

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Veterans Project

World War II Experience
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GEORGE R. BIDDLE

Interviewed

by

Steven R. Ard

on

April 19, 1980

GEORGE R. BIDDLE

George Robert Biddle still lives in New Castle, Pennsylvania, where he was born on November 21, 1920 to John and Helen Biddle. After graduating from Princeton High School, he earned an accounting degree at New Castle Business College. He was working at the J. C. Penney's Company when he was drafted in November of 1942.

Placed in the 45th Division of the United States Infantry, Biddle saw much action in Italy and Germany. He was wounded at the Battle of Anzio. His division liberated the German concentration camp Dachau. Biddle still has pictures which he personally took and developed of the camp and its inmates. When he was honorably discharged in October of 1945, he had earned the Purple Heart.

Since 1954, Biddle has been a self-employed contractor. His main hobby is gardening. Biddle and his wife Rienette attend the First Presbyterian Church in New Castle. They have two grown children, John and Sheryl.

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INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE R. BIDDLE

INTERVIEWER: Steven R. Ard

SUBJECT: Anzio, liberation of Dachau, concentration camps

DATE: April 19, 1980

A: This is an interview with George R. Biddle for the Youngstown State University World War II Veterans Project, by Steven R. Ard, at the George R. Biddle Paving Company, Eastbrook Road, New Castle, Pennsylvania, on April 19, 1980, at approximately 10:15 a.m.

Okay Mr. Biddle, if you would simply like to tell me a little bit about your background, where you were prior to the war beginning? What were you doing?

B: Okay, I was working at Penney's, the J.C. Penney Company when I was drafted into the service; that was at the beginning of World War II. I was drafted and took my basic training in Georgia and was in basic training roughly six months; then I was sent overseas. We landed in Africa. We were on the train five days in Africa. Then from Africa we went over towards southern Italy on an LST (landing ship tank) boat. And southern Italy was where I first saw the action of the war.

A: What year were you drafted, do you remember?

B: It would be 1942.

A: 1942?

B: Yes, November of 1942, that's when I was drafted.

A: What type of basic training did you go through? Did you go through any special training or just the regular boot camp?

B: Yes, this was the infantry training that I was in, and I got kind of credit that to the fact that on the application they

asked you if you had any sports, and at that time I did like to hunt. I was very fond of hunting and I kind of felt that was one reason that I was led into the infantry.

A: You say you landed in Africa. Now was that just a stopping off point?

B: Yes, yes. We were on the boat going over approximately twelve days and we landed at Oran in Africa; that's the town that we landed at. We were there a couple days in the staging area; then we were sent on to Bizerte. It took five days on a train to go 800 miles. We came to Bizerte and we were there a few days and then walked on the LST and went over to southern Italy.

A: Okay now, what is an LST?

B: Well, it's the type of boat that hauls tanks, equipment, or personnel. It's a small transport vessel. It has a door on the end that they can load tanks in it and personnel. It's not too elaborate; it's not too elaborate a craft.

A: Do you remember the crossing before you got to Africa? Was it an easy crossing?

B: No, the crossing, I tend to be seasick on the boats. I didn't have any problem at any other time, but it just seemed something about a boat that I would get seasick. Crossing was not the best. I didn't enjoy that at all.

A: Did you see any enemy vessels?

B: No, no. No enemy vessels at all, although we did see lots of enemy aircraft. Every time we saw an aircraft we knew it was enemy. We didn't have any of ours that seemed to be available at that time. Just if we saw an airplane, we knew it was enemy airplane.

A: Did they fly close down by? Were they observing you or were they just passing over?

B: Well some of them were passing over and then as we entered combat, they would strafe us. In other words, they would see us on the ground and they would turn and open up their machine guns on us. And that's what they call strafing. Bomb, occasionally, why, they would drop a bomb, but mostly it was the enemy plane that had the machine guns mounted on them that we had to encounter. That was what we all feared, strafing action.

A: Now, this was at seabor after you landed?

