

Interviewer:

Weâ€™re here in the West Point Center for Oral Historyâ€™s studio with Mr. Richard Duchossois. Is that right?

Richard Duchossois:

Duchossois, yes sir. You do that very well.

Interviewer:

You say Duchossois. Can you spell that for us?

Richard Duchossois:

Thatâ€™s D-U-C-H-O-S-S-O-I-S.

Interviewer:

And weâ€™re going to talk to him about his childhood, and his experience in the military and as a businessman today. Can you tell us when you were born and where you were born?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, I was born in 1921, October 7, in Chicago - where else?

Interviewer:

And what -

Richard Duchossois:

And Iâ€™m still there.

Interviewer:

What did your parents do?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, my father was a controller for a chain of clothing stores, and my mother was a housewife. We lived on the far south side of Chicago in a place called Beverly Hills. It was a suburb, a pretty empty one when we moved out there, but itâ€™s grown up pretty good now.

Interviewer:

Did you have siblings?

Richard Duchossois:

Yes, I have an older sister and two younger brothers. Theyâ€™re all gone now, though.

Interviewer:

And you mentioned while we were talking earlier about how you used to go to church every Sunday. Iâ€™m wondering if you could -

Richard Duchossois:

Well, uh-huh.

Interviewer:

What church did you go to, andâ€¦

Richard Duchossois:

My mother used to dress us up every Sunday with our jackets. We were too young to wear neckties, but we got our face shined and our hair combed, and we went to Trinity Methodist Church every Sunday. And I have a whole string of the attendance medals from there.

Interviewer:

So was there a military tradition in your family at all - your father or uncles or anything?

Richard Duchossois:

No. My father had been in the Navy in World War I, but that was just because everyone was going to war, and he went too. The way I got into the military was Iâ€™d gone to a military academy in high school, as did my other two brothers. And from there, some of us got what they called a Reserve Commission in the Infantry, because itâ€™d been an Infantry school. Well, you had to become 21 before you picked up that Reserve Commission. When the war broke out, it dropped down to 18, and I had just turned 19 in October. The war broke out in December. In January I got my notice that I should report for duty.

Interviewer:

Can you tell us a little bit about Morgan Park Military Academy? Why was that the school of choice for you and your brothers?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, Morgan Park Military Academy was a very fine school. It still is, but itâ€™s not a military academy anymore. Either that, or a public high school, and the public high school where we were really wasnâ€™t that good. It had just always been that thatâ€™s where we were going to go to school. We didnâ€™t choose it, didnâ€™t pick it out, or as an individual didnâ€™t. I had no desire. They said, â€œThatâ€™s where youâ€™re going to go to school,â€ and we did.

Interviewer:

Do you know why your parents wanted you to go there?

Richard Duchossois:

My parents did everything they could to make sure that my siblings and I had the best education they could possibly afford. We were not from a wealthy family. I guess today youâ€™d call it middle-class family. We werenâ€™t ever wanting anything, but my mother and father had to sacrifice to get us through school.

Interviewer:

Okay. So when you were growing up in the â€™30s, and when you were in middle school and high school, the world was going through a lot, and Iâ€™m wondering were you very aware of what was going on?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, I was at military academy then, and when youâ€™re in a military academy youâ€™re in somewhat of a closed community, if you know what I mean. You didnâ€™t get out, and of course there were no women or girls there at that time. You were at school and under your supervision you might say seven days a week, and the world was sort of closed to you. And you knew the world that you lived in, but you really didnâ€™t know much of the outside world, except in the classes they had, of course, civics and current affairs. And then we just went to those classes â€˜cause they were easier.

Interviewer:

So in 1939, you were a senior, probably, in high school, is that -

Richard Duchossois:

No, I was a junior, a Second Classman. I graduated in 1940.

Interviewer:

So did you know, for example, that the Nazis were on the move?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, you read about those things in the paper. You saw them in Newsweek and magazines like that, and you heard about it on the radio, but it really wasnâ€™t that big a deal. When I got to college, when the war broke out in December, I was a sophomore then. We were going to the library one Sunday, and as we were walking up the hill to go over there, somebody said, â€œPearl Harborâ€™s been bombed.â€ And most of us looked at each other and said, â€œWhereâ€™s Pearl Harbor?â€ We really werenâ€™t up to date on current events. Problems in Europe were really somebody elseâ€™s problems. It isnâ€™t the way it is today with the news which is almost instantaneous. We didnâ€™t get the news that fast, and when we did get it, there were other things on our mind in the little circle we lived in that occupied all of our time, I think.

Interviewer:

So where did you go to college?

Richard Duchossois:

Washington and Lee, down in Lexington, Virginia.

Interviewer:

And did your brother - or why did you pick Washington and Lee?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, no. My brothers didn't get to college. My next youngest brother, George, he was still in high school at military academy, and he went from military academy directly into the Army. He was an MP, and his MP Division was on the beach at Normandy. My youngest brother, he left high school, or the military academy in his senior year to join the Army, but he no sooner joined than the war was over. We didn't have you might say a lot of combat duty in the family.

Interviewer:

So how did you end up at Washington and Lee - what was, why did you choose to go there?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, it was real impressive. I took the hard way to get to pick a school out. I wanted to go to either Dartmouth or Washington and Lee. I didn't know anyone at Dartmouth and I did at Washington and Lee, so I went to Washington and Lee.

Interviewer:

How did Dartmouth and Washington and Lee get in your head? What was the -

Richard Duchossois:

I knew people that had gone to Dartmouth but had graduated, and I knew people that were at Washington and Lee at that time. It wasn't any great scholarship type thing, or it wasn't because of any particular studies. I didn't know what I wanted to be. I just went to college because you went to college when you finished high school.

Interviewer:

So had you picked a major -

Richard Duchossois:

No.

Interviewer:

At university - still too early?

Richard Duchossois:

At Washington and Lee, everyone in the first year, your freshman year, they pretty well tell you what you should take, get your basics in. And then you move on.

Interviewer:

So in your freshman year, were you in a - you were not in ROTC. You didn't have to be -

Richard Duchossois:

No.

Interviewer:

Because you were already qualified?

Richard Duchossois:

Not at Washington and Lee. Washington and Lee didn't have ROTC. Our campus was right next door to VMI. VMI was a military school, but I had had all of the ROTC type thing in high school. We had the same certificate of eligibility to become a Second Lieutenant in the Reserve that an ROTC in college would have.

Interviewer:

So Pearl Harbor is bombed, and President Roosevelt gives that famous speech. Did you hear that famous speech?

Richard Duchossois:

No, I didn't. We had something at the fraternity house that night, and most of us really didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was. We got out maps and looked, but it was the farthest thing from our mind. We were not war-oriented.

Interviewer:

So when did you find out you were going to become - you were going to leave school?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, Pearl Harbor was in December, and in January I got my orders to report for duty as a Second Lieutenant in the Reserve. I was to report to Camp Robinson in Little Rock, Arkansas, and I didn't even know where Little Rock was.

Interviewer:

So how did you feel about this?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, I was the first one to come out of Washington and Lee to be called to go into the service. I don't know. I just felt I'm supposed to do it. I know what I know, and I'm glad. It wasn't any great patriot move. It was here's another experience. I was delighted to go in.

Interviewer:

So what happened in Arkansas?

Richard Duchossois:

Beg your pardon?

Interviewer:

What happened in Arkansas when you got there?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, like any other placement unit in the Army, it's last in and first out. We got down there, oh, it was maybe 5:00. We all took the train down from Chicago. We got our assignments and what we were supposed to do, and because I'd been to military academy - there were a lot of draftees there - and I knew my right foot from my left foot, they said, "You've got a Company tomorrow morning to train. You're going to train them in bayonet training." I had never had a bayonet in my hands. I stayed up half the night with the Sergeant, Regular Army Sergeant. He taught me. We had a good class in bayonet the next day.

Interviewer:

How did your parents feel about this turn of events?

Richard Duchossois:

It was war, and we were going to do whatever we had to do, and I think they didn't want to see me go to war, but they knew that it was what we had to do.

Interviewer:

So in Arkansas, how long did you stay in Arkansas?

Richard Duchossois:

Oh, couldn't have been over five or six days, and then this last in, first out. They were forming units down at - or a unit down at Camp Hood, or Fort Hood - it was Camp Hood at that time - down near Abilene, Texas, with Tank Destroyers. I went, "What's a Tank Destroyer?" "Don't worry, you'll learn when you get down there." So they chapped out so many of us, and from that list, when we checked in we were Tank Destroyers from then on. Camp Hood at that time was just being built. We lived in tents.

Interviewer:

So you trained -

Richard Duchossois:

Beg pardon?

Interviewer:

So you trained to

Richard Duchossois:

Well, what we went through, a lot of what you might call basic training. We had a cadre down there of mostly Texas-Oklahoma people. They would've normally been the 90th Infantry Division. And we did basic military - no one really knew what Tank Destroyers were, and we had no manuals. So we were what we were, and we tried to understand what it was, and we were assigned to different Companies. Because I knew my right foot from my left foot and they had a bunch of draftees, they said, "That Company is yours. You train them, and here's what you're supposed to do." And then we gradually brought in some Officers. The Army kept switching Battalion Commanders, but the Battalion Commanders didn't know what Tank Destroyers were, either, so we just sort of felt our way along. We were there, oh, I would say maybe three months, and they said,

â€œDuchossois, youâ€™re going over to Fort Knox,â€ for I think it was six weeks training in Communications.

So I went over there and I learned Communications, but that was Communications for everything. Then I came back, and they said, â€œNow youâ€™re in charge of this Company,â€ and itâ€™s always been I got the charge of a Company. But I was 19 at that time. You do what youâ€™re told.

Interviewer:

And how long were you at Fort Knox?

Richard Duchossois:

Beg pardon?

Interviewer:

How long were you at Fort Knox?

Richard Duchossois:

How old?

Interviewer:

How long were you there?

Richard Duchossois:

Oh, I think it was six weeks; Iâ€™m not sure.

Interviewer:

And then did you go back to Camp Hood?

Richard Duchossois:

Then I went back to the same unit. Iâ€™ve never been with any other unit, then the 610th. When the 610th was formed, I was part of - well, I shouldnâ€™t say that. There was a cadre formed out of the 90th Infantry Division, but they were just - as soon as they got their cadre put together, then to put some troops in, I was with the first of the troops that went in. Then we werenâ€™t a full Battalion at that time; we still had to get more people.

Interviewer:

So tell me, what is a Tank Destroyer? What did you do? How did you train?

Richard Duchossois:

The Tank Destroyers - we had no equipment. But then eventually we moved from what they called a weapons carrier with a light gun on top of it, about a 37-millimeter, into vehicles called half tracks, and they had a 75-millimeter on it, and we trained with the half tracks for a while. There werenâ€™t enough to go around, so weâ€™d switch from Company to Company. One day you had half tracks and the next day you marched, so we learned to operate and shoot, and weâ€™d go out on the range. We did a lot of the plain everyday military thing - marching, formations - and then going through you might say what would be junior tactics of how to break your Squads and stuff up. When I went in, they still had the old Army uniforms. We wore the campaign caps. The Officers had Sam Browne belts, and so everything that we had down there was pretty much based upon what the old Regular Army had been.

And we had always a Regular Army Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel, who would come down, would be in charge of the Battalion, but they didnâ€™t really always understand what a Tank Destroyer was, either. So - and the Tank Destroyers were basically a combination of Artillery, Cavalry, and Infantry, and we were to use all three styles of warfare, but no one knew which was best. We had a motto: seek, strike, and destroy. Well, seek what? Where? Strike how? And destroy with what? So we really didnâ€™t understand yet, because the Army hadnâ€™t really formulized Tank Destroyers - even though this was the Tank Destroyer Center, they didnâ€™t have their manuals put together. And it kept changing, and as anything else in the Army, there were different opinions as to how they should be used. Some felt it should support the Infantry. Some said it should support the Artillery. Some said it should support Tanks. And some said, â€œWell, move them on their own.â€ So we tried to teach our people, â€œcause none of - I shouldnâ€™t say none, but very few had ever been in the National Guard or in the Army. They were civilians. So I think that what we were really doing maybe that first four, five, six months was teaching them how the

Army lived. The disciplines, the formation, the marching, and when you got an order, how you did it. What the ranks were - most of them didn't even know a Corporal from a Sergeant. So there was a lot of basic training. You're dealing with plain civilians that had no idea what the Army was, other than you wore a uniform. And those of us that had been in military academy of some sort, or those that had come out of the National Guard - I'm talking about the Officers - that was our responsibility to teach them that. When you get up in the morning, what Reveille was.

Get out there. Be first out there. What you wore, what you did. It was a different way of life for almost everyone, and once you got over that hump, then you were prepared to become a soldier.

Interviewer:

So as you were training, and the idea of the Tank Destroyer was evolving, did you start to have a sense of what might be possible or needed for the Tank Destroyer to operate? Or did that really have to wait until you saw combat?

Richard Duchossois:

I believe you've asked a question I never really thought about that way, but I think we didn't know, and we waited. And as a Company Commander, I felt my responsibility was to get the people in a military Army frame of mind with the disciplines and what they had to do, and later on we could teach other things. For instance, when the bazookas first came out, I'm trying to teach bazookas. Well, no one knew what a bazooka was, but I had to teach them not so much what to do and how to use it, but why you had a bazooka. Now, we knew we were Tank Destroyers. We knew we might be in a vehicle. We knew we might have a heavy gun. But we also knew that we had to fight on the ground. So if you're fighting on the ground, what do you do? And here you have this long tube. Well, that's going to be your Tank Destroyer for a while until you have something else.

So you improvise, you learn, you try to imagine, and I think this is where I benefitted the most. I didn't realize it at the time, but from military academy in high school, at that particular age, you become focused. We had a PMS&T, a Professor of Military Science and Tactics, who was Regular Army, and he always taught us second-best isn't good enough, and what you're going to do, always understand it's going to have a repercussion on something. And he said, "You have a job to do. You come second. Do your job first." And I think that when we got that frame of mind into our people, they gradually became disciplined to Army life. And when you're disciplined to Army life, you have to get to a point, I believe, and what we tried to get our men to do, if you see a problem coming up, you want to be able to have instinct solve it, because if they're going to be shooting at you, if you have to stop to say, "Should I shoot back?" you're dead by that time.

So we would have to develop it to the mind that would react rather than the mind say, "I've got to solve a problem." And I think those basic trainings were what brought us through the war the way we got through.

Interviewer:

So you were several months with this unit, this group of -

Richard Duchossois:

I beg your pardon?

Interviewer:

You were with this group of men for several months. Did you form very close relationships with them?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, in military academy we had Plebes, we had Third Classmen, we had Second Classmen, then we had the First Classmen. Each had your own sort of social class, to an extent. But you never got on a real close personal relationship, except in sports and academics, with the class below you, because we learned to respect rank. We learned to respect title. But then if you weren't being respected and you weren't taking your

proper authority and doing what you were supposed to do, generally someone would come along and what we used to call you got busted. Youâ€™re back a Private again.

Interviewer:

So when did you find out you were going to ship out to fight?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, we were going to ship out, I donâ€™t know, maybe three or four different times we got ready to go, and something happened and we got back. We started moving from different camps. We finally got to - oh, I canâ€™t think of the name of the camp now - Camp Kilmer, out I think in New Jersey. We were in and out of there, and then finally we moved up, because the boat that we were supposed to go on - any rumor goes in the Army, and most of those rumors are imagination. But that boat was theoretically sunk, so then we got back again. Then one day we got our orders to send everyone on vacation - or not vacation - on leave before we went overseas. Those that lived farthest should go first. So we let some of those go at noon. By 4:00 in the afternoon, we said, â€œGet them all back again,â€ and we shipped out at midnight that night.

So thereâ€™s an element of confusion sometimes that goes on, and itâ€™s not - confusionâ€™s the wrong word. Things change so fast. Circumstances change so fast that you had to be prepared to do it. I think that was good for us, because when we got to combat, there was no hour that was the same as the preceding hour, and you had to be prepared for whatâ€™s going to come up, and try to imagine what might be there. So you always had now we call it a plan B - we didnâ€™t call it anything then. We just tried to get prepared for it, what might happen.

Interviewer:

So when was that, that you shipped out finally?

Richard Duchossois:

We finally shipped out in I think it was â€˜44. We shipped out I think it was May of â€˜44. Iâ€™m not positive of that date, but it was around then. It was before the Invasion.

Interviewer:

And where were you headed?

Richard Duchossois:

Beg pardon?

Interviewer:

Where were you headed?

