Transcription: Johnnie Marino

This is Mike McCreekin with the Texas Veterans Land Board sitting in the dining room with Johnnie Marino, who lives at what's known as the East End in Houston. Mr. Marino is a veteran of World War II, and today is January the 12th after several different tries to get together. And I'm just gonna kind of be quiet, Mr. Marino, and just turn it over to you. When were you born?

Johnnie Marino: I was born June 24, 1919.

Where were you born?

Johnnie Marino: Colorado City, Texas.

Oh, Colorado City, that's up north.

Johnnie Marino: Northwest.

I passed through it on my way to Lubbock a few times. When did you move to the Houston area?

Johnnie Marino: Oh, my parents moved to Houston in 1928.

OK, tell me a little bit about your life before you went into the service.

Johnnie Marino: Well, we lived at Crosby, Texas, before we came to Houston when my mom took sick. She was brought over here to Houston to the hospital, and we stayed in Crosby. A few months later, our mom got real sick. We were notified, so my dad, a friend of his with a car came over, and brought us over to see my mom. But coming down 90 which was the only route outside of Houston, there was a big wreck there right before we got to the San Jacinto Bridge, and we were held up there for hours. So by the time we got back to Houston, mom had already passed away. Then we stayed here in Houston right after my mom died, we stayed here, and my dad, he would leave us with friends, members of the church where we went, and they would take care of us. He worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad. After a year, he met this lady from Mexico and married her. He continued working for the railroad. About that time, the Depression set in and he was laid off from Southern Pacific, and then took a job with Rice University as a groundskeeper, and after a couple of months he was laid off. They had no students. People couldn't afford sending their kids to school I guess. He helped farmers over at the farmers market for a while. They would gather the vegetables and stuff that farmers brought that the stores wouldn't buy if it was too ripe or whatever, so he'd bring that home. That would serve us our food a lot of times.

How old were you at this time?

Johnnie Marino: I had started elementary school already. I was around 9 I would say.

So you grew up here in the East End.

Johnnie Marino: Mostly in the beginning when my mom passed away, we lived around Houston Avenue, in that area, and then from there we moved down to the north side. During

those years, my dad decided to go back to Crosby. That way we could have a vegetable garden and we would be better off than living here. So we went back to Crosby. He got started working with a guy that owned a ranch, to take care of his cattle, milk his cows and all that. That's where mostly we grew up until the late 30s. It seems like the economy started picking up a little bit.

Are you the oldest?

Johnnie Marino: No sir, I had an older brother and an older sister, and then me and then a younger brother. And we stayed in Crosby until things started picking up again, so we moved back to Houston and by that time I was already in my teens. Then the government had a program like the WPA and they had CC camps and all that for the young people, they had a program called the National Youth Administration, NYA. That was for kids like me that didn't finish high school. We could be sent to a university and take basic courses there and study a trade at the same time. So a group of us boys got sent to Kingsville, Texas, to Texas ANI University. There, we started classes with the regular college kids that were going, plus we started learning whatever trade you wanted to learn – electricity, carpentry -

And you were a teenager at this time.

Johnnie Marino: Yes, and they had one called, learn to be a tin smith. That was a big thing back then, tin. There was no aluminum, you know. So I took a trade in tin smith while I was there. During the 40s, things in Europe and elsewhere were getting pretty hot.

So were you at Texas ANI when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Johnnie Marino: In 1940, during the Christmas holidays, we came home for the holidays, and a group of us boys from the university, about three or four of us. President Roosevelt had started a program in which we were, and it gave us a chance, what they wanted really, the government wanted was volunteers to go into the service. So they opened up a deal for young people, whoever wanted to join the service, you could join and serve for one year. At the end of the year you would be discharged and you would be free of serving in the service Armed Forces again. So that was a pretty good deal. So we decided to volunteer for the services.

So you volunteered before Pearl Harbor.

Johnnie Marino: Yes, 11 months before Pearl Harbor. We volunteered on January 13, 1941. And here's where the whole thing turns around, because actually I was 18, because according to my parents, I was born June 24, 1922. So we went to a recruiting station, and one of the guys there in our group says you know, my dad wouldn't sign a release. They told us at the recruiting station, if you are 18, you are going to a university, we've got to have your parent's signature, a release form. My dad wouldn't sign it. So we went to another recruiting station, the one here in San Jacinto and Rusk I believe it is. When they asked us, we didn't change the month or day, we changed the year. I told them I was born in 1919. That made me 21 right then. So they didn't ask anything else. You sign, and that's it.

