

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II

Personal Experience

O. H. 1035

SYLVESTER GREY

Interviewed

by

Carrie A. Stanton

on

October 4, 1983

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: SYLVESTER GREY

INTERVIEWER: Carrie A. Stanton

SUBJECT: Dachau, UNRA (United Nations Rehabilatation),  
Omaha Beach

DATE: October 4, 1983

S: This is an interview with Sylvester Grey for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project by Carrie Stanton, at Youngstown State University, on October 4, 1983, at approximately 2:10 p.m.

Do you want to just give me some information about your background? Where you were born and that kind of thing.

G: I was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey. I moved to Youngstown when I was about six years old. I went to Jefferson, Hayes Junior High, and Rayen School. There were ten of us in the family: Four boys, four girls, and mother and father.

S: What section of town did you live in?

G: The North Side. On Oxford, off Belmont Avenue.

S: And you went to school here in town?

G: I went to school here. I played football. I was quarterback at Rayen High School, and we were city champs back in 1939.

S: Is that when you graduated?

G: I graduated January of 1940. That was the sixth month. Every sixth month they would have a graduation class. I graduated in January, instead of now it's every June.

- S: Oh, they graduated every six months?
- G: Yes. Then the war started and I was drafted in November, 1942.
- S: What did you do. . .
- G: In the meantime, well, the week after I graduated I worked at General Fireproofing.
- S: What did you do there?
- G: I was an accountant. I was assistant chief cost accountant when I went into the service.
- S: You weren't married then?
- G: No, I was single. I was married when I was in the service.
- S: Do you have children?
- G: Yes, I have two, a boy and a girl.
- S: Do you remember Pearl Harbor?
- G: Oh yes, very well.
- S: What were you doing then?
- G: Well, I was working at GF. As a matter of fact, Roosevelt was making a speech while we were on our way to work and I stayed in the parking lot just to hear the rest of the speech. Naturally, everybody remembers it. It's played back on the radio and the television today.
- S: It must be one of those things like when Kennedy was shot. Everybody remembers what they were doing then.
- G: Right. That's the way it happened. Even now, whenever I hear it on the radio--when they go back and play some various speeches or recordings--I always remember sitting in the car listening to it.
- S: Was that in the morning?
- G: Yes.
- S: Did he announce it immediately after it happened?

G: Well, no, not until the following morning, because there was a time element.

S: It took a whole day?

G: Well, just from that evening till the next day. Everbody heard it on the radio, but his speech was the next morning.

S: Do you know what he said?

G: Yes. Just that we would do just what had to be done. We would remember that day forever.

S: Did Congress meet right away after that? Do you know?

G: Yes.

S: Did you volunteer or anything like that?

G: No. My brother did. I had a brother that volunteered two days later. He went into the Air Corps and then he was shipped to Florida. From Florida he went straight to Australia and then Borneo, stayed there since. But I didn't go in the service till almost a year later.

S: And you wound up there in time?

G: Yes. I got up all the green cards.

S: Your parents were living then?

G: Yes.

S: How did they feel?

G: Well, they didn't like the idea that my brother volunteered. Then, naturally the day I got drafted my father went down to the station with me--this was the bottom of Belmont Avenue. Erie Station is where everybody got on a train and you had to take an examination at Akron. Then we came back home and thirty days later. . .

S: You went by train to Akron and then back again?

G: Yes. There was two or three hundred of us.

S: The Erie Station, where is that?

G: Commerce. Right in back of Strouss's.

S: Is that the one they're going to preserve?

G: I don't think so. It's right in the center of town.

S: Didn't they have the New York Central Station down there?

G: Oh yes.

S: What's the name of that bridge there? It's by Cedar Street.

G: Near East Federal Street.

S: It was a shame they tore that down.

G: I can also recall Pennsylvania Station and Spring Common Bridge, too.

S: I don't remember that one.

G: Oh yes, right at the bottom of Belmont Avenue. They used to have a watering trough for horses right at the base of the bridge where it met West Federal Street. Of course, to the left just twenty or thirty yards were the steps that went down to the railroad station.

S: They still had the old steam engines then?

G: That's all they had, yes.

S: Where did you go then? When you came back, where were you sent?

G: I went to Columbus and stayed there about ten days.

S: Was there a fort down there?

G: Yes. Fort Hayes. Right in the center of Columbus. That's where we received all our shots and they gave us information, and coded numbers as to what we could do or what we preferred to do. We got our shots and clothing. Ten days later. . .

S: Did the clothing fit?

G: No, not a thing, no. As a matter of fact, that was comical. They would just issue you. . . You went by and

and told them what size. If you saw it was a different size and if you said something, they said, "That's all right, exchange it later." All they were interested in was seeing that you received two of this and one of this and five of the packages, five socks, and so on.

S: On some of the other interviews, the guys will say, "Nothing fit! Nothing fit!"

G: We all stood in the big auditorium and somebody would say, "All right, now, pick up your pants. Hold them up high! Hold them up high!" He said, "Alright now, stuff them in this bag!" He had a duffle bag. And then he would ask us to pick up our socks and count them. "How many do you have?" And he'd make you holler out loud. "How many do you have?" "Five." He said, "Stuff them in the bag!" And he would go through the whole roster of what everybody had to have. That was one of the things when we first got in the service. Everybody had to have the same number, and then stuff them in the bag. (Laughter).

S: What about shoes? Did shoes fit? That could be pretty uncomfortable.

G: They just asked for size. They would ask whether it was seven and a half or eight or nine, whatever your foot was. They didn't care whether it was narrow or wide. If you wore eight and a half, you got eight and a half whether it was narrow or wide. When you got to basic training. . .

S: Where was that?

G: Ten days later we got on our train and went straight to California. That's right about thirty miles east of San Francisco.

S: Do you remember what it was called?

G: Yes. There was a mountain. It was a CCC camp that we went to. It was Camp Ramon. And about four miles from the camp in was Mount Diablo. That was where it was. They had a camp on top and one on the bottom. That's what we did, we marched, all the time, from one camp to the other.