- B: Well, Anzio was pretty tough going. The enemy had made up their mind they didn't want us to advance when we were in Anzio, and they threw everything but the proverbial kitchen sink at us. I was wounded at Anzio. I had a slug in the leg and I was in the hospital for six weeks before I returned to action. This was one of the battles I know of.
- A: Where were you at when you got wounded? Were you on the beach? Were you under fire or skirmishing or what?
- B: Well, yes. We had advanced approximately sixteen miles and one morning about 5:00, why, we heard that the enemy artillery opened up. It was just very heavy barrage artillery and then the tanks advanced at us and we just couldn't hold it. We tried. We fired our fifty-seven millimeter antitank guns and fired our machine guns and everything we had, but they outweighed us and we had to retreat. That's a word that they didn't like us to use, but actually that's what it was. We had to make withdrawal. We headed back, of course, towards the beach. Their idea was to drive us onto the beach and have us swim or sink. It was very much touch and go for awhile.
- A: What rank did you have at this point?
- B: PFC (private first class), that was my rank that I maintained through the war. It just wasn't my cup of tea. I did do my share to defend the country, but I didn't have any desire to gain any rank and to advance. I knew I wasn't going to make it a career. In other words, I didn't have any idea of making the Army a career.
- A: You were in the hospital then for six weeks?
- B: Six weeks I was in the hospital, yes.
- A: Okay, and then after that where did you join up, with your unit again?
- B: Well, I was back with the unit and we were still on Anzio beachhead. We hadn't gotten off of there. We were on there quite some months. We were on Anzio. We advanced up towards France and then we were pulled off and then I'm not sure. We came into the outfit again probably up around. . . Well, I'm not real sure what part of France we started in.
- A: Do you know why they pulled you back?
- B: Well, one division would be pulled back to give us a little

rest and the other division would. . . We worked pretty closely with the 3rd Division, and the 34th and the 36th Divisions. And they tried to give you a little rest occasionally. In other words, you just didn't stay on the line just continually. At one part in southern Italy on the mountain at Benefro, our outfit went up there. There were around thirty of us and after seven days there were only six of us left. That was kind of a tough skirmish. It was all mountain fighting all the way. It was even too mountainous for the mules to pack the food up. We had to carry our rations.

A: What kind of rations did you have?

B: Mostly K rations. It was just a little box with a pack of cheese and a couple of crackers and maybe a little packet of cocoa or coffee.

A: What was the weather like?

B: Very bad in Italy. We were out all winter and some of the people got frostbite. You would get your hands and fingers frostbitten. And you would sleep out in the foxholes. We were never in. Nobody seemed to have a cold. I don't recall of anybody getting a cold and pneumonia. We couldn't quite figure that out. It just seemed to be we were always healthy, ready to go. Nobody had the flu or anything like that.

A: Okay, from southern Italy then, where did you move on to?

B: Okay, from southern Italy then we made that invasion of Anzio. After Benefro, we got on a pass and a couple of us got into Rome. We got a three day pass and went into Rome. And then shortly after that we were sent on the invasion of Anzio. That was where I was wounded. We were on Anzio quite some time, and then from Anzio we went to southern France, went through some of the towns of France.

A: Did you have contact with some of the Italian or French people as you moved through this area?

B: Yes, we did. In fact, when we were in Italy, I met a woman who had lived in New Castle, my hometown, and she could talk really good English. She had been in New Castle and had gone back to see some of her relatives and when the war came on, she wasn't able to return. It was kind of interesting to talk to the natives. We talked to the natives.

A: What did they tell you? What kind of things did you talk about?

B: Well, we would talk about the war. Their impression was that

their leader put them into war, like Mussolini. And we blamed Roosevelt for getting us into war. It was just talk that we would do. I mean actually we never fought with the civilians and they didn't fight with us. We had a really good relationship with the civilians.

A: All right now, from southern France, which direction are we moving?

B: Well, we moved up toward Munich. Munich was the end of the war for us; where we finished was in Munich. There was quite some heavy skirmishes in France, not near as bad though as we had had. It seemed like Patton's Army was taking the heat off of us. He was drawing a lot of the fire. A lot of their good troops were sent out to meet Patton and we weren't having so much trouble. It wasn't an easy snap but then still, it wasn't near as hard as it was in southern Italy.

A: What regiment are you in now?

B: I was with the 45th Division and a tank company, 179th Infantry.

A: Did you stay with this throughout the entire war?

