

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II--combat veterans

Personal Experience

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PAUL H. MURRAY

Interviewed

by

Mark D. Dittmer

on

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: PAUL H. MURRAY
INTERVIEWER: Mark D. Dittmer
SUBJECT: 384th and 428th Army Ambulance Battalions,
D+3, 3rd Army, Gera, Germany, Czechoslovakia
DATE: November 30, 1978

D: This is an interview with Mr. Paul Murray for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the World War II combat veterans project, by Mark Dittmer, in Warren, Ohio, on November 30, 1978, at 8:00 p.m.

Mr. Murray, I would like for you to try to go back to the days prior to World War II, and give me basically a background of what you were doing and what you thought of the war in Europe prior to U.S. involvement.

M: Well, that was in 1941, and I was working at that time at the Packard Electric Division of General Motors, in Warren, Ohio. On the particular day that the event happened, is that what you want to know, more or less?

D: You can talk about what you thought of the war in Europe prior to December 7, or if you had an opinion [about it].

M: Of course, everybody was quite interested or seemingly interested in what was happening in Europe at that time and with Hitler and Germany. What we read and heard on the radio was that our country was attempting to keep out of the war, but yet help those that needed it, like England, our ally. We knew that there were bad feelings between the United States and Japan, but no one

really had any idea that anything would come of their attacking the United States. As I remember vaguely, the situation in Europe seemed to be pretty bad, but on this particular December day, we were sitting in a home of a friend when the news came that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. We knew then that we would be going off to war. There would be no doubt about it. My thoughts at the particular time were that I've just finished one year of college, and not having had enough money to go back the second time, I was trying to earn money to go. I knew that, of course, I would be drafted before I even got back into school. Right at that particular time, that was my biggest thought.

D: Can you recall anything that Packard Electric was doing as far as building up for the war?

M: Well, of course they had plans that were laid forth by the Government as to what they were to do in case of war, in preparation for building supplies for the Army, but none of this, as far as I knew, was in production at that time. It could be, of course, that Packard makes harnesses for trucks, and conceivably, they were making harnesses for Army equipment, but it was not the main production line or anything like that. It was a minor production, but I remember that I was laid off just a few days later, and after they got things back into the production of war materials, I was called back and stayed at Packard Electric until I was drafted.

D: When was this?

M: It was in June of 1941. That's when it was, June of 1941.

D: Can you recall the day you were drafted and the day you went in?

M: No, I can't. Well, I can recall going, but I don't know exactly the date.

D: Did you have any particular feelings or. . . .

M: Well yes, it was. . . . (laughter)

D: What branch were you drafted into?

M: I was in the medical branch. I was in what we call the 584th Medical Ambulance Company or Battalion. Of course, that didn't happen until I was through basic training and had a choice of things to do. Not a choice, but I had a small choice.

D: Is this a branch of the Army?

M: Yes, this is a branch of the Army.

D: Let's go ahead and talk about your training period. What was your training period like when you first went in? How were you able to get into this ambulance service?

M: This, of course, was not formed at the time. This was actually basic training, the same as anybody else would have taken. I was sent to Camp Kilmer in Illinois, and I took--I think it was just--three months of basic training. The basic training consisted of a drill, of course, and all kinds of classes on war games. There were all kinds of hikes, tremendous hikes. There was something to do all of the time. It was a rugged situation, because we were new and uprooted from normal activities. There was a lot of homesickness among the guys. Some of them went AWOL, of course. There was always something going on. During our basic training, we were only allowed sometimes one pass per week into town, if at all. Of course, there was always the guard duty, which was very irritating as far as I was concerned, and KP, which wasn't much better (laughter). It wasn't bad. I think the big thing was, it was so blasted hot at that particular time for some reason or another.

D: Were you in the summer?

M: It was June or July, and real warm. Clothes didn't fit, shoes were too big, the whole bit. After the basic training, we were divided into groups and taken to a train. I was sent clear down to Texas. I can't even think of the name of the camp, how about that? [It was in] Abilene, Texas.

D: What did you do down there?

M: We were formed into a battalion, then. I was in company A, and we formed the 584th Ambulance Company, but we had no equipment whatsoever, and we didn't have any equipment until we moved away from that particular camp. It was basics all over again. That's all there was to do.

D: What kind of training could they teach you?

