Interview with Joseph Flynn

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Interviewer: Jerry Smith

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Smith: My name is Jerry Smith, and I'm conducting an interview. This interview is part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Veterans Remember oral history project. And it's my honor to interview Mr. Joseph Flynn today. Hello, Mr. Flynn.

Flynn: Hi, Jerry.

Smith: Would you give us your birth date?

Flynn: June 7, 1920.

Smith: And you were born where, sir?

Flynn: Chicago, Illinois, Passavant Hospital, number five of thirteen children.

Smith: Oh, my gracious. You told me during the pre-interview that a number of your siblings were in the service also.

Flynn: During my time in the service, when I went in, shortly thereafter, there was three more brothers that came in with my brother Tim and I, who went in together in 1941, before the war.

Smith: It was World War II, and what branch of the service were you in?

Flynn: I was in field artillery.

Smith: And what was your rank when you left?

Flynn: When I left, I was—let me see if I can show you this. There's a picture with my rank on it, and that was just when we were leaving Rheims, France, to go back home. That was 1945.

Smith: So you served in Europe.

Flynn: In Europe, from D-Day, D plus seven, all the way through to the end of the war.

Smith: And you were living in Chicago before entering the service?

Flynn: We've always lived in Chicago, yeah. When I left Chicago, I was twenty-one years of age; when I came back in '45, I was twenty-five.

Smith: What were you doing at the time? Were you going to school, or …?

Flynn: No. After I graduated from high school, I went to work in a grocery store, helping around the store, delivering orders and stuff like that. And then I got a job with a silkscreen printer who was right across the street from us on Well Street. He made hand-made wallpapers from scratch with a sulfite paper, sprayed it with alkaline paints, made his own designs and screens, and he hand printed it. His primary business was interior decorators.

Smith: I would imagine expensive.

Flynn: It was. At that time, a roll of wallpaper—and you put this wallpaper on, it was just like putting paint on the walls—it was the amount of $3.50 for one color and graduated with the number of colors.

Smith: Wow. How did you enter the service?

Flynn: How did I enter?

Smith: Uh-huh.

Flynn: When I was twenty-one years of age, I reported to the draft board and they sent me to a doctor at Clark and Diversey for a physical. And the doctor examined me, and he said, "You're a skinny kid," he says, "but we'll fatten

you up." I think I was five-foot-nine, and I weighed 121 pounds. (Smith laughs)

And so then I waited for a while, and my brother, who had signed up quite an earlier time previous, because he was twenty-five, he said, "Joe, I'm going to the draft board to see what my status is," and I said, "Well, I'll go with you, and we'll see what happens." At that time, if we went into the Army, we had to go in for fourteen months, and your service was finished. So I went to the draft board with my brother Tim, and he asked the head of the draft board when he thought Tim might go, and he said, "Well, you're pretty close. Within three months, you'll be going." And he says, "Now, as for you, I don't know when you'll go, because that might be some time." So I says, "I'll go with him." Well, he was very impressed, and he liked that, because so many guys were trying to get out of it, you know, even though the war hadn't … At the time, you really didn't give thought of war. I thought I was just going to do my service and that would be it.

Smith: So there was a draft before Pearl Harbor?

Flynn: Oh, yes. I think it must have started—let's see, my brother was four years older than me, so that would have been 1937 he must have signed up, and he was on that list for a long time, and that's why he decided to go and see how … But when he was going down—and I thought, Well, I might as well get my service over with, and I'd go with my brother. I didn't know at the time that they were going to separate us. So we went downtown for a physical. They gave us a physical, and we both passed, and they sent us to Camp Grant. I think that was somewhere up near Highwood, Illinois, not too far from the lake there. And it was a reception area. And so I think we took the train up to Camp Grant, and they gave us our shots and clothing, and they said we'd be there temporarily and we'd be shipped to another camp.

Well, it just so happened we were separated as we were leaving Camp Grant. They said, "You're both going to North Carolina, Fort Bragg, North Carolina". There's my book for it right there. And there at Fort Bragg, when we got to Fort Bragg, they split us up. They didn't want two brothers going together. So I was put into an artillery battalion, and Long Tom was there, 155-millimeter Long Toms. Oh, they'd shoot maybe fifteen to twenty miles, and it was a real long gun. There's pictures of it in the book there. And my brother, he was sent about half a mile down the road from me into the Signal Corps.

So we were there for thirteen weeks of basic training. And I'd go on the rifle range, you know, with a group, and I couldn't hit the side of a barn. I was a terrible shooter. I had never had a gun in my hand. And as a matter of fact, it was the first time I shot that rifle, I thought, Oh, my God. Well, I got the red flag all the time, so I don't know if that was—

Smith: What did the red flag mean, that you missed?

Flynn: That you didn't hit the target at all. Yeah, that you didn't come close. Then we had to be members of the gun. I think there was twelve men in a crew, and they'd give you a change order, "one two three, step back," and that meant the first three guys would go to the back of the twelve. And they'd say, Well, we're going to go for a march now. Number one carries the .30 caliber machine gun—I think it was the barrel part—the second man carried the tripod, and the third man carried the water, because they were water-cooled .30 caliber machine guns.

And so I went through all of that—and I was with a lot of fellows that were from Chicago. And it came time for us to be sent to our permanent outfits, and so all of these fellows from Chicago, they're getting called out and lined up. They were going to Madison Barracks, New York. That's up in the Canadian border. And so the colonel come to us, and he says, "Well, you guys are lucky. You guys who are going out this afternoon, you're lucky. You're going down to Florida." Well, I'd much have rather gone with my friends or people that I met that were from Chicago—I didn't know them before we were drafted—but we went down to Camp Blanding, Florida.

Smith: Why weren't you with the other group?

Flynn: I don't know how they separated us. Well, my brother, when he left Fort Bragg, North Carolina, he went to Minnesota, the 34th Infantry Division Signal Corps. And I went to the 172nd Field Artillery Regiment in Camp Blanding, Florida. And I think in that period, my brother got a three-day pass to go home, and then he had to report to Minnesota, the 34th Infantry Division. After he finished his three days, he went back to his unit, and the unit was shipped to Ireland, Northern Ireland. And we had relatives in southern Ireland—had Grandma and uncles and aunts and cousins—but he wasn't allowed to go there because southern Ireland was neutral. So from Northern Ireland, he went on to Africa, and then on to Italy for his tour of duty. In the meantime, I was in the States. I went to Camp Blanding, stayed there a few months; then I went to Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

Smith: Now, when you were at Camp Blanding, were you still in the artillery?

Flynn: Yeah, yeah, 172nd Field Artillery. I stayed with that group until it was split up into just the battalions. Instead of being a regiment, it became just battalions, and then they were overseen by a group.

Smith: I have a question about the artillery. The gun that you described, was that a leftover from World War I?

Flynn: The gun that we worked on in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. As a matter of fact, I had a picture, but I couldn't find it. I had World War I helmets.

Smith: Oh, really.

Flynn: No kidding, and then the leggings, too. That was a very hard gun … But then they come up with a motorized 155 Long Tom. But the unit I went to, the 172nd Field Artillery, they had 155 Howitzers that were short—comparatively—maybe it might have been about six or eight foot, where the Long Tom was I think over eighteen foot or something like that. It was a long, long gun, and it had a bigger mileage on it.

When I went down to Camp Blanding—I'll never forget this—it was so hot in the afternoon. We arrived there by train, and they let us out there standing, waiting for somebody to take the whole group. I think there must have been about a hundred of us. And they start sending them to different batteries within the regiment. You had a first battalion, second battalion; then they had A, B, C; and service batteries in the units. And they got through pulling all the guys. I think there was about close to a hundred or maybe a little more. And there was just three of us standing, and somebody said, "Who in the hell are"—he was a big guy, too, a big colonel. Oh, he was a monster. Colonel Chapman. And he said, "Who in the hell are these guys?" And somebody popped up from behind: "Oh, they must be medics." I didn't know that I was going to be a medic. Maybe after they saw my rifle marks, they figured this guy (laughter) isn't going to be a fighter. But they put me in the medics.

