



## J. Herman Sitrick



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**Interviewer:** Chad Comello  
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**Transcriber:** Elizabeth Ceisel

## INTRODUCTION

J. Herman Sitrick has lived in Morton Grove for almost 50 years. A first-generation American, Sitrick's parents emigrated from Russia and settled in Davenport, Iowa, where he grew up. In 1943, at age 18, he was drafted into the 83<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, which was among the first replacements after the initial D-Day invasion on Omaha Beach. He fought through Normandy, Luxembourg, German's Hürtgen Forest, and the Battle of the Bulge, where he single-handedly captured 21 German soldiers during a snowy night in an abandoned farmhouse. For his heroics, in June 2017 he was awarded the Legion d'Honneur, France's highest honor for military and civil actions.

After his discharge in December 1945, Sitrick married Marcia, his wife of 71 years, and worked in broadcasting, which brought him to radio stations around the country before settling in Chicago. He started his own advertising business in 1981 in Skokie, where he remains working today. In addition to the widespread media coverage Sitrick has garnered since receiving the Legion d'Honneur, the Village of Morton Grove's board of trustees recently proclaimed June 26 to be J. Herman Sitrick Day.

In this interview, Sitrick talks about his war experience, his chance encounter with Martin Luther King, Jr., the relationships he gained through his advertising business, and the successes of his three sons.

**JHS: J. Herman Sitrick**

**Q: Question asked by interviewer, Chad Comello**

JHS: Well, I was in the 83rd Infantry Division. I was among the first infantry replacements after the initial invasion of Omaha Beach in Normandy. When I joined my company, we were preparing to attack the Nazis through the hedgerows. While we were being handed our C-rations—those are the big boxes—for the next couple days—they're big and they fit in these oversized pockets—as we were handed them, the Germans attacked us instead. There were artillery shells, mortar shells, machine guns coming, crossfire. We hit the ground, but with two bandoliers of ammunition over each shoulder crisscross and with grenades hanging on our suspenders from our belts, we felt like we were raised that high up when we hit the ground, you know. Within a couple of minutes of them starting to fire at us, I felt something hot hit the back of my leg with a slam, and it was shrapnel. Then later on, they continued to fire, and the medic crawled over our way and says, "Anybody hit over here?" and I didn't answer because I figured there were soldiers who were hurt more than I was. Then one of the fellows yelled, "Didn't you say you were wounded?" I said, "Yes, but I thought somebody else might need the medic more." Anyway, he took his knife and he cut my fatigues all the way up to the buttocks and put sulfur powder in the bandage and told me to meet him in the back of the next field.

The Germans continued to pour the artillery and the gunfire. So I limped over across that field and jumped over the hedgerow, landed with my hand on

the face of a dead German soldier as I fell over the hedgerow. And then I made my way back. There were German snipers in the trees as well. There's a lot of foliage in June and July. So I got back to the back of the field and I went with him to the aid station and they tagged me to go to back to the hospital in England.

Then a sergeant from our platoon who had been slightly wounded made a plea to us that anybody who could still walk and fire a gun, we need you, we were really hit badly in this attack. So as an 18 or 19 year old, whatever I was at the time, I did something I wouldn't do again today. I ripped the tag that was hanging from my uniform off and put it down and went back. It was only something that... afterward, I wondered why I'd done it. But then we fought in Normandy, Brittany, Luxembourg, the Hürtgen Forest on the Rur River, and the Battle of the Bulge.

Q: We'll get to that, but what do you think, looking back, compelled you to rip that tag off and stay and fight?

JHS: Well, I felt sorry for the soldiers who were still there. I wasn't thinking about "What am I doing?" I just did it. And not too many of the guys pulled their tags off. But I went back there and then we fought in Saint-Malo and Saint-Lunaire in Brittany. And then we got to the Moselle River where Luxembourg connects. And from there we went to Hürtgen Forest, and we fought in the Hürtgen Forest. I was in the Hürtgen Forest for several weeks, probably three or four weeks. Then we were relieved by soldiers from another division. The usual procedure if you've

been in combat for a while, at least for us, was to walk back to the rear, maybe five miles, six miles, and then be picked up by trucks, then be in relief for a couple of days to a week, and then we'd go back to battle again. We were about maybe five or six miles back of the line and my company commander was stopped by a lieutenant colonel from another of the regiments in the division. We were the 331st Regiment and they had the 329th and the 330th were also regiments of the same division. So I think it was the 329th, the colonel said to our company commander, "I may need you in our plan of attack. Can you put your men over in that field and send a liaison over." Well, you don't wanna be the liaison; you want to rest. But I was sent over there and I'm in these dirty, sloppy fatigues from fighting and living in foxholes. And I had hushpuppy-type boots; we never did get the leather ones. And my pants were sliced all the way up because the medical officer told me not to wear the leggings anymore because he thought encephalitis might be a possibility.

So as I was watching for the lieutenant colonel to come out of the chateau to let me know, all of a sudden, out of nowhere, a commanding general for our division, who wouldn't know a combat soldier if he saw one, walked up to me. I might add that the headquarter soldiers there, you could shave in your reflection from their shoes. And they didn't look quite as dressed as the people at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier procedure. But they all had olive drab dress uniforms, neat, pressed uniforms, shiny shoes and all. And I had these hushpuppies and

my pants were torn and I had these dirty fatigues. And he walked up to me, he's about 6'3" and 260.

Q: Who was this?

JHS: The commanding general of our division.

Q: Do you remember his name?

