



## **MJ Eschler**

United States Army

Tank Commander

European Theater

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Interviewer:  
Rick Randle

**THIS INTERVIEW IS NOT EDITED FOR CONTENT, LANGUAGE OR HISTORICAL ACCURACY.**

**Rick:** MJ Eschler was a Sherman Tank commander during the Second World War [trained under General Patton and fought in North Africa and Italy.]

MJ, can you tell us a little about your early childhood? Where you grew up and where you were when Pearl Harbor happened?

**MJ:** I was born in a little town called Bern Idaho which was named after Bern Switzerland because my people all came from Switzerland and when they got to Ogden they brought their big copper kettles and brother Brigham sent them up to Bear Lake County Idaho to settle and make cheese and they settled Bern Idaho. I lived in the wilds on a ranch all my life except when we'd come in for school; we'd have to come back to Montpelier Idaho for school. And that's how I grew up – a cowboy, shepherd, whatever. I knew how to handle guns when I was very young. I was in Fort Lewis Washington at Pearl Harbor and we had been...

**Rick:** You had already enlisted prior to Pearl Harbor?

**MJ:** Yes, I enlisted in the military on the 20 March of '41. It was eminent that we were going to be in war and I up and joined. So on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 1941 I was up at Fort Lewis Washington and I told you this over the phone this morning – we were going to be given furloughs to go home for Christmas. Depending on the length of distance that we lived from Fort Lewis Washington- and I put down Montpelier Idaho and I guess this company clerk didn't know where it was, so he put Montpelier Vermont and I was going to get a long furlough, like about three weeks and went up to Seattle, went to a football game and came home a happy person, happy camper and that's when the Jap's hit Pearl Harbor. Well things changed immediately then.

**Rick:** They cancelled your furlough?

**MJ:** They moved us out of the barracks.

**Rick:** All right, so your furlough got cancelled because of Pearl Harbor. [The United States was drawn into World War II when the Japanese Imperial Navy attacked Pearl Harbor, Oahu, Hawaii on December 7, 1941.]

**MJ:** Yes, yes sir and am I on record now?

**Rick:** Yes you are.

**MJ:** Well, if I weren't on record I'd say I've hated them Jap's ever since. Not for the war but they beat me out of a three week furlough.

**Rick:** Well I'm interested that you enlisted before Pearl Harbor. Were there a lot of young men in your community that felt the same way- who felt that war was imminent and that you were going?

**MJ:** Yes, there were. I'm going to say 60% were drafted but there were, I'd come in a train there at Soda Springs Idaho and there were five of us, all volunteers.

**Rick:** So they cancelled your leave and then what happened?

**MJ:** They moved us out of fairly comfortable barracks out into the woods where it rains all the time in Washington, that was in December; and wet and cold and miserable and afraid that we're going to get shelled by a Jap submarine.

**Rick:** You were still at Fort Lewis when the war started? Did you then go to some basic training somewhere after that?

**MJ:** Yes sir, we trained...we finally got some tanks. I'd been in nine months and never saw the inside of a tank (I'll put something in extra here). The United States of America was taking in millions of soldiers, millions of young men; they didn't know what to do with them. They were 100% unprepared, so mostly we marched. We learned how to march which in combat is strictly

worthless and I remember training with...four men take a piece of two-by-four and pretend it was a tank...not that was dumb, that was boring. We would take a Colt 45, empty and aim in at a building for hour after hour and so finally along in the spring, I'm going to say April they sent us down to what was called Fort Young California – down in the desert and there we met old '*Blood and Guts*' and he was our commander then – George Smith Patton Junior. Yes sir and so I trained there under him – now this was good training, this was...at least we were firing weapons, we were driving tanks, we were maintaining tanks and at least...I think the biggest waste of time in all my life was basic training in the army but here now you were...you know we're 21, 22 years old, we're not stupid and we started training under the old man. In August of 1942 we shipped from...