Richard Duchossois:

We were headed - we didnâ€™t know. We went up to Scotland, and then we went over on a boat by - I shouldnâ€™t say by ourselves. We were not in a convoy. We went over on a boat that could travel fast enough that - and we took the northern route and entered in Scotland, and then came down into London. And then we were moved down to a place called Pakenham Park, which was halfway between Birmingham and Coventry. It was an old estate, one of the noblesâ€™ estate. We were there for a little while. Then we went down - and at that time, we went over, we were with towed 3-inch guns, pulled by a half track, because as we left, we left with M-10s, which are self propelled, but the British got those and we got the others in exchange. Then we went on over to I canâ€™t think what, a place in southern England, to zero the guns in.

And then we came back up to what they called the Hards where we would get on the boat, the landing crafts, to go over to Normandy.

Interviewer:

So you didnâ€™t spend a lot of time in the United Kingdom before -

Richard Duchossois:

In where?

Interviewer:

In the United Kingdom, in England and Scotland, before you went over. You were there maybe a month or so?

Richard Duchossois:

No more than that. We didn't spend any time in Scotland. We landed there, took the train down to England, but we really never got in - we went through Scotland.

Interviewer:

So when did you invade? Were you -

Richard Duchossois:

We really didn't invade anything. The Invasion was over when we landed.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Richard Duchossois:

It was sometime in July, I believe, early July. I'm not sure of when it was, but the Invasion was over, and we were assigned at that time to the First Army, because Patton was still back in England. Then Patton eventually came over, and then we were assigned to Patton for a while. But then I'm not sure if it was before or after we were assigned to Patton, we were moving up toward the peninsula up there, and they counterattacked at Avranches, the Germans did. Then we were assigned then back in the First Army. And then after we got through Avranches, we went back up to Argentan, and then we were at the closing of the gap at Argentan. We got to Argentan and the orders that we had at the time were we shouldn't go beyond it.

There was the British or the Canadians, one or the other, were going to come down from Falaise, but they got held up at some fighting up there and they didn't get down, but we just stayed there. Because it would've been possible if they had come down, we could've closed the whole German Army, the Normandy - we would've enclosed and wrapped around the German Normandy Army, which was the bulk of their coast Army. But those things happen; in war, everything doesn't come the way you plan it, so we have to move on from there. And we got, we were pretty well shaken up at Avranches Gap.

Interviewer:

Can you tell me what happened?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, we were firing there, and they were firing back, and our Colonel, our Battalion Commander, and his Staff were up forward with A Company, and they all got killed - or killed and seriously wounded. And we had some other fighting that went on up there. It was pretty close fighting up there. Then after the gap was closed, we then were with the Third Army. We started toward the Rhine - actually, it was the Moselle River. It was a pretty fast - we were with the Third Army at that time. It was a pretty fast run across France. It was if you could say anything a glamorous run, because there was no resistance. When they talk about fighting our way across France, we didn't really fight our way across France. We drove across France. But Patton always had us out forward, and we went pretty fast.

When Paris fell, we were sitting in a place called Chalons-sur-Marne, which was quite a ways east of Paris. And when we got, from there we went on down to the Moselle River. By then, everyone was out of gas and ammunition and everything else. So when we got down to - or got down to the Moselle, in the Stars and Stripes we read about how the British took Pont-A-Mousson. That didn't make our guys happy, but that's what happens.

Interviewer:

So were you destroying tanks at any point that you went -

Richard Duchossois:

We did back in the Argentan-Falaise - or not the Argentan - yeah, the Argentan-Falaise Gap, we did. But then going across France, no. There weren't any to destroy. There was no Army, really, there. We just sort of went. It was a pretty glorious ride. Everyone came out.

Interviewer:

Did you drink any French wine when -

Richard Duchossois:

Beg pardon?

Interviewer:

Did you drink any French wine when you went across?

Richard Duchossois:

I think some of the men had a little bit, but I think the rest of us were pretty tired, and we just didn't have a chance to. We slept every time we had a break anywhere along the line to catch. We'd take turns, and grab a few hours here and a few hours there. Patton kept us moving.

Interviewer:

So what was your first combat? Was that at -

Richard Duchossois:

In Normandy. In Normandy, yeah.

Interviewer:

And did you face tanks there?

Richard Duchossois:

Yes, we did. We faced them, but I don't quite know how to - it wasn't actual tank fighting. The tanks were out farther, at a longer range than we liked to fight them. My unit, we wanted them to get up close, so every shot would count, and if you're shooting say 3-400 yards, or 500 yards out there, your accuracy is pretty well shot. And we just sort of felt we had a spirit, if we're going to shoot them, we're going to hit them. We aren't going to miss. That's how we felt in our unit. Some people felt that if you see them, shoot. It's a matter of what you think, how you're trained.

Interviewer:

So did you shoot -

Richard Duchossois:

Yeah, we shot.

Interviewer:

Even though they were so far away.

Richard Duchossois:

Yeah, we shot.

Interviewer:

What kind of tanks were they, do you know?

Richard Duchossois:

Back in the Argentan-Falaise Gap, I'm not sure. We didn't run into the major, the big Tiger tanks till later. But they had - it was - I've forgotten the name of what their tank was. It wasn't the Tiger tank.

Interviewer:

So when you made your way across France, what happened?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, we just kept going. The resistance was very slight; very slight. The troops weren't there. Patton - or Hitler and his group hadn't moved - didn't have the troops to move to stop us. They were back in Normandy, or what was left of them, and those that were there were trying to get out. Though they had to drop back, and the Moselle was really the next phase line that you had. And actually, people considered you get to Paris, and the war would be won. That was the feeling most people had, or most of the troops had. I don't know what the papers had, but that's what the troops had felt. But that was not the case, because up in the First Army they were fighting pretty heavy up there. And then Montgomery was going to make a major campaign. So all of our materiel - the gasoline, food, and everything - went up to Montgomery. That's why Patton had us stop at the Moselle. Our next big fight was the Moselle, across the Moselle.

Interviewer:

So what happened at the Moselle?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, we sat on the west side of the Moselle for some time, and they would, the Germans

would come up. There wasn't a lot of resistance over there. When we got to the Moselle, I had to send one Platoon of Tank Destroyers out through Nancy, to see how far the Germans were up there. There weren't any Germans out there, or what there were, there were just stragglers. But they got out pretty far, and the Metz would be the next big place, and that's where they had their training center, where the fort was. But we didn't see anything to speak of, other than scattered resistance that you always have. So we had to pull back, and then we sat on the west side of the Moselle for, I don't know, must've been close to ten days. They would send - the Germans gradually started filling in then on that west side, and just kept our attention by shooting at us, and we would shoot back.

It wasn't really fighting; it was a matter of just keeping you on your toes.

Interviewer:

So did you find combat frightening?

Richard Duchossois:

I was more fortunate than many. If you're commanding a unit, you have so many things going on all the time, you don't have time to do it. You only have time to think about your job and what you're doing. Now, if you were, say, a G.I. in a foxhole, or say you were a gunner in a gun position that didn't have anything to do, you have time to think about what you're doing, about what the consequences and so forth might be. I believe I learned in Normandy, when I was over there for the 70th anniversary, and I would hear some of the guides talk about what happened here, there, and the next place, and I also read some of the books and heard some of the lectures. And it didn't dawn on me till we were standing down there on the beach, and these guys are very, very good and very knowledgeable, but it's who did they talk to? I didn't mean to be a smart ass, but I asked, 'cause we had a very small group.

I think there were only eight or ten. And he was talking about when the landing craft came in, and I asked, 'Was it at high tide or low tide?' And he just sort of looked at me, 'What difference does it make?' Well, I could guesstimate that where we were at, well, Utah Beach, it was 300 yards, pretty close to that. Now, if you came in at real low tide, you had a lot of beach to get across; that meant you were scattered. If you came in at a much higher tide, that meant you're bunched up, and they could just shoot at anything. But if you came in at too high a tide, I would imagine that the landing craft would drop you off sooner, 'cause if the tide was going down, they couldn't get out. You know, their propellers and so forth would get stuck in the sand.

And I also learned there, hearing some of the people talk, the guides over there, if it were a G.I., a Private, Corporal or so, trying to get across that beach, he was concerned about he's going to get across that beach. You know, some would be helping their friend, but he's going to get across. He's got to have hell scared out of him. If you get on up to, say, a Lieutenant, he's trying to gather his Platoon together. The Captain, he's got even more on his mind trying to keep his Company; 'Are we in the right spot?' All the way up the line. So the fellow I really feel sorry for was the enlisted man, down at the bottom; he really just took care of himself, maybe his buddy on either side of him. But the higher your rank, the more your responsibility, the less time you had, so you had to be going across. You say, 'Are you scared?' I guess you're always scared, but you go on adrenaline. And anyone that tells you they're not scared isn't really telling you the truth, but your adrenaline overtakes all of that, and your responsibility overtakes it. You have a job to do, and you're going to do the best you can to get there.

Interviewer:

Did your relationship to it change; I mean did you get used to it as the war wore on?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, you might - how do you mean, my relationship?

Interviewer:

Your relationship to your fear, but do you get used to it? Do you get used to the adrenaline?

Richard Duchossois:

I think you get used to it. You get very sensitive. When there's shooting, say the artillery's coming in, you learn to hear, "Well, that one's going to go over. Well, this one's going to drop short." You don't stop and think about it; you react to what the sound is. And when they're shooting the Screaming Mimis at you, you hear "sht" and they're coming pretty fast, but you can tell if they're going to go over you. You don't stop and think, "Oh, those are going over." You either duck, or you keep going. It's what you get used to. It's the same thing as when you're in June, or in July, August, and into September. We had pretty decent weather. You learn to live outside in that weather, and you learn to - your body adapted to it. I went back to a hospital in mid-September, didn't get back to the troops until November, before Thanksgiving.

In the meantime, we'd gone through the fall session, and it took me several weeks to get back to the climate and the conditions, "cause the leaves were off the trees then and it was different. Your body adjusts, I think; your mind adjusts. If you had the military training, you have learned to react to the conditions that are surrounding you. You automatically start thinking, "Well I do this, that's going to be repercussion - how's that going to result?" So you start thinking of the results of what your action is going to be. That's where an Officer comes in. The enlisted man, he just sort of has to do what he is told to do, and do the very best he can, and use his own innovation on there. But he doesn't have as much responsibility. For his particular job he has a responsibility, but the higher the rank, the more responsibility, the more intuition you should develop. And if you don't develop it, maybe you should be replaced.

Interviewer:

So did you have - did you find that your soldiers were, that some of them really did have trouble because of the had too much time to think, where you had to actually urge and lead them on? Or was everybody pretty much well-trained?

Richard Duchossois:

Back in the States, we got to be known as a well-trained, pretty good outfit, so other Tank Destroyer Battalions would send their people to train with us. In the Army, you're a number. I'd always - when they came to train in my Company, I'd always keep the best and send my run-dums, so by the time we left, we had some pretty good people. But I also learned there that some of the people that are really good in there, you say, "Boy, that's the model you should have," they're all conversation. And when you get into combat, it changes when the first bullets come over; it changes. But if you picked out good people, and have been very competitive back in training, generally speaking, you're going to have damn good combat soldiers, because you have people that can think. But if you wait for the people that have to be told every move that they have to make, you aren't going to have good soldiers.

I also found that sometimes you have Company Commanders in the States that are probably the most popular that they can be, and everyone knows them. Oftentimes they get called by their first name. They generally have the highest VD rate, they have the highest AWOL rate, they have the lousiest inspections, but they're really popular. Those were much tighter in the military; they aren't so popular. But when you get into combat and you get all your guys across to a given mission with almost no casualties, the other guy has troops that even break on him, because they don't have the respect, they don't have the training, pretty soon they're the ones taking the guy that has the heavy discipline. It's all about discipline, and it's a mindset. And the mindset comes from the discipline.

Interviewer:

Did you lose any guys in France?

Richard Duchossois:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

You did.

Richard Duchossois:

Not in a - we did - our heaviest casualties came down on the Moselle, and that's because we had to stop, and we were zeroed in, and the Germans had an opportunity to reinforce the east side of the Moselle River, and there we had a pretty good scrap.

Interviewer:

And does that threaten the discipline at all?

Richard Duchossois:

Beg pardon?

Interviewer:

When you lose guys, did that threaten the discipline?

Richard Duchossois:

My outfit lost hardly anyone, except me.

Interviewer:

So tell me what happened to you. Where was it, and when was it?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, I can't remember if it was maybe the third day after we had crossed. The Germans would come down from Metz, but they couldn't ever completely get their act together. One time the smoke would come in first, and the Artillery, and then they'd send their Tanks and Infantry in. The next day, the Tanks and Infantry would come, and then the Artillery would fall on their own troops, and went back and forth with that. But I think it was about the third day they got all their act together and came at the same time. And I had one of my people come back to my Command - I put my Command Post with the First Platoon. And one of the guys came back and said, "Captain, they're overrunning you. They're going to outflank you." So my driver and I went up to make sure that I knew what the situation was, and I got caught up there, and they were coming in. I didn't have a radio in my jeep at the time. He went back to get some reinforcements, and I was trying to hold some people off, and I got hit then.

I saw the guy.

Interviewer:

Where did you get hit?

Richard Duchossois:

I got hit in the side and it went across my back, and I was paralyzed then. It didn't hit the nerves, but it cut all the muscles, and that's what paralyzed me. It shocked the nerves, so I couldn't move, just my head. But my guys came up and got me and pulled me out, and I got back.

Interviewer:

So what hospital did you go to?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, I ended up going back to I believe the first train - I can't think of the name of the town now - out, going back to Paris, and I was in Paris then. You go through your - first you go to your Battalion - first they've got to get you back to Battalion, then they, you go to a field hospital, then they shove you out from there. They sort of sort you out, to a degree. And then I was in Paris, and every day they would come in, and they'd take a group out. They'd call you ZI, for going back to the Zone of Interior, and I was in, the hospital I was in, they had the Officers' Ward, then they had one room in back I guess that had been a private room back there, but we had five beds in there. But it kept dropping out; those were the guys I guess that weren't going to make it. Every time I'd wake up, I'd see different people in there. Then we got to a point then I was - I think they were just giving me shots to keep me asleep, because I slept most of the time, so I wasn't in any real pain or anything else.

I just couldn't move. But when I could move and look over, there'd always be new people in the bed, in the other beds there. Well, one day, they were able to - I got up.

â€˜Cause theyâ€™d come along and stick a needle in the bottom of your foot and see if you feel it, but first day I felt that needle coming, I was ready to go dancing that night. I still couldnâ€™t move. But then a fellow, a British Aircraft guy had lost a leg, and he was in there, and he didnâ€™t want to go back and get to England. So we got together, and when theyâ€™d come the nurse would help us get out, and weâ€™d go back to the other room. Finally my guys came up and got me, and I just went out the window, went back to my troops.

Interviewer:

So how long was your recovery?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, I got back - I donâ€™t know the exact time; Iâ€™ve forgotten. It was before Thanksgiving, though. I went in on the 15th of September, and I got back before Thanksgiving.

Interviewer:

So it was a couple of months.

Richard Duchossois:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

And when you got -

Richard Duchossois:

The Battalion Surgeon took care of me for a while then.

Interviewer:

So your guys actually came to get you, and you -

Richard Duchossois:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Left with them. They came to visit, or -

Richard Duchossois:

Well, you see, in those days, when you got out, your - -, you very seldom went back to your own outfit. Youâ€™d go back into a pool, and then theyâ€™d send you out from there. But my - they sent a truck up from wherever they were at the time. We went out the side door. No one ever knew.

Interviewer:

They wanted you back, huh?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, I donâ€™t know if they wanted me back, but they came and got me anyway. But it really didnâ€™t make much difference. They were so busy in those hospitals; they needed extra beds all the time. And if someone was gone, they knew you were - where were you going to go? Youâ€™re going to go back to your troops, or youâ€™re going to be shipped over, Z.I.ed, which would be to London and then back to the States. Youâ€™re just - you become a number. But believe me, you couldnâ€™t say more for those nurses and the care that you got. It was excellent. I was just down with some of the Medal of Honor people, and got to know this one fellow. He had a Medal of Honor from Vietnam, and he was telling me from the time he got wounded until the time you were back at a station was really almost minutes. Theyâ€™d pick you up and take you back. Verdun was the name of the town we were in.

It took us - I was on the first hospital train going out of Verdun - and Iâ€™ve forgotten, it was about almost a full day before we got back, and itâ€™s not - you can drive it in a few hours. But they had to repair track, they had to repair things that go back, â€˜cause we were the first hospital train to go. The old French railroad, where you have a boxcar, and you have the pegs in the side of the boxcar, and a 55-gallon drum in the middle where you put the food to keep the boxcar on. And I think we were two or three decks high, and theyâ€™d put the stretcher on the deck and you go back. And they werenâ€™t anything like Iâ€™d seen in the movies, these big hospital trains.

Interviewer:

So when you went back to fight, had you recuperated 100%, or were you still weak - do you remember?

Richard Duchossois:

I remember I was barely walking.

Interviewer:

You were barely walking?

Richard Duchossois:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

So what -

Richard Duchossois:

Beg pardon?

Interviewer:

So what happened? So you went back to the -

Richard Duchossois:

Well, the Battalion Surgeon took care of me for a while, and then you just do it. You get up and - I donâ€™t know what makes you get up. You do it. Thatâ€™s - your whole life changes, and you adapt to the conditions that are around you. And you know youâ€™ve got a job to do, and you do it. Itâ€™s just like you learn to eat K-rations or C-rations. You donâ€™t like them, but you eat them. Itâ€™s all youâ€™ve got, so you do it.

Interviewer:

So when you went back, what were you guys doing then; what was your -

Richard Duchossois:

Well, we got, we had, the Battalion was equipped with 90-millimeter Tanks then. It was up to me to learn what they were all about. But a part of the lessons that I learned on the Moselle, our first night there I was again stationed at my CP with the First Platoon, and we moved in at dark. And it was a clump of woods that looked over the road that the Germans would have to come down if they were going to come. And I told my Lieutenant where to put one of the 50-caliber machine gun, in a gully that came up that hill. Well, the Germans came, and pretty forceful, and I said, â€œTheyâ€™re going to come up there,â€ and they did. And we had more Germans in our area there, in that little patch of woods, than we had our own people, and we got rid of the Germans.

And I went over and I asked the Lieutenant, â€œDidnâ€™t we say we were going to put a machine gun right in that gully?â€ He said, â€œI did.â€ I said, â€œShow me.â€ There were two gullies. So I learned an expression: donâ€™t expect what you didnâ€™t inspect. Every desk in my Company - all my Companies - had that little sign on it: donâ€™t expect what you didnâ€™t inspect. It was my fault, not his. I didnâ€™t know there were two gullies, and he didnâ€™t know there were two gullies. He got the wrong gully, and they came up the one I was worried about. So you learn as you go; itâ€™s on the job training, if you can look at it. Youâ€™re not going to learn these things in the classroom. Youâ€™re not going to learn it out of a textbook. You have to be there, and you have to make fast decisions, but all your decisions, somewhere in the computer mind, back here, it tells you what to do and why.

If you had to stop and think about it, youâ€™d probably do something different. Itâ€™s I think leadership develops from the man that has the instincts that are proper, and can get them done and done now, and doesnâ€™t stop and take a lot of time to think about it, â€œcause if you do, youâ€™re gone. You donâ€™t have time in war. War is a - as horrible as it is - is a tremendous training ground; a tremendous training ground. I remember that first night when we got our first counterattack. A very close friend of mine - I had mentioned having to go into Nancy to see how far back - was back in the area of the Moselle where we crossed, which is between Nancy and Dieulouard. It had been a pretty good battleground in the First World War, and there were these big craters there. And they threw

a lot of artillery in that night, and he took, he and his driver dived into one. And I got word a round landed right in there with them. It stripped his driver from the waist up. I donâ€™t mean of his uniform - skin and all. And he had his head blown from his thing there. We got up there and got them, but I spent a good bit of that night with a patch, trying to keep his brains in. You learn the dirty, filthy part of war. War is not what you really - most of it - I havenâ€™t seen any movies lately on war, but thereâ€™s a dirty part of it, an exciting part, and when you stop, and youâ€™re doing that, and theyâ€™re your closest friends, and theyâ€™re people that work for you, itâ€™s sort of youâ€™re learning another chapter. You learn that you got business, and you have to move on, and thatâ€™s the hard thing to do. Itâ€™s a very hard thing. But that was the first of several times when something similar to that happened. You canâ€™t stop and whine and cry about it.

Interviewer:

Did he survive?

Richard Duchossois:

We were both on the same hospital train going back to Paris, but he died in Paris.

Interviewer:

So in line with this idea that you sort of have to do a lot of improvising -

Richard Duchossois:

I beg your pardon.

Interviewer:

You have to do a lot of improvising, it sounds like, when youâ€™re at war. Do you - what other challenges did you face, other than Tank Destroying? Did you have -

Richard Duchossois:

Other than?

Interviewer:

Other than Tank Destroying - what other kinds of jobs did you find that you all had to do?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, no one really knew how to use Tank Destroyers. If you report to a Battalion Commander, he might have one idea of, â€œIâ€™ve got to take this town over there; you guys go through and clean it out.â€ Then you talk to another one, â€œI want you to go in and shoot a lot of stuff into the town.â€ You talk to another one, â€œYour mission is you know that the Germans would have their guns zeroed in on a village, on all the crossroads and so forth, so your job would be, â€œGo through the buildings and blow holes in it so we donâ€™t have to go down the street; we can go through the buildings that way.â€ Whatever the job happened to be, that was what we did.

Interviewer:

So what happened after Metz - what was your next?

Richard Duchossois:

Then we had to go through the - I think it was the Maginot. Yeah, we went through the Maginot Line. We went through the two different lines several times, â€˜cause we got in and got switched around. It was the Maginot Line that was our next job to go through, and that wasnâ€™t too difficult. We read how difficult it was, but it wasnâ€™t that bad. At that time, a lot of the Germans had dispersed, or gone back, and it was a demoralized group. We were starting to see older people. We were starting to see troops coming in on bicycles, which meant they were out of fuel and so forth. And we hit the Maginot Line then, and you learn again that regardless of rank, you donâ€™t always think things through as fast as you can, and sometimes you react and react wrong.

Let me give you a for-instance on there. We were going through the Maginot Line, and we got stopped. It was with a Division; the Regimental Commander was there. Iâ€™d better not even go into the names of the thing. But they had a tank trap in front of the pillboxes. The pillboxes were back maybe 40, 45, 50 yards from the, where the German had his gun in the pillbox. And it was about as deep as this room. Well, you canâ€™t get a tank across there, and they had stopped the Infantry. And one of my Lieutenants was working with him at the time. He said, â€œGet him across your tanks and knock out that pillbox.â€ Hell,

there was no way on God's green earth we could get our tanks across there. So in the excitement, he said, "You're under arrest - go back." So Lou came back and told me about it. I went over and talked to the guy, the Colonel.

And said, "Don't worry. We'll get your pillbox knocked out. That's our job." I had no idea in the world what - now, I had my First Platoon in reserve, but the Lieutenant was out on reconnaissance. So I took him and you know that the tank traps can't go forever, and you know the tanks don't go through woods, but we've got woods to the left of us. So I just got them and we went around, we circled the whole thing, came in through the back, and we knocked him out. But the thing is that the Regimental Commander got so excited because he was on the point. We were making a push and Patton was pushing him, and the Division Commander, and all the way up, and he made a bad decision, or he made a bad judgment, "cause there was no way we could get across a tank trap. But his Infantry couldn't get across it, either, so here he puts someone back.

So regardless of what your rank is, what you think you are, a fatigue comes in when you're fighting long enough, and they had been fighting. You don't always think clearly, so you have to stop for a second and catch your breath, and then combat does many things to people, and everyone reacts different. It isn't out of fear; it's out of what have you been trained for. What experience have you had, "cause you're not going to read about these things in the books. You have to learn to react, and react fast, and do it the right way. Otherwise, you're going to lose people. And it was the simplest thing in the world - you just go around and go behind him. They can't turn their big guns around. So we got back there, remembered in Tennessee we had hand signals, "cause we didn't have any radios to take to the tanks. I go to hand signals. Everyone remembered what those hand signals were. I was surprised that I remembered them.

The 90-millimeter gun shot him and nothing happened, so okay, we'll take all four guns and hit him, fire at the same time. We did, and the - we didn't go through the pillbox. The concussion inside from those four rounds of 90-millimeter hit all about the same time; then the Germans came out. We went back to where we were to go, and the Infantry got across, and everyone was happy. It's a matter of stopping to think and keeping cool, because if you get too excited and you let your emotions get too high, you're going to make bad decisions. But this comes from training. If that same thing had happened, say, several months before, I probably wouldn't have done the same thing the Colonel would've said. Your emotions get there, so. And to say you're working constantly without sleep, you're going to do all those things, you aren't. You have to rest your people every now and then.

You have to give them some sleep. Otherwise, their mind doesn't get back in gear, and it's different with different people.

Interviewer:

So when you told the Colonel you couldn't drive the tanks through, did he -
Richard Duchossois:

I didn't tell him anything. I just said, "Yes sir, I'll get it done."

Interviewer:

Did he understand -

Richard Duchossois:

Beg pardon?

Interviewer:

Did he understand that you were saying, "I'm not going to follow your order," or did he -

Richard Duchossois:

All he wanted to know, someone's going to knock that pillbox out so I can get across. He had done his job. Get the pillbox knocked out so he can get across. He didn't give a God damn how it got done.

Interviewer:

Okay. So did you ever have -

Richard Duchossois:

He didn't get through the war. We found him later, being eaten by a bunch of hogs. Some people get emotional and move too fast, and some stop and think things out. Some react. The guy who just reacts because he's had the experience and he's done it, he's going to be the guy that's going to be first on the phase line.

Interviewer:

Did you ever have any interactions with Patton?

Richard Duchossois:

No. I saw him several times, but going to, you know.

Interviewer:

Did you have an impression of him? What did you think about him?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, as far as my troops were, we thought he was God. He pushed us awfully hard and we'd cuss him out, but all G.I.s, they have to have something to bitch about. When they quit bitching, you've got trouble. You'd better start looking to see what's wrong.

Interviewer:

So when did you face the Tiger tanks?

Richard Duchossois:

It was right after that; that's the first time we really hit major Tiger tanks.

Interviewer:

So what happened?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, we had to shoot at them, and we got some and we missed some, but we finally - we were on the border of Germany when I learned another lesson. I learned a lesson every day. They would - we were coming across a valley, and it was clear, and then all of a sudden, the woods came up. A little one of their - I've forgotten what they called those tanks - it was smaller than a Tiger. They had put it out as bait, and we'd shoot at it, but the Tiger would be sitting back in the woods a little bit farther; but from our flash it would know exactly where we were, and boom. That only happened to us once. They were tricky people. But they were good. The main part, we had pretty good soldiers, or the Germans had pretty good soldiers. It wasn't too often that we got what I call the bicycle corps. Those are the old men and stuff.

Interviewer:

So was it hard to take out a Tiger tank?

Richard Duchossois:

It's hard to take out any tank. The first tanks that we ran had too much armor on them, and our Sherman tanks, with their 76 or 3-inch - or I think it was 76 they had on there - they'd bounce off of the tank. So you have to learn to hit them in the sponson when you can, if you've got the small one. That's between the track and where the tank body is. And if you get in there, it'll blow them all apart. The Tiger tank, if you try to take them on headfirst, we couldn't get through them. You have to hit them in the side with a 90-millimeter, will go through the side of a Tiger tank. But if you can hit them right above the tracks, you've got a sure kill. That's what we would shoot for. Now, when your guys, your gunners have had a lot of experience in shooting, that's what you're getting, 'cause they're inside that tank there, that's their job. They learn pretty fast. When someone's shooting at you, you learn faster than you do out of a textbook.

Interviewer:

So what is skip ricochet fire?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, we learned that on the Moselle. We had at that time 3-inch towed guns, and we have a flat trajectory, where the Artillery has an arching one. On the nose of each shell, it can go

delayed fire or armor-piercing. They would put Infantry up there, I guess to sort of tease us a little bit, and we couldn't really hit them with our direct fire on there, 'cause you know, it'd just shoot right through it. So a couple of our gunners got the idea, well, we'll put it on delayed fire, hit in front of them, and when it hits the ground it'll go up, and with the delayed action, it'll burst up above them. It would be the same as Artillery. So we started that - I was telling someone about it - right near the very end of the war. "Oh hell, we've been doing that right along." We thought we were pretty sharp - we weren't. There's nothing you can get over, past a G.I. They're very innovative people, and particularly a gunner.

Interviewer:

So when you got through the Tiger tanks, I mean you said that was where you faced the most resistance -

Richard Duchossois:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

From the Germans, was it -

Richard Duchossois:

Well, from the German tanks that's where we - but you have tanks all the time. But we - when they say seek, strike, destroy, that isn't really what we did. We did a number of other things. But when there were tanks there we had to shoot them. But did we get into what you'd read about tank battles, where you're shooting right at each other in an open field? We never had that. There weren't that many Tankers that had that, either, but you'll see it in the movies. But that doesn't say it didn't happen; it did happen, but it didn't happen as often as one might think.

Interviewer:

So when you broke - did you say you broke through there?

Richard Duchossois:

Going into -

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Richard Duchossois:

This was what I'm talking about, that part was we were assigned to a new Division. I've forgotten what number it was. And it looked like out in front of us like a low valley, and the borderline of Germany ran through there, and this new Division came in. We knew the Germans were just on the other side in the woods, and we were on the high ground on this side. And the Division Commander said, "You guys put your tanks down there and go through." Well, that was suicide, you know. You don't do it. He never knew in the line. So we stayed on the hill. We substituted and looked like we were going to go, but we kept my other tanks up on top of the hill. And every time a German tank would shoot at anything down there, we could pick their flash up. But then they came in with that non-flash type ammunition, so it was hard to pick them out after a while, but you'd always pick them out. The Germans were very well-trained, most of the troops.

However, there were always somebody that would goof up, and you always look for their fault, and you'll find it, 'cause they always have a fault somewhere. They do something wrong and that's what you have to be looking for. If you think that they're going to be doing what they're supposed to be doing, you're going to get left.

Interviewer:

So when you look back over the course of your journey through Europe, was there a particular moment that you felt was the biggest challenge?

Richard Duchossois:

I guess the biggest challenge is stay awake. I can't think of one that's bigger.

They're all challenges. One of the best Lieutenants that I had - he commanded the

Second Platoon - came from your school, out of West Point. He graduated on one day, he had a day off, next day reported to our outfit, so he didn't even get the break after. He went all the way - he's buried in Arlington Cemetery up here.

Interviewer:

So where were you when the Germans surrendered?

Richard Duchossois:

We were - where was the Army down there? We'd just been moved down there. We were about halfway between Metz and - not - yeah - not Metz. Oh - where the beer festival is - it's a plain. I can't think of the name of the town now, the big town.

Interviewer:

Munich.

Richard Duchossois:

Munich - we were halfway between Munich and the Alps. And from Munich to the Alps, it's as flat as this floor, and it was snowing a little bit that day. We knew the war was over ten days before that, because all the P.O.W.s and the German prisoners kept coming back and coming back and coming back. Although we went into concentration camps, we didn't conquer any, or force our way, or fight our way in. They had all - the Germans had all left, really, and they were all their prisoners or their P.O.W.s and so forth. They were coming out. And it was a terrible thing to see those camps.

Interviewer:

Were there people still in them when you saw them, or?

Richard Duchossois:

Yeah, there were people in there, but for almost, well, particularly the last two, three days, when the guards were all gone, they'd be coming out, and they were just skin and bones. You'd say, "How could anyone even be alive when you look like that?" Their wrists and their elbows and that, it was just really skin - like a big thing here, a skinny bone coming up here, and then a big elbow. The joints were there, and their faces were all - it was terrible. But you could smell them from way back - not the people. You'd smell the camps as you got - before you could see them, you could smell them.

Interviewer:

So -

Richard Duchossois:

And when we were going down that way, the wind was coming out of the south, and we could smell that. It's a terrible smell. You never get rid of it.

Interviewer:

So were you guys the first at any camps? Did you liberate any camps?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, I wouldn't say anyone liberated a camp. I think they were all liberated by themselves. But were we first into any? I don't recall. Everyone was first into one. Oh yeah. It depends upon who you talk to.

Interviewer:

So the war's over, or the European theater, the war's over. What was your feeling? How - did you guys celebrate at all, or?

Richard Duchossois:

No. No. We didn't. We were too tired. We went back up to I can't think of the name of the town, and they felt the Russians were coming through, and the Germans all had the shades pulled, and no lights or anything. And then we went, we were moved up to Nuremberg, and then the military government hadn't caught up with us, so then our Battalion, we broke down into different groups. We got different assignments. I was over in Kreis Eichstatt. A Kreis is bigger than a county, but it's not as big as a state, and we had to take over the military government until the military government troops got there, which was maybe three months after that. In our little group, we had two or three Officers. I had I think maybe five or six enlisted men. You're the Burgermeister, you're the jail master, you're the judge, you're the whole shebang, the jailkeeper.

But you found that maybe all of them really didnâ€™t - they werenâ€™t really Nazis, but they were very, very disciplined. I told my kids about how the discipline went, and I think it was on Tuesdays - it was one day that I would hold court. And they would come, the Germans would come in, and they want permission to go into the next Kreis so they would - to do anything. So this elderly couple came in. I donâ€™t know, they had to be really old. He was on a cane and so forth. And first they wanted a pass so they could go to the next Kreis to visit their family or whatever. Fine, whatâ€™s wrong with that? Then he said, â€œWell, is it okay if we leave today?â€ â€œWell, you leave whenever you want.â€ We went through the thing. And they said - he asked for several other things, which I thought were perfectly normal. Then they came back about 15, 20 minutes later, and asked this - and the lady was crying.

Because - and he asked one of our people there, and he said, â€œWell, youâ€™d better go see the Captain again.â€ And he came up and I said, â€œWell, what was wrong?â€ She said, â€œWell, I forgot to ask you. We want to kill our pig.â€ â€œYeah, well, go ahead and kill him.â€ â€œBut you havenâ€™t told us who to divide it with.â€ So thatâ€™s how disciplined they were. Their own pig, they had to get permission who to divide it with. Now, when you say the discipline of their troops, it wasnâ€™t just the troops. It was everybody that was disciplined that way.

Interviewer:

Do you think they were disciplined or afraid?

Richard Duchossois:

I think thereâ€™s - on occasions like that, I donâ€™t think thereâ€™s much difference. I think that youâ€™re living in that atmosphere. Youâ€™ve been doing it. Youâ€™re getting around. But you know that if you donâ€™t do it, youâ€™ve got a problem. Yeah, could be afraid, but youâ€™re automatically doing it. Why do the guys here get up at Reveille? I ask you that. Because youâ€™re supposed to. Well, these guys are supposed to get those answers.

Interviewer:

So were they surprised by your flexibility, by your relatively casual -

Richard Duchossois:

I think they were. I think they were. They thought we were weak, that we would just give into it, I think, because theyâ€™d been disciplined to the Army. You know, I - I had a so-called secretary - sheâ€™d been secretary to the Burgermeister. She could speak better English than I could, and she knew more about Chicago than I knew. Her husband was Colonel General Von something. His job was to get the supplies across the pole for the German Army. But they had some very, very intelligent people over there, and they had some others who were just waiting; if theyâ€™d scratch their nose, theyâ€™d get permission. It was a discipline there that I - it was one we didnâ€™t understand, and they didnâ€™t understand us. The Papal Embassy had moved down to Eichstatt, a little village I was in.

And they had used a building. I thought they were all gone. And the hospital had been in, the field hospital, first the Colonel came down, and they wanted to move down, and that was a perfect place for them to be. And he said, â€œCould we move in here while weâ€™re going back to the States?â€ â€œAbsolutely you can move in.â€ That was I think on a Friday afternoon, and Saturday in the early evening, he came down and said, â€œYou ready to move?â€ He said, â€œWeâ€™re not coming.â€ You know, the Germans had no communications, but from the time we said, â€œYes, you could come in,â€ they had to go back to Regensburg to the Third Army to get the permission to do the moving. Apparently that went back to the States through the Catholic group. Iâ€™m not Catholic. You might understand it better than I. They said, â€œNo, you canâ€™t move. You canâ€™t touch any Church property.â€

Because - and this hadnâ€™t been - they had just moved in there from come down from Berlin. It wasnâ€™t, you know, built for them. So there was a communications network that

was going on that we had no idea what it was. And when we let them have all of their religious holidays, the Catholic Church must have a holiday every day. Every day theyâ€™d have the parades or the - they were entirely different people than what we thought they were - the ones that we saw. That doesnâ€™t mean they were all that way, but the ones that we saw were that way.

Interviewer:

So over the three months that you were there in that period, did they -

Richard Duchossois:

Beg pardon?

Interviewer:

Over the three months, did they change? Did there start to be any mutual appreciation?

Richard Duchossois:

I donâ€™t know. We were up then in Nuremberg, and our Battalion had the assignment to clean up all the stuff around there, put different Platoons. And one of the things that I personally had was to clean up the - canâ€™t think of the name of the hotel now. It was the major hotel - I canâ€™t think of the name right now. We got that sort of rehabilitated.

Thereâ€™d been a bomb come down from the Air Force right in the middle. It was right on the square up there, next to the walled city. And we moved up there, got it in pretty good shape. Some workers wanted to work, some didnâ€™t, and some - I donâ€™t know where they lived, but they would come in. But they were fairly disciplined when they got a leader, and you had to find out who was going to be their leader there. We got it all dressed up real nice. The War Crimes Commission came and took over. They moved us on out to a little place - I canâ€™t think of the - it was out far east, or far west of Nuremberg.

It was an Air Force base out there. The service, when youâ€™re in - I look at World War II as the last civilized war. The enemy had a uniform. You could tell where he was. You had phase lines. Today itâ€™s Indian warfare, jungle warfare, like they had to a degree in the Pacific. So all of the tactics that we would have then are probably very inferior for now, and certainly obsolete, because you have to think the way the enemy thinks. And I donâ€™t think we have learned to think the way the enemy weâ€™re fighting thinks now. Though it might be somewhere, maybe theyâ€™re teaching it down here, how they think, because itâ€™s all - I found in business itâ€™s the same thing. You got to think the way your competitor thinks, so you can find a way around them.

Interviewer:

So what happened next for you? Did you think you - was there any possibility you might prepare for the Japanese invasion, or?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, I wanted to switch and become a paratrooper, go to Japan, but you couldnâ€™t. Well, first, Iâ€™d been wounded and I wasnâ€™t physically fit. But second, they were winding down over there. We were always hoping weâ€™d be sent back to the States, though we kept moving around, and they had these cigarette, called them cigarette camps. These were the staging areas for troops that would be moving out. We did nothing, really. Close order drill, baseball, things of that sort in that fall, the end of the summer and fall. It just sort of fizzles away. There is no one definite time you could - we see the pictures of, you know, Times Square and all that, all the celebrating and that. We had no part of that. Not that we wouldnâ€™t have liked to have been there, but we were just tired.

Interviewer:

So did you stay in Europe, then, for the next several months -

Richard Duchossois:

Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer:

And then did you -

Richard Duchossois:

We didnâ€™t get out until I think it was October. I didnâ€™t get home until early December. But we moved to several different places. Everything was on a point system.

Our guys had all sorts of points, but we were a separate Battalion, and so we didn't fit into the Army slot, and they'd move a Division, see. "Division so-and-so, all your people with such-and-such points, go." Not being attached to it, we weren't part of that. So finally they worked down to the different units of service, and then got into them, but the others got out first, before we did. And we just sort of stayed there in military government, and then after the military government people came, they had no place to put us, so we just went to these cigarette camps. Those are the ports of debarkation.

Interviewer:

So when you came back to the States, where did you go?

Richard Duchossois:

Home.

Interviewer:

What base did you go - did you have to go to a -

Richard Duchossois:

I went - we went from Europe, we went to Camp McCoy and got out of the Army. We got our discharge there, and then came home. We didn't have any duty in the United States coming back.

Interviewer:

So you got married during the war?

Richard Duchossois:

I got married before the war.

Interviewer:

Before the war.

Richard Duchossois:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

Oh. So did you -

Richard Duchossois:

I shouldn't say before the war - before I went overseas. Before I went overseas.

Interviewer:

Where did you meet your wife?

Richard Duchossois:

I met her up in Michigan. My folks and her folks had summer homes close to the different lakes, and I met her up there. When you're in school like I was in high school, you didn't have time really to do a lot of dating, and if you had to go any distance, you didn't do it. You dated - what few dates you'd have would be right in the neighborhood. Then when we got to college, then I would date more, but she was at Beloit and I was at Washington and Lee.

Interviewer:

And so did you - so when did you get married?

Richard Duchossois:

Got married - oh Jesus - she's dead now, but she'd kill me anyway if I said I couldn't remember the date. It had to be I want to say '44. It'd be just before we went overseas, so it had to be in '44.

Interviewer:

And did you have children?

Richard Duchossois:

Yes. I didn't see my son for a year when he was born, my oldest son, I don't know, a year and half, close to that, before I saw him.

Interviewer:

So that was -

Richard Duchossois:

Beg pardon?

Interviewer:

So when you came home at the end of the war, that was the first time you saw him?

Richard Duchossois:

Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer:

What was that like?

Richard Duchossois:

Beg pardon?

Interviewer:

What was that like, to see him for the first time?

Interviewer:

I don't know. I don't know. It was certainly something. I guess it takes - it did me, anyway - a little bit of time to reacclimate again. You go from summer to winter, and you go from combat into other things, and then you come home, it's different. It took me a little while to acclimate.

Interviewer:

How long did it take, would you say?

Richard Duchossois:

Oh, several months.

Interviewer:

Just several months?

Richard Duchossois:

I wouldn't say I was living the war; I was just getting used to a different way of life.

Interviewer:

Right.

Richard Duchossois:

Then I started working right away.

Interviewer:

You started working right away?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, right after the first of the year in '46, I started.

Interviewer:

Uh-huh. And what did you do?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, my father-in-law, which I didn't know when we got married, he had a little shop out in Chicago Heights that repaired secondhand freight cars. We had 38 men out there, sold the scrap and did the repair work and so forth, and I went to work for him. I really wanted to go back to college, but I felt that I had a family, and if I couldn't pay my own way I didn't want to go on someone else's dime, so I thought I'd work till I had enough money and then I'd go on. But that's the same job I have now; I've never left the company.

Interviewer:

So you had a lot of - you learned a lot about leadership in World War II, it seems, or how to manage people, how to solve problems, and I'm just wondering, when did you realize as working at your father-in-law's company, or when you took it over, when did you realize that some of those lessons actually had application in business?

Richard Duchossois:

You know, it was only a few years ago when I was going down to Fort Benning for something, and had the family with me, and they started asking me about the war. But I didn't - I didn't want to remember a lot of it, but I didn't think it was something that - pass over it. Then I got thinking, you know, in high school - and here's how I figured it out now. In high school, in military academy, I learned discipline, I learned teamwork, I learned to be competitive, I learned you have to keep focused and working. We were under very strict, confined - similar to what you have. Then I went to Washington and

Lee, where General Lee had put up an honor code. We had no classes - or we had no classes - we had - you could do as you want, but you had to follow the honor code. So I had no supervision, so then you learn to, you know, really some of the things, right and wrong, and you aren't going to be missing the honor code.

You don't know it at the time, but then when you get into combat, the things you've learned in high school from the discipline and the staying focused, from having the freedom and not getting way off on anything, I think you develop some sort of a culture in your own mind, and you just move forward. And as I look back, many of the things that I learned in military academy, and the things I learned in the year and a half of college, were things that I just automatically did. And when I got into business, to be competitive, to have the challenges, and to do it the right thing, the right way, I think you sort of develop your own what you call culture, and it grows on you. You don't deliberately do all those things; it just happens. And I think that's one of the reasons our companies have been as successful, because we've always followed that. And our companies - I became president in '51.

And the first thing I did - and at that time, we only had I think maybe we were up to 100 people then. I don't want to hear the word profit around here except at the end of the year where we're going. If we have the best product, the best discipline, on-time delivery, treat our customer the way we want to be treated, innovate, and save money for him, the profit's going to catch us. So let's not chase the dollar; let the dollar chase us. We operate that way today. We are a multi-billion-dollar operation.

Interviewer:

So -

Richard Duchossois:

But this was from culture from the military training, and from the training at Washington and Lee, and I never put it together until, I don't know, maybe four or five years ago.

Interviewer:

I'm wondering, did you and your father-in-law see eye to eye about how to run that business?

Richard Duchossois:

Bear in mind, I was the outsider in a family company.

Interviewer:

Right.

Richard Duchossois:

Beg pardon?

Interviewer:

Playing with the paper it's moving and the mic's picking it up.

Richard Duchossois:

Oh. You have to bear in mind, I was the outsider in a family company, and those are good conditions. Eventually, he retired. Then my brother-in-law, who was in the company, things were getting to the point where we had different ideas on different lifestyles. He's the grandest guy you've ever seen, like my father-in-law was, but we just had different cultures and different thoughts. So I ended up buying the whole thing, and that's how my family is there. But now I have my children's in-laws to worry about. That's where problems come, when you get too big a family and go into the third and fourth generation.

Interviewer:

So I've read a little of the history of your business life, and it seems that you bring principles to it like the one you just mentioned. That you don't chase the dollar, you let the dollar find you. That you uphold - you see the business, the business activities as a way to organize people's lives in the communities you're in, and things like that. Does that - that seems to come from somewhere else other than high school and Washington and Lee, that kind of -

Richard Duchossois:

Well, I know what you're driving at. I think high school and military academy, the disciplines and things that I learned there, and what I learned at Washington and Lee, they came together. You needed both of them, not one or just the other; you needed both. And all of a sudden, you're just doing it, and you don't realize that you're doing it, but you don't realize until you look back at where did we make mistakes? Where did we go right? Where did we go wrong? And you start then correcting it, 'cause I hate to make the same mistake twice. And you learn - you have to learn every day.

Interviewer:

So what were the biggest challenges in business, maybe in the early years? So you acquired another company -

Richard Duchossois:

Well, you know, we acquired -

Interviewer:

While you were running Thrall?

Richard Duchossois:

Yeah, I started acquiring companies, smaller companies that would help our base company. Then somehow or another I got into - after my wife died, I was down seeing the Kentucky Derby for the first time - I'd always wanted to see one. I met some people that I had known that they were going to put together a syndicate and buy a race track. Didn't want any part of it, but eventually I said I'd take 10%, forgot all about it. They called me up one day and say, 'Gulf and Western are all set. We're down at the lawyer's office, we're signing everything up. Come on down.' 'Well, just go ahead and tell me what I should send down.' 'No, you'd better get down here.' Well, I found no one had any money, so I ended up with a racetrack, and that put us into a different - then I turned the rest of our operation over to others. And then we took a different course for a while, but now we're coming back to it now. We're getting back to where we belong.

We've always - I think one learns to live on adrenaline. You learn to live on challenge. Where is when there was two stars up here, they beat Navy twice - that's life. You got to have something to compete with. You got to have a challenge. And when you don't have a challenge, you don't have competition, you're not doing anything. And you guys are going to have challenges day in and day out, more so than the average guy, because you're going to learn that you're going to be able to meet those challenges, and like to have challenges; and when challenges stop, you're going to get bored. A lot of people just don't want the challenges. They want to be left alone and go that way, so we start separating who is going to be leading, and who just is content to follow. Nothing wrong with either of them. It's just what your personality wants you to do.

And I think that coming to a school like West Point, or any military academy, in high school or college, you change from what you could've been, and the change is always for the better. I'd say almost - there's always going to be some exceptions, but I think it's the best education anyone can get, if they take care of it, and if they understand that they're being educated. If they understand that their life depends upon it, but not just your life; it's the other people that work for you, and you have to take care of them, too.

Interviewer:

So I have one last question. What challenges are you setting for yourself now?

Richard Duchossois:

Now?

Interviewer:

Now, yeah. What are your challenges now?

Richard Duchossois:

We're reorganizing our company, and that's going to be - I'm trying to get - at

my age, I'm trying to say, "Okay, I've died; what does the place look like?" And I don't like what everything looked like, so my challenge is to get it so I can die with knowing it's right. That's my challenge today.

Interviewer:

I don't think he knows. He doesn't? Okay. Do you have a list of places that young Americans should see -

Richard Duchossois:

Sure.

Interviewer:

And why?

Richard Duchossois:

Well, I think they should see West Point. I think they should see Annapolis. I think they should see Arlington Cemetery. I think they should see Normandy Cemetery. I think that they should understand from talking to some of the veterans, some of the military people, that what they take for granted now, the freedom that we have, it doesn't come except at a price. Freedom isn't free, and we have to learn. I believe now we're getting away from - we used to be the be-boppers, and then the hippies, and then the liberals, and now we're coming back now to a conservative type way of life. We have seen now that we're not going to go out and conquer the world. The world's going to conquer us if we're not careful. We'll lost our freedom, and we'd better get to what made our country great. A lot of that starts right here at West Point, at Annapolis, at the Air Force Academy. These are people that are devoting their lives. The military serves to protect us, to protect the freedom, and we have to get that message across to our entire population. Doesn't make any difference if you're Republican, Democrat, or what you are. We have to live in that environment. Just as you change the environment from summer to fall to winter. You don't wear your bathing suit in January, and you don't wear your topcoat in June, July. We have to learn that. That's what I see is happening now.

Interviewer:

Okay. Thank you very much.

Richard Duchossois:

Well, thank you for inviting me down here.