cognac before Christmas, and then we'd also be getting one for New Year's. So that sounded pretty good for us. Well, to keep this cognac secure, they put this at the military post, the military headquarters, and that's where the military police guarded any American soldier that's subject to them, and tries to keep everything on an even keel.

Well, as Christmas approached, one night, I guess it must have been the lieutenant in charge decided he would sample maybe a bottle of cognac. And by dern, it seemed like it was so good, he'd better have another one. That made his generosity even more favorable, so Hey, why not share this with these guys here under lock and key? So he unlocks them. Well, to make a long story short, they really had quite a chaos there at the MP headquarters. Between what they had consumed, and what they had given away themselves, it greatly shortened the amount of cognac to be given to the balance of the soldiers over there. Matter of fact, it cut it in half, that you would just get one bottle either for New Year's or for Christmas, which was your choice. And so we were kind of disappointed at that.

But I'll never forget. I had a British girlfriend at the time, and I take this bottle of cognac and, hey, we're going to have a nice little night out. We're going to go out to a pub and have a drink of cognac, so that's what we did. But this bartender wasn't too favorable of somebody else bringing in liquor to his place, and he said that just wouldn't go. So he ordered us out of there. (laugh) So I gave that doggone bottle of cognac to the first GI I saw. I said the heck with that cognac. (laugh)

DePue: Well, you made for one happy GI, though.

Farmer: Yeah. (laugh)

DePue: When did you finally get to the United States?

Farmer: Well, I can't give you the specific date right now. I've got that in there someplace.

DePue: I'm thinking its March.

Farmer: It was around February of '46, I guess.

DePue: You've got March 23, 1946.

Farmer: Okay, okay. So finally, while we're there at this bride's center in England, our turn comes up. Not like coming over, we're assigned to a little victory ship coming back. Instead of 16,000 troops, there's only, I think, about 1,200 soldiers, and maybe 600 sailors. And those sailors had been stationed in Southampton during the war. So there we are, almost less than 2,000, as opposed to 16,000. And the captain of the ship was a real congenial fellow, and he welcomed us. Matter of fact, he stood by the gangplank as we got on, and just seemed like a fun guy. And we hadn't been out on the water but about a day, and he said there was a stowaway on a boat, and that kind of got us excited. Well come to find out the stowaway was a girl. And the next day, we find out that the stowaway was a girlfriend of one of the ship's crew, and that they were going to get

married. And the marriage would be out in the ocean, so the captain was going to be the one. And we only had one other lady on the ship that could stand up. She was a nurse. I think she had a captain's rank. So they had the wedding the next day, and they were supposed to give them a private place to stay.

Well, as it happened, we took a southern route back to the states. It was really enjoyable, from the cold, damp winter in England, to be out in the sun. And of course, there we were, out there onboard the ship, bareback, bare from the waist up. And lo and behold, if the captain doesn't come in and say that one of his buddies is coming over with a load of troops for Europe, and his buddy said that they would like to meet out in the middle of the Atlantic. So the next day, they were supposed to meet about eleven o'clock, something like that. So we all got out, eventually, waiting to see the other ship coming in. And finally, we could spot it up. I'd say we probably got within a block of each other and then shut the motor off, and we were just kind of floating around there with the waves, out in the middle of the Atlantic. Well, here's these GI's on this other ship. They're all sitting up straight and prim and proper. And here's these GI's and us, we're going all over the place, no shirts on or nothing. So we started giving them hell, and we'd say, "Hey, where you been? The war's over. Why do you want to go over there now for?" (laugh) So after about five minutes of that tomfoolery, they cranked the motor up and away we went, each on our way.

The other thing I remember about that trip was coming along the Atlantic coast. It seemed like we must have got there like about five o'clock in the morning, and the lights were on. Then it seemed like we could just never come down to New York harbor. (laugh) I guess we were just too anxious to get home. But finally, we come in, and came by the Statue of Liberty. And with all the ships giving us an honorable toot, it was very emotional for most of us. Just really glad to get back home. (laugh)

DePue: Something you remember to this day?

