

VETERAN'S NAME: Philip Thompson

INTERVIEW DATE: November 6, 2010

TRANSCRIBER: Teresa M. Schafer, RMR

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ALEXANDER: Today is November 6, 2010, and we are interviewing Mr. Phillip Thompson at Anoka Technical College.

Mr. Thompson is 73 years old having been born on 3-20-37.

My name is Julie Alexander and I will be the interviewer.

Also present at the interview are Teresa Schafer.

Mr. Thompson is a resident of Exeland, Wisconsin.

First of all, we'll start off with some biographical information.

Where and when were you born?

THOMPSON: I was born in a neighboring town of Radisson by a, instead of a doctor they called them house nurse, or what do they call them?

Q: Midwife?

A: Midwife. And Radisson is about eight miles north of Exeland, but I was born at that midwife's house.

Q: Okay.

A: And I basically lived in the Exeland area all my life.

Q: And what were your parents' occupations?

A: My dad was -- came up there in 1935, started a small

farm. And he played for dances. He played music, saxophone, for dances for supplemental income.

Q: Okay.

A: Which wasn't much. He got \$5 a dance, I think. And as the family grew, there were 13 of us kids, every time another child was born, he'd buy another cow, so we each had a cow to milk. And then he took on a business of sharpening golf course mowers. And we had a little mower -- a sharpening device on the back of a truck with a house on it, and he pulled a trailer house and he went all around Minnesota and Wisconsin and got to meet a lot of people. He did that for a supplement in the summertime. In the wintertime he maybe logged a little bit and tended the farm a little bit.

Q: Okay.

A: And keep raising kids. 13 of us.

Q: Wow. How many boys and how many girls?

A: There were six boys and five years, and one girl died, it would have been six and six. Well, no, wait a minute, excuse me, six boys, five girls, 11 that survived. Another boy died. That would have been seven. And another girl died, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: So it would have been seven and six. Seven boys and

six girls, yeah.

Q: Okay. So he raised 11?

A: 11 survived until 1963 the youngest girl died of cancer at age 11. And then in 1988 the next youngest girl died of cancer. So at the present time right now there are still six boys and there's, let's see, Pauline, Lori, and three girls left. Still six boys and three girls left.

Q: How old were you when your 11-year-old sister died?

A: In 1963, I would have been 25 or 6, I guess. I haven't figured it out.

Q: Yeah. Okay. And what were you doing before you entered the service?

A: I was logging, and construction work. A young man, you know. And I did work one summer in Taconite Harbor in northern Minnesota when they were building that harbor. And I also worked one summer down here in Minneapolis for a contractor, and that was just for about three or four months. And then I went back to logging. And then in the spring I went in the -- I got drafted into the service.

Q: Was that when you were 18?

A: No. I was 21, but my call came in June to go in, and so I volunteered and I went in in April.

Q: Okay.

A: So I jumped the gun two months is really what I did.

Q: Okay.

A: So but it was still drafted in, you know.

Q: Okay. Did you have any other family members who served in the military?

A: Yes. My two older brothers served in the Air Force. And that was during the Korean War. And the Air Force is four years, period. But I didn't want four years, so I thought at that time when I went in, it was -- they were drafting, so you couldn't get out of it. You had to go. So I chose two years instead of four.

Q: And what branch of service?

A: Army.

Q: Army. Okay. And what was your rank?

A: I was discharged as a Specialist 4th Class. That would be like a Corporal, kind of.

Q: Okay. And where did you serve? Did you do, like, boot camp one place and --

A: I was inducted in Fort Carson, Colorado, and then from there I went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for one year. I had basic training then advanced basic, and then we were in a missile, artillery they called, but we were in the Redstone missile unit, so we went to White Sands, New Mexico, and fired two missiles. And

we came back to Fort Sill and embarked to Germany for a year after that. I spent one year in Germany.

Q: Okay. Where at in Germany, do you remember?

A: We landed in Bremerhaven and we waited there for two weeks until all the equipment came. And the whole thing was like a propaganda thing to drive from the north end of Germany clear to the south end, we convoyed, it took about two weeks just to display all this missile stuff. And it was mainly for propaganda to -- the Berlin crisis was very close at that time, and I don't know if the wall was built yet. I don't think it was. And they were -- it was just to kind of let the Russians know that we had some force in Germany, kind of. And so then to Stuttgart, then we convoyed back up to Heilbronn, and there about 10 miles out is, or five miles, is a little town named Neckarsulm, and that's where we lived there for a year. That was our camp.

Q: And what year, I'm sorry, what year did you join the military?

A: 1958.

Q: Okay. So it was after World War II?

A: II, yes, yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay. Why did you choose the army?