M: Well, you got a lot of training as far as the medical end of the thing. We had to learn how to bandage, [apply] splints and what the equipment was for, use the morphine and how to administer it. It was so long ago that it's hard to remember what it was about. This in Camp Barkley, Texas. That was probably one of the hardest basic training programs to take of any camp in the United States that I went through. There were

probably about, I would say, 50 to 75 of us from Camp Kilmer that were sent down there, and when the train finally made it, they shoved us onto a siding. We unloaded, and the only thing that was there was one quonset hut, just one quonset hut. There was nothing but a big hut, nothing. Inside of it were all kinds of equipment, tents, perametal tents. There wasn't anyone there to meet us. We were in charge of one sergeant that had come along or picked us up on the train somewhere along the line. That's where we got off. We didn't have any blankets. What turned out to be something that we needed was mosquito netting. We didn't have any water, and it was getting dark. It was getting cold, and there we were. There was no one there to tell us where to go and what to do, and that's where we sat all night, until finally, a couple of lieutenants and some cabby men showed up. We finally got perametal tents out, and we went off into the field. It took us all day to pitch the things. We had never put up a perametal tent in our lives, any of us. In the mean time, there wasn't anything to eat. Well, on that day, finally they got around with some . . . [they] finally found out that we were there. The amazing thing was that we were there from August. It was about the end of July or the first of August when we arrived, and I left camp in February. The amazing thing is that it held thirty thousand soldiers. It had all of the roads and all of the quonset huts for thirty thousand soldiers, including piped-in water and sewage in that length of time. They just poured in there by the thousands, I think, and just completely built that camp from nothing in that length of time. While they were doing it, of course, we were in perametal tents. As soon as they got your area done, you moved into it. There was an entertainment center, movies, and the whole bit. It became pretty nice. In about the middle of February, we got word that we were to go on maneuvers.

D: So, this is in 1943?

M: Now, this is 1942, but they didn't know where we were going. So, just about the day before we left, they found out that we were going to California. Then, we had visions of palm trees and a place to go to in town and really some nice activities. It was cold there in Texas, very cold. The nice warm weather [that we thought of in California]. . . . When we got there, we were let off in Indio, California.

D: Where is that?

M: Well, it's east of Los Angeles, I assume about 50, 60, 70 miles or something like that. Trucks met us at the train, and we were taken to a place called Camp White,

which is in the Chocolate Mountains of California, pretty close to the Salton Sea. There again, we went back to the perametal tents. This turned out to be a maneuver area, not only for the Army, but for the Marines. There also was an air base close by. We were supposedly in . . . in this maneuver area, we were under air attack almost everyday. I think the fly boys thought it was pretty funny, because they would. . . . Just about the time the P-38's came out, they would dive down and go right straight up in the air and, the backwash from their props would just tear our tents to pieces. They thought that was pretty funny. That was something, but it turned out that it was probably the hottest place I've every been in, in my whole life. I was really hot.

D: You went to an extreme.

M: It was just tremendously hot! The nights were quite cold. That is where we finally got our equipment. We were sure that we were going to Africa, because all we did was drive in sand and dunes, and we took all of our basic principles and equipment and pitched it in our tents. We went through the motions of dragging in the wounded and all of this stuff. In the meantime . . . one of the interesting things that was there, we had stations that we were assigned to in case of an alert, a yellow or red alert. It was a yellow alert. There were three alerts: a yellow, a green, and a red [alert]. They were sure that the Japanese were going to attack the west coast, and we had positions to fill in case they did. Of course, there was--whether it was actual or just a maneuver--they put on the yellow and the green, and you had to go out and stay at your station. Then, maybe you'd be out there for 8, 10, 12, or 14 hours. You would never know [how long you were going to be out there]. It was pretty nice. We had nice latrines and showers, and we had an outdoor movie house. Of course, these alerts always came in, but when they had a good movie, all of the alerts always came right in the middle of it. They would shut the movie off, and I'd have to go. Other than that, life was pretty good.

One of the amazing things was that health wise, I never felt better in my life than I did when I was out on the desert. I went from about 135 pounds to 180 pounds. It wasn't that the meals were tremendous, as I can remember them. The fact is that I don't think I could get enough to eat, and it certainly did agree with me. As I can remember, that was one of the times in my life that I never felt better health wise. Of course, I really put on weight.

