

JAMES MONTGOMERY BURGESS
WWII Oral Histories
January 7, 2004
Atlanta History Center

Interviewer: Marilyn Parr
Transcriber: Joyce Dumas

[Tape 1, Side A]

Interviewer: Today is Wednesday, January fourteen, two thousand four. My name is Marilyn Parr and we're at the Atlanta History Center in Atlanta, Georgia. Could you tell us your name and your date of birth, sir.

Burgess: My name is James Montgomery Burgess and my date of birth is May thirty, nineteen twenty-four.

Interviewer: And were you born here [inaudible]?

Burgess: I was born in Athens, Georgia.

Interviewer: Athens, Georgia. Could you tell us just a little bit about your early upbringing?

Burgess: Well, we didn't live in Athens very long. I don't remember that. I grew up basically in the South, mostly in Atlanta and I've lived here, except for two or three times when in my business I was in other cities. This has been my home all along. I lived in San Francisco, Chicago and Philadelphia. I graduated from North Fulton High School here and from Georgia Tech. So I'm pretty much of an Atlanta person.

Interviewer: Now were you...when you went to Georgia Tech, did you finish college before the war broke out?

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- 1 **Burgess:** No, I had two years before I was called up in the service. And then
2 after the war I went back and graduated.
- 3 **Interviewer:** So you were drafted?
- 4 **Burgess:** No. Well, I was an ROTC at Tech and they called up all of the
5 ROTCs at the same time.
- 6 **Interviewer:** What year would that have been?
- 7 **Burgess:** Nineteen forty-three.
- 8 **Interviewer:** So the war had been going on for a while. You were in ROTC.
- 9 **Burgess:** Yeah, it'd been about a year and a half it'd been going on. Yeah.
- 10 **Interviewer:** And you expected that eventually you would be called up.
- 11 **Burgess:** Oh, yes. Yes.
- 12 **Interviewer:** Can you tell us what that was like when you first actually, officially
13 knew?
- 14 **Burgess:** You mean being called up or after I got in the service?
- 15 **Interviewer:** Either.
- 16 **Burgess:** Okay. Well, there were many rumors around at that time that they
17 were gonna activate the ROTC, which they did. And they took us out
18 to Fort McPherson and swore us into the service, sent us back to
19 school and we were there for about two or three weeks and then we
20 were sent to basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama. And we were
21 there for seventeen weeks, about four months being trained. And then
22 from then on, it became strictly a military thing. I was through with
23 the school until after the war at that point.

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- 1 **Interviewer:** In your training, you had basic training and then how did you get into
2 a particular area, I believe you were in rifle?
- 3 **Burgess:** I was in infantry, yes. Well, I was in the infantry ROTC, so that was
4 my...my ah...ROTC training. And then I stayed in that once I went
5 into the Army itself. And we got infantry training at Fort McClellan
6 and then later went to Fort Benning and got further training before we
7 went overseas.
- 8 **Interviewer:** Can you tell us a little bit about that basic training? You went with
9 your unit...I'm gonna stop.
- 10 **Burgess:** Is this okay the way...what we're doing? Okay.
- 11 **Interviewer:** We just had a brief mike adjustment and we're going to go back and
12 continue the conversation. We were talking about your beginning
13 basic training. And you were in the ROTC, so when you went to the
14 first place, were you with fellas that you knew?
- 15 **Burgess:** Yes. In fact, it was...our entire ROTC class was sent en mass over to
16 Fort McClellan, Alabama. Then we got basic infantry training over
17 there for four months. Very hot cause it was in the summertime and
18 the training was very rugged.
- 19 **Interviewer:** Were you anxious at that time to go overseas? What was the feeling
20 amongst the...
- 21 **Burgess:** I think so. I think just out of patriotism, I think most people in my age
22 group and all at that time were very anxious to go in the service and to
23 be part of it. So in that sense, yes we were.

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- 1 **Interviewer:** So you'd been following what had been going on in the war.
- 2 **Burgess:** Oh, yes.
- 3 **Interviewer:** Did you know at that point during your training, did you know which
4 theater of operations that you would be sent to?
- 5 **Burgess:** No, it could have been either the Pacific or Europe. As it turned out,
6 we went to Europe.
- 7 **Interviewer:** When you went to Europe, can you tell us what month and year that
8 was?
- 9 **Burgess:** Nineteen forty-four. We went over in April. We arrived in...we left
10 from Boston and we arrived in Liverpool, England, about the first
11 week in May. We were just a general group at that point. We weren't
12 assigned to any particular division or anything. But we were...once
13 we got to England, they assigned us to...in my case, to the Fourth
14 Infantry Division and they were, at that time, had already been there
15 and they were training their troops in southern England in Exeter and
16 Exmouth and Portsmouth area. And we were brought into there. And
17 see, this was very close. We got there in mid-May and the invasion
18 was in the first week in June. So we only had about two weeks or
19 three weeks to learn the people there that we were gonna with and be
20 integrated into their operation. So it was a very tight schedule at that
21 point.
- 22 **Interviewer:** And at that point, you didn't know what the invasion plans would be,
23 did you?

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- 1 **Burgess:** No. We just...no. We just knew that we were ultimately going to
2 invade Europe, but didn't know where or exactly when.
- 3 **Interviewer:** So when did you find out and what was that like?
- 4 **Burgess:** Well, they sent us to a marshalling area, which was near Plymouth,
5 England. And it was totally isolated from a security standpoint. There
6 was a barbed wire in this big, wooded area. We were in tents. We had
7 absolutely no communication in or out with anyone. And we were
8 there for a week before they loaded us onto boats to make the
9 invasion. So there was no in or out communication at all for that
10 week. And we knew then that it was very...serious, yes.
- 11 **Interviewer:** It was real and it was going to happen.
- 12 **Burgess:** Yes.
- 13 **Interviewer:** Were you apprehensive, excited?
- 14 **Burgess:** Oh, yeah. I think so. Because, you know, it's so brand new. You'd
15 never...had never been through anything like that before. In training,
16 we had had exercises where we'd crawl on the ground and they would
17 shoot machine gun, live machine gun fire over us. But this would be
18 the first when someone was actually shooting at you and also the
19 artillery that we had not had any of that shot at us. So, yeah.
- 20 Everybody was very apprehensive about it because it was so new and
21 dangerous.
- 22 **Interviewer:** So they're loading you on the ships.
- 23 **Burgess:** They put us on the ship, yes.