A: Well, like I said, I chose that because it was two

years, and I thought -- I had two brothers that were in the Air Force, and they were in for four years, and I thought that's a long time. So I took two years instead. Otherwise there was no preference, really.

Q: Okay. Do you have any fond memories of early days of training camp?

A: Yes, I do. I remember I used to love the training and the push-ups and the exercises, but there was one young man that was overweight somewhat, and they picked on him because he couldn't do the push-ups, and I felt bad about that, that poor guy. He had to do extra push-ups for that, and do extra details. That's just a matter of discipline. They teach you that, you know. And, let's see, well, one fond memory was after you got your eight weeks, first eight weeks in, then you were allowed to go to the PX and have a beer. Other than that we were eight weeks with pretty dry going there.

Q: Yeah.

A: But I guess that was healthy for us.

Q: And did you make any good friends?

A: Oh, yes, yeah, I had some real good friends, and while we were in Germany we took two leaves. One we went down to southern Rome or southern Italy and back

up through Venice and Austria. And then another leave I went north up into Denmark and some of those little countries up in there. And I got to see a lot of Europe. It was very -- I don't regret any of it.

Q: Okay.

A: It was very interesting.

Q: What was it like adapting to military life such as the physical regimen, the food, the barracks?

A: Really when you go back to that age it's not that bad. It would be tough right now. But when you're 21, you're pretty tough and changeable, you know, at 21, you can stand a lot. It wasn't that hard.

Q: Now, you didn't spend any wartime service then?

A: There was no war, no.

Q: You said it was before Berlin --

A: Well, it was right during that time when they were building that wall, and it was like a crisis, and there was -- they were shooting people that were coming from eastern Berlin over to west, you know, the Russians were, I mean, and it was a time of critical circumstance, but nothing developed.

Q: Okay.

A: That's about all I can say, it was -- then after that wall was up there for, let's see, they built that wall I think in 1960 or, what, and they took it back

down in, what, when Reagan -- in '88 or '90, '88?

Q: I think 1988 or maybe even '89?

A: Yeah, that wall was up for 28 some years, something like that.

Q: So there was a lot of tension around the area?

A: Yeah, well, yeah, there's a lot of tension around there. The way that city got divided up, Berlin was part of western Germany, and yet eastern Germany circled the whole City of Berlin, but just one-half of that city belonged to western Germany. Really, I don't know how they come up with that.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't know how they settled on that at all. I just don't understand it.

Q: Were the German people nervous? Did they -- were they scared?

A: They were a little bit leery. When I was there it was really only 10 years after the war ended, and I noticed a lot of people that looked at you a little bit different, like, and there were some that were entirely on your side, but there were some that were -- felt like you won the war and we lost or something, I don't know. Kind of strange. But all in all I got along good with the people over there.

Q: Did you like the food?

- A: Good wienerschnitzel, yeah, very good wienerschnitzel. And good tasting beer. And we had a lot of fun there. I enjoyed my time, yeah.
- Q: How did you stay in touch with your family and friends back home?
- A: Really I don't think yet at that time if my dad and ma had a phone yet, had a telephone. They didn't come into our country until after 1960, so it was strictly by letter. Of course, I wrote to ma quite a bit. She'd always write to me about once a week, you know. She was a mother of 13 children, but she was -- every one of them was her baby, you know. She just died here in, let's see, she died at 90, she was born in -- in 2000, yeah, she lived to be 90.
- Q: Okay. She was born in 1900?
- A: She was born in 1910.
- Q: 1910, okay, and then she died in 2000?
- A: Yeah. She would have been 90 when she died.
- Q: Did you save any of her letters that she wrote?
- A: I, you know, I don't know. I may have some. I may have some.
- Q: What did you do for recreation or off-duty pursuits? You said you traveled to Italy?
- A: Well, like traveling, and recreation, well, when you're a young man, you chase women, you know, I

guess, I don't know, but you drink beer, chase women, and a young shoulder, he goes to town to have fun. That's about the size of it. Of course I joined the bowling team over there in Germany. We bowled. I never was real good at it but at least I was on the team anyway. And I tried football for awhile until a quarterback about 20 pounds heavier than me hit me awful hard and knocked me right out, and I quit the football after that.

Q: Now, were you over in Germany when your service ended or were you back in the United States?

A: No, my time ended in Germany, and then they shipped us home.

Q: Okay. So there were still U.S. forces over there?

A: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay. How were you received by your family and community once you returned home?

A: How was I received?

Q: Received, yeah.

A: Just like always, like one of the family, yeah.

Q: They were happy to see you?

A: Yeah.

Q: And did you have any trouble readjusting to civilian life?

A: Not really, no. Because I wasn't in wartime. We

didn't have to kill people or nothing.