While we were out there, we had several trips into L.A., which was nice. I had an aunt in L.A. and I could visit her and have a place to stay. We also had passes into Riverside and San Bernardino, which broke things up. There was a little more freedom then. You could get a pass easier, and they always had transportation running into one of those places where you could go, spend the evening, see a show, drink beer, or just go and have fun. While I was in Camp Barkley, Texas, in December, I got a furlough, I came home, and I got married (laughter). That's probably an important event in there, because I really had to fight for that furlough to get it to get home to get married, which I thought was interesting, anyway. It was about September or October, and I was called in by the company commander without any idea of what was going on. I was a corporal on the desert, and I was called, made a staff sergeant right away, and sent on cadre. There were five of us. All five were staff sergeants, five platoon sergeants, staff sergeants, four platoon sergeants, and a mess sergeant. We were all sent to Camp Carson, in Colorado. There, we formed the 428th Ambulance Battalion. Most of September and October were spent with just a battalion commander and the five noncommissioned officers of the company. We had, out of 175 men to make the company, 50 for that length of time. After about four weeks of doing nothing and trying to put in our time, we finally got a captain, a company commander, and the staff of lieutenants that go along with it. We were becoming a company again. As usual, it was back to the basics.

D: How many times did you have to go through the basics?

M: It seemed that everywhere we went was nothing but the basics, really. In that area then, as an ambulance company, we were sent over to the hospitals. Camp Carson is a permanent Army camp, and a very old one. There were ten divisions. In fact, I don't know how many thousands there were. I have no idea. The divisions were made up of companies with tank companies and the armored infantry, an infantry medical division, and artillery, which was all not armored, but donkeys. They carried their artillery on the donkeys, [along with] their ammunition and all of their equipment. Most of the time, they were out trying to climb Pike's Peak. One of the interesting things about that was, we were assigned to support that particular battalion. We had some pretty good experiences out on the mountains: broken legs, kicked by mules (laughter), and falling off of cliffs.

D: Do you think that really helped you prepare for. . . ?

M: I suppose it did. It really did. It gave us an insight as to what could happen or would happen, and how you could take care of it. Of course, out there, we couldn't . . . in the areas that we were in, you couldn't take an ambulance or jeeps through. Jeeps could make it through in some ways, but most of the stuff . . . if we had to carry somebody out, it was by hand, which happened, of course. I can remember that the days were pretty pleasant, but Rocky Mountain cold was about the most penetrating thing I think I ever went through. I think that the coldest I ever was, was right there in Colorado and all the time that we were in Europe. There was nothing that compared with that cold, weather wise.

D: Let's go ahead and go into your documentary on your veteran experience in Europe. Where did you go to first?

M: Of course, this company was new in Colorado, Camp Carson. They had to maneuver, so we were sent to Tennessee, and we were only there for a month--in Tennessee, on maneuvers--when we got the call to go to a staging area, which was in New Jersey. We all turned in our equipment, of course. We were in the staging area for about three weeks. We were finally taken to the pier and loaded onto the Queen Mary. We left in February and arrived about five days later in Scotland.

D: Did you have warnings of war on the way over there?

M: Yes, the Queen Mary ran by itself. It did not run in convoy. She was fast. They tell me, and I don't know how true it is, but they tell me there were about thirty thousand troops on board. Whether that's possible or not, I don't know, but there was an awful lot of us. They were sleeping on deck and, we were on the deck just level with the water on the Queen Mary. If we had gotten torpedoed, if they hit us in the middle of the ship, we were dead. Nevertheless, we left New York and the Queen ran by herself. Of course, it changed course every seven minutes or something like that, and sometimes in changing course, it would lean pretty good and roll us out of the bunk. We did run into a convoy that was under submarine attack. They never had a warning system. They had . . . there were English boys, they had sections, and they would notify us. Then, we would have to put on our flotation gear and at this particular time, when they ran into that, they must have really poured the coal to it, because you could just feel the ship shudder all over. They really leaned it, and this time, everybody went to the side. They ran it for about two or three hours, about as fast as they could go, I think.

We got to Scotland, and it was night time. We had to get off of the Queen Mary and onto a ferry, which took us to land. We got off the ferry and got right onto a train. We traveled most of the night by train. The train stopped, and this was where the camp was. We had no idea where we were. [It was] just pitch dark. We got off of the train, and nobody could stand up. We had to sit there for a couple of hours. Finally, it began to get light. We were all at a station along the siding, and we finally got our land legs under us again. That was the weirdest thing; you couldn't stand up.

D: Did you see any evidence of the war when you first got to Britain?

M: No, there was no evidence whatsoever.

D: By this time, were they pretty much cleaning up?

M: No, this was getting into the best part of it.

D: Can you remember the attitude of the people?

M: Yes. They were very friendly where we were. We were stationed--the place we got off at was a place called "Hay, Hay on the Y", and it was in Wales. It was a very Medieval looking town. In fact, it was Medieval even to the cobble-stone streets that were very narrow. An interesting thing was that you would walk down the street, and you'd have to walk around the ducks hanging from the sign up above with the blood dripping down. So, you'd walk around them. It was. . . . They were very friendly, and they did all they could to make us feel welcome, it seemed. There were several pubs in the place. One was called the White Swan, and one was the Mason Arms. That's the one that I frequented as much as I could. I remember I don't like their warm beer. We did some maneuvering and training there, and finally in just a couple, three or four, weeks, we were moved to South Hampton, the staging area. There, we got some air attacks and bombings, and most of it was with the buzz bombs.

D: Was this the first time you ever heard them?

M: Yes, it was the first time we ever heard them. We were loaded onto the ship three times, and each time we went on, we thought, "This is it." No, it was just a practice session, but the third time. . . . D-Day came, D-plus, D-minus, D-minus, and D-plus. We were on board for almost fourteen or eighteen hours before they moved out. I was in France on the beach at D+ 30.

D: This was in Normandy?

M: This is in Omaha, Omaha Beach.

D: Were you pretty much aware of what was going on?

M: Yes, because we were two or three times under attack for about two-thirds of the way over there. In order to get our equipment out. . . . This was on one of Kaiser's war time ships. It couldn't go in too close, so they brought out what you call a rhinoceros. All it was, was a platform on barrels with a ramp to let down, so you could get the equipment off. As we were loading, you could . . . I think we had to do it three times to get all of our equipment off of the ship: all of the trucks, the ambulances, the jeeps, and everything that was stored. We could see bulldozers on the beach clearing away whatever was intruding their way, of course. I can remember the first rhinoceros out was full. It went up as close to the beach as it could, and it let down the ramp. No matter how often that bulldozer had crossed there and tried to pick up things, we still hit a mine. The thing was just so big and so heavy that all it did was jump up in the air about 15 feet, then it fell back down again. It ripped a whole in it, but it didn't impeded our getting off or anything like that. We went from there to just outside of Saint-Lo.

D: This is in Northern France.

M: This is in Normandy. From there, we were assigned to the third Army.

D: Who was under control?

M: General Patton.

D: This is Patton's [Army]?

M: General Patton's third army, right. Of course, the big event there was that we knew that there was going to be a break through, but we didn't know when or how. We were assigned to an infantry division, and we got in behind them. Of course, we were about a mile behind or something like that, and we got ready to go. We were waiting around there, and all of a sudden, we could hear this roar. We looked up, and the sky was just filled with hundreds and hundreds of planes. It seemed like that, anyway. [There was] just flight formation after flight formation. It looked like it was ten or twenty miles wide, and it was far back out as we could see. They got up to a point and started dropping. Some got a little bit excited, and they dropped them short.

D: Dropped them on you?

M: Of course that happened. We had work to do. But after that, there was a break-through, and we got our. . . . Finally, we got started, and we drove until we couldn't go any further in Le Mans, France. That's where we bivouacked. The only thing was that our commanding officer picked a site, and he picked it right beside something unknown to him and anyone else, an ammunition dump, which they didn't want us to capture. I don't know if the infantry had passed by or didn't know that it was there or what, but the Germans came back to get it, or tried to, by air. We had dug in, but when it was all over, with the morning came our slab of bacon, and it was full of shrapnel. (laughter)

Some of the trucks were full of holes and flat tires and things like that, so we had to get that all straightened out. Then, we started toward where our division was going, and I can't think of the name of the little place at all, but we drove until we ran out of gasoline. We couldn't find enough fuel, and finally the fuel situation caught up with us. We were assigned to the same division, and it was a little town in France. I can't think of the name of it now, but it was right at the . . . France had built a defense line across the northern strip, and it was part of the Maginot, but it wasn't anywhere near Germany yet. Why they built it there, I don't know.

Anyway, we were supporting our division when I was called on to take a convoy as a staff sergeant. [I had to] take my platoon and take the convoy to a certain place where there was an emergency Red Cross station. [There, I had to] pick up casualties and take them back to the battalion headquarters medical staff, and the battalion information people gave me a trip map as to how to get to where I was going and which [road] would take me through a little town. That, of course, I followed, and I went through this little town. I finally got to my station, wherever it was, picked up people, and started back. I was met by road blocks, M.P. road blocks, and they wanted to know what the hell I was doing out there. I was in Germany area, territory. This whole town was all Germany, but we got through and nothing happened. Then, we stood after we finally got back, and I was questioned by the battalion commander, who was a colonel, as to why I was there. Fortunately for me, I had my trip map that was given to me. He said, "Well, you're lucky. In just about five minutes, that town will be no more." And, it wasn't.

D: The Germans were moving in?

M: Well, they may have been there, I don't know. It was just a very, very small town, but one of the things they did, they had a little factory there that made cigars. They had a long, tall smoke stack. It was one of the first things to go. We noticed that when we were going through this little factory over here, with the big smoke stack. When we went through, it was sort of peculiar, because there wasn't a soul around. There wasn't probably one soul out, a Frenchman or even a chicken. That probably was one of the events in my career while in Europe that was a little bit scary.

D: Okay, let's turn to the French. How did they react when you were there?

M: They were very friendly. They would just help you in any way they could. The fact is we'd gather up packs of cigarettes, chocolate bars, and anything we could, and sugar particularly, and take it to a French farm somewhere. There was no way to get their produce to the market, so they had an abundance of produce out on farm area. We could get chicken eggs, fruits, vegetables, and anything that they had, and we could trade it for loot. But they did . . . they were very friendly.

D: Was this the time that they were turning into Vichy, France? When you were there, was this before Vichy, France, and when they went under? [Was this] more or less when they surrendered to the Germans?

M: No, this was immediately after that. That was when Germany conquered France and swept through France, but this was after they had set up the Vichy. . . . I'm not sure of the history on that. Wasn't the Vichy Government. . . .

D: The Vichy Government was set up. . . .

M: [It] was set up after German occupation.

D: Right.

M: Well, it could have been in swing right then.

D: How much were you aware of the French underground?

M: Very little as far as we were concerned, very little. We had no contact, and although we could have been among them, to our knowledge, there was no contact at all.

D: Let's go on. From that point in France, where did you go to?

M: We thought we were going to Paris, but we didn't get that far. We were bivouacked--if I could get my directions right--somewhere north of Paris. We stayed there for, I suppose, two weeks.

This is something that is real vague in my mind, but I know that we were sent to support another division of the third Army that had surrounded one or two divisions of the Germans. I can't tell you now where it was. All I know is that we were set up at our station, and we sat in this area. We made one or two trips occasionally, to pick up wounded and take them back to the field hospital. It was a real slow time, and everything was on by us, other than this. We had this division of Germans surrounded, and there just wasn't much happening. I suppose we sat there--I don't know--I can't remember how long. I really can't. Then, that finally was settled. They captured them; no, they surrendered. That was what happened with them. I can remember that on our way to wherever we were going next, I can remember this great group of German soldiers marching down the road, under the guarded infantry, going back to a staging area somewhere or D.W. area. I know there was more traffic coming against us than there was going. Sometimes, it was pretty slow. We moved into Stuttgart, Germany, across the Rhine [River].

No, I've got to back up on that. Our next assignment was Remagen, Germany. They had captured the bridge, as you remember, at Remagen, and we crossed it also. We got in the town of Remagen and set up a field hospital or supported a field hospital in the town school. We were there when the bridge collapsed, and we rushed our ambulances down there to pick up any survivors we could find. From the time we were there, they were attempting every day, to try to blow that bridge up. They would send an aircraft over it to try to bomb it. They would send divers down the river to try to place explosives. They never did. It just finally collapsed on its own free will, I guess. It was damaged, and they tried to do it. I can remember seeing the bridge, and they had moved out a huge crane in the middle of it, in an attempt to put some structural braces on it of some kind. I think it was too heavy, and it collapsed. Then, we were sent to Stuttgart, after that.

D: What time is this, now?

M: Well, that's what's so darn vague anymore. But, it was in the spring.

D: The spring of 1944?

M: Either the spring of 1944 or 1943.

D: Okay, this is before the invasion from North Italy?

M: Yes.

D: Okay, it was in 1943, then.

M: 1943.

D: Do you recall at all, more or less, the battle's strategy at this time? Were we more or less pushing Germany back at this time?

M: Well, they of course. . . .

D: Were you aware of what you were doing?

M: It seems to me, because we were just a supporting unit, that we were constantly on the move, trying to keep up with the people that we were supporting. They were moving faster than we could get there. Of course, one of the problems was that it was preferable to move the equipment by. As far as seeing actual fighting, myself and our company, there were only two or three occasions where we were, you might say, in danger. It just wasn't that. . . .

D: Do you think your unit was pretty efficient as part of a medical corp?

M: I think we were. It seemed that we were anyway, because we were always being assigned. We were never sent back as a support, as a group to wait in case of emergencies. I know that there were a lot of them that were.

D: Did you ever help civilians in the area?

M: Yes.

D: Can you recall some of those times?

M: Well, one time we were called on to clear out what was called "kid civilians," an orphanage, and they seemed to think that a counter attack would happen, so they'd be in danger. We took, I suppose, fifty or sixty of them back, and that was a riot. It was funny! (laughter)

D: Sixty little French kids.

M: And, I know in one town, that we were under air attack most of the night, but we were very fortunate. Out of all the people that we had in our company, I think, only two were wounded in the whole fray.

D: Okay, what were some of your major problems at that time? Was it hard to get materials?

M: No, after they had the situation in hand there, they moved equipment and materials more than we could use, as far as we were concerned. We had all the supplies that you could possibly want. I know the field hospitals sometimes were wanting for blood. Of course, that wasn't our problem; that was the higher echelon's problem to get that to them. But, I know that occasionally, we would get back to the field hospital with a load, and they would take you in and take a pint from you. (laughter) Of course, they would do that to anybody that they could get a hold of, if that was necessary.

D: What kinds of problems did you have?

M: Problems, I don't know what you mean, other than. . . .

D: Lack of gasoline. . . .

M: Well, petrol was a problem for a while, but after we got through that stage of it, it was no longer a problem. We had a source of gasoline, seemingly all we wanted and all we needed. As far as our supplies were concerned, we were never without supplies of that kind. I suppose, as far as the company commander is concerned, getting tired or the equipment was old . . . not old, but it had been run quite a bit, getting oiled and having the mechanics keep it up. They had to keep things going. That was probably one of the most serious problems. As far as food was concerned, K-rations or C-rations [were what we ate]. I can't remember ever having a problem with them. Of course, it wasn't like sitting down to a Sunday dinner, but it was always there.

D: Did you ever have to transport Germans back?

M: Well, we'll get to that.

D: Okay.

M: The war is over now. Germany has given up, and there is a line drawn between the Allied Forces and the Russians. Okay, we were taken clear up into the Northeast section of Germany, to a town called Gera. I suppose that's not the German pronunciation, but it's close. There, we were assigned to a support of a division that was in there, and we sat waiting for the Russians to come down. As we were there, as they came down, we were moved back until they got to the line. I know on several occasions, the forces sort of

infiltrated each other, and it was always a comrade sort of thing. They always had a bottle and wanted you to take a drink. It was nice. They were very friendly and [we had] no problems. It was just a matter of moving back as they moved forward. Well, let's see what other question did you ask?

D: I was talking about transporting Germans?

M: Yes, we got back to a place called. . . . I can't remember the name of it, but we were very near at this time, to Nuremberg. The fact is that we went through Nuremberg, which was nothing but a big mess, in order to get to this little town, "Ahlersberg" is the English pronunciation. It was a typical little German farm village, complete with wall. Of course, all of the homes were within this little area, and the farms were all on the outside, where they went to everyday. They had a gurgermeister, which greeted us and tried to make us feel at home, but they had the community oven out in the middle of the town square.

D: The old feudal system.

M: [It was] where the women with their bread came to bake it every morning. Another one of the interesting things, they had a town crier who came and stood on top of a stone table and gave the news by mouth, read it from a paper. This is when we were picked up by order of a division commander to go into Prague, Czechoslovakia, and pick up D.P.'s and also Americans that were imprisoned up there, that were in the hospital. There most have been a convoy of--I'm guessing, because I can't remember now--two or three hundred, two and one half ton trucks, plus ambulances. We went from this place to just outside the city of Prague, which was a large Catholic monastery. It was walled also, a great big area. And, just inside the walls, were all these little cubicles or huts built. That's where the Americans were, and they had cots. That's where they were trying to take care of them. Of course, we dispatched about ten or fifteen ambulances for the trip, to take them back. In the mean time, we were in Russian territory, of course, and they had a guard and a commander there at that particular hospital. One of the things that we were supposed to do was to gather up all these D.P.'s, French displaced persons who were French, Italian, Dutch, Belgium, and transport them back to a certain point where they would be picked up and tried to be taken back to France or to wherever they were going. One of the scariest things that happened on that particular trip was that there was a misunderstanding, because of the language barrier. None of our commanding people could speak or understand Russian, and Russian generals and officers could not understand

English. We loaded all of these people up and started out, and they slammed the gate and set up a machine gun in front of it to stop us. Of course, this was partially infantry, and you know that a two and a half ton open ring combat vessel, or vehicle, had fifty caliber machine guns mounted on top of it. One of the things was in the agreement with the Russians. All these machine guns were still there, but they were canvas covered. In about a split second, everything was "uncanvased," and we could have started a big war right there. But, the misunderstanding was that all of these D.P.'s, before they went back with us, had to have shots of some type. I think it was Typhus?

D: Typhus, yes.

M: Diphtheria or something else, too. That didn't happen, though. And, they finally got it straight that this was why. . . . These people had not yet, according to their agreement, had their shots and all of this. So, that took another day that we were there. We finally got them loaded up, and it took us . . . it was pretty rough going, because these people were in miserable condition, believe me. I know of one that died on the way there, and there must have been . . . he was just one among lots of hundreds of them that died along the way. They just couldn't stand the trip. It was a rough, rugged thing, because they were just in the back of a two and a half ton truck. The people who couldn't ride back there, of course, were in the ambulances, and I don't think we had enough ambulances to put everybody that should have been in them. That was war. We did finally get them all back.

D: Were you ever able to liberate any of the concentration camps?

M: No.

D: Were you aware of what was going on?

M: Yes. We were told, and we were even shown pictures of it, but I've never been in one.

D: When were you shown the pictures, was this during the war?

M: Well, this was after it was discovered, and the company and the officers were briefed on it. [We] were given some pictures to show what had happened, but there were very few of them. In fact, I've seen more here of this stuff than we ever were shown there, but we did know. We were told what was going on and how they had found these concentration camps, and how horrible it was. We were never sent to one. We were sent to an area, my

particular platoon was sent to this little town, and we were given flip-guns with DDT on them. Of course, we had to keep filling them. All of these D.P.'s that were in this area, they had them behind barbed wire and what have you. It wasn't concentration; it was just sort of a point where they congregated after having escaped or tried to get back to their own country. They were just lousy with whatever, and we were sent to try to help with several guns of DDT (laughter).

D: Okay, I have a couple of other questions. Being a part of Patton's third Army, what did you think of Patton himself?

M: Well, as far as I was concerned, they did a lot of kidding about him. They would ask you if you had your tie and your leggings on, but that was one of his strict things. You have got to admit that the guy knew what he was doing. When he moved, he moved. When he said, "Get to this particular place," he meant to get there. I don't think, as far as we were concerned, in our battalion or any of the other battalions or support units that we ran into, that we ever had any hard feelings toward him at all. We weren't in actual contact. We didn't see him, of course. There were very few that did, I suppose. As far as his orders were concerned and the people under him, how they felt about him, I don't know. It takes those people under him to keep the supplies rolling toward us. Other than that, one situation where we were low on gasoline, there was never any doubt as to equipment.

D: Sometimes--I don't know--ambulance driving, wouldn't it have been awful gruesome at times?

M: Well, yes. The tough part was the night driving, of course, on roads that you didn't know. It was just creepy, crawly. And, [it was hard] to find your way back to the station.

D: Were you able to pick up any French at all?

M: Yes, I could say a few words. You can make yourself understood. I've lost it all since. Oh yes, if you wanted to get a few. . . . Well, I'll tell you a story. Is this going down on recording, too?

D: Yes.

M: Anyway, one night we needed something to drink, so we decided we would . . . the guys said, "There's a farm house over here. Let's go see what we can get." So, we took our empty canteens and started off. We got up and knocked on the Frenchman's door, and he came out. We told him what we wanted, cognac. "Come on," he

says, and he went out into the barn. He had a big barrel there and his lantern, of course. He filled all of our canteens with the liquor. We were standing around and sipping a little bit. [It was] pretty good, too. He took the top off of his lantern and held it down there, and filled it out of the same jug. (laughter)

D: Was there much looting in France?

M: Yes, [there was a] tremendous amount.

D: Was it ever out of control?

M: As far as we were concerned, do you mean?

D: Yes.

M: Well, every soldier picks up, I think, something somewhere and sends it back home, or carries it back home. I'll have to show you what I've looted, if I can find it. I picked up a dozen of these in a big, big house and sent them back to Martha. I think eight of them got here without breakage, and the rest of them have been broken since, but I think she has three of them left now.

D: It's fine crystal.

M: Part of my loot, I carried back. Well, I have to tell you the nice parts of the war, as far as I'm concerned. Just before we crossed the Rhine--we did cross the Rhine--we went along, and we found a cave. In this cave were all kinds of cognac, sherries, wines, champagne, which had been carried back and stored by the Germans with the intention of sending it down the Rhine or up the Rhine, whichever the case may be. Or, [it would] have been shipped and was going to be distributed elsewhere, but we got our share before the M.P.'s came and sealed the place off. (laughter) We took it for other purposes. I carried that bottle of champagne all the way back in my duffel bag. (laughter) But, we had some beautiful cognac and some apricot brandy. It was absolutely out of this world! It was made in Luxembourg. I had two lagers, and I lost those in the Rhine when the boat tipped over and we lost all of our equipment. But as far as my time in Europe, you might say in comparison to others, it was a breeze. You see, it's not a very interesting story

D: Oh my.

M: I was just one of the many there.

D: Was there anytime that their moral was low?

M: Yes, after the war was over. This point system came out, and our particular company was broken up according to the point system and put in with others with equal points. [They] made new companies. Fortunately, I had enough that I was going to be sent home in a short time. So, we were sent by forty and eights from Nuremberg, all the way to Le Havre, France, by devious routes. Believe me, because of the rail system in France, it was pretty well blown to pieces, and we did make it. On our way, we went through Paris. Okay, we were on these forty and eights, and we came into the railroad yards in Paris. In the center of Paris, we could see the Eiffel Tower and Saint Peter's Cathedral. That's the big church. . . .

D: Notre Dame.

M: Notre Dame Cathedral Dome. We could pick out other landmarks, but they said, "Don't leave. We'll only be here for an hour, and you don't have time to go into Paris." So, eighteen hours later, we were still waiting. (laughter) Fortunately, I managed to keep all of my guys there, but there were many of them that didn't make it. What happened to them, I have no idea. Then, we went to Le Havre, and our company was supposedly going to be shipped into the Pacific by the way of the Suez Canal. [They] went up the Mediterranean into the Suez Canal, into the Indian Ocean, and where from there, I don't know. So, we furnished a Mediterranean cruise ship. It was called the. . . . What was it called? I can't remember, but it had been dry dock from the beginning of the war. The Germans had tried several times to get it out but couldn't, because the English Air Force always kept it from being floated. How they did, I don't know. So, they were in a grand mess. Anyway, we were put on board, and we were starting up the coast when Japan surrendered. So, we were ordered back to Le Havre.

[We] stayed on board long enough to be resupplied or whatever they did, and we started across the Atlantic [Ocean] for home. In the middle, a bearing burned out on the ship, and we had fortunately--I don't know how many hundreds were on there--but, we had a company of engineers. And, they actually recast the bearing and got that ship moving again. We were only making a couple of knots. It took us, gee, I guess it took us six or seven days to get over. That was a long cruise. And, there was a good many of us pretty sick.

END OF INTERVIEW