YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Veterans Project

Army Nurse Corps

O. H. 508

HELEN ZEROVICH

Interviewed

by

Mark Dittmer

on

December 12, 1978

HELEN ZEROVICH

Helen Mary (Jerry) Zerovich was born to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph and Francis Zerovich on November 30, 1920 in Tyrell, Ohio. For most of their lives the Zerovich's have resided in the small Trumbull County town of Mecca, Ohio. Ms. Zerovich attended and graduated from Mecca High School in 1938. She had ambitions of becoming a nurse and therefore enrolled in the St. Elizabeth Hospital School of Nursing, located in Youngstown, Ohio. Upon her graduation with an R.N. degree in nursing, Ms. Zerovich enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1942.

During WWII Ms. Zerovich served in the 91st Army Evacuation Unit from 1941-1945. Her outdoor medical mobile hospital followed Patton's armies on the front line from North Africa to Sicily, Normandy and throughout Germany. She worked mostly as a nurse to chest and belly wounds. For her service in the Army she received Seven Battle Stars and the Bronze Star Medal.

Since World War II, Ms. Zerovich has worked at the Cleveland Clinic, the Matrons Memorial Hospital (Casper, Wyoming), the Akron Clinic and today has a position at Trumbull Memorial Hospital in Warren, Ohio. She is a member of the Catholic faith and has an active interest in literature and antiquing.

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INTERVIEWEE: HELEN ZEROVICH

INTERVIEWER: Mark Dittmer

SUBJECT: Army Medical Mobile Hospital--operations, problems, North Africa, Sicily, Britain, France, Germany

DATE: December 12, 1978

D: This is an interview with Miss Jerry Zerovich, by Mark Dittmer for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. Today's interview is located in Warren, Ohio, on December 12, 1978, at 4:00. The topic for discussion is World War II Veterans.

I would like for you to more or less try and go back and think of what you were doing prior to World War II, the United States involvement, and how you got involved into the Army Nurse Corps.

Z: I was in training at the time, and was just finishing up in 1941 when Pearl Harbor was bombed. It seemed to me it was the thing to do then, to try to go to the big war, and so as soon as I was old enough to take the state board--which I took in February of 1942 and passed--I joined the Army as a registered nurse.

D: What were you doing on December 7th, can you recall?

Z: I was at work, night duty, as an OB nurse in the hospital. I think it was a Sunday morning. I remember I heard the news before I went to sleep; it was just a real shock. Even then I know I didn't comprehend the horror of it all, it wasn't until many days after, I think probably. But that's how it was.

D: So you enlisted in the Army?

Z: Yes.

D: What kind of program did they put you through and where did you go?

Z: I went to Fort Knox and there was, as far as drilling and marching very little, but we went right to work in the hospital. They were shipping out quite a number--not too rapidly then, but by the time we got started, toward November they were really shipping out one hospital after another. Just fill the quotas and then ship another unit out, or parts of units and some other camp would fill the rest of the quota. There were 49 nurses at the time to each evacuation hospital. Maybe it was Camp Lee that would furnish some; Fort Knox was going to furnish some, but they left to go to a staging area, which was either Fort Dix in New Jersey, or several on the sea coast. They finished the hospitals there, completed the quota's and the TO's, and we were shipped from there.

D: How did they prepare you differently than you would during normal times?

Z: Probably not much more, because at that time, no one knew what to prepare us for. Combat Zone Nursing was new.

D: Not much difference.

Z: I really don't know what the normal times would be. It was rapid; you stood in line forever to be issued everything, from GI mess kits to blankets to bed rolls. You didn't get all these things in one day. My name was Z, and I was always last in line, so I always had to help fellows that were passing out stuff, because I had to stay from the beginning to the end.

D: Can I ask you some specific questions? How many women were in your unit at the time that you went through training?

Z: We didn't go through training as a unit, since we were all registered nurses. In our class at St. E's, there were thirty-some, but they didn't all go. In fact, I was the only one. At the time that I went, I was the only one, but there were already some in, some who were able to take the state boards. At that time you couldn't take the state boards until you were 21, and I wasn't going to be 21 until November, and we really graduated in . . . I was through three years in August, and so I had to wait. There were three of us that had to wait until we were 21. We took the exam later, in Columbus in February, and we got our grades in May. I already had my papers going, and I was in the Army in July.

D: Let's talk a little about what you did more or less between 1941, and up to the point that they had the mass shipment overseas, because I know they didn't move off right away.

Z: I was at Fort Knox, and from July to November we had drill once a week, and we worked at the hospital; that was the

training ground for the tank corps, and armour divisions. We had a lot of ordinary, I mean not war casualties . . . Naturally, the fellows in the camp had any of the accidents and diseases that could occur in any given place any time.