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- 1 **Interviewer:** What was your expectation of what was the first thing that was gonna
2 happen?
- 3 **Burgess:** Well, we didn't...they told us just briefly what was gonna happen.
4 They told us this was the invasion. And they put us on an ocean-going
5 ship—it was not a large ship—in Portsmouth, England. And we
6 pulled out into the English Channel and we went almost to the French
7 coast. And I might say one thing. The one group, not my group but
8 another group ahead of us had gone out the night before and weather
9 was bad and they had to come back in. We did not. We stayed in the
10 port. And then when we finally went, we went all the way on over.
11 They anchored the ship out of sight of land. We could not see the
12 land. We could hear some guns going off. Then we climbed down
13 what's called a Jacob's ladder. It's a big rope, mesh rope ladder that's
14 on the side of the ship and they put us in LCVPs. That's landing craft
15 vehicle and personnel. And these were the landing craft. And the
16 whole front of it is a ramp, a metal ramp. So they put us on that and
17 then we went into the shore on the LCVP until it grounded on the
18 sand there. And then the ramp came down and then we went onto the
19 beach itself.
- 20 **Interviewer:** Before we get to the beaches...
- 21 **Burgess:** Okay.
- 22 **Interviewer:** Can you tell us a little bit about...you're in first the larger ship and
23 then in the LCVP. What are you seeing around you?

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1 **Burgess:** Other ships just like that. [laughter] There were lots of them. And
2 then there were a lot of warships there, too. The Navy had battleships
3 and cruisers and all. They were firing at the time that we were
4 transferring to the LCVP. They were firing into the shore. Again, we
5 couldn't see where anything was landing. It was dark for one thing.
6 That was it. But there were ships all around us and LCVPs coming
7 and going. It was just like a traffic jam almost. They would take a
8 group in and then they would come back and get another group and
9 go in.

10 **Interviewer:** So at...about the time that you hit the beaches, could you remember
11 about what time that would have been?

12 **Burgess:** It would have been in mid-morning. My regiment was not the first
13 one. There's three regiments in the division and another one of the
14 regiments went in first. They went in about six o'clock. Another
15 group went in shortly thereafter. It must have been, I don't know
16 exactly. It must have been ten or eleven o'clock in the morning on
17 June six.

18 **Interviewer:** And this...could you tell us a little bit about the number of men that
19 were actually in the LCVP that you were in? And did you know all of
20 them? Were you still together as a unit [inaudible]?

21 **Burgess:** Well, we were all the same unit. I didn't know all of them though
22 because I hadn't been with them that long. Probably fifty were in
23 there. There were no vehicles in ours. It was strictly just troops and

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1 we were lined up and we had to come off two at a time once we got to
2 the grounding of the LCVP.

3 **Interviewer:** So the door comes down.

4 **Burgess:** The whole front comes off...comes down, yes.

5 **Interviewer:** Just tell us about those next few minutes.

6 **Burgess:** Okay. I have a funny little thing that happened there, too. [chuckles]
7 At that time, I smoked. So I had taken a bandolier, which is a canvas
8 or cloth type arrangement that you wear on your shoulder and you put
9 cartridges in there, a clip for the M-1 rifle, in the little pockets in this
10 sash that you have. Well, we were told ahead of time that they didn't
11 know when they could re-supply us with things like cigarettes, so we
12 cut the straps off and sewed the bandolier inside of our field jackets
13 and these pockets that fit...the eight-round clip fit into were exactly
14 the same size as a pack of cigarettes. So I had ten packs of cigarettes
15 sewed into my field jacket. Well, we got onto...when the ramp came
16 down, I was the second one off on my side. The first guy had got up
17 there and he and the one beside him got up and he yelled back at the
18 man who was running the LCVP and said, "The ramp's not all the
19 way down". At that point, he steps off and he's about knee-deep in
20 water and by that time, I had gotten into the middle of another man
21 next to me and he let the ramp down the rest of the way and it flipped
22 both of us over. We went head first and I cigarettes all over me. I had
23 tobacco coming down my clothes. [laughs] Anyway, but I was

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1 frightened and I didn't pay much attention to it at that point. We were
2 being shot at. There were shells coming. The LCVP right next to us
3 was hit and sunk. But most...I think most of the guys got off of it
4 okay cause it was shallow water at that point.

5 **Interviewer:** And you just told...you were just pushing forward.