JHS: It was General Macon. I know he never got within a couple miles of the front, but he shouted out to me, "Where are your leggings, soldier?" And instead of saying I was wounded, I said, "The medical officer told me not to wear any, sir." He said, "Well, General Patton is coming to see me and I don't want him to see you. Get out of sight." And he stormed away. He just assumed I was one of the headquarters people who wouldn't have gotten away with looking like that. Then I got into a communications tent that was there, that the communications staff were in, where I was out of sight. I saw the jeep come up and I saw Patton get out with his revolvers with the pearl handle or whatever they were. And they slapped each other in the back and walked away, you know. But then we walked back further after that and we were picked up by trucks and the trucks rode forever it seemed. We ended up in Belgium at the Ardennes Forest, the Battle of the Bulge.

Q: You said you were being relieved and then being sent back, but then were you pulled back into combat right away?

JHS: Right away.

Q: So how long were you in combat consecutively?

JHS: Between the two?

Q: So when you first land at Omaha...

JHS: At Omaha, it was almost continuous. We would get two days off here and there after we had finished the battle. Up to four or five days sometimes.

Q: Did you get back to England or did you have to stay?

JHS: No, I had to stay fighting. And you got a change of uniform, probably on the average of once every four or five weeks. So you wore the same uniforms, and we never did get the leather boots. They were taken by soldiers who liked them along the supply line. I've seen a lot of other combat divisions and they all had the nice leather boots that were doing the job.

Well, we went into the Battle of the Bulge. And I slept in a farmhouse with a lot of other soldiers on the floor. Never slept in a bed the whole time I was with the 83rd Division. And then we left in the middle of the night to go into the Ardennes. We were right at the border of it, the edge of it. We got through a good distance, then we were stopped by German soldiers on the other end. So the company commander wanted me... I had taken one prisoner who I had interrogated in my very broken-type German. I speak very little of any of it, but I speak some French and some German.

Q: That must have come in handy.

JHS: Yep.

Q: So you had captured a German and interrogated him. This was in the Ardennes?

JHS: Yes, in the Ardennes. And the company commander wanted me, when they got stopped by the opposition, wanted me to go out and take the German with and find American help. Well, it was crawling with German soldiers, a lot of them with American uniforms who spoke English. Who I never ran into, fortunately. I've read articles that if they had measured wind chill temperatures at the time that we were in the Battle of the Bulge, that it was like 40-below wind chill factor.

Q: It was a record winter.

JHS: Yeah. As I was going back with my prisoner, I saw some German soldiers by a knocked-out tank, a German tank, with the light from the tank signaling a low-flying German plane, but they didn't see us, fortunately. I went across an opening with my soldier. All I could say was "nicht sprechen" to him: "don't speak." We got to the other side of the opening, and I saw a large group of soldiers coming from the distance toward me. And I couldn't tell which army they were with and so as they got close enough to shout it, they asked me for the password. Every day we had a different password. That particular day, I remembered the password. So I gave it and they sent two or three soldiers to identify that it was really an American.

Then they came forward and the man leading the patrol asked if I had seen any Germans. I told him what I'd seen. He said, "Can you leave your prisoner with my men and crawl up there with me and show me where they are?" So we crawled through the snow and we could get close enough that we could hear them. And then we went back and he said, "Be careful" as we saw a lot of German soldiers. I told him about my company needing the help; I don't know how many there were in the patrol. Because it was so cold and because I had on these hushpuppy-type boots, my feet were freezing. I was freezing. I had the fatigues on. So we came across a partially bombed-out farmhouse in the forest. So I went in with my prisoner and the walls were pretty well demolished. But I

went down in the basement with him, put him at the foot of the steps, told him not to talk to anybody coming down or I'd shoot him. During the night, another twenty German soldiers came down, one or two at a time.

Q: Where were they coming from?

JHS: Well, they came down the steps. They came for shelter like I did. So as they got to the bottom, I took their weapons and put them in the corner behind me. I was under the see-through steps and they were down at the foot. And I ended up with twenty-one prisoners in the morning. The 3rd Armored Division came by in the morning, so I turned the prisoners over to them. I don't remember whether they told me what direction to go or if I had to guess which direction to go to try to find my company. But I did find my company, and then the medic sent me back to the regimental hospital with frozen feet. I'm told that if they were frozen they would have been amputated, somebody told me. But they were very cold and they were frozen in my opinion. You know, frozen in my mind. So I was in the regimental hospital for a week. When I got back, the company was still in reserve and all the soldiers in the company were telling me, "All the correspondents and photographers were here from America, from *Time* and *Life*"—they named various publications—"and they want to interview you. We told them about what had happened, and you weren't here!"

Shortly thereafter I was sent back to the hospital in England. That was a very short time before the Germans surrendered. The company went on to the Elbe River. Eisenhower had promised the Russians that we would stop on our side of the Elbe and they would be allowed to advance to the Elbe on the other side. Either allowed to or that was their demand, I don't know. I understand my company crossed the river and then had to go back over. Since I wasn't there you know... And they also, between the Ardennes and the Elbe River, they came across a concentration camp. I don't know that they got opposition from the Germans at that point.

Q: So this was your company that came across it? But you weren't there?

JHS: I left right before they left the battle of the Ardennes.

Q: So jumping back to the farmhouse, you had gone in there initially just to find shelter with the German prisoner?

JHS: Yeah.

Q: You have him set aside and more Germans come in one by one. Did they put up any resistance?

JHS: No, but I have to add that they were undoubtedly regular army like we were.

Q: Wehrmacht?

JHS: Yeah. If they had been SS troops—they were fanatic and loyal to Hitler—I never would be here to tell the story.

Q: So they were just looking to survive just like you.

