YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSTIY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Veterans Project

United States Army - Parachute Division

JOSEPH W. BLACKWELL

Interviewed

by

Steven Ard

on

April 15, 1980

JOSEPH W. BLACKWELL

Joseph W. Blackwell was born in Youngstown, Ohio on October 16, 1923, the son of Howard and Sarah Quigley Blackwell. He attended the Hubbard School system and graduated from high school in 1941. He worked as a grocery delivery boy until he turned eighteen. Mr. Blackwell found better employment at the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company; first as a laborer and then as a metallurgist's assistant.

In the fall of 1942, Blackwell entered Ohio State University as a pre-forestry student. He finished one quarter before he and a friend, impressed with the uniform and overall appearance of an enlisted friend, decided to join the Parachute Infantry of the United States Army. Blackwell served in the 517th Parachute Infantry from March 23, 1943 to August 1945 and in the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment and the 82nd Airborne Division until his discharge on December 2, 1945. His enlistment placed him in the European Front of the war.

In September of 1946, Blackwell returned to Ohio State University to pursue a law degree. He began his law practive in 1951 and is a member of the Ohio State Bar Association. His law office is presently in Hubbard, Ohio, where he has his residence.

On December 27, 1946, he married Evelyn R. Axelson and today they are raising four children: Sally, Thomas, Joseph and Nancy. They are members of the Hubbard Presbyterian Church.

Mr. Blackwell's many interests include boating, gardening, swimming, and volleyball. He belongs to the Springhills Club and the Hubbard V.F.W. He has been listed in Who's Who.

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INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH W. BLACKWELL

INTERVIEWER: Steven R. Ard

SUBJECT: Parachute training; Ardennes Campaign; Germany-Berlin occupation

DATE: April 15, 1980

A: This is an interview with Joseph W. Blackwell for the Youngstown State University World War II Veterans by Steven Ard at 418 Parkview Drive, Hubbard, Ohio on April 15, 1980 at 7:30 p.m.

Okay then, let's begin with a little bit of your background beginning when you were in high school and go from there.

B: All right, I attended Hubbard High School. In fact, I started in the Hubbard School System from the first grade and graduated from Hubbard High School in 1941. At the end of my graduation, I decided not to go into college immediately, so I worked temporarily as a delivery boy in a local grocery store and then, when I became eighteen, I worked in the steel mill, Youngstown Sheet and Tube, as a laborer and later as a metallurgist tester/helper. I entered Ohio State University in the fall of 1942 and started to pursue a course of pre-forestry.

By 1942 the war had started to wind up, as far as the United States was concerned. We had entered the war in December 7, 1941. I can recall that day because I was finishing day-turn at the Sheet and Tube and someone came by and announced that the Japanese had attacked the Hawaiian Islands. We seemed to think that this was kind of far fetched because of the distance from Japan to the Hawaiian Islands, but when they mentioned the name of Pearl Harbor, I had some knowledge of geography and I knew that Pearl Harbor was a big Naval base and Army base in Hawaii and the Pacific. So, I can recall that.

But in any event, by 1942, I completed the fall quarter of 1942 at Ohio State and when I returned for the Christmas holiday, I had pretty well made up my mind that I wanted to go into the service. I had done fairly well in college, but nevertheless, I had decided I wanted to go into the service.

I talked to a fellow here in Hubbard. His name was Paul Vukovich--and you'll probably hear me refer to him in the interview later on--and Paul and I talked about going in together. We had seen a fellow from Hubbard, Ohio named Robert Keenan. Robert had been in the Parachute Infantry and he came home on a furlough and he looked like a million bucks. We were both impressed by that. We were eighteen years old at the time and we were both enthusiastic about this whole thing, so Paul and I decided to join the Parachute Infantry.

I re-entered college, but I had no intention of completing it. Paul and I had sent in our enlistment papers. We would eventually have been drafted. I was to understand that I could parbably have finished a year, at least, and perhaps gone a little further, but we were called up in March. Our enlistment was finally accepted in March and I dropped out of school in the second quarter. We went through the induction process, first reported to Cleveland for a physical, came back, a week later we left for Camp Perry and we were first, then, in the Army. We were issued our uniforms and that was it.

I had a couple of friends; one friend's brother had gone in the service and had never come home. This friend was a close friend of mine and he said, "Well, if you go we'll probably never see you again." The first weekend we were at Camp Perry, they gave us a weekend off and we came home and of course, I put it up to him that we had gotten away right off the bat.

My two friends were laughing because when you went into the service, they always gave you these horrible uniforms. They never began to fit you at all. You had to make changes and make alterations in them, and when I came back, they'd take a look at it and they'd say, "Oh God, you really look good. You really look good," and they're really giving it to me and I didn't look good.

So, went back to Perry and there was a group of us that had volunteered for the Parachute Infantry. It was strictly a volunteer organization. We left Camp Perry after about a week of testing and took a train, on our own, with somebody who was made an acting group leader; and we took this train down to Cincinnati and from Cincinnati down to Atlanta, Georgia, from Atlanta, Georgia up into the mountains of northern Georgia to a camp called Camp Toccoa. It was a very small camp that contained perhaps, a regiment.

Now, I'm going to give you some terms and to understand the meaning of the terms, I think I'd better define these for you. The Army is made up, first, of individual men, and men in an infantry organization are usually in a squad. The squad is usually composed of twelve men. Three squads normally make up a platoon. A platoon is normally commanded by a first lieutenant with a second lieutenant as his executive officer. Three regular rifle companies in the Parachute Infantry and one headquarters company, which was made up of machine guns, mortars and communications, eighty-one millimeter mortars and communications made up a battalion. So, you had four companies in a battalion--Headquarters First: A, B, C Companies; then you got Headquarters Second: D, E, F Companies, and so forth. And three battalions made up a regiment. Then if you went beyond the regiment, it would normally take three regiments to make a division, two or more divisions to make a corps, at least two corps or three corps to make an army, and then if you got two armies, you had army groups, so that takes you clear to the top.

But in any event, we arrived in Toccoa, Georgia. At the time, they were forming the regiment that I later went into and spent all of my time in the service doing combat in World War II. That regiment was the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment. They were filling it up a little bit at a time. They had taken a lot of men in to fill the first battalion. I was one of the first people there. They had a cadre of parachutists. The rest of us weren't qualified as parachutists; we just came straight in from basic training, which was unusual because a lot of parachute units were formed by men who had been in the service, transhand and gone down to Fort Benning, Georgia to Jump School and then went into parachute regiments. We started as a fresh regiment.

Our colonel was a colonel named Walsh, Louis Walsh, and he was supposed to be the youngsest full colonel in World War II, at that time, commanding a regiment. That excludes, of course, Air Force and some of these other organizations.

We went into our companies. I started in the A Company of the First Battalion and stayed in it. I stayed in the Second Platoon all the way through combat in Europe in World War II.

We went through very intensive training in the States, much more training than most units participated in. As an example, when we were to wake in the morning, we were required to make a three mile run around the camp before we had breakfast. We'd fall out on the company street and we'd run and then we came in and ate quickly and came back out on the street and then went through our training. Basically, you started with close order drill. From close order drill, they took us into the different things--weapons; we were issued different weapons. We were taken to the range and familiarized with the use of the weapons and fired for record.

We lived, most of the time, out of the barracks. It was our regimental commander's idea that we would be in the field almost all the time and he felt that we were eventually going to be in this situation, so we might as well get used to it early. He also had the theory that we were going to live under other adverse conditions. We were not going to get the normal rations when we were in combat that you got when you were back in camp, so a good deal of the time we were issued field rations, K rations, C rations. We were really pleased to get regular Army rations in camp because these other kind of rations are dehydrated. They're not too palatable, but when you're hungry, you'll eat them.

A K ration was a cardboard box about three times the size of a little Cracker Jacks box and it used to have some dehydrated crackers that were supposed to be fairly nutritious. There was a can which either had cheese or hash or stew or something in it--it wasn't stew--but there was two meat dishes and one cheese dish. Some cheese was flavored with bits of bacon. And you got some toilet paper, something to make either coffee or lemonade or once in awhile you got lucky--something like cocoa and maybe a stick of gum. But that was what it consisted of. You got one of those for each of your meals. You could burn the box. The box was a wax box. It could be used to provide heat. It was also waterproof, so if you were in the field and you were wet, you could normally still light these things because of the wax content of the box.

