

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #467

Interviewee: Eldon Currey

Interviewer: Ralph Dickenson

Subject: Military

Date: February 25, 2009

Place: Chester & Helen Felt Recording Room, Harney County Library, Burns, OR

RALPH DICKENSON: All right, I'm with Eldon Currey up at the Western History Recording Room, and Eldon is going to tell us about his history, and his military history. And I would just like to start with Eldon, tell you how much I appreciate you doing this, and it is nice of you to come up and do it.

ELDON CURREY: Well I'm glad to do it. You and several others have told me that its, I know stuff that is history and should be recorded. And I agree that some of it --- although I do not want to say that I won the war all by myself or anything, but that is sure not true, of course.

RALPH: When did you, Eldon, when did you, or are you going to tell us when you first enlisted?

ELDON: Yeah.

RALPH: Okay. I'll just keep quiet.

ELDON: Well I was drafted. I had worked the winter before at the Whitehorse Ranch, for the PLS Company. So in the spring, I knew I was going to be drafted, so I was, as quick as I knew they could get along without me, I quit and got, started settling up my,

the stuff that I had. So I was inducted into the Army on April the 10th, 1942, at Portland. I was sent to California for a week, then sent by troop train to Little Rock, Arkansas, for basic training. After about five weeks, possibly six, I don't remember exactly, we were loaded on another train, and three days later we arrived in Massachusetts. And when we went in, they said well we would probably be in training for a year. It ended up we were in training for four months, and then we ---

Anyhow, when we arrived in Massachusetts it was out on Camp Edwards. It was out on Cape Cod, way out on Cape Cod. So then they explained, they were making this new branch of the Army, amphibian engineers. And that would be our job, was to make landings. And not only did we have to fight making the landings, but we had to fix the beach so that we could unload cargo over it. And unloading the cargo was, actually turned out to be our biggest job.

RALPH: Up to that time, Eldon, did you know that you were going to be doing that kind of work?

ELDON: I had no idea. I didn't even know anything about the Army.

RALPH: Uh huh.

ELDON: But I found out. (Laughter)

RALPH: Did they pick you for that particular service?

ELDON: No, no.

RALPH: No.

ELDON: They just drafted me, and sent me to --- in Arkansas was a training camp, they gave you infantry training really. They had been given about, oh four months, I think. Up until that time, well they give us about five weeks. So then we were put on this train, god we went all over the United States. We went through Texas, and we went through Iowa, and of course they never told you where you were, but you could see signs. In the middle of the night we arrived in Massachusetts, it was in August. And they had fog in August, and I had never seen fog in August in Harney County. So I wondered what part of the world they had taken me to.

So anyhow there they were forming this new outfit. At first they were going to teach us how to run boats, and me I had been on maybe a ten-foot rowboat a few times in Harney County, so I had a lot to learn. Well they found out that didn't work, so they dropped the boats and left the boats to the navy, and started giving us this training. We were issued some equipment, not very much, and nothing special. Then they loaded us on boats and go out, and we --- they dropped the front of the boat, an old Higgins landing craft, and we learned how to do and ---

RALPH: How to get out of the boat?

ELDON: What?

RALPH: How to get out of the boat and get the equipment ---

ELDON: Huh? And what you needed to take, and what you needed to do. And then on August the 6th, of 1942, we loaded on a ship, which was a, oh I don't know if it was a passenger ship --- but the Thomas H. Berry. Then joined a convoy, and went up to, in

Canada, and stayed all night in a port there at Halifax. And then the next morning we went out and joined a convoy that was headed --- which was all right, nothing much to it. But any how after we got out about two days they had a submarine alert, and they started dropping death bombs around us which was quite an experience, because I --- I still wonder why they didn't sink our boat. It would shake it, them old death bombs would shake it. But anyhow ---

RALPH: Were they dropping these death charges off of the boat that you were on?

ELDON: No, off of --- a destroyer.

RALPH: Sub destroyer.

ELDON: Yeah. On August the 6th, we loaded on the Thomas Berry. On the 17th we landed in Ireland, in Northern Ireland, near Londonderry. We still didn't have any equipment, but we were taking training. And their training consisted on how to use your gas mask, and then they put your gas mask on you and double-timed you up a hill so to get you hardened in a little. And that's about all we done in North Ireland. And from there we went across to Scotland, and here we got just a little equipment, not very much, and more training on other things. And I think we went through training on M-1's, because we trained with those infield rifles in Little Rock, and we were issued our M-1's there. And we had to take a little training on them.

And then we were there, I don't remember just how long, about six weeks maybe. And on October 27th we loaded on a British ship, the Monarch of Bermuda was an old tour ship that they went to Bermuda from England. And we headed out into the Atlantic again, and of course we didn't know where we were, but the sailors knew where we were. So we went out, way out into the Atlantic. We were closer to Florida than we were

England or Africa. And we didn't know where we were going, they told us absolutely nothing about where we were going. They took us twenty --- I have here, it was twenty some days, well I think it was twenty-four or twenty-eight days.

RALPH: That you were on the water.

ELDON: Huh?

RALPH: That you were on the water, that you were on that boat.

ELDON: We went around, oh I can't remember, but we were almost over to South America, and then turned around. Well they had been gathering ships from everywhere, and so about the night before, I think, or a couple days before, they took us in and told us we were going to land in North Africa, and told us where we were going to land on the North Coast. Then that afternoon then we went through, between North Africa and the Rock of Gibraltar, into the Mediterranean. And it was a beautiful day, and we were out on deck. So then that --- then the next day it got a little rough in there, the weather. But anyhow we --- on October, I don't know just what day it was, anyhow we, about 4 o'clock in the morning we got up, got on deck, they unloaded us and took us ashore. They had some naval guns in blockhouses --- There was quite a, well you would almost call it a mountain back of us about three miles. Well they were where they couldn't hardly hit our beach where we landed, but they hit the little Monarch of Bermuda with one shell, and killed one crewman.

RALPH: This was a German?

ELDON: What?

RALPH: This was a German? Was this the German in placement you were ---

ELDON: Yeah. Well German and what --- Vichy French?

RALPH: Yeah.

ELDON: So anyhow, that landing I went in with the infantry, I marched in. The night before they said they sent a plane down to --- they didn't fly those planes very often over where we were going to land, ever. Because they didn't want to give any --- but they had flown the plane about a year before down that beach. And then about six weeks before, they had flown another plane. Well it was the same beach, you could tell that all right enough. But there was something out there, ahead of all the buildings on the beach, and they said we don't know what it is, we have no idea, and no way of finding out. It could be a reinforced block house there, a gun emplacement.

RALPH: Uh huh.

ELDON: So we didn't know what we was getting in. Now when we was marching in they were shooting at the boat we had just got off of out there. And you can hear them big old barrel bullets going over. They rumbled like a freight train almost. So we got up there --- well our blockhouse was an Arab's stack of rye hay. In the wintertime they had lots of rain there, so they would mix up mud in the summertime and smear mud all over this little stack of hay they had. They didn't have no machine to put it up, it was just how far they could pitch it up. And they covered it with mud. So one of our big worries was over. And anyhow, after we got there and set up a little, and they were still shooting over to the boats in the harbor, and they marched us in a little farther, and the first sergeant, he come over and he says, "Well here is your Caterpillar." And I said, "My Cat." "Yeah, you are a Cat driver." He says, "You know how to drive a Cat, don't you?" And I said, "Yeah, I know how to drive a Cat." Well in Massachusetts they had sent me to school, an

air compressor school, on how to take care of all, one of those self-contained air compressor that was mounted on a truck. And they had all kinds of equipment like skill saws, and drills, and pavement breakers, and Jackhammers. And I took two weeks of that, learning that. Well, nevertheless I was a Cat driver. And so anyhow ---

RALPH: Had you ever driven a Cat before?

ELDON: Yeah, I knew how to start one, and drive it. I wasn't a dozer operator, but I knew how it was done.

RALPH: But the military hadn't given you the training on that.

ELDON: No, no. So anyhow, that was the last time I had to march ashore, anyhow. I always drove ashore after that. But it was quite an experience. And we were all so untrained for it, actually. But we made it pretty good.

RALPH: You were just kind of learning as you went.

ELDON: Yeah.

RALPH: Well how long were you on that, how long were you on that beach?

ELDON: We were only on it a week and a half, or two weeks. And Oran, which was 20 miles east of us, they captured it by that time. We were on that beach, and we just started unloading boats on it. See that was our job, after we got in and got the position set up, and some protection out, then we were to unload boats.

RALPH: I'm kind of interested, Eldon, where did, how did the Cat get on shore? Did you ---

ELDON: The first time --- I don't know. It was setting there running, somebody ---

RALPH: Somebody had brought it on there.

ELDON: It was a little alley Cat, Allis Chalmers, gasoline. You couldn't do anything with it. It just bucked like a bronco when you started to doze.

RALPH: That's interesting.

ELDON: And anyhow --- then in about a week and a half, I think, they moved us to Oran. Well by that time the French had moved way up, and we --- they put us to fixing roads and unloading boats and repairing stuff. And that was our North Africa landing. And then we were there until --- let's see, that was ---

RALPH: That's kind of, let's, so they just were really untested. They didn't even ---

ELDON: Yeah.

RALPH: The brass didn't even know what they were doing then.

ELDON: No, nobody. The army had never done any of this before. And we really learned there. And the lucky thing, there wasn't very much, the big guns which never touched us, were a good education for us.

RALPH: But there wasn't a lot of resistance right on that ---

ELDON: No, not very much. The Free French, they called them, or the Vichy French, they --- we were scared of the American, or the Foreign Legion. Because the cowboy stories always had what fighters they were, well they weren't much fighters. And they were tired of fighting; they were tired of the Germans being there actually. So the actual fighting between us and them took three days. And they turned over and joined us then, helped us. And me and this guy, I buddied with a little, this was kind of funny, we of course got into Oran, we had been there a week in North Africa, and they gave us passes

to go up in Oran. So this guy that I buddied with, him and I buddied together, we liked to go to good restaurants. So we went up to Oran and gosh, the prices we could get a meal and wine with it and everything for a couple of bucks, you know. So we went out on a pass. Well we drank a couple of bottles of pretty good wine, and it was the middle of the

night and we went out to go home, and we got lost in there. There was a whole bunch of French Foreign Legion moving into this vacant block. So we stumbled into there and didn't know where our camp was. And finally found a French man that could talk some English. Well yeah, I know where, so they took us home. We didn't know whether to let them know whether we was American soldiers or not, because three days before we would have been fighting them.

RALPH: Yeah, that's funny.

ELDON: So anyhow, that was about, we got into Oran and they gave us the usual thing. Put us to doing whatever they needed doing. And let's see, that was in North Africa --- that was in July, yeah --- no, that was in August I think. Wait just a minute; I know I got them dates here. Yeah, North Africa, November. It was November the 8th of 1942. Well in --- they moved us then east of Oran, and we stayed there all winter. And we done the usual things, fixed roads, dug ditches, made ... to store stuff. Then the next year then, in July, on July the 10th, we went, loaded up and went across to Sicily. And we landed in July, July the 10th in Sicily. By that time I was on a D-4 by that time, and they pushed it up and dropped it over side of the boat into a landing craft and we went ashore. It was, a little fighting right there, but very little. Them Sicilians were pretty tired of the Germans telling them what they could do, and what they couldn't do. And we went ashore, and

that time we had to unload for quite awhile on the beach. We got a lot of practice there unloading. And we had to do some fighting too.

RALPH: So when they loaded your Cat onto the boat to take it in, the landing craft, did you go with it, you got in the boat with the Cat?

ELDON: Yeah, yeah. They hoisted the Cat up, and I had to go over to the side in cargo net and get the ---

RALPH: So did you get clear into the beach before you unloaded the Cat, or did you have to unload it in the water that time?

ELDON: No, went in and --- there was a little water, maybe a foot and a half deep when I went through.

RALPH: So you got pretty close.

ELDON: Yeah, yeah, they got close. So we were there, and then they took us back to North Africa after we were there. We landed there when --- July, oh not July, and we weren't there too long. And while we were there they didn't really have much to do with Cats so they took me off a Cat and we had just got a bunch of Ducks, which were the amphibian GMC trucks.

RALPH: Uh huh.

ELDON: Well they put me on Duck. That was an experience too, because they didn't drive like a truck, they were ---

RALPH: They had tracks didn't they?

ELDON: No.

RALPH: Didn't they?

ELDON: They were 6 x 6.

RALPH: Oh, 6 x 6.

ELDON: All the works was a GMC truck, but it was put in a hull that floated. And of course a boat steers from the back with a rudder. Well they had a rudder and a propeller back there that you shifted in, but you couldn't shift your front steering out --- cartwheels was bigger than the rudder behind, so they went this way and that way. Took about a week to get them pointed the right direction.

RALPH: You was kind of like being back on the farm for you, because you went from a Cat to a Duck. You were involved with animals all the time. (Laughter)

ELDON: Yeah. And ---

RALPH: So you went from Sicily back to North Africa, you said?

ELDON: No, we went from --- yeah we went back, but we were only there just a little while and they loaded us up. So September the 9th we went into Italy. And this was the rough one. They unloaded the Cat the same way, but I was on a D-7 by that time. And we got out, and it was a big bay we landed in. And the Navy had laid a smoke screen in there. So we got out and got with our boats we were supposed to go in. And in that smoke screen they started out, and then they would start shooting at us. And so we were out there two hours going around and around, and go out of that smoke screen and start in. The infantry had got in ahead of us, before they opened up. And the beach that we landed on had one of those quad 20-millimeter anti-aircraft guns; four like machine guns, only 20 millimeters, almost an inch. And they had one of them at each end of our beach that we landed on. And we was under fire for quite a little while. But I got ashore. Then by that time it had got daylight. And they had knocked the 20-millimeters out of each ...

Beach out. So they were shooting from inland at those boats out there. And we started unloading stuff, and of course we made kind of a defensive, you know, sent out people.

RALPH: Uh huh.

ELDON: And we were, unloaded quite a lot of stuff, and was working fine. They were shooting at the boats out in the bay. And then there was a big sand hill, big like the, oh I don't know, maybe 150, 200 feet high, and then there was a valley back there. Well I was dragging some trucks that drowned out, and stuff that got stuck, up over that hill, up on the hill, and then go back after more. It was mostly my job to rescue them trucks that drowned out or got stuck in the sand. So then there was 6 or 8 German tanks that came down this valley, and they started shelling us. And the cruiser Boise was out in the bay, cruising back and forth, and another boat, I never did know, it was smaller than a cruiser, smaller than the heavy cruiser. The Boise was a heavy cruiser. They were going back and forth, and these German tanks broke through and they got in there and they were raising heck with us, because we were all over that little valley, the American troops were, and had gun in placements and everything there. The little Boise came in real close to our beach. Had a squatter on top of this sand hill where he could see the, they took four or five shots at them, three tanks that had got through, and they hit one of them. And from then on it was like shooting ducks. They'd shoot and they'd miss once in awhile, but then pretty quickly hit another.

RALPH: They had the range.

ELDON: Yeah, they got the range on them.

RALPH: Eldon, a minute ago when you said you unloaded a lot of stuff on the beach, was this all kinds of things, military equipment mostly ---

ELDON: Yeah, it was mostly artillery. And artillery ammunition, see that's what you need first is to get the artillery set up so that you've got some protection. And then keeping some ammunition to it was a big item.

RALPH: Yeah. So did you have to, at this time did you have to lay any road, road down on the beach?

ELDON: Well yeah, we laid a little of this chicken wire road. We called it chicken wire; it was heavier wire than that, but with burlap tied to it. And we laid quite a little of it in Italy. And it was, my job was to get it in there, and to get it where they wanted it. That was the first job that --- we had sand sleds, and had this road piled on it. And so anyhow the Germans got close enough they closed the beach and quit taking boats in. And Boise came in and started shooting. And they dropped out three of them tanks, and the rest they decided it wasn't healthy around there, and they got out. And that was the most fire that we was ever in really.

RALPH: How long do you suppose that lasted, Eldon, was it a couple hours, or days, or ---

ELDON: Well it was a day.

RALPH: A day.

ELDON: Yeah. The biggest part of a day.

RALPH: Uh huh. Long day, wasn't it?

ELDON: Yeah, it was. Let see now, I was in Italy. And then, yeah --- I should have got an outline of this.

RALPH: No, you're doing fine.

ELDON: Then we followed the front in Italy, up. Italy, they fought all the way. The Italian troops, in Sicily they were tired of the Germans, and heck we hadn't been there an hour when those natives were down there helping us unload stuff. And Italy, there was nobody there. The Germans said anybody that wasn't a German army or something were taken back.

RALPH: So you had resistance all the way there.

ELDON: Yeah. And the Army troops had a lot of resistance, but we unloaded a lot of supplies in Italy.

RALPH: And you said that you followed, you followed inland a little bit when you were in Italy.

ELDON: Yeah, yeah after they finally got some ports opened, then they put us to building roads and fixing bridges and stuff like that. Yeah, we made quite a few Bailey bridges. The Germans had all stone bridges there. They blew up a place out of the middle, you know, as they went by. And they wouldn't destroy the bridge, because they figured they was coming back and shove us into the ocean. And so we'd go out there with these Bailey bridges, which you made in before, as part of --- you got to the bridge. And made it twice as long as it had to be, then you got either a Cat across the creek or a, some pulleys anchored over there. And we hooked to the cables, and ---

RALPH: Pulleys ---

ELDON: Pullings about --- bridge across, and it was made twice as long so it didn't drop down and hook up on the other side.

RALPH: What was that, was those made out of steel?

ELDON: What?

RALPH: The bridge. Steel bridge.

ELDON: Yeah, made out of angle iron and bolted together.

RALPH: Uh huh.

ELDON: And then we stayed in Italy until it was, turned cold. It was in September we went in there. And we stayed along into November. And I had always heard about sunny Italy. Well we had moved up by that time, up to pretty close to the mountains in Switzerland. And I never came so near freezing to death in my life as that, in there, we were in pup tents and had about four inches of snow. Anyhow, then they pulled us out of there, and put us on the old Monarch ... again, and we sailed out of them, the Mediterranean. We knew we wasn't going home, but we didn't know where we was going. Well incidentally before --- no --- anyhow we got on it and we ended up in England, they took us back there. Well we knew it was, when they went in France well that was in Italy, it was in November and we went back, we stayed in England in a summer resort, in the southern part of England. And it was cold, or not cold, it was wet and damp. And we stayed there all winter. We got all new equipment, done some more practicing and everything. And then the next spring we start doing dry runs to --- they had a beach there in England, well it's almost like the one we was in France, across the

channel there. So Cat drivers, they were short of stuff to move Cats with, you know. So they took us up there, we camped in a college up there. And the Cat drivers stayed, and each bunch that would come in, we'd line up down on the beach just like we come off of

a boat, and all these people would have to go up and do their thing while we done our thing. So we got a lot of practice, which was great, we needed it.

RALPH: Lots of troops there?

ELDON: Huh?

RALPH: Were there lots of troops gathered there?

ELDON: Oh yeah. England was so full of troops, that was a joke that they had to put them barage balloons up, that was to keep them bombers from coming in too low. They was afraid England was going to sink from all the American stuff there. So that's the reason they had the ... balloon was to keep it from sinking. But all those troops, it was a lot of them.

RALPH: This was all in preparation for D-Day in France.

ELDON: D-Day in France. And we, they hadn't issued us any Cats. Of course every time we got someplace, and got there and done our thing, then we left all of our equipment for somebody else to use, and took it back, when we went back.

RALPH: Without your equipment.

ELDON: So in England they started issuing us all new equipment. Then we had new trucks, we had new Cats, and then we went to --- and all of spring we, or all winter, early spring we practiced landings here and there, and getting ready. And so then in June,

about the 3rd, oh maybe before that, they moved us down toward the beach, and in the camp, none of our stuff, the stuff was there, we moved in, we stayed a few days, and then we landed on, or loaded our boats. Well before they'd taken our Cats on a big boat, a steamer you know, and then they unloaded it into the little L-CT's --- this time when we

got ready to go to France they were on landing craft tank which held four, four Cats and the sand sleds that we pulled. And then we had a Jeep and a trailer behind that. It had a medical, to set up, so they could set up a ---

RALPH: A hospital.

ELDON: A, well a first aid station on the beach. And we loaded that, we went out, and that was when we was going to land on the 5th. And then the weather was terrible, raining, and blowing, and gray, rain. LCT was a landing craft tank, was bigger than the little ones that --- the foot soldiers went in, but not very big, and no protection on it. We slept in our Cat seats or ---

RALPH: In the cabs.

ELDON: Most everybody got seasick. They were flat bottomed. And the English Channel is famous for being rough anyhow. And we were out there, and then they brought us part way back. We turned around and went back again. We were three days on that damn boat. We was glad to get ashore. What a --- Anyhow, when we got ashore we went in, our boats went in with the infantry boats. They had bombed; oh they had bombed that beach something terrible the night before. And then they had landed paratroopers that morning, in the early morning. And we went in about, I forget, seven or eight o'clock. That was quite a show. I was up from 3 o'clock on to waiting for my, well

we was in the boat there and we was waiting to go in. We had to be ready to go at any time, you know, whenever. And anyhow them old battlewagons was lined out there, and them big old shells you could see them, and it was still dark when they started. And they went up there, and it looked like they was slow enough you could catch them. But when they hit something --- So anyhow, about seven o'clock I think it was, six-thirty or seven, we went in. Our Cats, incidentally were waterproof for twelve feet of water. Those old diesel Cats would run with the engine completely under water, but not for very long. That cold water would slow them. But we went in, and I was, my Cat was second. And they had an old International Cat in ahead, and it had ... They hit the shore a little too hard and that old International slid in, slid on the pavement box and got crossways in the ramp. So when we went into France, it was first time they ever gave you a relief driver. And he was a replacement, and he would, was telling me he got beered up a few days before. I had been through three of them, and here he was, the war was about over, and he wasn't going to get --- I says, well be my guest, just drive her. Well he was going to drive it in, and so when that old International got there, he couldn't get out then. The night before they told us, well two nights before when they briefed us on this. They said Cats is the one thing that we are short of. And says, we got lots of boats, and if the boat you get in gets breached, you can't get out the front of it, doze the side of it out, and get the Cats ashore. Well I told my assistant driver, I said, "Angle the blade, angle the blade and get it down in there and straighten him up." And in order to get --- and he says, "You know how to do it, you do it, I don't want to drive." So I got in and I got the little International straightened out. So he was out. And we went out in water that came up on

the floor, a foot or so deep, on the floor of a D-7. One of the sailors, in order to get to that Cat and get him straightened out, I had to back the back of my Cat through the rail of the ship and bent it. He says you're tearing up our boat. And about that time the German shot through the front of it. Well I said well them Germans is doing a pretty good job of tearing it up too, ain't they? I got him straightened out and we went ashore. We were bombed, we were strafed, and very few people got hurt. There was some, and we lost a couple of Cat drivers. They told us that night, when they told us to get them Cats ashore; they said our estimate of your life expectancy, as a Cat driver is 45 minutes. But I never got hurt, never got hit.

RALPH: That was, that wasn't very encouraging, was it?

ELDON: No. Made you wonder if you really wanted the job. It was too late to do anything then.

RALPH: It sure was.

ELDON: But the Cat, I had a brand new Cat issued in England. And we put them ashore, and we never could get waterproof, a Cat starting motor, so that water wouldn't get in it. We could waterproof the diesel, so that it would run under water, but we found out in our trial runs that cold ocean water you had to watch your feed gauge, and the minute it started going down you had two minutes to get that motor up out of that water or she'd die on you. And they would just get so cold they wouldn't fire.

RALPH: Wouldn't run.

ELDON: And so we were, the Cat drivers said that you've got a short cable there, and a ... on it. And then of course we had all sorts of wenches. But they said you stay with

your Cat, if an outfit is drawing it out, out there and there is, they want pulled, you give them the hook, and tell them to hook on it, you stay with your Cat. And you know that you've only got a few minutes under that hot, or cold water, just don't lose the Cat.

RALPH: So they were pretty concerned because they were short of caterpillars.

ELDON: Yeah, yeah. So anyhow after the third day we never could start them, start the motors. So if we had to stop a Cat, we stopped it and worked on it just as quick as we could, and of course a caterpillar you can check the oil running, or setting. So we always kept them full of oil. That Cat, we run it ten days, and after the second day we never shut it off. And then the tenth day it was fixed up with an internal hoist for the blade behind the Cat, or behind the seat. And they worked good, but this one had one that run off the front of the engine, down under the radiator. Well the tenth day they couldn't get that gearbox for that hoist waterproofed. And it got water in it and it started throwing gears out through the radiator. Well, I was out of a Cat. So I went in to the company commander and he was there and I said, "Well my Cat blew up." He says, "Don't worry." He says, "You know they figured up that every one of you guys Cats has saved over 15 million dollars worth of equipment already." And he says, "We can get new Cats." He says, "Now we got new Cats." Next morning I had a brand new D-7.

RALPH: Did that just come in on ship?

ELDON: Yeah. It had come on in. Come in on a ship. And we stayed there, and oh gosh, it seemed like it was forever. And there for, after we were there about a week they said that we had handled more equipment and stuff than the port of New York handled that day over our beach. So we were there ---

RALPH: You were working.

ELDON: Oh yeah.

RALPH: What beach was that.

ELDON: Utah Beach.

RALPH: Utah, Utah. I have read Eldon that some of those beaches there in France had a lot of reinforcement out, a lot of metal reinforcement, a lot of concrete.

ELDON: Yeah, yeah. That was a high; I got a story on that too. Our foot troops that was with us, everyone of --- one platoon, that is four squads is a platoon. Instead of taking their stuff in their backpacks, they packed in a box of TNT, each one of them, and it was ready to go. And they threw it. There was this big cement fence they put up there and sand it, at the foot of the sand hill. Then the sand hill filled in. Back of that, it was about seven feet high. Well when we got up there and found out there was no land mines, you had to watch for land mines. We, me and a guy that drove the V-8 we started pushing sand up there. And we got some sand against it, and well the foot soldiers had come in and threw all our TNT against that wall. And then as quick as they got out of way, and we were out of way, they set it off. Well they cracked the wall all right now. So then we went in and filled where it had blowed up. And I tried to get on top of that wall, and I couldn't make it, the D-7 was too short. And so the guy with the D-8 he says I think I can make that. Let's shove a little more sand in there. So we shoveled a little more sand against it, and he went up there and he got the front to the tracks on the top of that, and he got on top. Well they crawled up on top, and they were flagging right over that. And he got up there to turn around, and when we went in each Cat had like a

luggage carrier built on the side and we had diesel in there, enough for a day or day and a half of diesel. Because we didn't know how quick we'd be able to get fuel. So he went up there and he turned around and they dropped a mortar shell just the other side of him. Well he come back down and he says them bastards is idiots. (Laughter) We looked at these GI cans and about four or five of them had little holes and they are spraying hot diesel, so we had to dump some diesel in these Cats before it all leaked out.

RALPH: Yeah, yeah.

ELDON: But anyhow there is always something funny that happened it seemed like.

RALPH: Well that made it bearable.

ELDON: I guess.

RALPH: It made it bearable I guess. Yeah.

ELDON: Yeah.

RALPH: You know, thinking back to what you were talking about, preparations to landing, and you got loaded up, and all of a sudden the storm got real rough.

ELDON: Yeah.

RALPH: And you were out there, and back and forth for a day or so. Then it just kind of cleared up, didn't it?

ELDON: Yes, just for about a day and a half.

RALPH: Uh huh. I think I've read where they almost decided not to make those landings it was so rough.

ELDON: Yeah, they did. And they were figuring on making them a day earlier than that.

RALPH: Yeah.

ELDON: And then the next week we had a terrible storm there. We had, oh it was a fright. They had to shut the beach down. But I thought, and they towed a lot of those, oh they made a big square tank about fourteen feet square, and probably eight feet deep.

Then they hooked them together and made walls out of them, see. And they brought a lot of them in and were putting them together when that big storm came up. Then about the third, fourth, fourth or fifth day that we were there, well they just couldn't land any boats there for that day. And this one landing ship, LCT, which was the ones that the bow opened up that way, and then the ramp went out. It got greased there and got over this wharf, and bent it in the middle. We worked several days getting it and that wharf out of there.

RALPH: As you remember it Eldon, what was the majority of your work? Was the majority of your work pulling in, you know, disabled trucks and tanks and ships, that kind of work?

ELDON: Yeah. That was the majority of our work when we first landed. Well when we first landed our priority was to get those chicken wire roads in. Get a hole cut through the sand hill and make an entrance.

RALPH: So they could get off the beach.

ELDON: Yeah.

RALPH: Uh huh.

ELDON: And then from then on to save all the trucks we could that got grounded out. Pull stuff out of the way. I don't know, some of them officers thought a Cat could knit up holes in their socks, you know.

RALPH: Yeah, could do anything.

ELDON: Wanted a Cat there to do something that they could have with a Jeep.

RALPH: Did you have a lot of equipment that you couldn't use again, that you had to get out of the way in those initial landings? A lot of stuff that you just had to pull off to the side and get out of the way?

ELDON: Yeah, yeah. Well when we, after we landed and got a little room, we made a field somewhere. And incidentally that morning, going in, I pulled three trucks that had drowned out, and they cleared a little road through the sand hill. And I pulled them back to this field, and they'd park them there. And on my third trip, I was pulling a GI truck, and there was a Jeep behind me, and that was my third trip over that same road. And I was careful, I stayed in that road. Well there was a booby trap in the middle, and that Jeep hit it, and blowed the back end of the Jeep off behind me in that truck, after I had made three trips. It just wasn't my time to go is all.

RALPH: No, it sure wasn't. And you were doing a good job of staying in the old tracks. You were staying in your old tracks all the time.

ELDON: Yeah.

RALPH: Well that's quite a story in itself. Well how long then were you in France?

ELDON: Well we were in France, we were there --- see they figured they would take Cherbourg, which was up, 30, 20, 30 miles. Well it took them so long to get up there, and the Germans when they dropped --- they had them reinforced walls there. When they left they blowed them up so you couldn't move them out of the way then they were so big and heavy. Right back of our beach were those big guns. They had twelve feet of reinforced concrete over each one of those gun in placements. Them guns couldn't reach our beach. They reached out, in, and that was one of our big problems. They'd go out

there and run them fourteen inch shells see, was bigger, well they were like a big water tank almost, for looks. They blowed that sand up, and then we'd go out there, the tide had come in, we'd go out and shovel out what sand we could around in there if we had time. And then put up signs, shell crater, keep off. Well then it would be about two days before we would have to have about three or four tides to come in and settle that sand until ---

RALPH: So you could move over there.

ELDON: So you could move over. But we'd have signs, and they'd come. Airborne outfit came in by boat about the fifth day, and I was pretty tired by that time, and a little short tempered maybe. Anyhow they had a Jimmy, GMC 6 x 6 with one of those beaufort guns, which had four wheels of its own, and anti aircraft gun, a 40 millimeter. And they had that truck, must of had ten tons of ammunition on it. And the driver instead of going around our sign, he cut through and got stuck. Well they dug it down to; the wheels of the truck were more than halfway under. And then they were pulling down ... so I went; they came up and got me. And I went down there and I said to this little

lieutenant, and he was a bossing them all around, and he says --- I said, "I'd hook your gun, and hook this cable onto your truck." And he didn't want to hook to his truck. And I said, "Okay." "If you don't want to hook it to the truck I'll go to somebody else that wants to." Well he says, "It's a damn poor Cat driver that can't pull us out." And he just hooked it to one side of his bumper, and he had two hooks on the bumper. I said, "You better hook to both sides." "No", he says. So I gave the pull, and I see the bumper start to give, and I backed up and eased off. And I said, "You've got to undo that gun, and I'll pull it out by itself." So then he told me what a poor driver I was. I said, "Well how would you pull this out?" He says, "I'd get about four feet of slack." I thought to get about four feet of slack and it would come right out. And I said, "Are you telling me to do that?" He said, "Yeah." I backed up, and I hit that end of that slack and that old bumper ones come loose, then the blades in between, it come out, and then the other one come loose, and here come all the rods and the winch. And I stopped and I backed up and I said, "Hook to front axle I'll bring it next." "Oh no, no, no," he says. But I made him order me to do it. Boy I --- So as he left, he says, "You guys sure tear up a lot of equipment." And I said, "We save a lot of equipment too, and if you had any sense you would never have got in that position." I said, "You could have, we could have saved every penny, if you hadn't ordered me to throw the slack in it." So I got back at one of them anyway.

RALPH: Did you pull it out?

ELDON: Yeah, yeah I pulled the truck out.

RALPH: Took the trailer off, and pulled the truck out and then pulled the trailer out, like you wanted to do in the first place.

ELDON: Pulled the trailer. He didn't even thank me for it.

RALPH: No, he knew what he was doing.

ELDON: And so we were there for, oh let's see, we landed in June, and we were there --- oh I don't remember just when we did leave there. But we built roads; we had 57 miles of road. And after they got the, well they got a system there, then they had trains in and they would bring these great big, they were like rafts, I forget what they called them,

loaded with tanks and bring them in on the high tide. Then we would take a crane out and unload them. Like I say, we put more through there than New York put through its port, several times.

RALPH: How big, how big a crew do you suppose that you had working on that. How many men do you suppose involved in that?

ELDON: Oh, I have no idea. There were three battalions of us, a brigade. And we were working out --- and they had some more going down.

RALPH: So there were lots of men, and working around the clock, so you handled lots of ---

ELDON: Yeah. Eventually we had 57 miles of unpaved road on our beach. And eventually they took me off the Cat and put me on a motor grade. And we had, we only had two motor graders for each brigade. That's six motor graders. And the truck drivers would see the sands, it would be pretty good, you know, and then it started to going, dig it out, and then you had to go in and repair it. So one time this other company

commander --- I was, well the truck drivers would see us, and they knew we worked from daylight to dark on them graders keeping it so traffic could go over them, you know. And the truck driver said down the beach about a mile it was getting pretty bad. And so I said well I'll go down there. I was on some road that was still all right, but I was keeping it good you know. And I said, "I'll go down there." And so anyhow I pulled the blade out of the ground and I had it in road gear going down there. And this company commander, not my company, but the company, the other company of engineers, he stopped me. He come by in a Jeep and he stopped me. Well he chewed me out. We

were short of graders, and I was motoring down the beach. I said, "Well there is a bad place down there; I'm trying to get down to fix." And he chewed me out some more. And he says, "If I catch you going down the road without that in the ground I'll court marshal you." And so I was pretty aggravated about that. So I put it down in the ground, and I was going along, and here come the brigade commander. And he stopped me, and he said, "There is a place getting bad." And I said, "I realize that, sir." But I said, "I was headed down there, a truck driver told me about it, I was headed down there, and I'm headed there now." But I said, "Captain Brown stopped me and told me he would court marshal me if he ever caught me with this blade out of the ground again." And I said, "I can't go down there very fast with the blade in the ground." He says, "You go down there and don't worry." So I was feeling pretty good about it. And I see he had his back, the road and I was in between him and my grader, and I see --- So I pulled everything out of the ground and was in high gear again, and old Captain Brown met me, he was coming back from where he had been, and he stopped and he was giving me a real reaming, you

know. And I see the old Brigade Commander coming in his Jeep, and so I never acted like there was anybody coming or anything, I was listening to him go on about he give me a direct order and I hadn't made it. So the old Brigade Commander stopped his Jeep and got out, and he says, "What's the problem here?" And old Captain Brown he turned around, and boy you could tell he was a little scared. And he said, "Well I gave this driver orders not to travel with his blade out of the ground." And the old Brigade Commandeer says, "He was right, he should have had his blade out of the ground." And he says, "From now on don't bother with these graders, we've got three of them, and they are taking care of 60 miles of sand road with all this traffic on it." He says, "They're doing twice the job they should be doing." And he says, "From now on consider them road graders under my direct command." Doctor, or old Captain Brown never saw me again. He'd go by and ---

RALPH: Didn't recognize you at all.

ELDON: Didn't recognize me.

RALPH: That's a good story.

ELDON: Well, the Brigade Commander he give him a real talking to, I'll tell you.

RALPH: Well, that's a good story.

ELDON: So there was funny parts.

RALPH: Sure there were, sure there were.

ELDON: So we were there until they never could get to Cherbourg to where they could get much over, and so we were there, and they took us back up to Cherbourg by that time. Took all of our equipment away from us. Going to bring us home for 30 days, then send

us on to Japan. And so it was winter by that time. And after we were in this camp, ready to go home, taken all of our equipment except our guns, we still had our rifles. And all the heavy equipment was gone, and Hitler broke through up in the Bulge in Belgium. We were about the closest troops there. So guess who got to go up to Belgium then? So we went there. God it was cold, it was miserable. We never did get to any fighting there. They took us in to a bridge on the views that had been built by the Army. And they were afraid they was going to, the Germans were going to get that far, and they didn't want them to get across that river. So they took us up there, we had to put demolition on every one of those piles. And the bridge was almost a quarter of a mile wide, or long, and it was ... well there was room for a rowboat. We had to put a demolition charge on each one of them. We worked there all night. We got there about 5 o'clock at night, and they give us a boat and give us some men to paddle the boat. And we spent all night putting demolition on there. Well the demolitions they gave us were just plain TNT, which is almost like dynamite. And it wasn't waterproofed, and we kept telling them, these are never going to go off, they are never going to go. And so finally we got, just before it was getting daylight, we got the demolition on all the bridge. We decided amongst ourselves it wasn't going to work. So we went and got a whole bunch of GI cans full of gas, and got one of these magnesium hand grenades and wired it to a GI can of gas. Had about 40 cans of gas piled in a big pile, and took a trip wire back across so we could pull the pin on that grenade. They took us in and give us a hot breakfast then. And before we got done eating breakfast they come and said, "Well that demolition you guys put on won't go." And we said, "We told you that last night." Well, we got to take it down.

Somebody else will put some, some waterproof in. So I said, "How come we got to take it down?" "Well you guys put it up, know how it's up there, you know how to take it down." So we got it down about 8 o'clock. And the Germans never did get there.

RALPH: Uh huh. Do you remember what bridge that was?

ELDON: Huh?

RALPH: Do you remember what bridge that was, Eldon?

ELDON: It didn't have any name. It wasn't, there wasn't even a bridge there before they had built it, because the road came up one side, then there was a road to the other, and

then there was, where the bridges were they had a lot of fortifications and they built that bridge across there to --- So anyhow, we was up there about six weeks, then they, we fixed the bridge so we could blow it up. So they left us there to guard it. We never had to blow it up though.

RALPH: So the Germans never came?

ELDON: Huh?

RALPH: The Germans never came back?

ELDON: No, they didn't get back that far. New years day, that's the only chance I ever got to shoot at a German. I was always either, didn't have my gun, or was too busy to use it before. And this plane come up the river, and so they was shooting at him down the river a little, and everybody took a shot at him. I was on a truck by that time, and when they took us up there they didn't bring any Cats, so they put me on a truck. And my truck was right by this basement of house, building, had been blown up. It had a 50 caliber ring mount on the, above the seat, you know. And that damned old 50 caliber; I bumped

my head on it a million times that winter. And I said to this other guy, I'm going to get to shoot that damned gun. So he come up the river, and I said, "I'll give him a short burst, see if it works." I pulled the trigger, and it clicked, it wouldn't fire. So after --- I says, "Well this is no place to be. Let's get in that basement." So we jumped down into that basement, and he went by. And there was an anti-aircraft outfit up the river just a little ways from us. They shot him down. He didn't get to blow up anything. Well it was New Year's Day, and then from then on they pushed them right back.

RALPH: Now where did your outfit go from ---

ELDON: Huh?

RALPH: Where did your outfit go after that?

ELDON: Well we went back down to Cherbourg, and then they put us to building camps for all these soldiers.

If you had 101 points you got to go home. I had a 100 points. You got points for --- see I was in seven different, well I forget what they called them, anyhow they were ---

RALPH: Engagements or something?

ELDON: Well campaigns.

RALPH: Theaters.

ELDON: Yeah. And I had a 100 points I guess. Anyhow, they took us back down to Cherbourg, and we started building camps for, because we knew --- well it was over in Europe by then. In fact we knew we was going to go to Japan. And our headquarters company, they had taken them home already. And we were building these camps there. Then they put me running a concrete mixer. (Laughter)

RALPH: A truck mounted one?

ELDON: No, no, it was an old French made one. It was a bearcat to run too, it heat runned. But anyhow then finally they was going to take us home. They had taken us from that. They even took our guns away from us, going to leave them there. And they took us down to this Liberty ship, which was newer than a --- no, Liberty ships was the ones they made so many of, wasn't they? Yeah. It was a little bigger than a Liberty ship, and quite a little faster. They took us down and loaded us on it, and in the middle of the night, all the whistles in bay started to blowing, and we wondered what in the heck was

--- and got up the next morning, Japan had given up. So they just left us on there and brought us home.

RALPH: That was pretty good news, wasn't it?

ELDON: Yeah, well we was glad to hear it. Yeah, because I didn't want to get back in that Pacific ...

RALPH: So how long were you, how long were you in the service, Eldon?

ELDON: Just about four years. I think it is a month and a half or something short of four years.

RALPH: So when you came back then, you came back to the states. Did you come right back to the states?

ELDON: Yeah, we came right back. We were eight days I think getting back. We landed in New York. They took us down to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. We stayed there three days. That's one time I didn't go AWOL, boy. They said we're flying as quick as we can get planes and pilots, we're flying everybody home that we can. Your name goes

on the top of the list, and when we get down to your name and we call it off, and they get out in front of the barracks and read these names off, and says if you don't answer, you go back to the top of the list. And I'd rode enough troop trains, I wanted to fly. I was Johnny on the spot every time. So they put us in an old gooney bird about 6 o'clock at night in New Jersey. We flew all night. The next morning we, sun up we was in, well we got up to Buffalo and the electrical system on our plane went out. We didn't have any lights, or any radio either I guess. Maybe they had a radio, I don't know. Anyhow in Buffalo they landed, they tried to fix the plane. They worked on it about 3 hours, then

they told us to unload our stuff, they would put us in another plane. We had this little paratrooper, and he sat next to me, and there was only one guy from my outfit in that whole planeload. And he sat on one side of me, and this little paratrooper sat on the other side. And we took off from New Jersey, well this paratrooper says, "This is the twelfth time I've took off in one of these." And he says, "I'm scared to death." He says, "I'd rather watch these planes, and when they come in to land they have less control of that plane than at any other time during the flight." He'd been up eleven times, and he'd jumped out eleven time, and he was ready to jump out if he had a ---

RALPH: Had a chance.

ELDON: A chance. So anyhow we landed. We landed about every 500 miles, you know, to gas up. After the second or third time he kind of got used to it. He figured he was doing a pretty good job, I guess, on landing. Anyhow, it got daylight, and we was coming over upper Montana, way back there. And the pilot came out, and this guy that was setting by me that I knew, he come over to him and tapped him on the shoulder and

took him up, into the cockpit in the front. And the little paratrooper says, "You know him don't you?" "Yeah," I says, "yeah he was in the same company as I was." He was one of them, he'd been a logger in Washington and had a dry sense of humor, you know. So this little paratrooper says find out what they were taking him up in the front for. So I knew better than to ask him when he come back. And he sat down, didn't say anything, and so finally the little paratrooper he leaned across me and he said, "What did they take you up in the cockpit for?" This guy, he says, "Well they said they heard that I cut loose from this part of the country, did I recognize anything?" (Laughter) I thought that little paratrooper was going to go jump our without a parachute. So I didn't say anything. Pretty quick he says, "Are you comfortable," to me. And I said, "Yeah." He says, "The pilot showed me how to work the heater here if you get too hot or too cold, let me know."

RALPH: So you flew into where?

ELDON: Into Seattle. And that's one time they really got us, didn't waste no time on us. In two days I was home.

RALPH: Harney County look pretty good to you?

ELDON: It looked darned good.

RALPH: Yeah, I bet it did. You had been gone a long time.

ELDON: I wasn't sure until we topped the raise out here at little Sagehen, and I could see the lights, that I was going to make it.

RALPH: Well that's a good story Eldon.

ELDON: Well, it shows where I was.

RALPH: Can you think of anything else you'd like to add?

ELDON: Oh I --- just read off the names of the countries I was in.

RALPH: Okay.

ELDON: I was in Ireland, Scotland, Algeria, Sicily, Italy, England, France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany. After we didn't come home, then they sent us up through Germany; I got way over in what was the Russian part of Germany that Russia took over.

RALPH: Uh huh.

ELDON: So that's seven, we called them battle scars. I don't know. I had seven of them. Four D-Day landings, so I guess I done my part, maybe.

RALPH: Extra ordinary service to your country, Eldon.

ELDON: Well, like somebody said, "You had a pretty interesting life." And I guess I have.

RALPH: You sure did.

ELDON: And it's still interesting.

RALPH: Well Eldon, thank you for taking the time to do this, and above that, thank you to your service to your country and to people like me, we appreciate it.

ELDON: Well, I had a job and I done it.

RALPH: Thank you for that.

ELDON: Belly ached about it all the time I was doing it, but I done it. (Laughter)

RALPH: Well that's what made it bearable.

ELDON: Well thank you for putting up with me.

RALPH: Oh, I'm just glad to do it. Do you have a copy of that?

ELDON: Oh, you can have this one.

RALPH: Can I? I'm going to make me one personally, and then I'm going to give this one so it goes along with the tape.

ELDON: Oh, okay.

RALPH: But I want one myself.

ELDON: Well it's like somebody told me, how many people can say they even made four D-Day landings.

RALPH: Not very many. And a lot of those that tried it, Eldon, didn't make it.

ELDON: Yeah, I know that.

RALPH: Yeah, I know you do.

ELDON: I saw a Cat driver get blown up right along side of me.

RALPH: Pretty hard ---

ELDON: There is no reason that ---

RALPH: That it wasn't you.

ELDON: --- that it wasn't me.

RALPH: Well it just wasn't your time.

ELDON: Well it ... when it's your time, it's your time.

RALPH: Right.

(The End)

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