Q: Okay.

A: That's why it was a good -- I don't regret the two years that I served. In fact, I count it as a wealthy lively experience, you know.

Q: Okay.

A: Because the traveling that I got to do, I got around quite a bit, so, yeah, I'm happy to have served for two years. I'm glad I did.

Q: Do you stay in contact with any veterans?

A: I went to a 40-year-old reunion that our outfit had in Colorado Springs here in 1990. Let's see, I got out in '60, yeah, in 1990 we had a 40-year reunion, and that's -- I only went to that one, and it was kind of nice to see some of the old guys, but my -- couple of my dear friends weren't there. And some of the guys that were there I was friends with, but not close friends, so I never went back to another one.

Q: Was that in '90 or 2000?

A: It was 2000, it was our 40-year anniversary, yeah, 40-year anniversary.

Q: So now it's been 50 this year?

A: Yeah, it would be 50 this year.

Q: Did they have a 50?

A: Yeah, so I've been out 50 years now. But, yeah, it

was kind of nice to see some of these old people. First Lieutenant, I get a kick out of him, I don't know if you want to record this, I used to drive the little Jeep and run errands, you know, and the Warrant Officer that I had to drive around, I liked to smoke then, and you're not supposed to smoke and drive your Jeep at the same time. He was smoking on his cigars, so I thought what the heck, I'll just light up a cigarette. He said, boy, Tommy, he says, you go ahead, but don't let Rex, Rex was our First Lieutenant, he says don't let Rex see you doing that. He said, you go ahead, it's all right by me, but -- so I said, okay. So the next time I had Rex out, our First Lieutenant, and he didn't even smoke, you know, but I thought, well, I'm going to see what Rex does now, so I lit up a cigarette, and Rex looked at me and he says, okay, Tommy, he says, but don't let the Warrant Officer see you. I thought that was kind of funny.

Q: Is that what your nickname was, Tommy?

A: Well, they called me Tommy for short.

Q: For Thompson?

A: Usually you have your last name, Thompson, so they just call you Tommy for short a lot, sort of. Yeah, I thought that was kind of fun.

Q: Are you a member of any veterans organizations?

A: No, I've been asked to be, but I just haven't got around to joining it yet. They ask me to get in those parades for Memorial Day and stuff like that, you know, and I just haven't got around to it yet.

Q: Okay.

A: I may do that here.

Q: What life lessons did you learn from military service?

A: One of the things that you learn, and I noticed my younger brothers that never was in the -- served in the service, is that you learn a lesson in basic training that I think is very beneficial to a young man growing up, and that is discipline from your superiors. And I notice in my younger brothers, they're real good fellas, but I notice that they lack that training that I had, that you submit to your superiors, you know. You learn that right off the bat in the service. If you don't, you're digging holes here and there, you know.

Q: Life's tough when you don't follow the rules.

A: You're right. You follow -- you do what they tell you to do. And they break everybody right down to rock bottom when you go in, everybody gets their hair cut right off, so you're all equal. There's no one

guy better than this guy or that. Everybody is equal. And then they build you back up from there, see, and then -- then you get to become Private First Class, first you're just a Private, then you're Private First Class. Now you've gained one echelon, you know. Then when you get another promotion, you're a little better now, see, and then you're better than some of the other, so it's all of a matter of -- it's training which was beneficial to you in your growing up life, really.

Q: What did you do when you got back from the service?

A: Made a big mistake, I went and bought a logging truck. And I've been doing that ever since. That was a big -- and I'm still -- now I'm trying to sell the stupid thing. I just have to keep on hauling, I guess, keep on trucking.

Q: Anything else you would like to share? Any special stories?

A: Well, let's see, I told that story out there about this man I went in with, he was same grade as me in high school. We happened to be going in together. And we were inducted at Fort Carson, Colorado, and he went to Fort Hood after we took our test, and I went to Fort Sill. And I didn't see him for two years. And we were in Germany getting loaded onto the ship

and they call you off by alphabetical order, your names, and his last name was Clements, so he went on one of the early ones, and they called off Clements, and I thought, I know that guy. By goll, he come walking right past me, and I said, hi, Benny. And I hadn't seen him for two years. We went in together but he went different directions, you know, and here he'd been in Germany all that time, too, and I didn't know. But we met there on the way home. We were both getting out at the same time, see. I thought that was kind of interesting. And then I also met another neighbor of mine from home that lived in Heilbronn, went up to visit him. And he had a wife and a couple kids. They lived off base. That was kind of interesting. Let's see. Got to see a lot of castles over there. A lot of strange things like that that you wouldn't see here, you know.

Q: Okay.

A: I'll have to let you ask me. I can't think of anything right now.

Q: How do you spell Benny's last name?

A: C L E M E N T S. Yeah, we were in the same grade, we graduated high school in '54. And then I worked for about, well, almost going on four years before I went in the service, but I knew then that I was drafted so

I had to go. I got out of high school kind of young. I was only 17. So you couldn't hardly get a job until I was 18, so I worked in the woods, you know, and stuff like that. And then when I turned 18, boy, I went up for the big money up in Taconite Harbor. That was in 1955. We got \$2 an hour up there. Boy, that was big money. Yes. And, then after that, see, then the next year, I think I worked down here for a guy by the name of McNulty out of South St. Paul. And we worked on construction laying storm sewer pipes and different things like that, you know. And then after that I went home that winter, yeah, we always cut Christmas trees as a family. That's another business my dad had. And then we took them to Chicago and sold them. So I did another year of Christmas trees. And then when spring rolled around I thought, man, this is when I knew I was going to have to go in the Army and I thought I better about get this over with, so I went and volunteered and jumped ahead of a guy a couple two or three months here. So I got in in April because you can't really do much in April, everything is mud, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: So I got in and got my two years over with. And then after I got out of the service, I had met my

daughter's mother, and it wasn't too long we were married. You know how that goes.

Q: Yep.

A: So but Jennifer is the third child. The older two have passed on already.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: I had a boy, my boy died in '61 of a car accident. And the next daughter died here about six years ago of cancer.

Q: Ovarian cancer.

A: Yeah, ovarian cancer, yeah. And then my wife died four years ago. She had a lot of complications, so now I've only got two girls left.

Q: Okay.

A: One in Michigan and Jennifer. And I don't know why I'm still around here, but I guess must be a reason for it.

Q: You've got grandkids?

A: Oh, yes, Jen's got three and Christy in Michigan has three kids. And Jennifer's oldest one is teaching school here in Minneapolis.

Q: Okay.

A: So she's not married yet, but I don't know. Won't be long I suppose I'll be having great-grandkids.

Q: Have you ever been back to Germany since the --

A: No, I haven't. I thought about it, but I don't know, I've been too busy, I guess. And then the economy has switched around. When I was in Germany you got four marks for a dollar. And now you get one and a half mark for a dollar, or is it even that much now? I don't know. But it's very expensive compared to what it was. At the time I was there, boy, a dollar would last quite awhile.

Q: How much was a beer back then?

A: Well, beers were, like, 25 cents on the base, but if you go downtown you get them for 15, you know, 10 or 15 cents, yeah. Yeah, you could get by pretty good. I think I got \$120 a month when I -- in Germany you got \$20 overseas pay. My rank paid a hundred, but then you got \$20 for overseas pay. But when I was in the states as a Private, you only got \$67 a month when you first went in. I'm going way back, you know, \$67 a month, and then when you made PFC you got up to maybe 72 or 4, 5, I can't remember. And then when you got to be Spec. Four you got a hundred. That was in the big bucks then. And then you got \$20 overseas pay, see. So \$120, you know, that, boy, back when beer was 15 cents, you could last a long time, you know.

Q: Did they ever ask you to reenlist?

A: Oh, yes. And there was a thousand dollar reenlistment bonus I think they offered. But they got very few draftees to reenlist. There was a couple young guys in our outfit that were enlisted men that had enlisted, and they reenlisted.

Q: Okay.

A: But when a person is drafted, it's just like I was telling them guys out there, a draftee is at that time they were between 21 and 22, 21 1/2 and 22, they're more set in their ways. When an 18-year-old kid comes in, you can control him better. Because an older man is taking care of himself for awhile, he gets set in his ways. And it's very -- little harder to change him, where a young man you can change him. That's why it's important to get the men in there at 18, they can train them better really. But not that they can't train the older people, it's just that they don't like to put up with any foolishness, you know, I guess.

Q: Did you see anything traumatic happen while you were in the service?

A: Like?

Q: Any fellow injuries or?

A: Oh, let's see.

Q: Anything serious?

A: Well, let's see. Boy, you know, well, outside of a few guys passing out when -- we used to have to stand in Oklahoma when we had a parade review where the parents come and review their children and stuff, you know, they're standing out here in the hot sun, 115 degrees, and that one day I think about four or five people just keeled over. You're dressed in full uniform in 115 degrees, terribly hot day.

Q: Yes.

A: And they just passed out. You can't stand it. So they finally called it off and let us get in on the shade. But there was about four or five guys that just passed right out.

Q: Were they from Minnesota?

A: I don't know.

Q: Not used to that heat.

A: Yeah, but that was something. And then we were standing at attention and a tarantula, they had tarantulas in Oklahoma, that's a great big spider, he's about that big, and he come walking like this, and we were standing over here at attention, and that spider come and we had to tell the Sergeant in control about that tarantula, and he let us get out of there. And we killed the thing. Yeah, the tarantula, boy, they get big. Have you seen one? I

could be wrong, but it seemed to me like he was about that round. You know, it had a body about that round, then these legs, you know, they got a lot of legs and they're crawling like that, and if that ever got on you, he'd really bite you. Kind of makes your skin curdle.

Q: It wasn't in the barracks, was it?

A: No, it was outside, just outside the barracks in the sand there. He was standing there and walking along in the sand, boy. We used to have to go out and bivouac once in a while. You think about bivouacking sleeping on the ground in your sleeping bag, you know, and have one of them crawl in with you.

Q: Yuk.

A: That's not real fun.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah, I can't recall of anyone traumatically getting killed or nothing. I know there was a close call a couple times. This friend of mine had a brand new Little Prince car that we took one trip down to Rome in, and when we went over the mountains in Switzerland, I think they called it Brenner Pass, we had to get get out and push because this little car would go 40 miles to the gallon but it didn't have much power. So when we got up this high mountain,

that Brenner Pass, I think that's where they hung Mussolini up by the feet, you know, after World War II. The federales hung him up there. It's kind of an interesting thing to see, but we had to push that thing over that, and then when we got down the mountains, it switchbacks like this, and we went all the way down into Rome, and there where you meet traffic like you've never seen before, and there's -- everybody says that when you're in Rome you drive like the Romans do, because you've heard of the traffic in California, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: Just like a madhouse, you know. Well, that's the way Rome is. Just terrible. It's -- you got to be on your toes when you drive around town. But, yeah, other than that, that's about the most dangerous place I was in, I suppose. I don't know. Yeah.

Q: All right. Anything else you would like to add?

A: Boy, let's see. What could I add? Do you want me to try to make a juicy story you mean? Well, I met a couple of girls over there, Frauleins they call them, you know, and they were real nice. Well, that's what a Fraulein is is a Fraulein, you know. You remember that song? You've heard that song Fraulein. Boy, other than that, I was glad to get home, too, I

guess. Glad to have served my two years and glad to get home.

Q: Miss home cooking?

A: Yes, I do. But we had pretty good cooking in the service, but I was was about 172 or 3 pounds when I got out of the service. And after I got married to a wife that didn't know how to cook, my mother finally taught her how to cook, I was down to about 158.

Q: Wow.

A: I mean, that's from working hard and not eating properly, of course, she didn't -- hotdogs and bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwiches, that's about all she knew how to make, you know. I finally told her one day, that's just got to quit, these hotdogs, there's just not enough in them, you know. But after she learned how to cook then I started putting weight back on again. Yeah. Boy, I wish I could think of something real interesting to say. The only thing I can say is that my MOS was Remote Fire Panel Operator, and that would be to fire this missile in case of a strategic setup for defense. But we did fire two missiles at White Sands, New Mexico. And my job was to press the firing button, we checked all the instruments out, and it come right down, I thought, boy, big, big deal, I get to press the

button and make this great big rocket -- it was 69 feet long and six feet in diameter was the size of this Redstone. Of course they're outdated now so it's nothing secretive. But anyway, I got right down to the point, everything checked all out, and this Sergeant Harden, our Master Sergeant, he comes over and says, okay, Tommy, I'll take over now. And he scoots me off the seat. He wanted to be the one to press the button. I never forgave him for that because I thought all this work I done and all this training and here I get to actuality press the button that fires that missile, and he got right down to the last couple minutes, he says, okay, Tommy, I'll take over now. I felt kind of bad about this, but when that thing took off, we were in the blockhouse, the walls are, like, five-foot thick of cement and it's really protected, you know, a bomb couldn't shake that, but when that thing took off, the thrust was so great, it blew sand right inside of that thing. How it got in there, I don't know. But it got in there. It must have came through the keyhole or something. That's tremendous force from that thing.

Q: And you got to see two of those shot off?

A: Well, we had two. I was in B battery. There's A battery and B battery. Actually this missile was

called artillery, it's the 46th Artillery Group is what I was in. And out of that artillery, instead of using these big Howitzers, the missile was considered artillery, and A battery had one and B battery had one. And I was in B battery, so that's the two missiles, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: One -- each battery had a missile. And our main job was taking it all apart, all the hoses and the electrical wires and cables and loading it into the truck. It had to be loaded just a certain way so that everybody would fit in there, and then the tube, tubular things would be tipped back down onto a semitrailer and hauled on a semi. But all the electrical components and fuel lines and hoses and stuff that you have to hook up, are all packed away into a bus. And we had to practice unloading and loading and unloading, setting up, take down, you know, just rigmarole like that, round and round, but it was -- it was fun. It was interesting. And but now they're outdated. They have missiles now that are all put together, they can just remote fire them just like you flip your TV on, you know. We came up through the hard way, the old-fashioned way, we earned it, you know. Yeah, but anyway, it was an

interesting experience. Yeah, this guy, that Werner von Strauss or somebody that they got from Germany after World War II was the original designer of that Redstone. Yeah, he was one of Hitler's men, but after the war, why, he came to the United States. Don't write his name down. I probably got it wrong. But it was something like that. This guy's name. Anyway, he's the one that got us into the missiles, you know.

Q: Okay.

A: But I couldn't remember that guy's exact name, but he did come from Germany. It was something like von Strauss or something. Yeah.

Q: And he came over to the United States and taught us about the missiles and?

A: Yeah, well, otherwise Hitler could have had that, if the war wouldn't have been won, like, when we dropped the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that took the wind out of the Japanese sails. Then we concentrated on Germany. And Russia was in there bitching, too. And they finally brought Hitler to the halt, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: But we had the missile information before Russia got it, I'll put it that way.

Q: Okay.

A: We had it before Russia got it, but of course Russia got in on there, too, they -- I remember Khrushchev when he came over here in 1954 when President Eisenhower was president, and there was a joke going around that Russia got the first Sputnik up in space, and everybody said, I couldn't get a Sputnik up, you know. But that Sputnik was the first one in space. Yeah. Boy, I don't know what else I could tell you.

(Discussion off the record
regarding Elvis Presley.)

A: I was over in Germany in '59. Now, I was under the impression that Presley was on his way home when I was on my way over. That's what I thought. I never seen him over there.

Q: He actually went to Germany and served?

A: Yeah, he was over in Germany, yeah. But I know I was in Fort Sill, Oklahoma when George Hamilton was down there, but I never got to see him. But, you know, those celebrities kind of have their own quarters or whatever, but George Hamilton was -- we're somewhere near the same age, I guess. But Elvis, now, I -- unless I got my wires crossed, I thought he was

coming home when I was going over.

Q: So was he already singing when he went in the military? Was he drafted?

A: He was there -- then he would have been over there in -- well, if he's a year younger than me, he would have been going over in '59 or '60. Because I thought that Elvis was coming home when I was going over. That's the way -- I never did see him over there. I never heard much about him when I was there. Yeah, it was about in a same timeframe, because Elvis I think is a couple years older than I am, I think. I'm pretty sure he is.

Q: I don't know what year Elvis was born. I know what year he died, but I don't remember what year he was born.

A: He died in '79 or '80.

Q: '77, wasn't it? '77 or '79.

A: Yeah, one of the two there, yeah.

Q: Was George Hamilton an actor by then or a star by then?

A: Well, yeah, he did some acting. He was known as an actor, but he -- I never got to see him. I just heard that he was there and, you know.

Q: Was he as tan as he was?

A: Did what?

Q: Was he as tan as he is now?

A: Well, I don't know. I really -- I never seen him while he was there, but I just heard he was there. And I was in Fort Sill for a whole year, or better part of that year, probably 11 months or something like that.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah, he was there. And, let's see, well, I met some interesting people down there. I know that just about three-fourth of the population of Oklahoma has got some Indian blood in them. I never realized that, but just about anybody that come from Oklahoma has got some Indian blood in them. Even though they look white, you know, they've got some ancestry. So there's a lot of Indians in Oklahoma. We have a lot of them up here. Up where I come from, Hayward, there's a lot around there, but there's other places that have a lot of them, too. Boy, I know there's some more stuff I should tell you, but I'd have to have you ask me a question or something to remind me of it.

I went in in April of '58 and got out in April of 1960. So actually I was discharged four days before my -- I was April 8 when I went in and April 4 when I got out. So I was just four days short of

being two full years. Then after I got out, they kept writing me. That's why I know we never had a phone yet. Yeah, they kept writing me and saying that I had to get in this two years of active reserve. See, in those days you had four years of active -- two years active duty, two years active reserve, and two years of inactive reserve.

Q: Okay.

A: And the nearest place that they had for a MOS like mine, not that I had spectacular MOS, but I used that for -- for an excuse, and I said that they don't have a training for my MOS in Hayward. They wanted me to go to Hayward for this active reserve and they kept writing me and writing me and I said I have no way to get up there. I just used every -- I just didn't want no more of it. I wanted to wash my hands of it. I finally got out of it. So then after four years then, let's see, in 1964 then, that was the year Jennifer was born, I got my complete discharge. Because you have to have two years active service, two years of active reserve which would mean going to meetings I think one night a week and then you spend a week or two on bivouac in the summertime or something like that, and I didn't want any part of that, you know, if I could get out of that. I did

manage to get out of that. And so then I got my full discharge after. That was the year Jennifer was born, yeah.

Q: And what does inactive mean?

A: Inactive means that you are still in the reserve but you don't have to come to the meetings.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: See, active reserve is that you are active in that you go to a meeting, it was either once a week or once every two weeks, I can't remember. And then you also had to go to an active bivouac for, like, a week or two in the summertime where you actually went out and bivouacked in the field, you know, and lived in a tent, or what have you. And that's two years of active reserve there, that way they've got you, you've got your duffle bag and you've got your boots packed and you're ready to be called if they need you, see. That's what active reserve is. But inactive reserve is you're basically done but if they have to call you up, they could.

Q: If there was a crisis or a wartime or something?

A: Yeah, if there was a crisis, right, right. So after '64 then I was officially done then.

Q: Okay.

A: So that was a load off my chest there. I had met a

lot a good friends in the service and there's some I've tried to contact, one of my best buddies, and I can't find him no place. You have a way to -- I don't have a -- my daughter does, she has Internet at home, but I don't have a computer at home. I'm kind of computer -- but there's a way to trace someone, right?

Q: I would think so.

A: Because I can't find this one good friend of mine no place. I hope he hasn't passed on, but. Yeah.

Q: Should see if Jennifer can help you do that.

A: We did, we did look one time and we found -- this man's name was Norbert Tombarge, and a real good friend of mine, and we found several Tombarges in Montana. And I know that his wife loved horses because she used to have a couple horses, you know.

Q: Okay.

A: They originally come from down by Menomonie in Wisconsin. But then, you know, people never stay in the same place, and there's Tombarges in Montana, and but I never found a Norbert Tombarge. And I can't find him in the phone book or anything around the cities because he used to work in Minneapolis for years.

Q: Okay.

A: In fact, he was a baker then. But then he got into electronics, and I don't know what happened to him now. Yeah, there's several good friends like that that I would like to get ahold of. They never showed up at the reunion, you know.

Q: Okay.

A: But.

Q: And that would be interesting to see if you could find him.

A: Yeah, it would be very interesting. After our lives are pretty near over with, you know, and you got so many stories to tell. That's really nice to meet someone that you haven't seen for a long time, you've got so many stories to tell and talk about. It will probably be like that when you die and get to heaven, just think of all the people you'll get to talk and your old friends and stuff. Yeah. I wish I had some more good news for you.

(Discussion off the record

regarding veterans organizations.)

A: Here about 10 years ago they started hitting me up and asking me to join, and I asked them about that, too, but they said, no, that don't matter, they said, but I think the reason is they're running short of guys to help out. Well, the oldtimers, you know, any

time -- the World War II vets are just about all gone, there's not too many left, and whenever one of them dies you always have the gun salute, and then Memorial Day march in the parade and gun salute, and they need the VFW's for that, you know, and they had me in mind for that, they figured -- but I'm still working, I'm not completely retired yet. I'm tired, but --

Q: You're 73 and you're not completely retired yet?

A: Like I said, when I got out of the service in '60, I bought a logging truck and I've got still it, you know. But I can't sell it, you know, the economy took a turn here two years ago.

Q: Yep.

A: And I wanted to unload that thing and I couldn't. And so now I just have to just wear it out, I guess. Park it along with the other equipment. I got some bull dozer and some skidders and stuff out there. Let it rot down into the ground with the rest of that stuff. It's about all we can do.

Q: All right. Well, thank you, for giving us your time, Mr. Thompson.

A: Yes.

Q: And we appreciate your dedication and sacrifice.

A: I enjoyed giving you my 10 cents worth. I don't know

if it's worth anything.

Q: Of course. I can't believe Jennifer hasn't talked you into doing this before?

A: She tried to get me down here for the last three or four or five years.

(Discussion off the record
regarding family of origin.)

A: I'll start from the top is Bob, Pauline, Max, little Georgie was a girl that died before I was born. Okay. That's four, and then along come Phil, see, number five. Little Georgie now, was she counted in the 13? Let me see, Bob, Pauline, Max, Georgie, Phil, Russell, Lorraine, Don, Ralph, Mary. That's 10. Billy died, a little boy; and then Linda, or Grace and Linda. That's 13, yeah. And little Billy died of pneumonia when he was only -- he was about two or two and a half rocking on his little horse. The doctor came down to treat Russell that had pneumonia, and he said that little guy sounds, you know how your lungs will whistle, he said, he's got pneumonia. And by goll they started -- and in them days they never had penicillin, see, this is back in about 19 -- what year would that have been, about 19 -- let's see, Donny was born in '41, '43, '47, I think, about. And I don't think there was any

penicillin then at that time yet, see, the penicillin really didn't come out much until the polio thing come in the early '50's, wasn't it? That's when they developed the penicillin. So '47 they never had that. And he died of pneumonia. Oh dad, my dad took that awful bad. He was such a cute little guy. He used to rock on that little horse, yeah. That was --

Q: And Russell was okay, he got over it?

A: Russell got over it, yeah, of course Russell was about four or five years older.

Q: So he was little stronger?

A: He was seven or eight years old, see. In those days, you know, our house we heated with a wood stove inside and no running water. We had to go out in the morning to get a drink of water out of the pail. You would break the ice in it, you know. And us kids upstairs would never get out of bed until we could hear ma got the fire going downstairs and then you grab your clothes and you run down by the stove and put them on by the stove, you know. Those were the good old days. You think of them as good old days. You don't forget them, I'll tell you. But it was easy to get pneumonia. The floors were cold, you know, and little kids like two years old crawling around on the floor, he's right down there in the

cold. Yeah.

Q: And he was two?

A: What?

Q: He was two years old?

A: He was between two and two and a half, yeah, but he was rocking on his horse. He could walk and run around, but he's still small and, you know, not real strong yet, but once you get that pneumonia bug, you know, you need some narcotics -- or some antibiotics to knock it out, you can't just get it with drinking orange juice which we was in very short supply in those days. We didn't get much apples and oranges.

Q: And how much older were you than Billy?

A: I could have my years -- but I was born in '37 so in '47 I would have been 10, but maybe Billy was '46, born in -- he was about two, so maybe he was born in '45.

Q: Okay.

A: Then died in '47, something like that. I was probably 10 when he died, see. I could be off a year one way or the other there. But, I could tell stories. In '41 my mother took sick, and she had a tumor on her brain behind her ear. And back in 1941, you know, the doctors, they didn't do much, they didn't know much about it. Little doctors that we

had. So my dad had to take her to Madison, which was 240 miles from home. And my oldest brother Bob was 11, let's see, he was born in '30, yeah, he would have been 11, Pauline was 10, and Donny was a baby, so but he had to up and get her down there, and nobody to watch the kids. And this, I hear this story so many times, of course I was only four years old, but this Harry Taylor from Exeland used to peddle apples and strawberries and stuff, he come around the place that day with his pickup and we all come running out to look at what he had in there. We was hungry, you know, nobody home to take care of us, see, dad had to get ma to the hospital because she was going to die. And Harry, we asked him how much did he want for them strawberries, he said them are 10 cents for a little basket. And Bob and Pauline said, well, you know, I've got a nickel, and Pauline said, I think I got five pennies stored up there someplace. And Harry, he was looking at these little kids talking about where they going to get 10 cents, and he said, well, where's your mother? And we proceeded to tell him that she was in the hospital in Madison. And, boy, it wasn't very long, Harry left a couple boxes of strawberries and some apples and he went home and he come back with a whole pickup load

of groceries. And then he told the county nurse, they had a nurse in Hayward, which is 40 miles north, she came down and made sure that there was a grownup person from neighbors, she found someone to come and kind of manage these kids. Because there was, let's see, Bob, Pauline, Max, myself, Russell, Lorraine and Donny, there's seven, and Donny was in diapers. He was born in '41. He was just one year old. Seven kids at home and the oldest one is 11, and Pauline was 10, she's doing the cooking and heating the milk for the baby, and the nurse says, well, what do you -- and there was just regular cows milk that we had, and then she heated in the tea kettle water and then put the bottle in the water, somehow get it the right temperature, you know, and she did it right. Donny survived. He lived through that. And anyway, it wasn't long, we lived that way for about three or four days before they got an elderly woman or somebody to come and oversee, because ma was laid up there for about, oh, three or four months. Quite awhile. She was in bad shape. Very lucky to pull out of that. She almost died. They had to operate behind the ear and take this tumor out. And I understand it was a tumor about the size of an orange or something, and they got that tumor out and they

left her deaf in that one ear. But it did something to her brain. She had to entirely learn everything all over again. The doctor put his car keys out and said, what is that, and she said, I know what you use that for, but she couldn't think of the name of it, you know. I mean, she didn't, like, lose her intelligence, she just lost --

Q: Part of her memory?

A: I guess the memory was gone, but it took about a year or two and it finally came back.

Q: That's almost a miracle.

A: It is a miracle.

Q: At that time in 1941 to have something like that.

A: To have a brain surgery, they had to actually take the ear and pull the ear back, and it was back in behind that ear, and it was something like the size of an orange or something like that. They got that tumor out.

Q: And she had more children?

A: She kept having children. And she lived to be 90. So that was a miracle right there. Yeah.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Thompson.