6 **Burgess:** Correct. And then when we got onto the...we fortunately had a fairly
7 easy beach from a geographical standpoint. We went in Utah Beach
8 and Omaha Beach was to our left. It was a lot rougher cause they had
9 cliffs there and they had some severe fighting trying to get up those
10 cliffs. Ours was very much flatter than that one was. And it was a flat
11 beach and then sand dunes beyond there. And there's one other thing
12 I'll tell you in a minute though. But anyway, we came and got off and
13 as soon as I got up out of the water [laughing] with all my cigarettes,
14 we went onto the beach itself and our assistant division commander
15 was standing there. He was General Teddy Roosevelt. He was the son
16 of President Teddy Roosevelt. And he was a brigadier general. He
17 was the number two man in our division. And he was standing on the
18 beach and he was yelling at everybody, "Get off the beach. Don't get
19 killed here. Keep going." And all of that was easy as far as walking
20 and that's concerned. We were getting no small arms fire. There were
21 no rifles being shot at us. Artillery was coming in. But see, up ahead
22 of us were two other regiments of our own company that had gone
23 ashore for several hours before. So they had pushed on through and it

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1 made it a lot safer for us to get in. But just over the sand dunes was a
2 marsh area there and it was controlled by some canals that they had,
3 some irrigation canals. And the Germans had opened them all up and
4 flooded it as soon as the shelling started. And you had parallel roads
5 off the beach that there were maybe four or five of them that got you
6 across this marshland. But...and we had to use those. You couldn't
7 walk through the marsh. But the problem is the Germans had all those
8 roads zeroed in with the artillery. So you had to pick your time when
9 you ran down it. And that was probably five hundred yards that you
10 had to go on those roads. That was the toughest part.

11 **Interviewer:** It sounds like it. What were the noises like?

12 **Burgess:** Lots of noise. [laughs] Great deal of noise. Explosions, ours and theirs
13 both. But it was shocking because none of us had ever been through
14 anything like that before. So, then I think finally you just go on
15 adrenaline. You get paralyzed as far thinking about anything except
16 what you have to do itself.

17 **Interviewer:** So even though you were trained to fight, there wasn't an opportunity
18 for you then to use your rifle. You weren't shooting...

19 **Burgess:** Well, not at the moment. There was very shortly thereafter, as soon as
20 we got to the hard land, then they started spreading us out and the
21 units that had gone ahead of us were off somewhere else. And we just
22 went on. We had objectives that we had to reach, a crossroad. We
23 were going toward a town called Sainte Mere-Eglise, which is very

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1 well-known in that area. But we went in maybe a mile, something like
2 that. And then turned and started toward the city of Cherbourg which
3 forty, fifty miles away. It was our objective ultimately. We didn't get
4 there for two, couple of weeks.

5 **Interviewer:** So that first day though, you land around maybe nine in the morning
6 or so.

7 **Burgess:** Except it would be a little later. Yep.

8 **Interviewer:** And then how long do you go that day before that day ended for you?

9 **Burgess:** A long time because at that time of year it doesn't get dark until ten
10 o'clock at night, in that northern latitude. So you fight as long as you
11 can see something and then we stopped and dug foxholes and got in
12 there. So that was it. So I'd say we were actually...of course, we'd
13 been on the LCVP since sometime during the night. That must have
14 been four, five o'clock in the...no, earlier than that. Two or three
15 o'clock in the morning we got on it. So we'd been on it since then.
16 Landed say eleven o'clock, something like that and then we were
17 fighting until ten o'clock at night. And you don't stop. You
18 keep...guns are still firing all night.

19 **Interviewer:** Did you have a sense then that you were part of something really...

20 **Burgess:** Oh yeah.

21 **Interviewer:** You knew then.

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- 1 **Burgess:** Yeah. With all those ships and all...everything that was going on, we
2 knew it was large. And of course, we knew it was the invasion of
3 Europe, which everybody had talked about before that.
- 4 **Interviewer:** And did you have a sense from your commanders and what you were
5 doing that things were going well? Did you have a sense of how
6 things were going that day outside of your unit?
- 7 **Burgess:** Yes and no. I think no, you don't know overall how it's doing because
8 you're too compartmentalized and everything. We knew what our
9 company was doing and what our platoon was doing. But as far as the
10 First Army or what another division was doing, we had no
11 knowledge. You could hear sounds and you could figure they were
12 inland, so they had landed. The paratroops had jumped the night
13 before at midnight, around midnight. Two divisions there, eighty-
14 second and the hundred and first. And one of our missions was to
15 connect up with them. And we started connecting with them that same
16 day, later in the afternoon. And they were...they came through us and
17 then went on back to England after they had been relieved by us.
- 18 **Interviewer:** But you stayed on in France and your objective then...[inaudible].
- 19 **Burgess:** First...first...excuse me?
- 20 **Interviewer:** You said you were on your way to Cherbourg.
- 21 **Burgess:** Cherbourg. That was our big, main objective early on.
- 22 **Interviewer:** And you got that objective.

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- 1 **Burgess:** We got that about the eighteenth or nineteenth of June, yes. So
2 what...that would be what? Two weeks. Something like that. We had
3 to fight all the way there. There were Germans everywhere.
- 4 **Interviewer:** And then how long did you stay there before you...
- 5 **Burgess:** Not long. They pulled us back out again and we leaped [sic] around
6 and came back down to Saint Leu and there we had a big bomb raid.
7 They used three thousand American planes that bombed in front of us.
8 And then they got out of the way. Then we made an attack. We're
9 going south. And I didn't get very far cause I got wounded. [laughs]
10 Right after that I was hit with some shrapnel from an artillery shell
11 and I went back to England at that point.
- 12 **Interviewer:** So at that point near Saint Leu is where is when you first got
13 wounded.
- 14 **Burgess:** Yeah. Just about three or four days after Saint Leu, yeah. I was
15 wounded on the thirtieth of July.
- 16 **Interviewer:** So from that point, can you tell us a little bit about what...you're a
17 wounded soldier. How does that work to be taken off the battlefield
18 and sent back to England? Give us some details on that.
- 19 **Burgess:** Yeah. Well, I was hit in the leg so I couldn't walk. I was helped out
20 by some of the guys in my unit. We didn't have a stretcher or
21 anything like that, so I leaned on them and they got me back...I guess,
22 several hundred yards until there was...there were some medical
23 people there and they had a stretcher. They put me on that and carried

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1 me another few hundred yards to a Jeep. [coughs] Excuse me. Put me
2 on a Jeep and I was taken from there to an aid station with was, I
3 guess, a couple of miles more back. And I got my first treatment
4 there. They had to cut my clothes...some of my...legs of my pants off
5 and they had to work on the wound and all. And they gave me
6 some...a bandage there. Then I was put in a...there, I was put in an
7 ambulance and taken to a field hospital, very much like a MASH that
8 you can...have seen on television. From there, I was put on a hospital
9 ship and went back across the English Channel to Southampton and
10 then they...then I was put in an ambulance there and taken to Oxford.
11 And I spent two months in the hospital there recovering and riding
12 bicycles a lot, [laughs] rebuilding my leg. And then went back to my
13 unit again.