S: That's what you remember the most about that, is the marching?

G: Yes. We worked for five or six weeks--we got there November 30, and four weeks later we received a pass. Anyone that wanted to have a pass, they would just holler, "Who wanted a pass?" You would have to dress and pass inspection and learn the ten rules of the Army.

S: What were the ten rules?

G: I can't remember. (Laughter) What every soldier's supposed to know in the service. We went to church and we were auctioned off like cattle. Somebody wanted two soldiers to take home to have a Christmas dinner, so they'd say, "I'll take two." "I'll take one." "I'll take three." Then they'd say, "Next two guys, next soldier, out!" And that was the way that we received our pass. Just for Christmas.

S: You didn't really have time enough to get back home?

G: No.

S: And your family wouldn't have enough time to get out there?

G: Well, of course, you don't get a pass for several months, maybe up to a year. We got a two week furlough every year. This was the fourth week in the service and they decided to have one day off for Christmas. The only ones that were allowed to go were the ones that went to the church. We didn't even know. We thought we were going to be on our own, but instead we were just sort of kept by people who wanted so many soldiers to invite into their home and we went with them.

S: What was your rank then?

G: I was a private. Everybody was a private.

D: Did they teach you some occupation?

G: You have to learn Army life. How to march and how to follow rank. . . How to deal with our environment, maybe. We practiced firing a .22 rifle, became familiar with firing a rifle.

S: Had you ever shot a gun before?

G: No, I never had a gun in my life until I got in the Army. I fired a .22 rifle then.

- S: Learned quick, huh?
- G: Oh, yes. You had to.
- S: They don't train you specifically?
- G: No, just basic. . . How to march and the various figures and formation--how to open the ranks and guard duty. It was just, basically, what the Army is all about.
- S: After your basic training, then what?
- G: Then everybody was assigned to various outfits. There were two fellows, and they wanted to know if anyone could type. There was a newspaper reporter and myself that raised our hands saying that we could type. We were both sent to regimental headquarters in San Francisco. We were fortunate. The rest of them were all sent to various outfits, like halftrack or ninety millimeters or search-light blue, whatever. The whole west coast was under one command. We went to regimental headquarters, and that was to protect the whole west coast, the San Francisco Bay area.
- S: Do you remember during the war when they put the Japanese in the concentration camps?
- G: I recall it.
- S: Did you have any connection?
- G: I had no connection. I remember reading it in the paper that they were carting them off to the midwest from San Francisco. They talked about it while I was there, but it had already happened.
- S: Were they really afraid for attack on the west coast?
- G: Oh yes! As a matter of fact, we even had several alerts while I was there. The Japanese submarines were nearby.
- S: Was it true?
- G: Yes. Whether the subs were actually there, I don't know, but I know they did think so and we were alerted, our outfit. We had the protection of the whole west coast, and that is the San Francisco Bay area. We had the search lights and the anti-aircraft guns. We were all alerted that there was something in the air.



S: They really felt that there was a threat?

G: Yes. We didn't see them fall or know what happened to them, but they were in the area, or were reported. Whether they came from the submarines or from Japan I don't know.

S: How long were you in California?

G: I arrived December 7, the year after war was started, and stayed there until May. Then they formed a cadre. I worked as a cadre clerk.

S: What's a cadre?

G: A cadre is a nucleus of about 150 men that formed a new anti-aircraft outfit. Then we had to wait for 700 to 800 new draftees and had to teach them everything from basic training plus showing them how to operate the guns. We were one that formed the outfit. Naturally, everybody that went was promoted one grade. I was corporal at the time and became sergeant.

S: Moved up fast!

G: Yes, I did and stayed that way. Once our outfit was full, the roster had about 800 men, once it was complete and the promotions made, there were no more promotions until somebody either was transferred out or demoted, or what have you.

S: Where did you go from there?

G: El Paso, Texas. That's when we received about six hundred and some recruits. We had to train them. We were teaching them almost the same thing that we had in basic training. It normally lasted six weeks. We stayed there until the following March. In San Francisco we had everything, we had halftracks, nineties, search light outfits. But in El Paso, all we did was work on the ninety millimeter guns.

S: Did you travel all over the country doing this?

G: No, just in El Paso. It's a camp. El Paso has a camp there of approximately a thousand soldiers. Fort Bliss was the name of it. It was an air corps base plus anti-aircraft. It included all anti-aircraft, whether it was halftrack, forty millimeters, or ninety millimeters.

S: And where did you go from El Paso?

G: I went to Tennessee, Camp Forrest. I stayed there for six weeks.

S: Still training people?

G: No, maneuvers. It was the first of March and we stayed there about four weeks. We were on maneuvers. We travelled several hundred miles in every direction, just as if it were actual combat conditions. We left our camp and had bivouacs and slept in tents or whatever.

S: You didn't walk?

G: No, fortunately the whole outfit that we belonged to was motorized. We did no walking, fortunately.

S: Oh, I thought you had to walk 150 miles!

G: No, from there we travelled by truck.

S: Did the news from the front get back to you pretty well in the states? Did you know pretty much what was going on?

G: Oh, yes. At that time all the fighting was in Africa. The American soldiers that went overseas were all in Africa fighting Rommel's forces.

S: They weren't in the Pacific?

G: Yes. I was getting letters regularly from my brother. Mostly we heard so much about the Japanese war that everything you heard was bad news.

S: Did people get discouraged?

G: Yes and no. We knew that we weren't prepared. But we simulated with guns that we didn't have, and we pretended that there were aircraft in that vicinity, even though they didn't fly. In certain instances they would fly aircraft over just so they would practice. They'd be able to track it, find out how high it was and how fast it was going. In most cases, you'd have simulate everything.

S: So they really knew that they weren't ready?

G: Right. Everybody was aware at the time. It was just building it up.

S: Did you feel at any point then, that people were learning and people were getting more experienced?

G: Yes. We even saw that ourselves. We had three or four guns and we had to take turns training the fellows on them. Later on we got all sixteen of them. So each month that went by, we became aware of the fact that we were getting supplied and enforced with all the material.