Farmer: Oh, sure. Yep.

DePue: And once you got to New York City, did you take a train out to Illinois?

Farmer: Well, you know, I can't remember getting on a troop train, but I'm sure we did. We went to — I can't think of this camp in Wisconsin.

DePue: Camp McCoy.

Farmer: Camp McCoy, that's right. We were there for a couple of days and caught a bus back home to Waverly.

DePue: Do you remember finally getting back to Waverly and seeing the family, that reunion?

Farmer: Oh, well, I'm having trouble distinguishing between this time when I come home, or whether it was the last time, when I was on a furlough. I know that one time, you know, there was no bus service to Waverly, so I had to hitchhike from Springfield. And, I don't know. I don't think I remember hitchhiking from Springfield when I finally got my discharge. I remember hitchhiking at two o'clock in the morning when I was on furlough, but I can't remember. Hitchhiking might seem kind of foreign now, but it was very common during the war, and really very effective. I really didn't mind those, and people didn't mind picking you up. They were happy to do it. They weren't suspicious of you like you would be today.

DePue: Did you have any intentions of staying in the military?

Farmer: I thought about it, but I thought, no, I think I'll just get out.

DePue: What did you do then, with the rest of your life?

Farmer: Well, I guess what they call rocked the chair. I think I did a rocking chair for about six months or so. And then I had a buddy of mine, he said, "What do you say let's go to business school?" and I said, "Well, okay with me. I don't care." So off we went. We went to Brown's Business School. I went to school at Brown's for two-and-a-half years, yeah.

DePue: What after that then? What was your career?

Farmer: Well, I wound up with the Department of Revenue, and I worked for them for 17 years. I was in a tax unit known as the capital stock tax. And it was also defined by the Supreme Court as a personal property tax. So when a personal property tax was eliminated in Illinois, that eliminated my job, too. (laugh) Then I went to work for the Illinois Commerce Commission. I worked there for another 13 years, and retired from the State then.

DePue: You must have been one of the least favorite tax collectors in the state.

Farmer: Oh, well, the thing about it, the tax that I administered was on corporations. And I don't know whether it was something to be proud of, or something to be ashamed of. (laugh) But I was the assessor for this capital stock tax, and I put an assessment on Illinois Power Company for $105 million. And to my knowledge, that was the highest assessment ever placed on anybody or anything, including Commonwealth Edison. Now, Commonwealth Edison was not in the jurisdiction of the department. It was under the jurisdiction of Chicago. And even though Commonwealth Edison could eat Illinois Power alive, their assessment was like about $38 million, as opposed to Illinois Power at $105 million. (laugh)

DePue: When did you get married?

Farmer: I got married on October 14, 1950.

DePue: Tell us about meeting your wife then.

Farmer: Well, it may be a little bit peculiar, but I met my wife at a pool hall. I talked about my buddy and I going to business college. And every morning, we'd go down to what was called the Center. And the Center, they served breakfast, and they also had a pool hall in the back. So one morning, my buddy and I were having breakfast there, and these two girls go by. And one of them knew my buddy, and so they called him in. And that's when I first met Mary, at a pool hall. (laugh)

DePue: Mary is her first name?

Farmer: Yeah.

DePue: What was her last name?

Farmer: Cadagin, C-a-d-a-g-i-n.

DePue: So that's why the house is so decked out for St. Patty's Day.

Farmer: That's right. That's right, right. I think I told you about St. Patrick or Irish. I always assumed, with the name of Farmer, that I was of English descent. It seemed like Farmer was more like English. In our travels after I retired, I was in Oxford, England. And there's a cemetery right in the center of the city, and I found the name of John Farmer, and so I was pretty much convinced then that I was from English descent. But then later, I was in Ireland, and my wife wanted to go to the Belleek Plant. At that time, Belleek was in Northern Ireland. We were staying at a bed & breakfast, and when I signed in for the bed & breakfast the lady noticed my name, Farmer. And she says, "Oh, I know lots of Farmers." And she proceeded to get the telephone book out. They only have one telephone book in all of Ireland. And she showed me all the long list of Farmer names in the telephone book. And then she says, "You know what? Fermanagh County — which is where the Belleek Plant is — Fermanagh in Gaelic means farmer." (laugh) So now I don't know where I'm from, Irish or England. (laugh)

DePue: Or you could have been an Englishman whose family ended up in Ireland. (laugh) Okay, a couple more questions about your time in the service. The food, especially k-rations, or c-rations. Remember much about the food?