14 **Interviewer:** Did you expect when you got wounded and sent back to England that
15 you would be back in France again?

16 **Burgess:** Didn't know. You always...you were hoping you were going back to
17 the States, [laughing] but...mine was not that bad. It was bad enough.
18 But you just don't know. You have no idea how serious it is or you
19 know, what the recovery period is gonna be or how you're gonna be
20 after you recover. Excuse me. Could I have some water, please?

21 **Interviewer:** Sure.

22 **[tape stop]**

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- 1 **Interviewer:** So we were talking about...you'd been...you were in England, you
2 recovered and now you're going back...
- 3 **Burgess:** Correct.
- 4 **Interviewer:** ...to France. Do you join up with the same...
- 5 **Burgess:** I did. You didn't always. Many times they sent people to other units. I
6 made a lot of noise and said I wanted to go to my old unit, so they did.
7 They sent me back there. I missed one thing. My division was
8 the...were the first Americans to go into Paris to relieve Paris and I
9 missed all that completely. I was in the hospital in England so I didn't
10 get to see Paris then. I saw it later. But by the time I rejoined them,
11 they had gone back into the area of the German/Belgium border and
12 the Siegfried Line, which was a big fortification that the Germans had
13 were there. So I rejoined the unit there. And shortly after that we got
14 into the roughest fighting that I was in. Much worse than the beach
15 was the Hirken [phonetic] Forest, which was a major forest just south
16 of Cologne, Germany. And we were in there for the whole month of
17 November. I got back about the end of October. Shortly thereafter, we
18 went into the Hirken Forest and as I say, we had a month of
19 absolutely the toughest fighting that we had. I was later in the Bulge.
20 It was not nearly as bad as Hirken Forest. Hirken Forest was the
21 roughest thing that I saw.
- 22 **Interviewer:** What was different about it? Could you tell us what a typical day
23 would have like?

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1 **Burgess:** [laughs] Yeah. The roughest thing...first of all, there were excellent
2 German troops there. Probably their best divisions, I think, that we
3 saw at all were defending it. They were trying to protect Cologne as a
4 major city in Germany. It would have been the first major city that
5 Americans had captured. So there was a psychological reason, I
6 guess, for them to fight there. So they had excellent troops. The
7 terrain was very hilly and heavy woods, very heavy woods. And
8 occasionally they'd have fire breaks cut through the woods and the
9 Germans would bring the tanks into the fire...into the fire breaks and
10 shoot at you with...and we had great difficulty getting our equipment
11 in there because there were no lead-in roads from our direction. And
12 then it was very cold. We're into November then. We'd get periodic
13 snow. And remember, we were living on the ground. We were living
14 in holes in the ground. There were no buildings for us or anything like
15 that. So it was very tough in that respect. So you had excellent
16 German soldiers against you, you had bad terrain and you had bad
17 weather. So the combination was about everything that you don't
18 want. And it lasted a month. It took us a month to get through this
19 forest till we finally broke out and got through it. But I think that was
20 my, without any doubt, was my toughest time. I also got a silver star
21 in there. [laughs] So I was...that came much later. I got the award
22 very much later.

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- 1 **Interviewer:** Will you tell us a little bit about the service that warranted the silver
2 star?
- 3 **Burgess:** Well, it was in the Hirken Forest and we were dug in in foxholes [sic]
4 along a fire break. And we'd been there for a couple of days, I guess,
5 fighting with the Germans and the Germans brought some tanks up
6 into the fire break and started shooting at us. And then they brought
7 some sort of vehicle. It must have been a halftrack or something like
8 that. It had a loudspeaker on it. They were...they asked us...not ask.
9 They demanded that we surrender. So we didn't and they said they
10 would give us thirty minutes to surrender when...
- 11 **Interviewer:** They did this in English?
- 12 **Burgess:** Yes. And...so at that time, I crawled out of the hole and went back to
13 our company command post and got with the artillery forward
14 observer and we called for artillery fire on those tanks. We got the
15 tanks out of there. They pulled out when artillery shells started hitting
16 all around them. Well then we got an order evacuate, to pull our...all
17 of our troops out. So I went back up there and we got...one of
18 them...I had to help one guy out. And we got out and we were
19 missing one of the guys. So I went back and got him. He didn't get
20 the word. And I brought him out and they gave me an award for all
21 that. I don't know.
- 22 **Interviewer:** I'm sure both not only the country but that individual is very happy
23 that you went back there.