JHS: Yep. Well, I caught them by surprise. They saw a German soldier then as they came out they saw more Germans there. So they weren't expecting.

Q: At some point there were, you said twenty?

JHS: Twenty-one altogether.

Q: Twenty-one versus one American soldier. At any point did you think they would try to overtake you?

JHS: Well, I had impressed them that I would shoot anybody who talked or tried. It would have been hard for me to shoot a person anyway. Other than if somebody was firing at me.

Q: So what was going through your mind? This was overnight?

JHS: This was overnight.

Q: That's kind of a long night of the soul right there, so what was going through your mind at that time?

JHS: I don't really remember. I must have been scared, you know. And then coming up, VE day happened shortly after I got to the hospital, Victory in Europe. And the company clerk called me—he was at battalion headquarters—and told me what was happening with the company. He was headquartered at battalion headquarters but whenever we had a break in the fighting he would come and talk to us. And I was one of two soldiers in the company who had been there from Normandy on. The others were all replacements' replacements, you know. So I was wounded a total of four times. Now two of the times there was a medic there to do a report. So my discharge certificate shows me wounded in Normandy and wounded in Düren, Germany.

Q: What were the circumstances for that second one, in Germany? Was that in a firefight?

JHS: That was shrapnel in the other leg.

Q: So both were shrapnel in different legs?

JHS: And then I had burns on my hands and I had a machine gun wound, when the medic was there to make a written report. I also had a concussion, which was during battle.

Q: Where did that happen?

JHS: I don't really remember where it happened. They didn't tell us where we were or what town we were in or anything. Just the company commander, the lieutenants, and some of the top sergeants knew. And I was 18 when I was drafted.

Q: So maybe let's jump back. Are you originally from Morton Grove?

JHS: No, I'm from Davenport, Iowa.

Q: So Davenport, Iowa, what was your childhood like growing up there?

JHS: I had a wonderful childhood, a lot of friends.

Q: Do you have siblings?

JHS: I had two brothers: one of them has died, the other is 96. And I just went to a function in his family in Washington D.C. before the award thing. He's looking good. He told me he has sleep apnea, but outside of that he didn't show any signs of wear.

Q: So good genes on your side I guess. What did your parents do?

JHS: My father and mother came over from Russia. And my father came over when he was about 19 or 20 and my mother came over when she was a little girl. My mother lived in St. Louis originally and my father had settled in Davenport, Iowa. He had a grocery store, a pretty big grocery store they had there.

Q: So this was early 1900s when he would have come here?

JHS: Well, I think my mother was born in 1900, so yeah in the early 1900s. Probably 1906, 1908, 1910.

Q: You're a first-generation American then.

JHS: Yes.

Q: So St. Louis and Davenport: how did they meet, do you know?

JHS: They were related somehow, so the families knew each other. And then my father proposed marriage. Again, they never talked about it so I don't know. My brother, who is no longer with us, was a very popular CPA. And my brother who was in Washington with me, he lives in Florida now, Boca Raton, and he was a very successful broker selling radio and TV stations and cable systems from one owner to another. So he's been retired since he was about 55, and I'm still going to the office.

Q: What were you like as a child?

JHS: I had my friends. In sixth grade, I had fights with a couple bullies. But I didn't look for trouble. I had a lot of friends though. At the time I was drafted, a man I knew—I was in Davenport but he lived in Rock Island across the river—he had joined the Marines and his parents had got notice that he had been killed in action, just before I was drafted. And a friend of mine wanted to fight the Japanese after Pearl Harbor. So he enlisted in the Marines and he really wanted to fight the Japanese army. In the Marines they sent him to radio school and he was in San

Diego, he was in Norfolk. They sent him to radio school, radar school. He never left the shores of the United States. He had gone in gung-ho.

Q: So you were 18 when you were drafted. Were you drafted right after Pearl Harbor?

JHS: No, that was 1941. It was '43 when I was drafted.

Q: What do you remember about that time? Starting I guess with Pearl Harbor. You were still too young to be drafted at that point.

JHS: Yeah, I was sixteen.

Q: What was that time like from your perspective?

JHS: We were all angry. They were terrible and what they did and this is the way we felt. I wasn't so angry that I wanted to go and fight the Japanese like this friend of mine did. And I should not have torn the tag off, but that's in retrospect. 'Cause I went on to fight with my division a long time after that. Dug foxholes all the way across different battles. Never knew what a bed was like. In Normandy it was very hot and in Hürtgen Forest and the Battle of the Bulge it was very cold and snow and everything.

Q: You saw it all.

JHS: Yeah.

Q: Before you got drafted, as a student and a kid, did you have any aspirations of what you wanted to do?

JHS: I wasn't sure.

Q: Then it was decided for you.

JHS: Yeah. After I got back, two days after I came back home, they had a dance at the Quad City center there for community dances. Two very rich girls whose parents were very wealthy had called me when they found out I was home: "I'll see you at the dance." Then at the dance I met somebody I had never known before, my wife. I danced with her a lot and took her out for a Coke afterward. And the next night I asked her out before and I asked her to marry me.

Q: The next day? So you had a good feeling about her.

JHS: Yeah. And she said, "Is it okay if I let you know tomorrow night?" So the next night she said, "I'll marry you." Well, all the adults, seniors and such were saying, "You have to get to know each other. The statistics are really bad against you." But we were both certain. We've been married 71 years now and the love for each other has never been weakened in any way. And then we had the three wonderful sons. The one son still lives here downtown and the other two live in California. We have six grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

Q: That's quite the legacy. So you went back to Iowa after the war and that's where you met your wife. What happened after that?