D: During the training periods?

Z: During their training periods, because they had all the ailments that anybody else had, except that is was the Army hospital over there. There was a section of OB; there was a section of surgery; a lot of it was elective, and appendix and gall bladders, and all that sort of thing, just what is ordinary in any community really.

D: Let's start up to where you were shipped out to overseas. You said you went to North Africa?

Z: Yes North Africa, we landed in Casablanca. They set up the hospital in tents. They had long ward tents. I worked in surgery proper. Then we were divided into teams; you had two doctors, an anesthetist, a nurse and three corps men for each team. There were four teams that worked twelve hours a day, from 7 to 7. It was just like any other hospital, except by that time there were more casualties then. Of course there was a medical section that had a lot of malaria, and jaundice, and all the other things that they contracted over in Africa, in those hot climates that they weren't used to. A lot of diarrhea, a lot of more or less, not exactly tropical diseases like yaws or anything like that, but certainly things like our men were prone to get. Mostly in the diarrhea order, dysentery, a lot of malaria, a lot of jaundice.

D: At this point, what specific time was it?

Z: This was 1942, December. Well, December we finally landed in Casablanca, and then we moved up to Port Layaty and then the war got real far ahead of us. They went across the Sahara Desert, and we were still getting patients back from the front, but it was miles away. Then we moved up to Bizerte, and we didn't set up there; we were waiting to go to Sicily, and Sicily was invaded in July. We went over in July in an LCI [Landing Craft Infantry], a small ship. We landed in the southern part of Sicily and then moved north across to Palermo, in a convoy of trucks. We moved across the desert earlier in Africa in trucks; six days of it, just traveling, and then we would set up our little pup tents at night.

D: Can you recall any incidents of your first knowledge of war, first site of war coming over, or anything like that? Were you followed by subs?

Z: Yes, I imagine we were, but we didn't know it at the time.

The convoy was large; it was huge. They had escorts, but they shifted positions every once in awhile. So I'm sure there were boats in the area or somewhere. In fact, we didn't know it until we were over there. How many times we changed course; maybe it would be just for several hours. I still don't know enough about that. I suppose it was unnecessary to alarm everybody, but the crew must have known it. Of course how can you tell? You don't know north and south then, unless you have a compass, on the broad open Atlantic. I know going across the Mediterranean from Africa to Sicily, well it took an all day affair, which certainly would not have ordinarily been all day. I think we were on board ship two nights and a day. It was just a slow moving thing; that was quite a large convoy too.

When you landed, you set up your pup tents if it was an overnight stop. If we were going to set up a hospital, then the hospital tents went up first, and we went to work to put them up, to unload everything that was in the trucks. The wards had to have their cots set up, and the surgery had to have all their surgeries ready to go. The entire thing from an open field to the starting of the first surgery was three hours--about the time it took our unit to set up--and that was after many times of practice. Several officers and men would quickly survey the field and from a given spot they would stake out a right angle. From there the men knew which way to set up the hospital. It was always set up the same: The chest-abdomen tent was in the same place, next to the head injury tent, the orthopedic tent, the minor injuries tent, et cetera. You could take any field anywhere and, in the dark, you would know where the next tent was, because that is where it would always be. It would sometimes be facing a different direction, but the entire layout was always the same. Then the personnel's tent would be outlined, but I mean the hospital's proper was always set up identical. The great big Red Cross would be pegged out in some fields close by.

We were usually in the field, and it was usually tents, but every once in awhile we would have a building that wasn't quite as bombed out as some of the rest. Part of or all of the hospital would be in the building then.

D: Now in North Africa which divisions were you following?

Z: First, Second Armoured, Third and Ninth Divisions. Some of this is so old, the numbers don't come to mind as easily now. General Patton was there.

D: So you were more or less following General Patton's Army?

Z: Well, for awhile, yes. In Africa we were, but not later in Europe because we came in from the north through Normandy

and he came up from southern France.

D: How well informed were you in the unit as to what was going on outside? It seemed that you had to be well informed if you had to pick up Patton, and move out in a matter of hours.

Z: Well, we got the news, the BBC was always there; they gave a good news coverage. Then there were many things that were top secret that we didn't know too much about. We didn't know too many days ahead--maybe we didn't know in the morning that we were moving by the afternoon. Now somebody in the unit may have. I imagine our colonel knew ahead of us quite well. Then there would be times that the front would move so fast. I remember in France several times the front was moving really fast. They would tell us we would have to sit and wait because we weren't going to stop where we were originally going to stop, but perhaps maybe thirty or forty miles further, because of unexpected allied gains.