B: Almost. At the end they divided us up and we were transferred to other outfits to come home on. We came on the point system. In other words, if you had enough points, why, you were transferred with another outfit to come home. And I was transferred into another outfit to come home and I, just at this time, don't remember what it was.

A: Can you remember some of your officers from the 45th?

B: Yes, I can. We had a Lieutenant Roberts that was made captain, a real good friend of mine. And he was with us through most of the war. Now the officers sometimes didn't last too long. They were just like the rest of us. They would be wounded and some of them killed. But this Captain Roberts was one of the officers that stayed. Most of the time he was there. Some of the officers were killed and wounded. He was our company officer and captain.

A: Who was in control of the division?

B: Oh, I don't want to say. I tell you some of that stuff has left me. I mean I'm going to have to look them up.

A: Okay, that's okay, no problem. All right, now, when you got up around Munich what part of the war. . . Is this where it's kind of winding down for you?

B: Yes, it was beginning to wind down. At one time we had come into an area that was relatively quiet. We were in more or less a rest area, and one of the fellows took a little hike one day and he came back with this German soldier. He said, "Say, there's a little prison camp up there." He said, "It's a Polish prison camp." And this fellow said, "There are only two or three guards around there. We could liberate that prison camp." So just as something to do, why, we decided we would go up and see what it was all about. One of the fellows said, "You know this fellow might be wading us into a trap. Let's put him out ahead of us. If he's wading us into a trap, why, he. . ." This fellow who we thought was maybe wading us into a trap, he was a German soldier who wanted to surrender. He wanted to give up. So we put him out ahead of us and sure enough it wasn't a trap. It was a little prison camp up there so we took the two guards, two or three guards that were there, back to our POW (prisoner of war) camp and let the Polish people go.

So, in that process we got a little loot. We got a motorcycle and a couple cars that belonged to these officers, so we had a little fun with that. We kind of destroyed them just racing them. We were more or less in a rest area. We weren't supposed to be in a heavy combat zone.

That was ahead of the time we went into Dachau and stood that over. I was one of the first to get to Dachau. Of course, Dachau covered several acres. And the part that we came into was in the fenced off area where the prisoners were held in, restrained by barbed wire.

I do have some photographs that I can show you. At the other end of the prison camp was some of our outfit that got there, and they opened up the camp and let the prisoners take care of the guards. They just mutilated the guards. The prisoners were so hostile that they just mutilated the guards. I have photos of that.

A: This, the first little camp before you actually got to Dachau, was there anything similar at that camp with Dachau?

B: No, no. Those people were fairly well fed. They were all in good order and if I remember correctly, there were around 200 people in there. They were okay. They weren't too bad off. They weren't eating T-bone steaks by any means but they did have something to eat. Where Dachau, people there, I actually myself saw this one fellow reaching through the barbed wire fence. The fence was barbed wire and on the outside of that fence it was just as bare as a ball field where they had reached and picked the grass. I actually

saw this one fellow just reaching, stretching for this one blade of grass, hoping that he could get a blade of grass out there beyond the fence to eat. That's how desperate they were for anything to eat. They just didn't have anything at all in there to eat.

A: How did you acquire these pictures? Did you take them?

B: Yes, I took the pictures myself. I had my own camera. In fact there's another fellow and I, in the outfit, who developed our own pictures. The shots that I took were firsthand shots. They weren't bought from anybody. I saw them and took pictures myself. Almost unbelievable how people could be kept in those conditions, but it was very bad.

A: All right, do you want to turn to some of the pictures and possibly you can explain them as we go through them?

B: There it just happens as I opened the book, there is a picture of the fellow and I that had the photo shop. There's a picture of our enlarger. And these pictures aren't prime but they do show what we had to work with. There was our developing light and this is the enlarger and we had a few chemicals and a few things to work with.

As I mentioned before, that's one of the motorcycles we took in the former prison camp. I picked that motorcycle up.

The pictures exactly aren't in order but this is Dachau. They're burying their dead. They have a wagonload of them there. In one of these pictures, one of these men that is helping to bury the dead, the next day they buried him. That's just how close to starvation they were. I mean they just. . . Well, as you'll see, some of the pictures are just skin and bones.

This is an overall picture of the camp. You can see the expanse of acres in the camp. We were not allowed to hand them any food. They said that if we would give those people food, their stomachs were in so bad shape that if we gave them food, they would have adverse effects. So we weren't allowed to give them any food. We were told that before we got there.