JHS: Well, her grandmother owned some theaters and promised if we would stay and live with her that we'd never have to worry financially. But my wife wanted me to be independent and she wanted me to go to Chicago and go to college there. So I got my degree here. I carried 21 hours a semester and I worked 36 hours a week in part-time jobs at the same time. And got my degree in a very short time.

Q: Where did you go?

JHS: Roosevelt was just a new university at the time, and most of the professors were from either Northwestern or the University of Chicago because it was a new school. So after I got out, because there were so many veterans looking for jobs,

especially in advertising, there was a newspaper, a Hearst paper that was similar to the *Sun-Times* at the time as the number two paper. So I went up for an interview and he took out a tablet and showed me he had seventy people on a list if a job opening came. He said, "Do you want me to put you on the list?" I said yes. So that was on a Wednesday or Thursday, and on Friday he called me and said, "Can you start Monday?" So I worked there and then I had a couple more jobs. Then I went to Joliet, to a radio station—I wanted to get into broadcasting. I was there for a year and a half. Then the station that carried the White Sox games, I had met the general manager and he offered me a job selling for them. I was there for probably four, four and a half years. And then Ward Quaal took over as president of WGN. He offered me a job, but he said, "I can't hire you personally, I have to let the sales manager interview you." The sales manager was sort of a crotchety old guy. He liked me though. And he said, "Well, I'll have to hire you whether I like you or not" at the beginning. And then he took a real liking.

Q: What got you interested in broadcasting?

JHS: Well, my older brother had done announcing, but I was just attracted to it. I can't really remember why. I went on to be in sales management at WGN. I was there eight years. And then I was offered a job running a group of radio stations in the south, headquartered in Birmingham, with stations in Birmingham, Atlanta, and

Wheeling. I oversaw the others and ran the Birmingham station. Got to know George Wallace at the time. In fact, when it was in the paper down there that I was coming there, he sent me a letter in Chicago welcoming me. He's very good at public relations. Not the racial stuff...

Q: When was that?

JHS: That was about 1964, '65.

Q: So that's the peak years of the Civil Rights movement.

JHS: Mmhmm. So I was going for a meeting with the largest department store in Birmingham one morning, and standing on the corner waiting for the red light to change, standing next to me as I turned over, Martin Luther King Jr. We looked at each other, we looked into each other's eyes, but neither of us spoke.

Q: It was just him there?

JHS: Just him. I would have expected him to have an entourage, but he was all alone. At the time they were publicizing that the FBI was watching his every move. So I was a little scared to talk to him under the circumstances. Then I went from there

to Baltimore where I ran an AM/FM and put the first UHF television station on the air in Baltimore. I ran all three of those.

Then I got a call from the original all-news radio station in Chicago—the owners were in Dallas—and they called and they wanted me to run the station. I ran that station and then I went on to run another radio station. The original owners who sold to CBS, who owned the radio and the TV stations WBBM and WBBM TV, he had another station that he owned and their ratings had been terrible, so I went there and we raised the ratings quite a bit.

Q: Where was that?

JHS: Here in Chicago.

Q: So what was your job like for these different stations? What did you do?

JHS: General manager.

Q: So if a station needed to get better ratings, what are some of the things that you would do?

JHS: Well, I hired the on-air parts. Two men who had worked for me at one of the stations in Baltimore were terrific and they wanted to get out of Baltimore

anyway. So I brought the one in as my program director and morning announcer, very easygoing style. Then he reminded me that the man who did afternoon drive time wanted to come work for us too. I didn't want to raid my former employer because I left with a good relationship. But anyway, he resigned so he could come here. And then channel 26's owners, the U, they contacted me. One of them, I had kicked him off the old news station as an advertiser with his retail business. I didn't like the pitch commercials. He admired that about me that I was looking out for my station, and he and his partner wanted me to manage channel 26. First of all I turned them down. We had three meetings and I turned them down at the first two. They offered me a million-dollar life insurance policy on myself with my own beneficiaries, that they would pay the premiums on in addition to the salary and so on. So with three sons, I did.

I left there after close to five years and I was vice president broadcast for a good-sized ad agency that had Hyatt International—they had a lot of hospitality accounts. They had Sheraton for the Midwest, a big restaurant chain. So I came over to that agency; it was in the Civic Opera Building. You know, as I reflect, I was in the Tribune Tower, I was in the Wrigley Building, I was in the Board of Trade Building... some pretty famous buildings.

Q: Yeah, a lot of iconic buildings.

JHS: After two years at that agency—wonderful relationship with them—but I decided to open my own company. That was back in 1981. We attracted business. I don't remember ever making a phone call or knocking on doors. We were the go-to agency all those years. We had Morrie Mages Sports, I don't know whether you remember that.

Q: No.

JHS: That was before Sports Mart. They owned the big building on LaSalle there and they had five other stores. And then I had Bigsby & Kruthers clothing, which was very popular. They had stores downtown.

Q: So you had a good reputation when you started.

JHS: Yeah. And I had Courtesy Home Centers with seven stores—you know, similar to Menard's. This goes way back, had Mark Motors Mercedes Benz, that was in Arlington Heights. I had Roto Lincoln Mercury Subaru in Arlington Heights. I'm trying to think... And I never made a phone call or knocked on doors. I had twelve employees. Then some of the accounts or clients died. I had RE/MAX of Northern Illinois. They were a franchise. When RE/MAX came to me, the real estate business was terrible. Interest rates were 21%. So I put together a marketing plan and we attracted 7,000 franchisees—the individuals were

franchises. At that point RE/MAX International wanted to buy the region back, and they paid them millions of dollars for the region. They paid virtually nothing for the franchise.