S: Were you sent overseas then?

G: Then I went to New York and New Jersey.

S: Did you get leave?

G: Yes, one time from El Paso. I was working in the regiment at Battalion Headquarters. I was fortunate that I not only got my two-week leave, I received a five-day pass and a three-day pass on top of it. I had better than three weeks that I didn't get the first year. We didn't get it for about a year and a half, before I got furlough.

S: Then you went to Europe?

G: Then I went to Europe. From Tennessee we went to New Jersey, on the New York side.

S: Time-wise this would be about the middle of 1942?

G: Well, I went in November of 1942, and this is now. . .

S: 1943?

G: Yes. I went in April. Easter Sunday we pulled out of the harbor. No, not in 1943, it was 1944. Because I was in San Francisco, California till May and then we stayed through Christmas. All of 1943 in El Paso and then the first of 1944 I went to Tennessee. This was in 1944 when I was sent overseas.

S: Do you think you weren't just all shipped overseas because you were in this training.

G: Well, no.

S: Weren't there guys who were just in basic camp and then sent out?

- G: Oh, yes, my brother was one. He only stayed in the States three weeks, and then he was over in Australia. I received mine--it's supposed to be a six to seven week basic training--I only had four weeks. They just put me in El Paso where we received orders and formed a new outfit. The problem there, they had it just combined. They had basic for them and also teaching them the ninety millimeter operational, and forming a battalion combined together. They came in somewhere around June or July of each year. They ran six or seven months and the following April, they went overseas. Most of them are six, seven months and then they went overseas.
- S: Why do you think you were shipped over then? Because they were thinking about D-day and all of that?
- G: Oh, no! Nobody had any idea when they were going to land in France or wherever the battle was going to take place. As a matter of fact, the war was still going on in Africa. Nobody had any idea when we were going over to England. We didn't even know we were going to England at the time until we were half way across. We were informed that we were heading for England.
- S: What kind of ship did you go over on?
- G: I was fortunate. I went over on the Queen Mary. So many of them went on, we called them matchboxes, the LST's.
- S: What does that stand for?
- G: Landing Ship Tanks. There are some smaller, but most of those that went overseas were the LST's.
- S: What does that stand for?
- G: Landing Ship Tanks. There are some smaller, but most of those that went overseas were the LST's.
- S: How big were they? Not too big?
- G: We took an LST when we landed on Omaha Beach. It took 150 men and fourteen vehicles on one ship. So, it was good size, but to travel across the ocean it was pretty small.
- S: They probably got sick.
- G: Oh, they were all sick, from what I understand. That's

why I say I was fortunate I went over on the Queen Mary. There were fifteen thousand of us. We were anti-aircraft, and they assigned us to man the three inch British guns that were on the ship. The American captain manned the guns. It was for practice also. We were all MP's, our outfit, so I wore an armband even though I didn't do anything. It's fortunate that I was able to do that and I could travel all over the ship to see what it was like. Otherwise, you had to stay in just your own area.

S: What did the ship look like?

G: It was entirely different from after the war was over. I was in New York and the ship was in the harbor, so I went on it. They charged me three or four dollars to visit the ship. It was entirely different from when I was on it. A lot went on. We were on the promenade deck above the main deck, right at the front of the ship, on the bow. That was all metal when I was there. The sleeping quarters you could stack four or five high. It was a big ship and that's the way I could recall it at the time. But after the war, when I went to visit, the whole section that we were in was the bar, and it was all glass when it was in the harbor when I went on. The carpeting was two inches thick, but when we were there there was no carpeting.

S: They took everything out?

G: Yes, they took everything out and just put in bunks in that section. You wouldn't realize it was the same ship after the war.

S: Did they have a lot of destroyers protecting them?

G: No, when we travelled on the Queen Mary it was by itself. We had no escort.

S: Was that unusual?

G: No. It went faster than most warships. It could outrun a submarine, so rather than going slower in a convoy it went by itself. However, it stayed close to the shore. Being MPs we were able to walk all over the ship and talk to sailors and the British, and they informed us of the direction that we were going. We went clear to the coast of Florida from New York. And then we went over toward the African coast, and then up towards England. We thought we would go toward New Foundland, the

northern route, but then we went the southern. I understood the reason for it was that everywhere we went, we were noticing that the aircraft were in the vicinity. They kept track of us by flying cover and checking for submarines ahead of us. That was the reason we kept to a southern route and close to various bases so they were able to fly cover and check on submarines.

S: So you went over to Africa?

G: No, just along the coast. Apparently we had some bases somewhere there that they were able to fly out and check on us as we were going over.

S: Where did you land?

G: In Scotland. It's the only place that they had, I understand, that they could take the Queen Mary. There are just a few places it can dock.

S: Why didn't you go into England?

G: I don't know.

S: Like Liverpool?

G: To keep away from the German airplanes and submarines. We did have difficulty getting off. There were possibly fifteen thousand soldiers and you have to get on little ferries. I don't recall the name of the lake or port, but they put four or five hundred soldiers on it at a time and shuttled back and forth. It took three or four days to unload everybody.

S: Was that way north in Scotland?

G: Yes, way north. I have it at home, I don't recall the name of the town now, but it was way north. From there we went to Wales and stayed there about a week.

S: How did you get there? By rail?

G: By rail, yes. We called it the Tooneyville Trolley because the cars were old fashioned. I think they had the type that were compartments. Each compartment also opened to the outside and the whole outside of the train had like an old fashioned running board. It was warm. April. We would leave the door open and we sat with our feet outside on what we called a running board. Just a

wooden board a foot wide. Most of us just sat there and some of the fellows even crawled out and stood on the outside. One car didn't have more than thirty soldiers. They were just little compartment cars.

S: Did you have to travel a long time?

G: Yes.

S: Did everybody go to the same place then?

G: I don't know about the rest of the soldiers, but our whole outfit, 800 men, we stayed together. We all went to Wales. We went to a camp that had several thousand soldiers there.

S: Do you recall the name of it?