Now that's one of the cars that we retrieved on the first prison camp that we liberated, the Polish camp.

These are the boxcars at the edge of Dachau that they sent the people in to be burned. Those were the boxcars with some of the people in them. I actually stood right there

and took those pictures. That's another boxcar with people in it ready to be sent to the incinerator.

There are a few pieces of old German money.

These are the pictures I got when I was on the pass in (Italy). There's a picture of a couple of the natives in Italy. They had old hand tools to work with.

There you can see how much they had lost weight. There's actually nothing to those people. I stood on the outside of the fence and took those pictures. It happened just like it shows it there.

That's where the guards were stationed that guarded the camp. These are the guards after our outfit had let the prisoners loose and they worked the guards over. I didn't see this happen but I was there ten minutes after it happened.

Those are customary pictures of that Dachau camp and like I mentioned before, some of these fellows that were helping to bury the dead. . . I saw one of them that I recognized at the time. He was helping to bury the dead this one day and the next day, why, they were burying him.

- A: Did you encounter any resistance when you came to the camp?
- B: No, the war was pretty well wound down and we didn't have any resistance at all. There wasn't even a shot fired at our particular outfit. We didn't have any problem at all, just more or less walking in there. I think most of the guards had left. They probably knew that we were coming and at that time the Germans were getting a little bit soft. They were trying to save their hide and they just weren't putting up too much resistance.
- A: Did you hear about Dachau? Did you know you were going there?
- B: Well, rumor had it that we were coming near Dachau; it was a prison camp. And we didn't have any idea what it was. I mean we maybe assumed it was like that little Polish camp that we had come across before. We didn't have any idea there were conditions like it was there, just no idea at all.
- A: All right now, did you actually go into the camp to see the facilities, to see some of the buildings in there?
- B: No, we didn't go inside the fence. Myself, I was never inside the fence. The pictures I took, we were on the outside. We were supposed to stand there and guard so that

the Germans didn't come back. It was actually just more or less guard duty. If I remember correctly, we were there a couple days and then the MP's (military police) took over. They had the MP's come in with some of our rescue units to bring food and supplies.

A: Were you there when the prisoners finally left the camp?

B: No, no. I think they sent in food and probably tried to take care of them in that fashion, but we weren't allowed to give them any of our food. In other words, we weren't allowed to give them any of our rations.

A: Did you have occasion to talk to any of these prisoners?

B: No, I couldn't speak their language. They were friendly toward us. I mean they would make gestures. They tried to beg food. That was one thing that they tried to do. They would hold their hand out and then point to their mouth trying to beg food, but we weren't allowed to give them any food.

It was barren outside the fence. That might give you a little idea although it's a little hard to visualize in that photo, but for two or three feet outside the fence, it was absolutely barren. It was barren inside. It was just like a ball field, bare; there was just absolutely nothing in there, no vegetation or anything, and they were reaching out through the fence trying to get a blade of grass. Even one blade was an immense amount of food if they could get it. That's how bad things were.

A: This picture of the railroad gun, where is this located?

B: I believe that was taken in southern France. That was one of their big railroad guns.

A: Big German railroad gun?

B: Yes, this is a German gun. And it wasn't mobile. It wasn't a very practical gun. I think they just had a few of them, but it was really powerful. It wasn't what you would call too effective.

The German antitank gun. . . Anybody that had been in combat against the Germans will remember the eighty-eight. That's the gun that we respected, the eighty-eight, and anybody that's really been through combat against the Germans, why, they'll remember the eighty-eight because, well, an antitank gun, they used it against our personnel. It was just a fearful, fearful weapon. They had that and they had what

- we called the burp gun. It was like a tommy gun or a submachine gun. That was another weapon that they used on us that we feared, the burp gun or the eighty-eight.
- A: Did you come under fire from the eighty-eight?
- B: Many times, many times. That eighty-eight was terrific. It was an artillery piece or an antitank gun and they used it. That was one of their main weapons.
- A: Where were you when you were under fire from that, just in the field or when you advanced?
- B: Well yes, the fact is they used that any time we were advancing. They mostly used that artillery piece against us, the eighty-eight. On Anzio beachhead they fired many, many rounds of that, thousands of rounds of that against us. You could hear it come. It just sounded like a fire engine coming at you more or less. It had a terrific sound. You could duck it. I mean, there were times you could hear it coming. You could actually duck it before the artillery piece got to you. They would explode on impact. It was a sizable shell and when the shell hit anything, a tree or if it hit the ground, then it would explode. It was the shrapnel that you feared. The shrapnel breaking up would just tear you apart if it hit you in the right place, take an arm off or kill you. Actually, the shrapnel, we would fear that more than we would a bullet. I mean, of course, we feared the bullets too but this shrapnel would tear you up. It would terrifically tear you up.
- A: What was the closest you ever came to one of those shells?
- B: We probably had them drop eight or ten feet away from us. If you were in a foxhole, why, they could drop three or four feet from you.

We were even bombed with our own planes on the Anzio beachhead. In fact there's this friend of mine from Iowa; he has a metal plate in his head due to the fact we were bombed. We had been under fire. We had to stay in the holes and about 9:30 in the morning we saw our planes coming over and we all cheered. Then after we thought we were going to have some action. Here the planes mistook us for the enemy and they dropped the bomb right onto our antitank gun. We had a fifty-seven millimeter antitank gun and they dropped probably a 250 pound bomb right on the gun.

My buddy and I were lying on our backs and when we came to, we were lying on our stomachs. The bomb shook us up that bad. We figured that the two fellows who were under the gun

would be dead so we hollered over to their hole, which was only fifteen feet from ours, and we heard somebody moaning, so we got up out of our hole. We had been under fire all day.

That's one thing I'll have to say about the Germans. Most of them would respect your chance to get the wounded out or to remove the dead. They would give you a pretty good break for that. So we went over and dug these two fellows out and put them on a stretcher and carried them back to the aid station. The Germans never fired a round at us. They were out there, just a couple hundred yards away, and we carried these two fellows back. They're both living today to my knowledge.

A: Did you find the Air Force doing this on a number of occasions or was this one accident?

B: Not too often. There were accidents and I imagine the enemy had the same thing happen to them. We would occasionally capture a German prisoner and interrogate them. Quite a few of them can talk English. They even went to the extent of saying that if we would fight a war the way we should that they could outsmart us, but they said that we would do everything so backwards that they couldn't figure us out and that's why we were winning the war. And sometimes I think maybe they were correct. (Laughter)

A: How did we have them captured out there? Were they just caught in battle? Did they surrender?

B: Yes, they would surrender if they were in a tight place and wanted to save their life. Rather than go clear down to the wire and get shot, why, they would surrender. When they would come out of the foxhole with their hands in the air waving the white handkerchief, why, we would take them prisoner.

A: Did you ever take any of these prisoners?

B: I took a prisoner once. We were going through woods and this fellow seemed to be lost. He was a German soldier and he came towards me with his hands up. He had a pair of German field glasses on. I still have that pair of German field glasses today. I took the field glasses. We sent him back to our POW camp.

A: Were you surprised when you noticed some of these Germans spoke English?

B: To some extent, yes, but then we learned that Hitler required them to have so much English in their schools. The fact is,

we even talked to a German civilian, a young lady; she had been a schoolteacher. She taught English in the German school system. She was very interesting to talk to. We asked her what she thought about Hitler and she said, "Well, what do you think about Roosevelt?" She said, "We didn't like Hitler's approach either but he was the leader and we had to go along." They were interesting people to talk to, very well educated. We actually didn't have any animosity about the German people.

The fact is the first night when we crossed the Rhine River going into Germany, we drew a ham in our rations and we pulled this across the Rhine River. I don't remember the town now but we went into this house and there was an older lady in the house. We would always. . . We would try to find a house to sleep in towards the end of the war. She said that she would be of any help she could. So we asked her if she would cook that ham for us and she said she would. So she had some potatoes and cabbage and she cooked the ham and set us out a nice spread, put the tablecloth on and nice silverware and we had a feast the first night in Germany. She said something to us. She said to make ourselves comfortable. We slept on the floor and she said she would set the alarm clock and wake us the next morning. We didn't even put a guard out. That was very unethical. We were supposed to have a guard out at all times but we all laid down and went to sleep. The alarm clock woke us up the next morning and that's how we spent the first night in Germany.

- A: Would some of the English spoken by the Germans, would that be identifiable as, say, a foreigner speaking our language, or were they good enough at it to think that they were American?
- B: Some of them were good enough that they were actually. . . You couldn't tell. This young lady who was a schoolteacher, she would talk just as fluent in English as anybody. You wouldn't be able to tell her from one of our people. She was really very good at it.
- A: Now part of Hitler's program was to sneak some German spies who spoke English in amongst us.
- B: Right.
- A: Did you ever run into that?
- B: No, we never did. We not knowingly had anybody with us. Well, we just know it didn't happen in our outfit because you knew everybody that was with you and most of them had come from the States or they were sent in as a replacement.

So we didn't have anybody infiltrate our own little outfit that way. But it could happen. I mean it could really happen.

We were cautioned about being careful who we talked to and what we told. In other words, if you were talking to any of the natives, why, I mean you're not supposed to divulge how much equipment we had and how much ammunition or anything like that. I mean, you just didn't. And we didn't. We talked about personal items. If you ran into any natives, it was more or less on a personal basis.

- A: What did they think in terms of your being there now? Did they kind of welcome you? Did they resent you? How did they actually see the Americans now towards the end of the war, now that you were in their country?
- B: Well, they didn't seem to resent us to the fact that they would try to kill us. In other words, they didn't try to sneak around and put a knife in our back or anything like that. Without a doubt, they probably resented us being there but it wasn't as much as you would expect. They would talk to us and actually. . . We had a soccer game with some of the Germans, with German civilians. It was much better than you expected. In other words, you would expect that maybe you couldn't stay, you couldn't go to sleep at night, that somebody would knife your, or something like that but that wasn't the case at all.
- A: Okay, let's go back to Munich again. How did you find the city?
- B: Munich was a well kept city. At that time when we went into Munich, some of the apartment houses had modern bathtubs that had the hot and cold water all on the same faucet. I didn't run into that till quite awhile after the war in this country. They had their freeway over there. I got a picture of that someplace in the book there. But they had a freeway that was far nicer than our Pennsylvania Turnpike. I mean it was very modern that was leading into Munich. They were really up-to-date. Munich was a nice town. We had destroyed it in some cases with our bombs. Sometimes we bombed it pretty hard but there were parts of it that were not bombed and it was really modern and really nice.
- A: Which parts had been hit? Were they industrial areas? Did you notice that?
- B: Not necessarily, no. The bombing accuracy. . . Well, they had so many anti-aircraft guns that I don't think our planes could always get to the target. That was probably where the problem was. Then we would dump the bombs on a secondary

target or just at random to get back. And there were many, many villages that were pretty well destroyed that just weren't defense plants at all. I mean there was much residential area destroyed. We found that all through the war and in Italy too; there would be quite a bit of destruction of residential areas.

A: Did you go through some of these sections? Were you able to talk to anybody who lived in a house?

B: Occasionally we did, yes. We would get to talk to somebody. Maybe they would be living in half the house. I have a picture or two that half the house is bombed out and the other half is just staying there, and they would live in half of it.

One thing we did find out, that the people were really congenial with their neighbors. If somebody had been bombed out, why, the next door neighbor would just take them in without any hesitation.

There's something there; these cartoons by Maulding. We got the Army magazine, the Stars and Stripes, and each issue had a cartoon by Maulding. We enjoyed that very much. It was something a little bit exceptional the way he designed the cartoons and what he would add in.

We got quite a bit of literature from the Germans. They would shoot this over in their artillery shells or drop it from aircraft, and this particular one was a POW life insurance company. It had a picture of a girl on it and it said, "This is the way the future is made," and then it has there that "the average American dies at age 60.5 and the average GI Joe in combat reaches the age of 23.2; therefore, POW's live longer by 37.3 years." That was sent over to us so that we would surrender and become a prisoner of war. They thought that was the easy way out.

A: Let me comment. On the bottom of this it says, "All German POW camps are run on the Geneva Convention plan as well." They sent this over sometimes in a shell?

B: Yes, artillery shells or they dropped them from aircraft.

A: When the shell exploded, then these things just came flying out?