You were born in 1919, right?

Johnnie Marino: I was born in 1922.

OK, because you told me, OK, I'm with you.

Johnnie Marino: But see, all my records according to the government, Uncle Sam says I'm 90 right now. I'm really 87. But the government records and everything, social security, the whole business, it's 1919. So there's no way I can change that unless they want to change it. So I asked the captain in charge of the deal there, I said I want to change my last name to my mom's maiden name, after I told him I was born in 1919. He says yeah, that's OK because most Hispanic families that we know of, the children carry their mom's maiden name, and the names are gonna be there, you're not gonna use another name. So I changed my last name to my mom's maiden name, and that's the main name I take. My mom was half Italian and half Spanish, and she was born in Valencia, Spain, my mom. Her dad would be my grandfather, he was born in Italy, and he met my mom's mother in Spain, and they married over there and my mom was born there. Then they came to Mexico where she met my dad. But I used my dad's last name as my middle name, and my mom's maiden name as my last name, and that's in the records.

So you enlisted in January 1941 into the Army. Where did they send you for basic training?

Johnnie Marino: They sent me from here to Fort Sam Houston.

So that's where you did your basic.

Johnnie Marino: Yeah, my basic, most of my training was at Fort Sam Houston. Of course rumors started coming in later, you know, that we would be sent to the Pacific. One of our top commanders, General Kruger, had been commander of the 2nd Division, and we knew right away that he was going to ask that same division to go to the Pacific. But they kept us, the division I was in, as a training division. In other words, we trained and used the latest Army equipment to test it, and everything was changing, weapons and everything. That's in '41. In '42, they shipped us to Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. The 2nd Division where I was in, most of the guys from the 2nd were Texans. We didn't know anything about cold weather or anything like that. So they shipped us to Wisconsin and we took winter training in Wisconsin and Michigan, where it gets zero degrees and 1 or 10 below like that, and we were testing the latest winter clothing, included underwear, jackets, trousers, boots, everything. Man, we didn't feel cold at all. Even our tents were weatherproof. The winters, it got down to 10 below, and we didn't know it was 10 below. But a lot of guys lot frostbit, ears, nose. During that time, at one of the breaks we had, I had a real sharp pain on my side, so the major that came by, a doctor, he said this guy needs to go to the hospital. He has an appendix. So they couldn't send me back to Fort McCoy because it was too far, so they looked for a general hospital, civilian hospital. They found one and they took me there. The medics told the doctor I had an appendix attack. He said OK. Leave him here and we'll see what we can do. By the time I got there, I was OK. I didn't feel no pain or anything. So he said well, I'll check you in the morning. What the Army didn't know, and I didn't know, my parents didn't know, when I was born, I was born with a little bag attached to my kidney, and that bag grew real slow throughout the years, but the urology wasn't up to what it is now, you know. So they didn't catch that. So the little bag just kept there, and every time I would get sick, something would happen and it would hurt me. What the urologist later found out was that liquid that I drank, water or whatever, some of those would drop in there in that little bag. So when I went to the hospital that time, the doctor he says no, I don't think it's your appendix. I don't see anything that indicates that. He says but the Army sent you here to have your appendix removed, so that's what we're gonna do. So they removed my appendix.

They didn't see that little bag?

Johnnie Marino: No, that was a few weeks before Christmas. So he operated on me, removed my appendix, and he kept me there for a month. Do you believe that, for an appendix operation? But he was getting money from the government. So I was treated like a king. Here's a Texan, you know, training to be a ski trooper and all that, it was in the newspaper. So they treated me I mean, real neat. Of course the people I think, the people up north are altogether different from us southerners, really.

I agree.

Johnnie Marino: And from there, after we took ski training, I learned how to walk with a full pack and snowshoes and all that. We got sent back to, we were getting ready to come back to Texas. That was already '43.

So you were there for more than a year.

Johnnie Marino: Yeah. So in October of '43, we got orders that we were moving out, so they shipped us to New York, put on a troop ship in October of '43, and went across the Atlantic. It took us 12 days on account of the U-boats, zig-zagging, and they were blowing up a lot of merchant ships, the U-boats were, so we made it across to northern Ireland, Belfast. From there, they took us to different places, bivouacked. And our unit that I was in, they put us in a 17th century castle, had these huge rooms, dungeons down there. It was really something. And our dining room was a long table made out of stone. I mean there was a drawbridge and everything. And we trained in Ireland from October of '43 until around it was either the first part of May. I guess the top commander was already thinking of the invasion, you see. We trained and then in May we got sent to, what's that little country next to Ireland?