Farmer: Well, I don't remember too much about c-rations. I thought c-rations were pretty good, if you could get some way to heat them. If you had time, and if a situation warranted it, it wasn't bad food. I can't say that much for k-

rations, but I survived. You look back. You wonder why they issued cigarettes in that, but that's the way they did, yeah.

DePue: That's how you started smoking?

Farmer: Oh, yes. I didn't smoke 'til I went in the Army.

DePue: Was there a favorite k-ration?

Farmer: No, I can't say as any favorite.

DePue: Was there one that you hated?

Farmer: No, I can't remember any that I really particularly hated. Spam, I can't say as I particularly liked that, but maybe that was a c-ration. I'm not sure.

DePue: I think it was. One of the stories that struck me was about onions.

Farmer: Oh. (laugh)

DePue: Maybe this was after the war was over?

Farmer: No, no, this is when I was at that officer's training camp there in Fontainebleau. And it was kind of a strange arrangement, the facility that we was in. It was sort of like a castle, and yet I can't recall a moat around it. The window that was close to the mess hall was right over a local man's garden; sometimes we would hop out that window go run across to his garden and jump over a wall. Then we'd be outside. We wouldn't have to go by a guard, and stuff like that. So we noticed what a neat garden this guy had with his onions and radishes and everything. It's just, really, not a weed in the place. You never saw him, so we thought, boy, it's been a long time since I had a fresh onion. (laugh) So we pulled up three or four of those onions there, and washed them off and took them with us to the mess hall, and we had onions for... (laugh).

Well, I'm kind of getting ahead of myself, because when we moved into this place, I said it was prior French, prior German, and even some American unit had been there in front of us for a short while. In this one building, one of our guys found quite a supply of what we'd probably refer to as GI soap. Now soap in France at that time was like a bar of gold. Oh, you could name your price for it. We knew we had a gold mine there, so we didn't tell any of the officers, or anybody else. It was just sort of a secret amongst about six or seven of us. If we ever needed money, we could take a bar of soap or two and go sell it, and be on our way. And so that was the arrangement. At this one particular time, my buddy and I, we found out we're just about broke, so we say, "Hey, how about taking a couple of bars of soap and selling it down to the bar?" So we get a pillowcase and put a couple of bars of soap apiece in there and hop out

this window. Hop across the garden, over the fence, over the stone wall, and we'd go down to the tavern. Dang, our luck, it was closed. It was some sort of French holiday. The ladies told us that they would open up at six. Okay, so we come back, and go back in the garden. In the back of his garden he had a lot of hedge posts all stacked up, so we just threw that soap in there, and went back in the apartment, and waited for six o'clock to come at night. So six o'clock approached. We jumped out the window again, and head for the hedge posts, and no soap there. So apparently, this Frenchman and gardener had been watching us all the time. He didn't complain about his onions. So he was pretty well paid for those with that soap. (laugh)

DePue: Did you ever think, during all this time, about, you know, if this was my dad's farm back in Illinois, I might be upset?

Farmer: (laugh) Never gave it a thought. (laugh)

DePue: Did you ever have an opportunity to see any entertainers?

Farmer: No, I can't say as I ever had an opportunity to see any notable. It seemed like they were all with some other unit. I never did see anybody.

DePue: Okay, we're about at the time I want to wrap up, but here's the question I've got for you. You wrote *Angels in Combat Boots* in what year? When did you write this? What year did this come out?

DePue: 2000. Okay, there it is.

Farmer: Okay.

DePue: Why did you write this book?

Farmer: Well, the reason I wrote the book was because I kept getting requests from my kids, especially Mike, to get something down from World War II.

DePue: Had you told them a lot of these stories over the years?

Farmer: No, no.

DePue: Why not?

Farmer: I was clogged up. It seemed like that we just wanted to forget about it and move on. So not until my youngest son, Terry, took us to see *Saving Private Ryan* did I have any indication of writing a book. But when I saw a 29th Division patch on the soldiers in that movie, I thought well, maybe I should be telling some of my stories, too.

DePue: How did you manage to remember so well, after all those years?

Farmer: Well, the only thing I can say is, up until that point, I had led such a drab, unimpressive life, that getting out into the real world, going to other states, going to other countries, particularly going into a matter of life and death situations, was such a change in my system that I think it just left a lasting impression.

DePue: What was it like, the experience of writing these stories down? Was that an emotional experience?

Farmer: Well…

DePue: Okay, we're going to have to take a break here.

Farmer: Okay.

(pause in recording)

DePue: We had to take a very quick break, but we're back. And the last question I asked you before we took the break was: what was it like to write these stories, and write the book.

Farmer: Well, as I say, I really hadn't planned on writing a book. I guess I procrastinated. Maybe I did, in the back of my mind, but in really getting down to it, I really didn't want to get going on it. But as I say, after Terry took Mary and I to see *Saving Private Ryan*, I changed my mind. I thought, well maybe I better get some of my stories down that's in the back of my mind for so long. So that's how I come in to do that.

DePue: Did somebody help you write the book?

Farmer: No, nobody helped me write the book, and I typed every word of it. Mary and I proofed it. The only thing as far as with the book was the actual printing of it. I had no help at all.

DePue: Was it published locally then?

Farmer: I did not have it published. I just wanted to give it to some of my friends and to my relatives. I never thought about going to a publisher.

DePue: Have your kids or your grandchildren come and talked to you about it after they've read this?

Farmer: Well, I've gone to some of my grandchildren's schools and given talks. That goes grade school and high school, as well. Aside from that, the veterans' crowd that we belonged to some five or six years ago had quite an extensive program to visit area schools and give discussions on World War II. So I participated in that, too, at the time.

DePue: I know that pretty late in your life, you got some awards. Did you ever receive a Purple Heart?

Farmer: I have never received a Purple Heart, no.

DePue: But you did get some other awards. I mean over here, we can see on the wall.

Farmer: Yeah. Well, I got the Ruptured Duck for getting out. (laugh) I got the Good Conduct Medal for not getting in the pen when I was in the service. I got the Marksmanship for proficiency in shooting the rifle. The one I'm most proud of is the Combat Infantryman's Badge. Of course, along with that goes the Bronze Star. A Bronze Star is one given for bravery in action. A lot of people don't understand the Bronze Star. They get a Bronze Star for being in a certain campaign, and they get another Bronze Star for being in another campaign. But this Bronze Star, this particular Bronze Star, is **the** Bronze Star, and it's not for a particular campaign. You will probably see some Bronze Stars on some ribbons up there, but that is entirely different than the Bronze Star, itself.

DePue: What was the action that you got the Bronze Star for?

Farmer: Well, I can't say as it was a specific action. It was the fact that you were in this situation for one or so many times that they just felt that you were deserving of the Bronze Star.

DePue: When did you receive the Bronze Star?

Farmer: Oh, I didn't receive it till probably seven or eight years ago, something like that maybe, something like that.

DePue: Wow! Can you tell us about the experience of getting your awards that far removed from the war itself?

Farmer: Well, I wouldn't have had many of these awards if it hadn't been for my son, Mike. He is really a historian. He always referred to me as his hero, and I said, "I'm no hero." He says, "Yes, you are, Dad." He started asking me about some of the stuff. I said, "No, I didn't want to. I just wanted to get out of the Army the quickest way out." And so he said, "Well maybe you should have some more rewards." And he says, "I'm going to see if I can find out." So he went to…

DePue: To the Department of Veterans Affairs?