B: Yes, the pamphlets would roll around and the wind would blow them around. We could pick those up most any time. I had another one or two but this is another one they sent over to us.

- A: All right, let me describe this one. We have a scene of a wounded soldier bleeding being helped by two of his comrades and these soldiers are trudging across Europe. As they are bleeding, their blood is running down into a stream. It says, "Your way to the Rhine and then what?" Again, propaganda designed to encourage the Americans to either quit or surrender. Did this come along with it?
- B: Yes, that's another piece of propaganda.
- A: All right, let me read this one. It says, "Well kid, you are fighting in Europe. Why are you risking your neck? Do you still believe that the nasty Nazis want to invade the western hemisphere? Remember that's what Wall Street and its stooges told you in order to get you in a fighting mood. Now no right thinking man still believes that damned lie, they say the German has to be smashed."
- B: This next one, if you wish to read it, it is probably the one that really takes care of all of the propaganda. In other words, we had to agree with a little bit of that. You may want to read that. It simulates a letter; that is, a soldier is writing a letter to his wife back home. In other words, this is a letter that probably did arrive at some of the homes in America. I mean we've all more or less, at times, written things similar to what that says.
- A: It sounds like something a GI could have written, and possibly they may have gotten some of our mail and actually used the letter when a GI was in a slump.
- B: Yes, right.
- A: How did you come in possession of this? Was this shot over in artillery, dropped from a plane?
- B: Yes, I picked it up laying on the ground someplace. And they made interesting reading for us. I mean it was something. You didn't get too much to read and we would gather up all these we could and read them when we had the chance.
- A: Okay, at the top of this page it says, "The William J. Ganz Company." It says, "Motion picture title films." It has an address that says, "East 49th Street, New York, 17 New York, Eldorado." And then it has 5-144 on it. It's dated Wednesday, December 20, 1944 and the time is 5:00 p.m. And the letter starts this way:

My dearest darling,
Congratulations cutie for being able to stand
it for seven months even though you are away.

Believe it or not, I really feel happy today, probably because it's our anniversary. I hope that even though we're not together now that we will be at least before the end of our first seven years.

How do you think it looks? The war news is very bad right now with all the controversy between England and Russia about Greece. I think the stand that the English is taking is disgusting. She's going against everything that our boys are fighting for. Never did like England anyway. She has always been an aggressive nation and it's not very likely that her policies will be changed.

Decided that things look lousy so I'm not going to read the paper or listen to the radio for awhile. I can hear some good news like the war being over and headlines something like this: Joe Seivel, staff sergeant attached to the 100th Infantry Division, the first GI to return home after peace has come! No, hon, I'm not going goofy, just sort of wishful thinking and daydreaming. Oh well, someday. I'll say our boy didn't get in and how sorry I am.

That stinking, son of a witch Roosevelt is the fly in the ointment. No matter how you look at it, I still maintain that he wants war. He's the cause of anything that went wrong and I hate the mention of his name. How foolish the people are, but it can't be helped because a lot of people don't even know how to vote intelligently.

So on and the letter is discontinued thereafter.

- B: I'm going to retract that. I thought that was a letter that this fellow was writing home, but I'll say that that's a letter that she is sending to him and she has written it on company stationery of the William J. Ganz Company. I have one or two that the soldier has written home but that, in this particular case, that's a letter that she has written to him.
- A: Okay, but this was propaganda that was found strewn on the battlefield?
- B: Yes, right. That's probably the better piece of propaganda that they had sent us. Now here's another one here and this one starts out, it says, "F.D.R. leaves the vets in a lurch." They would send us all kind of propaganda like that trying to get us discouraged. That was the idea of the thing, to see if they could break our will. But actually, when we

would get propaganda, that was more interesting. We knew exactly what it was and we would get a charge out of their propaganda.

A: Okay, let me finish reading that one. It says:

The Washington government stated officially on January 25, 1944 that the number of wounded men in the U.S. fighting force has reached the figure of 47,123. Now we read in the New York Times that Mr. Atherton, commander of the American Legion, said in a broadcast over a San Francisco station that over 100,000 wounded men have already gone the long way from the front via the main dressing station, and the casualty clearing station across the sea to the home hospital. Thus Atherton, who should know what he is talking about, more than doubled the official figures.

And again, more propaganda.