England.

Johnnie Marino: No, England is across the channel. I forget.

You got me. I just think of Ireland and then I know England and Scotland are on the same little island.

Johnnie Marino: Yeah, well there's another one. Anyway we went to that place, and they changed the invasion date, I don't know, I forget what it was, until the 6th of June, and then we got on the ships and they said OK, we're gonna invade. We were at the USS Texas and other battleships just shooting up a storm. We got the word to get on the LST's across the English channel. I was an ammo carrier, that was my main job, carry ammo for artillery, 105's. And we were put in an LST with a weapons carrier full of 105's. They said your job is to get to the beach, says by that time artillery should be there, and you deliver these shells to the battery there. But everything turned around. I mean nothing came out like they had planned, really. I mean on the first day, there wasn't an artillery piece that landed on our – we landed at Omaha Beach, and all we had was rifles, a couple of BAR's and that's it, no heavy weapons at all. Artillery didn't make it. The others did the next day.

You were in the first wave.

Johnnie Marino: Yeah, first day. And there we are stuck with a weapons carrier full of ammo. So we started late that evening, so we started making a few yards inland. By next morning, we

were already able to go up over, because here was the Germans sitting up here, and we were down here, so they were picking us off like ducks.

You had to go through the embankments. You didn't go up the cliff, you went through the embankment.

Johnnie Marino: The second rangers were the ones that went up the cliffs. And it was for naught because the guns they were supposed to put up in action weren't even there when they got up on top. They had moved them already. So we finally made it, and then the second day our shells were delivered, we gave them to I don't know if it was the artillery of the 2nd or some other artillery because the 1st Infantry Division and the 29th Infantry Division were the spearhead of the invasion, and then they picked a few like us from special troops from other units, and we had other units come in that were not with these divisions, special artillery units, engineers and so forth. Of course the invasion people were trying to put in as much fire power in the initial invasion units, but they didn't make it. Tanks got hit direct because these people up here, the Germans were looking down there and they see an LST or LCI full of people or machinery, that's where they try to blow 'em up, which they did. The main armament that got to the beach was June 7th, the day after.

Were you wounded?

Johnnie Marino: Not there, but I got wounded later on in St. Lo. and then again during the Battle of the Bulge. But we got rid of the ammo we had. It was given to some other unit but I don't think it was the 2nd. I believe it was the 29th. But they got use of it. From there, we started, what helped us, by us I mean the whole force that went in, was the other units that came behind us, the other divisions that kept pouring in.

Once you broke through, it just opened it up for everybody else.

Johnnie Marino: Right, the force of what's coming in. And all the training we had was a big thing because that's what helped us to keep on going, keep on going until we got to the border of Belgium and Germany where the Germans made their last stand and tried to counterattack, which they did in December 16 of '44 was the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge and it lasted until January 26 of 1945. And they just nearly were successful, but like I said, our troops that came behind us -

They kept pushing you guys forward.

Johnnie Marino: I believe our initial units really fought a great fight initially, you know. Otherwise, if the Germans had been successful in their counterattacks, because their main, some of our guys captured some of the Germans and they had secret papers with them, and in those papers, some of them had an outline of what they were supposed to do, and their main thing according to those documents was to push us all the way back to the ship channel -

To the coast, right?

Johnnie Marino: Right.

What did you do in the Battle of the Bulge? What type of combat were you involved with?

Johnnie Marino: Well you know, I was initially an ammo carrier, and my job was 24/7, to get ammo to the firing.

So that's where you did your ammo carrying.

Johnnie Marino: I remember going, I mean night and day, because at one point, one of our artillery units in the division, according to a book I have that details the history of our unit, they fired 5,000 rounds in one day. That's a lot of rounds.

Tell me what an ammo carrier does. I have a mental picture, and maybe other people do, too.

Johnnie Marino: Well, the division artillery headquarters, they get a call from the gunners or the officer in charge of the battery that's doing the firing, and they say they are either running low or they are out of certain ammo they need, because there was different type of ammo they used. One would be just with black smoke to cover, you know, the infantry, and there would be shrapnel stuff, and another type would be to explode. So they would tell us, you go back to the ammo dump and pick up so many rounds of this and so many rounds. We'd go to the ammo dump, come back, and then they would tell us, the first gun is in that area, and the second gun probably half a mile or a mile on the other side, they give you a route. Remember, this was in December, cold, drizzling, ground is in parts frozen. All that equipment that we used to train back in '42 -

At Fort McCoy -

Johnnie Marino: Yeah, ski pants and ski boots and all of that junk, we didn't have none of that. We just had regular boots and OD pants and whatever we could put on.