G: No, I don't recall the name of it. We only stayed there three or four days till they, I guess, found room for us. From there we went to Blandford, England. I would imagine about thirty or forty miles, and that's where we stayed until D-day started.

S: So you were in D-day?

G: Well, we were scheduled to be there. Fortunately we didn't. We had our guns set up on the coast near Dover firing at U2s that came across, and any German planes. They would drop bombs constantly on England. One of the battle stars that our outfit received was for the Battle of Britain because we fired at the airplanes and also the U2s that they were shooting over there. I guess we stayed about six weeks. When we landed, I believe it was April 20, and D-day came on the sixth. We had one gun in ordnance, and the fact that we were missing one gun we were scheduled over on D-day. But being minus one gun, they postponed us until a couple of weeks later. I think it was June 26 when I went over. D-day was on the sixth.

S: Did you have any contact with the English, the natives, over there?

G: Yes.

S: How did they feel about Americans? They write so much now about how it was a bad relationship, everyone I talk to.

G: I don't think so, because we had no more work to do, especially in the headquarters battery. We always had two batteries on the coast. They alternated every five or six days. Two of the batteries would go up and two would come back to the Blanford Field location. Those that were in the area of Blanford had absolutely nothing to do. So, every night everyone could go out on a pass.

S: Go to the pub?

G: Right. I was lucky, I met my brother-in-law there. He sent me censored mail. It wasn't properly censored. It was scratched rather than cut out. I was able to make out the town and I went to the post office to try to locate him and they wouldn't let me know exactly where he was located.

S: Why did you do that? Did they always do that?

G: Oh yes! You weren't allowed to say where you were located in your letters. In other words, you could say you went to London, or certain other towns that you visited, but you couldn't say where you were. He wrote on there that he was located at Blanford, but they scratched it out, they punctured it. But I was able to make out the town and I said, "That's where I'm at." So I went to the post office.

S: You wouldn't even have known!

G: No. It was all APO405. That was the only address we had, you know, just New York, period. I sat at the post office until their mail truck came to pick up the air mail. Then I rode back with him and he was located maybe six, seven miles from where I was. So I visited him every other day.

S: Did you ever run into any other buddies in towns?

G: Not in England, but I did in France. It's a funny situation. The way it happened is very comical. We were being shelled. Our mess was set up across the street from where our headquarters battery was. Every time a shell dropped, we took off to go to the curb or run across the street. We had them stopped at the river. The bridge was blown out. It was my turn to dash across the street and a truck was coming down. Engineers were coming in to build a new bridge. It (the truck) almost hit me and it swerved and then somebody hollered my name. He recognized me. I don't know how



he could have done it. I had a steel helmet on and fatigues, and I was carrying a rifle. He hollered, and I stood there and yelled back at him.

S: Probably made you feel good.

G: Yes. And somebody hollered, "Good going!" That was the closest I came to visiting with anybody, or seeing them anyway. He was on the track team and he recognized me.

S: So, you went over to Omaha Beach? Is that where you went?

G: Right, we landed on Omaha Beach.

S: It was pretty bad there then?

G: Yes, it was. The front line wasn't more than nine or ten miles. That's as far as we penetrated. But the boat I was on didn't make it until the next morning. It took us about fourteen hours just to travel across the channel. It was moving out just a little bit until everybody was able to get on LSTs and we went over in one big convoy. The way the LSTs would hit the shore, they'd drop an anchor, or two anchors, about five, six hundred yards off the shore, and then they'd ram the shoreline. When we got there, there were already bulldozers on the shore and they tried to push sand in front of us. We couldn't get off. They kept pushing, bulldozing sand, trying to pack the sand in front of us so that we could get out. But every time they did, why, the waves would wash it back out. We weren't permitted to get off, so we had to pull back out an anchor out in the ocean again--the channel. The following morning the tide was okay for us to come back in.

S: Does that happen pretty often? Do you think?

G: I imagine.

S: Well, how did the first ones get over?

G: The first ones wouldn't go on the LST. They went over on a smaller landing craft infantry. Just infantry went in first. Once they secured a foothold, then the bigger ships went in. There were still those that had been sunk, they were using them to break some of the tide. They dragged them over to more or less make a break-wall out of those that had been sunk.

S: Did they pull docks over?

G: I don't know. I didn't see any. They were supposed to, I understand. The section of beaches probably where ninety percent of us landed would be the same place. We didn't see any docks. All we saw were just regular landings. They were more or less pulled over to the side to make it clear for us, the ones that were coming in later, and also to break some of the waves. I didn't see any docks. Everybody that landed, landed on that shoreline. Now, what they did later I don't know.

S: Was there shelling there all the time that you landed?

G: Oh yes. That's why I say, when we pulled back out nobody liked that, because even though we were in a boat, there was no place to hide or no place to dig a hole, you just sat there like a duck. That night, naturally we got shelled. There was no place to hide. We were glad to get on shore.

S: Did you lose a lot of men?

G: Not landing. None of our men were hit. Some of the men had shrapnel, but nobody got hit. We were lucky. I'm glad it was June 26 and 27. When we went up on top of the hill and went down the highway, we could still see some of the aircraft and they had a lot of gliders that had crashed.

S: They used gliders?

G: Yes.

S: Both sides?

G: Well, the Americans did. When we went over there the paratroopers landed, and the 82nd and the 101st and also the gliders. They pulled gliders across and as soon as they cut them loose they landed whether they wanted to or not. There were a lot of them that were just the way they had landed fifteen days before.

S: It must have been dangerous.

G: Yes, and they still hadn't had the chance to clean the area up yet. It was still the same way as it was on D-day.

S: Then what did you do?