Farmer: No. He went to one of the congressmen there.

DePue: Shimkus?

Farmer: Yeah, Shimkus.

DePue: John Shimkus.

Farmer: And so that was the time that Shimkus was able to get a response from the War Department, military. And it was also, as I mentioned before, the time that Senator Bob Dole was making collection for the World War II National Monument, and being as he was coming to Springfield to make the collection, he incorporated the presentation for my stuff, for my ribbons, and for his dad at the time that Dole was at the fairground, yeah.

DePue: So I'm looking at the picture here. You've got a pretty distinguished group. This is at the fairground?

Farmer: Yes, it was Veteran's Day out at the Fairgrounds, yeah.

DePue: Okay, so you've got John Shimkus, yourself. I guess that's Mary next to you.

Farmer: Yeah.

DePue: And Senator Bob Dole.

Farmer: Yeah.

DePue: Retired at that time, I assume.

Farmer: Yeah.

DePue: And next to him is George Ryan.

Farmer: Yeah, in prison at this time. (laugh)

DePue: That's quite a group.

Farmer: Well, there was actually a lot more than that. In back of the podium was probably 20 officers of various organizations in a line. There was a lot of American Legion and other veterans' groups there. The whole stage was probably 25 feet long, maybe 20 feet wide, and it was full of what you might call distinguished guests. It was just a lot of brass, (laugh) a lot of brass.

DePue: Did you know about this, or was this something of a surprise?

Farmer: Well, I didn't know about it coming up until like about a day or two before. They said, Well, you be at the fairgrounds at, I forget what they call that area there, governor something, governor's garden or something like that. And that was where. And as I say, it was on Veterans' Day, so

there was a lot of veterans in the audience, probably 500-600, something like that. So I really felt honored at that point. (laugh)

DePue: You didn't know you were going to be the center of attention?

Farmer: No.

DePue: Well, that would be something.

Farmer: Yeah.

DePue: I have a couple questions to wrap up then. You went through some pretty tough combat. You saw a lot of action. Did all of these experiences, did they change you? Did you end up being a different person coming out of this?

Farmer: Well, I imagine I was a different person. I was, and still am, pretty much reserved. But I think that probably let me come out a little bit, especially after I wrote this book. I probably came out of a, shall we say a shell, a little bit.

DePue: Are you proud of what of you did during the war?

Farmer: Oh, yes, yeah, definitely proud of it, yeah.

DePue: Does Veterans' Day and Memorial Day, do they mean more to you now because of that?

Farmer: Oh, yes. Oh, absolutely. Right.

DePue: You wrote in the book about hearing the Star Spangled Banner and seeing the flag and things like that.

Farmer: Right, right. Oh yes, I still get emotional, particularly at a sports event. They play the Star Spangled Banner, and it just automatically brings back some memories that you've had in your prior life. And it irritates me to no end to see professional people, professional players, athletes that seem like they could care less about the National Anthem. And that's really one of my pet peeves. I've just got a strong feeling about the National Anthem, and when it's been played. I think it should be respected to the highest degree.

DePue: How about when people do things that are disrespectful to the flag?

Farmer: That's just as bad, as far as I'm concerned, yeah, yeah. Spit on a flag, or burn a flag, I just don't think that's right.

DePue: What lessons would you want to tell people that you learned because of your experiences? What things would you want to tell your grandchildren, advice?

Farmer: Well, that's a hard question. I guess if I was going to say anything, it's that I think you've got to get back to your will to live. And I think with your will to live, you've also got to have some religion to go along with that. And with that religion, I think you should be saying your prayers. I'll get back to that statement I made long ago, that there's no atheists in foxholes. I would say there's so many foxholes along the way now.

DePue: Okay. Thanks very much, Mr. Farmer. This has been a wonderful experience. Do you have any closing comments for us?

Farmer: I don't have any closing, no.

DePue: Okay. I appreciate your taking the time to do this with us.

Farmer: Very good. Thank you. Thank you, Mark.

DePue: You bet.

(End of Audio Recording)