So you guys were freezing.

Johnnie Marino: Big overcoats. And that was all over. They didn't have enough, the Army messed up for some reason, I don't know why. It was a big joke later because in July, we got word, that's when all that clothing came over from the States.

It caught up with you. Geez, that was July of '45.

Johnnie Marino: Yeah, but it was pretty rough. It got to where I would sit and I'd just go to sleep sitting down, just waiting. And those orders would come in. One day, one evening, my section sergeant, a good friend of mine, he was from Waxahachie, Sergeant Roberts, he came over and he says well Marino, he says you've been going 24/7. He said I know you are tired. He said I'll tell you what. I'm gonna take your run. The next run they give you, I'll take it for you. I said no sergeant, I'll be OK. I can manage. He says no, he said I'll take it, and he took another friend of mine with him to get a load and never made it back. They got hit by a shell somewhere on the road. That was something that I've always thought about. It was meant to be I guess, that I wouldn't go after that run. But both my feet are frostbitten, both of them, to this day since then. And of course the Army says there ain't nothing they can do for it, nothing.

But you are receiving compensation.

Johnnie Marino: No.

Not from VA?

Johnnie Marino: The only compensation I get know, and I tell people, they say no, man, I don't know, it's for PTSD, $123 a month, PTSD. For the tinny thing, I mean that's, I don't think it's even in the records, for my two purple hearts, they're not even in the records. My frozen feet, they're not in the records, so how can approve anything like that. They tell me I can go ahead and get whatever is due me. I said well, I'll let some other guy that really deserves it.

But when the battle ended in January, where did your unit go after that?

Johnnie Marino: We were initially when we went in D-Day, we were with the 1st Army. At the end of the Battle of the Bulge, they put us with the 3rd Army with Patton. Patton had a talk with Eisenhower. You know, Patton was to me one of the greatest generals of World War II. He told Eisenhower, he says I have a plan to cut Germany in half, and use his divisions to mop up, because the Germans are gonna go this way. So Eisenhower, he said OK, he says you formulate the plan, take your divisions you want. So naturally he got to his take in the best divisions, so he picked our division to be the spearhead. I was in a weapons carrier with three other guys. Our mission was to seek and report, no combat. Seek and report whatever you see, you report back what you see. Let these other units on your right and left do the – so I had a lieutenant with me, I forget his name, and we drove at night with just the night lights, over roads we never knew existed. They told us, you keep your eyes on that vehicle in front of you. If you see those lights disappear, you stop. Because he could've gone off the road or something. So that's the way we drove at night. One of the times they gave us a rest stop, we stopped, and I told the lieutenant, I said we better get off and take a pee or something. So we got off. You know, the vehicle didn't have no side doors or anything, it's open. So he got off and went off, and I got off and went off. As soon as we got off, here comes a rocket right through the door of it. Yeah, right through the door. It didn't hit nothing though, missed everything, but it crashed up there in the woods. So we were both cramming when we got back in the truck. So we kept on going and we got to a place where we saw a tall building up there on kind of a hill, you know. So we cautionally we got out and started walking, and the first thing that we saw were these pile of bodies, all naked, piled up like you pile cord wood. Men, women, old, young. It was this camp. We started walking around and nobody there. We didn't see no living people.

This was just you and the lieutenant.

Johnnie Marino: Me, the lieutenant and the rest of the guys that were with me. And the stench was so bad we had to pull out our bandanas and put them over our nose. But we didn't know what it was. Finally the lieutenant said, he said that's people that started smelling already. Then we went behind the building and the Germans had built a trench maybe about half a block long, but deep as this room, and it was full of bodies. We later found out that that place there was called the Murder Factory. That was in Hadamar.

Hadamar? And that was in Germany.

Johnnie Marino: Yeah, in Germany. H-A-D-A-M-A-R I believe it was. Then we came around the other side and there were some railroad cars. They had railroad going into it and there was railroad cars parked there, and inside was full of bodies, dead bodies. That place there, we learned that any Jewish person that would reach that place would eventually be put to death. That's why they called it Murder Factory. Of course our job was to keep going, don't stop, because we knew there would be other units coming in that had whatever it took to take care of

that. We went through other camps, and these other camps we saw people walking. People, I don't think I would say people, I would say skeletons.