D: Are there any specific incidents in North America that stick out in your mind, that more or less cause you to reflect more than others?

Z: So much of the time, being a tent hospital, and even in Africa we would be on the sea coast, they were bombing. Casablanca isn't very far inland, and they would be bombing the port. The war was ahead of us so that we were really like a little sandwich in between. Even then and many times later in the European war, our long guns were behind us, so they were lobbing their shells over us. It seemed like you got it from all angles. Like the front line you could hear the small arms fire ahead of you, but the big guns that were shelling into the line were behind us, and of course the planes were forever and ever going across. They were strafing and they were bombing ahead and behind. I mean their bombers, the German bombers were bombing behind, and our bombers were bombing ahead of us, and of course the strategic Air Force was way ahead of us. We would just see them go over to bomb the German air fields or oil fields in Poland or munitions factories and industries in Germany and Essen.

I don't know of anything in particular there besides the heat, the bugs, the malaria and jaundice, the mosquitoes and sand flies. I suppose if I sat and thought about it awhile . . . but nothing really special. I think Normandy was as horrible as anything really! The nurses were supposed to have packed up once to go back to England because of the very eminent danger, but none of us would go if the unit wasn't going to go. They were going to ship us back because the Allies were losing some territory and this was for safety for the women.

D: During this part of the war, probably of the slowest part of the war, going through North Africa because they were chasing

General Patton all over North Africa, and Montgomery wasn't having very much success, did the guys get upset with this? As far as the people who came in who were shot up and stuff like this, did they complain?

Z: At that time, I don't think that Montgomery was as well-known to our men; they knew that there was a different war up there. What affected us, I think, at the time probably didn't until we heard more about it. Montgomery was doing thing quite differently from . . . many things didn't agree and were not known at the time to us, not to the general troops I don't think. I mean you read about it now, but at the time there was a war going up in Lybia, and we had ours down in toward Casablanca, and the Morrocco's and some of our Air Force was up there, but then when the men started going up in that direction they still were fighting, the British were still fighting, but it was still a long way from where our unit was. Now some of the other, the men in the other divisions might have gone up there, but I don't think there was that much fighting up in Lybia by the Americans. I'm sure of that.

D: Mostly British units?

Z: Up there, yes. Casablanca and that was ours, and Sicily was ours; it was very much ours. Then we were there long enough . . . after the invasion of Italy we were at Palermo with all their casualties. They couldn't get a beachhead with a hospital on for quite awhile. They really had boat loads and plane loads of patients that had just had first aid in the field. They were not from another hospital, they were just first aid. They were like battle casualties except by that time . . . It was miles between us and them. They were flown in, or shipped in and unloaded. Then of course some horrible things happened in Sicily. There were direct hits on the ships in port, and we would get like a hundred burn patients at one time, and really bad ones. We had a major who was an expert in plastic surgery and burns; he had done much of it on this side and he did fantastic work.

D: Do you remember his name?

Z: Major White. I don't remember any more about him. I think he was from New York. He would survey the entire casualty list and he told us--I think down to the last name--who was going to die and who wasn't and he was always right. I mean they did all they could for all of them. Everybody was getting plasma; blood was hard to get. They would ask us to donate when blood was absolutely necessary, but the IV fluids and plasma was available, and most of the time, I'm real sure, in good supply.

D: Now when you went from North Africa to Italy, I assume that

you knew you were going into an invasion, into Italy . . .

Z: We didn't go to Italy, we went to Sicily. It was in July or August of 1943 after that particular battle was over before they invaded Italy, which was in September of 1943. They went in Salerno, I think. They couldn't get a foothold big enough for . . . The first five or six, maybe longer, days they had nothing but first aid tents; they had no hospital there, so those patients evacuated. They had first aid stations where like a bandage was slapped on, a tourniquet. They used a lot of tourniquets there, which was bad to a degree especially behind the lines. The paratroopers were given a large dose of morphine and there was no way of evacuating them. They were all in enemy territory; they jumped in and the medics jumped in too.

D: Was morphine more or less the main drug that was used?

Z: There was an awful lot of it used there. Yes, absolutely, especially in the first aid tents.

D: Today you wouldn't be using this, you would be using something else.

Z: We use a lot of morphine. It is a good drug, used properly.