B: Yes, that's just a little more propaganda. And we found, for the most part, that some of the figures that they used were more accurate than the figures our government was giving us. In other words, we didn't get the worst of it. When we were out on the battlefield, why, they didn't try to feed us the worst figures that were available.

That's a telegram that went home to my wife saying that I had been wounded in action in Italy and it explains that more information would follow in the letter to come.

There's a little German money. I think that's a piece of their money that was maybe printed before they had their revolution. In 1923 they went broke and started over again and that's a piece of the money that was brought back.

A: It says, "Berlin, December 21, April of 1910." Okay, this was before.

B: Yes, that may have a little bit of value to it now being it's silver. We were able to retrieve some so-called souvenirs. We weren't supposed to send anything home. I sent a P-38 pistol home and a German luger.

A: Did it actually make it here?

B: Yes, yes, they made it back. The fact is, I gave one to my son and one to my son-in-law.

A: How did they get through? Do you know? Did nobody check it or. . .

B: I smuggled it through. I took it apart. I took the pistols apart and put them inside of an old German field telephone, sent them home as a German telephone. That's the way I got it home. When it arrived it just looked like a German field telephone. After I got back home, then I put the pistols together. I took the parts back out and put the pistols together. You were allowed to bring one home with you when you came home. You were allowed to bring one pistol but I got quite a few home.

This is some old German swastikas that you would cut off of some of the German uniforms. I guess that's just about all the main pictures I have that would apply to the war.

There is a picture of one of the houses that has been bombed out and maybe shelled. You can see that it's all caved in but on the other part, there would be people living. I mean they would live in it. If it just had a room or two, why, they would live there because you never knew how long that might stand. Maybe the next battle or something, why, it would be torn down.

The war front would vary back and forth. In other words, maybe it would seesaw. The front would be a certain place this day and if we shoved the Germans back, why, maybe we would shove them back six or eight miles. Maybe in a couple days they would push us and so the front could be seesawing right back and forth. When we were done fighting, why, there was hardly anything left. The houses were all destroyed, just a terrible thing for the people that had to live in that area.

I've actually seen some of our officers put people out at night, 2:00 in the morning, zero weather. We would be coming to a town and we would need quarters and they would put the civilians right out in the cold at 2:00 in the morning. I don't know where they went. I mean it would just be hard to say, but some of our officers weren't very easy on the natives. On occasion, why, we would be easy on them but Sherman said, "War is hell," and that's just about the size of it.

A: Then did you finish up at Munich? Then your tour of duty was over there, at Munich or where?

B: Yes, yes, we finished at Munich. I didn't have any more fighting to do after Munich. That was the end of it.

A: And how long from then till you were back home?

B: Roughly two months, something like that, in that vicinity.

It takes awhile to go through the processing of getting back home. You have to turn in your equipment and it takes a little time, but if I remember correctly, it was roughly two months.

A: So what happened? What of your equipment? Everything was turned in? Did they allow you to keep anything?

B: Oh yes. You don't get to keep any weapons with you. I mean you have to turn that all in. You get to keep suit clothes and your shoes, your duffle bag and a few things like that.

A: What did you keep in a duffle bag?

B: Oh, you would keep your personal items in it, an extra suit of underwear and your clothing and maybe a field jacket and your winter coat. I remember bringing my overcoat back. I wore it for a couple winters around here, a really heavy, wool overcoat, a long, winter overcoat. You got to keep things like that.

When we were on the Anzio beachhead when we had to retreat that morning, we lost everything. I mean I didn't even have a toothbrush. I got wounded and went in the hospital and the Red Cross came in and gave us some toothbrushes and a washrag and soap. We saw quite a bit of the Red Cross. They seemed to be very well on the job. You hear people complain about the Red Cross but I had no complaint about the Red Cross. I was well pleased with the service I saw from them.

A: Is there anything you would like to add, anything you think would be relevant about what we've been talking about?

B: Well, not exactly, just my own personal opinion. I heard one of my friends say that he wouldn't go back in for \$1 million, but he wouldn't take \$1 million for his experience, and I believe that pretty well sums it up. I mean, it's a great experience but there are times that you figure you'll never be back. I mean you figure it's all over. Some of your buddies right beside you get killed. You never knew whether you might be the one next there or not.

A: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW