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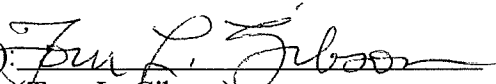
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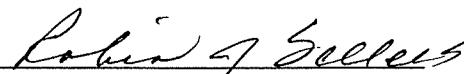
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(Signed): 
(Robin J. Sellers, Director, RPOH)

(Date): 5-8-00

Interviewee: Gibson, Tom
Interviewer: Bill Edmonds
Date: November 19, 1999
Location: Telephone interview: 850-644-7401 to 541-549-9105
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Edmonds: Mr. Gibson, if you don't mind, I'd like you to acknowledge that you are aware that I'm taping the interview and that's acceptable to you.

Gibson: I understand that.

Edmonds: If you can begin, Mr. Gibson, with where you were born and when.

Gibson: I was born in Memphis, Tennessee, August 18, 1924. I was raised in Jackson, Mississippi. My family moved to Jackson when I was six months old, and I was raised there. My family consisted of an older brother and a younger brother, mother and father, of course. My father had an eighth-grade education. My mother had a high-school education. There was no service history in my immediate family. As far back as anyone could know, we had not had any affiliation with the service. In my case, I always wanted to be a soldier, and that was crystallized by the time I was nine years old and it never changed.

Edmonds: What happened when you were nine?

Gibson: I think what it was was the fact that I was living in the South. The South was still remembering the Civil War and Lost Cause. Duty, honor, country . . . those concepts were very real to me, and I wanted to serve something bigger than myself. My family had no money, so I had no aspirations about making a lot of money. No one in my family had ever been to college,

so that was not really an alternative. The service was not only something that I wanted to do, it was something that I was going to do whether the war came or not. In high school, I played football, ran on the track team, and participated for three years in a high school ROTC program and hopefully I was going to go into the service. Well, when I was in the tenth grade in 1939, the war started, of course. For most of us young guys, we knew that we would be involved in the war. So it was a question of how much education can we get before we have to go in. When I was a senior in high school, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, so that was that. I graduated from high school and I never registered for the draft because I was going to go into the service regardless. I just went down on my eighteenth birthday and enlisted in the Army.

Edmonds: Can you back up a bit to Pearl Harbor? Do you remember where you were when you first heard that and what sort of affect did it have on you?

Gibson: My brother and I earned our spending money by working in the newspaper press room Saturday nights. So we would go to work at 7:00 Saturday night and work until 4:00 in the morning.

Edmonds: Is that for the *Clarion-Ledger* or *Daily News*?

Gibson: *Daily News*. Good for you. We'd work all night and then we had paper routes, so then we would go deliver our papers and go home. So we did that. Normally we would go to bed and sometime in the afternoon we would wake up. But that particular Sunday, all of a sudden I heard our dog barking and I could hear them cry out in the street, "Extra, extra," which, of course, was the way it was done then. Which surprised me because I had just delivered papers. So my mother went out and bought the paper, and it was about the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor.

Edmonds: What did your parents think of that?

Gibson: I can't really gauge their reaction. I think it was more of a sort of a sense of resignation. They, too, had been anticipating the fact that we would be involved, and since there were two boys in the family of service age, it was that consideration. My younger brother was only nine at the time. As I say, I did not register for the draft. I just went down and volunteered.

Edmonds: Did you tell your parents you were going to do that or did you just do it?

Gibson: I had to tell them because they had to sign my enlistment contract. I went down and took the physical and so on, and I took my papers home, got their signature, took it back to the recruiting office. Then you just waited four or five days or whatever it was for them to produce the necessary documents and send you on your way.

Edmonds: Why did you join the Army rather than the Navy or Marines?

Gibson: Actually, Bill, my heart was in the Marine Corps. I wanted to join the Marine Corps from the day I could first think of the Marine Corps. But I'm colorblind. I'm red-green blind. When I went down to enlist in the Marine Corps, they turned me down. I couldn't pass the physical. So the Army then was my next choice. I enlisted in the infantry. I had the option since I was a volunteer of enlisting in any branch of the service I wanted, but I chose the infantry. So I enlisted in that. I went originally to a camp called Camp Shelby, Mississippi, for routine processing. I was there a week or two. Then I was sent to Camp Wheeler, Georgia, for basic infantry training. I did well in that partly because I scored well on the IQ test. I had had the three years of high school ROTC and so on. I finished basic training, and then I was given the opportunity to apply for a commission -- anybody could. So I applied and after I finished basic training I was sent to an NCO (non-commissioned officer) school there at Camp Wheeler, Georgia. I got through that fine, and on the strength of that, I was then recommended for infantry OCS at Fort Benning, Georgia. So I went to Fort Benning, and April 16, '43 I was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant, Infantry.

Edmonds: Where did you take your first jump?

Gibson: After OCS I went to the 8th Armored Division at Camp Polk, Louisiana. At that time, I wanted to go into the parachute troops, but they were not taking applications from company grade officers. Parachute troops were somewhat discredited at that point. They earned their accreditation, if you want to use it that way, in late '43 at a large maneuver which was intended to find out, are these units of this size -- regiment and division -- are they practical. Well, the decision was made [that] yes they were. As of 1 January '44, it was put out that if you want to apply to jump school you can do so. So I did. I went back to Fort Benning, went through parachute school, got my wings, and then I went to a camp in North Carolina, and it was the site of the airborne command. There was nothing there really. It had housed divisions when they first formed, but no division was there at the time. All I did was jump. We just jumped as often as we could. There was nothing else to do. In May of '44 . . .

Edmonds: Let me ask you, did you like jumping?

Gibson: I loved it. Yeah, I'm jump happy. I loved jumping. As a matter of fact, during the period of time that I was there at this camp there was one thirty-day period when I got in ninety jumps.

Edmonds: [Chuckles]. That's three jumps a day.

Gibson: Well, I averaged three a day. Sometimes I did five in one day.

Edmonds: That's a lot of jumping. Did anything ever scare you off?

Gibson: Yes. [Laughter]. The jumping that we were doing was considered test jumping. We were not certified test jumpers, but this is what we were labeled as -- test jumpers -- anyway. One time, a request went out for volunteers to jump from a C-47 at an altitude of 475 feet.

Edmonds: Whoa, that's kind of low.

Gibson: That's very, very low. Ordinarily in the United States, it's mandatory that you have 1,000 feet under you when your chute opens. In our particular case, since we were this test bunch, that was waived. Thirteen of us volunteered, and then the thirteen of us sat down and talked about it and we recognized the time factor so we realized that if we jumped at 475 and our backpack did not open we really did not have the time to activate our reserve. The question arose, "Do we even bother with the reserve?" The British didn't wear reserves. The Russians didn't; the Germans didn't. But we did. The thirteen of us decided we would wear the reserve anyway. We made the jump and nothing happened. It was all over [and] it was fine.

Edmonds: You loved it. Did everyone love it?

Gibson: I was what was jokingly referred to as "jump happy." But the answer to your question -- no. Not everybody loved it. For example -- if I may move ahead a moment -- after the war we had not had a jump in some time, but we had been receiving jump pay all the time. After the war, the order came down that in order to continue to draw jump pay, you had to jump. I was a company commander at the time, and I was astounded at how many men declined to jump. They would rather go off jump pay. And their attitude was, "Hey, I survived the war. I'm not going to go break my rear end now." If I could have jumped for every one of them, I would have. But I jumped for me, and that's all I can do.

Edmonds: Did you ever have any accidents? Any close calls?

Gibson: Well, yeah. Nothing serious. All jumping is inherently dangerous. When you jump in the military, the object of your jumping is . . . the group of men in the airplane who exit one door as quickly as possible, that's called a "stick." So, a "stick" was normally thirteen men. Could be up to eighteen in a C-47, which was the standard airplane. When you pour eighteen men out of the door of a C-47 as rapidly as they can get out, the main danger is getting entangled in the air. That happens and some people get hurt. I got in a tangle but I didn't get hurt. Then the other thing that every jumper is trained to think about is . . . there are three basic enemies to

parachute jumping. One is wind, the other is water, and the other is wire. Whenever you get out and get open, you start looking for those three things.

Edmonds: Did you ever have any entanglements with wind, water, or wire?

Gibson: Not in the Army. I was a jumper in the Army, and after I went to Europe . . . after my period of time as a test jumper at Camp McCall, North Carolina, I went to Europe, joined the 101st, served with that division for seventeen months. I still wanted to go regular Army, so when the war was over people like myself who wanted to go regular Army transferred to the 82nd Airborne because the 101st was deactivated. So, I served with the 82nd in Europe and in the States for a period of fifteen months, during which time I continued jumping. I went to Airborne Pathfinder School back at Fort Benning and so on. In '47, I left the Army for a reason I'll mention in a moment and then years later -- 1962 to be exact -- I was now a Marine Major -- and I went back into jumping. While I was jumping as a Marine Major, yes, I had a problem with wind. I was very badly injured and was surveyed out medically as a result of it.

Edmonds: What happened?

Gibson: Well, it was a Saturday. I was the CO of a unit in the Marine Corps called Force Reconnaissance. Our duties are in the intelligence community, I suppose you could say. Annually, the Boy Scouts in San Diego would invite my personnel to jump as a demonstration for their Boy Scout fair. The jumps were held at the Del Mar Racetrack in Del Mar, California. On this particular Saturday . . . it was purely voluntary. Anybody who wanted to jump could; anybody who chose not to, that was fine. So many of the men in my company volunteered to jump, to spend their Saturday doing that, that I felt compelled to jump with them, which I did do. It was a gusty, windy day. Windy days are one thing; gusty days are worse. I was jumping from a helicopter. The grandstand was filled. The parking lot was filled. It was up to me to decide to go ahead with the jump or cancel it. I was in the air and thinking, "What the hell? Parachute jumping is inherently dangerous anyway." So, I put out four wind dummies. When you put out a

wind dummy -- this is not a dummy -- it's a person. What the jumper is instructed to do is just get out and make no effort to control his parachute. The chutes we were jumping were not steerable anyway. But there was a minimum amount of control you could exercise. The four wind dummies, of which I was number three, we went out and just rode the chutes. When I was coming in, I could see that I was coming in very, very fast, and there was nothing I could do about it. I hit the ground and bounced up in the air and hit the ground a second time. I broke my neck and my left shoulder, left elbow, two ribs, and my back in two places. So I was taken out in a helicopter. Some three months later I was retired medically. I spent those three months in traction in my bed.

Edmonds: I'm glad to hear you got over that, but that's pretty awful.

Gibson: My legacy is chronic pain. I've lived with that for thirty-six years now.

Edmonds: Let's go back. I took this detour actually through your jump experience and left you, I think, leaving jump school.

Gibson: Okay. I left jump school. This is when I went to Camp McCall, North Carolina, to the airborne command. This is when I did the ninety jumps in thirty days. After about three months there, then I went to New York at a port of embarkation and sailed to Europe.

Edmonds: When was this?

Gibson: I sailed the end of May '44. By the time I got to England . . . during the war, if you were in an organized unit, you moved with the organized unit. If you were not in a unit, you were what's called a casual. So I was a casual. I was a 2nd Lieutenant parachute infantry guy. So, I went through the replacement depot system. There were replacement depots all over the British Isles. Incoming personnel, whether they were coming in brand-new or whether they were returning to their units from hospitals, went through this replacement depot system. All that that

would mean is you'd go to one camp, and you may sit there for a week. You may sit there for a day. Then they would transfer you to a unit or to another camp and then another camp and so on. I went through about three camps, and then I wound up assigned to the 101st Airborne.

Edmonds: What were your duties with the 101st?

Gibson: I was assigned to the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment. They then assigned me to the 2nd Battalion of that regiment, and battalion assigned me to one of the rifle companies. In those days, rifle companies went by the alphabet. So, in the 1st Battalion was A, B, C, and the 2nd Battalion was D, E, F, and so on. I was assigned to D or Dog Company. I served in Dog Company from June '44 until April or so of '45. Then I was transferred to our 2nd Battalion Headquarters Company. My duties in Dog Company, I'd been a rifle platoon leader. When I was transferred to the Headquarters Company, I was told the reason I was being transferred was because I had more time in a rifle company than anybody else.

Edmonds: Where did they put up in Britain?

Gibson: We were stationed in Wiltshire. I was stationed in a little town called Aldborne, which was nine miles from Swindon. And this was west of London.

Edmonds: The 101st was involved in the D-Day landing. Were you part of that?

Gibson: No. The 101st was involved in the D-Day landing. You're correct. But I landed in England before I even started the replacement depot system, I just happened to have landed in England on June 6th. By the time I got through the pipeline and was assigned to this unit, the division was still fighting in Normandy. So, I just waited. When they came out of Normandy, the Normandy veterans were given a seven-day leave. When they came back, we -- the new guys like myself -- were integrated and we started training for the next operation.

Edmonds: When you were in England, did you have any idea when you would go over?

Gibson: Well, between the withdrawal from Normandy and the middle of September, we were alerted twice. We -- the division. The division went into what's called a marshalling yard. It's closed off and it's top secret. Nobody can go in or out. And you're briefed on a jump. We were briefed for two different jumps, but neither one of them came off because Patton and other units in Normandy were moving so rapidly that they eliminated the need for a parachute jump. There was another angle to this, and that is that whenever a parachute jump took place, it virtually claimed all of the transport aircraft available. For example, I had a platoon of forty-seven men. If we took three C-47s, you just multiply that by all the companies and units and so on participating, we're talking about a lot of C-47s. If the C-47 is occupied in jumping parachutists then it obviously cannot be performing its primary mission, which is hauling supplies. Part of the supply problem that existed in the summer of '44 was the fact that we had these operations that caused the aircraft to be set aside.

Edmonds: What was the effect of that?

Gibson: For us, we just went in. We were briefed for a couple of days, and the operation was scratched. We went back to the units and went back into training. In September, we were called into the marshalling yard for the third time. We were rather philosophical about it -- "Is this one going to go? Yes or no?" The one that we were called for in September of '44 was Operation Market-Garden. So, yes, we went.

Edmonds: Tell me what happened. And I'm curious, you had always wanted to be in the military since you were a child, and you're now heading into a possible combat situation. Were you excited or fearful or both or what?

Gibson: Both. Mostly excited. I was [chuckles] too ignorant to really understand all of the things that go on. A new guy who is untested in rifle combat, he's something of a liability

originally because he really doesn't know what's going on. He doesn't have a sense of the battlefield. He doesn't have an ability to anticipate and so on. For a leader, whether it's a Sergeant or a Lieutenant or a Captain, who is new to infantry combat, it's hard. If you can survive thirty days, you have half a chance.

Edmonds: Did the more seasoned men under you resent your inexperience?

Gibson: Well, it's a combination of things because I was a platoon leader, which meant I had these men under me, and even though I was inexperienced many of them had served in Normandy. So, I had to be effective enough to convince them that I was worthy of being a platoon leader. Tom Gibson's main concern was, well, to put it bluntly, not fucking up. That was my major fear, was that I would screw up and get people hurt.

Edmonds: How old were you?

Gibson: I had just turned twenty when we went into Holland.

Edmonds: That's a lot to put on a twenty year old.

Gibson: Well, I'd been commissioned when I was eighteen.

Edmonds: Tell me where they sent you and how you got there?

Gibson: In Holland?

Edmonds: Yeah.

Gibson: Look up your records about the Operation Market-Garden.

Edmonds: Actually, I just read something about it this morning. All it said was just a very brief passage about it, and it said it was the largest of these airborne operations, but not considered a success.

Gibson: It was not considered a success for a number of reasons. Partly because the overall idea was the brainchild of Montgomery -- Bernard Montgomery. Field Marshal. Montgomery was very slow, very cautious, would not do anything unless he was absolutely certain it was the right thing to do. So, the planning for Operation Market-Garden was deficient. There were three airborne divisions -- two American, one British, and then one Polish brigade -- that were all involved in this thing. There was a primary north-south axis. We were east of Amsterdam. The long axis was a series of bridges. The rivers were draining toward the channel, of course. The 101st Airborne jumped the furthest south, and then north of us was the 82nd. North of the 82nd was the British 1st Airborne Division. There were so many people involved and so few aircraft that it had to be done in a couple of days. You couldn't do the whole lift in one day. The 101st Airborne was commanded by a general who had been in command in Normandy, so he knew the ropes. The 82nd was commanded by the best leader I ever saw in my life, and that was James M. Gavin. The British Airborne to the north . . . their planning was atrocious. They jumped on the north side of the Neider Rhine River, which was a ghastly mistake, and the division commander was brand-new. So, the Brits did not do well in our opinion. We, the 101st, being farther south linked up with the British ground troops D plus 1, which was September 18, on a Monday. We were astonished at the rather leisurely attitude the Brits had. Their division was fighting for its life up to the north, and they were in no great big hurry to get there.

Edmonds: When you were involved in Market-Garden, you were a platoon commander?

Gibson: We called them platoon leader. Same thing.

Edmonds: How many men were under you?

Gibson: A good question. In the military, you have two tables. One's a Table of Organization or TO. The other is a Table of Equipment or TE. The Table of Organization is the perfect arrangement. If you were full strength and had every man that you were supposed to have, there would be forty-seven men and two officers. But we rarely were full strength.

Edmonds: At that time you had half that or . . . ?

Gibson: No. We were probably about forty-one . . . something like that. The TO was forty-seven. We were a little under that.

Edmonds: Two officers. It would be you and who else? Another 2nd Lieutenant or would you be under a Captain?

Gibson: He was a 1st Lieutenant Normandy veteran. During those times when we went in the marshalling yard and were in training, I was hoping that I could be close enough to him to learn. How does he react to things? How does he think? How do the men react to him and so on? He was a 1st Lieutenant platoon leader; I was a 2nd Lieutenant assistant. We jumped, got off the drop zone, headed south across the Wilhelmina Canal, and were going to get into the town of Eindhoven, but the division commander was reluctant to put us in a big city like that at night. So we didn't go into Eindhoven. We stopped short of that. But the platoon leader, whom I had hoped to watch, was killed almost immediately.

Edmonds: What happened?

Gibson: Well, we had been told as part of the briefing that there were German 88mm canon, which was a multi-purpose thing -- anti-aircraft or ground use -- and an 88 was the best artillery piece in World War II. People had great fear and great respect for the German 88's. We knew that there were two in the immediate vicinity of where we were supposed to cross the Wilhelmina Canal. When we were getting there, the platoon leader was up in front of the column.

He was the point, and I was bringing up the rear of the column. There was this sudden report, and the word came back down the line, "Platoon leader up front." I had heard the report. I figured it was an 88, so I yelled for the attached bazooka people to come with me. We went racing up to the front to find the gun. Here was the platoon leader and a Dutch civilian who had bicycled into the middle of them, and they were all laid out. I think three or four were killed and several were wounded. So, I took over.

Edmonds: That's pretty unnerving circumstances.

Gibson: Yeah. It is. If you are well-motivated and well-trained, what should kick in at that great moment of stress is your training, and you will be doing things without being conscious of it. It's not deliberate; it just happens. You know what to do and you do it. It's like a grooved golf swing. You have a muscle memory.

Edmonds: Was this your first encounter with someone being killed?

Gibson: No, when I was a boy, we lived briefly in the little town of Meridian, Mississippi. Instead of a house sitting right down on the street, because of the hilly nature of the town, some of the homes were six or eight feet up above the sidewalk. There were big brick walls as retaining walls. One night we heard this screaming of brakes. When we lived in Meridian I was eight or nine. We heard this hellacious crash, and we went outside and two men and been driving along, apparently driving too fast, apparently under the influence, lost control and crashed into that brick wall. The bodies were laying out, and that's the first time I ever saw any dead person.

Edmonds: This platoon [leader], had it in fact been an 88 shell that had landed and killed him?

Gibson: Yes, it was. We found the gun and knocked it out. We figured -- like rattlesnakes -- if there's one, there's another one here. Our intelligence had told us there were two. We found the one. I was in the 1st Platoon. The 2nd Platoon in my same company came racing up. The

platoon leader and I talked about what we'd found. He went off with his platoon trying to find this other gun, but he had to be cautious because he had to stay out of the street. Somebody knocked the second gun out. There's still a question of who did. The documents say that 2nd Platoon of Dog Company did; other documents say it was the 1st Battalion. So, who knows?

Edmonds: How were your men armed and how were you armed personally?

Gibson: My battalion commander was a very strange man. He had certain idiosyncrasies, and one of his was that any officer will be armed according to his Table of Equipment weapon. I mentioned there's a Table of Organization and Table of Equipment. The Table of Equipment dictated that a parachute infantry 2nd Lieutenant would be armed with the M1 carbine. In that period of time after Normandy and before Holland, I was trying to pick the brains of people. They were all to a man telling me, "Do not, I repeat, do not go into combat with a carbine. It's a lousy, under strength, underpowered weapon." But I knew that the battalion commander was dogmatic, and I said, "I'm supposed to carry a carbine, and you say 'Don't do it,' so what's the rule?" They just laughed. These guys said, "Don't worry about it. He's a CP commando. He'll never be up front." Which proved to be the case. I grabbed myself an M1 rifle, and I dressed as close to an enlisted man's appearance as I could. An officer who goes into combat wearing typical officer's gear -- webbing and so on -- and wearing his insignia of rank visible is a fool.

Edmonds: Why is that?

Gibson: He'll be a dead fool very quickly because snipers, who lay behind, look for that. So, I wore enlisted man's equipment. I carried an enlisted man's rifle, and I carried two bandoliers of ammunition, a loaded cartridge belt, and I had finagled a Colt .45 pistol. So I was armed with that plus two grenades.

Edmonds: It's a lot to lug around.

Gibson: After a while it gets very light. You feel undressed without it.

Edmonds: How did you jump with all that equipment or did you?

Gibson: [Chuckles]. You jumped with all of that plus two parachutes. Their total weight was sixty-six pounds -- just the parachutes. It was common for an 180 pound man to go out of the door of an airplane weighing over 300 pounds.

Edmonds: They must have had a lot of people injured when they hit the ground trying to negotiate all that weight.

Gibson: What was assumed was that on any jump statistically four percent of the people jumping will be injured. That's probably pretty accurate.

Edmonds: I'm surprised that you didn't like the carbine because it was lighter.

Gibson: It was lighter, but it had no punch. It was not as robust. You can take an M1 rifle -- and I've done this. You can take an M1 rifle, disassemble it, bury it in the sand, leave it buried in a foot of sand, go back, pull it out of the sand, assemble it, and it's ready to shoot. The tolerances in the M1 carbine were so small that a grain of sand would pretty well shut it down. Not only that, it just did not have the impact. An M1 rifle, if you hit a man in the body -- a chest shot, for example -- you're going to knock him down. You hit a man with an M1 carbine, you won't even slow him down. This is why all of the Normandy veterans said don't carry one. And I never did, and the battalion commander never knew about it.

Edmonds: Someone had a bazooka?

Gibson: Three rifle companies were the major elements in a parachute infantry battalion. In addition you had a headquarters company, which was a headquarters/weapons company, meaning

that the battalion staff, battalion functions -- medical functions and so on -- were in the headquarters company. In addition to that, you had a platoon of heavy machine guns. In a squad, you had a light machine gun. So, we had a platoon of heavy machine guns, a platoon of 81 mortars, and a platoon of bazookas. These bazookas that I called for were a section assigned to my company out of our own battalion headquarters company.

Edmonds: It sounds like you found the bazookas effective.

Gibson: The ones we had at the time, a 2.36 inch -- it was later superseded by a 3.5 and then there were 37mm and 57mm cannon. The 2.36 inch bazooka was effective only . . . there were several things that you had to do to hope for any success with a 2.36 inch. To knock out something like a tank or an 88, number one, the weapon that you chose had to be able to do it. That sounds sort of silly, but what I'm saying is, you don't attack a tank with a rifle, for example, because a rifle won't do it. You have to have a weapon that does have the capability. The second thing is, you have to close with the target. You can't sit back 100 yards away and shoot a 2.36 inch and expect to do anything. If you can get to within ten yards of it, do it. Then the third thing is that you have to hit . . . the target that you shoot at has to have something to do with the mechanism. When the kid that was with me fired his 2.36 inch, he aimed it at the elevating and traversing mechanism of this 88. He hit the elevating traversing mechanism, which jammed the gun. Whatever position the barrel had been in at the moment that bazooka struck, that's the position it stayed in so they couldn't elevate or traverse.

Edmonds: Gotcha. Take me through the rest of your experiences in Market-Garden.

Gibson: Well, we went to Eindhoven, we turned around, reversed ourselves, went back north. We had some rather nasty battles at little towns along the road. The Krauts would come at us from the east or west. Holland was polder, which means that the ground over which we were operating was reclaimed from the sea. So Holland is a series of dikes. The dikes are raised above the polder, and this poses a lot of problems because the polder is very soft and mushy.

You cannot dig in. If you dig a foot, you're in water. This pretty well binds you to the road, which makes problems for you and the enemy, as well.

Edmonds: So it's harder to hide.

Gibson: The only way you can hide is to build up something rather than dig down. An infantry soldier is very limited. The equipment that he has is whatever he can carry. He's a beast of burden as well as a fighting man. Every infantry soldier had a small shovel called an entrenching tool, and your life depended on that.

Edmonds: For someone who's trained to dig in, that must have been unsettling.

Gibson: Well, a lot of things that you're trained to do, do not come to pass. A lot of things that you haven't been trained for do come to pass, so you have to be pretty flexible.

Edmonds: How did you react as a platoon leader?

Gibson: All you can do is do the best you can. I don't know what else to say but that.

Edmonds: You said you had some nasty fights. For your platoon, what did that mean? Did that mean close combat or were you being shelled or what?

Gibson: Holland was so open. There were few trees. There were these high dikes. There was this polder land. Much of Holland that we operated over was like that. The fact that it was open meant that your fighting was not at close range. Later, the next campaign we did was in the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes Forest in Belgium.

End of Side A, Tape 1

Begin Side B, Tape 1

Edmonds: Okay, Mr. Gibson. You were talking about how it was so open and flat in Holland but in the Bulge it was a different circumstance.

Gibson: Yeah. The people that had the worst of the hand-to-hand combat if you want to call it that were the British up at Arnhem. We didn't have a great deal of that. But in the Battle of the Bulge, everybody did. When the 101st was put into its defensive perimeter around Bastogne, my regiment was put up in the north and northeast quadrant, and we were in the thickest pine forest you've ever seen. You couldn't see ten feet. So, your contact was very close.

Edmonds: In Market-Garden then, if you're not in close, what does an airborne infantryman do in those circumstances?

Gibson: That's an interesting question because ordinarily . . . we didn't call them airborne. The airborne consisted of two elements, at least it did during the war. The 101st was the 101st Airborne Division, and the major components of the airborne division were three parachute infantry regiments, one glider infantry regiment, and then you had various other units that came in either by parachute or glider. Parachute men were all volunteers. They were mostly young, mostly in superb physical condition, mostly highly motivated or they wouldn't have gotten through jump school. The glider people were simply draftees. They were assigned to gliders and that was that. Some of them were older. The morale of your unit is a combination of a lot of things, so the morale of the parachute infantry people was spectacular. It was a pleasure and an honor to serve with such people. You do what you have to do.

Edmonds: What was the effect on morale when as soon as you get rolling the platoon leader is knocked dead?

Gibson: I can answer that question in two ways. First of all, you sort of expect that. When you're in a rifle platoon, life is very short. The reason there are two platoon leaders assigned is because the platoon leader is supposed to be aggressive, and he pays for that aggression by

becoming a casualty rather quickly. That's why they have two officers there. Any man's death, particularly a friend of yours or particularly someone who's vaporized in front of you or whatever, if you dwell on that -- particularly a leader -- if you dwell on that, you're finished. You cannot take the stress. You'll crack up. What you have to do is you have to blank it out of your mind. You have to go on with the job. If the squad leader gets nailed, either the platoon leader says, "Okay, Joe, you're the squad leader," or some man will step up and take over. You just go on.

Edmonds: In Market-Garden, how many casualties did your platoon suffer?

Gibson: Good lord, I have no idea now. I have no idea.

Edmonds: You lost more than just the platoon leader I take it.

Gibson: Oh, yeah.

Edmonds: You blanked it out of your mind. Did it ever come back?

Gibson: Yes. Combat soldiers in World War II . . . there was the expression of combat fatigue, for example. In World War I, it was something else. In World War II, it was combat fatigue. In Korea they didn't have a title for it. It was combat fatigue again. Then in the Vietnam War, they had this fancy new term. A combat soldier who is never wounded, never hit by anything, is still scarred. You can't take that emotionally. I'm struggling. You're never the same.

Edmonds: When it came back, did it come back years later or did you have to deal with it every night when you tried to go to sleep?

Gibson: In my case, the latter. I'm not a religious guy, and I certainly lost whatever

religion I had during the war, but I used to pray for two things every night. The first thing was just what I'd said earlier -- "Just don't let me screw up."

Edmonds: What was the second?

Gibson: The second thing . . . there's something about the horrors of the night. Americans are not trained for night combat. We weren't then, and we should have been. So the nights were particularly horrible. This is when you did a lot of patrolling, which is the worst thing you can do. I used to pray, number one, don't let me screw up. Number two, I just wanted to see the sun once more.

Edmonds: Did you ever screw up?

Gibson: I panicked once. Did I ever screw up? No. Do I have on my conscience that I was inadequate and as a result of that some of my men got hurt, killed, where we failed to achieve our mission? No. And that's in two wars. I wear eight infantry battle stars. I screwed up briefly [chuckles] in the Battle of the Bulge. My platoon sergeant was a crusty West Virginia guy with an eighth-grade education who was the best combat soldier I ever saw. His name was Tom Rice. What made him so extraordinary was I honestly believe that this man did not know what fear was. We would get into a rip-roaring, close-in, knock-down, drag-out fire fight, and we were both doing the same thing. We were up running around, kicking people, and directing fire and so on. Rice would have a Thompson submachine gun in one hand, and he'd ball up his fist in the other hand and he'd curse the Krauts and so on. He was so involved that I began to worry about him. He was my platoon sergeant for the whole time I was in the company. He was so totally without fear that I was concerned because I thought, "This is not normal. He's a man just like me. Is he suddenly going to crack wide open like a ripe melon? If so, I'm in a hell of a mess." But, he never did. He never changed. The first day in the Bulge, we were moving into a position, and I was placing my troops where I wanted them to be. I was the platoon leader. Rice and I were standing. There was a bush between us, and I was plucking leaves off this bush and I was

watching a squad that I was having him place. All of a sudden, all hell broke loose. My initial reaction was to panic. I just hit the ground, and Rice hit the ground right with me. I couldn't breathe; I couldn't move. I was absolutely frozen. Rice was laying with his head maybe four feet away, and he looked me straight in the eye and he said, "Lieutenant, you better do something or you're going to get us all killed." So that did it. I got up and went on.

Edmonds: What did you do?

Gibson: Get up and take the men to the battle. You find out where the enemy is. How do you counter whatever action he's doing? Where are his machine guns? How far away is he? What weapons do I have that I can bring to my disposal? Is my formation the right formation to do this and so on.

Edmonds: How do you learn those lessons?

Gibson: Well, you learn them in training. When you're a private rifleman going through basic infantry training, you start off and the first lessons that you learn are those which have to do with you, the individual. So, a lot of time is spent teaching the individual how to make his pack, how to disassemble his rifle, how to shoot his rifle and so on. You move up from that up to the man now is part of a unit -- a squad. He learns to work within this squad, and he learns to take orders from his squad leader. The squad leader learns how to give orders and so on. Depending on how much time you have in training, you then move up to the next level, which is platoon. You just keep going, as long as you have training time to do it, to learn to operate as an individual and then as an individual in a unit and then the bigger units. You learn that. The average guy coming into the service in World War II in my opinion took at least one year to convert him from being a civilian to convert him into a being a man who had a chance as a rifleman. If you were a leader, then you had to have those things, and then you had to be trained to be a leader. That's what the non-commissioned officers school and the Infantry Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning did.

Edmonds: Was the training good? Bad?

Gibson: As an academic, I think you'll appreciate this. The Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning was established as a brainchild of General Marshall, the Chief of Staff. Marshall was very prescient. He felt that in World War II, West Point and the regular Army are not going to be able to provide all the leaders we need down at the lower levels -- company and so on. So there has to be some way where a qualified, bright, ambitious young man can be screened and chosen and trained so that he can come out of there as a halfway decent rifle platoon leader. The OCS program was not only infantry. There were OCS programs in the artillery and engineers as well. You learned there. When you got into your unit, the learning process was constant. A leader, regardless of what level, a leader is also a teacher. So, why do you select someone to be a squad leader or platoon leader or company commander or whatever? One of the things you want to do is you want to pick a man who can teach.

Edmonds: You left us here in our narrative still somewhere in Holland on the dikes. How did you get out of Market-Garden?

Gibson: Airborne units, when they jumped in Normandy, were expected to be there forty-eight hours. They were there for thirty some-odd days. When we jumped in Holland, we were supposed to be there seventy-two hours; we were there seventy-two days. I got out of there because I was wounded and was evacuated to a general hospital in England. After my recuperative period, I went back to the same platoon. That first day in the Bulge when I panicked and Rice [chuckles] got me going again, we were in the Bulge from . . . the Bulge broke December 16th. We were there the 18th and committed the 19th as I remember. We were encircled. The Germans demanded our surrender. The division commander said, "Nuts" in response to the demand. Once the encirclement was over, we went from being in a defensive mode to being very, very offensive. That went on until about the middle of January. Then we were pulled out. Went back to France to pick up training and incorporate new people and so on.

Edmonds: Tell me about your being wounded in Market-Garden.

Gibson: We were in a town called Opheusden. It was up between the two rivers -- between the Nieder Rhine, which is the Rhine River, and the next river south. We were in a place called the Island. My unit was on the left flank of my regiment, and the Krauts were attacking us frontally and they were attacking us from their right. So they were attacking our left flank. Units were being moved around to counter things, and confusion is rampant. Under the best of circumstances things get terribly confused. You don't know who's where; you don't know what's going on. I was assigned a patrol to go to my left and try to contact some elements of my regiment because people didn't know exactly where they were. In the process of going to do that, we didn't find the units we were looking for. We found the Germans instead. And I got nailed.

Edmonds: In what way?

Gibson: We were in this little village, and the store fronts are right on the street. If you're walking down the street and you want to go into a shop, there's normally a recessed doorway to protect you in inclement weather. Then you just open the door and you step into the shop. The streets are cobblestone. When you're operating in something like that [chuckles] . . . how can I explain it? It's a combination of fire and movement. One man stays in one of those recessed doorways. You stay out of the street. You get killed in the street, so you stay out of the street. You do the best you can. One guy looks up ahead of himself, and he picks out a doorway he wants to go to. So you do it in a sequence. Let's say it's your turn to move. You look up ahead and you see a recessed doorway, and you jump out of where you are and you just run as hard as you can to get into that doorway that you picked out. While you are moving, the other people are covering you -- your own men. I picked out a doorway and jumped out of the doorway and started running as hard as I could to get into the next one, and a German just side-stepped out of one of the doors and raked the street with a Schmeisser, which was a sub-machine gun. He got me. It was very strange because you just put your head down and go as hard as you can as fast as

you can, but I looked up and here was this guy side-stepping out of a doorway and his gun was firing. He was hit by the cover people and went down. I ran on and jumped in the doorway, and I was thinking, "How on earth could he have missed me? He was right in front of me."

Edmonds: So you didn't know you were hit.

Gibson: I didn't know I was hit. I jumped in this doorway. I was standing there and I was looking at my legs. I was wondering, "How could he have missed me?" We had big reinforced pockets, and I noticed in the reinforcement of the pocket there was a hole, which was not there before. I tried to tear it open with my fingers, but the material was very resistant to tear. That's why it was reinforcing stuff. I was trying to tear it, and one of my other men jumped in with me and said, "Lieutenant, are you okay?" I started to say, "Yeah," and all of a sudden I could feel the blood running down my leg. That was all. What happens, when you're in something like that -- that kind of close situation -- the adrenaline is pumping so hard that you can be . . . the second time I was wounded I was on my feet moving along, and the next thing I knew I was on my back of my neck down in a hole. There would be times when you're upright, you're doing something, and the next thing you know you're flat on your back. Or you're on your right side. Or you're on your face. For a moment, you wonder, "How in the hell did I get here?" You realize "I'm not supposed to be here." You sort of run a mental check. Do I have both arms and both legs? Can I move? Then you get up and do what you have to do.

Edmonds: How badly were you injured?

Gibson: The rule at the time was, if you were wounded, it drew blood, if it was a condition that could not be handled by your own regiment's or division's medical people. If the nature of the wound was such that a doctor decided, "This guy is going to require over thirty days to recuperate." If it was thirty days, then they sent you to a field hospital. If it was between thirty and sixty days, they sent you to an evac hospital. If it was between sixty and ninety days, they sent you to a general hospital. If it was to be in excess of ninety days, you went to the States.

That was the rule. So I was flown back to a general hospital in England. The assumption was that it would be somewhere around ninety days.

Edmonds: Were you shot in the thigh or calf?

Gibson: In the right thigh. Just dead center in the right thigh.

Edmonds: Break a bone or anything?

Gibson: Didn't break the bone. What they did in those days was, when you were operated on and they took out the object, whatever it was, they would take it out, sterilize it, and then tape it on your chest. So when you woke up [chuckles] you had that souvenir. I still have it. Then I was in the hospital. What they did, you came in initially to what was called the emergency surgical ward. They call it ER and all sorts of things now. At first, people who came into this emergency surgical ward were all ranks, regardless of the nature of the wound -- whether it was a broken bone, a burn, a stab wound, whether it was orthopedic in nature or whatever. You went initially to this emergency surgical ward and then you stayed there as long as was needed to perform the necessary surgery and give you a little recovery time there. As soon as they could, they moved you out of the emergency surgical and then you were sorted out in the hospital into whatever ward was the specialty. If your wound had been orthopedic, you went to an orthopedic ward. If it had been a burn case, you went to a burn ward. Or, if you were an officer, you went to an officers' ward. The officers there were a mixture of burn cases and so on.

Edmonds: How long did it take you to get treatment from the time you were wounded?

Gibson: Every unit has men who are not warriors; it's their purpose to administer emergency first aid. As soon as I got hit, because of the nature of the small patrol, we did not have any medical personnel with us. We had to go back to my unit and then . . . we called them aid men. The aid men took over. They gave me morphine. I don't know . . . for forty-eight

hours. I don't really remember. I sort of floated in and out. I remember going through a British hospital. We were under the Brits in Market-Garden. So I remember being in a British aid station of some sort, and they gave me whole blood. I remember thinking how great that felt. [Chuckles]. It was as though I'd had a big shot of good scotch whiskey. The next thing I knew I was in an airplane, and I could hear the engines droning and the plane moving up and down. The next thing I knew I was in England.

Edmonds: Did you get good care?

Gibson: Service medicine is either outstanding or it's outstandingly bad. At first, when you're hit it's outstanding. A lot of men who otherwise would have died, say, in World War I did not die in World War II because of the extraordinary quality of the medicine. But the catch was that sometimes hospitals took advantage of situations, and you as a commander had to be alert to this. What would often happen is, an enlisted man would be wounded, he'd go into a hospital, and he would be recovered. His thirty-day period, forty-five-day period or whatever it was had ended and he was okay. But the hospitals would hold him over and just turn him into a worker. He'd swab the floors and do things like that. So, a unit commander had to stay on top of the men who were in the hospital because you needed that man back in the unit. You didn't need him swabbing floors.

Edmonds: But you were an officer. They're not going to have you swabbing the floor, are you?

Gibson: Negative. That's why I clarified the fact that this was done to enlisted men -- not officers.

Edmonds: What about your personal medical treatment?

Gibson: I guess it was real good. Because of the surgery, the incision was all the way to

the bone. They had tied off a lot of things, and they packed the incision with some kind of lubricated gauze. Then they put an Ace bandage on it. After a week or two weeks they decided, "Okay, it's time to take you back in and sew you back up again." They unwrapped the Ace bandage, and when he started hauling this gauze out of the incision, the hole looked big enough so I could stick my head in it. Anyway, I was taken in. They sewed me back up. In the act of doing that, all the muscles -- everything in that leg -- was tightened up. The leg for months was just straight as a ramrod. I couldn't bend it an inch. Remember, it's ninety days and back to the States. So the doctor came in one day and said that if I could not do a deep knee bend in a month, they were going to send me back to the States. Well, I'm no great hero, but I thought, "Wait a minute. I just got here, and I don't want to go home right now. I want to finish the job." There was an aid man in the hospital who knew that that was my sentiment. So he became a co-conspirator. He went down to the local motor pool and got a canvas water bucket -- collapsible water bucket that tied to vehicles. He brought it in, and then he scrounged around outside. There was construction going on. There were old foundations being torn up and so on. He would get pieces of cement, and he brought the bucket and pieces of cement in and he'd hide them during the day. At night, he would come in after the lights were out, and he'd hang the canvas water bucket over my instep and then he would just add chunks of cement. So, in two weeks I could do a deep knee bend.

Edmonds: You really wanted to get back in there it sounds like.

Gibson: The reason I was in the Army to begin with, the reason why I wanted responsibility, the reason why I wanted to go into parachute troops, which I considered the elite, if you've got to go to war as in infantry soldier, go to war with the best people you can find. All of these things were contributing factors. Here I was okay. All right, I'd been hit, but I didn't want to have to go all the way back to the States. I wanted to stay here and finish this thing. I wanted to go back to my unit. You have an enormous sense of identity with your unit. You talk about bonding. It's terribly significant. And I wanted to go home -- back to the unit -- rather than home to the States.

Edmonds: So you did go home. What were the circumstances?

Gibson: No, I didn't go home.

Edmonds: Home back to your unit.

Gibson: I went back to my unit. As I recall, I got there on a Friday. I was still limping. It was a Friday if I remember correctly.

Edmonds: They flew you out of London or out of where?

Gibson: When you are released from the hospital, it's very easy for you to scrounge transport to go to the sound of the guns because everything is moving in that direction. So it's easy. You finagle around. You talk to this guy, talk to that guy. I finagled around like any guy would, and was flown back to Europe -- back to the Continent. My division had been pulled out of Holland and was in training in France. So I went back to my unit.

Edmonds: Where in France?

Gibson: We were just outside of Reims. Châlons-sur-Marne, if I remember correctly, was the name of the town. Anyway, I got there on a Friday. The Bulge broke on Sunday, and we took off.

Edmonds: Great timing. Tell me what happened during the Bulge for you. You've told me some already but go ahead and just take me through it.

Gibson: Well, we went into the Bulge . . .

Edmonds: At this point, were you acting as airborne or as regular infantry?

Gibson: We were regular infantry. We did not jump into the Bulge. We went in in big cattle cars. Nobody knew what the hell was going on. I remember as we were in the cattle cars riding through the night, there was a man in the vehicle who spoke French. Every time we would stop momentarily, he would yell out something that sounded like "*Qu'est-ce la nom de la ville*" or "*Qu'est-cez la nom de le village?*" "What's the name of the town?" The people would yell back. Sometimes we could hear them; sometimes we couldn't. There was one point at which he yelled out, and there was a response and he said, "We're no longer in France. The accent has changed." We were now in Belgium. We spent one night not knowing where the hell we were, but we were west of Bastogne. The next morning my regiment went east, went into the town of Bastogne, and then headed north because we'd been assigned to a position in the north and northeast and that's where we were going. So, we went there. Within two days, I guess, the Germans had encircled my division, the 101st and some attached units. Nobody was worried about being encircled. If you were a World War I person, the idea of being encircled was horrifying because that was sort of a last-ditch thing. But parachutists don't think that way because when you jump in combat, you jump behind the enemy lines anyway. So, what's the big deal about being encircled? The Germans had learned in Russia, and the Russians had learned in Russia that being encircled is not fatal by any means. The fact that we were encircled, no big deal. When Patton's Third Army and other units came to us, then, as I mentioned earlier, we went from a defensive mode over to an offensive mode and just went back to war. When we finished the Bulge, we went back to France again . . . excuse me, we went to Alsace-Lorraine. We were in Alsace for -- I don't remember -- less than a month as I recall. Then we went back to France. More training. In the spring of '45, we went up on the Rhine on the west bank of the Rhine about halfway between Dusseldorf and Cologne. We just did a lot of patrolling and raiding and so forth from there, which can get you killed very dead. It's no pink tea party. Then we pulled out of there and went back across the Rhine. Went into Germany -- sort of in the southwestern corner of Germany -- then we headed east and went past Munich. We were not allowed to go into Munich. We went to Landsberg. Then we went on in to Berchtesgaden. We were in Berchtesgaden on V-E Day ironically.

Edmonds: What was that like?

Gibson: By that time, the European war was pretty well over because when we started moving east into Germany, the Germans were surrendering by the thousands. We would be heading east on the autobahns, and they would be heading west on the autobahns walking. There would be places where they were told to drop their weapons, and they complied with that. We kept going to Berchtesgaden. We were sitting there anticipating the fact that the war was over, and my troops decided to celebrate. [Chuckles]. For a few days we were filching potatoes out of the fields and liberating cases of champagne. When V-E Day was announced, we celebrated by frying potatoes and drinking champagne.

Edmonds: How did that feel to have the war over?

Gibson: Mixed. Because on the one hand you had survived. If you had survived . . . I keep using the word "honor" because it's one of the things I believe in. I don't believe in much, but I do believe in honor. If you can finish that job with a sense of honor, it's a great feeling. However, we knew that the Pacific war was still going on. We were in France, and I had a company. We had already started building crates and labeling crates and getting ready to go to Marseilles, get aboard ship, go east through the Med, go through Suez, and eventually we were scheduled to jump into Honshu. Every day while we were getting ready for this, I would go down to my company office, and I asked my 1st Sergeant the same question every morning. That was, "1st Sergeant, is that war over over there?" meaning the Pacific. The Pacific war might as well have been on the moon with the little we knew about it. We never thought about it; we didn't know what was going on. Every day I'd ask my 1st sergeant the same question, and he'd always give me the same answer. "No, sir, not yet." One day I went, asked him the question, and he said, "I don't know. Something about some big bomb that was dropped on the Japanese. I don't know." That was it. Some big bomb. A couple of days later, I asked the same question. "They dropped another one of them big bombs, and I think the Japanese are going to quit." A few days later we got the word that V-J Day had come to pass. That was that.

Edmonds: What did your guys in your platoon -- and maybe some of the officers that you knew as well -- think about the idea of leaving the European war and going into the Asian war?

Gibson: I can't speak for any appreciable number. I can only speak for myself. My feeling was, "Okay, we've done the job here. But if we have to go to Japan, we'll have to go to Japan. I don't want to go to Japan." I sort of had the feeling, "Hey, we did our job here." But that's not my option. If Dame Fortune says, "Okay, you did your job here, but you've got to go there," then we would go there.

Edmonds: Did you stay in touch with your family during the war?

Gibson: As well as I could.

Edmonds: Did you tell them what it was like or did you tell them everything was okay?

Gibson: Here again, I don't know what other people did. Because of the nature of my family, I didn't say much. I just tried to be as optimistic and play it close to the vest and really not comment.

Edmonds: Were you married before you left?

Gibson: Oh, no. When I went to war I was only nineteen.

Edmonds: Did you have a girlfriend?

Gibson: I had a series of them. [Laughter]. Nothing special.

Edmonds: Did you stay in touch with any of them?

Gibson: No. They were just high school girlfriends.

Edmonds: Did you date any women during the war?

Gibson: Oh, yes. In England, in France. I studiously avoided the German women because I hated the Germans with such an intensity that if the most beautiful German woman in the world had offered herself to me, I would have probably punched her in the mouth. I hated the Germans. So I wouldn't touch a German woman. No.

Edmonds: Why did you hate them? It seems like an obvious question, but . . .

Gibson: We thought we knew the extent of their inhumanity to man. Landsberg was a German concentration camp. We got into Landsberg when the bodies were still burning, draped over the wire. All these emaciated, starving, abused, maltreated people. The concentration camps, particularly the extermination camps . . . of course, when they stuffed these bodies, after they worked them to death, when they stuffed the bodies in the crematoriums and burned them, you could smell the smell ten miles away. But the Germans, of course, maintained that they knew nothing about it. There was not a Nazi in Germany. How many times did I ask a German, "Were you a Nazi?" The denial was absolute. "Oh, me? Oh, no. I was never a Nazi. I worked in the underground. We didn't like Hitler." And all this stuff. We'd shake our heads. We had a routine when we were in Germany. If we came into a village and it was inclement weather or it was getting dark or whatever, then we were simply told, "Gibson, you take that house and that house. Smith, you take that house and that house." You would go up to the front door of this house, and the people would come to the door. We had a phrase which we memorized in probably terrible German. Anyway, what we would say to them is something like this, "*Alle Man, Alle Frau, Alle Kinder, Haben Sie Gehen Sie Avecein Stunde, Raus.*" What we were saying is, "All the men, all the women, all the kids have to get out in one hour. Move." *Raus* is a favorite [chuckles] German word. If the people responded and quickly packed and got out, we'd go into the house. We were not there to destroy. We were just there for cover. The people would

move over with somebody else, and we would move on. Maybe somebody else moved into the house.

End of Side B, Tape 1

Begin Side A, Tape 2

Edmonds: Okay, Mr. Gibson, go ahead. You were talking about in Germany when you would . . .

Gibson: We stopped at one place, which was a two-story home. It was built like a Swiss ski chalet, and there was a smaller home there that was more or less a servants' quarters. The people who owned the home, it was an older man and his wife. His wife was English. The man was German. He, like most Germans did, professed to know nothing about English, and most of them did. Through the wife, who became the translator . . . this was the house we were supposed to occupy. I had my men go in . . . we always checked in advance of you going in to make sure there were no booby traps or whatever. My men had gone in the house and looked around. I was talking to the German man and the wife. I asked the normal questions. "Were you a member of the Nazi Party?" "No, no, no. Of course not." "Were you ever in the German military?" "Oh, no, no. Of course not." By this time, a man had found big cases of over and under shotguns. Beautiful weapons in glass cases and so on. I asked if he had any ammunition for those weapons. "No, of course not." "Do you have any service weapon?" "No, no." "Do you have any ammo for service weapons?" "Oh, no, no." Well, my men were standing there listening to this. They would just look at me and nod their heads. They'd go into the house and in five minutes, without forcing anything, they came back and here was a picture of this guy in his service uniform wearing his Iron Crosses and so on. He was a Major. We found service weapons. We found ammo for the service weapons. We found ammo for the other weapons. I'm talking about these were high-quality, beautiful shotguns. Over and under, double-barrel and so on. I had told this man in the course of the initial interrogation, "If what you're telling me is true . . ." they kept putting their hands together and saying, "*Bitte, bitte*," which means please. "Don't destroy our house."

Americans didn't do that deliberately. If I had been in that house and the Germans had come to my front door and I had lied to them, they'd have shot me out of course. Period. Anyway, we did go into the house. We found all these things. I just told my men, "Okay, guys, wreck the place."

Edmonds: Why?

Gibson: Why not? This was the hatred that I had built up by this time. The Germans would have shot us out of hand. My men smashed open the cases, took out the shotguns, stuffed them with ammo, and went around through the house blowing out windows, pictures, furniture, whatever. I began getting some radio traffic asking me what the hell I was doing. [Chuckles]. I told them. Somebody said, "Save a weapon for me. I'll be right over." We did that, and we moved on. Another time, there were two platoons, and the other officer and myself were standing outside of a house in Germany. We were leaning against the building waiting to move in and so on. All of a sudden, there was a crack of a rifle and a bullet hit the wall right up over our head. Didn't hit either one of us. We dropped down and looked around because most of the buildings in close proximity were one-story buildings. But the angle with which this bullet had struck the wall indicated that it was a much taller building. So, we could see a three- or four-story building a couple of blocks away. We decided that's where it came from. He grabbed his platoon, and I grabbed mine. We went over. He circled the building with his platoon, and I went inside to search the building with mine. It was a German military hospital. I got ahold of the head medic -- whatever his rank was -- I explained what happened. He said, "This is a military hospital." I went through the normal drill. "Do you have weapons, ammo?" He denied it. "Of course not. This is a military hospital." Well, we searched the place, and we found men lying in their hospital beds with rifles between their legs. I got mad and I told this guy to evacuate. "Get out and leave." "Where should we go?" I said, "I don't give a shit where you go. Get out." I was mad. The hatred led you to do things like that. I never raped a woman; I never beat up a child. I never shot a German unless he was shooting at me and so on. Cooler heads prevailed. When somebody from headquarters came down and found out what I was doing, they made me stop and let the

Germans stay. Then they just told me to go on. So I packed up and went on about my business. I don't know how you could live among those people and see the things that they did and not feel that way. That's a burden for you. Hatred is bad, but sometimes it's inevitable.

Edmonds: You said you never raped a woman. Did any soldiers rape anyone?

Gibson: I can answer that honestly. No.

Edmonds: Did you witness any acts of physical cruelty during the war or after the war?

Gibson: Only from the Germans' point of view.

Edmonds: What were those?

Gibson: The evidence of Landsberg, for example. Then, of course, the fighting. They're trying to kill you. They're 100 yards, 50 yards, 300 yards away, and their purpose is to kill you. Your purpose is to kill them. What's interesting about being an infantry soldier, particularly of the time I was . . . as a boy, I grew up in the South with its courtly manners and all this other business. I was taught, "Do not fight." You get thrown out of school for fighting. You get in trouble with your parents for fighting. But, if you do get in a fight, never hit anybody smaller than you. Never hit anybody older than you, never hit a girl, never hit anybody wearing glasses. Within a year of going into the service, I knew thirty-five different ways to kill you, including gauging your eyes out and biting your jugular if I needed to. You can't go through that . . . whether you ever bite somebody or poke them in the eye, you can't go through that kind of transition and stay the same.

Edmonds: Did you remain angry at the Germans?

Gibson: I remain angry at the Germans to this day. I've been back to Germany as a tourist.

Edmonds: How'd that go over?

Gibson: Let me give it to you this way. My whole family -- my wife, my mother-in-law, my three children -- one was a babe in arms -- and a Mexican maid. We all went to Europe one summer -- the summer of '69 as I remember. We went to Italy first, all over Italy. And then to Switzerland, Germany, France, England, Scotland, Ireland. Wherever we were in Italy or Switzerland or these other places, my wife would pick up the phone and call the concierge, and she would make dinner arrangements for the Mexican maid and the youngest child. Having done that, then we would go out. The rest of us would go out to dinner. That was the routine. The Italians were gracious about it, all over the place. The Swiss were gracious about it. When we got to Germany, we tried the same thing. My wife always made the call. She called down . . . this was in Frankfurt if I remember correctly. It was an hour or two before anybody came to the door. I had been telling my wife, "Honey, you can't ask Germans. You have to dictate to Germans." She was of a nature that that was not easy for her. After that second night in Germany, I said, "Okay. We tried it your way. Here, let me try it my way." I picked up the phone, and in my most imperative German -- mangled no doubt -- I said, "Send a dinner menu to room, whatever it was, *jetz*." And "*jetz*" means now. I said it in that kind of a tone. By the time the phone hit the cradle, the guy was at the front door. I just went up and yanked the menu out of his hand, ordered what I wanted, and dismissed him. After that, my wife would pick up the phone, and she got the same treatment. They were there the instant the phone hit the cradle. Germans are weird people.

Edmonds: [Chuckles]. Did you witness any acts of what might best be described as tenderness during the war?

Gibson: I'm trying to think. That's an interesting question. Yes. The most memorable acts of tenderness were among the servicemen themselves looking out for each other. Acts of tenderness were by the nurses in the hospitals. The first acts of tenderness that I saw were in England because the Brits had been in the war for so long. I got there in '44; they had been at

war since '39. Had the Germans been successful in cutting them off at sea, the Brits would have starved to death. Americans in their generosity would give kids candy. One of the expressions that came out of World War II, which I think has been forgotten, but it was very common. It was every day in England. Kids would say, "Got any gum, chum?" Americans would give them gum. Give them candy. Americans would invite the Brits to come and share your rations in your mess halls and this kind of thing. So, yeah. There was tenderness.

Edmonds: Just briefly tell me how you ended up back home and what happened to you.

Gibson: As I said earlier, my division deactivated after the war by order of the War Department. I transferred to the 82nd Airborne because I wanted to go regular Army. I came back to Fort Bragg, served there for fifteen months. I had a good record. I had hopes of becoming a regular officer in the Army and going as a career. In '46, the Army established a program whereby they would select officers from all these wartime guys who would be regulars, which means that you had a permanent commission and you stayed on. I had a good record so I applied. Beginning in the second quarter of '46, the Army had this system whereby if you were selected you got a telegram. If you were dropped from consideration, you got a telegram. If you heard nothing, you were still under consideration. '46 ended and I'd gone through the second, third, and fourth quarter. I had not been given a commission. I had not been dropped either. The first quarter of '47 would be the final selection. Strangely enough, it was not until 1 January '47 just before the final selection was announced, that the Army announced its criteria. Number one, a four-year college education. I was a high school graduate. That finished it for me. I could have stayed on in the regular Army as a Master Sergeant. I was a Captain by then. A Master Sergeant with a Captain's commission in the reserve.

Edmonds: That would be kind of strange.

Gibson: I chose not to do that for a number of reasons. Probably the primary reason was the fact that I was a warrior. If the Army is going to build its future on college degrees rather

than proven combat leadership, I didn't think I wanted to be in that kind of an Army. So that was that. I left.

Edmonds: And so you left and joined the Marine Corps. Is that correct?

Gibson: Well, I left . . .

Edmonds: You left and went into the Marine Corps later.

Gibson: Yes. I left and I said to myself, "I want to give myself a year, and if in a year I can adjust to being a civilian I'll do it. If I can't I'll go back into the Army whatever they give me." I had mentioned earlier in this conversation that I had been turned down by the Marine Corps when I first tried to enlist because I'm colorblind. In that year that I was out, the Marine Corps came out with a program which would do exactly what I had hoped the Army would do. And that is, a qualified enlisted man who could demonstrate some ability, who was recommended for a commission, who could pass the screening, who could survive to the Marine Corps standards for three years as an officer would then have a regular commission. And color perception was no longer an issue. So, I resigned my Army commission, enlisted in the Marine Corps as a Private and started off all over again.

Edmonds: Look, Mr. Gibson, I think we've covered all the ground I needed to cover and want to thank you for the interview.

Gibson: This will go into a data bank kind of thing?

Edmonds: Yeah. It sure will. Let me turn off my tape, and I'll give you some background information.

End of interview