The first thing they—they fed us. They took us to the mess, and we had plates. Prior to that, we never ate out of a plate; we had mess gear all the time. And then you had to clean it with sand or whatever you could get to keep it clean, you know, and rinse it out a little. And I thought, Boy, this is great, eating off of plates. Then they gave us assignments. And one thing about this 172nd Field Artillery Regiment—you can pick this all up on the Internet—the 172nd Field Artillery Regiment and the battalion I was in, which was the 2nd Battalion of the regiment, and they changed that to the 941st Field Artillery Battalion. And they split us up.

And they had a wonderful, wonderful doctor in the 1st Battalion—his name was Captain Chet Morgan. And I'll never forget one day he came into the dispensary—I think we must have had maybe—I don't know whether it was training period for doctors, what, but we must have had a dozen doctors in that regimental area. But Captain Morgan came there, and one day he came into the dispensary and he saw me looking sort of glum, and he said to me, "What's the matter, Joe?" I said, "My brother is getting married, and he wanted me to be the best man, and I understand the regiment has called off all furloughs." Well, Captain Morgan was a Mason. The colonel of the regiment was a Mason. And he says, "I'll take care of it, Joe." And he was a great big guy. Oh, I mean, he was just like a country doctor, and he was such a terrific guy. And he said, "You know, we'll come over and we'll have a little ethyl alcohol." You know, and ethyl alcohol at that time was 180 proof.

Smith: Oh, really?

Flynn: And he says, "We'll cut it with some grapefruit juice." He was really great. And so he come back to the dispensary and he said to me, "You're good to go, Joe." "That's wonderful." "You're good to go." And he says, "Your papers will be cut." And that June, I went home to my brother's, and I was best man at his wedding. And at that time in Chicago, by the time I got back there for his wedding, there were hardly any guys around, any young guys; they were all being drafted, you know? And you had women galore. And I went with my girlfriend, who I eventually married, and she saw all these girls around me, and she was getting mad. (laughter) But we had a good time anyway. But it was due to Captain Morgan that I got this furlough.

But another part I wanted to tell you about this unit that I was in, the 172nd Field Artillery Regiment—it was from Manchester, New Hampshire. They were National Guard. The majority of the soldiers were Canadian French that had migrated to the States. They had a lot of shoe factories in New Hampshire at that time, and business was very bad, and I guess these fellows right away signed up for the National Guard. So, you know, to help them.

Smith: So they came to New Hampshire to work but ended up in the service.

Flynn: Yeah, but when we were getting drafted—I guess this applied to all National Guard units. They sent them in there, like that Minnesota National Guard where my brother went to 34th Infantry, they were a National Guard unit, just like 33rd would be here in Illinois was the National Guard unit. And so they didn't like it when we were coming in. They didn't like the draftees coming in, because this was family. Majority—and a lot of them spoke the French. But they were a family; they didn't like these guys coming from helter-skelter, all over the world, coming in here—I mean, all over the States—coming in here to invade the family. But eventually we got along with them. But there was one thing that they did that surprised me so much. On Sunday morning, it was time for church. I think at the time we were fifteen hundred men in the regiment, and about 6:30—I believe it was about 6:30 in the morning—we had a band. It was about sixty people in the band. And here they come down the streets, the battery streets, playing "Cheer, Cheer, Cheer for Old Notre Dame."

Smith: Oh, really? (laughs)

Flynn: And they'd do this every Sunday. The Catholics, the Protestants, and the Jews, we all had to go to church together. The Catholics had to wait until the Protestant—the priest, who was the chaplain, he said the King James Version of the Bible and did that for the Protestant boys, and the Protestant boys, we could go. I think they let the Jewish boys go, too. But the Catholics then had to stay for mass. So there came a draftee in from Tennessee. I'll never forget him. He was a good kid, too—Willy Barnes. And he said, "What's this?

We're going to church?" And the chaplain had a name; his name was Father Casey. And he says, "I don't go for this." So he gets permission to go up to see the colonel, and, like I told you, the colonel was a Mason, and he said, "Sir, I don't think this is right, that you are having us all go to church. That should be up to the individual." And we had to march to church, you know. Now, fifteen hundred men, that's a lot of men.

Smith: Oh, no kidding.

Flynn: And so Colonel Jacobson was his name, he says, "That's it. As of today, there will be no more organized Catholic stuff. If they want to go to church, they go to church, or go to the mass, whatever, but whatever anybody else does, that's their business." And that ended it.

Smith: That's incredible.

Flynn: Now, this took this one draftee from Tennessee—

Smith: Yeah, one guy from Tennessee made that change.

Flynn: And he was a real nice kid, too. He wasn't a braggart or somebody trying to change the world or anything like that, but he thought that just wasn't right. So that ended it. So things proceeded along, and my wife—oh, I wanted to show you my picture of my wife in her uniform. Remember before we leave. She was working for Curtiss Candy at the time; she worked at Diversey and Clark in Chicago. And she made arrangements through her company to come down and visit me, and they arranged a hotel room for her in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. And I got a call one day that said, "Joe Flynn, there's a young lady that wants to talk to you. She's at Hotel Forrest in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. And I thought, Oh my God, my girlfriend's come down. Because we were thinking about getting married. I think this must have been the latter part of '42 or '43. And I says to Martha, I says, "Martha," I says, "I don't know what this chaplain we have … He seems (laughs) to me a very strict guy, and your not being Catholic, he might not go for it." So she said, "Oh, don't get upset. We'll just wait, and when you get out, we'll get married." And so I didn't want to brook interference with the priest or anything like that, so we just stayed on. And the majority of cases of kids, young guys like me, that had girlfriends when they went into the Army, I would say nine out of ten got a Dear John letter—I'm sorry, *adios, amigo*. So this happened, I'll relate that later, this happened to my buddy.

So from Camp Shelby, they thought maybe we were going to go to the Pacific area, so they sent us out to the California desert. And we got out to the California desert, Camp Mountain, that was near Desert Center. I would say some of the closest towns would be Indio or something like that, away from Indio, California. This is where our camp was. There was nothing when we got out there, absolutely nothing but sand, and we had to build a camp. And

our diet was changed to—I forget what they called it. They had it changed, figuring if we went over to the Pacific, we'd have to have a diet like this, and we had more dehydrated stuff. And our water had to be salted so that we wouldn't—you know, I jumped ahead here, and I didn't tell you about our trip across the sea, but we stayed in Camp Mountain for I think it was about—almost to February of '44.

Smith: Really?

Flynn: Yeah.

Smith: Now, had you been to Europe before that?

Flynn: No, we hadn't been to Europe yet. Right.

Smith: Let me ask you. Where were you when Pearl Harbor occurred?

Flynn: When Pearl Harbor occurred, I was in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. They marched us all out to a big parade field, and they had big parade fields out there, and we all listened to President Roosevelt tell us what happened. And then the officers or noncoms, prior to that, they would go home on the weekend, and they dressed in civilian clothes, but when the president declared war on Germany and Japan, that was the end of the civilian clothes. They were no longer allowed to go home on the weekend, everybody.

Smith: What did you think about Pearl Harbor?

Flynn: Oh, we were really—we knew then that the fourteen months was out of the way. At that time, they had the scare, because they thought that the Japs might come along the North Carolina coast with submarines, so they started to put us on guard duty, and they'd give us three bullets. Well, then, at the time, I wasn't in the medics yet, but we had to walk guard duty, and we had three bullets, because they didn't want to take any chance of any Japanese coming off the coast of Carolina.

So, let's see, from Carolina we went to the desert, and from the desert—I think before we left the desert, we had so much clothing that I think they made us bury it because there was no place to get rid of it. And we were going, and nobody was supposed to know where we were going or anything, so I guess they didn't want to be pushing clothing someplace else.

