

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Conflict 1961-75

Personal Experience

O.H. 914

DANIEL OPINCAR

Interviewed

by

Dale Voitus

on

October 27, 1982

V: This is an interview with Daniel S. Opincar for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on World War II Veterans, by Dale J. Voitus, on October 27, 1982.

Tell me about your childhood and family as you grew up in Youngstown.

O: My childhood was rather typical of my generation because my parents were immigrants. We lived in a little ghetto where we all spoke a common language. Mine was Romanian. When I went to school, I could not even speak English. I could only speak Romanian. I had to go to kindergarten to learn to speak English. I progressed through school. We moved quite a bit here and there, due to circumstances, money, jobs, and I attended quite a few different schools in my life. We finally ended up back in Youngstown. I graduated from Rayen High School in 1934. I got a job, my first job, at the Isaly Dairy Company. I worked there until the draft came. When the draft started, I enlisted. The problems were such that I felt it was the solution to the problem. That is how I got into the service.

V: That goes into my second question. You enlisted, but then, was your number called or did you actually go down and say, "I want to join." How did that come by?

O: No, my draft number, I was lucky that I did have a good draft number, from that job that I had. I had a deferment. I went down and enlisted in the United States Army. From there, I was drafted and we went to Hampton Alabama at Fort McClellan to do basic infantry training. I stayed there for about three months. From there, we went to Fort Hood, Texas for tank and armor division. We stayed there for about six months. We finally transferred to Fort Dicks, and we stayed there for about two months, I believe, and we were shipped overseas.

V: Tell me a little bit about what basic was like then. I mean, how many people were in the barracks? What was it like in the morning? Were there a lot of people there?

O: I thought basic training in Alabama was hard. We were out in the boondocks where all we had was a tent city. It was a bunch of tents.

V: There were no wooden barracks? It was just tents?

O: We were not attached to the wooden barracks. We were out in the fields in the tents. It was all red clay, mud, bugs, and it was in the summertime. The weather was terrible. It was hot. We had quite a problem of adjusting to the heat and to the bugs.

- V: You said you went to Camp Hood for Tank Training. What kind of vehicles were those? Do you remember what kind of tanks you trained in?
- O: The first tanks we trained in were the old General Grants or whatever they were.
- V: Grants.
- O: Grants. Then after that, we got the tanks with the seventy-six millimeter rifles. We trained on them out in the flats and in the woods and up and down the hills. The thing I remember the most, is we had this lieutenant one time in our company. He said, "Do not be afraid to drive these tanks. They can take a lot of abuse." He said this to the wrong group of people. We were used to cars and driving. When he said that, we ruined more equipment than they had for quite a long time. In fact, the next in command said that he had never seen a bunch of people acting so crazy, like we did with this big heavy equipment.
- V: What were the backgrounds of some of the soldiers that you were with? Were they maybe from the north or the south? How were their education backgrounds? Why did they get in and things like that?
- O: Most of the fellows that I went in with had about half from the north and half from the south. They came from the bigger cities. I would say that they were a little better educated or knowledgeable. In fact, the company that I went in with were all enlisted men. At that time, they would separate the enlisted men and the draftees. They were a little tougher on us because we enlisted in the Army. They kept telling us, "If you did not want it, why did you enlist? Why did you get here?" They were pretty knowledgeable. The thing was that the weather was so horrible, the flies, the bugs, and then we used to live out in the fields.
- V: What was it like, living in the field at Camp Hood, too? Did you get some wooden barracks there?
- O: It was just as bad at Camp Hood. They would send us out. We went through, first, what they called "guerilla training," and infiltration. That was mostly on foot at night. We were running up and down hills before we got to run the equipment. We were always outside, sleeping on the ground. We got infested with bugs. The food was not all that good. The flies and the conditions, half of the time, most of the company had diarrhea. They used to have big open mess kitchens out in the field. Of course, you could not keep the flies away.
- V: Did you get any free time on the weekends or at night? Did you get a chance to see any movies or play cards? How did you relax?