Currently we're doing Darvin Furniture, you've seen them on TV I think. They're the largest individual furniture store in the Chicago area. Last year, the Illinois Retail Merchants Association named them the Illinois Retailer of the Year, in a ceremony at the Palmer House, the Empire Room. And we were invited. In fact, at the medal ceremony I had the two owners of Darvin there. I had the president general manager of both channel 2 and channel 7 there, sales vice presidents... just a lot of friends.

Q: That's great. So when did you move to Morton Grove?

JHS: With the all-news station I stayed in the corporate apartment on Lake Shore Drive, that all glass building. Then when my sons were through with school in Baltimore, my wife and my sons came, and I rented an apartment in Skokie.

Q: So you had gone ahead to Chicago while your family was still in Baltimore?

JHS: Right, until the school year ended. When they got here I was looking for a home. It was the middle of the winter at the time, snow on the ground, on the roof. I couldn't even see that part of the house, but I liked it. So I bought the house.

They said we want to stay in the apartment until our sons are through with school in June. I don't remember what month it was, but we stayed in the apartment in Skokie until it was spring. So we've been there ever since. I like my neighbors on both sides, and some neighbors I like across the street.

Q: What drew you to Morton Grove when you were looking?

JHS: Well, I didn't really have anything in mind. Later on, when my friends were going out to the further-out suburbs, I liked what I had here and I just stayed.

Q: So you would commute downtown from there?

JHS: Yeah, I did. Dempster, we were just a matter of several blocks from the ramp. So I drove downtown all those years. Then I opened my agency originally in an office building on Peterson, and then I outgrew the space and it was a full building. So I found the building in Skokie. It had an elevator, it had a garage. We asked the landlord, "Who designs the space for us?" he said, "You do." So my wife worked it out.

Q: What does your wife do? Was she primarily a homemaker?

JHS: She was a homemaker, but she took off the apron so to speak. She came in and she was in charge of administration and finance. Her office was the opposite of mine. She was neat, loose leafs with everything, organized, a clean desk, and mine always looks like a whirlwind.

Q: So it was a family business.

JHS: Well, we had, as I mentioned, twelve employees. I have a young man working for me now who I advertised when I needed somebody in each of the university newspapers. He was a graduate of DePaul originally. He was a practicing lawyer and he wanted to really do marketing and advertising, which was his DePaul part of his education. So the best letter I received from anybody was Northwestern, DePaul, and Loyola. His resume and his letter were by far the best. He's been with me about five years now. Neither one of us feels we made a mistake.

Q: Besides the business you have, do you have any other things that keep you busy? Any interests you pursue?

JHS: Currently it's just my family. Every Sunday afternoon I go down and have brunch with my son and his wife. He's an attorney. He does business litigation. Other law firms come to him. My middle son recently, a few years ago, moved to California. He was an adjunct professor at Northwestern's Kellogg School and also at the

same time at the law school. He had a law practice for patents and trademarks. He was an inventor too. He's very technical minded. So he had a whole group of inventions that he sold to a conglomerate. Got so much money that his wife wanted to move to California where she was raised, where her sister still lives. And my oldest son has clients all over the world. He is in public relations. He's the best-known crisis management person in the business.

Q: Talented sons.

JHS: They owe it all to the fact that his mother was a very good disciplinarian. I could let them get away with things, you know. But she really molded their character with wanting them to do what was right at all times. And I'm still going to the office as I mentioned. I don't go five full days a week anymore. We have client meetings, full-day client meetings that we go to. That's pretty much the story. The medal thing...

Q: Yeah, so when were you contacted about that?

JHS: My division has an association that was formed right after the war, but I didn't receive notice until I was reading the *Disabled American Vets* magazine and saw reunions on the page. They were having their 59th annual reunion somewhere in Indiana. My sons insisted they didn't want me to drive—it was near

Indianapolis—so they hired a limo to come take us down and then hired a limo to bring us home. And I didn't want to pull up... a lot of the vets from our division were sitting outside the building when the limo pulled up. And I thought, Oh no, they're going to have an image of me.

Q: A hotshot.

JHS: Yeah. As it turned out, nobody from my company was at the reunion. There were probably about 7 to 10 members of the division association who were from my company, but nobody showed up at that reunion. But I met a lot of great friends. I couldn't go the following year, but then I went the year after that in Arlington, Virginia. And I met more people and saw the same ones. Then my wife had this head injury, we were on our way to spring training as I told you and she had a brain aneurism and multiple TIAs, so couldn't travel after that.

But the way the medal thing came about is because I was among the youngest in the division, coming in at 18. The members of the association were dying off, so they looked up the legality of it, and they found that they could have next generations of the same families as fully recognized members of the association. So it's really descendants who are virtually running the division association now. There are still some of the people around in the administration, but I got a call from the first vice president of the division association. He said that the French government wanted to bestow its highest honor on me. I've never

met him—he lives in Dallas, his father died not too long ago—but his father was an infantry soldier in a different company, different part of the division. He's active in the association. He sounds like a great guy; I'd like to meet him. He had a graduation of either a son or a grandson on the day of the medal thing, or he would have been here. But he was in touch with the French general consul. I think, if I remember right, it was like 15,000 in the infantry division, and not having met him, being singled out like that. He knew about my history with the company somehow, maybe from the ones who were still around. Napoleon was supposed to have originated that reward, and Americans who received it were President Eisenhower, General George Patton, and General MacArthur. It's a beautiful medal. We had the ceremony down at Alliance Française on Chicago Avenue near Dearborn. It was a wonderful ceremony. I'd only talked to channels 2 and 7, but 2, 5, 7, 9, and FOX all had their coverage there

Q: Yeah, it's a big deal!

JHS: And then the Morton Grove paper. I was in the Tribune a couple different times on it.

Q: The story got picked up and spread around pretty quickly.

JHS: Yeah. So where I expected just to go down and have a medal pinned on me, I asked the consul general's aide, "Is there any way they can do it without making a hole in my suit?" She said, "You know, I've never been asked that question." And she said, "It is a pretty thick needle." I haven't looked at my suit since to see what the hole is. I had a three-star general there. Tammy Duckworth sent me a beautiful note. They're still in session, as we all know. And it just mushroomed and mushroomed.

Q: Like you said, it's become this enormous deal. But trying to process it now, what does it mean to you to get that?

JHS: Well, I appreciate the recognition, but I honestly don't feel like I'm a hero. I was in there and they came down the stairs... It's not like I charged the German line and killed a lot of Germans or anything. So I don't look at it that way. I'm flattered. The mayor had called me and I wasn't there. Then the village administrator called me and next Monday—I think it's next Monday—they're going to have a meeting at village hall and they want to honor me. Whether it's a proclamation or what I don't know. And all the sudden I've got neighbors coming over and congratulating me. My one neighbor works at the library on Waukegan and Oakton there.

Q: Niles Library?

JHS: Yeah. And she and her two sons got dressed up to come to my house and ring the bell. And she had brought a copy of the Morton Grove paper in case I needed an extra copy. And I invited them in. Her sons are in the range of 15 or 16 years of age. I've waved at them, I've talked to her once in a while, very short talk. She's two doors over, she and her husband are nice people. But I only know my immediate next-door neighbor to the north well.

Q: So it's strange getting all this new attention because of this?

JHS: Yeah, it just surprised me.

Q: I'm sure this medal has forced you to talk to a lot of people about it and bring up these memories again. Was this event something you thought a lot about after the war, or were you able to move on?

JHS: No, my sons tell me that they never knew any of this. That I never talked about being in service. Not being in service, but I never talked about what I did. So none of them knew that. The medals I had received, I gave them to my son and told him to keep them there. I didn't want them in the house.

Q: Why was that?

JHS: I had them on a shelf in the back of the basement, in a box. A lot of my friends framed them in picture frames and so on. And I just wanted to go on with my life. There was nothing I really liked about being in the service.

Q: It was just an obligation.

JHS: Yeah. I was glad when I got my discharge.

Q: When were you discharged?

JHS: In December of '45.

Q: And you had started in Normandy. Was that June of '44 when you landed?

JHS: Probably. I went through basic training, and then I was sent over to England and then I was sent over with a group of soldiers on a landing craft over across the channel. The end of the landing craft goes down in the water and you wade into the water—it's chest high and then stomach high—and you have your rifle over your head. And when we walked up on to the beach, there was crime scene like tape on either side that we were supposed to walk between because they hadn't checked the sand for the landlines or anti-personnel mines or anything.

Q: So this was soon after D-day then.

JHS: Yeah, it wasn't long afterwards. One of the newspapers, or maybe one of the TV stations, said that I was wounded the first time on the first day of the invasion. I wasn't there for the invasion! I saw a lot of things that they made up in the coverage that made me wince. Because we came after the invasion. It was a real bloodbath, the invasion, from what I've read.

Q: So you came in right after that and fought a long time after that.

JHS: One of the meetings I went to of the reunion, the man who had been president the year before of the reunion group had gone to Normandy with his wife. They received permission to take a lot of the sand back from Omaha Beach. In Indiana where they lived, there was a company that made paperweights. And they had the sand put into individual paperweights and then it said 83rd Division, whatever it said on it. So they gave me one like they did everybody else. I have three sons, so I said, "Is there any way I can buy three if you've got any left over?" So they gave me one for each of my sons and for me. It's on my desk in Skokie.

Q: Did you ever go back to Europe after that? Since the war.

JHS: Not to there, no. My wife and I had been to Spain and we had been to England.

We went to some of the islands on the opposite direction. I have a granddaughter who lives in Honolulu and she just had a baby about six months ago. She teaches at the private school that Obama attended.

Q: Oh, interesting. Were there many other soldiers that you knew who started the war basically in Normandy and made it all the way through along with you?

JHS: There was one other soldier in my company when I went back who had been with the whole time. They were all replacements for replacements for replacements, you know. There were some very awful things. We had taken a position—this is gory, but it's just an example—we had taken a position and my squad was ordered to dig in on one side of the hill. And tank destroyers are like tanks but they're built to knock out the enemy's tanks. So tank destroyers had to come up on the road that was adjacent to where the other squad was. There were some anti-tank mines in the ditch next to the road. There were twelve of them and each one had six pounds of TNT. And they were told that the pins were all supposed to be intact so they wouldn't explode or anything. Well, they were taking these twelve to put them in the field so the tank destroyers could go by. And all of a sudden there was this horrendous shaking of the earth and black smoke that we could see coming up. And we were summoned to come with our shovels. It was thought that they had been buried alive or something. Then before we could get

very far, we were told to go on back. So I went over there and one of the pins, one or more, must have been loose and they all exploded simultaneously. These men were blown to pieces. You'd see shreds from their uniforms, you'd see splinters from their rifle butts, you'd see intestines or brain cells that you'd see in a jar or in a lab, all over the field. And the stench was horrendous. They were all killed. And this was not by enemy fire in that case.

Q: Stuff like that stays with you I'd imagine.

JHS: And the one fellow I had gotten to know pretty well was with a different platoon in my company. He was from Philadelphia. They were in Luxembourg on the shore of the Moselle River and the Germans were on the other side of the river and were up with the altitude where they could look down on them. And they started to shoot at this platoon and shoot mortar shells. And a mortar shell landed right at his feet and killed him instantly. He used to talk about his wife, his little baby, and just wanting to get back to them. So there had been a lot of things like that.

Q: Do you think that's why you were reluctant to talk about your experience?

JHS: No, because my experience was not anything I wanted to remember. All these years later, the division association wants me to get the medal, and it just came as a surprise. It's all been wonderful, but...

Q: But it brings you back there.

JHS: Yeah.

Q: Is there something about being a soldier, in your experience, that most people don't understand? We see war depicted in the movies as one way, but what do people not understand?

JHS: Well, I saw *Saving Private Ryan*. I didn't see it at first; my wife wouldn't let me see it. I saw it on TV a long time later. And they're supposed to get technical advice when they do something like that. The uniforms were the olive drab uniforms, which were our version of dress uniforms—nothing like they show today, fancy things, you know. They were in combat in olive drab uniforms, not in fatigues like we were. You know, they were fighting in the same general Europe and so on. And they were clean-shaven. When we went into reserve we had quite a bit...

Q: Facial hair.

JHS: Yeah. It disappointed me; I would have thought they would have had some good technical advice. So did the officers who gave them advice apparently were like

the general I talked about, you know, never knew what a combat soldier looked like.

Q: *Saving Private Ryan* was a famous one and then also *Band of Brothers*, the miniseries, was another famous depiction.

JHS: *Band of Brothers*, that's the airborne division. I saw several of the shows and I enjoyed the entertainment, but they were inside buildings in towns. This wasn't the same war I was in. In Normandy, we relieved the 82nd airborne in Carentan, France. They had jumped there at the time of the invasion. One of our missions was to fight through the Germans to get them out of there. When I got out of the service there was a television show named *Combat*, and it depicted the dirty faces and the whiskers and the way they felt. It was really a day in the life of a combat soldier. Bill Mauldin had cartoons at the time that were very representative of what we were really like. We weren't dressed for dinner at a nice restaurant.

So I had totally put it in the back of my mind, and my sons were surprised because I didn't talk about it. My wife told me that when we first got married that I would have nightmares, which I didn't recall. I was perspiring and I was calling out to the soldiers in my squad and she was holding me down. In the morning I had no recollection of having had the dreams.

Q: Sounds like post-traumatic stress.

JHS: Yeah. But here I was very pleased that I hadn't had post-traumatic stress when I hear about these really bad cases. She used to just hold me down, and it was in the first year that we were married that it stopped finally, I think.

Q: That was soon after the war too, right?

JHS: Yeah. So I didn't know, I thought I had escaped any of that post-traumatic stuff. We only had one man from my company who was sent back with what they called Section 8, which was a mental discharge. In all the time I was over there in combat. Today, you know, they are basket cases in all these other wars.

Q: You mentioned digging foxholes and you would be sleeping outside all the time. Again that's something that we've seen depicted, but it's hard to know what it's really like.

JHS: We'd take our folding shovel and we'd dig, and we'd get two or three feet down where shells were landing, you know, they missed us.

Q: What's it like to live in a foxhole day to day? Were you digging new ones each day?

JHS: Well, if we were in a particular position, we were in it for two three days, sometimes four days. And other times it was on to the next fight. Sometimes the Germans attacked us; most of the time we were attacking them. My company commander always chose me to be the first scout when we were attacking over a wide-open area. The way it worked is the first scout was out by himself, and barely visible to the second scout, intentionally, to draw fire and warn the first attack platoon, the point platoon that was well behind the second scout. He had me as first scout in a number of cases, and nobody would volunteer for that. Also, when it was an attack in a closed area, he had me carrying the SCR-300 radio—it's a big box with the antenna sticking up—as a target for the communication with the rear. My company commander had been a West Point man. He was wounded, part of his nose was blown away and so on. And then this other man was a first lieutenant, so he was next in command. Throughout the whole war they never made him a captain. His judgment to me was very bad, even at 18, 19. But somehow he got through the war OK.

Q: And you, so you were often the first scout and carrying the radio—

JHS: Not at the same time.

Q: Yeah, at different times, but those seem like two positions that would be targeted frequently.

JHS: Yeah. And there were a lot of German soldiers, when there was a lot of foliage, who were up in the trees.

Q: Did you have a lot of close encounters?

JHS: Yeah. Well, as first scout I never got fired on fortunately. But you know I was out there all by myself and to be a target for the Germans to warn the people behind. So it wasn't something any soldier in his right mind would volunteer for.

Q: Right. But you got assigned that a lot.

JHS: By this particular officer.

Q: Do you know why?

JHS: I was a good soldier and a good member of the company, so something with him. I had a lot of friends—not a lot but you know I had friends. You don't have a lot of friends in combat, but they respect you or like you or don't like you. And I was respected and liked by my fellow soldiers.

Q: You say you don't have a lot of friends in combat. Is that just because anyone could be killed at any moment, so it was harder to bond?

JHS: Yeah, and it wasn't something you wanted to get attached in a friendship. The exception was a friend, he was in a different platoon, but he had a wife and a baby back in Philadelphia, very nice guy. When we were being bombarded when we were in our foxholes, he would put his leg out to get hit because he wanted to get back even without a leg.

Q: Wow. Meanwhile you were one of the longest serving soldiers in your unit—

JHS: There were only two of us who were from when I joined.

Q: Right, and all these new replacements keep coming in. What's it like for you as the veteran to keep going through all this, but see all these new faces?

JHS: Well, there wasn't any feeling or reaction. The replacements kept coming. I was assigned to teach combat judo when we were in reserve. I'm no judo expert, but I was closer to it than anybody else there. So I was teaching combat judo to soldiers who joined us when we would be in reserve. And today I don't remember any of that judo.

Q: Once you stopped needing it then you didn't need to remember it.

JHS: Yeah, and I never really liked fighting anyway—you know, personal fighting. I only fought when I had to.

Q: Is there anything else that comes to mind that you want to share?

JHS: Well, I can only tell you that the good lord was looking over me, first of all. And secondly my wife and I, we've always felt strong attachment. Our sons, and our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren... there's a lot of love in the family, and that I'm grateful for. And in the business, all of the stations covered [the medal ceremony]. I deal with the stations, but to have the president and general manager of channel 2, president and general manager of channel 7, the VP of sales—they were all there. And my family doctor, our internist, was there. She's the busiest doctor in the entire Advocate system and she took time off to go. Not too many months ago I had my heart valve replaced down at Northwestern Hospital. The entire surgical team, the chief surgeon and all of his team, came except that the one doctor got an emergency just before that, but they were all there. And friends galore and relatives.

Q: That's quite a testament to you.

JHS: The only thing I missed was having my wife there, and she can't. That was the biggest thing of all. I would have liked her there because we take pride in each other. But when I came back she wanted me to forget about the war. And those nightmares that I don't remember, that I didn't remember in the morning, she knew it was there. She was glad when I handed the medals to my son in California, not as a gift, because I want them to share them someday. We were meant for each other and we both feel the same way. A lot of marriages, they get along, but they're not really... the feelings aren't like... I bet there are a lot of them that are like ours too.

Q: Not really many that are 71 years on though. Pretty impressive.

JHS: Yeah. And we've got wonderful family. My son downtown did all the work inviting our friends and everything. The consul general couldn't have been nicer. The three-star general who was there flew in from Baltimore. He was in charge of our forces in Bosnia and he was in charge of the National Guard at one time. When he retired he was at the Pentagon. He wasn't in my division, but at his age, when I was his age I would have liked to have been in the shape he was. He takes good care of himself.

Q: You seem like you're in good spirits and in good shape.

JHS: I'm diabetic and the blood was not flowing through the heart valve very much. What had happened was I was in my driveway about to get it in the car and passed out from the lack of blood flow through the valve. Cracked my head on the cement and I woke up in the ambulance with the siren going. They stitched my head up and I was in the hospital three weeks in March. And the valve was the thing; the blood wasn't coming through strong enough. When they did the surgery it went from .5 to 2.5 blood flow. They said my coloring changed immediately. So the good lord has been with me a lot.

Q: Well I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me.

JHS: I'm sorry I forgot that Friday.

Q: Yeah, I figured we'd connect eventually and we did.

JHS: And the mayor's office, I guess they're going to do something.

Q: Yeah, it's not over yet.

JHS: I didn't invite any politicians, and then because Tammy Duckworth had served under the general when she was wounded, I was going to make an exception,

and he was going to contact her. Then Congress is still in session. But he said both of her legs were lost, one of them just above the knee and the other one at the knee, I guess, and her arm was badly hurt. See, that to me is a hero because of what she's done with her life. She didn't let it make a cripple out of her. That's the real definition to me. So many soldiers came back and they gave up on life, homeless, whatever. To me she had the perseverance to not let that get in her way. I haven't met her, someday I'd like to. One of her aides came over, gave a little speech, and gave me the thing that she had written. But I didn't invite any of the officials.

I handled the advertising for the last two years to John Stroger, who was chairman of the county board, or president rather, and one day I was in his office and he said, "You know you're the only person I've ever worked with who's never asked me for anything." I said, "John, I only want your friendship." My clients have been very loyal. I knew Mayor Richard J. Daley. I liked him. I don't know his son, but I don't like what he did with Meigs Field and what he did with parking meters, putting a lot of extra expense for citizens who park near their homes. Billions of dollars for the parking meters—who knows where those billions are. But I did like Richard J. So I've known a few politicians.

Q: Yeah, sounds like it.

JHS: When I'd go out to LA my son got me a trainer there at Gold's Gym and he introduced me to the man who played the champion who Rocky beat in the first *Rocky* movie.

Q: Oh, Carl Weathers?

JHS: Yeah, I met Carl. He's always on a bicycle when I'm in there. So I'd go in, everyday I'd go in there and the trainer worked with me. The last time I saw Carl, he walked across the gym to say hello. Ernie Banks and I were personal friends. Billy Williams not as much, but we're friendly. Ernie used to call me from Marina Del Ray, California, where he lived. And he'd say, "Come out and play golf with me." And I'd say, "Ernie, I've got a business to run." "Let somebody else run the business!" But very nice guy.

Q: So it sounds like you've been really involved in Chicago.

JHS: Well, the Cubs were my client for 26 seasons at the agency.

Q: So last year must have been pretty fun for you then to watch. I'm assuming you're a Cubs fan?

JHS: Yeah. And I was invited by the Blackhawks to be honored on the ice when the season gets underway. You know all these things have happened and I'm stunned. I like what's happened but I'm stunned.

Q: Right. It's discombobulating I'll bet. Well, I think you've earned it, so enjoy it.

JHS: Well, thank you. Now I'm going to my office for a few hours.

Q: Oh sure, absolutely. Again I really appreciate you taking the time.

JHS: Thank you.