So you were some of the first troops.

Johnnie Marino: We were the first. But see, here's the thing. You read in books, you see in TV, they always show, the newspaper people, reporters, the camera people over there who had already gone through that. But I guess they never knew that we were the first troops that went in there. From there, we went through Belsen. There we saw a lot of people that we talked to some that spoke English. We told them that we couldn't help them, give them food or medicine or nothing like that because we weren't equipped for that, but there would be others behind us that would take care of them. I learned later, friends that were in other units I talked to later on, none of those walking skeletons, as soon as they put something in their mouth, they just keeled over and died. But you see those people and I don't see how they lived that long. I forget what camp it is, but one of those camps was a camp for people that were sent there, they would die of starvation. They wouldn't be fed. The Germans were seeing how long a human lives I guess without eating. That camp, that was like that. They would be put there and they wouldn't be fed at all. So some would die. I don't know how long they could stand. But a lot of them walking around, just naked. All you saw was their bones sticking out. We called them the walking dead because actually that's what they were. So we kept going. We reported all this, you know. So from there, we went to Austria. In Austria, there was a camp. We never did see it though, but we were told later that there was a camp in Austria. From Austria, we went to Czechoslovakia, Pilsen. I believe it was the second largest city in Czech. There, we were told to stop. By that time, it was already April. We got the news that our president had passed away, and we actually cried for President Roosevelt. We reached Pilsen, May 7th or 8th I believe it was, where we got news that the war ended. That's as far as we got because we got orders not to go into Berlin because the Russians were coming in. So we stopped and we stayed there in Pilsen. But another thing that really got to me was after we got the Germans out of there, you know, Czechoslovakia had been under the Germans since it was 1940, and of course these officers, they brought their families over and they would go to a nice home, you live there with your family, you know, Czech people, and you got thrown out. The Germans would take it. They didn't care what happened to you. So one day they told us the German people are gonna leave Pilsen, families. Says you don't interfere for nothing. Whatever you see, don't interfere. So all these German people walking down the main street, and on both sides you have Czech people with bricks, pipes, 2x4's or whatever they could get, and as they walked by, they would just hit them over the head or shoulder. And there I am with my rifle at my side, just looking at all this. It was just, it was terrible. To this day I just can't understand a lot of times how we react to different things. During the invasion, during the Battle of the Bulge, during the liberation of the camps, during all that time, I forget where I put it, I always had the little book that has the name of the divisions and the camps they liberated by division. Of course we didn't know that we had participated in other -

Yeah, because you were up front reporting back.

Johnnie Marino: Yeah, but they have our division as liberating about three different camps. And I have some friends of mine who were in divisions that liberated some of these camps, and when the Jewish community built the Holocaust museum, they asked through the newspaper, they asked for volunteers that had participated in that to come forward and give their testimony. So I was the first one that went, called that number, because I felt like it was something that I should do. They set up an appointment with me at Rice University and they had a camera and

everything set up, and this lady from the Holocaust, the Holocaust hadn't been built yet, this was before, but they wanted to have all this info when the museum would open. So she took my testimony. It's about, I'd say about two or three hours long. Of course it would take me, like you asked me where I was born and all that, they have all that in there at the Holocaust museum. Later on, a few years ago, they had a ceremony and all the liberators they could come up with, they made us lifetime members of the Holocaust museum. And in April is when they have all their commemoration deals. I was at the city hall right there in the front, and it came out in the paper, this man, he was six years old when we liberated the camps, and he was in Bergenbelsen, and there was a big deal here at the city hall in April of I forget what year it was. Anyway, they had us up there on the top of the steps and he was by me. They had a survivor and a liberator, yeah, and then they took a picture, and the picture is just where he's just hugging me. Every time he sees me, he starts crying. He lost his father, his mother, and all his family there at the concentration camps, yeah. And I used to go to the schools, high schools rather, not elementary, I try to keep away from them unless it's the last grade in elementary which are kids already in their teens, 13-14, and tell them about whatever they are studying, I tell them, if you are studying D-Day, I can talk to you about D-Day. You study about Normandy, I can talk to you about Normandy, or Battle of the Bulge, or liberation of the concentration camps. I try not to mention the gory stuff as much as possible, just try to tell them, try to as they grow up, be considerate of their neighbor, of their friends, don't discriminate, and try to love everybody, because that's the way I was brought up. My dad was a layman Baptist preacher. And I tell people, you know, I believe last week I went to that part downtown, the Discovery Green. They took my testimony over there. I try to give what I have, what I know, what I went through as much as possible. But lately my leg has been bothering me a lot. They gave me a walker. I believe my wife uses it. They told me, they says every time you come to the VA, you come with a walker. I said you know I don't think I'm ready for that walker, be all over the place with a walker. A lot of guys use them though.

Well, there's nothing wrong with using a walker or a cane just to help with your balance. You may have real good balance, but sometimes it's just –

Johnnie Marino: Sometimes I'll be walking and my knee gives out and I have to get a hold of something, yeah. Like I said, I was at Pilsen when the war ended, and we celebrated a whole week. The Czech people, man, they're something else. To this day they are grateful I guess just like the French people, you know. A lot of people have a different way of thinking of the French people, especially, but they don't know that people over there in Europe, especially the countries where we went through, to me they seem to be more grateful for our liberating them, which that's things that America in general people don't realize that it's something real. But you know, I'm going to tell you something real funny. It wasn't funny to me at the time. But when I left New York on the troop ship and crossed the Atlantic, I don't think I've ever been as sick as I was during that time, sea sick. I mean it's awful. I'd eat something and there it goes, you know. It got to where I said Lord, you just take me right now because I can't take it no more. So when the war ended, I found out that the Army was asking guys that wanted to stay for the occupation forces. So I said man, that's a good idea, because I didn't want to come back. Both my parents had already passed away, mom and my dad. My dad passed away when I was in the service. And you know, your brothers, they're not the same as your parents, as much as they love you, but still you know. So my intentions were not to come back, to stay over there. So they said we want people that want to stay in the occupation forces in different places in Europe. So I told a major that was doing the recruiting, I said I'd like to stay. He said you don't want to go back, the outfit is going back home. I said no, I want to stay. But I didn't give him the reason. He said OK. By that time, we had been sent to Marseilles, France, to be coming home. So he says OK,

we'll send you back to Germany. So from Marseilles, France, they shipped me all the way back to Germany. I forget the name of the German town I was in. Anyway, our job was to check the papers because after the war, a lot of people in Germany and other countries over here that were from other countries. They escaped, so they were going back home.

Back to the country they escaped from during the war.

Johnnie Marino: And we had to check their papers. And a lot of these guards from the concentration camps, they tried to slip through these people with false documents, but we could spot 'em. We were good at that.

Oh you were –

Johnnie Marino: Oh yeah, we'd just look at 'em. Their face and their bodies, you could tell that they were well fed. Who else? You know. So we'd bring them out, you over here, and you over here. All of them false. So they would be taken out.

So you were doing profiling way back then.

Johnnie Marino: Yeah, and we caught a lot. You'd be surprised at how many guys we caught, all of them guards trying to escape with the regular general public.

So you were able to take those guys captive and turn them over to the authorities.

Johnnie Marino: Yeah, they would take care of them right away. So that was in the first week of April. I stayed there all of April, May, June, July, August, September – six months. Finally a colonel came over where I was. He says Marino, how long you been here? When did you come over? I said sir, I came over in October of '43. He says man, don't you think it's time you go back home? I said well, I guess if you say it's time, I guess it's time. He said well I'm ordering you to go back home. He said I'm going to send you back to Marseilles and get on a ship and go back home. I said yes sir. So I shipped back to Marseilles, and when I got up to where I was going to ship and I saw this big, huge boat. It didn't look like that rinky deal I came over from New York. It was just like the Queen Mary. I didn't feel a thing. In no time we were in Norfolk, Virginia. I'll never forget that. I saw the Rock of Gibraltar as we went around. We got to Norfolk and I was walking down the ramp and there was this girl comes up, and I don't know who she was, but she just did it because she was full of emotion or something, she threw her arms around me and kissed me and I looked at her, and then she looked at me and said oh, I'm sorry, I thought it was my boyfriend. I said I don't mind, that's OK. And the same thing happened to me right before the invasion when we were getting off somewhere going to board the ship for the invasion. There was this girl come up also, and she thought I was somebody else. I guess she just wanted to kiss somebody I guess. But I'll never forget those days that I spent in Ireland because one thing that sticks with me, because those people there, they didn't have a place to get meat, or the restaurants didn't have, they tried to serve the best they could. Their main dish was the potatoes because Ireland is known for its potatoes. But they knew how to fix potatoes a different way, all kinds of ways. And of course we tried not to, we'd go to the restaurant once a while, but of course our food was much better because we'd get stuff from the States all the time. But the invasion, we had to do without real food for three days. We had to eat the K-rations we had. But I'm always thankful for the farmers. They always come up, French farmers, with their French bread, one of the tastiest bread there is made is French bread, because they use the ovens outside, and eggs, chicken, all of that they would treat us all the time.

There wasn't a farm where we went through that didn't offer us. And I was always finding stuff, going through the German towns, I remember going through a German town and a lot of guys got killed that way though because they would go in a house like this, and the first thing they would do is open a drawer and it would explode on them. Always go to the cellar, there were those ones where they have cellars, and because it was cool down there, a pile of potatoes. I'd dig inside a pile and that's where you'd find all the loot – rings, watches, guns, and I always had a pocket full of stuff but always traded for something else. I found at a place I went to the chicken coop and I saw a box full of chicken stuff all over it, so I cleaned it off, took it out, and it was full of German cameras, brand new. And you know, German is known for its camera. In fact, well I gave 'em to the guys. You're not going to carry all that stuff. A lieutenant gave me $125 for one, so I'm pretty sure it was pretty expensive stuff. Another time in Germany, already going through Germany, we stopped at a farm to rest and I went up to the barn where they had the hay, and I took my rifle and I hit something hard. So I got up and said what, started digging in the hay, and there was a burlap bag full of P38 guns brand new. I couldn't carry all of them. I gave them away to the guys, you know, traded. I kept one for myself. But later on I saw a guy that had an Italian beretta, a real nice gun, so I said look, I'll trade you this P38. Yeah man, sure. Right away we traded. It's the one I brought home.

Do you still have that?

Johnnie Marino: No, I gave it to my father-in-law, ex father-in-law. He tried to kill me with it though because I left his daughter.

Just for the record, when you were discharged from the Army after World War II, where did you work after that?

Johnnie Marino: I couldn't get adjusted to the civilian life, really. I was discharged in October of '45 and by December of the same year I was back in the Army. I couldn't stand it. I had to sleep under the bed. I couldn't sleep on a mattress. Every time a plane came by, I didn't know what to do. So I said well, there's no life for me.

So you went back into the Army. How long did you stay then?

Johnnie Marino: I joined the 2nd Armored at Fort Hood. I stayed there until December of '46. I was going to make it a career, but I had already gotten married in October of '45 and our first child was due already in '46. So I asked the sergeant if I could get a three-day pass to come to Fort Hood over here and be with my wife. First child. But he was the type of guy, he didn't like Hispanics to begin with. I don't know, he just didn't. And especially since he didn't get to go to combat or anything, he hated the veterans. So he said no, I can't let you go. You're needed here for something. I said OK. So I went over the hill that same guy. I knew the guys at the guards, you know, and I told them. They said OK, go. So I started walking from Fort Hood towards Houston and it got dark. I said well I got to stop somewhere and sleep. So I got to this farm that had haystacks. So I made me a hole there and slept in there. Before I got up I heard a noise, a horse eating hay, and I made a little hole and was looking, I said OK, you scared me, I'm gonna scare you. So I got ready and man he farted. So I got back on the road and I saw this pickup truc coming towards me. He passed me and made a u-turn, came back, and says where are you going? I said Houston. He says well you're a few miles off the access. He said get in, I'm gonna go pick up some coffee and take you to the house and make you some breakfast. So he lost his son in Europe during the war. That was the only son he had. He had a daughter also. And he kept telling me what he had planned to do when his son got home. He had bought a

brand new tractor, farming equipment ready for him. He took me to the barn, showed me all that he had, and he says you know, I have things to do today. If I didn't, he said I'd drive you all the way to Houston. I said that's OK, I said I'll get a ride soon. So I had breakfast with him and we had a long talk and he took me back to the road. And that weekend, it was on a Saturday I believe, there was a game going on with A&M and U of H I believe. I saw these guys coming, a car load of guys picked me up and they brought me all the way to downtown. So the FBI started looking for me because I was already AWOL. But I went to see my daughter being born and then my dad, when he married my second step mom, she had a big family. She had ten boys and out of the ten, well, she counted us as her family also. So there was five from the family that served in the Army, and three of us that fought overseas. Finally I decided, I said well I'll just go back. There's no sense in people looking for me all the time. So I went to a recruiting station downtown and I told the colonel, I gave him the whole story. He says I advise you to come Monday and I'll give you a ticket to go on the bus from here to Galveston. In Galveston there used to be a camp there, Camp Crockett or something, I forget the name of it.

I think you're right. I vaguely remember the name, but not real well.

Johnnie Marino: Yeah, he says go there and turn yourself in, and he says I don't think they'll give you too much. I said OK. So that following Monday I went, told them the story. They called Fort Hood. They sent a couple of friends in a jeep. They had handcuffs and all. They said we're not going to put no handcuffs on you. I said no? OK. So we rode all the way, on the way over to eat and everything. They said well, looking at the records you have, we'd still like to give you a chance. At one time you indicated you wanted to retire from the Army. So I tell you what, you can be discharged, you can go back to your old outfit you were with during the war, but we still have to court marshal you. Says you'll probably get maybe a month or so. But that won't be on your records. OK. I said no, I don't want to stay in the Army. So they court marshaled me and they gave me a month in the stockade, yeah. I served there in the Fort Hood stockade, cleaning the streets and all that. Then I was let out and I came home, and got a job with a warehouse, wholesale warehouse. They sold drugs and houseware supplies. There's a Jewish guy. He found out I was in the service ___. So my three bosses that I had were all Jewish for some reason. So I worked for him for about 10-11 years. I went to another one because he offered me a little more. This other guy used to be a salesman for the first, and he opened his business, and I worked for him for another 10 years. Then I got a job with another wholesale place. Then in 1950, this friend of mine, says why don't you go to school? Why don't you go to U of H? You could be a good teacher. I said yeah but I didn't finish high school. He said it don't matter, you get an entrance exam. By then, a lot of guys were going in to the universities through the GI. So the time I spent at Texas ANI, U of H didn't honor it because I was substituting, classified as a substitute. That's OK. This guy said take an entrance exam. Take exam for GED also. So I did all that and I passed them all. So the spring of 1950, I was admitted to U of H. So I went to U of H all of '50, all of '51, all of '52, and I was going to graduate in '53, but in the middle of '53 I remember I got this pain again. It hadn't bothered me since I was in the Army. So a friend of mine said why don't you go see a urologist. So I went to see this urologist. By then urology was already well – he says you know what, you have a bag next to your kidney and it's already, I don't know how big he said it was. He said it's full of liquid. He said I have to take it off. He says it's not too delicate of a thing, but you're going to be off for a little while. So Dr. Sponso, I'll never forget him. At the hospital he operated on me, took that bag off, and OK, I didn't touch your kidney. You still have your kidney. But it took me, I'm not kidding you, it took me a whole year to recoup to where I could, so that year of '53, I mean I lost it. I tried to go back working full time 8 hours and going to school in the evenings from 6 to 10, but then I'd get home and I'd have to study for the next, plus get ready for work. I

went on for a few months like that, but then all of a sudden, the doctor told me, he said you can't do it. You can't make it. You're going to have a relapse. Your brain can't function too much, nervous breakdown, he says I'll guarantee you. He says what I can tell you is you either give up school or give up work. Well work was out of the question, so I had to give up going to school and I never did finish.

If you had an opportunity to talk to a group of young men and women that had enlisted in the service and were getting ready to go overseas today, what would be your advice to give those soldiers or sailors?

Johnnie Marino: My main advice would be train well. I mean learn as much as possible from the people that are teaching you, whether it be weaponry, survival of wherever you are, but the main thing is follow orders. I saw a lot of guys get hit just because they tell you we expect artillery, shells to come in. Now you better start digging. I remember a friend of mine from San Antonio, he was this kind of guy, he didn't care. He dug and his butt came up above the ground and shells started coming in and he got half his butt blown off.

So train well and follow orders. It sounds like good advice, sir.

Johnnie Marino: That's the main thing, because that'll save your life, really.

Well on behalf of Commissioner Patterson and the people of the state of Texas, we just want to thank you for your service to our country and for taking time out of your day to just relive some of those experiences with us and with the folks that are coming in tomorrow.

Johnnie Marino: Yeah, that's really, because I've noticed especially during the Vietnam War and the war we are in right now – of course Korea, I had a lot of friends in World War II that stayed with the division and fought in Korea. Of course sadly, a lot of them didn't make it back out of Korea. But these guys that went to Vietnam, that's something I never did understand, or this thing with Iraq and Afghanistan. A lot of people don't realize, oh that's involve and go to fight in places like that, those people are for centuries, that's what they've been doing is fighting each other. Your factions, different factions, they all don't think the same way. They are always one against the other, killing each other.

[End of recording]