- O: I would say the first four or five weeks you did not want to go anywhere. You got time off and went back to camp and took a shower. You would lay down and go to sleep. After awhile, when they slackened on our training, they would give us a pass and we could go into town. Most of the towns there were nothing more than a four-lane crossroad. There was nothing there anyway. They did not even have a beer garden, no shows, so consequently, you would either gamble or sing songs.
- V: Did you have to spend any holidays that you remember in your training, like Easter or Christmas, away from your family?
- O: I think the first Christmas I was home because I was still in the States. I think the next three Christmases I was overseas. I could not get home. That was the hardest part, holidays, even when I came back from training for the holidays. It is such a great emotional experience. You did not mind coming home, but going back was the hard part.
- V: I will bet. What kind of pay was it like then, as far as what you were actually making? Do you remember?
- O: When I first went in, we got one dollar a day, or thirty dollars a month. We were in it for about three or four months, and then they raised it to fifty dollars, sixty, or ninety.
- V: That was a big raise.
- O: Yes. Then they made allowances for your family. You could send money home. Then they had something like health and welfare insurance. At that time, we got ten thousand dollars life insurance.
- V: After Fort Dicks, where did your career take you? Where did you end up?
- O: Thinking back, it is a little fuzzy there. I think there is another place, but I cannot seem to fit it in there. I do know that we ended up at Fort Dicks. We were shipping out. By then, we had no equipment. All of it was gone. All we had was our uniform.
- V: Waiting for the ships?
- O: We had a duffle bag. We were waiting to get shipped out. I think they took our equipment and loaded it on ships. We were supposed to go to North Africa. In the meantime, at North Africa, the campaign was running so strongly against us, they lost so much equipment and took our equipment to resupply the troops

there. Consequently, we had to wait at Fort Dicks a little longer until they could reassemble new equipment or new directions that we were supposed to go. We were in Fort Dicks for three months because we were hung up with no equipment.

V: When was this, what date? Was it in 1942?

O: It would have to be the fall or winter of 1942. I think the Allies were taking a beating in North Africa. They had to send all of our equipment down there. It was already loaded. We were supposed to pick up when we got there. Consequently, our plans were canceled. We sat out at Fort Dicks for three months, ninety days.

V: Did you get a chance to see your family then?

O: Yes. I used to go home on the weekends then. Seems to me that I could get home on a weekend, but I would be late for Monday morning reveille. Consequently, I was always in the doghouse.

V: KP (kitchen patrol)?

O: A lot of time it was KP, or in the brig. I remember one time in particular that we had motorcycles. I came back late to camp, as usual, and I remember he made me push the motorcycle around the doggone compound about eight times as punishment. I was late. I missed reveille.

V: Do you remember, what was your unit designation? What kind of unit was it? Do you know the number? Do you know what kind of a unit it was?

O: We had a unit designation. We were called 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. At that time, I was in one of the companies. Eventually, I ended up in Recon Company. I could not stand being enclosed in one of those big tanks. I would much rather take my chances and be outside, than ride one of those big iron things.

V: The 803rd Tank Destroyer was attached to what higher unit? Was it attached to an armored division in part of a certain army?

O: We were usually unattached. Wherever they needed more fire power, for instance. Our biggest job was reconnaissance. We would do what they would call reconnaissance in force. Later on, we found this out. We would go out. The tank companies would come up from behind us from the information that we would send back or a battalion or corps or whatever. Then it would depend on

how much resistance that we would encounter and how they would commit the bulk of their iron forces. Consequently with Patton's Third Army.

V: After Fort Dicks, you did not go to North Africa. Did you go to England?

O: After Fort Dicks, we finally ended up in England. We still did not have any equipment in England. We were there for three or four months. It was more or less spit and polish, training, maneuvers, landing off of LST's. We played football, basketball. The food was terrible at that time. The German submarines were so active that we had to live off of British rations. We could not get American rations and everybody lost a lot of weight. We got skinny. We had kidney stew; kidney pie, they called it. It would come in cans. I was one of the few guys that could eat it. I had been used to eating that stuff from when I was a young fellow.

V: You traveled across in a ship convoy?

O: Yes. When we left England, it was a big convoy. I think it was a steady stream of boats from England to France. It depended. We were half way out in the channel when they would organize the attacking force from whatever group that they wanted to hit the beach or who was best able to hit the beach, the weather.

V: When would you say that your unit went ashore? Was it right on D-Day? Was it a couple days afterwards?

O: We were scheduled to go in on D plus three. We did not make the D plus three. A couple of our units went ashore and then the weather went bad. We pulled back and laid offshore. We did not go in until about D plus fourteen. Until the weather cleared. I think they built a dock or a floating dock in which they could unload supplies and ammunition. The bottleneck was ammunition. If you had enough equipment. When we landed, I think we had a beachhead about two miles wide and a mile in depth, off of Omaha Beach.

V: Omaha. Being attached to Patton's Third Army, you were traveling pretty fast, as far as getting across France, if you were with his unit?

O: We first went in and the front was only about one mile in depth. We pulled up behind the 155th Battery. The place was so crowded with equipment and GI's, that we could not move, and we were right there. I remember when the first barrage of one fifty-fives went off. I think everyone in the whole place got scared.

