

## Oral History Interview with Perry Bonner

Johnson: Uh, today is March 15<sup>th</sup> . . . 14<sup>th</sup> idnit?

Bonner: I think so.

Johnson: 1994. [chuckles] I am speaking with, uh, Perry D. Bonner, B-o-n-n-e-r. Uh, uh, who lives at, uh, 511 West Burleson. B-u-r-l-e-s-o-n in Marshall. And the, uh, subject will be, uh, Mr. Bonner's service in World War II. Interviewer Bobby H. Johnson. [blank testing] Well the first thing I'd like for you to do Mr. Bonner is, uh, tell me, uh, a little bit about your early background, where you were born, when, where you went to school and, uh, you know, your, your early life.

Bonner: Well, I'm originally from Marshall, Texas. I was born here in July the 24<sup>th</sup> 1924.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: I went to school here through the tenth grade. I was in the National Guard.

Johnson: Who were your parents?

Bonner: Uh, uh, Perry Thomas Bonner. He died when I was nine.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: And, my mother remarried and I lived with my aunt and my grandparents for some years.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: I had a paper route and, uh, and worked at the theater taking tickets while I was going to school. I made total of seven and half a week.

Johnson: Was, that was here in Marshall?

Bonner: Uh huh.

Johnson: Well, that was during the Depression, wasn't it?

Bonner: Right, uh, huh.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: Where local bread was a nickel a loaf.

Johnson: You went through the tenth grade at Marshall High School?

Bonner: Yes sir.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: And I finished at Fort Sill, Okalahoma. Eleventh, back then we just went through the eleventh grade.

Johnson: Right. Um hum. Well, uh, how did you come to be in the army so young?

Bonner: Well it was pretty hard back in those days and every drill we got well, we got some money for it. And, uh . . .

Johnson: You were in the National Guard?

Bonner: National Guard, 36<sup>th</sup> Division.

Johnson: Okay

Bonner: And, uh . . .

Johnson: Where did you join?

Bonner: Here in Marshall.

Johnson: They had a local . . .

Bonner: We had a Battery F a 132<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery here.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: Part of the 36<sup>th</sup> Division.

Johnson: And you joined at age fifteen?

Bonner: Fifteen. Yes sir.

Johnson: How was that, uh, legal now?

Bonner: It wasn't actually legal but my mother signed. I fibbed about my age.

Johnson: I see. What was the minimum age?

Bonner: Uh, eighteen.

Johnson: Oh, really?

Bonner: Yes sir.

Johnson: And they didn't check out your birth certificate . . .

Bonner: Well, the captain, he, he, knew I wasn't that old.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: And, uh. He never did check. And four of us started to get out, but when we mobilized we could've got but we didn't want to.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: He told us if we stayed in he'd see that we graduated from high school, which he did. He kept his promise. We graduated at Fort Sill, Oklahoma at Fort High School, Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

Johnson: That was your first place you were sent.

Bonner: No we were sent to Camp Bowie, Texas.

Johnson: Okay. And . . .

Bonner: We opened that camp up out there.

Johnson: When was that now? 1940 you said?

Bonner: Uh, it probably first, uh, part, we got up there first part of '41.

Johnson: Okay. The National Guard had been nationalized in . . .

Bonner: November the 25<sup>th</sup> 1940.

Johnson: Okay. So . . .

Bonner: We stayed here for two or three months before we moved to Camp Bowie, Texas.

Johnson: That's . . .

Bonner: At Brownwood.

Johnson: That was over a year before, uh, we got in the war then.

Bonner: Right. Yes sir.

Johnson: And they were already building, uh, Camp Bowie?

Bonner: We built it.

Johnson: Well that was because they were, they had a draft going . . .

Bonner: Right.

Johnson: I believe and uh . . .

Bonner: Right.

Johnson: . . . and, uh, and uh, they were already training people then.

Bonner: They were building Camp Walters . . .

Johnson: At Mineral Wells.

Bonner: At Mineral Wells.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: At the same time, uh huh.

Johnson: Uh huh. And, uh, well you say you were building at what, did you just do physical labor on that?

Bonner: Ah we, uh, built the tents. Floors for tents and just different things like that they already had the mess hall built and the PXs. Our living quarters, we had to build them ourselves.

Johnson: Then you went to, uh, uh, Fort Sill after that?

Bonner: Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

Johnson: And went to high school.

Bonner: Went, finished high school at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

Johnson: Uh huh. And, uh, do you remember were you where on December 7, 1941?

Bonner: Yes sir.

Johnson: What were you doing?

Bonner: I was between, uh, Brownwood and Fort Worth. I was on the way to visit my sister in Fort Worth and I heard it on the radio.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: It was on Sunday morning.

Johnson: Well, had you kept up with things enough to know that we were probably going to be in that war?

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: You knew about the war in Europe.

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: But were you surprised about the Japanese end of it?

Bonner: Not really. No, sir. And, uh, it is just you know talk about it, what we gonna do, this and that we knew that it was going to be war.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: Cause they were building up too fast. They called. I forget how many National Guard divisions up. And, uh, I knew they were getting ready for something.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: I still think we knew about Pearl Harbor. [Johnson chuckles]

Johnson: Well we knew that, we did have their, their, code, we knew some of it. Uh, well, where was your first uh, where did you start heading to the war from?

Bonner: Uh, from Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania.

Johnson: Indian what?

Bonner: Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania.

Johnson: What was there now?

Bonner: It was just an Army post. Right out of Allentown.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And, uh, I joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Division there from the 36<sup>th</sup> Division. They was fixin to go overseas. We left to go overseas in April of '42.

Johnson: In the 1<sup>st</sup> Division?

Bonner: First Infantry Division. They called it the "Big Red One." They made a movie about it.

Johnson: Yes.

Bonner: And, uh, we, uh . . .

Johnson: Was that a standing, uh, division or one that was created?

Bonner: That was regular army. No. [Johnson and Bonner talk over each other] It dates back to 1600s. And, uh, the 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry dates back to sixteenth hun-, hundred and the artillery battalions we had in the, uh, uh, division dates back to Hamilton.

Johnson: Alexander Hamilton?

Bonner: Yes.

Johnson: During the American Revolution?

Bonner: Yes sir.

Johnson: Okay. 1700s.

Bonner: 1700s. Excuse me.

Johnson: Okay. So it is very old part of the army then.

Bonner: Yes sir. We left Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania on trains. We went to New York.

Johnson: When was this?

Bonner: April of '42. We loaded on the *Queen Mary* twenty-five thousand of us. And . . .

Johnson: Would you believe I spent the night on the *Queen Mary*?

Bonner: Oh, is that right?

Johnson: [chuckles] You know it is a hotel.

Bonner: You know that middle smoke stack on the *Queen Mary*? [Johnson chuckles]

Johnson: Yeah, yeah.

Bonner: . . . is false.

Johnson: [chuckles] Oh, really?

Bonner: We started over, it didn't take us but four and a half days to go from New York, it did forty two knots an hour.

Johnson: Oh that was fast.

Bonner: We didn't have any escort or anything. Half us have to go down twelve hours and half us have to go on deck twelve hours.

Johnson: It out-ran the submarines.

Bonner: Yes sir.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: And, uh, I saw a door in that middle smoke stack so I opened it. It wasn't anything but hardwood floor in there. I moved my whole platoon in there and was where we stayed the whole trip.