- G: We went about ten miles only, till we couldn't go any further. Our objective was Cherbourg, but it hadn't fallen yet. We went into some ravine, an area that was off the highway. We stayed there about three days. We were waiting to move into Cherbourg. Occasionally shells would hit nearby.
- S: You didn't run into any Germans there?
- G: Yes, we scattered. That was when we received our first prisoners there. But they had no place to go and naturally we had guards out. We got our first prisoners just waiting to move into Cherbourg.
- S: When you ran into Germans over there and took them prisoner, did they realize that the end was coming? Did they give up easily?
- G: Yes, they did, because they had no place to go. They apparently tried to get back and there were just so many Americans. They just kept hiding until they just had no place to go and they just gave up, more or less. There were no shots fired or anything, they more or less just surrendered. But at the time they still felt Germany could win.
- S: Just keep going on?
- G: Yes.
- S: Then you went through France. Did you stay with the same group all the time?
- G: Yes. When we went over we only had like sixty percent of our men when we landed on Omaha Beach. We stayed thirty days before the rest of the outfit caught up to us. We watched Oherborg fall. The Germans went out to the break-wall and they had more or less like a pill box out there in the harbor. Our dive bombers couldn't get them out and then we sent our guns and shot at the break wall. It was two or three days before they finally surrendered. Once Cherbourg fell, instead of landing on the beaches they opened a port and all the Americans landed in Cherbourg instead of Omaha, Utah Beach.
- S: Where did you go from there?
- G: We called it the Saint Lo Breakthrough, once enough soldiers landed. I went over with the First Army, and thirty days later the rest of our outfit caught up to

us, then the Third Army started. I went in with General Patton's outfit. We had St. Lo Breakthrough. We started to move and didn't stop until we finally stopped at the Battle of the Bulge. We kept going until we met the Russians. That's the way we did it. From there we went straight south and cut off the rest.

S: You went south?

G: Yes. We went around the, what they called the Fille Gap. There was one pocket of the whole German army. The British, and part of the First Army were pretty much on a delay tactic. At the time we didn't know it, but I read about it later, that the British and the First Army were more or less at a stand still along the coast. But the Third Army went clear around them and were more or less encircled with the German army. We went through France where we headed toward Paris. We could have gone into Paris before the French did, but apparently the general decided to let General de Gaulle march in. We went below Paris instead, a couple of days before the French even got there.

S: When you were marching through France, do you think the French people were real happy to see you?

G: Oh yes. Every town they just cheered and practically blocked the road, wanting to feel all the fellows food and whatever they had; wine and some cognac and what-have-you.

S: How nice!

G: There was one town. . .I can't recall it now, when the Breakthrough first started. We were there about four hours before we could move the infantry. We had some problems and we had to wait until they cleared things in front of us. We stayed in this town, Avranches was the name of it. We were there about four hours. Every midnight I had to make a report. I had to collect reports for the desk center chief and go back to headquarters. Every captain had to make out his report and headquarters battery and then the regiment. Then the colonel had to make one out for our outfit, and I had to have a messenger return it back to headquarters. Half the time I used to go with him at midnight. It was always a midnight run. We had to go back through this town that was leveled by the Germans. We sat there four hours with no gunfire, nothing. But that midnight I couldn't get through town. It was gone. Leveled. We were kind of lucky that we got out when we did.

S: There was still quite a bit of fighting going on then?

G: Yes. A lot of fighting. In this case, the generals realized what the Third Army was doing, that was to go around the German army. They wanted to open a path back to the sea. That's why they leveled that town and a few others. The Army didn't allow it. As a matter of fact, one particular army in that area was either shot or captured. Very few of them got out. Then we went on to the one city. But they couldn't stop Patton. Naturally we complained because every two hours or four hours, we'd move.

S: Did you march?

G: No. Like I say, I was fortunate being in a mobile outfit. We rode.

S: Weren't there people who marched?

G: Oh, yes. Everything was done like a leap-frog. There was another anti-aircraft outfit, the 131st. We would set up wherever we were, and they would march up and they would pass us. They would move five or ten miles in front of us and they would set up. And the infantry and the armored division--we all did the same. For one or two days we'd be with the 26th Infantry and the 6th Armored Division, and the 131st Anti-Aircraft. There were other outfits, in fact every outfit that you could think of. The enemy would move in front of us. Once they moved five or ten or fifteen miles, then they'd stop, we would go through them and then move ten or fifteen miles. That's the way we travelled, like leap frog. At the end of the day we were just an outfit. Sometimes we would be with the 26th infantry or the 19th or the Sixth armored.

S: Was the Red Cross around?

G: No. We saw them only one time.

S: I've never heard anything good about the Red Cross.  
(Laughter)

G: We saw the Salvation Army two or three times, but the Red Cross, we only saw them one time in Nancy, France. That was the second biggest city after Paris. We were in Nancy when the Red Cross came. The girls all disappeared but they left the donuts and the coffee. We had to make the coffee, the mess sergeant, and we all

went out and got coffee and donuts. That was the only time, just one time in the whole war that I saw the Red Cross. Until after the war was over. Then in different towns and cities we saw the Red Cross. It could be that the Red Cross was in the back area. Where we were, just the one time that I told you about.

S: They charged for the donuts?

G: Yes. We made the coffee and then we paid for the donuts. We were fortunate in our outfit. We had our casualties, I'll tell you that. I never got hit, fortunately. I'd like to go back someday and see where I've been. We travelled a lot, but most of it was under circumstances where you didn't look around to see the scenery. You were glad to get off the highway or dig in a foxhole somewhere.

S: You were into Germany then?

G: Yes, well we went as far as Nancy, France, and they stopped us. We ran out of gasoline and they stopped the Army from moving until all the supplies moved up. Then we went up to Metz, which had not fallen for several thousand years from what I understand. It was the dividing part of the Maginot Line and one of the German lines. It was one of the biggest centers. The Third Army was captured and they must have had several thousand pillboxes. Then the Battle of the Bulge came about when we were in Metz. I didn't have to go up, but our outfit had to. All our vehicles were used. The drivers went up to the Bulge because they had to bring the whole 98th Infantry Division, you read that after the war is over. You don't know what's going on at the time. We knew there was a Battle of the Bulge, of course.

S: Did they call it that then?