V: Were you almost ready to change your minds?

- O: Yes, change your mind and go back. The problem was mobility. In that part of the country they had what they called hedgerows. The farmers would make a bit hedgerow around each one of the plots of ground. That was theirs. It was like a fence. They were made out of stone and dirt, brush and trees. They had been there for centuries. The only way to really get over them was to use the infantry to attack one at a time. They finally used the one-oh-fives. They would pull them up to the front line and fire point-blank at the next hedgerow or two, over as a weapon. They even tried to put these big blades on tanks as a weapon. They would charge the hedgerow and put a hole in it. That was not very successful either. The Germans would fire their bazookas and knock the tanks out. The only way that they could really do it was to bring in the one-oh-fives and fire point-blank. Right after that, they would jump over and take off. At the time, there was mostly airborne troops there. They would jump right over the hedgerow and take one hedge at a time, the hard way.
- V: Your unit really was not deployed? You were just waiting for something to happen for awhile?
- O: Yes. We were waiting units they would break through, so they could maneuver the equipment around and attack the enemy. The way we were sitting, all we were doing was gathering information and going around to the various CP's and finding out. Honestly, you could not even walk. It was that close together. It was a constant artillery barrage going out and coming in. It would be hard to tell. It was amazing after awhile, how you could tell by your ear how close it was going to hit. If it hit more than twenty-five feet away, you would not even duck. You would know it.
- V: Just keep walking?
- O: Just keep walking.
- V: Did you ever have to worry about German airplanes? Was that something that you just forgot about?
- O: In the initial stage, they were in strength. I think there was a tremendous amount of anti-aircraft batteries there. We had good air support from our own. At that time, I do not think they had established an airfield yet. They would fly over from England, I would imagine. It was the closest place. We had it pretty strong. Of course, the Navy was off the beach. The Navy had a lot of big shells in there. You could hear those suckers coming in, too.
- V: When that happened, you were attached with Patton and did some fast moving around?

O: Yes:

V: That was in the fall then?

O: Yes. They finally punched and punched until they got enough room to maneuver enough to get a big springboard. They had a big aerial attack one time that was prearranged. They were going to punch out a corridor two miles wide and seven miles long. That was after we cleared the hedge rows where we would maneuver. Every aircraft that they could get a hold of and dropped the bombs and we poured through that opening. We went through that opening and got to the first end. That is where we stopped for the night. We held up to see if it was going to hold. We did not know if we were going to be prisoners or what until the next day came around. We all dug in and waited to see if they could protect this corridor because the Germans were going to counter-attack. They did. It held. That was the hold that gave us. We all poured through that. Then we stayed there and watched the equipment rumble through for about a week or so. We were on this one side of this post. All we had to do was to make sure that it stayed clear. Of course, we would run a big, round, circular perimeter around that nothing would happen. I never saw so much armored equipment pour through there in all of my life. It was day and night, one right after the other, truck after truck, tank after tank, and all kinds of support equipment, artillery, and all it takes to keep the movement going. After that, it becomes a lot more fluid. They were not pinned down as much as we were down on the beach head.

V: How close did your unit come to Paris?

O: We never did get to Paris. In our territory, we went on the outskirts of Paris. I never did get to Paris. We could see the Eiffel Tower when we were going through. By the time we went around Paris, the biggest part of the fighting was done. It was over. The Germans were demoralized. It was not as tough. You were not as afraid, although it could always happen. I remember one incident we had when we were with Patton. We pulled all the way up to the Siegfried Line. That was when Patton ran out of gas. They would give him ammunition. We could see it. There it was, but for some reason or another, we had to pull back. We did pull back. I would say months later, when we came up to the same position, we could still see some of our forward equipment that was knocked out. I do not understand the logistics, but if Eisenhower would have reinforced Patton, he would have been through Siegfried Line right then, before the Germans had a chance.

V: It was in the fall of 1944 then? Before the winter set in?

O: Yes. We wintered in the Hurkin Forest.

- V: What was winter like?
- O: It was terrible. It was right in the woods. The weather was cold. Everything was bitter cold.
- V: It was a stag then?
- O: Yes. We were in a stag position. In the winter time, you could not do much fighting. You could not do much of anything. Nobody wanted to do a hell of a lot except stay alive and not freeze to death. You could try to keep warm wherever you were at. If you were lucky enough to get in an old farmhouse or barn, you would build a little fire to keep warm. If the farmer had chickens or something, they were prize game. I remember, we used to loot the farmers' cellars. Some of the fellows used to get their alcoholic beverages, canned goods, and meats and eat them.
- V: How did they farmers feel about that?
- O: They were not there. Usually when we would approach a town or something, they would all desert it. The population would desert the town. They would probably go into the woods or somewhere else. There was absolutely nobody there. I cannot say that I blame them. Sometimes if we would meet any resistance, the artillery barrages were horrendous. They just leveled everything down.
- V: What kind of people were you with? Were these the same guys that you had been training with? What were your buddies like? Did you develop some kind of close relationships?
- O: Yes, especially in my platoon. We were very good friends. We lived together. Some of us even thought that we might die together. We got to be quite friendly. We were together for about three years. I would say that it was like a family. I know when somebody got hurt or somebody had to go back for medical attention, we would miss them and inquire what happened to them. Maybe somebody would get killed. I remember one time that one of our fellows got killed. I had to write a letter home. I did not want to write it, but the officer said that I was the only one who could write it. I did. It was a terrible thing to do. I did not know what the hell to say. It is a terrible thing to do, and I did not know what the hell to say: patriotism, country, doing what is right. He was gone.
- V: How were letters from home? Did you get communication often? Was it kind of like a whole bunch at one time, or was it spaced out? Did you get regular mail?

O: I would say that the mail service was excellent. They really tried. We got mail mostly in bunches or clumps, whenever we would pull back to a staging area or something like that. It was not unusual for them to deliver the mail right out to where we were stationed, right up to the front line. You could not say that it was exactly a front line, because of the fluid situation. It was come and go. There were not static positions. If the enemy came and we could not hold, we would back off, or vice versa. At night, everybody would dig in and stay put. You did not know who they were.

V: Was there much activity at night?

O: No, very little. The only thing at night would maybe be foot patrols. There was not even too much of that. If there was, I never saw them. Sometimes we were really stretched for a yard zone of a couple hundred yards. It might have been five hundred yards, and there is no way that you could patrol all of that. You would patrol your own little immediate area, with the vehicle you were in or group you were in. We never dug in like they dug in with machine guns and rifles.

V: No?

O: No. We were more or less fluid. We would be able to move.

V: How did you feel? Did you feel that you were adequately supplied as far as the winter came? Did you get warm clothing, gloves, boots, and that kind of stuff right away? How did you feel about the supply situation? Did you get what you wanted or needed?

O: I think we had to wait. It did not come as soon as you wanted it. I think they tried. We had adequate clothing, coats. The hardest part to get were rubber boots. We got a pair of those rubber overshoes that you pulled over your combat boots. By that time, we needed big sized ones because we had big shoes on. We would have to get big boots. Usually when you got a pair, you hung on to them. I would say, all in all, yes, they did. The supply corps did a good job with food, rationing, ammunition, mail. I was satisfied.

V: What was your particular job assignment? Tell me what you had to do.

O: I would say the biggest part of the time we would get a map and have to go out in a certain area. Maybe there was Fort OP or a village. Maybe we just had to run a road down to see if it was passable for tanks, for instance, like bridges. Most of the time, they would send out a convoy, an armored car, or two or three jeeps. I would ride in the jeep as an assistant driver. We would radio back.

V: This area is clear, this is okay?

O: Yes. This is clear. Most of the time it was not even necessary to radio back. We were working in such a big group that if something happened or there was something that we thought we should tell back, the radio operator in the armored car would call back and talk. I did that job for awhile, too. I did not care for that either. I ended up as an assistant driver in a jeep because you are right out there in the open. If something would happen, you could get the hell out of there. If you were in one of those big armored cars, you were stuck in there.

V: You liked those jeeps?

O: Yes, I think so.

V: Was it a good piece of equipment?

O: They were good, tough, rugged. They seemed to take a lot of abuse. The tires seemed to go forever. You never ran out of gasoline. I do not remember adding much oil to the engines.

V: You had to do some of your own maintenance on them?

O: No, not really. No, because most of the time we would pull back to the motor pool. They would change oil, grease, and would weld them or repair them or whatever had to be done. I do not think we ever lost any jeeps. We always managed to bring them back. Of course, some of them would get shelled or would run over a mine or something like that. They would be wrecked.

V: How were you armed yourself? What kind of weapons? Did you carry any weapons?

O: We had what they called an M-30 Carbine. It was a little automatic, but it was not much good because they were not accurate. They would not hit anything. Fortunately, we never had to use them. Some of the fellows picked up other arms. It was no problem. You could pick up anything that you wanted. You could always pick up an M-1 rifle. They were laying around. You would go into a battle area and follow the infantry because usually they were there. After you followed the infantry, there were all kinds of loose weapons around. Usually somebody would get the M-1 rifles and pile them in a stack. Ordinance would come through later and pick them up, bring them back, and reuse them. I like machine guns. You could always find hand grenades laying around. There was also a lot of German equipment laying around, guns and hand grenades.