Johnson: Well, I guess that was to trick them so that they would not know what it was.

Bonner: Well they never did have a, you know it never did have but two smokestacks, but I mean . . .

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Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: Working smokestacks.

Johnson: Did they add that?

Bonner: No. It's always been there . . .

Johnson: I see.

Bonner: . . . but it is just a false smokestack.

Johnson: I see.

Bonner: To make it look better I guess.

Johnson: Yeah. That's, that's, a big ship isn't it?

Bonner: It is. Especially with twenty-five thousand GIs on it.

Johnson: Yeah. It is just hardly any place to put 'em were there.

Bonner: Uh huh. We got to York, they unloaded us at York, Scotland. Loaded us on ferries and, uh, they shot us right down on the English Channel. That's when they were expecting an invasion from France.

Johnson: Well, where you among the first American troops to land in . . .

Bonner: We was the first American combat troops into England.

Johnson: In England, I see.

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: How were you received? Did you ever meet any of the English people?

Bonner: Ah yeah. We stayed in, after we, went on down on the English Channel dug and stayed there about a month. Then we moved back to, I lived with family for ah, two or three months and we lived in some chateaus and just different places.

Johnson: Um hum. Where were you, where was this?

Bonner: All that old town called Crewkerne.

Johnson: Where was that near?

Bonner: Ah, it was near Salisbury.

Johnson: Okay.

Bonner: And Beaminster . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And just different . . .

Johnson: So you'd, did you ever get a chance to get in any of those English pubs?

Bonner: Naw, we stayed in 'em. [Johnson chuckles] It was the funniest thing that every happened to me. I was acting platoon leader and we was living in a little hotel in this town and headquarters another town about seven or eight miles. We had a Women's Land Army was on the next floor of this hotel and we's down on this floor.

Johnson: That was the women that worked in the parks.

Bonner: Uh huh.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: We called, well it the same as our WACs here.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: They called 'em Women's Land Army.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: But anyway, I sat in a pub, was standing at, the bars were lots higher than ours over there.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: And this woman came in. She ordered twelve pints of bitter.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: She turned every one of those things up [Johnson chuckles] just one after another. She turned around looked at me and she grabbed me by the collar and says don't you think I am good-looking. I said not especially and she knocked me plum over the bar. [Johnson laughs] I liked to never lived that down.

Johnson: So, some people saw it huh?

Bonner: And every time we'd go to London we'd get bombed.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: So I, we just quit going to London.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: And, uh, we'd go to these smaller towns.

Johnson: Um hum. Well, were you in training then?

Bonner: Yes sir. We, amphibious training, and rifle range, and it was just, it was all kinds of training. We'd have night problems and just . . .

Johnson: You, uh, were training for, uh, the invasion of, in Africa?

Bonner: Africa, yes, sir.

Johnson: Did you know that was what it was going to be?

Bonner: No, sir. But . . .

Johnson: When did you know? When you got on the ship and went?

Bonner: When we got 'bout, we stayed on a ship thirty-one days. We was on the ship 'bout ten days when they told us.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And, uh . . .

Johnson: You went around and landing where then?

Bonner: We landed in Algeria, uh, Oran, Algeria.

Johnson: Okay, so you went in through, the Cape of, through Gibraltar.

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: Uh huh. Did you get to see it?

Bonner: Yes, sir. You could see the German flag flying over in Spain.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: In, I don't know. They was waiting for us between Malta and North Africa. They thought we was going to the Suez Canal.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And they had the whole Italian navy, German navy, everything lined up waiting on us. And that night they just did a right face . . .

Johnson: Headed right into Africa.

Bonner: Right into Africa.

Johnson: You went in at Oran?

Bonner: Yes sir.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And . . .

Johnson: Well now that was a, uh, not necessarily a, a fighting invasion was it?

Bonner: We lost about a hundred men . . .

Johnson: Did we?

Bonner: . . . out of the whole division.

Johnson: There was some opposition?

Bonner: Ah yeah. The French Foreign Legion.

Johnson: Yeah. But they, they arranged a cease-fire pretty quickly didn't they?

Bonner: Well we had our guns, the second day we had our guns all lined up on, on, uh, Oran . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: . . . and they surrendered. But, uh, my platoon was in Oran before we surrendered [Bonner chuckles] and they pulled us out.

Johnson: Isn't that where that guy was assassinated?

Bonner: Um hum. Yeah.

Johnson: That, uh, French leader.

Bonner: Yeah.

Johnson: Yeah. And Mark Clark had gone in and helped, uh . . .

Bonner: Yeah.

Johnson: . . . arrange all of that.

Bonner: Oh, he was as much as nothing as I ever saw.

Johnson: Did you ever see him?

Bonner: Yeah, he should have been court-martialed.

Johnson: Who was the, uh, who was the commander, I mean the person in charge of your division?

Bonner: Uh . . .

Johnson: At that time.

Bonner: General Terry Allen.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And General Teddy Roosevelt Jr. was our assistant division commander.

Johnson: Um hum. And, uh, you said a minute ago then that you, uh were later involved in fighting in the Kasserine Pass.

Bonner: Yes sir. We was . . .

Johnson: Wasn't that where the United States took a lot of loses at first?

Bonner: Well, we take loses, weren't in the in the 1<sup>st</sup> Division. It was the 9<sup>th</sup> Division. And, uh, they broke through us but we didn't fall back.

Johnson: The, uh . . .

Bonner: Germans did that, uh . . .

Johnson: What was the problem there?

Bonner: Well, we was just fresh and it was the first time we was ever in combat.

Johnson: Unseasoned troops, huh?

Bonner: And, uh, it wasn't, I don't know where you have ever seen that movie *Patton* or not. But it wasn't anything close to that.

Johnson: I understand that Eisenhower though was quite upset over that and even considered possibly that would be the end of his career.

Bonner: No, uh . . .

Johnson: That wasn't right.

Bonner: No we didn't hear that. We just, uh, he sent [Omar] Bradley down. Then they decided to get "Blood and Guts" Patton, and, uh, which they did. They relieved our corps commander. I think it was more his fault than anybody else's and, uh . . .

Johnson: Who was that?

Bonner: Uh, I don't even remember his name now and, uh . . .

Johnson: But eventually the tide turned and then we started, uh, moving, uh, east.

Bonner: That's the only time the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division ever lost a inch of ground.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: That was the first time.

Johnson: Well, you were fighting Rommel's troops.

Bonner: Right.

Johnson: And that went on, uh, until when.

Bonner: Oh, '42. We'd taken Tunis. After the Kasserine Pass, well, uh, I made contact. They sent me out on patrol to make contact with British 8<sup>th</sup> Army. And I made contact with a motorcycle rider. My platoon went out on some half tracks . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: . . . and, uh, that's the first time we'd made contact with the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

Johnson: Well, was that bad fighting in North Africa?

Bonner: Kasserine Pass wasn't that bad. Uh, Hill 609 there right out of Bursnia and, uh, that was real mountainous.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: That was real, we lost a lot of men there.

Johnson: But of course a lot of the action had been taken place over in the East, uh, where Montgomery's forces where at El Alemein and that area. Is that right and . . .

Bonner: Yeah.

Johnson: . . . eventually, uh, the Germans just had to get out.

Bonner: Yes sir. We was coming this way and . . .

Johnson: Right.

Bonner: . . . and the 8<sup>th</sup> Army was coming this way. We just pinch 'em in at Tunis there.

Johnson: And, uh, of course a lot of those Africa Corps people ended up in prison camps right here in East Texas.

Bonner: Two-hundred fifty thousand.

Johnson: And a good many of 'em here in East Texas. Some 'em at uh . . .

Bonner: But you know . . .

Johnson: . . . in Tyler.

Bonner: Yeah uh huh. You talking about the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army, they wasn't any British in the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, they were Canadians . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: They were Australians, they was New Zealanders, and they was Indians.

Johnson: Imperial troops.

Bonner: And, uh, those Limys couldn't fight. [Johnson chuckles] They couldn't. We fought all the time.

Johnson: Okay after that then you went on, uh, to be involved in the invasion at, uh, of, uh, did you go to, uh, uh, Sicily?

Bonner: Yes, we made an invasion of Sicily on July the 10<sup>th</sup> 1943.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And we was assault battalion.

Johnson: That means the first ashore.

Bonner: First battalion ashore. Yes, sir.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And, uh . . .

Johnson: What was your specific unit?

Bonner: Uh, at the time I was a Sixteenth Infantry I Company.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And, uh, I was, was with quite a few different companies. I was what they call a FO, forward observer.

Johnson: Um, hum.

Bonner: I stayed at in front of most of 'em. [Bonner chuckles]

Johnson: You were still in artillery.

Bonner: Naw.

Johnson: No?

Bonner: No . . .

Johnson: It was infantry.

Bonner: . . . what, what we call a cannon company. They had self-propelled guns.

Johnson: What kind? What?

Bonner: Self-propelled guns.

Johnson: You said though, some kind of company.

Bonner: Cannons, c-a-n-n-o-n-s.

Johnson: Oh, cannon, okay, oh, I see. I am sorry.

Bonner: And we had, uh, seventy-five millimeter guns. We had one-oh-five millimeter guns.

Johnson: But you were in the infantry.

Bonner: Yes sir.

Johnson: I see. So you had your own weapons.

Bonner: Yes sir.

Johnson: I see.

Bonner: And, uh, I was what they call a, my platoon was what they call a FO forward observers.

Johnson: Were you spotting?

Bonner: Yes sir.

Johnson: I see.

Bonner: So I had twenty-two different officers while I was over there.

Johnson: I see

[Bonner makes a repetitive tapping sound]

Johnson: Yeah, just the . . .

Bonner: Get knocked off and you can't make an officer in ninety days.

Johnson: No. [Johnson Chuckles] Well you got a lot of 'em, they tried didn't they.

Bonner: Yeah.

Johnson: Uh, well, was that pretty bad fighting there in Sicily?

Bonner: It was, uh, we like to got cut off a beach, uh, we got another president's citation there, uh, Goering's panzer division attacked us and we didn't have our artillery off . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: . . . the boats. And the British were always in charge of the, of the boats, we was always on British ships.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And one time there, they had our barracks bags packed on, division's barracks bags packed on all the guns. All artillery pieces. And, uh, the Second Armored Division landed after we did. They never had been in been in combat before. And they were trying to shoot direct fire, uh, indirect fire at 'em. And, uh, I'd taken some men back. Taken one of the tanks by gunpoint. And we right up on top of this big cliff, we shooting right down on top of 'em. We knocked out thirteen of 'em. And they give us a President's Citation for that, if it hadn't been for that Patton would had to be court-martialed. [both chuckle]

Johnson: 'Cause you did something wrong. Taking a tank.

Bonner: Yes, sir. We'd taken it at gunpoint, yes sir. We lost, I forget how many, uh, we, we landed at 2 o'clock AM. That's actually the only night invasion we were on.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: And, uh . . .

Johnson: Well, I want to ask you that inevitable question, uh, were you scared?

Bonner: All the time. [Johnson chuckles] I guess more careful than anything. We was actually four hundred and ninety-three days of actual combat with the enemy. And, uh . . .

Johnson: That's over a year.

Bonner: Yes, sir. And, uh, bring you back for two or three day rest and change clothes and get replacement stuff. Every time you move back up to the front. That really gets you. And when you get up there and get situated its all right.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: Just, just on the way up there.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And it got me more than anything in the world. And, uh . . .

Johnson: Well, did you fe--, did you feel like that, uh, you would come back from that war.

Bonner: No, sir, I didn't.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: Specially when we got back, we loaded on ships in Sicily after the Sicilian Campaign. Patton messed up there bad. He supposed to be under Montgomery and the British. And we landed. We was gonna guard the 8<sup>th</sup> Army's left flank going to Messina to cut the Germans off and cross the bay to Italy.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And Patton got mad cause they put him in charge. He loaded us on 3<sup>rd</sup> armor tanks. We went all the way down to the far end of Sicily, Alcerano, captured it, back up the other side of the island and still beat the British to Messina.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And, uh, but he got he got a lot of kids killed [unclear word].

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: He told us one time there in Sicily, he said, "Men are expendable," but he says, "Equipment is hard to get." I got wounded, big ol hole here in my leg. I was in the same hospital at the same time that he slapped a kid.

Johnson: Oh really.

Bonner: The kid was from the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division. But anyway, I had thirty-two stitches and I had been there four days. And he come in my tent and, uh, picked up my chart and asked the doctor what was the matter with me. He (doctor) said, "He got a whole in his leg." He (Patton) said, "Let me see it." The doctor unwrapped it and he (Patton) says, "Send him on back up to the front." 'Bout two weeks the medics taken the stitches out.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And also . . .

Johnson: But did you go immediately to the front?

Bonner: Yes sir. Also, in Sicily I had the hepatitis and malaria at the same time and they wouldn't let me check in the hospital. We called it yellow jaundice back then.

Johnson: Um hum. Um hum.

Bonner: I was just as yellowier as that glass there. And, uh, I, you know we just taken lots more I think. And I have always wondered, just like there, the French Foreign Legion relieved us at Fade Pass out in the Sahara Desert.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And we was going back for a rest. And we was under French, French command. Every time they would put us under French or British command we'd get in trouble.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: But anyway, we were back there one or two days and the Germans made attack Fade Pass and drove the Foreign Legion out.

Johnson: Which pass?

Bonner: The Fade Pass.

Johnson: How do you spell that? F-a . . .

Bonner: F-a-d-e.

Johnson: Okay.

Bonner: Anyway, we marched fifty miles in seven hours in hundred and thirty degree weather. Went into Tack and fought forty-eight straight hours. And I just wondered if a GI today could do that.

Johnson: Ah man.

Bonner: And like I said, we, a lot of times there in Africa we went over two months without taking a bath and changing clothes. We drank boiled salt water and we eat camel meat, we eat horse meat, we eat grasshoppers.

Johnson: Well, just didn't have these supplies.

Bonner: Didn't have it . . .

Johnson: Um.

Bonner: . . . just like we got to England. Mutton three times a day.

Johnson: Pretty bad isn't it?

Bonner: And the Red Cross, they charged us a dollar a piece for Coca-Colas. Back here in the states they were a nickel. And, uh they never gave us nothing, we never saw any celebrity, front line troops never saw anything.

Johnson: Yeah, you were on the raw edge of the fighting, you got in early. And I understand that, uh, those were the people who fought the war.

Bonner: Well, the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry's Divisions has more campaigns to their credit than any other division in the United States Army.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: Like I said we ended up in Czechoslovakia, but from Sicily after the campaign, we went to, well, I met a girl over in, uh, Africa in Algiers. In the Casaba.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: She was the most beautiful thing. She was half-French and half-Spanish.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And man I tell you, I just went kooflooe over her. Here I was all of seventeen or eighteen. Anyway, after that Sicilian campaign, well uh, we had a airport right down the hill from us so, I hitched a ride one weekend in a P-47. I rode piggy-back to Algiers and the British had charge of the airport over there and they wasn't gonna let us come in, but anyway he told him that he didn't have any gas we're coming in anyway. So I tried to look her up and I never could find her and we got ready to go that Sunday afternoon, they wasn't gonna give us no petrol. So anyway, colonel got some petro somewhere. [Bonner chuckles] And, uh coming back to Sicily, I noticed Sicily over here to our left, I think we was about maybe twenty-thousand feet and, uh, flack started busting everywhere. I said, "Chet where the hell are we." He said, "You are over Naples," he says, "I gonna give you a little of what we have to go through." I says, "Man, I tell you," I said, "Get the hell out of here." [Bonner chuckles] That black puff was bopping everywhere.

Johnson: Over Italy then.

Bonner: Over, uh, that's where we taken Naples.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: And, uh . . .

Johnson: Well, you were in on the invasion then of, uh, Italy? Originally?

Bonner: No.

Johnson: No, you . . .

Bonner: The 36<sup>th</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 45<sup>th</sup> . . .

Johnson: Yes.

Bonner: . . . made invasions.

Johnson: Yes and that was very rough fighting, wasn't it?

Bonner: Yes sir. They was about to get drove off to Salerno. They marched us down to the airport and gave us four-hour nomenclature on how to land in a parachute. They had C-47s lined up just as far as you could see. I had never been in a plane, but just that one time.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And they was going to make us jump! We stayed down there over a week.

Johnson: What happened?

Bonner: They didn't get to over. They didn't get, they broke out of the bridge head.

Johnson: Well, where did you go from there then?

Bonner: Uh, we loaded on ships . . .

Johnson: This is '43.

Bonner: '43. We loaded on ships. We thought we was coming home. We ended up back in England.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: About two weeks, well, General Eisenhower and Mr. Churchill came down told us why they brought us back. That we was going to be the

center of the assault force on the continent of Europe and we don't make it nobody make it.

Johnson: I believe, to go back, uh, I gonna have to turn the tape in just a minute, but you said you had actually met President Roosevelt.

Bonner: Yes sir. North Africa at Casablanca.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: He pinned a President's Citation on me and Mr. Churchill pin—pinned a British Cross on me and I shook hands with, uh, Premier Stalin.

Johnson: So you met every one of them.

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: The "big three."

Bonner: They was at a chateau about four or five miles out of Casablanca. And, uh, that's when I saw, the next time I seen General Eisenhower besides Louisiana maneuvers. We knew he was our commander, but you know, you don't see him where we are.

Johnson: Yeah. No.

Bonner: And they always talking about Patton up on the front lines and stuff. That's bologna.

Johnson: [chuckles] Didn't happen that way.

Bonner: Naw.

Johnson: That movie wasn't right.

Bonner: Naw.

Johnson: [chuckles] Uh, well the tape is about to, uh, I have gotta a little more left here. But, uh, you actually did see these and actually shook hands with these three . . .

Bonner: Yes sir.

Johnson: That's amazing.

Bonner: President hugged me.

Johnson: And, and what did he tell you when he saw . . .

Bonner: He says, "Son you just a baby." He said, "I gonna take you back home with me."

Johnson: [chuckles] And you were fearful, huh? [Continues to chuckle]

Bonner: They flew me, they flew me from Oran to Casablanca and I was so scared that I, I didn't, you know, didn't know how to take him serious or not serious, but I hitchhiked, it taken me two days to hitchhike back to Oran. [Johnson chuckles] Out there in that, uh, well it is not too bad along the coast . . .

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: . . . but it is still rough country.

Johnson: Yeah. And you were actually hitchhiking?

Bonner: Yes sir.

Johnson: Well, you went back to England then, uh, uh, in time to get on the, uh, the, uh, the next invasion, which of course was going to be across the Channel. You didn't know that at the time did you?

Bonner: No sir. First thing we did when we got back to England our general, we had a new general division commander says we using too much ammunition.

Johnson: Hum.

Bonner: He put us out on firing range. I got down on the target. Every time I fired I got a bull's eye. I finally got on a telephone and called back and asked who was marking target such and such. They says Sergeant Lease, which is one of my squad leaders. I shot a two-ninety eight. They was going to give two of the highest shots in the regiment a seven day furlough of all expenses paid to London. I shot a two ninety-eight out of a possible three hundred. And, I found out what target he was on when I went back to mark and he shot a two ninety-seven. So we went to London.

Johnson: Where were you stationed at?

Bonner: Ah, at Tidworth Barracks.

Johnson: Which is where?

Bonner: It is out of Salisbury.

Johnson: Okay.

Bonner: We all around Salisbury . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: . . . all the time.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: But anyway, somebody squealed on us.

Johnson: [chuckles] What are you saying you didn't really shoot that good?

Bonner: I was reduced in rank eight times while I was over there.

Johnson: Well what, what, what rank were you say in, in Africa?

Bonner: I was a buck sergeant. That's the highest they went then.

Johnson: Okay.

Bonner: They changed them the MOs gradually.

Johnson: Uh huh. Uh huh.

Bonner: Then they changed the, uh, platoon leader to staff sergeant. Then they went on, later on we got back to England they change it to tech sergeant.

Johnson: And you became a tech sergeant?

Bonner: Yes, sir . . .

Johnson: But you were busted.

Bonner: Eight times.

Johnson: Busted all the way back to private.

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: And crawled your way back up?

Bonner: Most times were off limits.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: And impersonating an officer.

Johnson: [chuckles] You actually impersonated an officer?

Bonner: There, in North Africa they had down on Oran they had the International Hotels Officers' Club.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And we had, uh, our company commander was a West Pointer. He was boxing champ at West Point for two years. He give me, he and another sergeant, lieutenant bars we'd pin 'em on and go with him.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: So he got in a fight with a chicken colonel down there one night and he beat the devil out of him. He locked us up. The next morning we went before a provost marshal and he told provost marshal, he says "He ought to put those bars on, his life being threatened, we was his body guards." So he turned us loose.

Johnson: Hum.

Bonner: Five or six days we was fixin' to back up front and here he come. And, well he's dead now but he never did tell me how he got out of that but I know he cause he's a West Pointer.

Johnson: They, uh, knew . . .

Bonner: They stick together.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: And, uh, but, uh . . .

Johnson: Well the, this tape is about to run out. I am going to have to turn it over here.

[Side Two]

Johnson: Okay this is, uh, side two of the, uh, interview with Perry Bonner. Well you were back to England in '43. Uh, what, when in '43?

Bonner: I don't member what month. [Johnson and Bonner talk over each other]

Johnson: Uh, it may be here. Uh, yeah. Okay. Yes. For October. No.

Bonner: October of '43.

Johnson: Anyway the fall of '43. And, uh, of course everybody knew that there was going to be an invasion of some type I guess. What did you do in this interim then? Training?

Bonner: Well, after the rifle range and everything. Well, my, captain called me in one day and told me to report to Oxford University. Actually, uh, I would be in the hospital, he had my tonsils taken out. And I reported to Oxford University, I don't remember what day, but anyway I reported to OSS which is practically the same thing the CIA is now.

Johnson: Right.

Bonner: And, uh, they poked French in us twelve hours a day seven days a week for I don't remember if it was four or five weeks but we could speak it pretty good.

Johnson: Did you stay on, on, at, in the dormitories at Oxford?

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: I see.

Bonner: Yes, sir. They had a special place for us.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: And, uh, then they told us what they, we was going to do. We was going to be landing along the coast of France in different places. See I was on one landing where I was and I was landing, I don't know why they landed me as far as they did cause I had to contact the underground at a farmhouse about, oh, about four or five miles out of St. Lô, France.

Johnson: Well, was this a large group of you that went to Oxford?

Bonner: It was it was thirty of us.

Johnson: Thirty, I see and so, and uh, so they did . . .

Bonner: All Americans, real young, they wanted us to pass high school if we could. They give us papers. They didn't tell us anything about the invasion or anything in case we got captured.

Johnson: Did you wear uniforms?

Bonner: No sir. We wore civilian clothes.

Johnson: Well, then you could have been shot as spies.

Bonner: Right.

Johnson: Yeah. You were spies.

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: And you actually, uh, made contact with the French.

Bonner: Made contact with French. And told 'em what they wanted blew, blown up. Told 'em password it would be on the BBC.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And, uh, told 'em to be waiting for, I stayed over there, I stayed nine days.

Johnson: Were, were your others with you?

Bonner: Not with me.

Johnson: You were by yourself.

Bonner: By myself.

Johnson: Wasn't that terribly fearful?

Bonner: It was.

Johnson: Did you have any close calls.

Bonner: Uh, not really. No sir. I passed a lot of Germans. But, uh, I didn't have any close calls. Uh, I had one guide, he was real young. And, uh, we rode on the cart awhile. Then we got some bicycles and rode awhile. And we walked most of the way. And I, they had maps there at the farmhouse. I stayed up in the attic.

Johnson: How were you landed?

Bonner: Uh, in a fishing crawler.

Johnson: Is that right? You went in from England?

Bonner: Yes sir.

Johnson: And how did they pick you up?

Bonner: A fishing crawler. And, uh . . .

Johnson: Did you have to go out in a raft to it, or a boat, or a . . .

Bonner: I swam out to it this time.

Johnson: On coming back.

Bonner: Coming back I had, going in I had a life jacket.

Johnson: My.

Bonner: I didn't get exactly the same place I was supposed to be picked up. But, we got back to England I don't where any of them, they never did tell me where any of them got back or not. I was debriefed for about five or six days.

Johnson: Um hum. By intelligence people, I guess.

Bonner: Yes sir. And, uh . . .

Johnson: You never knew what happened to any of those others.

Bonner: No sir.

Johnson: Never saw 'em or heard again.

Bonner: No sir. Then I went to, they give me a little time in London.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And give me some money. And I spent all five or six days in London. And, uh, they told me when I got through with my good times report back to my outfit.

Johnson: Was London experiencing any of those buzz bombs yet, or not?

Bonner: Naw. They wasn't quite.

Johnson: That was later.

Bonner: That was later. Yes, sir.

Johnson: So you were not there when they . . .

Bonner: Not the buzz bombs. I seen a lot of 'em go over. But I never did, uh . . .

Johnson: You saw them after you were in Europe.

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: I see. Uh huh. Well, uh, then you went back to your unit.

Bonner: Yes, sir . . .

Johnson: And trained?

Bonner: Well, it was, it was about four or five days before we went to the staging area to load on the boats.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And, uh . . .

Johnson: When you went back, you mean?

Bonner: I thought I was going to get out of it. [Bonner chuckles]

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: But, uh, we loaded on some LSIs, Canadian LSIs, we never was on American ships.

Johnson: Out of where now, you told me a minute ago.

Bonner: Out of Poole.

Johnson: P-o-o . . .

Bonner: l - e.

Johnson: l - e ?

Bonner: Uh huh. Uh huh.

Johnson: O.k.

Bonner: Its not too far from Portsmouth.

Johnson: Well, now there was a, uh, there was a false alarm that first time they, they were supposed to land a day before weren't they?

Bonner: Yes sir. We started out . . .

Johnson: Did you put back in?

Bonner: And backed up. Yes, sir.

Johnson: Came back to port.

Bonner: Yes, sir. Some PT boats slipped in the harbor one night and sunk some of our ships. And, uh . . .

Johnson: Germans?

Bonner: Yes.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: Yes, sir. And, uh, besides that, that's the only thing that, uh, we didn't have any bombing at all.

Johnson: So you were on a Canadian boat. How big a boat was that?

Bonner: It was big enough for one company of men.

Johnson: Which is . . .?

Bonner: Small boat.

Johnson: I mean how many, how many men did you have?

Bonner: Uh . . .

Johnson: A company was about what?

Bonner: About a hundred and sixty, hundred and seventy-five full strength.

Johnson: And your equipment?

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: Uh huh. So it was a ship.

Bonner: Oh, we didn't have any equipment, I mean, we just had our rifles and stuff.

Johnson: I see.

Bonner: See the guns and stuff was on a large, larger ship.

Johnson: Okay. And you, uh, how long would that, was that ship roughly, would you say? Hundred feet?

Bonner: Oh I'd say maybe between ninety and a hundred foot.

Johnson: I see. Well it was pretty rough in that channel wasn't it?

Bonner: It was. Well, we, we was lots rougher than that. We was on a bridge, uh, LCI, LCI out of Malta. And we hit a storm going to Sicily. And we had about twenty-five foot waves.

Johnson: Um.

Bonner: And, uh . . .

Johnson: Well, I understand though it was really very rough on some of those and then a lot of them got seasick.

Bonner: Yes, we had, we had these amphibious tanks that was supposed to landed with us.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And, all but three of those sunk out of fifty.

Johnson: Is that right? You mean just sank from the weather?

Bonner: Weather, yes, sir.

Johnson: Did you, did you get seasick?

Bonner: No, sir. Never did.

Johnson: Never did, huh. Not in any of the . . .

Bonner: I was lucky.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: But I have seen a many of 'em.

Johnson: Oh yeah. Well now tell me about as, uh, as you landed. You went in on the first wave you told me.

Bonner: First, we was the first boat hit "Easy Red" beach.

Johnson: And that was early in the morning.

Bonner: It was five-fifty I believe.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And, uh, they put us out about probably a hundred, a hundred and twenty-five yards from shore.

Johnson: Um hum. You were going in on Omaha Beach.

Bonner: Yes sir. On Omaha Beach. "Easy Red" beach. They had three beaches we had to land on.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: "Easy Red," "Easy Green," and "Easy" I forget what the other one was.

Johnson: Sectors. Uh huh.

Bonner: But, uh, the 29<sup>th</sup> was landing on our right, 29<sup>th</sup> Division. One of their regiments. They couldn't land. And they was mowing us down just as fast they hit the ground. I stayed behind a big oh, about a twelve inch creosoted piling and drove out in the . . .

Johnson: Water.

Bonner: Water. Keep the landing craft to get to the beach. Had a big land mine sitting on top of it.

Johnson: [chuckles] It could've blown up.

Bonner: Yeah. I shot a whole bandolier, a whole belt of ammunition and four bandoliers of ammunition from behind that uh . . .

Johnson: Well, now wasn't it true that though that some of 'em did drown?

Bonner: All of 'em had drowned. Hundreds.

Johnson: Yeah.

Johnson: But you say a lot of them were shot in the water too?

Bonner: Ah, yes, sir.

Johnson: Well, how far was the enemy away?

Bonner: Ah, they was about a hundred yards.

Johnson: That close. They were that close to the beach.

Bonner: It was on a cliff.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: They was dug in pill-boxes. See the Air Force supposed to bomb us some holes to get in.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: It wouldn't a hole on that beach. [Johnson chuckles] But any, uh . . .

Johnson: You saw a lot of death that day.

Bonner: All officers, we didn't have any officers. Sergeants had to take over.

Johnson: Because officers were killed.

Bonner: They were killed. Yes, sir.

Johnson: Why because they were in front?

Bonner: Naw, I don't know, just look liked that they picked out officers.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: I wasn't even wearing my stripes.

Johnson: Oh really.

Bonner: When I was in combat. Some of those young, most of the old men wouldn't. Old officers wouldn't. But, uh, the young ones, they, you know how they are.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: Ego.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: And, uh . . .

Johnson: Well, did you ever have any feeling that you were going to be pushed back off that beach?

Bonner: I had a feeling that they gave up. We look, we kept on looking back for another wave to come in. It wasn't any coming in.

Johnson: Is that right?

Bonner: And, uh, we thought they'd give up. And, uh . . .

Johnson: Well, what did you do? Just give in?

Bonner: Well, I had a big oh four point two mortar plate standing up in front of me. You can't dig in.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: You couldn't dig in. We had a little oh sea bank there, it was about, I guess about this high but they would shooting like this.

Johnson: Down on you.

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And, uh, we laid there and oh probably from anywhere from four to six hours. And . . .

Johnson: Getting, taking fire?

Bonner: Pardon?

Johnson: Taking fire all the time?

Bonner: All the time. Yes, sir. And boats started coming back in, they were getting direct hits on 'em before they even let the ramps down. And, uh it was twelve to fifteen feet out in the water, you could walk on bodies.

Johnson: Well, how did we, uh, of course that was about the worse wasn't it?

Bonner: Yes, worse.

Johnson: It was not true, uh, in the, uh, British and Canadian . . .

Bonner: Naw it wasn't.

Johnson: They really did not experience much opposition did they?

Bonner: They didn't. The British or the, uh, the Utalya Beach, either one.

Johnson: Right, you were in the worse place.

Bonner: Yes sir.

Johnson: Yeah. Well, what was that near, uh, what villages was that near, uh, that Saint Mare, Saint Mary's? [Johnson & Bonner talk over each other]

Bonner: That's a couple little o' towns and then forget, I been there. [Johnson talking in background] I forgot the names of 'em.

Johnson: Uh, of course the Paratroopers had dropped in.

Bonner: Well, they wasn't even supposed to drop it in front of us. We found a lot of 'em that . . .

Johnson: Well . . .

Bonner: Off course.

Johnson: Yes.

Bonner: And, uh, first night in we got a, I got about eight or ten men together and we found a bunk torpedo screwed it together and put it under the barb wire entanglement. Shoved it through there. Let it go off. It didn't. It just knocked the, it didn't knock the wire completely out, but we could crawl under it.

Johnson: That was one of those, what kind of torpedoes they called . . .

Bonner: Bungalow torpedoes.

Johnson: Uh huh. Yeah.

Bonner: And, it was a, right to our left is a ravine going up on the cliff and, uh, we finally got up to that ravine about eight or nine of us. And it wasn't even my outfit. And, uh, when they had turned their guns on the boat's landing, we'd go up a little farther. We got up, finally got up on top of the cliff, they had trenches dug just like World War I.

Johnson: Is that right? Were they, were they in them?

Bonner: They was in the trenches. We started, uh, hand grenading them. We had, four or five of us had hand-to-hand combat. And, uh, we finally cleared that bunch out and we had another ravine over here on the right. The 29<sup>th</sup> got up it. And cleaned out, I picked up a flame thrower and knocked out three pill-boxes.

Johnson: You told me that you went ashore with how many hand grenades?

Bonner: Twelve hand grenades and three pounds of TNT. And, uh, I picked up a flame thrower and never did use one in my life, knocked out three pill-boxes, concrete pill-boxes.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And, uh they put me in for Medal of Honor and I got in trouble a little later on and they canceled it.

Johnson: When did you get your Silver Star?

Bonner: I got one in Africa. First day of combat in Africa, November the 8<sup>th</sup> '42, and I got one in Sicily and I got one in . . .

Johnson: You had three Silver Stars?

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: Is that right? Did you get one in, you got one in Normandy?

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: And I got five bronze stars. That's the fourth highest decoration . . .

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: I got, uh, and . . .

Johnson: The Purple Heart.

Bonner: I got it three times.

Johnson: Yeah. Did you get three separate medals? Or, not?

Bonner: No they just give you one, a oak-leaf cluster.

Johnson: I see. Yeah.

Bonner: And, uh . . .

Johnson: That's what the cluster means it is a repeat of it.

Bonner: Yes sir, yes sir. And, uh . . .

Johnson: Well . . .

Bonner: . . . our first night up there we was, we went going in to the beach head we bypassed German strong points. The first night we was about eight hundred, a thousand yards off the beach. And we were surrounded by Germans. We don't know where to shoot or anything.

Johnson: The first night before you went in.

Bonner: No, the night . . .

Johnson: Oh, you were, were, three, off the beach . . . [Johnson and Bonner talking over each other]

Bonner: . . . about eight hundred or a thousand yards inland.

Johnson: That's not very far.

Bonner: No, it isn't. It was some of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was going to come up and relieve us. They started up there and Germans opened up on 'em, they run back to the beach. They never had been in combat before.

Johnson: Well, now were the Germans, where were the Germans at this time? You had pushed them back and they had . . . [Johnson and Bonner talk over each other]

Bonner: Hedgerows. And, uh . . .

Johnson: Did you, were you aware of the, uh ships out there firing in, uh . . .

Bonner: Yes, we could hear them go over.

Johnson: Uh huh, and you could see those ships?

Bonner: We could hear the shells go over.

Johnson: But could you, okay. Could see them though once you got ashore?

Bonner: No.

Johnson: Well, I understand the battleship *Texas* played a prominent role in this.

Bonner: We passed the battleship *Texas* going in.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: But anyway, uh, we was already on the beach when the Rangers gonna climb the cliff . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And they landed about eight miles farther down the beach where they was supposed to be landed and we was already on the beach when we was trying to get word to 'em it wasn't any guns up there.

Johnson: And they went up anyway?

Bonner: Went up anyway. And had about eighty percent casualties.

Johnson: That's right.

Bonner: We couldn't get word.

Johnson: Wasn't that, uh, Boatner guy at A&M?

Bonner: Yes sir.

Johnson: I believe it was Boatner wasn't it.

Bonner: Yes sir. 5<sup>th</sup> Ranger Battalion.

Johnson: Yeah. Uh, well . . .

Bonner: I believe it was more Americans got killed by friendly fire than it was by the enemy.

Johnson: Yeah. Well, you mentioned that, uh, uh, Theodore Roosevelt's son, I forgot his first name.

Bonner: Teddy.

Johnson: Teddy? Also?

Bonner: Teddy Jr.

Johnson: Was a uh, your what, your assistant?

Bonner: Assistant division commander.

Johnson: And he, uh, died when?

Bonner: In France, after the invasion. I don't exactly know.

Johnson: It was pretty early on in, wasn't it?

Bonner: It was pretty early on, yeah. Uh . . .

Johnson: And you knew him.

Bonner: Oh yeah. He slept in the same foxhole with me one night.

Johnson: Is that right?

Bonner: Yeah, he was a GI . . .

Johnson: He was a brigadier general.

Bonner: He was a GI general.

Johnson: And he had a heart attack.

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: And he died, I think, seven or eight days into the landing.

Bonner: It could had been a little longer than that.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: I have seen him lead tank attacks and jeeps and stuff like that and I never would have thought he would have died of a heart attack.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: He wasn't scared of nothing.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: My platoon be attacking up a hill and turn around, and he would be right behind us.

Johnson: Was he a West Point man? I don't know.

Bonner: I can't, I don't remember.

Johnson: I don't either. Well, you ended up, of course that was terrible fighting, but you ended up going farther. You went on into Europe.

Bonner: We went on into, we, we made a breakthrough for Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. They moved us, around from St. Lô.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And, uh, the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force was going to bomb us a path through. And they started coming in squadron time was gonna bomb on smoke, the wind was blowing away from us. First squadron was dropping them just right. They was dropping hundred pound personnel bombs. And that they was coming in about fifteen-hundred feet. And you could see that, uh, bomb bay door open, looked like he had five-thousand of those hundred pound bombs in there.

Johnson: B-17s.

Bonner: Yes sir.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: But, anyway time second squadron got there the smoke was back on us. It killed six hundred and something of us.

Johnson: Of our own men.

Bonner: Yes sir. General McNair got killed the same.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: Bomb . . .

Johnson: Yes.

Bonner: And, uh, we made the break through there and, uh, Patton taken off after we made the breakthrough. And got all the glory. And, uh, we went right to the outskirts of Paris.

Johnson: Didn't go into Paris?

Bonner: Naw we waited for the 2<sup>nd</sup> French Armor . . .

Johnson: Yes.

Bonner: . . . to come up and take it.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: They went in taken it. The Germans left it.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: They went in and they all got drunk, stuff.

Johnson: Got the champagne and the girls. [Johnson chuckles]

Bonner: Got drove out and the 4<sup>th</sup> Division finally taken it.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: We on around Paris. And we taken Bonds, Belgium. And, uh we captured thirty-six thousand Germans, didn't fire a shot.

Johnson: My.

Bonner: We captured, my platoon captured the Browning's Arms Factory, Bonds, Belgium.

Johnson: [chuckles] Really?

Bonner: Yeah. They was making, uh, P-38s. And, uh . . .

Johnson: Those were pistols.

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: But, uh, we taken Liege, Belgium. We went the same route that the 1<sup>st</sup> Division went in World War I.

Johnson: I'll be.

Bonner: Went through the Argonne Forest.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: We, we take this Siegfried Line twice.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: We was the first ones in the Germany. The first division was. We taken . . .

Johnson: Where did you cross?

Bonner: At Aachen.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: We taken Aachen. Nobody else helped us.

Johnson: Well what about the Bulge now, are you down below it?

Bonner: Well, the Bulge, no we are above the Bulge. Here is Aachen here and the Bulge happened down here.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: We'd already crossed the, taken Aachen, we'd already penetrated Siegfried Line on into Germany. Then, um, the Battle of the Bulge started and, uh, they pulled us back. There was a spearhead, three spearheads in that Battle of the Bulge. One spearhead was going to try to take Antwerp.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: That was our spearhead. And, uh, we're the only spearhead that they didn't break through. They never did break through the 1<sup>st</sup> division. They broke through the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored and all the rest of 'em. They broke through, but they didn't break through us and we wasn't, we wasn't two miles on the, uh, from the massacre that the Germans . . .

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: . . . pulled on us.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: That just made us that much madder.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And, uh . . .

Johnson: So you were not, you were on the edge of the Bulge but not, uh . . .

Bonner: No, we come back. They pulled us out . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: . . . and brought us back to stop one of the . . .

Johnson: Yeah. Were you, were you under Patton at this time? [Johnson & Bonner talk over each other]

Bonner: No we was under Hodges.

Johnson: Okay.

Bonner: We was the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored.

Johnson: Well, Patton was portrayed as the hero that came up and stopped that wasn't he?

Bonner: Naw, he, only thing he did actually was get the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne . . .

Johnson: Right.

Bonner: . . . out of Bastogne.

Johnson: Yeah. Okay.

Bonner: And, uh . . .

Johnson: Well then you, had said you ended up the war in Czechoslovakia?

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: You went all the way across Europe. Did you, let me ask you, did you do a lot of walking?

Bonner: I walked the whole circle.

Johnson: You, uh, literally walked across Europe.

Bonner: Yes, sir. We didn't know what vehicles was.

Johnson: That's amazing.

Bonner: And, uh, the . . .

Johnson: Where were you when the war ended?

Bonner: In Page Czechoslovakia.

Johnson: Pa—how do you spell that?

Bonner: P-a- . . .

Johnson: Is it on here?

Bonner: No sir. I don't think so.

Johnson: No.

Bonner: P-a -g-e, Cage.

Johnson: P-a-g-e or c?

Bonner: C-a-g-e. They got a, first degree, uh, 1<sup>st</sup> Division Monument there now.

Johnson: Uh huh. Uh huh.

Bonner: And I got wounded the last day of the war.

Johnson: Is that right?

Bonner: Yeah.

Johnson: Seriously?

Bonner: Ah, a concussion.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: My nose and ears bled for over two months before they got it stopped.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And they flew me back to England. Then they flew me from England to Stark General Hospital in North Carolina and then they flew me to Brooks Generals in San Antonio, I think. And, uh, that's the only hospital . . .

Johnson: How long were you in the hospital?

Bonner: Oh, it wasn't too long. They was trying to get me to go back to duty. But, uh, [chuckles] . . .

Johnson: The war, you mean, uh, so you might've gone to Japan?

Bonner: Yeah.

Johnson: Did some of the people you fought with go to Japan? Or go to the Pacific, rather?

Bonner: Naw. See they was letting 'em out then with seventy-two points.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: And I had a hundred and ninety-seven. And . . .

Johnson: You mean they were letting 'em out before the war was over actually?

Bonner: The war was over in . . .

Johnson: In Europe. Yeah, uh huh. But they were letting 'em out of the service?

Bonner: Yeah.

Johnson: 'Cause you'd had enough.

Bonner: I had enough. Well, at one period of time there in France and Belgium we was at steady combat with the enemy for a hundred and seventy-eight days without any relief at all.

Johnson: Hum.

Bonner: And right now the head shrinkers say a human body can't take but around fifty-three days of it.

Johnson: Yeah, yeah. Well . . .

Bonner: I mean that was night and day and the Battle of the Bulge was the worst thing that I have ever. We had one GI blanket, snow four and five foot deep . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: . . . zero weather.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: Wet, night in and night out, one GI blanket. We made an attack on some towns, snow, waist deep. We'd have to walk about fifty feet and stop and rest. Walk about fifty feet and stop and rest. I look back and I don't know how we made it. We'd cover up with; we'd wrap up in a blanket and cover up with snow to keep warm.

Johnson: And it worked?

Bonner: We kept warm. Get out of that wind.

Johnson: What, uh, we've got a little tape left, I want to ask you a few general questions. Uh, it's obvious you saw more than your share of the war. What, uh, what was the worse thing you saw?

Bonner: I guess Omaha, I guess, naw, I guess the first concentration camp we captured in Austria.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: It was, five, six thousand stacked up like cordwood . . .

Johnson: Dead.

Bonner: Done turned black. We captured, my platoon was attacking platoon and what we didn't kill . . .

Johnson: What kind of platoon?

Bonner: Attacking platoon.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: We was making the attack on it. We could smell flesh burning for two or three miles. It was, it was a big opening they opened, in a forest. And, uh,

we knew that was what it was when we smelled that flesh, 'cause nothing else smells like burning flesh.

Johnson: That's what I heard.

Bonner: And, uh, the platoon we killed probably had SS guards. We killed probably twelve or thirteen. They rounded up fifteen prisoners. I always carried a, one of those nine millimeter German burp guns that fired so fast all you could hear was burp, burp.

Johnson: You carried that kind?

Bonner: Um hum. Longest as I could get ammunition for it.

Johnson: Really?

Bonner: Uh huh. They would line up in front of me and I shot all fifteen of 'em down. I was crying. I was vomiting. I guess that was the worse . . .

Johnson: Worse thing you seen.

Bonner: That had eight furnaces going wide open.

Johnson: What, that, what was the name of that camp?

Bonner: Uh, this camp didn't have a name.

Johnson: I see.

Bonner: Just the large ones. This one was a small camp.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: Just the large ones did. And, uh . . .

Johnson: What was the funniest thing that ever happened to you during the war?

Bonner: Let me think . . .

Johnson: Let me rephrase that . . .

Bonner: Oh yeah, I'll tell you one . . .

Johnson: All right.

Bonner: After the campaign, after we'd taken Oran we'd bivouacked across the road from the cemetery.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: It was the rainy season.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: Rained day and night. Day and night. Day and night. Then over there, instead of taking their ashes home when they cremate somebody, they have a big thing there in the cemetery where they stack some of their own jars that got their names on it and everything.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: So we finally after about a week, we finally just moved all of them jars out of there and moved in. [Johnson chuckles] We stayed in that thing for over a month.

Johnson: [Laughing] You had better use for it huh?

Bonner: Boy, I tell you it was . . .

Johnson: Uh, well, you survived some of the worst fighting of the war and several major invasions. Has it ever, uh, I am sure it has, uh, I am sure you have thought about. Why you have survived?

Bonner: Well, a lot of people say it was luck. I think it was the good Lord, myself.

Johnson: You think it was a reason.

Bonner: I think it was a reason. I don't what, I don't know what yet. But, uh . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: Uh, I have never had since I been out of the service. I have never had even a parking ticket, never had a speeding ticket, never been in any kind of trouble. I tended to my own business, don't bother anybody. But I don't approve of the way this world is today.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: And, uh, sometimes I look back and sometimes I wonder whether it was really worth it or not. That's, my wife says I hadn't changed with times. I met my wife. She was my nurse down at Brooks General Hospital.

Johnson: Oh, I see.

Bonner: I knew her two months and we got married and we been married forty-seven years I think.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: And, uh, we have had a good marriage. I like, I said lost a boy when he was fifteen. That didn't help me any.

Johnson: Well, you told me a minute ago that you, you'd of course had some problems from the war. Uh, your nerves . . .

Bonner: Ah yes. I have been, since '74 I have been in intensive care over at Shreveport Shepherd Medical Center eleven times I believe [says something that is unclear]. They thought it was a heart attack.

Johnson: Another, Um hum.

Bonner: It was stress and I never fooled with veterans or anything 'till I retired. I started going over to the VA Hospital in Shreveport. I went over there two years and I got to see one doctor. So I quit that.

Johnson: But you have obviously adapted, you had a business career.

Bonner: Yes sir. I officiated football for twenty-one years. I called Southwest Conference for seven years.

Johnson: Is that right?

Bonner: And, uh, Darrell Royal's days.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: My team was rated number one five out of seven years.

Johnson: Well, obviously the physical, uh, wounds you got, didn't, uh, slow you up did they?

Bonner: Well, I enjoyed it and when, uh, I got so didn't enjoy it, well I didn't think it was fair to the kids so you wouldn't do a good job if you didn't enjoy it so I just quit. And, uh . . .

Johnson: Well we're about out here. Uh, I just want to tell you I really appreciate you talking to me and, uh, I feel honored that you shared this story with me.

Bonner: Well, there is a lot of other stuff, you know, small things that I could, uh, say but, uh . . .

Johnson: Well, uh, that, uh, war was the greatest adventure of your life wasn't it?

Bonner: Well there will never be another one like it.

Johnson: No.

Bonner: They talk about women in the service today. I like to had one on each side of me in a foxhole.

Johnson: Um hum.

Bonner: Going two or three months without taking a bath or changing clothes. Naw, I don't get it.

Johnson: In a way your life peaked at age, uh, twenty, in your early twenties didn't it?

Bonner: Twenty-years old.

Johnson: Yeah.

Bonner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: Yeah. The greatest experience of your life?

Bonner: Well, I think so, I really do and, uh, I do appreciate my country and I fly a flag everyday. I hate anybody that talks about, I wrote a verse about our flag and they published it *Stars and Stripes* in 1944.

Johnson: Oh really?

Bonner: Yes, sir. I wrote another poem to that, uh, I told Ernie Pile, remember, Ernie Pile?

Johnson: Yes. I know Ernie.

Bonner: He interviewed me about three or four times over there. But this one I am going to tell you about that I wrote:  
Here is to ol' Hitler the Son of a Bitch,

We'll walk in his palace and shit on his floor,  
And hang ol' Glory over his door,  
The land of the free and the home of the brave,  
We'll all march down shit on his grave. [Johnson laughs]

They published that in *Stars and Stripes*.

Johnson: Really? You have a copy of that?

Bonner: Naw. I don't. I'll send you a copy of my . . .

Johnson: I was gonna say I'd use that in my play but I don't believe I could get away with it. [Johnson laughs]

Bonner: I'll send you a copy of my flag poem.

Johnson: Okay and it was published where? In . . .

Bonner: In *Stars and Stripes* in early '44 I believe.

Johnson: Is that right? Well, that's amazing.

Bonner: Ernie Pile interviewed me in North Africa.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Bonner: And interviewed me in, uh, he's looking for a Texan to interview and I was the only Texan in my outfit.