In any event, we went through thirteen weeks, which is unusual. Most people complete nine weeks basic. We went through thirteen weeks. We had very rigid discipline. We were required to march to the toilets in formation for maybe the first four to six weeks. If somebody had to go at night, the whole barracks had to fall out. We had to pick up our weapons and we had to "fall in" outside the barracks and march over to the latrine and then you'd have to form up and come back. And this was to show us togetherness; it was also to keep us under control; it was also to keep people from wandering around at night.

They didn't let us go to town for thirteen weeks. They finally released us; we were able to go into town and we enjoyed being away over the weekend. We'd leave on Saturday at noon and had to be back on Sunday at six o'clock.

After we completed thirteen weeks of the basic, we went through some advanced training, that was advanced infantry training and then went down after we completed that--I think it was about seventeen or eighteen weeks--we then got on trains and went down to Fort Benning, Georgia. At Fort Benning we went through jump school. We were taught how to pack a parachute, how to assume body positions when exiting a door, and the rest of these things. And we eventually qualified as parachutists by making five jumps. These jumps were made on successive days. And I can recall that the training was in Georgia and it was hot. It was in the nineties. Everyday it was in the nineties. It ran ninety-four and ninety-five and God, to get out that plane door was just a relief.

Back in Toccoa, going back in my story, in addition to running around the camp, we had a full day's duty if we were around the camp, in camp. Then at the end of the day, we had PT [physical training]. It was very strenuous PT--obstacle course, push-ups.

Every time you did something wrong, you got 50 push-ups; you'd get 75 push-ups. It started off with 20 and 25, but it got to the point where anybody that couldn't do 100, there was something wrong with them because you were just doing push-ups all the time. For being out of step or for being late or for just looking sideways you got push-ups. It didn't hurt anybody. Everybody was in tiptop shape.

At the end of the day in Georgia, we also used to have a real dandy thing. We either ran five miles with full field pack and equipment including sixty millimeter mortars and light maching guns, rifles and all the rest of the equipment, with our helmets on, or we got to run with shorts, boots, and helmets up a mountain called Mount Currahee. We used to run a mile and a half out and it took two miles to get to the top of the mountain and two miles down and a mile and a half back. And we caught that at the end of every day after pulling duty all day and being up first thing in the morning. And it used to just exhaust you. But by the time we got down to Benning, we were in great shape.

We qualified as a unit. Instead of people that normally went through from individual units and went down and trained and then came back to a parachute unit, the first battalion went through by itself. Later the second came down and the third came down. We went through Benning and left Benning; made our last jump on Friday August 13.

On Saturday or Sunday I think it was, we left and went to North Carolina to Camp McCall. Camp McCall is no longer in existence. It was adjacent to Fort Bragg. Army camps and forts cover extensive land areas. And as an example, it might be ten miles out from camp to a particular place where we'd practice dropping and if you go the other direction, when you hit the boundary of Camp McCall, you'd be in Fort Bragg's area, but you wouldn't know one area from the other because it was a typical southern terrain, long leaf pine and back sandy roads and you wouldn't know whether you were in one place or the other unless there was some identifying mark, but it was right adjacent to Fort Bragg.

At that point, we started to get more advanced training. We had a couple of what they called "squad drops." I was a squad leader by that time; I was a sergeant and a squad leader and I would take my squad and be assigned a problem. They would tell us where they were going to drop us and they'd tell us where they expected us to move to and what check points to hit. And we would be judged in our approach to different places, the discipline, the march discipline we had, whether we kept silent, whether we kept dispersed, whether we had flank security and scouts out. In other words, will we handle ourselves as we would in combat? So, we made two or three jumps in that fashion and we performed, I think, very well. We had some fun. We got into some watermelon patches and a few things, got to enjoy it.

We dropped; I led the stick out the door. A "stick" is comprised of a group of men that exit the plane in rapid sequence. We assembled and we moved from place to place. The problem would probably cover maybe ten miles, then at the end of the day you'd bivouac, end of the evening you'd bivouac and then you'd put out your security and everything. And we knew that the officers, they'd always like to devil us. They were always going to put it on us so we were careful. We set up good security and they came out at night. They caught another bunch and they took their weapons away from them, which was a disgrace. But we captured the ones that came after us. We captured our battalion commander and his executive officer. We knew they were coming. We had a feeling they'd be out because they'd already nailed some other guys and we nailed them. But we had a good time, I know that.

Then we started dropping platoons and companies and we had some problems with our first battalion drop. They dropped us; the wind conditions were supposed to be good, but they were poor. And they dropped six hundred of us and out of six hundred, nine hit the field, but because my men were in the first plane, six of my twelve were six out of the nine men that hit the field. I missed it by just a little bit. I probably had one of the best landings I ever had because the "chute" caught in the tree and it just caught in the tree so that my feet were only like a foot or so off the ground and all I had to do was shake myself down to the ground.

But we had a lot of people that were hurt because the wind was very high. And they always went out before and they dropped dummies to see how they were going to drop and they moved the planes off to the side, but the winds had changed, apparently, or had increased from the time that we went up. And there were chutes in the trees, there was guys in the trees all over the place. It was just a hell of a mess. There was a lot of people that were permanently hurt. When I say a lot, compared to the normal number of casualties, if you dropped six hundred men, you could expect maybe six, nine guys got hurt, sprained ankles or maybe a bad wound or broken collar bone or broken ankle or something like that. With this, we had quite a few. I don't know what the magnitude was, but it was quite a few.

We trained in North Carolina for quite some time, got a furlough at--didn't get a furlough--I went over the hill at Christmastime. I decided I wanted to come home. I knew we were going to go overseas, so I even mentioned it to my commanding officer before hand. I asked if there's any chance for a furlough and they said, "None, because they're going to give it to married people." That seemed fair to me, but I made up my mind I was going to come home, so I took eight days. I had a two-day pass and I took eight days and then went back. Oh boy, they were really mad. I got broken from sergeant to private. They took two-thirds of my pay for, I don't know, three or six months, I forget which it was. I was restricted to the company area for ninety days. Although I used to have to pull duty, at the end of the day I could never go outside the company area, which was a very confined place--maybe an area with three barracks on it and it would be maybe, oh, fifty yards by seventy-five or eighty yards and that was it--except to go to the mess hall. I couldn't go to the canteen or the PX or anyplace at all. I was just confined to that area. I wasn't put in the stockade though. So, they did this to me, that was okay.

We used to have to pull latrine duty. We used to do KP. I pulled 28 days straight KP before they tried me. That was one of their games; they had to try out within 30 days apparently, and they gave us 28 days of crap and duty before they gave us the punishment. So anyhow, within a short time there, I suppose a month and a half afterwards, I got the squad back. Even though I was a private, I ended up with a squad back again. They wanted me back where I was. And I was running a mortar squad at the time and the mortar we used was a sixty millimeter mortar.

After that Christmas episode, we left I think, about the end of February and went down to Tennessee for maneuvers. And they would have week long problems for these maneuvers and we went down as a unit. The whole regiment was assembled by that time and we went down and we participated in different problems.

We still had the same regimental commander, Colonel Walsh, and we thought an awful lot of him, but God, we got down to Tennessee and it seemed like we were lost three-fourths of the time. We got on these mountain roads and everything and I don't know what happened, but things went bad. As an example, one night we took off and we started about four o'clock in the afternoon and we were issued a sandwich and an apple. And we started up on the mountain, so we've got all these big trucks, six-by-six trucks. We've got command cars and all the rest of this equipment. We were going up into the mountains and we keep going and going and the next thing you know, the road starts to peter out. Then it's no longer a hard surface road, then it's a dirt road and we keep going on and the next thing you know, here's this big column of trucks on either side of us. We end up in a farmer's farmyard and here, the road ended, so he had obviously taken the wrong road and he's got all these damn trucks jammed in there. We don't know how he got them out because after they talked to the farmer, we went on over the mountain and we marched all that night, never stopped during the night. Marched that night; it got cold; it rained and toward morning it started to snow.

I remember one break, we used to get ten minutes break on the march and I remember laying in a furrowed field and they had a heck of a time getting me awake because I just laid down and was out. But we marched eighteen hours and the mileage we were supposed to have covered was fifty-four miles. Now, a twenty-five mile march is a hell of a long march. Oh, it was just a horrible feeling.