- V: Were there any souvenir hunters, or were the guys just seeing it so many times that it did not mean anything to them?
- O: Oh, yes, there were souvenir hunters. The revolvers were the thing, German lugers and P-48's and, of course, the German Flags. That was about all you could carry. Anything that you picked up you had to carry. Fortunately we had vehicles, but if you were on foot, everything that you owned was on your back.
- V: Did you ever think that the stuff you saw would be as valuable as it is today?
- O: No, not really. I did not think so. I thought maybe you would get a swastika, a flag, and hang it up in your room as a memento or something like that. We saw a lot of wrecked German equipment, their artillery pieces and cars. I never saw so much wrecked equipment. One move at Fillet Gap, where most of the Germans got through, but a lot did not, you could see the burned out equipment lying there. One time I picked up a motorcycle, a German motorcycle.
- V: What were you going to do with it?
- O: It was in running condition. I do not know where the driver was. The motorcycle was lying in the ditch. I picked it up and kicked it over. It started. We were running convoy and I was riding the motorcycle up and down. They do not even sound like an American motorcycle, so the company commander made me get rid of it.
- V: What would a typical day be like? What time did you get up in the morning? Was chow regular or was it catch it when you can? When did they knock off? Was it regular? What was it like on a typical day?
- O: On a typical day, we were mostly on dry rations. I think they were all in one where you had various components, like canned goods, cigarettes, and chocolate bars. They had a chocolate bar there that was loaded with vitamins and stuff. That is what we lived on most of the time. We would carry them in our pockets. If you ate one of them, you would not get hungry. We had canned goods. We had little tins of food and crackers. We would stick them in our pockets. Most of the time we would eat out in the field whenever we had time, whenever the weather was right. If you could not steal anything, you would eat your own rations. Because I did not smoke, I used to give my cigarettes away. The cigarettes came with the rations. We were mostly on dry rations.
- Occasionally, when we pulled back or to a rear area, our kitchen would come up and we would get a hot meal. That was not too often, unless we pulled back for a rest for three or four days, or a week. Then we would get all new clothes and take a shower. We would get meals. They were good about giving

you new clothes. You would take your old clothing out. These were not exactly new, but they were laundered, cleaned, and mended. If you needed it, you would get all new clothes to wear.

V: Did you start your day at sun-up?

O: Yes, I would say when the daylight would begin, when the sun would come up, that was when it would start. In fact, you would not know when it would stop. If you were in a forward position, you would always have to be listening or watching. Somebody would have to always be awake. We took turns. Somebody would be awake all of the time. If you heard something or saw something, or got a message, you would wake up the rest of the people. I remember one time we almost blew a cow away. That cow never did know. That cow woke us up and we could hear him crunching in the woods. The reason we did not fire is that we were afraid that we were going to give our position away. We kept waiting and waiting and waiting. Finally, this cow came out of the woods.

V: that is probably scarier than most because it did not have any purpose to it, and it was wandering aimlessly.

O: The Germans probably chased it away from their position because they were not too far away. We could hear their vehicles. At night, we could hear their tanks maneuvering. That is why we did not open fire. As soon as we would, we would have a fire fight. Another thing, whenever we would pull into position with our heavy equipment, the infantry people used to pull out. They could not stand that big fire. We would have attracted a big fire. We were shooting 76 millimeter at them and they would shoot 98 millimeters back at us. They would usually leave and go somewhere else.

V: We got you up to the Siegfried Line. You went through the winter. When your winter and spring time came, where did you go across the Rhine?

O: We went across the Rhine on Pontoon Bridge. It was a pontoon bridge that we crossed. We finally went through the Siegfried Line. We had a counter attack in there someplace.

V: Oh, yes. The Bulge.

O: Yes. We pulled into Luxemburg for a rest. No sooner did we get there with our equipment that we had to throw our stuff back into the vehicles and move out again. That was when they had the Battle of the Bulge. I think they wiped out two of our companies. It was their turn and we pulled back for a rest I know they

wiped out one company when the Battle of the Bulge started. They were right there. They were overrun before they knew what happened. We pulled back up to the front and it was a heck of a mess. Nobody seemed to know what the hell anybody was doing. They were asking questions and nobody would believe anything. I would think that a lot of American boys got shot by mistake. They would not trust anybody. Everything was so mixed up. They attacked us with such a force and so quick, I heard they punched a pretty big hole in the line.

V: What was everybody's reaction to that? Were they mad or just, "oh boy"? What kind of thoughts went through your mind at that time? You were probably hoping that you were going to get to go home.

O: I think it was a disappointment. Like you said, everybody thought that the end of the war was near. We had them on the run. We did not think that they had that much force or that many people left to mount a counter attack. After the winter, we had taken some pretty big tolls. I think we had more casualties from the weather than the enemy.

V: Up until that time.

O: Yes. They used to go around and say, "If you cannot feel your feet, you are in trouble." As long as they were hurting, you knew you were all right.

V: Were you doing a lot of heavy fighting in the Bulge time?

O: Yes, I would say. We were probably using our tanks for artillery pieces, doing indirect fire, because we were mobile, fast, and right there. Before this foreign support, equipment would be able to come up. Plus, the fact that they knew now where the enemy was at and they had no definite lines. They had to give whatever they had. I know for awhile ammunition was a problem. They burned up a couple of these tanks from firing so hard. Another thing I remember, before we went through the Siegfried Line, one time, the first time we came up and approached the Siegfried Line, we ran out of gas. One of our missions was to run a big, round perimeter about two or five miles. The C-47 cargo planes were flying, and as they were taxiing on the road, they would throw us five-gallon cans of gasoline. That was what we were doing, going around and around.

V: Protecting them?

O: Yes. These C-47's would come in and throw the gas to us. Of course, there were other people who would take the gas away, or whatever.

V: After the Bulge, you got across the Rhine. How far did you go into Germany?

Where did you end up when the war was over?

O: We ended up in Czechoslovakia.

V: Czechoslovakia?

O: Yes. We went through Germany. We started going through the Balkan countries. At that time they told us that we were going to meet up with the Russians. I forget the name of the town, but we did meet up with the Russians in Czechoslovakia.

V: You met some Russians?

O: Yes. In fact, we met an airborne division from the Russians. One day, I do not know if it was before we met the Russians or after, they told us the war was over. Everybody felt good. They came out of the foxholes. They would build fires and walk around. They would build fires and walk around. They would quit hiding. They did not care where they parked the vehicles. Before you parked everything out of the way or throw something on it or hide it or something like that. Then we found out that the war was over. We finally met the Russians. They were a sorry lot.

V: How long were you exposed to them?

O: It was about two or three days.

V: What was your impression of them?

O: My impression was that, for paratroopers, they were smaller. I would say the average paratrooper was about five feet tall, maybe about five foot one. They were smaller. They were ignorant, as I would call them. I saw one officer come up and slap another guy right across the face. I do not know what the circumstances were. They had a lot of antique equipment. I do not know how they did what they did. They still had the machine guns with the little iron wheels. When they would pull up in position, one guy would pull. They had no mechanized equipment. I remember one time, we had to turn over a company of POW's to them. The first thing they did was strip all of the vehicles. They took the transmissions out, motors, and tires. They took them all back to Russia with them.

V: You were involved with some prisoner of war exchanges, then?

O: Yes. We were involved with that. I was not too happy. I still do not know what

the hell was going on. It was, men, and children. Mostly women. Somehow or another we had a convoy and turned them over to the Russians. Why? I do not know.

V: In your position, what was your rank? Were you a private.

O: Private First Class.

V: You really did not know what was going on? As a regular soldier, you did not know what the circumstances were or why these things were happening?

O: No, we did not know. A lot of times we did not know.

V: You know now what was probably going on, as you read about them.

O: Since then, I have realized some of the things. Then, I think the Army tried to communicate even to the lowest private.

V: You did?

O: Yes. I think they tried to tell them what was going on and what they were trying to do. Sometimes it would become so mixed up and snafu that you would wonder if anybody knew what the hell they were doing.

V: How long after the war was over did you come home?

O: I would say that we spent about three months in Germany. It was about three or four months and then I came home. At that time, they were taking enlistments of who wanted to go to Japan. I think about two or three officers went out of the company.

V: Really? Did you ever meet or come close to Patton? Did you ever see him? What were your impressions of him? How did the soldiers feel when talked about him?

O: It is true, like they said. "Patton's guts and our blood." To gain the objective, but if he wanted something, he would throw everything he had into it. He did not care what the cost was. Blood and Guts was a good name for him.

V: You never saw him?

O: One time, when the war was over, he gave a speech and I saw him then. It was not unusual for him to roll into the battle front. We heard stories where he

showed up in the most unexpected places, riding in a jeep with stars on, and his guns. That was what kind of a person he was. I never saw him. They say he did. Word gets around.

V: Be on guard?

O: Yes. Be on guard, Patton is liable to be by.

V: What was your impression of him at the speech?

O: I thought that he swore a lot and was very profane. He was very egotistical. He sure was in love with Patton. He was in love with his country. He would drift off into a spiritual something or other. I did not know what the hell he was talking about.

V: Is there anybody else that ended up being famous, or somebody that impressed you and should have been. It could have been somebody on a lower level, like a colonel or major, that impressed you.

O: Not really. More or less, mine was a day-by-day, dog-eat-dog, go-over-the-next-hill-type of thing. You never had any personalities that you could look back to. It was just a common, ordinary experience of staying alive and keeping war.

V: That is what it was all about?

O: Yes.

V: I know you were probably exposed to officers like lieutenants or platoon leaders or company commanders. How did you feel about these people? Do you feel that they were young, too young? Did they know their jobs? Were they learning with you? How did you feel about those people?

O: When we were training in Texas, we had this regular group of officers. They seemed to know what they were talking about with the maps and orientation.

V: Were they West Point people?

O: No, they were mostly National Guard. When they activated their units, they were either sergeants or top sergeants, and automatically became second lieutenants. They were not too bad. They generally knew what they were doing. As we went overseas, we lost most of the lower grade, like second lieutenants and first lieutenants and captains. The majors were back in headquarters and we never saw them anyway. They did not have too many casualties there. Some of the

lieutenants that we used to get were not all that great. They did not have a lot of combat experience. Some of them were just new from the states. They were trying to run the war by the book. It was pretty hard to do. We had problems there with the newer officers. I remember one time in particular, we were out on a patrol or recon mission. I was looking across the river. I could see another German soldier. His head popped up real slow and went back down again. We were looking out of a window. I was going to shoot him. The lieutenant said, "Do not shoot him. He will shoot back." I said, "What the hell do you think he is going to do?" That is how some of the guys were that we got.

V: Okay. That is funny there, but they talk about war. It has its gruesomeness, but were there any funny experiences? I mean, sometimes it just gets so ridiculous that you have to laugh at it. Do you remember any of those?

O: One time we had to go from one CP to another. It was at night.

V: CP, command post?

O: Yes. For something or other, we had to take a message. I was driving the jeep because I knew the route. I was driving the jeep and he was sitting over there with a BAR. I was afraid that he was going to shoot me with God-damned BAR. He was sitting there fidgeting. It was dark and spooky. There would be an occasional flash or something. It was never really quiet. I was more afraid of him than the enemy action. Of course, I think he was just fresh from the States of fresh from wherever he came from. When I came back, I said, "I am not ever going with him again." I will go by myself.

V: Now I want to talk the enemy. I want to talk about him in a couple of different ways. First of all, what about the civilians that you were exposed to. Were they resentful or happy that the war was over? How did they feel about it?

O: The English were admirable people.

V: I will get back to that. I am talking about the German civilians, and when you were exposed to the civilians.

O: You mean German civilians?

V: We are talking just about the enemy people right now.

O: The German civilians, when we got to them, they acted like they did not know what happened or how they got into the war. They were innocent bystanders. They did not know anything about what transpired. They were playing the part

of, "It just happened and we do not know anything about it."

V: They did not look at you like they were mean or mad at you because you were winning? They just kind of ignored you?

O: A lot of them were hungry and malnourished and needed medical attention. They had no food. In most cases, they were glad to see anybody. Their buildings were all torn up. They had no water supplies. The Army would bulldoze a road and clean it up. We would give them water or medical attention. I would say that the civilians were cooperative, yes.

V: About the enemy soldiers, how did you feel about them? Did you feel that they were fighting hard or just going through the motions?

O: I would say that the German soldier was top guard. He was a good, efficient fighting machine. They were so good, they could get these foreign troops wherever they could conscript them, from Romania or Czechoslovakia, and train them. They would fight alongside of them. They were tremendous fighting units. Until the German sergeant was killed or something, they would never quit fighting. They were wonderful soldiers. Sometimes I wondered, if Germany had not invaded Russia, if we would have never won the war.

V: You mean, if Germany had not been tied down to the Russians?

O: Right. They were a good, efficient fighting machine. They had good equipment and they had lots of it. Some of their artillery was much better than ours. Their tanks were superior to ours. They would usually take two or three of our tanks to knock one of theirs. Most of the time it was artillery or aircraft that would get their tanks. If we got into it one on one, you could not do it. Their tanks were good. Their control was good. Their firing was accurate. The German soldier was just as good. I think we just over-powered them with sheer numbers, better equipment.

V: Were you ever exposed to prisoners of war? How did they feel? Were they happy to be captured? Were they glad that they did not have to fight anymore?

O: The few that I saw after they were captured became docile. They accepted whatever POW camps they were going to or wherever we were going to send them. Most of them were dirty and ragged, hungry, and out of ammunition. There was somebody behind them kicking their butts, making them go forward.

This is the story that I heard. They picked up a German top sergeant, equivalent to a top sergeant. Than son of a gun fought all the way back. That is how good they were. He fought all the way back. He did not want to go.

Another instance was in an infantry company. They had German POW's doing their KP.

V: Is that right?

O: Yes. They did not seem to mind. They were so disciplined. They were used to taking orders. The Americans treated them better, so they would do KP for them.

V: What kind of units were you exposed to? I know the Germans had the regular Army and the SS troops. Did you fight against both kinds? Do you remember that? Were you ever exposed to any SS troops, where they were trying to be more Nazi than regular Germans?

O: I do not think we ever had much contact with SS troops. They were used more or less to control civilians, Army units, or something in the rear echelon. We were just exposed to the armor corps. They were top troops, paratroopers. Even the infantry was doggone good. They were top. I think the only reason they started to crack is they started taking more casualties and they poured more and more foreign troops into their service. That is when they started to crack. There was nothing unusual when we started to pull into position and see where these German soldiers had died right with their weapons, right there.

V: Did not go?

O: Did not run back.

V: You felt that they were pretty well supplied?

O: I think we probably defeated them with supplies, hunger, food. They froze to death in winter because they did not have the clothes. They ran out of gasoline. We could see vehicles laying. There was really nothing wrong with them, of course we did not try them because we were afraid that they were going to be booby trapped. We would go by and we could see that they looked all right.

V: Just ran out of gas?

O: Yes. Just ran out of gas. They ran out of ammunition, gas, and food. I think that killed their morale more than anything.

V: That would be true. Do you have any final comments? Do you just want to wrap it up, or is there anything that you wanted to say that we did not say before? Is there anything that you can remember?

- O: I was just trying to think. I think my biggest disappointment was when I saw the Russian soldier. I realized that I would never get along with Russians. If that represented their best, I would hate to think what their worst was like. At that time we returned this convoy of people back to the Russians, I never felt good about that. Of course, I did not know what happened or anything else. It was one of my down experiences. Outside of that, right now, I cannot think of anything else.
- V: How did you get back? Did you come back by boat?
- O: We came back on one of Kaiser's banana boats. I think they called them boats.
- V: Was it a captured luxury liner?
- O: Liberty. Anyway, Kaiser built them. That was when they built these unit boats.
- V: The ones that Kaiser Steel built?
- O: Yes, the ones that Kaiser Steel built. That is the way we came back. We ran into this big storm and I was never so sick in all of my life. I do not think I have been on another boat ride since. This boat was short and it wallowed in the waves. The mess kitchen was in front of the boat. Every time you would go into the kitchen, the boat would go right into the waves.
- V: You got back three months after the war was over?
- O: 1945.
- V: You came back in the fall of 1945?
- O: Yes.
- V: Did you have to spend much time in camp when you came back, or did they just kind of let you go?
- O: I would say that we spent two or three weeks there.
- V: You got processed?
- O: Yes. They were processing them out as fast as they could. I would say three or four weeks. It was somewhere around there. You had a lot of freedom. You could call home. They had telephones there. There were ten or twenty telephones. You had to wait in line.

V: I will bet.

O: They made arrangements for meeting back home. Then they had to type out your RB probes.

V: Then you went home?

O: Yes. I think one of the toughest experiences, the winter we spent in the Hurkin Forest. We were in the forest. They had these proximity shells. They would fire these proximity shells and as soon as they would get close to the tree or whatever, it would just splinter.

V: Oh, the tree fell apart?

O: Yes. You could just hear them going through the woods. I remember one time, just before we went through St. Lo, we were under mortar fire and artillery fire. One of our platoons picked up a piece of shrapnel and he sliced a piece of bacon with it. That is how sharp it was. That was always in the back of your mind. There was never a time you were relaxed. You were always stressed, even when you were asleep. One man was up and open to see if you could hear any incoming mail.

V: The day they said the war was over, it was pretty much a relief?

O: Yes. We busted out. We all had a few drinks. Somebody had a bottle of Cognac or brandy or something that they stole someplace. We built fires out in the road even at night. We were talking. It was just like they took ten tons off of your back.

V: I will bet.

O: It was over.

V: Thank you.

End of Interview