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- 1 **Burgess:** Yeah. I lost track of him. I have no idea what happened to him
2 afterwards.
- 3 **Interviewer:** What's his name?
- 4 **Burgess:** I don't know. I don't remember.
- 5 **Interviewer:** But you mentioned that it was for that the you got the Silver Star.
- 6 **Burgess:** Yes.
- 7 **Interviewer:** You got the Silver Star when?
- 8 **Burgess:** It was awarded...I don't know. It was about the end of the war in
9 Europe. I knew I'd been put in for it, but I didn't know it was coming.
- 10 **Interviewer:** Can you tell us about that day that you got it? I know we're kind of
11 jumping ahead here, but...
- 12 **Burgess:** You mean when it was awarded?
- 13 **Interviewer:** Right.
- 14 **Burgess:** Well, they had...it was in Germany. It must have been after the war
15 was over. And they had this big parade ground. They made the
16 awards and they called...they had that...our whole regiment was
17 there. And they called your name and you had to go up and you were
18 given that out in this field. That was one award. The other important
19 award I got was...well, I'm jumping ahead on it. Cause it...
- 20 **Interviewer:** It's okay.
- 21 **Burgess:** Okay. At that point, I had gone into the beach when we landed in
22 Normandy. I was a corporal. I went up, got promotions right up
23 because people were getting killed and wounded and all and became a

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1 tech sergeant, which is the...it's the highest rank in the individual
2 platoon. The second lieutenant is the officer and the tech sergeant is
3 the next ranking person. So I had reached that. Unfortunate, [sic] most
4 of the...I guess it was unfortunate. Most of the time, I had no
5 lieutenant. They would get hit or wounded or something. So I ended
6 up running the platoon most of the time. So my company commander
7 put me in for a commission. So I got a battlefield commission and it
8 was awarded to me by George Patton, which was an interesting thing.
9 It was in Luxembourg City where Third Army headquarters were [sic]
10 and this was in January. They took us into...there were eight of us
11 who were getting them and they took us into a building that...must
12 have been a school building or something. It looked like that. And this
13 very large room. It would have been a...to us it would be like an
14 auditorium in a grammar school, except there were no seats in there.
15 So we were lined up. The eight of us were lined up and we waited and
16 we were very grubby looking cause we'd all been line soldiers who
17 were dirty and unshaven and everything. And in walks George Patton
18 [laughing] with his pearl-handled pistols and his riding boots on and
19 all. A very striking man. And he walked in and spoke briefly to all of
20 us. And then he came down the line and there was a major with him
21 and the major had a clipboard with name and all on it. He would show
22 it to General Patton and he'd stop at each one. He got to me and he
23 said, "Where are you from?" And I said, "Atlanta". And he said,

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- 1 “Atlanta’s a good town to go to. Columbus is terrible, but Atlanta’s
2 good.” [laughs] Just to lighten the thing up. And then the major did
3 pin my bar on my collar and then Patton went on. Then he made
4 another little brief talk and left. But it was something I’ll never forget
5 anyway.
- 6 **Interviewer:** That must have been such a highlight. Did you have an opportunity to
7 write home to family to tell them about that experience then?
- 8 **Burgess:** Not entirely. I just told them I’d gotten the commission and I
9 increased my allotment, I think, at that time. [laughs] I was single in
10 those days so I didn’t have any responsibilities much.
- 11 **Interviewer:** We’re just gonna go back a little bit we left off [sic].
- 12 **Burgess:** Okay.
- 13 **Interviewer:** So after the Hirken Forest...
- 14 **Burgess:** Okay.
- 15 **Interviewer:** That was successful, but then you had the Battle of the Bulge.
- 16 **Burgess:** Yeah. And that was unexpected. Of course, it was a big surprise to all
17 of us. Anyway, they took us out of the Hirken Forest and we were
18 pretty well decimated as far as troops were concerned. A normal
19 platoon, my platoon, would have had about fifty people in it. I had no
20 officer at that time. I was a sergeant at that time. I had no officer, so I
21 was responsible for it. And out of the fifty, we came out of Hirken
22 Forest...we had about thirty. The others had been either killed or
23 wounded. So we lost maybe twenty people in there. And then...so

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1 they said, “Okay. We’re gonna give you some replacements for the
2 people that you had lost”. So I got nineteen replacements and the next
3 day they evacuated twenty-one of my people with frostbite and frozen
4 limbs. So I gained nothing. In fact, I lost two more in numbers. They
5 took us at that point and moved us down to Luxembourg and
6 [inaudible] rebuild the division and get us back at full strength again
7 and we’d have a rest period in there. So we got down there and we
8 dug in. We were outside of a town named Ekerknock [phonetic] and
9 we were there about a week and the Bulge hit. And we were the
10 southern corner of the Bulge and we held. And we were told, “You’ve
11 got to hold” because Third Army Headquarters, Patton’s
12 headquarters, is in Luxembourg City and it’s a straight line from
13 where the German were coming in. So we did. We held. And we
14 finally...well, the Germans were finally defeated, particularly
15 [inaudible]. Then we went into Baston [phonetic] to relieve some of
16 the hundred and first there, the airborne there. That was the Bulge.
17 The fighting was bad. It was very, very cold and we had ice and snow
18 everywhere. I can remember seeing our tankers, the guys running the
19 tanks, get up in the mornings and come out with a blow torch and cut
20 the ice off of the [inaudible] of the tanks so they could traverse their
21 guns. They’d freeze up solid every night. Again, we were living
22 outdoors in holes in the ground and it’s not very comfortable.

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- 1 **Interviewer:** Did the expectation that the war was wrapping up...when did it feel
2 like to you that it was close?
- 3 **Burgess:** I think immediately after the Bulge. We weren't sure about the Bulge.
4 We didn't know what anybody else was doing other than what we
5 were doing. If the Germans had gotten through all the way to the
6 English Channel, which was their goal, it could have...it would have
7 split our troops north and south and we'd been...devastating. But they
8 didn't. We held. Americans held. And then they had to pull back. The
9 Germans had to pull back. They ran out of everything; ammunition,
10 gasoline, everything else. And I think once they were defeated there,
11 we started moving forward. We felt like it was over. And literally it
12 was, in most instances, for us because from now...we crossed the
13 Rhine River at a town called Wrms, W-R-M-S [sic]. From there,
14 every day we just rode on tanks. We'd go from one village to the next
15 and go in and clean up the village and then some other troops would
16 come in behind us and they'd stay and we kept going. We'd go to the
17 next one. We did that from...literally from February till May eighth,
18 when the war was over.
- 19 **Interviewer:** Where were you at that point, when the war was over?
- 20 **Burgess:** We were at Badtolzt [phonetic], which is a spa and a very...a resort
21 city south of Munich, right on the edge of the Alps. And there was
22 snow on the ground May the eighth. [laughing] There was a lot of

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1 snow cause we were right on the edge of the Alps, so we were getting
2 some elevation there.