In doing this interview, there's one thing I wanted to bring up about my time in the desert. We had a sergeant, a first sergeant, that was in charge of battalion headquarters. His name was John a big—oh, I'd say six-foot-three, -four—Irishman. Real good-looking guy, strictly soldier-looking. You couldn't beat him. You couldn't beat him. This guy's smart as a whip and just as gentle as a lamb. And one day he comes up, and I was in the dispensary out in the desert, and he says, "Joe," he says, "have you gotten any Army regulations

here?" I says, "Yeah, they're right there on the shelf, Sarge. Go get them." I didn't know what he wanted them for. It seems that that weekend, him and a bunch of noncoms from the battalion went to Parker, Arizona—I guess it was a party town or something. I didn't know too much about any of that stuff at the time anyway. And so they said, "Did you hear the news? Sergeant is being transferred." He was a first sergeant—that's the master with the diamond. And "He's being transferred." And I said, "What's the matter?"

Smith: Oh, good grief.

Flynn: Oh, and this guy was teaching these young commissioned officers, second lieutenants, teaching them all about the artillery, teaching about how if a German gun fired off in the distance, the overhead—we have two pilots in our battalion that would fly, and if they'd see any firing, they could spot the fire and give coordinates to … This guy was teaching them all. I'm telling you, he was a terrific sergeant. He knew his business. But he was gay. And that was the first time—I think—no, I'd been with the outfit maybe a little over two years, and nobody ever, you know, gave a thought of him being gay. And everybody liked him. The officers liked him, especially these second louies that came in from ninety-day wonder school, and he'd teach—

Smith: A louie is a lieutenant.

Flynn: Yeah. He'd teach them everything. And, you know, they were sharp. And we even had one guy, I think he was from West Point, and he helped this guy from West Point. So what they did, a family organization, Manchester, New Hampshire—according to Army regulations, he could have been sent to Leavenworth.

Smith: Really?

Flynn: Yeah. Well, medically in I think the Army regulations at the time—I didn't know beans about it—sodomy. So I'm telling you, everybody really felt bad for Sergeant. But on my last furlough to Chicago, I was catching a train out there in the desert going to Kansas City, and from Kansas City, I'd transfer to Chicago, and the first guy I meet on the train is Sergeant.

Smith: Oh, really.

Flynn: He was busted to a T-5.

Smith: Oh, really. But—

Flynn: So they busted him, and, you know—

Smith: But he was allowed to continue in his service.

Flynn: Continue his service, yeah. I don't know how they did it, but they got him into another outfit, and probably told him he better watch his step. But oh, man, he was great. I mean, in all the time I knew this guy, I thought he was such a tremendous person. But it happened, so there was a case of a person …

Smith: Yeah, I didn't realize that that was an issue that far back.

Flynn: Well, yeah, according to Army regulations. well, right away, you think about, you might think that area. But heck, I didn't know anything about that, but I knew that we had the book of regulations there, and I could have come up into trouble with that myself, but that's a little later on in this story. But so that was my first encounter with—it wasn't my first encounter with people, because in Chicago at the time, when we didn't have anything to do on a summer night, as long as we were home at ten o'clock, we could go down to Bughouse Square. I don't know if you know anything about Chicago, but in Chicago, there's this Newberry Library. I guess it's got everything in there under the sun that you'd want to see—a very special place. Union Park is right across the street. And we used to go down there and watch the soap-boxers. They'd be getting up on the stands and they'd be talking about communism and Nazism and everything else. On the west side of the street, there'd be; on the east side of the street, there'd be lesbians, during this period. I guess we must have been at least eighteen years old at that time, but eighteen years old didn't mean anything to my mother. If she said you're supposed to be … (Smith laughs) And there was three of us—

Smith: So that was in the 1930s, probably.

Flynn: Yeah, yeah. Well, '30, '38, '39. When my mother would say, "You're supposed to be in here at ten o'clock" or sometimes nine o'clock, and you weren't there … There was three of us, John, Will, and I, and we'd take turns, because going in that door, my mother was going to catch one of us, (Smith laughs) and she had a wet washrag, and the first thing she did when we were late, the first one in got a wet rag across the puss. And she says, "Now, don't lock that bedroom door." This is going up seventeen stairs to our bedrooms. We had three rooms and the kitchen downstairs and four bedrooms upstairs. She said, "Don't lock that door," she says, "because I'm coming up." And my mother was a heavy lady, and she was—I thank God so much that I had such a mother, because—and she had the brogue, you know. And she was as gentle a person as you'd ever want to meet when you were talking to her. And she was great, but she'd say, "Don't lock the door." One time we locked the door. She come up and she put her foot through it, (laughter) and we never locked the door after that. But she kept control of us, you know. We weren't out gallivanting or—the only time we might be out a little later than 10:00 is if I think it was Max Schmeling was fighting—was he fighting Jimmy Braddock or Max Baer? The fighters. But we'd get out and hawk the papers at night. The papers would come out, and we'd go through the neighborhood—"Read all about it! Read all about the big fight," you know.

Smith: Was that the *Chicago Tribune*.

Flynn: No, it was the *Herald-Examiner*. The *Tribune* was out also, but I don't know, somehow or other we got the *Herald-Examiner*. Yeah, the *Tribune*, my brother worked for the *Tribune* for I think over thirty years.

Smith: You said your mother had a brogue. What—

Flynn: Oh, she still had the brogue from Ireland. Yeah, my mother and father both—

Smith: So they were both born in Ireland?

Flynn: Yeah. My mother was born in 1893; my father was born in 1883. My father was ten years older. He was born close to the north, but still within the range. He wasn't in the Belfast area. But they were much tighter people up there, and those that were in the south, like in Cork or Mayo [counties in Ireland] around that, they were more gentle. They seemed like they were more tense up there in the north when my father was born, in Sligo. My mother was born in Cork.

Smith: But let me interrupt for just a second and ask you what brought your parents here to the United States?

Flynn: I think it must have been the country was so poor at the time. Because when my wife and I and my son, Kevin, my youngest son, we went to visit Ireland and we went to visit our cousins, and they showed us where my mom lived. And I said to myself—it was beautiful, beautiful up there on a hill. And I says, "How in the heck did she ever get out of there?" I think she was eighteen. There's a picture when she was eighteen or nineteen there. And we used to ask her, "Mom, do you miss Ireland?" and she'd say, "No way. No way. America's the only country for me."

Smith: What did your father do for a living?

Flynn: My father was a streetcar conductor.

Smith: Oh, really?

Flynn: Yeah. He worked in New York, and then he came to Chicago and worked on the streetcars. Yeah. And he used to pass by our house, his run. He used to pass by our house, and sometimes when he'd get out to the South Side, he'd go out to the South Side with the Wells Street Line, they'd pepper him with eggs.

Smith: Why?

Flynn: Well, that was the game at the time—you know, throw eggs at the conductor, because he's always hanging out to see if there's somebody at the next stop.

And they used to pepper him. But he handled it all right. He played—it was rugby, I guess, when he was over there. And he was so proud to look at us play ball, you know. When we came back from the Army, he was hoping that I would go to school and become some kind of a medic, you know, because I had four years of service with the medics and I had so many different doctors that were always trying to teach us things. And, oh, my dad was for that. The good thing about it, the five of us that were in the service, four of us were overseas and one was in the States, and we all came out of it okay.

Smith: Yeah, that's wonderful. After Camp Mountain, where did you go?

Flynn: We left Camp Mountain, and they said, Guys from Chicago, we're going to be laying over in Chicago for three hours, and the guys from Chicago can go home. And we ate that up like a bag. There was no way that they were going to let troops that were going over to Boston to go to Europe wanting anybody to know what's going on. So anyway, we got into Chicago, we stayed for three hours. Instead of going anywhere, we were doing close order drill in the station, around the station. And from there, we got to Camp Myles Standish in Boston, Massachusetts. That was our port of debarkation—or embarkation. Yeah. We boarded a ship that was a cruise ship that traveled to South America. That was in February of '44. And we took twelve days to get across the ocean to England—I think it was Norwood or—I had the name of the town that we went to. But we just stayed there a short time and then we went to Exeter, England. And just inside there was a place called Bishops Court where we stayed until June sixth, I think I was on the road on my birthday, June seventh. June sixth, we started off. We left camp—I think it was at Bishops Court—and we went to Plymouth.

Smith: That was in 1944?

Flynn: Nineteen forty-four we were going across then. Yeah. And all this time it has taken me to talk here, my brother Tim, who had gone into the Army with me had gone to Africa and Italy and was in all those battles over there. It took us twelve days to get to England, and English Corvettes came out to meet us as the boat was coming in and we landed there. From there we went to Bishops Court, and at Bishops Court, they said we were going to go across the English Channel to Normandy. So we had to get our vehicles all prepared, and, oh, the roads were just jammed with GIs. There was trucks of English and American soldiers heading to the ports, you know, to go across. When we got to the port, the sky was just loaded with—I don't know what you'd call them—there were these, like, dirigibles, small dirigibles, but they prevented any Stuka dive bombers from coming down to hit at the troops going across.

Smith: German dive bombers.

Flynn: Yeah, the Stuka dive bombers, yeah.

Smith: So this was D-Day.

Flynn: That wasn't D-Day. We were on the road on D-Day. We got to our point of going across the Channel, I think it was D plus seven. D plus seven. Because there was no artillery or anything going across there much sooner than that. And the same way with my brother—he was with the anti-aircraft artillery. And it was just a wonderful fact—and a sorry fact for the British—that all those planes they lost, they put all the planes they shot down over London that saved our bacon, as far as I'm concerned. But, you know, they gave us a little scare. They said the French are using wooden bullets. Oh, for God's sake. Man, what those poor guys went through landing there, the first ones, that was horrendous. But we were fortunate, being with the heavier equipment coming in.

When we landed and we de-waterproofed our vehicles and the guns, why, we started to move up. And that's when I saw this unit with my brother's unit on it, 462nd Anti-Aircraft Battery. I had the driver stop, and I ran up to this guy, and I says, "Do you know Johnny Flynn?" and he says, "Sure. Hop in. I'll take you to see him." I said, "I can't. I'm in convoy. Just tell him I'm in convoy." A couple days later, we were moving up. My brother tapped me on the leg, and he says, "Wake up, Joe." And I said, "John, have you got a foxhole?" (laughs) He says, "Not yet." I said, "Well, you better get one."

Smith: That was quite a coincidence.

Flynn: Yeah, to meet your brother over there.

Smith: Of all the hundreds of thousands of guys over there.

Flynn: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Smith: Now, you landed at Omaha Beach?

Flynn: Omaha Beach, yeah. From there, we went to—the English were on the left—Caen. I think it's C-a-e-n. And our 7th Corps, 1st Army, was on our left at Saint-Lô. And we were in the center with a place, a town called Caumont, and that was where I told you they had the Scottish infantry up ahead of us that was called the Angels of Hell. I don't know why they called them that, but they must have been pretty tough guys. But anyway, from there we stayed in that area for forty-five days. So you can imagine what my foxhole was like. My foxhole was, I would say, approximately three feet wide, about maybe six or seven foot long, and packed over with dirt and twigs and branches and everything else that we could get, and then a shelter half over that.

Smith: And you dug that yourself.

Flynn: Oh, each guy had to dig his own hole, yeah. And one day, the captain is giving us the lay of the land, and he's down there telling us well, here, we're here,

and here and there, and all the sudden a German Messerschmitt plane come over strafing. Everybody ran for the holes. And this is one of the things that I thought about. We ran for the holes, and I ran for my hole, and I'm in there. Two guys come in after me.

Smith: (laughs) Into your hole.

Flynn: And I'm in there, and that scared me more than anything of that war—suffocation. I was in there, and oh, Just get out of here; get out of here. And (laughs) the CO, Captain Weinburg was our medical officer, and this fellow from Tennessee, Corporal Bingham. It was his hole, and the doctor went in his hole. Oh, he was so pissed. That Corporal Bingham was so mad. (laughs) You know, he's from the South, and he was—"I'm not going to dig another hole in this damn war, no matter what." (laughter) And the captain realized that he shouldn't have done that. But the things passed. But we were there for forty-five days, so you can imagine. When Patton started to make his move, they took all of our trucks that were used for anything, to haul materials of any kind. They took them, gave them all to Patton, just to carry gas to keep up with them. And for some reason—I don't know the reason—they picked me to—but I had to go with them, with the gas guys. And I was on top of a stack of gas cans, riding on the top. And finally one of the GIs from the artillery battalion says, "Come on, Joe. Get down off of there and come in with us." So I guess there was three of us in the front seat of that thing.

Smith: Were you commandeered by Patton's [Third] Army?

Flynn: Oh, I imagine—it was Lieutenant General Hodges, or no, there was another guy—Bradley. Bradley was in charge of First Army. [Lieutenant General Courtney Hodges took over command of First Army from General Omar Bradley in August, 1944 when Bradley assumed command of the 12th Army Group, which included both the 1st Army and Patton's Third Army.] He probably got the lay of the land from Patton, and he took all of our two-and-a-half-ton GMCs—or no, they were International Harvesters—and we supplied them with the gas.

Smith: Okay. That forty-five days that you were right in the same area, was there action at that time, or …?

Flynn: Oh, there was. You know, our guns were set up, and like I said, we have two airplanes. They were like these—oh, you know, they were just small planes, but they'd turn on a dime and anything else. They could get up and observe.

Smith: Just single-engine?

Flynn: Yeah, single-engine. You know, they just get up there and they spot. All they were looking for was fire, and when they saw that fire report, they could draw

the coordinates or however they did it, but they'd send it back to the firing batteries so the batteries would fire at that point. They were forward observers, but they were in the air. There was two of them—young guys. Slick-looking guys, compared to the rest of us, you know. But forty-five days, and then Patton started to move. And then we all had to move. And we were on long runs, you know. You wouldn't just be out in the road for a couple hours; you were out in the road for eight or ten hours, trying to catch up with Patton.

Smith: Yeah, Patton moved pretty quick.

Flynn: Oh, man, he moved quick as heck. Let's see, we … Oh, yeah, we got to Paris, but all the American troops were stopped, and they let the French 1st Armored Division go in first, and then we went into Paris. And oh, man, we had cigarettes galore, and we were giving them out a pack at a time. Couldn't do that. You had to give them out a couple cigarettes at a time because they were all jumping on the trucks and "*Vive l'Amerique, vive l'Amerique*" and all that stuff. My brother John at that time, somehow or other he got—he was there in Paris, but he was stationed there. His unit was stationed there, I guess for anti-aircraft purposes. And I didn't get to see him there.

From Paris, well, then we went on—from there, I think we went to—we crossed the Maginot Line, and we went to the Siegfried Line, and we was in some German town there. And then after we were there for a while, we were called back and we were put in Eupen, Belgium. And we thought that was going to be our easiest spot.

Smith: When you crossed the Maginot Line, was there anything left of it, or had the Germans destroyed it?

Flynn: No, there was still a lot there, but I think it was all under French control at that time, after they chased the Germans out. But let's see now, where was I.

Smith: You were talking about Belgium.

Flynn: In Belgium, yes. They said we're going to back to Belgium and that we'd be there just for a while; we'd just observe things, you know. And so we went back to Belgium, Eupen, and we had our first accident. I forget the guy's name, from Florida. He was a heavyset guy, and he was always singing country songs. But somehow or other he got a hold of a German bazooka, or a German—not a bazooka. What do you call it?

Smith: Mortar?

Flynn: Mortar. He didn't know what the hell it was. And he saw an American vehicle that was stuck in the mud or something, and he was going to drive that into the ground and tie the winch around it and see if he could get that truck out of there somehow. And it blew up.

Smith: Oh, so it was armed.

Flynn: It was armed. John Thornton was his name, now that I think of it. But he came out of it all right, but he got a lot of shrapnel. Let's see. From there, we went to where we were stationed for a while. And the battalion headquarters was just in front of us, so we were right behind them in that building.

Smith: Where was that?

Flynn: That was in Eupen, Belgium. And our colonel at the time was in the hospital—I think he got hurt somehow—and a major, Major Warner said the cows got to go. There was cows in all the fields all over, hit by shrapnel, you know, and they get to smell pretty bad. And so Sergeant Camille Chevalier—he was a National Guard first sergeant—he says, "I'll get somebody to take care of it right away, sir." So he went and got his friend, who was a thirty-eight-year-old, Shorty Frinette, a French kid—he wasn't a kid, thirty-eight years old. And he says, "Shorty, we've got to move that cow." He says, "Well, I'll bring my vehicle over here. I'll go over and get it, see where I can maybe put a winch on it and drag it out of there." Son of a gun, if he didn't go through a hedgerow or something, and (makes zing sound). My buddy called, "Joe, bring two litters." I was in the dispensary. "Bring two litters." I went to grab two litters. He said, "Bring one." The kid was just blown apart. And the sergeant was just peppered with shrapnel.

Smith: Good grief. So he stepped on a landmine or something?

Flynn: No, no, from the shrapnel from tripping the mine. The guy went through a hedgerow or something like that.

Smith: So it was a tripwire.

Flynn: Tripwire, and it just … So I got out there with my medical bag and morphine, and he says, "Joe," he says, "you got to give me some morphine," so I broke the thing on it and gave him a shot of morphine, and then I started to cut his clothing away. Almost took away his organs and his testicles. I must have worked on him about an hour patching him up and putting butterflies on him. You know, you take a piece of tape and you make a butterfly out of it so that the covering would cover the sticky glue, and then you tried to bring the wound together so it would stay. So he was taken away to the hospital, but they had to go around and pick up parts of Shorty.

Smith: Oh, good grief.

Flynn: Yeah. And the sad part of—well, it's sad, but it's just life, I guess. He had a wife in New Hampshire and a wife in Louisiana, and he was the most comical young thirty-eight-year-old Frenchman you'd ever want to see. Just a little guy.

Smith: He's the one that was killed?

Flynn: Yeah, he was killed. And the major was watching me all the time I was working there with him. I think it was three months later he came back, and he came to me at the dispensary where—I don't know what area we were—I think we were in Nuremberg, Germany, at the time. And he came there and he thanked me for taking care of him.

Smith: That's great. It's great that you got to see him again.

Flynn: Yeah, he was a really nice guy. He was a first sergeant that was unusual. He always had a duck that followed him around.

Smith: (laughs) Really?

Flynn: A duck, yeah. But he was Camille Chevalier. Boy, they had these names. There was another guy that they had there, Ephambo Laphambo or something like that. And I never forgot this guy. He come in to me one day and he said, "My arm's in bad shape. My right arm's in bad shape." From here down it's swollen. And I said, "We'll get the doctor on it right away." He had cellulitis. He had some bacteria entered around the elbow, and it just swelled, puffed his arm up like crazy.

How many years later that I had the same thing? I went to the doctor, and I says, "Doctor, I think I've got cellulitis." Dr. Crabtree, the doctor I go to here in Chatham, he says, "Yeah," he says, "Joe, I think we're going to put you in the hospital." So he took me over to St. John's, and he tried it himself—you put a needle—and this was without any anesthesia or anything—put a needle through there where it was puffed up to make it—you might be able to drain it. He said, "No way. No way. They're going to have to cut it." So that's what they did; they cut it open and got whatever was bad in there out and put whatever they needed to put in there. But I was in the hospital a week with it. But that's what it was, cellulitis.

Smith: I bet most people wouldn't have known what it was.

Flynn: No, no, no. The doctor was surprised.

Smith: I bet.

Flynn: But it was only the fact that I had seen it before. And I enjoyed that, because in your daily routine, the first thing you had in the Army was sick call. And somebody had to record it, so they had me take the story of the individual coming and complaining and what it was, and then I'd pass that slip on to the doctor, and the doctor would know just what's going on. And I found out the meaning of two words—two letters: CC. I was getting so many return packs—"Give this guy two CC." Two compound cathartic pills. What they were was something to make them crap. (laughter) I guess on 99 percent of the cases,

they were thinking these guys were malingerers or something like that and they were just trying to get out of something. So that's what they got, CC pills.

Smith: That didn't mean cubic centimeters, did it?

Flynn: (laughs) Yeah, that was something. But let's see, now, where were we at? I think we went back to Monschau, Germany, from Belgium. And there, they were very hostile. You could tell by the people—the streets were so narrow coming through, your vehicles could just barely navigate the streets. And when we passed by on a Jeep, the kids were spitting at us.

Smith: German kids?

Flynn: Yeah, yeah.

Smith: What was the town?

Flynn: Monschau. M-o-n-s-c-h-a-u, I think it was. Monschau. It was something like that. And we had a Lager there. There was at least forty thousand German prisoners. And we had some of these prisoners prior to that in some other town that we were at, and as soon as the saw us, they waved to let us know that they were there, and we'd bring them over to the building we were staying in, and do any kind of work around the building. But it was the unit's responsibility to see they got back to camp.

Smith: But you didn't think that the German civilians were happy to see the Americans?

Flynn: Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. As a matter of fact, I was surprised. But we left there, and they were—you know, like I say when we came in, we left there, but we went back there, and it was altogether different. We had one kid, he was manning a .50-caliber machine gun, and he got probably hit in the face with some mortar shrapnel. And he came into the dispensary and we took care of him. I don't know where our CO was. Our CO seemed to be absent from these accidents we had. I don't know if he was either playing cards somewhere or eating.

Smith: (laughs) Why do you think the mood was different the second time you went?

Flynn: Because they knew that the tide was turning.

Smith: This was 1944 sometime.

Flynn: This was almost '45, yeah, and it was just before the end. And we even told the people there that—there was a doctor and his daughters living next door to us, and we says, You better get out of here, because we're going to have to get out of this area, and the Russians are going to take over. And they said, Oh,

no, they could do it. But one guy we got, a prisoner, we got him out and got him a truck that somebody had abandoned with a lot of tools on it and stuff. We got him out and told him to get going, because he had worked with us for quite a while. No, but the second time we were in there, they were altogether different. They knew the writing was on the wall. But they were smiling when we'd bring a person to the aid station, you know.

Smith: They were appreciative.

Flynn: Yeah, yeah. But I guess that's how anybody would feel if you're coming in through their country. Where did we go from there? I think that was our last big haul, because the Battle of the Bulge was over, and we had all these prisoners, and the Russians were going to take over our duty there. But once we went out, there was no going back. You couldn't go back to get anything—the Russians wouldn't allow it. And then, well, you know, prior to that, when Roosevelt died, they said, Oh my God, we'll never get home. We'll never get home. Truman? We'll never get home. I'm telling you, that guy got those troops home as fast as you couldn't (laughs) believe.

And one guy—I think he was from Rock Island—he was our supply sergeant—he says, "I got eighty-four points, and the president is dead. I'll never get out of here." So him and another sergeant went to town—I forget the town they were going to—anyway, they went and got drunk. And on the way back, they were both drunk, and the one guy that had the most points, they hit a tree—he was killed.

Smith: Oh my God.

Flynn: What a way to go in a war.

Smith: No kidding.

Flynn: That was his getting home. What a way to get home.

Smith: What did the troops think about the Russians?

Flynn: You know, we didn't have any actual contact. It was just what we knew, what we heard about them from the Germans. The Germans would say the Russians would take everything, and there was no bartering, because you could go into the Lager, the German prison camp, and you would say, "*Haben Sie Kamera?*" And if you had some candy bars or cigarettes—I'll show you a camera I got here.

Smith: Oh, you're still hooked up there.

Flynn: Oh, that's right. Let me take this off for a second.

Smith: Okay. Let me put it on pause.

(pause in recording)

Smith: —sure if we're recording or not. Okay, now we're on.

Flynn: I got that, I think it was a couple packs of cigarettes and a bar of chocolate.

Smith: Oh, for this camera? Wow.

Flynn: Yeah. You know—

Smith: Well, that's in great shape.

Flynn: Yeah. Well, I probably shouldn't—I think I was mucking around with it, taking the paint off it, but I think that was a dumb thing to do. (Smith laughs) But it's a heavy little thing, isn't it?

Smith: It certainly is, yeah.

Flynn: Now, that came with me all the way from Germany, and it was many years ago.

Smith: That's great.

Flynn: Yeah. So from there, we went to Rheims, France. I think I have a picture of us when we were in Rheims, France. This is a picture of us—no.

Smith: I think it's on the table here.

Flynn: Yeah, this one here is a picture of us when we were in Rheims, France. That's in the Battle of the Bulge.

Smith: Okay. Oh, okay.

Flynn: And this one here is another one of Battle of the Bulge.

Smith: A bit of snow on the ground, isn't there?

Flynn: Yeah. And this is where in Rheims, France, we were getting ready to leave there and to go to Le Havre to go to New Jersey.

Smith: So where were you when the war ended in Europe?

Flynn: When the war ended in Europe—let's see—I was in Rheims—Rheims, France. And that was the port that we were going to ship out of.

Smith: And you were talking about the points that—

Flynn: Well, see, your points was the amount of years in service, you got so many points a year, and for how many battles you were in you got so many points. I think when I was discharged, I had eighty-four points.

Smith: And they let people come back in order of …

Flynn: Prior to that, you had to have at least eighty-five. And because some of these fellows that I went into the Army with, these particular battalions and the regiment, they had been in maybe a year and a half before I went in, so they had more points. And I guess your grade had a little to do with—you'd get so many points for your grade. When I went into the Army in '41, I was paid twenty-one dollars a month, and when I came out of the Army, my base pay for my T-3 was ninety-six dollars a month.

Smith: Wow, that's quite a raise.

Flynn: Yeah, and plus I think—I forget whether it was 5 percent for overseas or 10 percent for overseas.

Smith: Then you were mustered out back in the United States?

Flynn: Yeah. When we got to—where the heck did we get to? They put us on trains, and where did we come into? I think we came into Fort Sheridan—yeah, Fort Sheridan—just outside of Chicago. And as I was going through the door—and I know darn well, this CO that I had, Captain Weinburg, he didn't have as many points as I had—but I was going through the door, and he was going right ahead of me. I says, "Captain Weinburg." He says, "No, Joe, Major Weinburg, (Smith laughs) Yes, major."

And one day, you know, when I went back, you had to go before a group of soldiers that took all your information down—where you were and what you were doing and what you did before the war. But before the war, I worked doing this handmade wallpaper and the silk screening. I gave them the information and I told them the address, 1713 North Wells Street, Valentine Bing.

So I'm home, and I had two days. Well, the first day I was home, my sister said, "Martha called and wanted to know if you were home," because I didn't let my family know that I was coming home—didn't tell anybody. And so I got into the house and she says, "Martha called." And I said, "How did she know I was coming home?" And so the next day, her mother called, and she says, "Joe, I understand you're home." And I said, "Yes, Mrs. Tampa." She said, "Well, how about coming over to see me?" I said, "Okay, I'll be over about six o'clock tonight."

And so my brother Will and I went over. He was just in from Camp Shelby. He was a drill sergeant in Chicago, and during the Battle of the Bulge, they yanked him out of there and put him in Camp Shelby. They were going to

make a left-handed rifleman out of him because his right eye was bad. So he took me over there, and so I went over and I'm sitting there talking to Martha's mother, and she said, "I've got a big surprise for you, Joe." It was my girlfriend.

Smith: (laughs) That's great.

Flynn: Yeah. And so we're talking, and we're talking. Her mother left us, you know, and we were happy to see each other and all. She was stationed at Walter Reed General Hospital in Washington, DC. But she said, "I want to get married." (laughs) And coming across the ocean and all that stuff, coming back, it was just smooth as silk going across—no problems at all. I had no idea about getting married, you know. I didn't even give it a thought. So she was sort of tearing up, and her mother came in, and she said, "What's the matter with Martha? She's crying." I said, "She wants to get married." And my wife's mother says, "So?" And I says, "Okay." I says, "If you want to get married," I says, "but there's got to be a lot of talking to be done about this. I'm going to have to tell my mother."

It wasn't two days after—you know, I had a few fifteen-day furloughs in the four years, but theis was only two days after I got home and I said, I have to go down and see the priest and make the arrangements. So I went home and I told my mother. Oh, my mother was so—she had eleven kids. There was two daughters that were married—she didn't mind that at all. My brother Will was exactly a year and three days older than I am, but he got married. He got married, you know, while he was still in the service. And she says, "You're only home two days, and you're going to get married?" (Smith laughs) I said, "Mom, we're getting married."

So I went down and saw the priest, you know, in our parish church, and he had been there from when I was going to school there. Father Fleming and he put on a play—one year he put on a play at school, and sister said to me we're going to be all action class, said, "You're going to be Percy Wynn in a story." Now, Percy Wynn is a girl with ten sisters. And the play gets into the point where I had a big collar on, knickers, and checkered socks and stockings and stuff like that, and I walk out in the middle of the stage, and I say, "I'm Percy Wynn, and I have ten sisters." And this big burly kid comes out and he's pushing. The audience was going crazy! (Smith laughs) But at the end of the play, they liked it so much, and Father Fleming says, "Because you acted so well tonight, all the classes were great, I'm going to give you tomorrow off." And everybody was so happy. But my brother Will, he (laughs) wasn't going to take that.

As a matter of fact, you know, when school started in September, I says to my mom, I says, "Mom, Will and I are going to take a transfer from Immaculate Conception and we're going to go to La Salle School, the public school." So I go up to the nun, and I says, "Sister Kathleen, I would like a transfer for my

brother Will and I." She looked at me, and she said, "You get in that room, and I don't want to hear another word out of you the rest of the year.

Smith: (laughs) She didn't like that.

Flynn: She says, "Your brothers and sisters graduated from here, and you're going to graduate." Well, all eleven of us graduated from that school, and all eleven of us had the first-grade nun.

Smith: (laughs) Oh, really?

Flynn: No kidding. It was really something. And it was the happiest year of my school life.

Smith: Well, let me ask you a couple other questions. What was your mustering out date?

Flynn: My mustering out pay must have been —I think they gave us a little more than the mustering out pay, but what happened, after we were mustered out, some bill before Congress that, say, if you were in the Army four years, and you were allowed fifteen days a year for furlough, and if you didn't get that, they were going to give it to you. So that's what they did. I got thirty days of furlough pay at whatever my rate was at the time that—whether I was a T-5 or T-3, I would get the base pay.

Smith: Right. What date were you mustered up?

Flynn: I think it was October.

Smith: Forty-five?

Flynn: It was forty-five, yeah. It was in October. Yeah, it was October '45, and I got married November eighth of '45, and we had our first son October of '46, and he's sixty-three years old now. Tim, then Joe, he's a writer, Annie, Martha, we call her Noonie, Debbie and Kevin.

Smith: Okay. Is the re anything else you would like to talk about as far as your experiences?

Flynn: Well, about my experiences. Well, I had tremendous experiences with my marriage, if that is any interest—

Smith: Sure.

Flynn: —with my kids. I was working for this fellow for ten years, and I made pretty good money at that time—well, it amounted to two dollars an hour, but it was eighty dollars a week, and I'd get the whole month of July off with pay, because that's how he was. This guy was a terrific Republican. He was

Republican. He was from Holland. He was Republican, and him and I used to argue (Smith laughs) because I was such a Roosevelt man. And I used to tell him, Bing, I says, "How can you say that? Here you live in River Forest, one of the highest-class suburbs in Chicagoland area, and you have HOLC. HOLC saved your bacon"—Home Owners' Loan Corporation. That's where Roosevelt declared a moratorium on all mortgages. And he (laughs) went down and applied for it, and he got it. But, oh, he was a terrific guy, too. He was a very good guy. He was always good to me. But we argued politics and never got mad at each other. And it was really swell, you know.

My brother Tim, he got out a little bit earlier than I did, but he didn't go to work; he didn't go looking for work. He had enough work in the four years he was in the army—he was overseas almost four years. Later on he went into a different business. He went into a cosmetic business and tried that out and stuff like that. But eventually he come to work where I was. He was what they called an expediter, getting the orders out to the customers as fast as they could possibly get it. That was A. Finkl and Son. That's where Blagojevich's father worked.

Smith: Oh, really?

Flynn: They had three machine shops. They had two forge shops, and they had three heat-treating businesses. They did tremendous business. They owned a lot of property on—it's practically in the center of the city. It was at Southport and Cortland. But they got all that property. They bought the street, from Elston Avenue to Cortland. And now they're moving. Can you imagine what that property is going to be worth? They're going to move to Ninety-fifth Street or someplace out there on the South Side where plants have moved out that couldn't make it. But this plant has been in there for over a hundred years.

Smith: Has it really?

Flynn: Yeah. This is why it was getting to me. My brother was one of these guys—"How or what are the kids doing? Well, you got to do this. Don't let him do this." I said, "How many kids you got, Tim?" He wasn't even married. (Smith laughs) But anyway, getting along to him, he came to work at our place as an expediter, and he used to come by—I'd see him every single day. That was maybe for over twenty-five years. And we'd talk and we'd bullshit, and he'd tell me about a one-night stand, you know, all that stuff. He was a sharp guy, a sharp guy. He couldn't see the forest for the trees for some reason. And all that time that we talked, and we talked to different people about the war and all that stuff, I didn't find out till after he passed away—he was eighty years old—his twin was ninety-four just a few days ago—she's Mary, my oldest sister, Mary—but he smoked those cigarettes. He smoked those cigarettes. And I'm telling you, I used to be weighing material in the shipping department and he'd come behind me coughing like hell, and I'd say, "Tim, quit that smoking." But not once in all those twenty-five years that we were

that close did he ever tell me one thing about his war action. And so when he died, I went to my sister's house, and (unintelligible) my sister said, "If there's anything that you might like, you're welcome to it." So I went up there, and I saw this Bronze Star. I said, "What's with the Bronze Star?" "Oh," she said, "Tim gave that to his nephew," [the son of] my youngest sister who died [and] one of my sisters raised him. I guess he was two years old. His father was a colonel in the Marines. And my brother gave him that. And I said, "Well, where'd he get it?" She says, "Don't you know that Tim got this Bronze Star because he pulled a guy out from a fiery truck?" And he never told me a word about it.

Smith: Really? Huh.

Flynn: And, you know, we were so close, but he never once mentioned that he got that Bronze Star.

Smith: That's hard to believe.

Flynn: Yeah, yeah. Well, you know, the large family, and like I said, my mother was the disciplinarian—and she wasn't that much of a disciplinarian—she let us get away with murder. But we all got along. And you see some families, they've got two kids; they can't get along at all.

Smith: Yeah, well, times have changed.

Flynn: It's hard. It's hard.

Smith: Times have changed.

Flynn: Yeah, yeah. But we all stuck together, and even today there's six of us left—there's three boys and three girls—and we get along fine. We never argue or anything like that. We may disagree on politics or something like that, (Smith laughs) but we don't let it go beyond that.

Smith: Are they still in Chicago area?

Flynn: I'm the only one who moved out of Chicago.

Smith: Okay. What brought you to Springfield?

Flynn: My daughter has been down here I think for about—she finished school—she went to that school—what the heck is the name of that school with the big basketball team?

Smith: I shouldn't say because we may disagree. (laughs)

Flynn: No, I don't care. I don't care. You know, they had some good teams there. But my son-in-law came from there, too. He came from Long Island, New York,

and went to this school. What is it? it's right here in Illinois. Bradley, Bradley, which happened to be my mother's name, maiden name. But what was I talking about?

Smith: You came down to Springfield because your daughter was here.

Flynn: Oh, yeah, yeah. My daughter, Annie, and then my son-in-law was a year ahead of her, so they moved to Springfield, and my daughter finished up at Sangamon State and got her degree. And then she went to work for Senator Durbin—he was Representative Durbin then.

Smith: What did she do for Senator Durbin?

Flynn: She's in charge of all the money. And (laughs) she never took accounting, but she has to go by those FEC rules, you know, and—

Smith: Yeah, you better be careful.

Flynn: Oh, yeah. Oh, man, she's … (laughs) That's a really tough challenge. But anyway, (unintelligible) my son, Joe, they were having trouble in California—he lived in Los Angeles during that race riots and stuff like that. And so they got out of there and they moved down here to Springfield.

Smith: Oh, really? Isn't that great?

Flynn: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, he's been right here in Springfield now for quite a while. And his wife works for the Methodists. She does a lot of special work for the Methodist church.

Smith: Okay. Anything you'd like to pass on to the younger generations about your war experiences?

Flynn: Well, the only thing I would say—I think I did give this information, a little bit of advice. I don't know if it'll be accepted. I don't know where I got it, but it's just something that grew with me in the Army: Always look busy. But if you're not looking busy, they think there's something wrong with you. And if they—

Smith: They'll find something for you to do.

Flynn: They'll find something for you to do, and they'll think, Ooh, this guy's going on a free ride or something like that. I always tried to look busy. And I didn't have to apply that when I was working with one man, because I knew that I had to produce or work wasn't getting done. But when I went to work in this steel factory that made pistons and stuff for big steam engines and boats and stuff like that, and stuff that weighs twenty and thirty thousand pounds, you know, and die blocks for the automobile industry and for tool and die makers and all that stuff, but I always kept busy, and if I seen anybody that looked

like he was a big shot, I was busier than a dog shitting on—you know how busy a dog is when he's shitting. (Smith laughs) And it always paid off on me. Because my brother Tim said to me, "Why are you working here doing"—I was working on a test machine. I test the steel for hardness, and then I read it, and then I sign my name to it, and if there's anything wrong with it, why, it's in the back, but that would be starting the process all over, re–heat, treat it or something like that. If it was either too soft or too hard, they'd send it in for a special heat treatment. But he says, "Take the job in the shipping room, and it won't be hard." I said, "I don't want to do that." Finally I got the job, and (laughs) I stayed there twenty-five years.

Smith: Really?

Flynn: Yeah.

Smith: Huh.

Flynn: And I had about thirteen guys under me. I think for the most part, I got along. But the first thing I told guys that came into the shop new: "Watch yourself. You come in the doors of this building, you're walking into danger. There's so many places where you could get hurt."

Smith: Oh, I bet.

Flynn: Yeah. We had one guy who had his head cut off.

Smith: Oh my God!

Flynn: Yeah. And I had another guy—as a matter of fact, I was working for this guy. My granddaughter put in for an internship with Samsung in South Korea. She was in South Korea for two months, and they loved her, but they said, What we do here in South Korea, we bow. She says, "I don't bow." She says, "I say 'Hello.' 'Good morning.'" (laughter) They didn't let her go with that. But they loved her. The people on the street just loved her. And she'd be walking down the street with somebody from the office who was a Korean, and the lady would say, "Can I take your picture?" And the guy that's taking the picture, she'd say, "Get out of there. I want a picture of her, not of you." (laughter)

And my other daughter—this is my daughter, Debbie, that has raised these three girls by herself. Her husband passed—divorced—and he's a schoolteacher. But these three girls, Ashley, Brittany, and Courtney. And Courtney went to Australia for four months for a semester of school. And to—oh, I forget the name of the town. —I think she was over there when the Pope was visiting, and she was telling me about it, you know. I'm telling you, the best kids, the best kids. They always treat me with respect, and they love me so much.

Smith: Wow, they're good kids, then.

Flynn: It was just like my kids when I used to come home from work. In the—let's see—in the thirty-nine years I worked, I took public transportation all the time. And I'd have to go—I'd either take the 'L' or I'd have to go to a bus that was maybe three or four blocks away. And I always did that, and if I worked the night shift, if I got out at five o'clock in the morning and it'd be dark out, I'd run from where I got off the bus to my house, which was four blocks away on Sheffield. But when I used to come home from work at night, they'd always be looking for me, my girls, my three girls. And oh, they'd come running down the block and they'd see me coming. They were so happy to see me coming.

Smith: Makes you feel good.

Flynn: Oh, and how. And the kids have always treated me great. They've always been good to me. But I've always maintained this one thing about kids: there was one sister that I had, my sister Nora,, but she was just a skinny little girl. She's two years older than me, yeah. Mary's three, and Nora's two. And she says, "Okay." This is nine o'clock at night, and we're almost eighteen years old. "Come on, let's go home. Mom says to come home." "Tell Mom I'll be home in fifteen minutes." "Mom said to come right now." (Smith laughs) And she stuck with it. I remember, this girl, she never missed a day of school in twelve years. She had to really travel far. She had a scholarship to go to Rosary College, I think it was out there in River Forest. Now, we lived almost at the lake, and that was a long way to go, and there was no way she was going to get there on public transportation, so she had to give that up and go to a public school. She was tough, but she was the most finicky sister—person—that you could ever get to eat. Very picky. Now, we're eleven kids. You know, when you have eleven kids, you're looking to see what they can get, and you eat as much as they may get. Nora, she was not like that. And she was very smart, and she was very good with the hands, making clothes and stuff like that. And I remember her going to high school, and the icicles would be running from her nose and her eyes, and she wouldn't give up. Twelve years of school without missing a day!

Smith: Good gracious.

Flynn: When she died, she was passing away and they told us to come and see Nora. So I went over there, and I was crying, you know, and she says, "For crying out loud, Joe, I'm eighty-three years old." She says, "Now that one over there," and she pointed to my sister Mary, "she'll live to be a hundred." (Smith laughs) Of course, she's ninety-four now. But that was some family.

Smith: I guess.

Flynn: Yeah.

Smith: Maybe one more question: Have you been to the World War II memorial in Washington?

Flynn: Yeah, my youngest son took me there, yeah.

Smith: Recently, or …?

Flynn: Let's see. That must have been about four or five years ago.

Smith: Okay, so that wasn't one of the flights that …

Flynn: No, no, no, no, no, no, no. No, and we went to Senator Durbin's office there, and we went to the Senate area there and watched the Senate debate for a little while, and …

Smith: I bet you were well taken care of because of your daughter.

Flynn: Well, he wasn't there. He wasn't there. But no, he is terrific. As far as I'm concerned, he's been awful good to me. He's the one who told me—he called me last D-Day. He says, "Joe, somebody should hear your story." Because, you know, honest to—I've been so blessed, to go through the Depression, go through the war, and all my work life, and come out of it with very few bumps. I think maybe one time, just after I got married, I think I had a strep throat, and there was a period before that I had headaches, and I went to see a doctor who was supposed to be very good at St. Joe's in Chicago. And he tried everything on me, and he says, "I can't find any reason why you have a headache." So I come down here—that's, oh, maybe that's over forty years ago—I came down here, and I went to Dr. Crabtree out here in Chatham that I'd been going to, and he's always very good with me. You know, he wants to make sure that everything's going well with me. And he says, "I've got a young student here, a doctor. Would you mind if he came in first?" I said, "No, go ahead." So he comes in and he says to me, "Have you had any headaches?" And I said, "For God's sake, doc, I can't remember the last time I had a headache." In all those years. And it was bothering me so much. I don't know whether it was the work I was doing at the time—you know, I was in a lot of paint fumes.

Smith: Oh, I'm sure that was probably it.

Flynn: Naphtha and the benzenes and the lacquer thinner and stuff like that. That might have something to do with it, but he couldn't find anything.

Smith: Well, that's good.

Flynn: Yeah. I've been blessed that I'm almost ninety and that I can still get around.

Smith: That's true.

Flynn: This is something that's been on my mind all the time. I always used to tell everybody about it, that we go by hospitals and we think nothing of it, but when you think of all the misery within those hospitals …

Smith: That's very true.

Flynn: Another thing I wanted to make sure—this is something I've always told my kids. I says, "I don't care what you think about me or do about me, but one thing, I want you to respect your mother. Make a special care for your mom." I said, "I don't care about me, because I'm not as important as she is. Your mom is the greatest." And that's how it was with my mother. I thought my mother was the greatest. And she was strict with us. You know, eighteen years old and she's getting us in the house at nine and ten o'clock! (Smith laughs) But if we weren't in the house at ten o'clock, then, say, 1928—I remember 1928. Al Smith was running against Herbert Hoover. Well, you're too young to know that stuff. And we'd stay up and listen to that radio and listen to those conventions like it was going out of style. You know, it was just something that we enjoyed. And when President Roosevelt come on—oh, if he was going to be on the radio, we had to be there to listen to the radio.

Smith: I'm sure.

Flynn: But I always thought that children should pay a special attention to their mom

Smith: That's a good thought.

Flynn: Yeah. And I'm so thankful to God that he gave me such a wonderful mother. And toward the end—you know, I kid around with her and all that—and my younger brother Jim, oh, he'd call her Mary and pat her on the butt and all that stuff. He used to really kid around with her. But she loved all the kids, and that's why she was treated like that.

Smith: That's great.

Flynn: Yeah. So I've been bending your ear for a while now.

Smith: No, (laughs) that's quite all right. I appreciate it. I would like to, you know, close by saying we really appreciate you doing this.

Flynn: You know, like I told you—I might have said, you know, about flannel mouths—some Irish do overdo it. But I'm alone now for going on six years, but I have my kids come over, and I've got Marty here. But I like to talk, but I like to say things—I hate to have bad feelings toward anybody, but there are exceptions, and they're my exceptions, so I try to curtail them as much as I can.

Smith: Sure. Well, let me just say for the record that Marty is a big black dog. (laughter)

Flynn: He is a good guy. He's really a good guy. He plays me. Yeah, he plays me like a fiddle. Yeah, first thing, I'll take him out in the morning, and then I'll feed him right away, before I feed myself. And then he'll say, Well, this guy is—let's see what I can do with this guy. So he'll go to the door. And I'll say, "Marty, you're not going to get a treat." And he's out the door. He knows when he comes back, he's going to get the treat.

Smith: (laughs) Well, I'm sure he's good—it's good for you to have him.

Flynn: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah. I think had my wife been living yet, I don't know if she would go along with it, because there was a time in our life that she did go out and get a dog, and then I went out to California—Long Beach, California—for a hernia operation. This was 1974. And there was a doctor out there that—it was a one-day operation, one day and you're out. I was at St. Mary's Hospital in Long Beach, California. I went in, and he operated on me, and one nurse put me in a wheelchair and another nurse says, "Is that Dr. Carroll's patient?" She says, "Yeah." "Get him out of that wheelchair. He'll crown you for that. He walks out of here. He walked in; he's going to walk out."

Smith: (laughs) Oh, good grief.

Flynn: One day after the operation. And I went out there two times for that, for operations with him. People couldn't understand it, but it was better than spending thirteen days in the hospital.

Smith: Well, that's true.

Flynn: And then I went to—my brother-in-law was a chef in the Dunes, the Sultan's Table, and I'd spend ten days in Las Vegas.

Smith: Ah, (laughs) well, that's an added bonus.

Flynn: Yeah.

Smith: Well, again, Mr. Flynn, thank you very much.

Flynn: Oh, you're welcome. Thank you for coming.

(end of interview)