There was no alternative. These fellows would jump in and they would either bleed to death or . . . what the first aid medics would do is put a tourniquet on. If they couldn't staunch it with a pressure dressing, they would have to put a tourniquet on. If they weren't found for several days then, in that kind of a wound, it so often ended up in gas gangrene. That is where the men had lost their limbs, and some of them their lives. They would be given a large dose of morphine. What else can you do? There is nothing you can do; there is no way of getting them out. It wasn't our territory; they were behind enemy lines. The medics jumped behind the lines too and then ran for cover. They would go from one casualty to another wherever anyone fell, and whether they were shot or whether they were wounded in the landing. Most of it, of course, was shrapnel. But the fact that the tourniquet wasn't released, gave the anærobic germs a place to live. They didn't get any oxygen to that part, like say to a leg, and it would just turn blue, and the next thing you know it would be dead.

D: From Sicily where did you go?

Z: After the Italian invasion and the war was well on its way, we went to England, landed in Swansea, Wales, and went across by truck to an area outside of Bristol, England. We lived in a castle, the most dreadfully drafty castle. It was lovely from the outside, the most beautiful thing in the world, but it had no central heating with high ceilings, with little

fireplace heat and you roasted of course in the immediate vicinity. We had some wood and some coal, I really don't know where they got that, but it was very uncomfortable. We had cots there; we didn't sleep on the ground there. Part of the hospital, most of it, was at that place where we did all our practicing. That's where we really got proficient and got the hospital all ready in three hours from an open field to operating--ready to operate within three hours.

D: How long did this take, over how many months?

Z: We were in England almost six months. We were in Southhampton staging area for a little while, several days only. That was just getting ready to go across on the ship.

D: What were your duties and your concerns in Britain at the time?

Z: Actually classes probably, and we did some drilling. We were putting a hospital up and down all of the time, three or four times a week. You just tore it down until you got proficient that everybody knew their own duties. See we lived in the castle but we would go to the fields next to us to set up and pack up, over and over.

There we had a number of passes but not for any length of time. Nobody knew when the invasion was. We would have like a 72 hour pass so we could go to London. I remember it was a long six months.

D: During your time in Britain now, wasn't this more or less the height of the buzz bombings?

Z: They started buzz bombings then, yes, but I don't think any American installations were really hit to amount to anything. If they were, there were general hospitals there all around. That's where, in fact, a lot of the African casualties were. Instead of being flown home, they were taken up to the general hsopitals in England. Then after the general hospitals in Africa came in they stayed there for awhile too. But there were a lot of general hospitals, and station hospitals, that were all around. They were set up, but we were in the back and we were not set up to take patients. We would set up and tear down, set up and tear down, to get efficient and proficient, in our setting up.

D: Now there's an aspect of the nursing thing I would like to ask you about. I know your units did everything you could for them physically, but what could you do for them mentally, as far as like, if they came back and they had battle fatigue or they had shell shock?

Z: Actually I would have absolutely nothing to do with that in surgery itself. Those patients were screened in the admitting

center and flown to general hospitals further back. They rarely stayed overnight in our evacuation hospital.

D: So you were just in surgery?

Z: I was in surgery and a few times that I did get out, I was in the ward tents. If somebody was really so terribly upset there certainly would be no point in having them stay at our place. We were front line. Not front, front, but when you can hear the small fires in front, the rifles, the small guns and the big guns behind you, you know you weren't very far from the front.

D: Now when did you first go into the front line?

Z: Well, we had some of it in Africa. We had some of it in Sicily and almost all the way through Europe. Normandy, France, Belgium, Holand, Luxembourg, Germany was all front.

D: Let's go into the Normandy invasion. Where you notified that this was going to happen beforehand?

Z: Yes, we were sent to Southhampton, to the staging area and there were . . . I had absolutely no idea how many there were, but it had to be thousands and thousands and thousands of troops of all divisions. They filled ship loads and ship loads. We were there, I suppose, three or four days; I really don't know, and nobody knew at the time, until the morning that we heard General Eisenhower. We got on board ship and even then some of them had been on board two days. We got up at four o'clock in the morning; we didn't load, but stood or sat on the dock. We didn't get on until 9:00 p.m. or something. The next morning, the next day, must have been the fifth or the sixth of June, 1944. We didn't land until D-4 which was the enth of June. There were only first aid places there by that time; there weren't any nurses. We were the first hospital to go as a hospital unit, but there were other small medical station set ups.

D: So this was how many days after the invasion?

Z: Four days after the invasion.

D: Did you dread this, going over?

Z: No, no I don't think so; I really don't. I don't know whether it was false courage or what; we were anxious I think. No, I didn't dread going. I figured if they were there I wanted to be there. It is totally different when you look at it now. I don't know how to put it but you didn't live in fear all the time. It's amazing the things you laughed at that are rather grim. I suppose that was a false courage too, I don't really know. It was like no one was a coward and said I'm not going

to go. I mean everybody was anxious to go--If we are here, let's do it.

D: So you more or less knew what was going to happen, by going in?

Z: It wasn't known then. It did get awful nerve racking at times, but I think that the fact that you were so horribly busy was probably what kept you going. You really had very little time to think about it. From the time you got off duty you were weary enough to drop, and then you had to come back to work very soon. I mean, twelve-hour days are pretty long, day after day with no days off. They do get a little weary. And of course, we had little parties. Even when there were only three people, we had a little party. I mean, it didn't matter, you didn't have to go anywhere. You just sat around and had a nice little chat and whatever. It wasn't grim; somebody wasn't there all of the time with a long face. It wasn't exactly made light of, but it was not a sad time, in general.

D: Let's move into France. Where did you go first?

Z: We started in Normandy. We were an old hospital. They had taken three old experienced hospitals from Sicily and Africa to go into Normandy, so we went early and our unit was very efficient. As other hospitals were coming in, they were supposed to leapfrog. Say there were ten in line, the tenth one was supposed to go in front, and then the ninth one would go . . . so the last one naturally would always become the tenth. But instead, what they did to us was, we were almost always in front. The new hospital would take over our site and we would move on. We would tear down all of our old buildings except those non-transportable, those too critical to be moved. They couldn't evacuate them all; they just weren't in any condition to go by ambulance or by copter or by anything else; they just were not in any condition to be moved. And so, that part of the hospital, we would trade the equipment for it, so many cots, so many blankets and tent. The hospital that would be the tenth would take our place and we would move forward again. We did an awful lot of moving. All the getting up and tearing down equipment in England paid off because we would move at two o'clock in the afternoon and would be ready by five and be operating full tilt. They evacuated very rapidly, they really did. They had helicopters most of the time and the ambulances were constantly going in and out, some bringing in, and of course always taking back to the general hospitals or to the air fields or air strips or wherever it was. The general hospitals couldn't come in until miles of enemy area had been secured by our troops.

I remember Normandy was stretcher to stretcher as far as . . . We had over eight hundred patients backlogged that had not been touched except for first aid. It was unbelieveable, but that was unlike any other time during the war. There were

other times where there were four and five hundred. They just worked night and day, naturally, but it was still beyond. Just so many patients can be seen no matter what, so they would keep going and getting the worst ones. They could do many that were very small jobs too. I mean it could be the big war, but they weren't all major surgeries by a long shot. There were a lot of what we used to call band-aid jobs.

D: Just sewing up?

Z: Well, we sewed up nothing. You left all wounds; very few wounds were allowed to be sewn up. They had to be left with drains in, unless the patient went back to the front, unless it was that small of a wound. But any penetrating wound, anything that went in, whether or not it came out the other side or . . . like in an arm, the bone was missed totally, that could not be sutured, that had to be packed and sent back. For that, I mean it was for their safety. We didn't have all the sophisticated things; it was very primitive to a degree. When you think of the nice things, like our irrigating of wounds was really quite primitive.

D: Now did you have to bring in generators and stuff like that?

Z: Yes, we had our own power supply no matter where we went. But as soon as electric lines were set up, our unit would be hooked in.

D: You had to go by the generators?

Z: Emergency generators went with the hospital. In the operating tents, bare light bulbs are hardly adequate, but we sewed sheets together and made like a tent liner in sections that covered the dark tent. Because our lights were so terrible, we needed some reflection and the white reflected a little better than dark canvas. We had portable lamps and our own power system yes, but even so they either had awful good eyes or a big strain.

D: Let's move on to a different aspect. When you were moving through France, did you ever have time to look at France?

Z: Yes, to a degree. Mostly out of the backside of a truck. We were in fields, but when we were in Paris . . . Our colonel was a jewel. If he had any way of letting us--anybody who was off duty--go where it was all safe, he certainly would okay it and give us a little pass, even two or three hours. Some towns were, of course, sewn up good. There just wasn't any activity at all, but there were some that were quite open; maybe they didn't get too much of a shelling or bombing. Now Paris, a lot of it did, but then a lot of it didn't get a shelling or a bombing either. That was also their head-

quarters you know. The Germans had their headquarters there, Versailles. We got to go to Versailles.

If you got off duty and there was an ambulance going and maybe say there was only two or three patients or a supply truck was going to pick up supplies, you could bum a ride. Of course, you couldn't go that often because you never knew what they were going to bring back or which way they detoured. But every once in awhile there was somebody going into town. Our supply officer used to have to go to the supply depot and they would let one or two go--whoever got off duty and still felt like they could negotiate and travel.

D: Could you speak any of the foreign languages there?

Z: No, but you picked up an awful lot. It didn't take very long to learn a few little phrases that you thought you needed to.

It was really against the laws and the rules to trade with what they called natives. You weren't to do any trading, like say with the farmers. You can imagine after eating canned food for so long with nothing, how many people were dying for a few eggs and potatoes and things like that. But that was not supposed to be done.

D: Did you go out on the farms?

Z: We were always out in the fields. It didn't take you very long to say in French: "Do you have any eggs?" or "Do you have any potatoes?" or whatever it is. If they did, we used to trade off our soaps or shoes. That was sort of, not forbidden, but it was frowned on. It probably was forbidden. I didn't do too much of it, but I was no better or no worse than anybody else. There weren't too many places that you could go in the towns where the stores were open and you could buy; that was legal. You could buy, but you had different money with each different country. You had money that you could spend or get your money changed. There wasn't that much to buy really.

In Africa we got some leather goods that were really special, Morroccan leather, and a number of things that were quite special and unique for Africa. Some of those packages got back to the States and some never made it. I'm sure the ships were bombed out before they ever did. I don't know what happened to them, but there were many packages that never arrived back in the States which were very definitely sent. Nobody knows where they went, so I'm sure they went to the briny deep.

D: Let's go into other specific missions. Were you involved Bastogne at all?

Z: We were in Holland when the violent counter-offensive by the Germans took place, but we were outside of Bastogne. Now that was when the B-2's were coming over; those were the big new bombs.

D: Were you anywhere else before you went to Bastogne?

Z: Oh yes, a number of places in France, just a number of them.

D: Bastogne was probably one of the largest?

Z: We were outside of the area. We were in Holland in Van Vulcanberg, I think. Holland, part of it was in the building, and part of it was in the tent. That was a cold, cold winter.

D: Bastogne was in November of 1944. So what were you doing during the summer of 1944, up until this time?

Z: We had gone across France with, I imagine, probably no less than ten or maybe twelve stops. Sometimes we would be in a place a week and sometimes we would be there several, maybe three weeks. That's right, because General Patton's Army was supposed to run out of gasoline, remember? We were in Holland quite awhile and that was during Bastogne. That's right.

D: This was more or less a backward thrust for the Army. They didn't really expect the Germans to be able to put up with such a front by this time.

Z: True! True!!

Remember the lull; there was a big lull. In the meantime then the Germans had mined the Ruhr Valley. Day after day we got endless amputations from those same mined fields. When the front started again which was probably spring of 1945, this to me was the most gruesome. I thought that I was losing my mind then. Night after night after night we had amputations. Sometimes it would be four limbs, sometimes two limbs. I remember one night, they put the twenty-fourth amputee patient on my team's tables. I knew if I had one more amputation, I just knew I was going to blow my lid. I just screamed out loud, just screamed and screamed and screamed. I think that I had cracked.

D: Did it do you any good?

Z: Yes, I'm sure it did. I settled down after that. Everybody that wasn't scrubbed came out to see what was the matter, because I didn't get down very often. But I was so far down. I just couldn't see all those people with . . . I felt that was so much worse than chest and belly.

D: Let's talk about what you did go through. This more or less had to happen to everybody else, but was this what you considered battle fatigue?

Z: I suppose so. I had seen so many maimed limbs.

D: You were over there for almost three years by that time; I think almost everybody had their moments.

Z: Well, that was my worst. I remember that they gave me Nembutal, which was the last thing I probably needed. I went to sleep and I had these absolutely unholy dreams that piles of arms and legs were all moving. I just woke up screaming. It was the same morning, later in the day, but 10:00 in the morning and I am supposed to be sleeping. I was screaming hard by then. I was afraid to go back to sleep, so one of the doctors that was on our same shift decided to take me in hand. We walked in the snow thirteen miles one direction and thirteen miles the other direction. We came back that night; I went to work and he went to work, and we worked the entire night. I was pretty good after that.

I think everybody did to a degree but this was . . . My team was more orthopedic than the rest, so the others got a little more, but when you see twenty-four people in one night that have had either an arm . . . I mean nothing less than one limb; it was all either two, some had four limbs at various points, either above the elbow, below or what have you. It was all due to the mine fields and the medics that would go our and pick up these patients who were out there. They would get the same business. Here were all these medics with arms and legs blown off. They had stepped on these land mines that had been laid during the lull in the fighting.

We had always had several, but to me at the time I think there were just so many of them for our particular team that I think it worried me so much more. There were amputations and of course head wounds and all that throughout the entire war--there were horrible things happening all of the time--but it was just such a mess of that, why that should bother me anymore than the rest, but it did.

D: Let's go into the time that finally you are going into Deutchland. Did you have any eerie feeling going into Germany?

Z: I think not. I don't remember exactly, but I think not. I think it was more of the same, because remember France was occupied by the Germans. I mean they had lived there for awhile too. I think there was a little bit of a triumph or "I'm glad we are getting there". We were getting pretty weary of the war by then actually, and I think it was a step

closer to the end of it surely. They were in retreat, it was very obvious and then the push from Southern France was coming up in good shape. Their war had started in August of 1945 and they were doing very well too. Of course then the British were in their little sector. But it was moving along in a pretty steady fashion anyway.

D: What were your impressions of Germany. How much of it was different from France?

Z: It was very efficient, everything was. There was not a stick of wood in their woods that wasn't growing. It's just picked up, totally picked up. It's totally neat and like Belgium and Holland were great that way; they were beautifully neat. Germany in particular, so many of the cities were bombed so horribly, just rubble. But the country was beautiful, and really well kept. In all their little forests there wasn't anything; everything was picked up and burnt in the homes. I mean their forest was growing; there wasn't a limb or dead tree anywhere. This was all taken care of I suppose because they needed it.

D: Do you think you felt most at home in Germany?

Z: Not particularly, because so much of it was field. I mean how can you feel at home in the field. There would be times that cities were beside us, but you couldn't see them. You knew they were over the next hill or down the autobahn, but so much of it was field, totally. I mean you pushed cows aside, that's the way it was.

D: Where specifically did you go in Germany at this time?

Z: We crossed the Rhine at Cologne, then Bad Neuheem, Munster, Belefield, and many little towns. Very little towns mostly, and I don't even know the names of them right now. I was trying to think of it today--where we met and had the Russian patients. It was at the Magdeburg at the Elbe River. We had Russian patients that were . . . I could talk to some of them because I can talk Croatian. A lot of the Russian is quite similar to Croatian.

D: What did you talk about?

Z: Anything. I can't converse that much, and of course they were so shocked to find anybody I suppose . . . They thought Americans were Americans. They didn't realize that some Americans were the old country stock, or first generation.

D: So you surprised them?

Z: Then we did them. We didn't have that many of them. I imagine maybe twenty. No more than that went through surgery while I

was in surgery proper. The other shift might have got some more, or even the other tables might have, but our own tables . . . You didn't wander anywhere from your tables. You were there and that was it. You had two doctors and so much of the time, unless it was a big case, they worked apart. They had four tables going. There was a lot that I used to scrub for and finish up. They would go to the next case but I would finish whatever it was, like all the final dressings or course, and some of the packing. Your tables were constantly in motion, and you had somebody who just did nothing but direct traffic, get this patient out, get a new patient in. I mean that was his job and they were efficient. When you think of the scores and scores that went through our place, it was really no wonder that the high men of the Army used to ask for our hospital in particular over and over and our hospital was cited a number of times. Our unit got the presidential citation and we got all kinds of beautiful letters.

D: What was the name of your unit?

Z: Ninety-first Evac. Ninety-first Evacuation Hospital, but we were really . . . There were several stories in Reader's Digest and we were in different magazines.

D: Did you ever have to deal with or put back together any Germans?

Z: Oh yes, we had Germans all the way. We had a lot of SS troopers, but we had Germans all along. If they were critical, they were ahead of ours who weren't critical. If there were two, like say there was the American and German side-by-side, both with the same horrible condition, the American went in, but the other one followed real soon. But if the German patient was critical, and we had ten Americans that weren't, he went in first. The criticals went in as fast as they could through surgery. The others had first aid of course; they weren't ignored

D: How did they react?

Z: It all depended. Toward the end of the war we had a lot of the warmer or whatever it is when they are the desperate, old men; they were as sweet and dear. The SS were very aggressive and they were ashamed to be in the position, most of them, on their backs. I mean they were really sort of uptight. We had a few expressions, like I used to give them a lot of anesthetic and a lot of pentathol which you give into the vein. You say to make a fist when you put the tourniquet on. Well, they didn't understand that, and so one of our doctors told us to say "Macken ze foust" which supposedly, literally, means "make a fist". And right away they would make a fist. You would have to restrain them more or less, gently restrain them, because you weren't about to fight but you just wanted them to know that you wanted them to work up a vein. The

reaction was over and over repeatedly with the same thing, the same startling reaction; they were ready to fight.

D: So you really weren't saying that?

Z: No, you would say it. You would still need to make a fist more or less to get the vein . . .

D: But it must have been an expression that meant something more besides just making a fist.

Z: Well, no. "Macken ze foust," you would tell them to do that, but I think they were ready to fight no matter what. I suppose it was--I really don't know--part of their training. They were rather ashamed to be in that position, I think, where the regular soldier was hit and was too bad. Their reaction isn't the same. I think the SS were indoctrinated with the fact that they were so much above anybody else, that they were better, that they were superior beings, that they were ashamed to find themselves in the position of being injured. They were supposed to be out fighting this big war.

D: By this time of the war, were you sympathizing with them?

Z: Oh, I don't think so, no. You have seen all of the destruction, and we had to go through any number of camps, concentration camps I mean.

D: Did you get to go through those?

Z: Not Buchenwald or any of the well-known ones, but we went through small ones. We had one in Gardalagen. There is a whole cemetery; they were all political prisoners. I think they were probably all Polish-Jews, I suppose. But they had herded them all into this huge hanger and then they put straw on the floor and on the ground--I don't even remember if there was a floor, I don't think there was. I think it was just hard ground--and then they threw in phospherous bombs and locked the doors. Well, you can imagine. Their bodies were stacked up this high trying to get out. And we had to go to see those and no matter what letters . . . All the enlisted men were made to write, not forced, a certain amount of letters so that everybody at home would know. And it was nothing that they told, if it was true, ever cut out of those letters. Several of those horrible scenes were in the Life Magazine.

D: Now was this during the latter part of the war that you went here?

Z: This was in Germany during the war. No, it was during the

height of it. I mean it was at the time that they knew the Allies were coming when they brought those people in, because they hadn't been there. They just had on striped clothes and there was nothing else. They had no mess kits, no nothing. So they were probably herded in an overnight sort of thing. And then they were hoping to burn down everything I suppose, or maybe just get rid of them.

D: Did you know about this before you went to Germany?

Z: Probably not, not until that particular area was overrun and the camps discovered. I think you probably heard part of it; this gets a little old now. I know I had heard about it. I am not sure if I heard about Buchenwald then and some of these horribly big camps. It was so terribly bad. But I know that when we went to say this Gardalagen we already knew about it, only the day before. The human skin lamp shades, and all these horrible things. This is very true, Butcher of Buchenwald. I don't remember others right now, but there were a number of those camps where the people lived there for a long time. Like the hanger in particular, they hadn't been there very long, they were brought in probably overnight or two days worth of it, and then they were gone. They weren't well fed at all. And then they probably brought them by the boxcar full, I suppose, standing, no room to sit, no room to do anything, just herded in like cattle. That's the way they were in this hanger, they were just herded in, and then the phospherous bombs. They were all dead.

D: Now lets get toward the end, did you stay after the war was over? Did you stay over there?

Z: No, not for very long, although part of our unit was going to go over to the CBI, to the China, India, Burma Theater. We were scheduled to. I signed up to go through that too. I don't know why, but some of us had. We were forever filling out questionnaires, always filling out questionnaires. I think we got a little lax because some of us don't even remember exactly when we signed up to go to that. It was one of those questionnaires, "Would you be willng to go to the other theaters of operations?" and if you said yes you were on the list. I think that's the way it was, because after you fill out so many questionnaires you do get a little lax.

D: Did you go to the South Pacific?

Z: No, their war was over. By the time that they were staging, they had already separated us. Some of our unit was already separated. The ones that didn't want to go had already started their shipment home, and had gone to different staging areas. I don't know how many had got clear to the United States, but I know they had left our unit and they were leaving daily. But the rest of the unit, they wanted to keep our particular

unit intact. Our hospital had happened to be the Sixth Surgical Hosptial of the First World War; they had changed the name. They were trying to keep that one, the Ninety-first Evacuation Hospital, to keep a steady going history of it. They were going to retain the unit to go to the CBI.

After Japan's surrender in August of 1945, we started to be shipped in different directions, but most of my friends were already in the U.S.--except for the few of us that had signed. Well, I shouldn't say few, there were quite a number that had done that, but we went different directions. Of course, by that time we were going home by the point system; how many battle stars because each battle star was a certain number of pionts and each decoration counted, months overseas counted and so on. Those with the highest number of points went on the next boat.

D: Were you ever attacked there?

Z: Well no, fortunately our hospital never got hit directly at all although our tents had a lot of shrapnel holes which would be legal really if you were hitting anything close by.

They respected our red cross. We had this huge, huge red Cross; it was a tarp, a white background with a red cross, and they would stake it out in the field next to the hospital. It could be seen from the air, and they respected ours all the way. Now I think at Bastogne or someplace, they had run a tank through one of their hospitals there or did something on that order.

D: Are there any additional comments about the war that you can recall or remember that stick out in your mind?

Z: Well, I think we've covered highlights. I could probably tell you war stories forever. I have forgotten a lot; I have forgotten a lot of names and a lot of numbers that I thought I would never forget. But it's like anything else. I don't know that I'm getting that feeble, I think that I would have forgotten it no matter what.

END OF INTERVIEW