G: No. Not at first. It was just that the Germans were counter-attacking. Then they called it the Bulge because you had the Army newspapers. As a matter of fact, I remember one that was printed in France. I still have that at home someplace, I think. All our truck drivers and jeep drivers had to move the 19th Infantry Division up. You read about it after, but at the time we didn't know about it. When they asked Patton, they wanted to give him a couple of weeks to get up there. He said he'd be there over night. You probably saw the movie, General Patton, and he said,

"Hell, he'd be there tomorrow morning." The generals told him, "Now don't be too anxious, you know you can't do it." But he did it because he used us.

S: Did you ever meet him personally?

G: Yes, twice. I didn't meet him, I saw him. He never stayed still long enough that you'd see him. He just went by. He whisked by in his jeeps. Now that you mention it, I'll bring it up a little later, our men went into the Bulge because it took them four hours or so to move practically the whole 19th Infantry Division up there over night. So they were able to be up there but we didn't go up. We stayed where we were. We were just thirty-four miles away.

S: At this point, did you run across any Germans?

G: Oh, all the while!

S: What was their attitude then?

G: Well, we captured Germans all along.

S: Did they think they were still winning?

G: No. We could see it was changing, too, because some of the soldiers we were capturing were now fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old! We could see it too, that they were now scraping the bottom of the barrel. They were more scared. . . More so than we were. That's why, I guess, that would be a hard thing to do. . . To capture them. Some of them even cried.

S: They were little kids!

G: That's right. They were too young to be in the service. They were just young kids, some of them that we captured. Talking about Patton, he always travelled in a convoy of three. He would have one jeep with machine gun and several men are on the first jeep, he was in the middle, and there would be one following. When you're travelling at night or travelling fifty, sixty miles to go back to a rear echelon to deliver something, you don't go slow. You're travelling pretty fast. One jeep went down the road and one of my drivers went by him, in back of him across the intersection. Naturally the second jeep was Patton, and they almost collided. The third jeep, Patton's jeep went after our driver and reprimanded him and gave him a note. Unfortunately, I

didn't save it. But he had to be reprimanded. He took it back to me and was scared to death because he almost hit Patton, and I had to give it to the fellow that was in charge of operations that I was in. He in turn gave it to the colonel and on up. And we had to answer it, that we reprimanded the driver. We didn't, we just dated it, but let's face it, our driver was in a hurry to deliver a message and get back and he wasn't caring about how fast he was going.

S: So your driver almost killed Patton?

G: Yes, right before he did get hit by a truck. That's how he (Patton) died. He was killed in an accident.

S: I didn't know that.

G: A truck. . .He was killed in an auto accident. And our guy almost got him beforehand. We had to sign a letter and send it up through the channels, explaining that the fellow was doing his duty. However, he should have looked and didn't, or whatever. I didn't know exactly what they put in the letter, but they had to send it ahead.

S: So then you got the war over. . .

G: Yes, well, it went from there toward Lenz, Austria where we met the Russians and the war was over.

S: You actually met some Russians?

G: No. We split our outfit in two. We called it Combat A and Combat B. Half the headquarters and half of A and B went to one section, and half the headquarters and C and D outfits went another direction. That's what I was saying, we leap-frogged. We were in two different sections. The second section was the one met the Russians. I didn't get to meet them, but our outfit did.

S: Did anyone tell you how they acted?

G: Well, everyone was happy.

S: So there was no hate then?

G: No. There was no hate whatsoever at that time. Later on, when we were kidding about it because Patton wanted to go ahead and keep on going to Russia. But at the time we had no hate.



S: Too bad he didn't.

G: We didn't think about it. The war was over.

S: So tell me, on the tape this time, about going to Dachau.

G: I don't recall--somewhere around April. Around 1945. The war was still on, it wasn't over yet. During our travels there was five of us in a jeep. When we travelled, we never knew where anybody was (our outfits) and we would be ten, fifteen miles apart, everyone of us. Headquarters was at A,B,C,D batteries. Once you established a location on a map that had coordinates, they would send these coordinates back. Quite often you would be on radio silence and naturally you would always have to send a messenger. I was fortunate to have all five batteries having a jeep for me. When we moved, I'd send a jeep up to the coordinates. I always had to put it in code. I handled the cryptograph and code. I would put it in code and tell them where to move next. The messages I received were from the operations officer of the major or the colonel, or whoever wrote the message. Occasionally we couldn't find the outfit. They were not where they were supposed to be, or they had to move for some reason, and we would have to go out and look for them. We would have to find out where they're at. Five of us in a jeep would try to locate a battery. In our progress of trying to locate them, we ran across an MP at an intersection. He stopped us from going ahead, he said, "The Germans are that way, you can't go there." We naturally informed him of what we were trying to locate and he said, "Well, there's some activity this way." He told us where to go and he said that somewhere down there they had captured some kind of a camp. So we said, "Well, we'll go down there. We're this close, let's see what's down there." That's when we found out it was the concentration camp of Dachau. It was all new to us. We didn't know what was going on or what kind of a camp it had been or what they were doing there. When we pulled into the area, the MPs were already there, they just directed us where to park.

S: When you were there, how long was it since they had left there?

G: Well, we were just moving along with the war--the front line.

S: So it wasn't very long?

G: No, it was the next day or the day after, because even the MPs just knew it was some kind of a concentration camp. He hadn't been there yet either. So we were there the next day or the day after, because the front line was still--like I said, he didn't allow us to go forward where the front line was at the time. He said, "No, the front line is there. The Germans are ahead. You can't go that direction. You'd better go this way and inquire down there." Because he said they did capture a lot of concentration camps. So I don't know for certain whether it was the next day or the day after. But we were trying to locate our outfit, one of our batteries. So we went down to the camp and were told where to park and saw the inmates who were wearing, I don't recall whether it was stripes up and down or left and right because we saw them all. I don't remember just what he had, but he came over and spoke pretty good English and asked us to follow him, he was going to show us the camp! So we did! He took us into this one building and took us through this shower room. The shower room was built actually within the building. In other words, you could walk completely around it and it wasn't up to the ceiling. Two doors on it, the doors were open, and he just explained to us what they did there. They would have to undress at one end of it and tell them they were going to take a shower and get new clothing on the other end of it. They would lock the doors and they would be gassed. There was just one opening, a glass door, ten, fifteen inches to a foot and a half diameter. One German, or two, would be looking at the people while they died. After they saw they were all dead then they would apparently clear the gas that was in there, and open the door on the far side and then they would take the people out and keep whatever they wanted of the possessions that they had with them. They had containers, baskets and glasses, teeth--gold teeth--hair, miscellaneous items that were still there.