**Rick:** Let me ask you one question...it's so interesting- Patton was known for his strict discipline, was he that way when he was training you guys? [General George S. Patton led the U.S. Army to major victories in the North African, Italian and European campaigns.]

**MJ:** Oh, nuts! We were training down there in 110-degree heat and you could imagine what it was inside of the tank. I was driving at the time and I set straddling the transmission. We wore coveralls and you took the...if you didn't cut them buttons off your coveralls they'd burn your leg. And you drove with that lousy thing buttoned up; well I got smart and I took a C-ration can...I had a port here with a lever on and...but you're supposed to be buttoned up tight in that bake oven and I took a C-ration can and I put it under...the lid bucket was closed but I had that much nose...get my nose up there and get a little air and I never got caught. But one of the people got caught, this driver got caught – he got his idea from me and Patton caught him and he didn't do anything with the driver, the Lieutenant was the tank commander and he put him under arrest, put the Corporal in charge and I don't know what ever happened to the Lieutenant, I don't know but talk about discipline! And you buttoned up those coveralls up to here and oh, yeah he was...

**Rick:** In 110 degree heat and it was probably 160 degrees inside those tanks.

**MJ:** Yeah, and you know a man don't function properly and I guess he was trying to prove that he was the boss.

**Rick:** So everything we've heard about him is true then?

**MJ:** Oh he was nuts, do you want another story on Patton?

**Rick:** Yeah

**MJ:** All right. We were driving...our tanks had a Wright Whirlwind aircraft engine – 9 cylinder. A gutless wonder and it was fine, the engine was fine when you're rolling out on the blacktop but you get in that sand that deep and...they just didn't have the soup. Well, our tank kept malfunctioning and fire coming out the back out our exhaust, right on our big mudguards until we used all our fire extinguisher and finally I was driving for this officer and he said "*we're going back*". So we turned around and we started for our tank-park, our bivouac area and there he stood right in the middle of the road. He had a pipe or cobb, I didn't see it but there he stood. I have the engine revving at about 900 rpm and it was noisy but I could hear every word he said and he talked to my Lieutenant, he adored me, "*just where in the \*)@(#\$& do you think you are going?*" and the Lieutenant said "*sir, she keeps catching afire, we're gonna take her back*" and he "*you turn that !!@)!@\*\*(\*#&^ thing around and...*", well we went about maybe a half a mile and then it conked, it quit and ruined the engine. But he proved a point, he was still the boss. So yes, everything, everything about...I'd say he was a peacetime nut but a good fighting General. When he got in the military or when he got where the action was then you got the best of everything and a pretty good General all though he didn't care if you slaughtered 2,000 men if he got his name in the headline. Boy I hope the FBI don't get me.

**Rick:** The movie Patton- I'm sure you saw that- was that an accurate portrayal?

**MJ:** That's the only thing different was Patton had a high-pitched, whiney voice but George C. Scott, he looked more like Patton than George did and that's the greatest piece of acting I've ever seen, do you think it was?

**Rick:** So you trained under Patton in California and then what happened?

**MJ:** We went to New York City. We took a boat to Liverpool England, 14,000 of us.

**Rick:** When you were traveling to New York it was by train? [**MJ:** Yes sir] Did you have a lot of people meeting you along the way and giving you sandwiches and such?

**MJ:** If you tried to send ahead that you were coming, you'd give it to the black porter but it never got anywhere, they didn't want it...but it's good because anybody that would've wanted to sabotage with those troop trains well they sure had a golden opportunity but a couple of three of the boys would go in there...go through their home town, they'd just disembark. But my hometown was clear up in Idaho.

**Rick:** All right, so then you arrived in New York?

**MJ:** Yes sir.

**Rick:** Tell us about going overseas.

**MJ:** Well we took a British Troop ship. I think there were 14,000 men on there. Do you mind if I talk? [**Rick:** no] Well, when we got on the boat there in the harbor they says "*now men when you get on the ship go to your staterooms, don't leave there, we want to register you in*".

Stateroom! Our stateroom was down below the water line with the rats and there were great big areas just full of mess tables and you had your choice, you could sleep in a hammock – can you imagine me in a hammock? Or you could sleep on one of those tables. That's where...oh I gotta tell you this story. The first day out on the boat they rang an air raid alarm and you would run and put your '*Mae West*' on and take your rifle and go and stand on the deck you know...air raid and it was...that happened every day, all the way across. Well the enlisted men had salt-water showers. Can you imagine washing your head in...ooh it felt...well a friend of mine and I got the bright idea...when they'd sound that air raid alarm everyone ran up on deck and we learned that the officers had a nice beautiful bathroom with sunken bathtubs and soft water, and so this

boy Martin C. Welch and I would take our Mae West and our rifle and we'd run for that officer's cabin. This was a British ship, British people and boy it was beautiful you know- an enlisted man and an officer looked the same with no clothes on. Well we did that every day until the last day we got docked in Liverpool and a British man caught us and he says, "*from here out you chaps 'll have to use your own accommodations*". "*Oh yes sir, yes sir, oh yes thank you*". Well we'd had our showers and washed our hair and we looked respectable.

**Rick:** How many days were you on the water?

**MJ:** Fourteen days. Huge convoy zigzagging and none of us knew of these Walvacs, these U-Boats. I had no idea. I used to take my blanket after dark...it was strictly forbidden to go on deck after dark but those holds...we had a group of black soldiers right next door to us and people were vomiting and oh it's horrible down there. I would take my blanket...I was a goof off sir, but when war come I was a heck of a soldier...I took my blanket and slithered up on that deck and would find a bulkhead, find something and I would sleep up there. Get some good sleep up on that deck and then about daybreak get back down there. Then we landed in Liverpool. We done some good training there- we had tanks and blew up the British streets with them and learned to drive on the wrong side of the road and we stayed there until November when we went in and invaded North Africa, a place called '*Oran*' is where we went in, my outfit went in at Oran.

**Rick:** And that was in early '43 or late '42?

**MJ:** No that was seven November '42.

**Rick:** So you landed in North Africa? Kasserine pass? Were you there at that time?

**MJ:** Yeah, Kasserine pass must have come six months later.

**Rick:** So what happened after you arrived in North Africa?

**MJ:** Well, we had an enemy. The Germans never really gave us a lot of trouble, a little bit, half the French were Vichy and you never knew who was on your side. And that was a bad situation. We went towards Kasserine and see we're American soldiers, we're green, our officers don't know which way is up and you can't blame them but the Germans drew back and drew back and here come the Americans and oh boy are we taking this land and they let our columns come in and then they just closed in, closed in and sealed us off. And we took a beating there, we took a *beating*; we took a beating at Kasserine. But you know that was good experience because you finally learned that you were that great. And we learned that our equipment was horrible. We had 75 cannon on a tank...you could hit that tiger tank from me to you and it would just bounce off. And so our infantry actually, it was pitiful. Some of those boys had a 1903 single shot Springfield and we were not ready- it was all bluff, all bluff.

**Rick:** These Sherman tanks were a little faster than the Tiger tanks.

**MJ:** Yes, the Tiger Tank was like a cat, they would have to break the track to turn but someone gave us what was called a final drive and we could yank back on that lever and you could make a good circle and they were much more maneuverable but we liked the gun. If you can bear with that German 88. I think I'm taking a little too much time.

**Rick:** No, don't hesitate to give us details. Did you first see combat while in North Africa?

**MJ:** I was driving then, I was driving a tank which I liked much better than commanding. Because as a driver all I had to do was keep that thing gassed up with 180 gallons of high-test gas and keep everything greased and that. When I became a commander I was conscientious person, I thought "*I'm in charge...responsible for these boys*". And you know it weighed heavily on me. You know, you make a wrong turn, hit a mine, you do something...

**Rick:** Tell us a little about what that tank was like on the inside. Were there two drivers?

**MJ:** Yeah. Well now the first tank I told you about was the Grant and that was worse than worthless but then we got this Sherman, the driver sat over here, here's your transmission, here's your gear and here's your clutch and the system driver sits right here side by side and he's got a

30-caliber machine gun so you're sitting on the lower deck. Up one elevation is the gunner. He sits behind the cannon and he's sitting down and off to his left is a loader and when we'd fire the gun the...we did have an automatic breach on our guns which was better than the German's but the loader would grab one of those shells and 'wambo', slap it in that cannon and the breach would come up...the gunner would sit there and he had two switches there like the dimmer switch on your car and he had a 30-caliber coincided with his big gun which he could fire tracers and everything and then he could get on his target made with the machine and then the 'wambo' would catch the big one. And the tank commander, he stood up on a little round seat that folded up and let down and he was the lookout. When I became a tank commander, if you want to know why the national debt is so high, look at me. I had a 50-caliber Browning machine gun on top of my tank and brother I used it. Every fifth round in that 50 was incendiary. I'm not saying that right but set things afire and then every fifth round was a tracer and armor piercing. Oh I loved that weapon and I had a standing order with the supply Sergeant who was an Idaho boy – *"you supply all the other tanks and when you come to me I'll take everything that's left"*. And I used it.

**Rick:** So you had plenty of ammo to work with?

**MJ:** Yeah, we did. Yes sir.

**Rick:** You were eventually transferred to Italy weren't you? [**MJ:** yes sir]. Tell me, did you engage in combat while you were in North Africa?

**MJ:** Yes but very little. This shouldn't go on the record. Our commander was a Jewish man – Hyman Bross. I know that he come in the war as a Lieutenant Colonel. Most people were making advancement fast but we didn't see a lot of action in Italy, or in North Africa, sorry.

**Rick:** What happened when you were transferred to Italy?

**MJ:** All right, our infantry, those boys fought bravely. The first armored tank division fought beautifully and we finally went across to Bizurty. Here's Oran over where we come in, here's

Bizurty and it's only a skip over to Italy. We never went in to Sicily with George. We landed at a place called Solerno, Italy. I was made a tank commander there and then our rough stuff started.

**Rick:** Is a tank commander also an officer?

**MJ:** No, no. I commanded one tank and then I was finally the platoon Sergeant.

**Rick:** You had four men besides yourself in that tank?

**MJ:** Yes sir.

**Rick:** Well then, tell us about Italy.

**MJ:** Italy was tough. You got one row of hills and mountains after another and a little valley and the Germans used every trick in the book. Before the Geneva Convention, before they didn't follow any rules. They hauled ammunition in ambulances with a big red cross on; but anyway they would retreat. When we'd kick them out of here they would just retreat across the next valley and take the high ground and they'd be looking down our throats the whole time. And that's the way it was, it was tough. And our infantry bless their heart; that 36<sup>th</sup> Texas division were replaced five times. There was a lady congressman come over and said [tears] "*their moral was low*", so we could understand after you've been replaced five times you wonder why. But that was a hard place to fight.

**Rick:** Did you fight in the Monte Casino area?

**MJ:** Yes, yes. That Volturna River come down here like that – a big river and then our slope to Monte Casino is straight up, that lousy thing was straight up and time and time again they tried to take it. Time and time again and they slaughtered our infantry. Those guys you know slaughtered them and finally...that Monte Casino was up on top the German high command says "*we don't have troops up there*" but they did, they was using it for an operation up there.

Finally we got some bombers together and flattened it, flattened it. The (I know you'll edit this), the Catholic influence in the military didn't want to bomb that but if they'd have bombed it the first week it'd saved thousands of our poor old infantry boys. We took that and then we got stalled again and you've heard of the 'Anzio Beach Head' and then we made an assault from the sea there. We'd have the hospital ship loaded with nurses a quarter of a mile off the coast and the Germans would shell that and they would have the big hospital tent inland...they had no ethics at all

**Rick:** Well how long were you in Italy?

**MJ:** Eighteen months.

**Rick:** So that's where you saw the most action? [**MJ:** yeah] And what was the most harrowing experience that you can think of?

**MJ:** Well...

**Rick:** Did you come close to a mine?

**MJ:** I wouldn't say harrowing but believe it or not about a week before the war ended the Germans were retreating with everything they could. They were stealing bicycles; they were taking horses from the Italians. It was a beautiful spring morning and we pulled up on a kind of a sloping hillside and the sun come out and boy you know you took your shoes off and if you could stand to take your socks off. I was always on the alert, always on the alert and I'm standing in the turret of my tank with my field glasses like that and right past my ear a sniper shot and how he missed me ask the good Lord. My gunner Andy said "*chief I got him I got him*" and that lousy guy was out there fifty yards, sixty, seventy five yards; I said "*let him have it Andy*" and Andy shot and he was so close that he went right over his head and up come his white flag and I'm going to end this story right there, I'm not going to go on. One of the worst things, one of the biggest dangers in that war was to take prisoners because they're caught and they'll do anything in the world to [get away], yeah and we didn't take prisoners.

**Rick:** Are there any other combat experiences that you'd like to relate to us?

**MJ:** Well, day after day the same old thing.

**Rick:** For eighteen months you were in harms way.

**MJ:** Yeah, I told you in the beginning of my interview that when they made me the commander I was concerned about my crew. I make a goof off and we're a statistic but one day we were back here on this slope in the tanks and there was terrain we couldn't get over and we're back there, we're doing some artillery fire and my captain come '*Hoakenson*', he was a great guy. He'd come up the ranks but he was a good guy and he drank whiskey and chased the Italian women but he was a good commanding officer. He come up to me and said "*Sergeant I want you to take a volunteer crew and I want you to go down here*" and he showed me on a map and those maps were not good "*down here*" he said "*over here*", he said "*The Germans are playing hell with our infantry, you go and get 'em*". I'm alone and he gave me a map. Well I stood up he wanted me to get a volunteer crew and my gunner, my assistant gunner a guy named '*Steve Toff*' he's out of Jennet Pennsylvania "*chief*" he said "*where ya going*" and I said "*well I gotta go on a little mission here*". He said "*we're your crew, you don't want volunteers [tears]*" and right then...and the whole crew went with me and so right then I says "*these boys are with me*". We went down there and the map wasn't quite right and I couldn't, I couldn't really see much to fire at and finally I looked over there and there's a little group of trees and some buildings and I thought '*ah well it could be*' and so I told my gunner Andy "*cut a couple loose over there*" and so he did. It was  $\frac{3}{4}$ 's of a mile away and boy with about the second or third round the old black smoke come up, we hit ammunition oil and done a bang up job and pretty soon an infantryman come a racing off that hill "*hey you did it, you did it*". Well I'm not asking you to think I'm great but that was a great day in my life.

**Rick:** What happened after being assigned to go down and help this infantry group?

**MJ:** Well, I never realized at the time but this Captain, he must of liked me or he wouldn't have sent me, and it was a great learning experience for me and things kind of went better after that.

**Rick:** Where did you sleep at night?

**MJ:** Good question, all right – my four crewmen, none of them was six feet, none of them were six feet. They were oh five seven, five eight and those dudes would sleep in their seats [Rick: right in the tank huh?] Yep in the tank – with me, I got no place to sleep and I'm the only guy that I know that did this, we'd pull up...we would fight with the infantry until dark and then we would have to pull back four or five miles, six miles, whatever where the gasoline and ammunition trucks could come up. So we might not get gassed up until, oh eleven o'clock at night, but what I would do, I'd have that driver stop the tank. Right in front of the tank from like here to here, I would dig like crazy and I'd make me a foxhole maybe that deep and that wide and I'd lay down on that and take a blanket or something then I'd say "*okay boy pull it over me*" and he'd pull that tank over me and I'm that deep down and the tank on top of me and I'd get some good sleep stretched out.

**Rick:** Well, how inventive! And your other guys were inside the tank?

**MJ:** Yeah, they were inside and I never could sleep sitting up but when it was rough that's what we did. That's what I did.

**Rick:** Do you have a story about the Pinocchio pin?

**MJ:** Well, when we first went into to Solerno Italy, we pulled into an Italian family's orchard – a beautiful orchard with them tanks you know and here come a lady, an Italian lady oh 35 and a little girl and I could hear the little girl say to the mother "*momma Americano*" and they come closer and this woman says "*Evoy English or American*"? "*Well we're American*" and had a little chocolate that I gave to this little girl and the mother says "*oh exquisite, exsquisita*". But we stayed there a little while and this buddy of mine took the showers. We went up there you know and they would give us a spaghetti dinner – oh fabulous with the goats milk fromagio and

you never drank water you drank the vina rosa. Well we stayed there a little while and when we left my friends were both Catholics and they gave them the crocha rosa and they said “*what is your religion*” and I told them “*I’m a Mormon*”. They’d never heard of it – “*Protestenta*”? “*No, no, we’re Mormons, we’re different*”. I didn’t say ‘*different*’ but they gave me a nice 24 carat...a little Pinochetta ... the little Pinocchio with a long, long arm which I’ve got today. Now that’s just a little story how they were good to us. The average Italian was very good to the Americans. One of them shot my, one of my good friends – he got out of his tank and we were in a little town and some sniper shot him right through the back of the head, Italian. So most of them were good, some weren’t.

**Rick:** So did you ever serve under Patton in combat?

**MJ:** Not too much. In fact the last time I saw Patton was (it was exactly like the movie) in California, the last time I actually saw him and they had oh, there was thousands, literally thousands of troops sitting down in the sand and he ranted and raved and swore and used profanity and he broke down and wept at the end and quoted from the bible and I thought “*now there’s no one here but us GI’s*”, but right there in the front row is this (his wife I believed) and some ladies and he didn’t mind.

**Rick:** Any combat experiences other than Italy?

**MJ:** No, the war ended. The war ended for me I believe on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1945.

**Rick:** And you were still in Italy when the Germans surrendered and VE day occurred?

**MJ:** Yes, yeah.

**Rick:** What happened after that?

**MJ:** Well, I had a friend that was a Lieutenant and he and I clashed at first. He was from North Carolina and we’re fighting one day up the side hills and I kept throwing his track on my tank, it

was loose and he drove up about ten o'clock in the morning and he said *"sergeant we attacked over that hill at four o'clock"* I said *"Lieutenant if you do you'll attack without me"* boy and he bristled up like that... *"What's the matter?"* I says *"I've been trying to get battalion maintenance up here all day long to tighten this track. The minute I start over that hill and I throw a track I'm a sittin duck"*. And he says *"I'll have those stripes of yours"* and I says *"you've got 'em. I'm not gonna sacrifice my crew"*. Well anyway about three thirty here come the old T2 a chuggin up there and he tightened my tracks and away we went. Well I became pretty good friends with him and (I don't know, you can cut this out), but he had a girlfriend that was a nurse and one day he said to me and my friend McCaffry, we were a little ways back off the lines and he says, *"drive me back to this hospital there and you guys can take the rest of the day off and go into Leghorn and soak up some suds"* and so we stayed there. I guess I won't finish this story, but when we come back to pick him up he wasn't to be found and you couldn't blame him. Finally McCaffry, my friend, went through these rows of nurses tents boy it's funny he didn't get shot. He located him he says *"you guys go on back"* ...and anyway. His name's *'Lieutenant Suet'*. The war was over and I was going to sleep in a bed. My tank was right beneath about a two story hotel and there were beds and I was getting me a bed and he drove up under my window in his jeep and hollered *"Sergeant, how'd you like to go home"* I says *"get outta here"*, *"yeah I'm serious, you wanna go home? Get ready"* he says and I was the first guy to leave. I had lots of points and I was still alive and he drove me back to the Leaning Tower of Pisa and there I took an airplane back to Naples, back to Casablanca, down to Dakar, Africa over to Brazil up to Belam, up to Florida and then took a train to Salt Lake City.

**Rick:** Were you still in Europe when VJ day occurred?

**MJ:** No sir, no I was in Montpelier Idaho.

**Rick:** And so there was no thought of you having to go over and fight the Japanese?

**MJ:** No, we'd had it. I'd been in over four years and you know, [**Rick:** battle fatigue] no I didn't have battle fatigue but I didn't want any. I didn't want to fight anymore and we'd done our, we'd won our battle.

**Rick:** Is there anything you'd like to say to future generations? Any advice you'd give the young people that you've learned over the years?

**MJ:** I'm going to say sir that the US Army has certainly improved their training, everything is better – how we ever won a war with what we started out with and our ill-trained people, but I've watched today's soldiers and you know we used to get a cold can of C-rations – do you know what C-rations are?

**Rick:** Yes I do but explain it because some people watching may not know.

**MJ:** Well C-rations are a little can that big and it's called '*hash*' and '*stew*' and all that. You've gotta be hungry to eat 'em and I had a 32 inch waist when I came out of the military. Well the other day my neighbor moved and he'd been in the military and he gave me one of those meals that they have today. You can war them, gosh there's fruit, there's a main meal, there's everything and anything you'd want and more than you can eat. The hunter's now buy 'em to take out on hunting trips.

**Rick:** MRE's they're called.

**MJ:** Yes, that's good. Well training – this marching troops is no good. Its fine to learn how to march but you gotta learn to fight and you gotta learn to pull the trigger first. Training! I would say train – learn your weapons so you can fire that quick. The officers are trained better today. The only way you learn to fight is in combat. You can't learn to fight by marching or drills or outta books or nothing. You learn to fight not until you're in war.

**Rick:** Then you moved to Salt Lake? Your parents were still living in Montpelier?

**MJ:** Yes, I went up to Montpelier where a job with the Union Pacific which they kept for me and housing was tough and I met Carol's mother and she had an apartment in Salt Lake City and I could work here. So we came to Salt Lake City on a temporary basis and I stayed. The jobs here were good.

**Rick:** And you've been here ever since?

**MJ:** Been here ever since, yeah.

**Rick:** Well thank you very much for coming today we really appreciate it.

**Elizabeth:** Did you at the time have any sense of the accomplishment? After the war ended, did you know how significant your contributions were?

**MJ:** I said to my friend McCaffry, I said "*it wouldn't surprise me if a short while after the war we'd be feeding these guys*" which was true and I never dreamed it was true. These politicians you know the American boys can win the war and the politicians can give it away that quick and politics, appeasement...I believe we did, lady. I was certainly appreciative of the boys who were killed. Yes I was appreciative.

**Rick:** Were you ever near the 442<sup>nd</sup> regiment?

**MJ:** Yeah, yeah I was – I was from me to you- I talked with them.

**Rick:** And they're the most decorated unit. I guess everything's true that they say about those guys.

**MJ:** They were good. They were fighting two battles. They had to prove that they were Americans and boy they put them in the thick of it. I'll tell a story. When Anzio Beachhead -all right, we made a little beachhead but it was so small and the Germans are back there with their big guns and they were shelling. That's where I tell you they shelled the hospitals, anything, anything and as usual we pulled back and we got our gasoline and come back up and it was just breaking day and I saw a soldier that was small. It wasn't good daylight and he was coming with a German prisoner and this soldier had a bayonet a rifle and a bayonet right in this Kraut's back and this Kraut had been wounded and whoever patched him up you could see the bandage and

everything didn't make him a belt and (this was the 442<sup>nd</sup>, this was a Japanese soldier, a little guy) and that was my first experience with them. He would jam that bayonet into that Kraut and when the guy would put his hands up his pants would fall down and that went on about four or five...and finally the Kraut said "*nuts on my pants, I'll get that bayonet outta my back*". Well I had two friends from Montpellier, they run the Jap café – Frank and Shaw Sakimoto and Frank...or Shaw was the valedictorian in my high school class and they were there. And then I run into their officer – this was a white officer from Pocatello and I run into him and milled around and talked with them and we were supportive of them on oh a couple of three weeks – saw 'em fight you know. They were good, but I refer to the 36<sup>th</sup> infantry division that lost 500 or five times – they're the guys that took the beating. This 442<sup>nd</sup>, the 100<sup>th</sup> battalion of the 44 – heavens they never got to the war until (I'm gonna say '44).

**Rick:** Great fighters anyway.

**MJ:** Oh yeah and like I say they had to prove.

**Rick:** Any other stories that you want to relate?

**Elizabeth:** Would you mind giving us more detail on how you slept under your tank?

**MJ:** The tanks stopped and I get out right in the center between the tracks and I dig me a foxhole probably two and a half feet wide, six feet long down – dig down okay. Now I'm beneath the surface of the earth and when I would get it dug I would lay down in there with a blanket or yep blanket shelter and holler up "*okay*" and the driver would pull the track right over me. One time, this was where a boy from Malad Idaho was killed from me to this lady but oh they poured them mortar – that big mortar stuff and I'm laying under there and I could hear that shrapnel a beatin' on my tank. Now the tank had a trap door in and the drivers, they sit here and right between the drivers is a trap door and they was worrying about me and they dropped that big heavy old trap door down and I did, I climbed up in the tank so that I could get up in my position because it was hot and heavy there.

**Elizabeth:** Describe how things are laid out in the Sherman Tank.

**MJ:** All right – the inside of a Sherman Tank – on the bottom floor – on the left over here there's a seat and this is where the tank driver sits. He's got his clutch, he's got his gearshift, he's got handles for...you steer with two levers and that's your brakes also. He's got a port that he can open up and in that port when he's closed up; it's a periscope which is mostly worthless. It's very distorted – it'd make a little ditch look like six feet and so you'd almost have to drive opened up. Okay – across...and here's the transmission. Big old transmission coming up here – on this side, on the right side is an assistant driver and in front of him he's got a 30-caliber machine gun and he's just assistant driver that's about all he does and if he gets a chance he'll fire that 30. He sits like this and here's your levers, here's your gas and here's your clutch.

**Rick:** And is there a transmission that you can move from low to high?

**MJ:** Well you've got gears. We had five gears forward and one reverse just...one transmission. Then as you go up to the next level, here is a turret and it does a 360 degree turn which was very good that the Germans didn't have and up there on the right hand side sits the gunner and he's looking out through a good sight. There's a good sight and we finally got a 76 rifle that we could, that was as good as the 88 or better – yes that was a good gun and he's got a 30-caliber machine gun and a 76 millimeter rifle on the same cord. So he's got two switches like the dimmer switches on your car – if he touches one the machine gun fires, if he touches the other then that old big one cuts loose. I had a super gunner like when I was telling you about when that sniper took...he says *"I got him I got him"* and he was looking all the time. Over on the left here sits the loader and he's got stacks of ammunition all around the ring of this tank, all around the ring there and he's got machine gun fire...ammunition there too and he grabs around to that ammunition, pulls it back and slams it into the gun and the breach goes up – Andy touches the trigger, the brass fly's out and the breach goes down and he'd do it again. And up in the turret stood I. I had an intercom to each member of the tank and then we had a radio channel which we tried to stay off pretty much of because the Germans would pick it up and I directed the movement – left, right, up, down... *"Andy get on that target up there"*. This ambulance kept

making trips down into a little hollow there and back and back and up and I became suspicious that he wasn't hauling sick people so I says "*Andy hit him*" which he did and you know that old ambulance burned and black smoke and exploded – he was hauling ammunition, gasoline or whatever. I don't know if that should go on the air or not.