And you got in trouble with water discipline. You got one canteen of water and our commanding officer was supposed to have somebody there to give us breakfast and resupply us with good water because the water down in the mountain streams isn't what you think it is. A lot of it is contaminated. So anyhow, when we finished that march, out of the regiment of about two thousand, there was only about two hundred and fifty of us left that made the march all the way down. And God, the guys had blisters all over their feet and strained muscles and everything else. Even though we were in good shape, everybody was in terrible shape. So, we were ruled out for the rest of the problem. They decided we were no longer battle worthy, so that was a mark against the regimental commander.

Well then, as a result of that march and the lack of water, we were issued halogen tablets, things that decontaminated anything that was in the water, any bacteria in the water. And because of the fact that people were just plain thirsty and they're drinking out of the creek, the next week when we were all set to go, everybody came down with diarrhea. They had the GI's, as we called it. And it ran about 93 percent through the whole outfit. So, the outfit wasn't found battle worthy the second time through the problem, see. (Laughter)

So, in fact, there was, oh, ridiculous things happening. We're supposed to be at bivouac; we're supposed to have outposts and they decided they're going to try to move us because we were digging slit trenches and just making a mess out of the area. Everybody had diarrhea and it was just terrible.

I was lucky, I didn't have it, never got it because I was a good soldier and I did what I was supposed to. And that sounds like crap, but it wasn't. What they told me to do, I did because I had the idea that they knew what they were talking about. But it didn't do much good, because these other guys weren't in any shape to dig trenches, so we had to dig these damn trenches for them and fill them up. We're doing all the work, the few of us that are able bodied. And we're trying tc get a guy in off outpost, and they sent somebody up with diarrhea and he started up and he came to the first fence and he stopped and he had to go; then he climbed the fence and he had to stop and go; when he got on the other side, he'd get halfway through the field. And we're watching him with binoculars, and the guys that are watching him start to laugh, then they got to go, (laughter) the most ridiculous thing you ever saw. But that blew us out of the second week.

The third week he managed to get us into an attack on a mountain and we went up like gang busters. And it's all phony. It's all shooting blanks and everything, but in the mountain. And they decided that we were surrounded by tanks--and there were tanks in this area--and that he had had us wiped out. They came by with the big flag and that meant the artillery had us and the tanks had us trapped on the mountain. So, he had gotten us wiped out.

And then he committed an unpardonable crime, he lost his temper and raised hell with an umpire; and the umpire, no matter what his rank was, was supposed to be in control of the problem and he was supposed to make a ruling and whoever the officer was that he made a ruling against was supposed to accept it and that was all there was to it. And this guy got really hot about it because he was a hot shot; he was a West Pointer and a good officer, but he had screwed up and they removed him. They took him right out of the regiment. We never saw him to say good-bye to ro anything. Now, this was the guy that we had from March up until almost another March before we lost him. We never got anything. He was gone; Walsh was gone. He was replaced by an older man named Graves. Graves wasn't even a jumper, but he was supposed to have been a good tactician. I don't know, I think he taught tactics at the academy or someplace, the West Point Academy.

So, even though we had done poorly that way in our performance, apparently the soldier's performance was such that they felt that we were qualified to do something. We were part of the 17th Airborne Division. We were one of the regiments in the 17th Airborne Division. We were the only parachute regiment. I shouldn't say that. We were one of two parachute regiments, but the other one was way behind us in training and there was one glider regiment. And the gliders weren't volunteers and they were a different caliber of troops, not necessarily when they got into combat, but they were as far as training was concerned. They couldn't march or they weren't the physical specimens or anything. The volunteers were like the difference between the Marines and the regular Army man, there's just a difference.

They felt that even with what had taken place that we were far enough in advance of our division that we were taken out of our division and we were prepared to pull out of the maneuver, sent back to McCall and re-equipped and everything and sent from there to Port of Embarkation, Camp Patrick Henry near Hampton Roads, Virginia. And we left Hampton Roads, Virginia in early May, I think it was, either late April or early May of 1944, overseas by ourselves as a regiment.

Supporting our regiment we had also a battalion of artillery, the 460th and we had a company of engineers, the 597th, yes, a company of parachute engineers and a company of parachute artillery. Parachute artillery used to use pack howitzers, seventy-five millimeter pack howitzers, that's a type of howitzer that mountain troops used. With great strain and effort, they could be manhandled; and there's no vehicles in a parachute regiment because you couldn't drop vehicles at that time. So, the three of us went overseas together as the 517th Regimental Combat Team, a regiment of infantry, a battalion of artillery and a company of engineers.

We left Hampton Roads either late April or early May of 1944 and we traveled in a fast ship convoy. And our regiment traveled on the Santa Rosa, that was formerly a Grace Liner, a luxury liner and it was a fairly good sized liner. We had seven destroyers for escorts. Troop convoys were given pretty good protection, excellent protection. The crossing was delightful. We took the southern route, apparently, and we went through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean. I remember the first time being way out on the ocean. I had been on the ocean along the shore, but out on the ocean I remember the purple sea. It was really purple. It was just so dark blue and just gorgeous. So, we had a nice trip over, sunny all the time. We had two or three companies of WAC's [Women's Army Corps] on board too, so that wasn't too bad. We had a nice trip.

We had some problems. Part way across some of the guys from the artillery got into some alcohol and drank it. One or two died and a couple became blind. They got in this stuff and they drank it. I don't know what it was. It was some kind of ship alcohol that they got themselves into. And that was the only bad thing that happened to us on the way over. We were convoyed all the way over, never had any sightings or anything.

I remember seeing the coast of North Africa. We came in along the coast of North Africa and then we turned north and passed Sicily and some of these little islands. God, the islands seemed to come straight out of the ocean and there would be a castle up on the top, and you wondered how in the devil they would ever get anything up there.

So, we passed all these things and came into Naples Harbor in probably mid-May of 1944. And I can never forget coming into the harbor. The harbor was packed with supply ships, merchant ships, ships of every nature. It seemed like every thousand yards there was a ship any direction that you could look, just masses of ships.

At that time, in Italy, the Germans were still holding at Cassino, although they were getting wedged back at Cassino and they still had the American troops cut off at Anzio, the Anzio beachhead. But the build-up was coming and you could just sense that they were getting ready to bust out. The weather was changing because, in Italy, when the weather is wet and cold, they don't move much; it just bogs down. The mountains are high and they're steep and they favor the defender.

But things were starting to happen when we landed. We landed in Naples, went from Naples to a town calld Bagnoli and Pozzuoli. We were bivouaced one night in a college and then we went to an extinct volcano. It was the king's hunting ground, and I understand that they brought big game in from Africa and they released it in this volcano crater. The volcano crater, you could hardly tell it was a volcano crater except looking a long distance and seeing the rim of the volcano, because it was an immense thing, miles across. It had been extinct for so many years it was like a forest. There were big trees and everything and we were down at the bottom of the volcano crater and we climbed up to get into town. We weren't supposed to, but we climbed out and went into town. It was a long climb; you didn't go straight up; there were trails to zigzag up and then at the top there was a stone wall. We got ourselves over the wall and went into town and came back.

And then we left there and went north by LST to a town called Civitavecchia and as we came into Civitavecchia, we saw one of these big guns that they called, I guess, the Anzio Express or Anzio Annie or something. It was a German railway gun that they had used to bombard the Anzio beachhead and it had gotten caught being pulled back on the railroad car, but I remember seeing the thing. It was an immense gun. We saw that and we went north of there to a place called Grosetto and I think, at that time, we were in Lombardy or Tuscany. We were committed to the line. They put us in the line in Lombardy just shortly north of Grosetto and I think we were in the town of Follonica. We went up by trucks. We got off by trucks, even though we were a parachute infantry, they used us as regular infantry. And we got off the trucks and then we marched and we bivouaced.

One night we bivouaced in front of an eight inch howitzer emplacement that we weren't aware of. They were like in a small range of hills just behind us. We came in at the end of the day and we didn't realize they were back there. We dug ourselves in slit trenches and Christ, they opened up and we were startled. We thought we were getting shelled, (laughter) but it was our own going off and, oh God, it just scared the hell out of everybody.