3 **Interviewer:** How did you actually get word that the war was over?

4 **Burgess:** I don't remember. I guess...somebody got it on a telephone call or
5 radio call, something of that type. It was very frightening that night
6 cause the guys shot guns up in the air and we weren't sure whether
7 we'd be shot by our troops or not. Cause everybody was very excited.

8 **Interviewer:** Do you remember where you were when Roosevelt and how you got
9 the news?

10 **Burgess:** Yeah and we thought it was not true. We thought it was German
11 propaganda that he was dead. That was what? April the thirteen,
12 twelfth or thirteenth, I think. And we were in that period where we
13 were riding tanks everyday. We'd stop at night. The only good thing
14 about that trip was number one, we got to ride instead of walk. And
15 number two, we got to sleep in a house at night cause we'd just take
16 over a house in one of these villages and that would be it for the night.
17 So that period was very comfortable. And the Germans weren't
18 fighting much then. They were pretty well through.

19 **Interviewer:** So when you got the news, you weren't sure...

20 **Burgess:** We thought...yeah. We thought it was propaganda. We didn't think it
21 was true. It was probably the next day before it was confirmed that he
22 had died.

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1 **Interviewer:** Once the war was over, you stayed in Germany for a while longer.
2 How long were you there?
3 **Burgess:** We were there...the war was over on May eighth and they...we were in
4 the Badtolzt [phonetic] area. We must have stayed there for a few
5 days. I might tell one little story there, too. And then they moved us
6 from there. But on our way from...into Munich. We did not go into
7 Munich itself in the beginning. Another division had gone in there.
8 Our mission was to go around Munich and cut it off so that they could
9 not re-supply it from any other direction. That's why we ended up
10 down near Austria and Switzerland. But on the way down we were
11 straddling the Autobahn that went into Munich itself. And the
12 Germans...the airport at Munich had been so bombed and torn up,
13 they couldn't use it. All the runways had huge craters in them and all.
14 So the Germans had gone out to the Autobahn and they paved over
15 the grass median and they were using that as a runway for the
16 airplanes. Then they'd back their planes off into the woods on each
17 side of the runway. Also, when we came down there we looked over.
18 We saw Dachau, the horrible prison camp. And after the war was over
19 on May the eighth, about the ninth or tenth, two other lieutenants and
20 I got a Jeep and we went back to see Dachau. And that was a
21 shocking thing. They had been released, the prisoners had, for, I
22 guess, two weeks by that time. The gates were open. They weren't
23 leaving. They didn't know where to go or what to do. So we went in

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1 and we were looking around. And I can attest to the fact, there
2 absolutely was a Holocaust cause I saw it. But while we were there, a
3 Jeep came up with a major in it and he had a film crew and they
4 filmed something there. They were starting to film everything there.
5 So there must be a record somewhere of all of that. But he came to us
6 and he wanted to know what we were doing there and we said we
7 were just looking. And he says, “You’ll have to leave”. So he
8 outranked us, so we got in our Jeep and left. But it was really
9 shocking. It really got to you. I can remember it even today. But that
10 was...Dachau was, I don’t know, maybe ten or fifteen miles outside
11 of Munich. It’s in that area. But anyway, afterwards, we went back
12 and then they moved our division up north of Munich in the
13 neighborhood of Bamberg, Germany, and we were there from May
14 eighth...about May the fifteenth when we moved, probably till the
15 end of June. And then they put us on boxcars, freight boxcars. This is
16 not first-class travel. [laughs] But we went across from Bamberg all
17 the way across Germany and across France and went to Le Havre,
18 France. And they had a big camp there. So we were there for a couple
19 of weeks and they put us on ships and brought us back to the States.
20 We got home in the middle of July. I did get into Paris. [laughing] I
21 got in there for a couple of days. And it was very nice.

22 **Interviewer:** To make up for the time you [inaudible].

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- 1 **Burgess:** Yes, it certainly did. And the other thing, that trip back from Le
2 Havre, though, was not...we'd gone in convoy over when we'd gone
3 through the year before, when we'd gone over to Europe. But on the
4 way back we were just alone on a liberty ship and it took fourteen
5 days. It was no challenge to the Queen Mary or anything like that for
6 speed. But we came into New York City and went up the Hudson
7 River. And they gave us a salute with the fireboats and all and our
8 ship went on up under George Washington Bridge, up the Hudson,
9 almost up to West Point. And then they anchored the ship in the river
10 and they took us by boat over to the land. And there's Camp Shanks,
11 Calif...Camp Shanks, New York, was up there and we were there
12 only a couple of days and then left and got home. So that was pretty
13 much it. [laughs] That's the war.
- 14 **Interviewer:** That's pretty memorable. We're about to wrap up. Was there anything
15 else that you wanted to talk about or add?
- 16 **Burgess:** No, I guess not unless there's, you know, some particular questions
17 about it. The other thing is I finally got back home and went back to
18 Georgia Tech and graduated. Got married. Three years later my wife
19 was pregnant with twins and I got orders to go to Korea. I was in the
20 reserves. And my twins were born, I saw them one day and left the
21 next day on a troop train to go to Korea. And the next time I saw them
22 they were fifteen months old. So, that was...my wife always said that
23 I left on purpose, so I didn't have to handle two girls at that age.

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- 1 **Interviewer:** So you came from World War Two. Did you have any other training
2 before you left for Korea? Did you have any inkling that you would
3 serve again so soon?
- 4 **Burgess:** No. No.
- 5 **Interviewer:** So you left again, went to Korea and served there fifteen months?
- 6 **Burgess:** Fifteen months, yeah. Then came back home. Then I got out of the
7 reserves immediately after coming back. [laughs]
- 8 **Interviewer:** Just quickly, in comparison, Korea versus World War Two, your
9 experience, how different?
- 10 **Burgess:** I was...well, it was very much different for me because I was not in
11 the infantry in Korea. I was in intelligence and although I was still in
12 the Army, I was attached to the First Marine Division in Korea. And
13 my job there was really was [sic] screening prisoners and refugees
14 and things like that. So I was in no great danger in Korea, so I didn't
15 have that threat over me at any time at all. The weather was bad there
16 in the wintertime. I just followed bad weather wherever I went
17 apparently. It was not...the danger was not there. So it was very
18 different. I was just anxious to get home and see my family. In
19 Europe, I was...you always had that constant fear because people
20 were getting killed at all times. And you never got over it. It was
21 night. Day. And constant. So, that pressure is very different, I think,
22 from anything else that I've ever had in life.

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- 1 **Interviewer:** That leads me to my last question. The impact that your having served
2 in the military had on the rest of your life.
- 3 **Burgess:** Well, I think it gave me discipline that you don't normally get. I think
4 it gave me a lot of memories and you...I guess those are the two
5 biggest things. I think the other thing, the shock part of it is, I think of
6 all the time I was in Europe, I got to the point very early that it didn't
7 bother me to see dead German soldiers, but I never got over seeing a
8 dead American. It just...it always got to you. Okay?
- 9 **Interviewer:** Thank you so much.
- 10 **Burgess:** Okay.
- 11 **Interviewer:** This is Marilyn Parr again and we're still with Mr. Burgess. We
12 concluded the interview, but found that Mr. Burgess has a lot of
13 artifacts and materials and we're just gonna talk about some of those.
14 So you had a story to tell about...
- 15 **Burgess:** About this medal here. This is a German medal and it's called a
16 "Deutsch A Mutter" [phonetic] and it was given out by Hitler to
17 German mothers who in effect signed their children over to the
18 German government. And they agreed to put them into various youth
19 programs and bring them along. I picked this up as we were in the
20 final stages of the war when we were going between say Frankfurt
21 and Munich. And we came to a small village. I don't even remember
22 the name of the town now. There was a large building in there. It was
23 a hospital and so we went into the hospital and everybody in there

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1 were pregnant females. So we asked questions and found out that
2 that's what they were. They were in there and they were gonna give
3 their children after they were born to the German government. And
4 for that, they gave out medals, this being one of them. And on the
5 back is Hitler's signature and that's it. And I got this from one of the
6 supervisor women there. She had received it earlier in nineteen thirty-
7 eight. This would have been nineteen forty-four, forty-five, I guess.
8 So, it was that much earlier. I got that and that was one of the artifacts
9 that I brought with me. I have some others here. This is off of a cap. It
10 was a swastika that was on a German soldier's cap and this was a
11 breast plate that was from another one. And I have lots of things of
12 that type. You wanted to find out something about what my family
13 was doing here while I was gone and that sort of thing.

14 **Interviewer:** While your family was here, your Atlanta connections.

15 **Burgess:** Okay. At that point I was not married. I had been a student in college
16 and my mother and father and two sisters were here in Atlanta. And
17 this is...we went to Peachtree Road Presbyterian Church up at the
18 corner of Matheson and Peachtree. And when I was awarded the
19 Silver Star, my father gave them a copy of the citation [laughs], so
20 they printed it in the church bulletin. And this is what this is right
21 here. I have two maps here of my division. Half of it is from the beach
22 up through Paris up to the German border and the other half is from
23 the German border on down to the end of the war in Munich. This is a

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- 1 copy of the Stars and Stripes Newspaper the day the war was over.
- 2 They had...you can see here everybody was very happy about that
- 3 one. That's pretty much it.
- 4 **Interviewer:** You mentioned being very proud of your...
- 5 **Burgess:** My division? Yeah. The Fourth Division right now is in Iraq and they
- 6 are the division, they are the people that captured Saddam Hussein
- 7 recently. And they're there now and they're taking some heavy
- 8 casualties, but I'm always proud of them.
- 9 **Interviewer:** We're gonna talk again a little bit about your experience in Korea.
- 10 **Burgess:** Okay.
- 11 **Interviewer:** Talked a little bit about it before. Can you again tell us, when were
- 12 you notified, when did you know and how were you notified that you
- 13 would be going to Korea?
- 14 **Burgess:** I was notified with some orders that were sent to me by the Army. I
- 15 was notified in September of nineteen fifty. And I was told to go to
- 16 Fort McPherson and get a physical and be prepared to be called up on
- 17 active duty. So I did that. And as I said, my wife was pregnant with
- 18 twins at that time. And they were born on December first. In the
- 19 meantime, I went to Fort Mac and passed my physical. A funny thing
- 20 there, the psychiatrist that you had to check was...he asked me, he
- 21 says, "I only have one question." And I said, "What is that?" And he
- 22 says, "Are you happy about going back to the war?" I said,
- 23 "Absolutely not." And he says, "Okay, you pass." So, anyway I was

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1 put back in the service then. I went to...first I went to Fort Bragg,
2 North Carolina. We were there briefly and then back to Fort Gordon
3 over at Augusta. From there, as I said earlier, I got on a troop train
4 after having seen my children for one day and we went to Camp
5 Stoneman, California. And they put us on planes there and they flew
6 us to Toyko, outside of Toyko to a Japanese, what had been a
7 Japanese camp. And we were there for a couple of weeks, I guess.
8 Then they put us on ships and took us into Pusan [phonetic], Korea. I
9 was part of an organization called UNCACK, which was United
10 Nations Civil Assistance Command Korea. And actually what it was,
11 we did not function as a civil assistance unit. It was set up by the UN
12 to essentially put the Korean nation back together after the fighting
13 was over.

14 **[Tape 1, Side B]**

15 **Burgess:** So, we couldn't understand why we were there yet, because it was not
16 time. So, they said, "Well, you're here and you're trained." So some
17 of us were put into a group to serve as intelligence people. The First
18 Marine Division did not have that type of organization in their
19 structure. So I was attached to the First Marine Division the whole
20 time I was there. And we were basically up around the thirty-eighth
21 parallel and we spent our time back and forth in that area. Again, my
22 activities there were quite different from what they'd been in Europe,
23 because there I'd been in infantry and been fighting and this one I was

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1 basically just interviewing prisoners and refugees. And there were lots
2 of refugees who came flowing through there. Trying to spot anybody
3 who shouldn't be there. And we found quite a few. And that was it. I
4 lived there. I lived in the Marine Division Headquarters. And division
5 headquarters is very different from a line company where the fighting
6 was going on. I lived in a tent, had a stove in the tent. And it was very
7 cold, but it was quite comfortable. We had hot food all the time. Had
8 showers, which I had no idea existed in wartime because we'd had
9 none of that in Europe. So anyway, came back after...I finally got to
10 Korea in December of fifty, later December. In January of fifty-two,
11 which would have been thirteen months later, got to come home.
12 They brought us back to Japan. Didn't fly us back. We had to get on a
13 ship then. It was a slow trip. We came back to Seattle to...I can't
14 remember the name of the fort. Fort Lewis, Washington. And we
15 were there for a few days. And then flew back to Fort Benning and I
16 was released from Fort Benning then and got to see my children who
17 were then fifteen months old for the first time.

18 **Interviewer:** During the time that you were there in Korea, what kind of
19 communication were you able to have with your wife? Did she send
20 you pictures?

21 **Burgess:** Yeah. Oh yeah. Constantly. And they were good. She sent me little
22 flip books with the pictures in them. And she wrote a lot more often
23 that I did and she kept me informed as to how they were coming and I

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- 1 heard lots of terrible stories about how bad these kids were, which
2 was not true. But they...she got my sympathy anyway.
- 3 **Interviewer:** What were your children's names?
- 4 **Burgess:** My children's names? Well, the twin daughters, the one was named
5 Jan and the other was named Kim. She was named after her mother.
6 Her name was Kimsy [phonetic] and we called her Kim. That was a
7 family name. And Kim lives in Atlanta now. She lives in Garden
8 Hills. And Jan lives in California. The twins have split. And then I
9 have one third daughter, about a year after I got back.
- 10 **Interviewer:** And her name?
- 11 **Burgess:** Her name is Katie. Katherine. She also lives in California.
- 12 **Interviewer:** So for you the military part was definitely going to be over.
- 13 **Burgess:** Oh yes. I got out of reserves at the end of Korea. I think I'd had
14 enough. The one other funny thing, several years later, I guess, one
15 morning when I walked into the kitchen, my wife was there and she
16 said, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "What are you talking
17 about?" And she says, "There's a war going on in Vietnam. Why
18 aren't you there?" [laughter] I said, "I'm going to skip this one, I
19 think." So I didn't go there.
- 20 **Interviewer:** In comparison to World War Two and you had said earlier that you
21 were expecting that you knew that you were going to go.
- 22 **Burgess:** Yes.
- 23 **Interviewer:** Korea was a different situation.

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- 1 **Burgess:** Yes.
- 2 **Interviewer:** How did you feel about the war in Korea compared to World War
3 Two?
- 4 **Burgess:** I didn't question our need to be there. I questioned my need to be
5 there. [laughs] I don't think there were many others who could go
6 who hadn't been anywhere before. There was a small degree of
7 bitterness there, I guess, that I got called back again five years after
8 having been in Europe for a long period of time. But no, I felt that we
9 did a good job there. I think we accomplished our purpose there. It
10 dragged on, on and on with those talks that they had at Padamajam
11 [phonetic]. I was gone when they were still talking about that. And
12 that part was unpleasant, but I think we proved our point there, that
13 we stopped the...first the North Koreans and secondly, the Chinese
14 from taking over the rest of Korea. And I think all of Korea today
15 exists because we fought that war and saved the country for them.
- 16 **Interviewer:** So you were here in Atlanta then when you got news that end of
17 Korea. It wasn't the same as victory in Europe when you were in
18 Europe...
- 19 **Burgess:** Correct.
- 20 **Interviewer:** ...when Korea was over.
- 21 **Burgess:** Right.
- 22 **Interviewer:** Tell us about that day when you heard and knew that Korea was over.

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1 **Burgess:** Well, I'm not sure that I felt like it was completely over because it
2 was a truce, but there was no...as you said, there was no victory and I
3 think, again, there was a feeling of pleasure that we had accomplished
4 what we were there for. But you never trusted the North Koreans, that
5 they would live up to the agreements that they made and they even sit
6 there today. And I think one of the great problems today is that we're
7 afraid that they may come back again. And the city of Seoul is within
8 artillery range of where the thirty-eighth parallel is. They can actually
9 reach it with artillery pieces. So it's a very touch and go situation. So
10 there's not the feeling of elation like you had when the Germans had
11 been defeated and later the Japanese were defeated. So, you never had
12 that strong feeling like that after Korea. You just felt like, "Well,
13 they're not going to fight anymore. We're not going to have anymore
14 casualties." But...and we stopped them where they are. But beyond
15 that it was...that was it. Okay?

16 **Interviewer:** Thank you very much.

17 **Burgess:** Okay.

18 **Interviewer:** Thank you for taking the time again and share with us your artifacts.

19 **Burgess:** Okay.

20 **[end of tape]**