S: They were still there?

G: Yes, when we were there. I don't remember how many ovens that the fellow showed us, but he opened the one and told us that's where they would put the people and cremate them. Then he took us down along the side of it and showed us where the gas jets were and how they got there, how they would operate. And the pile of ashes were still even there on the end. He said they normally caught the ashes and hauled them away, but that time there was nothing there but just a bunch on the ground. Then we went out of that building and he took us over to

the yard where, he told us, they also shot people. A cement wall. . .It was approximately ten feet high or so, I don't recall exactly the dimensions of it. It was three or four feet thick. It was pretty solid. Toward the center you could see where all these bullets had chipped away the cement until it was eaten away. It was concave right into the middle of the cement. We went through two barracks. There was a number of them, but we only went through two. There were inmates still on these shelves, that was what we called them, there were three or four tiers. People were laying on the shelves, all they did was follow us with their eyes. They didn't move at all, they just laid there. What was wrong with them I don't know.

S: No one was there helping them?

G: No, they were just laying there. When we walked by them all they did was just follow us with their eyes.

S: They were probably near death.

G: Well, that's why it had to be the next day or the day after and they only took out those that they could help immediately and the ones that they felt there was nothing they could do. . .Now what was wrong with them I don't know. I understand that they were experimenting with these people, so maybe they were beyond help or something and they just felt they might as well help the others first. Then we went to the second barracks and it was the same way. Before we could get to the next barracks, the MPs called the fellow that was taking us around. It looked like there was a higher echelon that had sent officers there, and they needed him to escort them. We just drove in, so they probably thought we might have been the party that they were waiting for. They found out that we weren't the party that they wanted, and they called this fellow over and we thought, "Well, we'd better leave now." They weren't delighted. We were still looking for our outfit, but we spent an hour, hour and a half looking around because it was something that just took us by surprise on what was going on. So we left. I spent about an hour to a hour and a half there.

S: Where did you go then? You said something about you were in UNRA.

G: After the war was over, I was transferred from my outfit. Our outfit was going to France, scheduled

eventually for the Pacific War. I was having difficulty with my nose. I still have. The medical officer suggested why didn't I stay here. The war was over and maybe they'll fix your nose for you. That's why I transferred. I went to an automatic weapons outfit. I was sitting there with forty millimeter halftracks that I knew nothing of. I complained to the personnel officer about it that, "Why don't they put somebody on that knows something about automatic weapons and hasn't just pushed a pencil at headquarters all this time?" And at that time he said, "We've got a good job for you." He had a request, somebody requested a sergeant to be sent to UNRA.

S: What's that stand for?

G: United Nations Rehabilitation Association, I believe.

S: Or agency?

G: I don't know, exactly. I have it written down. I used to know all that, but it was United Nations Rehabilitation. So my request was filled and I'd go on that special duty to UNRA. I was the only soldier attached to them. They had only been there for a week or so and I was the first American soldier attached to this particular team.

S: Do you know how long this organization had been in existence?

G: No, I don't know how long it had been in existence. I don't even know what they were supposed to do. I knew what I was going to do when I got there. I was trying to get out of operating halftracks and they said, "Well, here's special duty. Just take it." And I was transferred to another town. I still belonged to the same outfit. I was just on special duty to them, to go to work for UNRA. There were about five or six personnel that were in the particular team. They had teams all over Europe.

S: What nationality were they?

G: All different. There were two English. There was an English gentleman that was in charge and a lady that was on the team. They call them teams. There was five of them. Then there was a Frenchman, two French, and an American girl on the team. They hired interpreters, there were four, two boys and two girls. They were

much older than I was. But not that much--although 28, 19, that was older than I was. I was 23 years old. Two fellows were Czechs, and they could speak practically all languages. The one girl--she claimed she was Czech, but I'm quite sure she was German. It made no difference, she was there as an interpreter. The other girl was a Czech and she also spoke ten or eleven other languages. I stayed right on the premises. They had, they called it the German guest house. Our office was set up. They recorded everybody's nationality, name, ages, and how many in the family, where they wanted to go and what-have-you.

S: You mean of the Germans?

G: No. DPs. Displaced Persons. That's what the UNRA was doing. Their purpose was to gather all these people from all countries, separate them, find out where they wanted to go. Apparently some of them did go to different countries, to America or wherever. They also wanted to know who they were. I slept in the. . . More like a guest house or apartment upstairs. It was enclosed. It had a big yard and five or six carriages--they had all horses in those days. We cleaned out all the horses and what-have-you. We stayed right in the middle of town. That's where the headquarters of the UNRA team was. I would have to inquire as to what they wanted me to do and one Czech said, "You can help me to get supplies to help to get these people settled." He was having difficulty from the German civilians acquiring materials. He gave me a pad to go along with this Czech interpreter and acquire what we needed. They would bring in 200, 500 people and we had no place to accommodate them.

S: They were from all over?