So then, the next day we moved further up. We were along side the 36th Division, which was the Texas National Guard Division. They had been over there for quite a long time and they fought with some distinction. We fought along side either, I think, the 141st or the 142nd Regiment and we were along side them. As we moved up, then you could see there was wrecked equipment. The German Army was pulling back then. We were committed at a good time because they had broken out. In the meantime, they had broken out at Anzio and Cassino and they had driven north of Rome and they were on the pull-back when we got committed; I didn't mention that. But they were moving back and what they were doing was throwing up rear guard actions until they could finally find a place to stop us. We could see wrecked self-propelled guns and wrecked tanks and equipment all over the roads, trucks and everything. And we went into bivouac in the fields like wheat fields, and we saw cork trees for the first time.

And we fell out on the road at dawn, in the morning and we fell out in an approach march which was a column of men on either side of the highway with about a ten yard interval between them. And we were in approach march. So, it was obvious that we didn't think we were going to have any contact yet or else you'd be into a line where you can put your fire power on anything that you were going to encounter. But we started up in the approach march and my God, we hadn't gone three hundred yards when we started to approach the crest of a hill and the Germans opened fire on us. And of course, everybody, it was the first time in combat and everybody is gung-ho, believe it or not, they're all gung-ho, everybody is kind of reckless and everything.

B Company was leading the column at the time and B Company just took off after them like it was going to be a bayonet charge or something like World War I. They just took off and shot and fired. It was the right thing to do, really, but later on we probably wouldn't have done it. Later on we'd have probably hit the dirt and started to move out to the side and taken a lot more time. But B Company just took off after them over the hill and they lost some men. We lost some good friends there and they were shot up.

We drove them off the crest of the hill. I was called because I had a mortar squad. We were called and we could see them, the Germans, pulling back over a valley and they were, oh, maybe a thousand yards away from us, a long way away. There were still some left between us and the people that were withdrawing in a column or anything. They were moving back in little parties of maybe half a dozen or ten fellows over here, three fellows here.

So, I was taught in the States that when you were approaching an area, if there was going to be a fire, that you were down. You always were down on your belly and that's where you stayed. They got a whole group of officers that are at the top of the hill and they're standing right on the crest of the hill, right on the crest of the hill. And they're standing there and they call me up and I slithered up. And I'm laying there on the ground and looking up at them and I asked them what they wanted. They're looking down at me like I'm some kind of an idiot. I knew I was doing the right thing, but yet I felt, "Well, Christ, if they stand up, I ought to stand up." Well, just at that time that I got about ready to stand up, some of the Germans that were left behind opened up and luckily they didn't get any of these guys, but boy, everybody else was on their belly in a hell of a short time. But these guys forgot. They're our officers and they're the ones that trained us and they forgot the first lessons, just stupid, and they stood right up there and watched what was going on when you could just lay there and see what was going on because they had a beautiful view over the valley. So, we were in action and we fired and we had some success and we caught some of the rear guard. And at that range, that was pretty good shooting.

We moved down; they'd left people behind that we found in the trees and everything and we were amazed. These men were orientals. We couldn't figure out what the hell they were. They looked like they were Japanese because they had oriental features. They had the slant eyes and everything else. They had a different type of complexion. And we later learned that they were what they called Turkomen. They were recruited by the German Army when the German Army was down in the Caucasian area. There was a German archeologist who had studied the tradition of these people and felt they were excellent soldiers and he had recruited these people. So, these were the people we went in against at the start. German troops were the best. The German troops were the best troops that we encountered. These guys weren't as good, but these were handled by German noncoms.

So, then we fought through the day and into the night and drove them back and we drove them over the next range of the hills. There's all sorts of things happening. I don't know how much of that you want. Well, like we almost shot some forward observers from the unit to our left that got up ahead of us. Actually, they shouldn't have been there, but they were just wandering around some distance away and you couldn't identify whether they were our group or another group.

I had a kid that was with me, a kid named John Hunt and John, when the firing broke out at the top of that hill, took off. He wasn't supposed to. He was supposed to stay in whrre I'd assigned him, the place I'd put him. He took off and got himself into a little shepherd's hut and we had M-1's and the M-1's had clips. The clips had eight rounds of ammunition it it. John fired eight clips of ammunition with eight rounds each inside of about three minutes. (laughter) He had no more ammunition--bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, as fast as he could pull the trigger he's shooting at the people. And the guys are so far away, with a rifle you could just about forget about it because it's just too far to hit anybody. It would just be lucky to hit one.

So, we fought through that and we fought through ten days and we kept moving all the time. We were always on the move. I don't know how much detail on that you want. But we kept advancing and I had jobs; we did outpost work. Our unit might be way ahead of the rest of the units. We put up road blocks. I used to take patrols out. I don't know how I got the patrols because I was a mortar squad leader and they had rifle squad leaders that never went out, but I always ended up going out with the patrols. We had to take patrols out to see what we could discover.

We were sent out on one patrol, goofiest damn thing you ever saw. We were sent with two bazooka men, one ammunition bearer and I think we had about three riflemen and an officer and I. We had to go out. We were supposed to try to find an artillery emplacement which is normally behind the lines. It's not going to be up in front of the lines. They're going to protect the artillery, but it was an 88 that had been knocking out some tanks that had been working with us. And it was the goofiest thing you ever heard of because you wouldn't take two bazookas, you should take one with a couple of ammunition bearers rather than two of them with one guy to carry the ammunition, because you can only carry about six rounds and it damn near kills you to carry it and you got all this stuff for two weapons when you only need one. You need more ammunition and less weapons.

We found a communications wire and then we followed it and we had an idea where the OP [observation post] was and we did find the OP. It was an emplacement that had been dug out and they abandoned that. I said, "Okay, it looks like it's coming from the farmhouse." He said, "Fine, we'll just follow the wire up." I said, "I will like hell. If I follow the wire up, when I get to the other end of the wire, there's going to be somebody there, we hope." So I said, "We'll go around this way." He said, "I'm going to follow the wire." I said, "Well you do whatever you please. I'm not going to take my men up there," because I had charge of the group that was sent out and I had to get them out and get them back. And that dumb so and so walked up the wire and apparently, him walking up the wire was enough to scare these people off. They couldn't believe anybody would come along and pick up the wire from time to time. Because when we got in the farmhouse, sure enough, on the second floor we found the--I can't remember, I think it was Beobisch Bachter--and some of the other German newspapers were there and there was a table where they had been sitting there ranging in and everything and they were there and they had left. We arrived at the farmhouse by another route. We had taken cover and been concealed all the way up and when he didn't get shot, we knew it was safe to go in. We went in, then we took off. We went back and we caught up to them later on. We caught up to them when they tried to pull back across a field in a short woods. We opened up on them and caught them there; and again, we went over and found that they were these Turkomen.

I took a second patrol up to see a town. This was probably like three or four miles out in front of our line which was moving all the time. But we could hear Germans talking, you could hear them. They might be down in a valley or they might be like six or eight hundred yards away from you, but you could hear them talking in their language and they're shouting to one another and everything and you didn't know whether there was somebody right next to you or not. It was really a spooky feeling.

So, we kept going and at the tenth day, we ended up at a place called Mount Pelosa. We fought at night. We normally slept out of doors. We fought at night. I shouldn't say we fought at night. We didn't fight at night. We marched a lot at night and we went into towns. A couple of times we'd get those nights; I think a couple nights we spent in a town. We slept in houses in town and that was a real treat to get in out of the ground.

I remember one time we came over the crest of a hill and came out and everything seemed to be calm. We were sleeping out of doors and the chaplain decided to have services. And I wasn't going to them, but a lot of the other guys were and it was about three hundred yards off to the side. We were all digging the slit trenches and it was a good deal, we were in a wheat field. And I thought, "Well, this was perfect. We'll put the wheat underneath us," and I ran out to get some wheat and I was going to get some to put over the top of me and then tuck my raincoat in to keep me warm at night, because it's always cold, even in the summertime it's cold outside at night. And boy I got over to a shock of wheat and there was another sergeant and we started to battle over the wheat. Just as we started to battle, some German artillery started to come in. It started to come in at the guys that were at the church service right out in the open on the forward slope of the hill in plain view of the Germans. We didn't know they were there or else we wouldn't have done it. I told this guy, I said, "Take it all, I don't want any." You could see the wheat coming out of the holes. Everybody was trying to get down lower. But there were a few casualties. It wasn't too bad.

We got to Mount Pelosa and we were told that we were going to be relieved. We were up on the mountain and we saw some Germans pulling back across an area below us that was about only six hundred yards away and we opened up on them and the word came to pull back. We were to pull back off the mountain. As we started back up off the mountain, the Germans started to mortar us. When they mortared us, I got hit in the shoulder, not seriously, but I got hit in the shoulder so I hit the ground. When I got hit I went down. The concussion dazed me, but I went down deliberately and as I laid there, our sergeant came back to see how it was and the aid man came back and I said, "Christ, get down." And just as I said that, the next one came in and it blew them both over me and they got hurt badly. But in any event, we were able to evacuate the mountain party.

There were two Japanese units, Japanese-American units in the United States Army. One was the 100th Battalion and the other was the 442 Regiment and three times as big. The 100th was the first and they weren't sure whether they'd be loyal or not. They went through all this sort of thing. They were excellent soldiers, marvelous soldiers. The 442nd came in to relieve us. Their first day in combat was our last day in combat in Italy. They went in in our stead and we saw them as they were going on up and we wished them luck and so forth.

And we went back and I was taken care of at an aid station and we went back, south of Rome by truck. We bivouaced in the mountains south of Rome around Frascati and we were given a wonderful time. We were allowed to go to Rome every day for about three or four weeks just to do whatever you want to. Then we got ready. We were getting ready for an invasion and we drew our equipment and everything. We had all sorts of experiences in Rome. God, just fantastic things. We used to steal trucks and jeeps and everything for transportation because parachute outfits don't have any transportation. We'd go down to town and steal guys' jeeps. Then we had more transportation than most of the other outfits had. We had our own motor pool hidden way up in the back of the mountains.

We used to march to Lake Albano, which is where the Pope has his summer home, Castle Gondolfo. We'd march from Frascati to Albano and then go down this crater. There's a beautiful lake down there. Some of the Japanese unit, the anti-tank company of the 442nd was withdrawn from the 442nd and attached to us and these guys stayed with us. They trained with us and they were getting ready to go in with us into southern France because we had no anti-tank capability at all. And they used to give us rides to the lake and we used to swim together and just had a great time with them.

We eventually left Rome by truck and went up to-- oh gosh, I can't think of the name of the town now or the area--but again it was, I think, up around Lombardy somewhere and we were there maybe a day, put on our camouflage, paint on our face. We drew our maps and we were assigned our missions for the invasion and we got ready for the jump. Our unit was picked for a very special operation which never came off. It was a disappointment. There was one group from another battalion and the second squad and the third squad of the second platoon and some guys from the, as I say, second battalion. And we were supposed to have the job of jumping into a different area than the whole invasion came in. We were supposed to land at this one town and march maybe a half an hour and arrive on the side of a hill on a mountain.

And the FFI, which was the resistance in France was aware of the activities of the German Army Commander and the Corps Commander in the south of France and he had a girlfriend, who was working with the FFI and he'd go over and have coffee with her in the morning. And the deal was that we were supposed to go into town, sneak in the back way--and I can still remember there's like down through the vinyards and everything and in the back door; all these big European homes have walls and things--and get through the back and go in and shoot this guy up, shoot he and his assistant up. And they figured maybe that would paralyze command, but when the drop actually came, we were just miles and miles and miles away from where we were supposed to be. There was supposed to be a bombing attack and that was to disrupt things in the town. We were supposed to make a quick attack and get back out and out back, but we never got to do it. They even gave us a cameraman to go with us. It just came to nothing.

But we took off at night and we flew from Italy across the Tyrrhenian Sea and up across the coast of southern France. We didn't know until the last day where we were going to go. They wouldn't tell us. There's speculation that we'll go to Yugoslavia or Corsica or different places. We flew into southern France; we landed, oh, about four o'clock in the morning. It was still dark. It was foggy. And a lot of us were very concerned because we had the old-fashioned chutes without the quick release on it. They had dropped some parachutists in the ocean in the invasion of Sicily and they drowned because they couldn't get out of the chutes and equipment.

You're carrying an awful lot of equipment. You got your reserve chute. You've got your musette bag and your rifle. You carry a couple bandoliers of ammunition. You have your belt, entrenching tool, first aid pack, your bayonet tied to your leg; you got a knife; you got your helmet. I had a mortar sight. We carried three rounds of mortar ammunition and half a belt of machine gun ammunition, rations of socks in your musette bag. You're just loaded down. Christ, you can hardly move and on top of that I had all these maps of the area. God, I had maps galore of all of southern France because I was a squad leader and we had this mission. We had to have all the regular maps plus some of these and I just had them stuck in my shirt. And we had a gas mask.

I remember getting on the plane. Everybody said, "Jesus Christ, we got to get rid of some of this stuff." So, we all throw our gas mask off and then somebody said, "What if they use gas," and then we all jumped off the plane and got the gas mask and jumped back on again. The last I remember, we threw them out. (Laughter) But we did throw them out and then we went back out and got them and then we'd worry about it.

So anyhow, we landed in southern France and you could hear a few shots, but not many. The resistance was almost nil where we were in. And hell, the shots could even have been our men shooting at each other or shooting at anything. We don't know. But in any event, it wasn't bad like the Normandy invasion or some of the other ones later, the Nijmegen invasion or some of the other jumps--the Rhine.

But it was disorganized. They dropped us over an area of maybe forty miles. They did a poor job of getting us in which was typical, frankly, of the Air Force. They did one rotten job of getting us to where the hell we were supposed to go most of the time.

We got down and we started to assemble and this other guy I was with, a guy named Collister, Dick Collister and I, took a look. There's these triangular road markers and they had kilometer measurements for the next town and everything, and I took a look at the town and I said, "Christ, Dick, we're nowhere where we should be, so we might as well go to the battalion assembly area." So, that's what we did. We moved to the battalion assembly area and he said, "Well, let's get going." So, we started to go and we started picking people up and as we moved down the highway, more and more people came in and I've got the head of the column and Dick has got the back of the column.

So Christ, I take a look back and we don't have any officers with us, there's none there. So, we heard some noise; we thought it was tanks and we get everybody off and the bazooka men up and we take positions along side the road and instead, it's just an old truck making a heck of a lot of noise. And as we were going down the highway, I kept the column moving and I walked back and I said, "Dick, Christ, we ought to have some officers around. Where are they?" He said, "Take a look behind me." My God, we got like the better part of two companies behind us with captains and everybody else back there. They think the battalion commander is leading the column. They never sent anybody up to see who the hell is at the head of the column. So, I got back and I said, "Captain so and so, who do you think is leading the column?" He said, "Isn't Major Boyle up there?" I said, "No, I'm up at the head of the column." He said, "Well, you're going the right way. Keep on going." (Laughter) That's all that was said.

We take them into the assembly area and the battalion commander is there and he had damn few people until we got there. The people came from all over and we started to assemble. We moved out across the highways and it was still very early. It was daylight, but it was very early and the Germans were all confused. They didn't know where we were.

So, we moved out across the highway. We encountered the first Frenchman and he damn near died. He was so surprised. He was coming along with the blue smock on. It was early morning and he was the only one moving around and he came along the highway and he's on a bicycle and we stepped out of the woods, there's probably forty or fifty of us in a group stepping out of the woods at one time. "Wah-lah," let out a hell of a yell and fell off the bike in the ditch and rolled over and ran over and started grabbing everybody and hugging them and he was happy as could be to see us. So, some of the people tried to get something from him and find out and he didn't seem to know a hell of a lot so we just kept moving.

We had a bad thing happen. One of the officers ordered one of the men up to cut the telephone lines and the damn telephone line had insulators on it so it was obviously an electrical line. And he gave him a direct order and told him that if he didn't do it he was going to shoot him. And he ordered the kid up and the kid swung with a machete and electrocuted himself. And they got rid of him; the officer got pulled out. It was a bad deal.

But anyhow, we moved out and took up a position on a hill. It wasn't a mountain, it was a hill. It would interdict a series of roadways and a railway and the Germans didn't know we were there. They still didn't know we were there. We put roadblocks down on the road and we sighted our weapons so that we could support the roadblocks. And God, down the road the first one that came down was a great big command car with a German general or colonel or something, some high officer in one of these convertibles. We stepped out of the ditch and didn't say anything at all, just opened up on him and blew him away. So, we then had a command car. We had to clean it up a little bit, but we had a command car. We had a big, fancy automobile. We caught a couple of trucks and then they caught on to the fact that we were there.

And then there was some fighting. Our group was up in this hill with an outpost. There was some fighting with some other companies. I think C Company and B Comapny got into it with a couple German columns and they had some fire fights, but we weren't able to support them because we had to stay where we were on the hill. And they were successful in driving them off. And meanwhile, the seacoast invasion was coming in. It was still quite some distance from us. We dropped at the towns of--between LeMuy and Les Arcs and this is inland from St. Tropez, St. Maxine on the Riveara, that's west of Cannes, Nice, Antibes, all these cities that are along the Riveara.

Well, we stayed there the night. That afternoon, the 551st Battalion [Parachutists] and a battalion of glider troops came in and they,-the glider troops, took terrible casualties. There wasn't room for them to land and they piled up one after the other. We saw eight pile up against one another in the one field that was available. The first glider came down, came to the edge of the field. He just managed to stop before he hit a building. The distance that that glider shortened the field was enough for the second one to hit it. It came in a little faster and hit it. The third one piled into it and God, there was a mess. There was jeeps flying through the gliders, flying out, and artillery pieces flying out of these damn gliders. It was just horrible, guys flying every which way and it was just a mess.

Glider pilots, instead of following their regular pattern and circling around and coming down in order, started to panic and they started to dive, and of course, as they dive, they pick up too much speed to land, and some of them caught in the air and they just made a hell of a mess of themselves.

And finally, one guy came down and he tried to land between the vineyard rows. They were afraid to do it before for fear that the wings would hit, apparently, and catch on these poles that were supporting vines, supporting the wires, and it would flip them, but there was a couple foot of clearance. You couldn't determine that when you were up there like two thousand feet. But they finally, out of desperation, started to do that and some of them landed right between the rows and they came out okay.

And we didn't get into too many fire fights that day. We had some and we caught some of the people. That night we stayed on the mountain. A British trooper came down; his chute didn't open. He came down in our area and he was dead. He was gone. He was a Welsh guy. We turned him over to our group that had grave registration. We didn't take too many casualties. It wasn't too bad except the fire fight that B and C got into when we were on the mountain.

Then we left and we drove from there across the coast of southern France. We were principally in the mountains; we would out flank the coastal roads and we fought along the mountains. And God, it was fantastic. There wasn't too much action except for wherever they had set up a roadblock. Where they had set up roadblocks, it was just tougher than hell to get them out of there. And we fought across to the Italian border over a period of time.

We landed on August 15, 1944. I got hit twenty-four days later. I got hit September 9. We were up in the mountains overlooking Italy and we had a patrol out. And we had seen a big German column, and we thought it was a German column and we sent out a patrol out to see what it was and then we were to recall the patrol and then move back to another position, move to another position near Pera Cava. We were up around Sospel, Luceram. These are towns in the French mountains right by the Italian border. And when we were recalling this group, we got mortared and then I was told, they say, "We are getting mortared." So I said, "Okay, grab your helmets and spread out."

I got the God awfullest feeling that this thing is going to hit me right in my back. I don't know why. I never had that feeling before. I said, "It's going to hit me right in the middle of the back," and it didn't, but it hit right next to me and it hit me in the back. It didn't hit me in the back, but a shell fragment hit me in the back and hit me in the legs. My gunner had his throat taken out and he was killed. And this other guy that was with me had another incident. He was hit on the inside of the thigh and he was really concerned about where that wound was. He felt it burning, put his hand down and he got the blood and he said, "Oh my God, I don't want to look." And I said, "You might as well look, Marlowe, it's not going to change." So, he took a look. He looked up and he smiled. He said, "It's in my leg!" (Laughter)

We both just felt like hell, but we managed to get ourselves back up the road. The shelling let up a little bit and we got up the road. Some guy, before I got to the road, somebody dressed me, put field dressing on my back and this was the runner--I had caught him--that was going back up to give them the orders to move back to Pera Cava. And he put a dressing on my back and I got up the road and got somebody from the engineers and the engineer captain was up there. He was checking the road that they were doing and I said, "Go on up and get the other guy because he can't move as well as I can." So, he went up to get him and I sat in the ditch and he came down and I didn't realize how much blood I lost because you can't see where you're hit. And he brought this guy down in a jeep and when I went to get up to get into the Jeep, I damn near passed out. I started walking and everything started to get grey, but I managed to stop and get ahold of myself and got in.

And they started taking us down and he's stopping the Jeep, going down, giving directions to his men saying, "Now I want you to watch that culvert there and watch out for the first one." Finally I said, "Hey Captain, get me the hell down out of there. I'm feeling bad." So, he took us down and we got back to an aid station and they took us down to Nice, France to a hospital. Then we went into, I think, the 54th Evacuation Hospital and we were operated on there, given excellent treatment. The surgeon got the shell fragments out of me and Marlowe's leg. We stayed there for awhile and then we went back to Italy to the 118th Station Hospital to recuperate. And I was gone for about five months. Between the time you get back and you get out of the same area, it takes a long time to move you back up. But it took me several months to recuperate.

So, I came back up at the tail end of the Bulge. Our regiment was one of the first regiments in the Bulge--Battle of the Bulge. Our regiment was off line. It had been on line for ninety-two days, which is a hell of a long time. It had been on line ninety-two days. As an example, when I got hit, instead of having a twelve-man squad, I had a sevan-man squad and then we lost three of the seven, so that left four guys when we left. It left them--took all the trained people; there was nobody left in our squad. They broke them up and put them with other outfits.

But our outfit, when it stayed in the mountains, went into heavy positions. They dug themselves heavy positions. They reinforced them with trees and they sand-bagged them and everything. It was a static position. It was unusual for us because we were very seldom in a static position. When we got back up to the outfit and the Battle of Ardennes was on and we got into it with the Germans at Stavelot. They were exposed to us and we were in the cellars of these buildings. It didn't give you much confidence--so we were going up to take these positions. The armor was pulling out. All these big God damned tanks with their weapons and hauling ass and we're going up there with rifles--M-1's. It didn't make us feel real happy about things.

So, we got in the basement of these houses and the Germans had to come down this hill exposed to us and then they had to cross a bridge and then they had to turn. And we managed to get the tanks knocked out. The first tanks coming across, we got them stopped and knocked out. And then the infantry, without the tanks getting in, that wasn't that big a problem. It was a problem because they were firing like hell and they were good soldiers, always good soldiers. But we stopped them there and then they pulled us out of there. They pulled us out of Stavelot. I think the whole outfit pulled back from Stavelot. They evacuated it and left it to the Germans, but we'd held it.

Then we got put up in the northern end of the Bulge. Out toward the end, we got committed to two towns called Soy and Hotten and Christ, it was just like the wild west. They came riding in on the tanks and we're shooting them off and it's just like cowboys and Indians. Most of the time you didn't see the other side, you fired in an area or you fired where they had gone to or you put fire into the woods or something. But this was one where you saw who was there. It was like at Stavelot, you know who was there and where they were.

So, we fought up at the northern end of the Bulge and we finally got pulled back out because the Bulge was coming down and went back later on into bivouac in old houses; and then we left from there and went to the Hurtgen Forest and we went into there and we fought there for a short time. We didn't do a hell of a lot.

We were attached to the 82nd Airborne Division, but we took some casualties because our own artillery was firing what they call proximity fuses. The fuse sends out a signal to the ground to get an air burst. When it's so many feet over the ground, that signal bounces back up and explodes the shell. And the artillery was firing over the woods we were in, and they were firing 155's, which is big stuff, about six-inch stuff, big stuff. When these damn things would hit in the trees, the signal would hit the tree and give the impression they were on the ground. They were trying to fire on an opening up ahead of us and the damn shells came in and just blew the hell out of the woods and hit a lot of our men. So, we were there for a short time. I think only like about five or six days we were with the 82nd Airborne Division.

General Gavin was commanding the 82nd and he was a pusher. He was really a driver, a good officer, good general, but a pusher. And he had the 82nd Airborne, so he should have had three regiments. On top of that he gets a couple more regiments attached to him, so instead of keeping one back in reserve, he commits two. So, then he got us and we're supposed to be in reserve and he commits us, so he ends up having the same as a corps instead of a division. He's got the equivalent of two divisions. He's got six regiments up there and he's got them all in line; everybody's committed. Nobody's in the back and he's pushing like hell.

So, then they pulled us back out of there and they took us around in trucks to an area up above the Ruhr River. We tried to take a town called Schmitt. We were in a town called Burgstall up on the top of the mountains and Christ, it was the most horrible place you can imagine, because it was on a ridge of hills and it was all the heavy forest, except this was clear. And we were in like a horseshoe area and the Germans held the high ground all around us. We were like a finger into a horseshoe. And Christ, at nighttime, when a shell fires, it's hot and you can see it. You can see the thing moving and God, the stuff came over from every direction.

We ended up in a church that had a big hole in it like a rocket had gone through it. And we were in this church and we dug in in the graveyard outside, which didn't make us real enthusiastic. We dug into this graveyard and a whole gang of shells come into us like small caliber and none of it exploded. It was something like armor-piercing shells or something. That damn stuff comes slapping into the mud and the muck outside and none of it exploded. Then we started worrying maybe it was time-fused and the thing was going to go off later! But you can only worry so much about so much.

One of our battalions was attacking. They tried to take the dams up one way and they couldn't make it and they got repulsed badly--the second and third battalion tried to do that. So, they tried to slip us down the side of a mountain at night and the mountain was a mountain. It was steep, heavily treed, just trees all over the damn place; and the Germans had mine fields all over the place and trip wires so that when you're trying to go down the place, if you touch a tree or you hit something, you let off a flare.

Our company, by that time, was down to a strength of about seventy-two men and we went down that mountain that one night to make the attack and Christ, you had a hard time just trying to keep from rolling down the mountain! It was like, probably a mile and a half to the bottom of the damned thing. We kept moving down and we could hear the Germans. They had some patrols along both of our sides. We weren't to make any noise until we got all the way down to where their positions were and we were supposed to break into their positions and try to take them from the back in the night attack. And I think they knew we were there all the time because hell, a couple times, with the flares, you could see them standing off to the side and if we could see them, they could sure as hell see us because we weren't crawling. You couldn't crawl a mile and a half on your belly. You have to walk. So, we're going down there and God, all of a sudden they opened up with machine guns from the bottom of the mountain. They let us get almost to the bottom then they opened up on us. And we got pinned down and been pinned down many times before, but boy, the fire here was just really intense.

And then I thought, "Oh Christ, all we need now is the mortars." Pretty soon I hear this pop, pop, pop. That's the explosion when you drop the mortar shell in the tube. You hear the pop and it's not nearly as loud as the explosion when it hits. That's just the one that accelerates the shell to get it over there. And the next thing you know, those damn things start dropping on us and the fire was so intense it just lit the whole place up. And we're laying there underneath it.

And we got some goofy hillbilly named Bannister and he finally rolls over on his back and he's shooting the machine gun down the hill between his legs and everybody's saying, "Don't fire anymore Bannister. Don't draw anymore attention to us." (Laughter) They finally just stopped. When we came back up, there was only twenty of us counting the guys we carried up, which would never get back up the hill. One the way back up--I don't know how many of us started back up--but on the way back up we must have gone a different direction because we hit the mine fields! Some of them went up in the mines.

When I came back to my outfit, out of 136 men, when I came back up, there was like 8 guys there and it got down to 4 of us by the tail end, of the ones that originally started the unit 6,000 through for the 2,000 men in the unit.

After that battle, when we got back up to the top of the mountain, I got this kid on my back and he had been hit in the foot. And as we came back up, one of these big rockets come over and it hit like about three or four city blocks from us, but the concussion was so strong that it just knocked us flat off our feet. When I fell, he was cursing me for falling after I carried that bastard up the mountain. I should have left him down there.

There was just the one that came in and it landed like maybe a half a city block from this old farmhouse where they had a CP, command post, and the whole house shook down and right on the people that were in there. It just shook down and they had some people killed and the rest of them had to be dug out. But the concussion was that strong. It was one of these big rockets that they fired. I suspect that's what had gone through the side of the church. So, we pulled back. There was so few of us that they pulled the outfit back. It was just shot by that time.

They took us back to Joigny, France. It's about a hundred miles south of Paris by that time, and they started to bring in replacements and a whole gang of things. We stayed there awhile; we built back up our strength. The war wasn't over. It was still going on. And they go us ready for the Rhine jump. They took us to northern France dispersal fields in the Arras area up near the coast, up in that corner of France. It's near Belgium and out near the coast of Lille, France, up near Lille, France. And we went to dispersal areas there, but the missions were cancelled. So, then we were sent back after the Rhine jump. They thought they were going to use us for the Rhine Jump, but they didn't.

They sent us back down to Joigny again and then we came back up again to get ready to make the jumps at the end of the war. They were going to try to break into a POW camp and they had, oh, five or six different things that they were going to have. They'd tell us, "Okay, we're getting ready to leave at eight o'clock tonight." You'd get yourself all packed up, you'd get your mission assigned, your maps and everything and then all of a sudden the thing would be cancelled. The Army overran what we had as a mission.

So, after that we were all over fighting. We were never committed again; that was it. When the war was over, then we went back to Joigny again for the third time; and we stayed there. That was the end of the combat. From that time on it was pretty easy. The war was still going on in the east and we were put in with the 13th Airborne Division. The only division that went to Europe that never saw combat was the 13th. And we were put in the 13th Airborne Division. That was something different because they were headed out to the Pacific. They were going to make the jump on Japan, the home islands of Japan.

I'd been hit again. I got hit up in Germany too. That was the third time. But it wasn't bad. Again, it was treated at the aid station.

And Eisenhower had come out with an edict that anybody who had served in two theaters--and Italy was considered the Mediterranean Theater, and France, Belgium and Germany were considered the European theater--and he said anybody that served in two theaters didn't have to go to a third. So, they called us and they said, "Okay, you don't have to go if you don't want to." So we said, "Okay, are we going to go through the States or are we going to go straight out?" Finally, first we were going to go through the States, we'd get a furlough and we all decided to stay together and go out, the ones of us that were left, because even though we were down to, like, eight and then four, it had built up to maybe fifty of the originals that were still around, just in round numbers. They had come back. Their wounds had healed and they had come back or whatever had happened until they had come back. And so, we decided we'd stay together. But then they said, "No, it looks like you're going to go straight out." We're going to go down through Marseilles and straight out the Red Sea. And I thought, "Well, if that's the case, I'm not going to go." So, about half of us decided not to go and the other half decided to go with the13th.

Well, we were sent up to the 82nd Airborne Division. The 82nd was slated for duty in Berlin in the area of occupation. I went with the 82nd; and our regiment, instead of going through Marseilles, went back through the States. They hit Boston Harbor on V.J. Day [Victory over Japan Day]. (Laughter) Guys were out of the service; we're stuck over in Berlin. (Laughter) But it wasn't bad duty.

They were going to have an Olympics among the four powers, the four power Olympics at the end of World War II between the Russians, the French, the English and the United States. And I had made the swimming team. I was going to swim for the team. When we got up to Berlin, the weather had gotten colder and they decided to cancel the swimming; it wouldn't be worth it. So, they had the Olympics later, but the Russians withdrew the night before. They drove up in a Jeep and handed a letter addressed to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, which was Eisenhower. When Eisenhower was in Berlin, we used to see him in Berlin. And they handed this letter to this private that was on guard duty. Who in the hell gives you a letter for Eisenhower? (Laughter) They got a hold of somebody else and they got a hold of somebody else, but that's the way they withdrew. If they couldn't win, they weren't going to participate.

So, we were there and we had a lot of very unusual, interesting things in Berlin. It was quite different because the city itself was fantastic. Berlin was the capital, so it was like Washington; it was the largest city, so it was like New York; it was the center of the film industry, so it was like Hollywood. People who had been trapped in Berlin were people that came from all over Europe. As the armies closed in on Germany, they were trapped and they couldn't get back out of Berlin to their homelands. It was a fantastic place.

We had the job of guarding all the high officers. I was with B Company. We were the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division. We had the job of guarding all the high officers. We had Admiral Kirk and I forget who all. All these high rankers. And we had these as our guard positions. We had about ten posts plus the Red Cross girls. And Christ, we had more trouble with the Red Cross women than anywhere else! The Admiral managed to--they had some kind of a naptha launch or some damn thing that they had on this launch, a boat--and he managed to blow that up I think. He thought sure the Russians were trying to get him! (Laughter) One of his aides said, "Hell, the old man doesn't know what he's doing. He set that thing off himself." (Laughter)

"A" Company had the job of guarding Eisenhower out on an island. And the German girls were very cooperative. They were very pleased to see men because there was no German men left in Berlin. And as a result, they were most anxious to make the acquaintance of the American soldiers. So, they ran an inspection because at one time they had seen some German women on the island and nobody's supposed to get near this island that Eisenhower is living on in the middle of Wannsee, a lake outside Berlin. And God, they ran this inspection and I think they found like about two women for every man out there on the island. (Laughter) They had them stashed all over the place. The company commander was relieved and oh God, they just punished everybody.

We had a big thing happen. I had a guy in my squad during the war. His name was Francis Ruddy. And Francis was a private and he never aspired to be anything else then. But later on he became a Sergeant Major of all Special Forces Troops, the Green Berets. He was the top noncom in the Green Berets. When Kennedy was buried, Frank was in charge of the guard of honor. And Frank is the one that started the tradition of putting the soldier's hat on Kennedy's grave. He was quite a character. He became a personal friend of the Kennedy family.

A German sail maker in Berlin had invented the ribbon parachute, and that allowed you to drop equipment at a high rate of speed without tearing the panels out of the chutes. And this guy was a sail maker and he didn't want to leave Berlin. His family was there and until he could take everybody, he didn't want to go. But the Allies wanted him. The American's wanted him. They wanted to get him out of there. And we were assigned to guard him. Most of the time we had guys armed with M-1's and everything and that was it. We weren't too far from the guard area where the off-duty guard remains. This one night I was put on guard and we were told to be on the lookout because they expected the Russians to try to snatch him.

So, I put Ruddy on one post up the road from where the yacht club was and I put a guy named Glick on the yacht club and I told him instead of staying up at the front of the yacht club [to stay] down around the boats. And instead of using M-1's, we used the M-3 machine guns, the metal machine guns rather than the old ones that we used to use earlier.

We started things that had not been done at that time, taping the magazines together so all you had to do was tear one out and snap it up and pop it around and use the other side of it so you could fire twice as much real quickly. So, we were loaded for the evening.

And I told everybody I put on guard that night, "If you hear any firing, get your ass down there and give anybody that's into it any help that you can," and I said, "We'll be there. We'll be running up the hill and I'll be down with a truckload of people right away."

So, everybody slept with their uniform on and Christ, sure as hell I hear the prrr, prrr, prrr, all over the place! So, we get a truckload of people and we come flying down and dive out about a block away and fan out and come beating it up the street and there's a Russian truck--well, it was one of our trucks, but it had Russian markings on it--and it was headed toward us--as we ran to it, we came around the back of the truck and there's Russians laying all over the street. I said, "What the hell happened?" Well, it transpired that a Russian officer came down and he came down behind the back of the yacht club and there was an American officer that used to hang around the yacht club--he liked boats; he liked sailboats. The Russian officer came down and started to talk to him and Glick was watching them. The Russian officer pulled a gun on the American. And I asked him, "Was he pointing it at him?" He said, "Well, he was kind of shaking it." So I said, "What did you do?" He said, "Well, I shot him." So, he shot him down.

Well, as soon as he shot, Ruddy, who's up the street decided that he better get down to help Glick and he was a good soldier. So, when he started running, he's running down the street and it occurred to him, if he's running down the street you have no concealment at all. You're running right down the middle of the street, anybody can pick you off with a rock practically, see. So, he's running down the street and there's this back end of a truck facing him; and he's thinking, "Holy Christ," and he can hear this clanking and all he could picture is this Russian machine gun they had with the wheels and they're getting the thing ready. With our machine guns you used to have to clear it to get it ready to fire, and he could just picture they're just ready to blow him out of the picture. So, he's running along the street and he just dives down and he sprays the back end. The Russians are jumping out and he's blowing the hell out of them! So, when we get around the back end, do you know what we found in the truck? A bicycle! (Laughter) Somebody decided to get the hell out of there on this bicycle. He's trying to get his bicycle down and Ruddy heard this and shot them all down! So, the colonel came right down right away and he said, "Don't worry about it. You did the right thing."

There's nobody left; they're all on the deck.

We didn't have any trouble with the Russians up there like they're having now; we just didn't have. If anybody was shooting anybody, it was always an American that was shooting a Russian.

They didn't stop us from going anywhere. Hell, you could go down into the Russian section and stay down there as late as you wanted to except the joints closed at like ten or eleven o'clock at night and nobody ever bothered us. If there was anything, it was the other way around. They had thousands of deserters.

We had given them our plates to make military currency. It didn't look like our dollars, it looks different; but we had given them our plates. So, soldiers that they hadn't paid for seven or eight years, they just ran the money off like it was Monopoly money, and as a result, there was tremendous amounts of money. The Second Armored Division was there first and guys were sending like six thousand dollars a month home to their families until they stopped it. Like about two months, and they just put a stop on it, I think.

The ones that got there first did very well. We got there, if you wanted to sell cigarettes, you got 300 bucks a carton for cigarettes and then it went to $200 and then $100 and then to $60; and you could always get $60 if you knew where to work at. But there was a lot of money. But it was all phony money. We were told that we could only bring out like a hundred bucks when we were coming home. But we found out later that we could have brought out just anything we wanted.

So, I finally got redeployed through France, over to England and then back to the States and then discharged on December 2, 1945. I was in two years, eight months and two days. I'd seen Naples, Rome, Paris London, Berlin and lot of the big cities and then dozens of other big cities like Lille, Marseilles, Lyon, France; Brussels, Belgium, just lots of other big cities besides that.

We were lucky. The unit I was in was in the 5th Army in Italy, was in the 7th Army in southern France, was in the 9th Army up in northern France, the 1st Army and went into the 1st Allied Airborne Army. So, that was a unit that they called a "Bastard Unit" and it was in five different armies overseas. And that was unusual. Usually you went in and you stayed right with them all the way through. So then, that was it.

A: When you were in Berlin, did you happen to visit any of the headquarters of the Germans there?

B: Oh yes, yes I went down to the Reichschancellery. The Reichstag itself was just a mess, everything was shot to pieces. I went to every place. I'd heard about all of these places. I went to the Wintergarten where Hitler used to make his speeches, went to Goebbel's Palace and, of course, the Brandenburg Gate; we went through that--Brandenburger Tor they called it. The Tiergarten and the Zoo. The Adlon Hotel was smashed. That was right down in the center of the town. And some of the famous nightclubs are up . . . The big street out there in Berlin was Kurfurstendamm Strasse. They called it the Broadway of Berlin. And I had been to the Blue and White Tennis Club and all these places, the Adlon Hotel, what was left of it. These places were just shot. The places you're speaking of are right down in the center of town. And the center of town was just devastated. The Adlon was right next to the Brandenburg Gate and right around behind it was the Reichshancellery and Goebbel's Palace and these things were pretty well beat up. I didn't get down to the bunker, Hitler's bunker, but, yes, I went every place. I went up to Tempelhof Airport to see the airport.

Well, when we first went up there, and we did swim for a couple days, the swimming was done in the SS Compound. That's where they trained the SS, where the SS had its headquarters, where Hitler had his headquarters. They had a magnificent indoor swimming pool. They used to film pictures. They had windows in the wall to film underwater pictures in Berlin. The SS cooperated with the film industry there. And then, of course, I was at the Olympic Stadium where they had the 1936 Olympics because that's where we had our Olympics, but we didn't participate in it. But they had the track and field events, but no swimming. I I think I saw about as much of that as you could.

In Paris I saw the Louvre, and Monmartre, and Napoleon's Tomb; and, oh, just about everything that you can think of to see, Notre Dame, and I can't think of what else I saw.

Rome, I saw the Vatican and Borghese Gardens and well, whatever I knew about in Rome. Of course, we used to come past the Colosseum everyday when we were in Rome.

London, I liked London the best of all because, of course, the people could speak English. In London we saw the British Museum, Hammersmith, Balais and Covent Gardens. Those are the places that you went to dance. And some of the other things--the Houses of Parliament. I don't remember too much else about . . . well, the Thames. We didn't go through the tower or anything. I didn't go through the Tower at that time. I did later.

I went back in 1964. We went to southern France, my wife and I went back and I found the places where I had been hit. I told her I'd find the one in southern France. I said, "I'll show you right where it happened." And I described the highway going up to it. We took the car and drove back up there.

Our regiment still has a reunion every two years. We still keep track of one another. I got a call today or yesterday from Paul Vukovich's sister to tell me that a fellow named Talomine died in Israel. Paul stayed in. He came out for a short time and went back in and he became a professional soldier. He did his full tour.

END OF INTERVIEW