G: They had a territory, so many towns that they had to clear out and get these displaced persons and put them in one group. They were just wandering all over Germany, looting and shooting people. They wanted to put them in one section. Our section was just outside of Nuremburg in the town of Laus. We would go out and accommodate--just an empty storeroom or an empty factory. Why if it had a room we could put the people in, that's where we put them. We'd try to get the Burgermeister to run good water in their toilet facilities. Whatever we needed we had to go out in a car and locate it and give him the requisition. We gave the person that we acquired the materials from a requisition and he went to

the Burgermeister to collect his money. Now, UNRA apparently paid it, but we just didn't have any time to do any talking. We just took what we needed and gave him the requisition to go collect his money and that's the way we acquired it. So if we needed blankets, he was familiar with the area and he knew exactly where everything was. Whenever I needed clothing he would think a little bit and say, "Oh, I know where such and such clothing store either got bombed out or moved out in the country or they moved to his house and we could go to his home." We took just half the clothes or whatever he had. I left him enough that he could still be in business and sell to his customers. But we took at least half of everything we needed. We needed barracks and he knew where there had been German camps that they dismantled. We got about forty, fifty barracks. I was able to go to an outfit that was a German prisoner of war camp in this town. The outfit would give me ten, fifteen trucks, whatever I needed. They furnished me the guards and fifty, sixty, a hundred prisoners and we would go and get these empty barracks and set them up and put the people in. In the meantime, they'd interrogate them (the people) in the office and record their names and whatever information they needed from each person. Then we would put the people in the camp, whatever nationality they belonged to--all the Polish Ukrainians and the Lithuanians--what-have-you all separated. Sometimes we had as high as sixteen different countries represented.

S: Were there many Jews left by then.

G: No. . .When you say left, I can't recall. I don't think we had one. At least he didn't admit he was. He could have been a Polish Jew and said he was Polish. The people could have been from a different country, nationality, because everybody spoke two or three languages, so they wouldn't even admit if they were Jews. They would probably say they were just Polish or Ukrainian or what-have-you, and that's where you would put them.

S: How did they feel about being shipped back to Russia?

G: Nobody wanted to go back. Everybody wanted to go to the United States. They just knew two towns. Chicago and Toronto. That's where everybody wanted to go.

S: Toronto?

G: Toronto. They wanted to go to Canada. Toronto, Canada. They all knew Toronto, Canada and Chicago, U.S.A. That's where they all wanted to go.

S: Not even New York?

G: No. It was just those two towns. We would get so many. We had to call the American outfit for trucks and put them on trucks and take them to the railroad station and herd them onto trains. At times the American soldiers practically had to force them on the trucks. They knew they were going back to wherever they were going, their country, and they didn't want to go back. They had a hard time trying to get them on the trains. They herded them just like cattle. They put--well I don't know the numbers--they just kept putting them into a regular box car until it was filled and locked the ceiling door and went to the next one until it was filled. All the people, they kept putting fir branches all over the cars. I never did find out what that represented.

S: Camouflage? It wouldn't be camouflage then?

G: No, the war was over.

S: You mean on top of the . . .

G: On the side, they put the branches. Why, I don't know.

S: It must have had some meaning.

G: It had some meaning, but why they did that I don't know. I can recall one time, in one of the camps, it was a Polish or Ukranian camp, where they had an Archbishop priest come in. Boy, they had that campground slick as a whistle. They swept the dirt and everything else, and rolled it and packed it, and laid a cloth down for him to walk down to the main barracks. They really had it clean as a whistle for him to come in. And the funny thing, word travels. . . I don't know how they got the information. I don't even know how they knew who was arriving, but they knew he was going to be there in a few days and, boy, they started getting it ready for him. We had to have guards everywhere because they would run away and you had to keep them confined to their barracks. You don't really like it, but they had to be put some place or they just ran on their own. Even the Germans were afraid of them.

S: How did the German people act by this time?

G: Well, everybody, especially when I went to get the clothing or. . . We didn't get the food. All the food was provided by UNRA. The French personnel always went someplace to get it, some headquarters. But we would go to get any materials and they would know what it was for and they would say, "Why do we have to take care of them? You're the one who brought them here." They knew nothing about it so they all felt like they had nothing to do with it. They were very resentful that we were taking things to give to them (refugees); clothing, blankets, shelter, what-have-you. Naturally, we had to have sanitation for them, latrines. We had to go out and clean this place, and then had to requisition all this through, we call it the mayor, Burgermeister is what they called him. I'd have to write up a requisition for it.

S: There were thousands and thousands of them?

G: Oh, gosh yes. Sometimes we had close to eighty, ninety thousand.

S: So this is what you did till the end of the war?

G: Yes, after the war. About three and a half months until they told me it was my turn to go home. For a while I was the only soldier in UNRA. Then they sent another GI and he was a Polish boy. He stayed in the office and acted as an interpreter and I was always on the road getting supplies.

S: Were you the only team?

G: No. There were many teams. Then there were two other officers that were assigned, but I never saw them. Anything that was needed, the interpreter and I, went out and got the items. He was probably just informed like me. I was just assigned special duty. I remember the officer, he was Polish too, Major Jacob Oscar, I'll never forget the name. He went visiting his outfit all the time. He had a civilian car and that was nice to have. Anything we wanted we were able to acquire so I had a civilian car. More than one time I would visit with the major and we'd go about twenty, thirty miles to his outfit and visit and then drive home. I'd do the driving.

S: Did you ever get into Berlin?



G: No, I never did get into Berlin.

S: None of the big cities?

G: Well, yes. Nuremburg, Munich. I've been in Munich beer hall where Hitler first started.

S: They were bombed up pretty bad?

G: Oh yes. One town in particular--Stuttgart. When we went through it, several roads had to be bulldozed open, I never realized what they meant by it, but every window had a black flag hanging from it. That was the only town. They had a lot of white flags in towns, but in Stuttgart they had black flags everywhere. They had them hanging out the windows.

S: You didn't ask them why?

G: No. We didn't want to stay, we wanted to get out of there. We preferred not to be in town. The people all just looked glad the war was over too. I mean, they were all down and out. We stayed mostly out of town. We were in the woods, in the country. We would take a home for our headquarters whenever we could, but never within the town. Once in a while. . .In Nancy, France we were right in the middle of town. But our gun batteries were all on the outskirts. Once we had a big German headquarters and that's where we took over for our location, which was in the center of town. But in most cases we always stayed in the countryside.

S: Then you were out of the Army?

G: Then I took the trip home and I was fortunate again. Coming home on the U.S.S. West Point, which was the U.S. America, the largest American ship. I went over on the Queen Mary and back on the U.S.S. West Point.

S: Everybody was pretty happy by then?

G: Yes.

S: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW