

Interviewee: Walt Mainerich

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

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Location of interview: living room of the Mainerich home in Chisholm, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, October 2002

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, December 2002

Walt Mainerich was born 15 October 1922 in the Iron Range town of Chisholm, St. Louis County, Minnesota, one of nine children of Croatian immigrant parents. He grew up in Chisholm, graduated from Chisholm High School in 1940, and then went to work in the area's iron ore mines. Walt enlisted in the US Army in December 1942 and, following basic training, volunteered for the paratroopers. Advanced training at Ft. Benning, Georgia, followed, before Walt joined his new unit, Company I, 501st Parachute Regiment, 101st Airborne.

In early 1944 Walt's unit left for England, joining the many thousands preparing for the invasion of France. When D-Day arrived, on 6 June 1944, Walt and Company I were among the first Americans involved, being dropped behind Utah Beach in the early morning hours.

Months of difficult combat in France followed: Walt was at subsequent engagements in the Netherlands (1944), at Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge, in eastern France, and southern Germany (all 1945). Walt then spent August to September 1945 in Sens, France, before being rotated back to the US and, in December 1945, discharged.

Once again a civilian, Walt returned to Chisholm and spent a year drawing ex-serviceman benefits before returning to mine work. He married in 1949 (wife Bernice), then worked several more years in the mines before becoming a rural mail carrier. Walt retired in 1986.

Walt provides an unfiltered account of basic training for the paratroopers, combat experiences, everyday life as an enlisted man, and the sometimes difficult adjustment back to civilian life after the war ended.

Interview Key:

T = Thomas Saylor

W = Walt Mainerich

[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation

(*) = words or phrase unclear**

NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is the 15th of August 2002 and this our interview with Walt Mainerich. First, Walt, thanks very much for taking the time to talk with me.

W: You're welcome.

T: I do know some things about you because we've talked a bit. To get us going, can you tell me when and where you were born?

W: I was born here in Chisholm on October 15, 1922.

T: You came from a family of more than a couple kids, right?

W: Yes. There were nine to start off with until one younger sister passed away when she was about twenty months old from some kind of flu epidemic or something like that. I never did see her because she was born in 1920 or '21.

T: And you were born in '22.

W: I was born in '22, but my older brothers would tell me about it.

T: In the range of nine kids, where do you fall? Which number are you?

W: I'm number eight.

T: So there's only one more after you.

W: Yes. One more younger than me.

T: And your folks you said came here as young people themselves.

W: That's right.

T: They came from Slovenia or Croatia?

W: Croatia. I guess it was separate at that time when they left in 1911. They came here then. During the war and right after World War II it was called Yugoslavia, now

it's split up again. We have to say Croatia. You can't say Yugoslavia anymore because there's four or five other countries there.

T: You're right. So some of your brothers and sisters were born in Croatia?

W: No.

T: They were all born here?

W: Except the oldest. The three oldest were born in Crosby-Ironton [towns on the Iron Range]. When my mother and dad were married here in Hibbing [Minnesota] in 1912 they moved down to Crosby-Ironton where my father's sister and younger brother lived. They went to work in the mine there. After the first three were born they moved back to Chisholm.

T: That's why you were born here.

W: Yes.

T: You went to school in Chisholm and graduated from high school here.

W: Right.

T: What year was that?

W: I graduated in 1940.

T: When you finished high school did you go straight to work in the mines?

W: Not quite. I couldn't get a job in the mines so the best thing was some of the neighborhood boys were working in CC Camps. Civilian Conservation Corps. I was assigned to a camp up there by Big Deer Lake about maybe forty, fifty miles away from here. I signed up in June of 1941 and I happened to be there in December of 1941 when Pearl Harbor was bombed. Then another friend and I left the camp. We said, "Well, we're going to go back to work in the mine or go in the service." We tried to get into service, him and I and somebody else at that time. We were going to go in the Marines. We were all hepped about joining the Marines. At that time we were going to go to Grand Rapids and sign up for it because that was in Itasca County. That day, when we were supposed to down, there was no truck available so we couldn't go and sign up. I think we were pretty lucky.

T: You almost went in as a Marine.

W: I almost ended up in the Marines. I would have ended up in the Pacific probably on the Bataan Death March.

T: When we talk about the US entering the war in December of 1941, December 7, 1941, what were you doing when you first heard that news?

W: I was in the CC Camp at Big Deer Lake when I heard about it. It was on a Sunday. It was a day of rest for us guys. We had a big barracks with about fifteen, twenty, maybe thirty guys in it. One guy who was in charge of the barracks was a World War I veteran. He always had a radio. He was the only one that had a radio on because we had lights out at a certain time and stuff like that. He'd leave the radio on. This happened to be during the daytime when we got the news about Pearl Harbor. Boy, oh, boy! He made us all stand up and they played the national anthem on the radio and we all stood there and anybody looked this way or monkeyed around, boy! You stand at attention when the national anthem is being played. That's what we did.

T: How did you react when you had time to think about it and process this news? What did it mean to you?

W: I really don't know. It was just something new. I remember in high school one of our teachers told us back then: "There's going to be a war and the United States is going to be in it." That's when I graduated in 1940. He said, "Most of all you boys are going to be in it." We just thought it was talk. But it wasn't. He must have known something. He was a social science teacher on top of it too. He knew something about it.

T: At the CC Camp, Walt, what did you think of that experience?

(1, A, 71)

W: Very good. Very good. That was nice.

T: What made it positive for you?

W: We had a lot of work. We did a lot of work. We always did a lot of work even before we got out of high school and in the CC Camp, making hay, cutting wood and hauling wood home, and shoveling snow and doing this and doing that. Some people had cows. We only had one cow at that time. I'd take care of it. Work wasn't any trouble. When we got to the CC Camp that was a snap for us because we all knew how to use an axe, how to use a shovel, how to use this and so on, and hunting and walking the woods which was really good. I loved that.

T: So it was a positive thing?

W: Yes.

T: After you came back from that you did work during most of 1942 in the mines around here.

W: Yes.

T: Doing what exactly?

W: I was working a (***) gang for a while, then I went on churn-drills which were large machines that drilled holes in the rock with a pounding system. We delivered the water and the different stuff that would shoot up and haul it out and pretty soon we'd go down so far and we'd move off the hole there. Then they would put dynamite in that hole to blow it up to loosen up the hard rock so the shovels could dig it out.

T: Hard work?

W: It was hard work, yes. Sometimes it was dirty because there was water and mud involved. No matter what you did in the mine, if you were in a (***) gang or doing something else, you were getting the red color from the ore. If you were in the steam engines or locomotives, if you worked one of those you got black from the smoke.

T: You were one color or the other I guess.

W: Every job had a different type of dirt.

T: When you were working there, the United States was already at war. This was 1942. How did you notice the war impacting your place of work in the mines?

W: The older fellas that were eligible to go, they were going little by little. That's one reason I got hired because I was too young to go in the Army and these older fellas were finally getting out and when the mining company needed the room they'd bring us younger fellas in.

T: The war led to you actually being employed.

W: Yes.

T: Were they hiring more people? I mean overall numbers or pretty much just replacing those who were going?

W: They were just replacing those until later on during the other years of the war. They needed more people. At that time they were even hiring women too. Some of the women were working, replacing the men.

T: So that was a change from when you started. Were there women working in the mines then?

W: When I left there were no women working except in the office. But in the mine itself, in the pit, there were no women working. Later on they had them.

T: This is still open pit mining?

W: Yes.

T: How about your pay? Did you consider yourself to be pretty decently paid for the time?

W: Oh, yes. At that time that was considered very good.

T: And the number of hours you worked per week. Do you recall working more hours since we were at war or not?

W: At that time it was very rarely that we worked more than forty hours. Maybe some places, some persons, maybe repair crews where a shovel broke down or something like that and they had to keep them going. Then they had the guys working overtime to get that repaired. For us guys normally at the regular work, we didn't put in very much overtime.

T: Did you notice the war in any other ways? Was the war talked about on the job? Were people talking about what was going on?

W: Oh, yes. They were all interested in hearing. I remember one time when we were on the (***) gang and the boss came down and he said, "Well, boys, they opened up the second front now." What was the second front?

They were all talking about the American Allies would invade Europe. It actually wasn't. It was that the British raid that they really lost at Dieppe. But that wasn't a second front. It was just a test. But everybody kept up with it. They always had older brothers that were already in there or friends that were older than us. I had five older brothers, six older brothers in fact. Four of them worked in the mines or the railroad around here and the other one worked for Harley-Davidson in Milwaukee so he never went but the other ones all went ahead of me.

T: You had four brothers ahead of you go into service?

W: Five brothers.

T: Five brothers go into service?

W: No, four brothers ahead of me.

T: And you were the fifth.

W: I was the fifth. Then there was one after that. My younger brother. He came in sixth. He graduated two years after I did and he went in right away then.

T: So the family was doing their bit.

W: Oh, yes.

(1, A, 151)

T: Did all your brothers come back from service?

W: They all came back, yes.

T: You mentioned a few moments ago that you tried to join the Marine Corps or had this in your mind anyway. Was that as a reaction to the news that the United States was at war? You wanted to be part of it?

W: Could be.

T: You didn't join the Marine Corps. Luckily as you may have said. You did volunteer later in 1942, in December. What prompted you to join the service when you did?

W: My four older brothers were going to go into service. I tried to get in earlier even after I got out of CC Camp. Even when I finished high school. I was going to get in because a few of my classmates joined the Air Force right away and they got in. I went home and I had the papers and everything and I was too young. I was seventeen and a half, not even eighteen. At that time you had to be a little bit older or get permission from your parents. I asked my father a couple times if he would sign and he said, "No, no, no." I think he knew that my older brothers were going to go already and that was going to be enough out of one family. Then I had to wait until I was almost twenty years old and that's when they were starting to draft the twenty year olds. Before that it was twenty one. Then I told my dad, "Dad, I want to join. I want to get into what I want to be in. I want to be in the paratroops." I wanted to join. I figured if I didn't sign up now they would put me in some other outfit that I didn't want to be in. I didn't want to be in the Air Corps or the Navy or something like that.

T: So he did sign for you then?

W: Yes.

T: But you had to talk him into it sounds like. You had to convince him.

W: Yes.

T: How about your mom? How did she react when you joined the service?

W: No reaction from her. She was just a mother and took care of the kids and she had enough to take care of the kids and everything. Whatever you did, she almost agreed with anything we did.

T: So it was your dad you had to convince?

W: Oh, yes.

T: Was that pretty typical around your house? When you had to convince your dad more than your mom?

W: Oh, yes. Mom was always there to help. She was the housewife and she did a lot of work. Sure missed her. Still miss her today too.

T: Your brothers that were in service. Were they volunteers most of them or were they drafted?

W: They were all drafted. My oldest one was single. He went into the Coast Guard Artillery someplace on the West Coast. The next oldest was married. His wife was pregnant. They drafted him and then they gave him a furlough for a couple weeks while their daughter was born at that time. Then he had to go back in again. Another one, the next one, he was single but they drafted him too. The next one in line was single and they drafted him. All four of them actually went in about the same time which was September of '42.

T: And you not long thereafter.

W: A couple months later I went.

(1, A, 217)

T: For basic training you went to Camp Toccoa, Georgia. Now Georgia, was that a new part of the country for you?

W: Yes.

T: What about Georgia for a guy from Minnesota?

W: *(laughs)* It was a long train ride from Fort Snelling in Minneapolis.

T: You were inducted in Minneapolis.

W: Yes. We were sworn in at Fort Snelling. Got on a civilian train because they gave us tickets and food tickets and all that stuff. They gave them all to me. I was in

charge of thirteen people to go down there. We got down to Georgia in early morning, almost the middle of the night. Couldn't see. The first morning we were going through northern Georgia there were red clay banks on both sides of the railroad tracks. I said, "My gosh! This looks like Minnesota with all the iron ore." It looked like iron ore in there but it was just red mud. We got to camp there. It was in December. No snow on the ground but it was chilly in the morning. I couldn't get over that. Eventually it got better. Awful damp. In the evening especially.

T: Was that your first time away from home for a long period?

W: Yes. The CC Camp was the longest the first time. But this would be the next longest one.

T: Did that time at CC Camp make basic training experience a little easier for you?

W: Yes. When we were at CC Camp we had an old Army sergeant that was our supply sergeant. He was an old Army man. Every day they took us up on the baseball field and gave us close order drill.

T: So almost like being in the military.

W: Yes. Maybe they knew ahead of time that the war was going to break out and they were going to get us in there. It helped us. When I went to Camp Toccoa, Georgia and they had us in close order drill, I got it just like that. Some guys had two left feet. It helped me quite a bit. Living with a bunch of other people, complete strangers, in one barrack and working together outside in the field, chowing down in the same mess hall.

T: This is all stuff you had done before.

W: Yes. At CC Camp.

T: What was one memorable thing about basic training?

W: There was lots and lots of exercise and work and physical work. We had to run in double time no matter where we went. If went from here to fifteen, twenty feet away for something we had to double time. You couldn't walk. They caught us walking and they gave us twenty-five push-ups all the time. We couldn't have our hands in our pockets. If they catch you, they'd give you another twenty-five push-ups you had to do.

We'd go on hikes in the middle of the night and every day we'd do calisthenics on the parade grounds. Our regimental commander would take every bunch and go three, four times a day. We said, "My gosh! That guy's pretty rough, pretty tough. Why can't we do it?" We went to the edge of the mountain and there was about a forty-five percent grade from the bottom of the mountain to the top on a gravel road. We had to get up to that thing and then down the road double time

again. If you fell out they took your name down and then to your room. The next morning they'd ship you out. You can't take this tough training. You gotta go and they'd get somebody else in your place.

In thirteen weeks they had enough guys that dropped out of there to make three more companies. It was pretty rough. I think when I was a kid around here we did that same thing. Running and go skiing out there. Running around the lake. So that kind of toughened us up a little bit before we got there.

T: Helped you get through this training.

W: Yes. I think so.

T: For the paratroop training you went to Fort Benning. How was the training at Fort Benning different from basic training at Camp Toccoa?

W: It was mostly taking care of how to exit a plane, and how to pack your own chutes. We had to pack our own chutes for the first five jumps to qualify. You had to make five jumps to qualify. We all had to pack our own chutes. Some of those guys really got leery. They were really sweating it out. They thought the chute wasn't packed right and everything. But it was pretty good. They taught us how to land coming out of a mock plane, coming out on the ground. We worried more about what it was going to be like when you were jumping out of the plane. That's what worried me. The second time. The first time it wasn't bad. In fact, some of us guys worried more about the plane ride because that was the first plane ride we had.

T: I bet it was for a lot of you.

W: Sure, for lots of us. A lot of them didn't admit it but after a while they said, "That was my first plane ride." I wasn't the only one.

T: Not only the first plane ride, but you're jumping out of it too.

W: Yes. It was tough. They had some tough sergeants there. Stringent training there and if you did something wrong you were running around that area "I did this. I did that." Even some officers, they were non-jumpers, they made them do the same things as we did. Our officers did the same things we did. We respected him and when he gave us orders we did it because they did the same thing we did and we knew they were going to be behind us. They helped us.

T: Were there guys at Fort Benning for this training that washed out or couldn't handle it?

W: Yes, there were guys. If they didn't jump, they didn't court-martial them or anything. They just shipped them to another outfit. That's all they did.

T: Back to a regular Army outfit.

W: Yes. They had no strikes against you at all on that. They figured that wasn't a normal thing to do. *(laughs)*

T: Sure. But if you don't you just move to a different unit and they developed the guys who were left.

W: Yes.

(1, A, 293)

T: Ultimately you went to Camp McCall, North Carolina. You spent a number of months there. How did the training at Camp McCall differ from what you'd just been through at Fort Benning then? You were at McCall for a number of months.

W: In training at McCall we went in stages where you first learn how to operate in combat as a squad. A squad was only twelve men. Then you went from that to a platoon which was three squads. Then you went to a company which was three platoons. Then you went from a company to a battalion which was four companies. Then eventually they tried to get a whole regiment but that was pretty tough to train as a whole regiment. The only time we ever did that was when we went down to Tennessee maneuvers for one month. Thirty days of that was included in the McCall deal. That was training as a whole unit.

T: The squad was the twelve men that was the core of it.

W: Yes, that was the core.

T: How did you interact with the other eleven men on this squad?

(1, A, 308)

W: You had to be friends with them and learn their job and they learned your job because they figured us as airborne if we went overseas, which actually happened lots of times, say if a squad leader got KIA or wounded somebody had to take his place. If the machine gunner happened to get killed or something, you had to have somebody take care of the machine gun. I was a demolition man when we went in at Normandy and I was also an anti-tank man. I carried anti-tank grenades for my gun which would shoot at tanks. Somebody else had to learn that besides me. I was the number one man for that. Demolition the same way. I was the only demolition man in my platoon because I was taught how to blow up bridges and stuff. After I got to Normandy after four or five days, they took the stuff away from me and had a regular demolition crew for that.

T: So people learned different jobs.

W: Yes.

T: Dependent on each other.

W: Yes.

T: Was there, in your opinion, a greater sense of camaraderie among airborne troops that among regular Army troops?

W: Probably. I know we had it. It was good. You got to know each other so well that at night time for instance, which was good training, because when we did get over there in combat and had that actually happening you know the guy's voice. You could tell the guy's voice if you didn't see him. You saw him walking by with no sound you could see that's so-and-so walking. Everybody had a certain walk. Or he tilted his helmet or this and that. You could tell.

T: You really had to know them.

W: You had to know them real well. Which was a good thing. Very good. It paid off a lot of times. You're sitting there waiting for the enemy and they sent out a patrol or something and you're wondering. You don't know who that guy is behind you which was supposed to be friendly. Something moving around and you see them and you say something and they speak and you know the voice right away. That really helps.

T: When you left Camp McCall you went to Boston and got on a ship to go to England. What do you remember about that ride on the ship across the ocean?

W: It was rough water. That was one of the roughest days they said. We happened to be right on the edge of the convoy and the Navy destroyers were riding right on the side. On a couple of nice days they let us go up on top on the deck. These big hatches, they were about thirty by thirty, and we used to play games on it. Look out there and pretty soon you see that destroyer going up and down and you'd see them and the next time you wouldn't see them. What's happening? Those big swells.

T: You were glad you weren't in the Navy at that point.

W: Yes. I think it was the next day it really got rough. Pretty soon we were on the deck and the waves were coming up and pretty soon they were washing right over the deck where they guys were playing. Everybody down below!

T: Were you one of the people who got seasick on a boat like this or not?

W: No, I didn't get seasick. I was fortunate.

T: Other guys weren't so fortunate.

W: No. I felt sorry for them. For that whole ten days we went across they were sitting by the entry stairway going down below into the hold. They were all just pale as a ghost. They couldn't eat. Even us guys that were pretty good, we had a heck of a time going to the galley to eat. You'd get that kitchen smell and everything. Wow! I think the first time I went down there I got sick. I went up and threw up but pretty soon I was okay. and I got down and it didn't bother me at all.

T: So you get used to it?

W: I got used to it. Just like that in one day.

T: Were the conditions cramped on board the ship? Were there a lot guys on it?

W: Oh, yes. There were a lot of guys. You had bunks, like you see in the Navy submarine. Every foot or so there was another bunk and another bunk and another bunk. In between was a little narrow aisle. When you got in there you didn't want to get up and down all the time.

T: You didn't dare raise your head up when you're sitting in bed.

W: No!

T: Did this make for a difficult mood? Was it hot? Did it smell down there?

W: Yes. Mostly kitchen smell and by the holds there were different smells, not like on top. To me I managed it pretty well. It didn't bother me too much after that.

T: You're an airborne trooper now. What made a good airborne soldier in your opinion? What kind of qualities?

W: First thing you had to follow orders. And do it. You had to be tough. You had to take a lot of physical abuse. That's what they trained us for in basic training. Run, run, run. You had to do that. Lack of sleep. Like when we went into Normandy, for instance. They postponed that invasion one day because of the sea, the English Channel was pretty rough. We went and that's another night that we lost sleep. And then the night we went we took off around twelve o'clock or twelve thirty, after midnight of the 5th, and we flew all night. It seemed like all night but it was two and a half or three hours I guess. And then we came down on the ground when we exited the plane and we had to move again here and there. So we never got any sleep that night. And all the next day.

Everybody, mostly everybody, was scattered. Well, not too many. But we were scattered and we had to look for everybody, especially the first couple of nights. Everything was new. You didn't know where the Germans were, you didn't know where we were. It got out to four or five days and we finally got together. We

were trained for that. To be awake. That was hard physically, especially physically, and mentally too. There's a lot of pressure, physically and mentally.

T: What kind of mental pressure do you mean?

W: Learn to be awake. You had to be awake. Not get afraid. Not be afraid of what's happening. The more physically worn out you are, some people explode and they lose their mind and they get what they call combat fatigue and then they're all through for the time being. It's the physical that wears your body down and your mind down. Even officers get that. Even the guys that for years and years--

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 383.

T: You mentioned fear. Considering what you went through, is it possible not to be afraid? Or is that just part of it?

W: It's part of it that you don't really realize. The fear. Maybe after a while. When there's a lull in the battle or something like that. Or in the evening. Then you're tired, so tired, that you've got to get every little sleep you can. Like a lot of people say, like the movies that show pictures where a couple of guys where one gets hit and they'd be standing by him and trying to take care of him. We weren't trained that way. We were trained that our job was to go no matter what or who got killed next to you or injured or wounded behind you or beside you. Somebody else was going to come up and take care of them. You had to go and do your job which was to take that position. That enemy position. You couldn't do that. You couldn't stop. You had to go right away. We were trained to do that. Just forget about that. Everybody will take care of them.

T: Was that different that regular Army training for non-paratroopers?

W: I don't know. I wouldn't know since I was only in the airborne. It probably was too.

T: On the way over there, once you were on this troop ship going to Europe, it's clear that the war was getting closer and closer in real terms for you. How did that change the way that you thought about the war? In Georgia, it's far away.

W: We didn't really know. What you don't know... You don't expect what's going to happen. You don't really know what's going to happen because it didn't happen to me yet. It's hard to explain. It was like a new experience. Then, once you got into it, then you found out what it was like. Even during basic training, they would tell us and show us movies in training. They said, "Kill or be killed." Which was true. You come down there and there's this guy shooting at you. What are you going to do? You gotta shoot back. That's the way it was.

T: Did some people handle the stress better than others?

W: I suppose. Yes. Oh, yes. But eventually, if they kept up long enough, they would have fallen to it too. There was a lot of combat fatigue. Almost everybody. I got a touch of combat fatigue in Bastogne. A buddy of mine and I, we both ended up in the hospital. But that was just something to snap you into it. Like in Bastogne, we were making an attack and I got behind a big tree and a German tank was about fifty yards or so away. He hit that tree. I was behind it and it blew me up in the air. I don't know what happened. The next thing I knew when I came to I was in the hospital.

They just knocked you right up. They say it was a good thing I went the right way. Sometimes, I know we had one guy from Minnesota here, he was in my squad and we were in Bastogne and they shelled the heck out of us one night. Pretty soon the guys said, "Where's so-and-so?" "Well, we don't know." "I saw him go back that way which was the right way to go." And they said, "He's going toward the enemy" and not away. All of a sudden their mind snaps and they've had it.

T: And until they rest or are given some time to recover that's it.

W: Need some rest. Yes.

T: As you got to England when you were training for what you knew would be the invasion eventually, it's clear the enemy, the Germans at this point not the Japanese, how did you think about the Germans? When you thought about Germans what came into your mind?

W: I don't know. I would say they were the enemy and that's all. That's about all.

T: Did this change? That thinking about the Germans, did that change during the war when you were actually in combat and facing the Germans?

W: Yes. Now you could see what they were doing. And you could see the enemy and what they did to some of the civilians and what they did to your own friends and comrades. It changed to a bit more bitter toward them.

T: So experience did change the way you thought about them?

W: Yes. Oh, yes. After getting in combat with them.

(1, A, 468)

T: How about German civilians, because later your unit encountered German civilians? How were they treated by your unit?

W: Pretty good. When I went from France when the war was just about over, we went to Berchtesgaden. They had a non-fraternization [policy]. We couldn't speak to the civilians at all. That's why we stayed there a couple months and they sent us

back to France. There was still non-fraternization when we left. We actually didn't get a chance to talk to them. We talked to some of the little children but we never talked to adults because they could have court-martialed us if they caught us. We just talked to little kids once in a while. We'd be walking in a park or some path and some little children. They were inquisitive as heck. Some of them I was surprised at how well they could speak English. They were eight, nine, ten years old. And they could speak real good English. They taught them how to speak French too. One year English, the next year the French.

T: Did civilians, do you think from what you observed, did German civilians get decent treatment from American soldiers?

W: I think so. I think so. We were at Berchtesgaden and we were walking around and there were civilians living around and I didn't hear anybody abusing them or anything like that. They came to the POW camps we had there, picking up all these German soldiers, and their relatives would be coming up the next day to the prison camp and they talked to their people that were in there. I didn't see anybody abusing them or anything like that when I was there and I saw them.

T: Did that surprise you that the German civilians were treated that fairly by Americans?

W: No. I don't think so.

T: You were in combat situations a number of times. The first time was when you were dropped into France as part of the D-Day invasion. Do you remember getting ready and the actual jump?

W: Yes. About two weeks before D-Day we were sent into the marshalling area next to the airport that we were going to take off from. They put us in that marshalling area and they fenced us in. They had cooks from the outside come in and feed us because we couldn't talk to the cooks. They made sure when we had chow time that they had one of our officers stand right there and watch. You couldn't even open your mouth and talk to your buddy.

T: You guys were really kept secret there.

W: Yes.

T: Something was clearly going on then.

W: Yes. Because right from two weeks before the actual invasion day they took us in large rooms where they had aerial photos and sand maps and contours of the land where we were supposed to go. They didn't want us talking to anybody. They had a big fence around the area with MPs watching so nobody could get out of there.

T: Did that heighten the tension for guys?

W: Oh, yes. I think so. Yes. This is really getting something. Prior to that, for I don't know how many months, we'd talk and discuss it in the evening after we were training. Well, where's the invasion going to be? And this one would say this, this one would say that. We'd all guess. We'd tell each other why it'd be here. We didn't know. We weren't military strategists. We found out after a while.

T: Rumors were a way of life.

W: Oh, yes.

T: When you were actually getting ready for the jump, getting close to getting on the plane to go over there, what went through your mind? What kind of things were you thinking?

W: I don't know. Excited about going. Stuff like that. This is going to be a big day. We're going to find out what's what. Right prior to taking off we were by the planes, by the C-47s. We were sitting there ready to get on because we couldn't get on yet. Pretty soon somebody says, "Hey, General Eisenhower's here." He pulled up in one of his staff cars and he, like maybe from here to across the street. He came over to our guys and we were called to attention, my planeload, and he came over and talked to us guys. He says I suppose he's going to give us a big gung ho stuff or something like that. But it wasn't. I was the first guy he stopped to talk to in that bunch of guys. All he asked me was, "What did you do in civilian life?" and I said that I worked in the iron ore mines. He said, "Where, in Wisconsin?" I said, "No, in Minnesota." "Where," he said. I said "Up in Duluth, north of Duluth." "Okay," he says, "Pretty rugged guy." Then he goes to the next guy and he asked the same thing, what did he do in civilian life? Some guy always has to come with a wise mouth. One guy says, "I used to drive a beer truck in Niagara Falls." *(laughs)* "I'm going to go back to that job too." And Eisenhower smiled.

T: So he kept the conversation everything but military.

W: That's right. Yes.

T: What was that like to see a fairly important or high-ranking officer, commander in chief, up close and personal?

W: Geez! I felt so relaxed. I couldn't believe it. So relaxed. He made you feel so relaxed. While he was talking to me I was at ease. I could see right behind over his shoulder was a guy with a camera taking photographs of it. I've been trying to find a photograph of that for years and years and I could never do it. I had different people looking for it and I could never find it. He made me feel so easy.

T: That's a real task because you guys could have been wound super tight.

W: That was nice.

T: You got on the plane and you were in the air for a while. The plane ride wasn't a short one.

W: It was about two hours, two and a half hours, I think. I can't remember. It was just getting dark. I think it was around ten o'clock it was getting dark. So when we were set to jump at about twelve fifteen, something like that. At twelve o'clock the Pathfinders, the guys that went in front of us, they came down on the ground and sent a radio signal back to the planes so the planes would know exactly where to come, where to drop us. It took about two and a half hours. Something like that.

T: What was the most memorable thing about that whole time for you? Getting on the plane ride and the jump. What was the most memorable thing?

W: The first part was the quietness. We were going over the English Channel and we could look down below. I was the number two guy and I could look out that door. There was no door in the plane. The door was taken out. I could look down below and see the water and these little blobs of ships going that way. Then it was quiet. Nice moonlight night.

Then we hit the west coast of the peninsula. Then the Germans were alerted. They started shooting at us. Then we had a couple times when the ack ack [anti-aircraft fire, from the ground] came right through the floor of the plane. Right down the middle of the floor of the plane. There were guys sitting on either side and nobody got hit. The next day they checked and everybody got out okay. We were just real lucky. We were one lucky plane. Other planes were shot down and everything. Just sitting there and seeing that red flak coming up through the floor of the plane was awesome.

T: Were you in a glider or a C-47?

W: C-47s.

T: You mentioned quiet a moment ago. Sort of looking out the window and see. Was that sense of quiet a good thing or a bad thing? Having time to focus and think.

W: It probably was a good thing because it calmed you down a little bit. We were all excited in loading up the plane and Eisenhower and all that training before that and the ten days in that marshalling area. Now you're sitting in the quiet. You couldn't talk to anybody because it was too noisy from the plane motors.

T: So you couldn't hear anything?

W: No.

(1, B, 595)

W: All I could hear was the motor revving up and running all night I could see outside. My job was to watch the green light and the red light by the main door there. That was the signal the pilot gave us to jump, to get ready. First he would give you a red light. That means to get ready to jump. To get up and check your equipment. Stand in the door ready to go. Then when you get the green light you go. It was good. It was calming. Then when we got over the land with the anti-aircraft stuff coming up there was turbulence. It was getting rough.

T: These are static line jumps, right?

W: Yes.

T: Can you describe briefly what you did in that time from when you hit the ground in France? You were there for almost a month? What was the purpose of your unit's jump into France?

W: One battalion was supposed to go north of where our landing area was and silence some coastal guns that were aiming for Utah beach. They knew something was coming in that way. Which they did. Another battalion was supposed to go south and capture a lock for a canal because otherwise the Germans would have opened up the lock and flooded that low area behind us which they wanted to keep so that tanks could come in and invade the low areas. Another one, my battalion, we were supposed to meet at a little town called Hiesville, which was division headquarters and division hospital. Our hospital jumped with us, medics and doctors and surgeons. They came in with us. We had a hospital right there, behind enemy lines. Because my squad leader got hit the first day, we were right there for him.

T: So you were going to a German hospital to use the...?

W: No, this was an American hospital that was put up by Americans. Some came in with gliders, the heavy equipment, the medical equipment. The doctors and surgeons all jumped out of our plane with us. We even had, each platoon had one medic that jumped with us. Our chaplain jumped with us. Our division commander jumped with us.

T: That's a sense of equality too. Everybody jumps.

W: Yes.

T: In the first couple days, what were you doing specifically?

W: When we came to this town of Hiesville after traveling all night, from midnight or twelve thirty when we got together, and we traveled together and we found

Hiesville which was a division headquarters with an assembly area. We were protecting the field, a large field where gliders were going to come in. One glider, the big one, our assistant division commander came in. They wanted to have two. They had one come by chute and one come by glider in case one got out of commission. This general, his name was General Pratt, came in on this glider and the field was too short and they hit the opposite end where the hedgerows were and they piled up in there. They had a steel plate in between him and the pilot and a jeep behind them there. That steel plate broke and killed him and the pilot right there.

T: They were both killed.

W: Yes.

T: That's in the field that your unit was in.

W: Yes. We were protecting that field.

T: Were there Germans around?

W: They were nearby. There was no shooting. We didn't know exactly where they were. They were scattered about. They were shooting at all these planes coming in. They were coming in the daylight. A lot of the gliders came in daylight. We had to protect them so they wouldn't be... what we could protect.

T: Were you in danger at this point from the Germans?

W: Yes. They were all around. We didn't know where they were at. Right prior to that my squad leader told me, "Take a patrol and go down the road and see what you can find out." There were just dirt roads around that area. They were all zigzagged this way and that way. I had three guys with me. We took a little patrol on this one road. We were coming along and there was a ditch on each side about maybe four or five feet deep and then a line of trees on a hedgerow all the way down. It made the whole road look like it was dark. So we walked down that road and pretty soon a scout, the first man, I saw him raise his rifle and shoot. So I ran up to him and said "What happened?" He said, "I saw a guy's leg hanging out of that tree over there." And just about that time a whole bunch of Germans come jumping out of the trees surrendering. There were about twenty or thirty of them. We were right there. We looked around behind. Good thing there were no Germans behind us or we would have been done for. But they all surrendered right away. We took them back to the camp to the division headquarters for the prisoners of war. They had to question them.

T: On this occasion or on other occasions that you saw, how were German POWs treated?

W: They were treated good. They were treated real good. I was surprised how they were treating them. You couldn't abuse them. Even later on I found out, we went on a work camp and we were guarding prisoners who were cutting brush along the road, and the German prisoners were different ages from maybe early twenties to early thirties and forties. Maybe some even older than that. The guy that was in charge of this guard detail said at a certain time you have to bring them in because if you don't the mess hall will be closed. We have to get you guys fed and the prisoners fed too. Whoever was in charge looked at his watch and said we were late so we had to hurry up. He gave the order for us to double time the prisoners. We had to double time quite a way, maybe about a mile. When he got back to the camp they were so mad at us, they almost court-martialed us. We couldn't abuse them at all.

T: Were you surprised by how the Germans were treated by the Americans?

W: Yes. I was surprised they treated them that well.

(1, B, 677)

T: You were in France for about a month. What was for you personally the most dangerous situation?

W: A lot of them were personal but the worst one and the most desperate was in Bastogne when they had us surrounded.

T: How about in France in that first month or so? Was there a time when you felt was dangerous or a close call?

W: The worst day was when we were capturing the town of Carentan. We were attacking Carentan. The 101st Division had the job of doing that. With three battalions in each regiment, there were three regiments there, the first day one battalion from each regiment went in and attacked Carentan and they couldn't make out. They were driven back. So the next day the other battalions came in there and they tried it for the second day. They couldn't take Carentan. So the third day my battalion were picked up and we had to go.

They moved us the night before. They moved us way back, about ten miles back. We were sitting right next to the canal we had to cross. At four o'clock in the morning the sun was just coming up. The engineers were there and they took us in these river boats going across the canal. It was right next to a railroad bridge, overhead railroad bridge coming out of town. So we got over that canal and we went along the railroad tracks and a bunch of us had to get on the other side. One squad was pulled to the other side of the railroad grade. I was the last man. It was just the squad leader and I and by the time we got over there two guys were shot and injured. Right in the middle of the railroad tracks. I was the last guy over. I could see the bullets coming down hitting that pew off the bank. Then it stopped. It just got in front of me and it stopped. It dropped down. I was so lucky.

Then I went back on the other side and we went along the railroad track and into the railroad yards and we had a battalion commander with us. One of the first guys. He said, "Let's go hit these maps. We'll go up on this road here." It was a hedgerow-lined road. The hedges were about four feet high. We were going up there and pretty soon we heard some noise, small arms fire. Two guys were killed there and a couple guys got wounded in there. We all hit the dirt. Pretty soon an engine started up. It was an enemy engine because we didn't have any of that stuff. We heard that engine start up and the guy hollered, "Come on with the anti-tank." That was me with the anti-tank grenade rifle. So I got over there and we were waiting and waiting and I didn't see anything so I didn't shoot.

Pretty soon everything quieted down and we could hear that noise of the tank going the other way. Which was a good thing for me. Then right after that we had the artillery man from the Navy, he was from the USS *Quincy*, he was an artillery observer that was with our battalion commander, a colonel. The colonel asked the guy, "Do you think you can get some shells in here?" He says, "Yes. Give me the coordinates and I'll call it in." He called back to the *Quincy*, which was about twenty miles back in the Channel, and pretty soon our battalion commander says, "Keep your heads down, boys. It's going to be close." Pretty soon you could hear that *wsssst!* Oh! The ground was shaking and shaking and shaking and shaking. That was the closest one I had there.

(1, B, 722)

T: In this case the shells were welcome though.

W: Yes.

T: How much for you or for other guys did exhaustion play a role?

W: A lot. Everybody was getting tired. We didn't get any replacements because we had no replacements at all. If you lost a guy, if you lost two guys, a squad was twelve men to start off with and pretty soon when we got to Carentan in the fighting there we only had about six guys left.

T: Your squad was gone.

W: My squad leader got killed right there by division headquarters by a sniper, not killed but he got shot. Somebody else had to come over. Pretty soon you had one squad was a whole platoon. You had twelve guys and that was the platoon.

T: So at the end of that first month or so in France your unit was pretty well...?

W: A lot of them were scattered around and missing. When we had right before Carentan, the same battalion commander, he had a job to cut off the Germans from St. Mere Eglise to Carentan. We were right in between there. The battalion was losing about eight hundred guys. When we went on that attack we had about three

hundred guys, not even that. Less than that. The battalion commander said later on, "We did more with those three hundred guys than I ever thought we could do. That was the biggest battle we ever had." You don't realize it until you see the whole picture.

T: You were evacuated to England for rest and refit?

W: Yes. Replacements and stuff like that. Get ready for the next mission.

T: What about this time in England? How do you adjust to instead of being in an intense exhausting situation to being completely away from it?

W: Relief. A lot of relief. Big relief. Short and rough for those thirty days but it was a relief. We always knew that we were ready for the next one. They would give us supplies and replacements and we had to train them all over again. We were fortunate. We had to wait until September for the next one.

T: You had some weeks in England.

W: Yes. In the meantime we always had alerts to go to. The Falaise Gap. We were scheduled to drop in front of that one too. To cut off the Germans. At the last minute they cancelled that one. There was another one. We were supposed to go someplace near Paris. They cancelled that one too. They kept on training us. This idea came up for Holland, for Operation Market Garden.

T: They scrubbed a couple missions that you were scheduled to be on.

W: Yes. We were ready to go.

T: You and the other guys had to psych yourselves up to go and then you didn't go.

W: Yes.

T: Was there a level of frustration or anger about having missions scrubbed that forced you... you had to get psyched up and then it didn't come to anything. Was that hard?

W: No. We were relieved.

T: Did you have any free time when you were in England?

W: Yes, a little. Just go downtown and go to the pubs in London. Everybody got a pass to London which was a long ways from where we were. We had to take a train and go to Newberry and take another train to London. You got one or two days. Two days was about the most you ever got out of it. They wanted you nearby all the time.

T: When you went to London, what did guys do when you had spare time?

W: Go to the pubs, drink beer. Go to dance halls. It was still all blacked out so you had to run through the alleys and streets. You didn't know if it was a street or an alley because there were narrow curves and you didn't know what was what.

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

W: If brothers meet over there they usually gave them a pass right away, take them off duty and gave them a pass. So my brother and I went down to London. We both got a pass for a couple days. He was taking me around London. I guess we got there at night. I don't know what way. I said, "Hang onto me." I was holding his hand and he was taking me this way and that way. Go in a doorway, knock, open up a curtain to get behind a curtain. Then you open the door so the light wouldn't come out. It was something. See the people in the evening going down in the subways.

T: They were expecting...?

W: They were expecting those bomb raids every night. When we were going from one part of London we were all in uniform and in the subways there, the people there, the kids... oh gee. You think why? Why?

T: Did you come into contact much with civilians in England?

W: Not too much, no. Just where we were stationed that first time. They had racehorses there and we got to know one of the jockeys, one of the kids. They were busy doing. We never had much time either. We had to train all the time too. Once in a while they would have a dance downtown which was a short distance to walk. The only time I went to the dance, I was an MP.

T: That's not very much fun.

W: No, no. I had to wear a big helmet and a big overcoat. It was hot in that thing and you couldn't take them off.

T: Couldn't take it off even if you were inside?

W: No. You were the MP. You dressed with the MP band on. You get some of the big guys like that and I said, "What did I get to be MP for? He's two heads taller than me." We recognized that. We didn't have any trouble with civilians. They were pretty friendly. Really friendly.

T: How did you observe relations between whites and blacks in the service?

W: We never had any blacks in our outfit at all.

T: Were there blacks doing service jobs, driving trucks or cooking?

W: Yes. The only ones I ever ran across were truck drivers, in Tennessee on maneuvers, when we were traveling from one end of the state to the other. We'd end up at one end and pretty soon they said we have to go over here because Monday we're going to start coming another direction. The trucks would be waiting for us. They were all black guys. That's all there were. In England that's the only ones I saw. There were no blacks in our units at all, right from the start.

T: How did you observe, even with these truck drivers, what were the relations with them and the white guys in your unit?

W: There were good relations. They liked to talk and tell jokes. When we were in Tennessee one guy says, "We gotta go. Be over there by a certain time for chow." And we were the last truck to get out. This truck came in late and we told him. He was a black guy and he says, "Well, I was a taxi driver in Chicago. We'll get you there." And boy! Did we fly on that road! And we got there in time too. *(laughs)* It was a ride. All in one piece. We thought we were never going to get there but we did.

T: Any women in uniform that you came into contact with?

W: Just nurses; a few WACS. More in France than in England. In England we didn't see any WACS unless we went dancing. I didn't care to go dancing. I never was much for dancing anyways. In France there were more because it was more wide open. I saw a lot of them at the airports when we were bumming rides from someone from one place to another. Going through Paris on a pass. That's the only times I ever saw them. I never had any close contact with them. Just what I saw.

T: The relations between the women in uniform and the men in uniform. How did that work?

W: To me, from what I saw, they were good.

(2, A, 62)

T: Let's shift back to your unit then because the next place you went was into Holland.

W: Right.

T: Were you trucked in there or did you jump in there?

W: We jumped in there. This was a daylight jump.

T: Do you remember the name of the place that you jumped into?

W: The town?

T: Yes.

W: Erde.

T: Small place?

W: Yes.

T: How did this jump or this preparation for you differ from the first time? Now you're experienced at this.

W: We expected the worst. We didn't know what was what. But it was kind of a surprise. I heard some remarks, a guy was saying it was like a training jump. There was nobody around there. It was daylight. We towed gliders behind us and they released the gliders and then we jumped. The fields were all level. There were no hedgerows there. It was nice. Some of the gliders were getting caught. In some areas where the Germans had anti-aircraft guns they were shooting some of them down. Some planes got shot down. Some of the gliders got shot down too. But we were lucky. We hit no resistance until we got in that area. We thought we had the town taken care of but before you knew it bingo! Here comes the enemy right away. It was just a little group on a main road.

We were going to capture two bridges and hold them going across the canals. The object was to capture these bridges from there to Arnhem and then the British armored units were supposed to come up and go to Arnhem. It was a daring thing. General Montgomery's idea. It was his idea to do that. They figured it was sixty miles from the front lines through Holland to Arnhem on the Rhine River. He said maybe this was the chance to get into Germany proper and kill their chances. But sixty miles. We took the first two bridges and about twenty miles and then the 82nd Airborne took the next two bridges and marched up twenty, twenty-five miles. Then the British were supposed to take Arnhem and the last bridge. And that's where the expression came, a bridge too far. That last bridge was the one that was too far.

T: How would you characterize the Germans as soldiers?

W: Good. Good soldiers. They were good soldiers. They were good soldiers. A couple times we met the paratroopers over there, German paratroopers in Normandy. Lined up against us. Later on, one guy in my squad told me about the paratroopers he met in Bastogne. He got shot up real bad. That's why he said he was taken care of well because you're a comrade. Meaning you're a paratrooper too, no matter what army you are. We were thinking of ourselves as elite. He liked that.

He said before he died that guy told me, "You're a paratrooper. We met you at Normandy." He was helped him. His arm was all shot up. He kind of took care of it.

(2, A, 137)

T: The Holland mission was part of the Bastogne thing later? Was that all part of the same thing?

W: No. Bastogne was later. Holland ended up sometime about the middle of December. We went back to France. To Mourmelon. To regroup. Guys were on passes. Our division commander went back to the United States for Christmas. I don't know what for but he had the authority. He was a general. A lot of guys were getting passes and going to Paris. Some of us stayed in camp. You couldn't send them all at the same time. But we were going gradually. We were at the bottom of the list for replacements and for being re-equipped. Then that Bastogne deal came up because that was the 17th or 18th of December when we were notified. We had to get through there.

T: In Holland, what was the most difficult or challenging time that you faced?

W: There wasn't anything really difficult. It was just normal. Attack here and attack there. That's about all there was. There wasn't really anything. There was only one that was something difficult. It was something new. We made a night attack. It was called the Sand Dunes of Erde right near the edge of Erde. They had sand dunes. I don't know why. It's not there anymore. It's gone. Somebody got the idea to do a night attack. Let's get out there and see what we can do. Just get out there and make as much noise as you can. Just go and shoot and make noise. Maybe we can terrify the Germans into surrendering. Maybe they did and maybe they didn't. I don't know. That's the only thing.

Then in Holland too at the end after we got relieved by our first positions we went toward Arnhem and we were more or less helping the British because their troopers landed about ten miles away. They lost everything. They were behind the lines and in the evening they would come to the Rhine River and we'd come over with boats. Everybody had a chance to go across and bring the British back. On our side. The first time they did that it was in broad daylight. That was featured in that book, "The Band of Brothers." That was one of the regiments in my outfit. That was in broad daylight. I don't know why they did it, but they did it. They lost a lot of guys in there. Later on they did it at night time when they couldn't see. We brought a lot of them back that way.

T: Was the time in Holland for you personally more difficult or less difficult? More or less dangerous than the time in France?

W: It wasn't any more dangerous but it was longer. We were there seventy-some days. It's a little bit longer. We had no living quarters. We got down in the rain and the mud and it was miserable.

T: Did that affect morale?

W: Yes. Sure. And then Montgomery kept us longer than we wanted to because Eisenhower even told him, "Send back the 101st and the 82nd[Airborne]." So we could join our own outfits. Montgomery was in charge of that area there. It took him a long time to let us go. We didn't like that but we couldn't help that.

T: You stayed longer than you thought. This also must have meant that when you're in a situation like this you don't get mail, do you?

W: Oh, yes. We got mail. Later on. You don't get it all the time, but later on, yes.

(2, A, 191)

T: How did you stay in touch with family and loved ones back home when you were in the service?

W: By mail. Mostly by mail. V-mail letters they called them. You write on a regular form and you have so much space to put on it and then they microfilm it and sent it back to the States. Over there they make a picture of it. Then it has to be censored too at the same time. Even in England before D -Day. We used to write letters and the officer had to read all the letters. They watched quite a bit on that.

T: Were you a regular letter writer?

W: Not too much. Not every day. Some guys would write every day. Not me. I didn't write regularly. Maybe once a week or who knows.

T: How important to soldiers was getting mail?

W: Very much. Very important. Very important.

T: To you too?

W: Oh, sure. As long as you hear from them and know everything is okay. It's good to get letters.

T: Did mail seem to matter more to some people than to others?

W: Sometimes, I suppose. Maybe those guys were married or those guys that had a sweetheart or something like that. Maybe that was more important. I suppose most of these guys with their wives. They were married. The majority of us were still single. There weren't very many married men.

T: Did you make lasting contacts during your time in the military? Guys you kept in contact with after you got out of the service?

W: Oh, yes. It took me a little while to make contact with them. I always thought about them. Until we went to Philadelphia that year, 1978 or '79. A friend of mine from Philadelphia was in my unit but he never went overseas with us in Europe. He went to the Pacific instead. I said, when my wife and I, when we decided to go to Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., and bring our kids to see some of that stuff on the East Coast, gee whiz, there's this guy in Philadelphia. Let's go see him. Let's look him up. So I wrote him a letter, taking a chance that he'd be there.

T: You hadn't been writing up until now.

W: No. Not till then. He wrote back and said, "Come on. I show you all this stuff." That's how we... we kept it up all the time. Then at the same time he told me, "Don't you get this magazine or that magazine or newsletter that our association puts out?" I said, "No." Pretty soon I subscribed to that and got it and kept up with it. By then I got in contact with another guy down in North Carolina. He and I talk by phone and write letters, mostly by phone. He can't write anymore like he used to.

T: Do you have or did you have unit reunions?

W: Yes. The division one started right after World War II. I guess they had the first reunion in 1946.

T: For which division?

W: The 101st Division.

T: Right off the bat they had them.

W: Right off the bat. Yes.

T: Did you go?

W: No. I didn't go to the first one. I never went until Minneapolis. That was '78. That was the first one I went to.

T: So it took you more than thirty years to start.

W: Yes.

T: If you think about it, why didn't you go before then? And why did you go then?

W: Before that I didn't know there was an association. Until this guy from Philadelphia told me there is, and that they have reunions. This airborne paper

comes out once a month and tells you about all the reunions, all airborne and stuff like that. Then I saw it and I said, "There's going to be one in Minneapolis." So that's where we went.

T: Have you been since then?

W: To a regimental reunion but not the division ones. I think the first one the regiment had was about '78 also. It started. The guy from North Carolina told me that was the first one they ever had. They had their reunion in Georgia that time because that's where we had all those training camps. They had one every year in different parts of the country. Mostly on the East Coast.

T: You've been since then or not?

W: I've been to the regimental ones quite a few times. Yes.

T: Why do guys go to those reunions?

W: Camaraderie. Talk about the war. What they did. A lot of times you go and talk. I never talked to my wife or kids about the war, hardly at all before I went to the reunions, and little by little. Even before I went to Normandy she didn't know half the stuff or even three-fourths of the stuff I had done. She said she heard more about what I did the two weeks we had in Normandy that time than all the years we were married. But the guys want to get together and they want to talk about it. You can understand each other. What he went through and what I went through. Just like the guys downtown at coffee. There's one guy I like to go talk to. He's a Marine, an ex-Marine, and we talk. The ones that really saw combat. We kid each other. We have that camaraderie. Just like that. It's in there. I don't know why. It's automatic.

T: Is it guys trying to get rid of bad memories or to relive the good ones?

W: I don't know. Sometimes relive them and the bad ones too. I guess you could get that out of your system too. We met a lot of guys over there that never talked about it and they feel bound up and tied up. Which is no good. You've gotta get it out of your system. I found that out too. It happened to me too. I got some of that stuff out of my system. I feel a lot better.

T: Can you say something more about that? About getting stuff out of your system? From your own perspective.

W: I had to get it out of my system sometimes. Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't.

T: Was it something for you that took time after the war until you were ready to get it out of your system?

W: Probably. Yes. After the war I didn't think much of it. No reunions and stuff like that. I just forgot about everything. Then you get to reunions and sometimes you remember. Somebody would say something. Yes. Now I remember this, now I remember that.

T: You went back to work by 1947. Did people at your workplace, did they know what you had done during the war?

W: Some did and some didn't. There were so many from town here and they came back. A lot of them didn't wear a uniform unless they were going to stay in the regular Army or Navy. They usually got rid of the clothes, the service clothes, and they put civilian clothes on and away they went to work and they didn't talk too much about it.

T: You weren't the only veteran back to work, were you? There were lots of other veterans.

W: Oh, yes.

(2, A, 287)

T: The time in Holland and in then you had some time in France. It was in France you were saying a few moments ago that suddenly this German attack in Belgium happened and you got called to what became the Battle of the Bulge.

W: Yes.

T: Can you say a little bit about that from your perspective? How that whole thing began to develop?

W: It was the 17th or 18th of December. Maybe a couple of days before that. They woke us up in the morning, about four o'clock. Oh, no, it was about two, three o'clock in the morning and says, "Come on. Let's go. Pick up your stuff. We need to go. The Germans made a breakthrough." That's all they said. "Put your long johns on. If you've got rubber galoshes on, put the galoshes on. Get your gun and ammunition. If you haven't got any of that stuff we'll get it up ahead." They loaded us into cars.

T: Pretty fast though.

W: Yes. That was fast. At that time we had a new platoon sergeant. We just barely knew his name. One day or two days before that. He didn't know half of us guys and we didn't know him. They took guys from the band. They said why? They had no replacements. Too many guys are on leave. So they put guys from the band in our outfit. They probably hadn't fired a gun for a whole year or so. We get everything

up there. Some guys didn't have any guns because they were in for repairs or something like that.

They throw us on these big cattle trucks, like a grain truck, a cattle truck. Nothing on top. Sides about three or four feet high. You could look and see everything. It was December and it was cold. Get in there. Where are we going? Never mind. We don't know. The big wheels know where we're going to go.

So we got to that town and we stopped before we hit Belgium. We stopped someplace and they gave us a hot meal, hot chow on the highway there. Then we took off again and we got to Bastogne. At that time we didn't know what the name of the town was or what. They took us off the trucks and said, "Get down here and lay down. Make yourselves comfortable." We had to sleep in the ditch of the road. We only had raincoats that we had to carry all the time. Some guys didn't have blankets, some did. Some guys had no rifles. We woke up and then pretty soon these soldiers were coming the other way. Those guys looked like they were a mess. Some had no rifles, no nothing. "What's going on?" They said, "You better get out of here. The Germans are coming!" We said, "That's why they brought us over here."

We took the ammunition from them. First aid kits. K rations. Everything they had to eat. Because we were short. Our officer told us to grab everything we could from those guys. So we stayed there. The next morning they took my company. We never had a full compliment in the company at that time. Company strength was about a hundred and twenty guys and we had about maybe seventy-five, eighty guys at that point. They told our company commander we were going to this one spot. Check out and see what the Germans are doing. If they're there or what. Set up a little defensive line there.

That's what we did. We walked about five, six miles out of Bastogne and we got in this little town called Awarden. We looked around for things to do. What we were going to do and what's going on. There's nobody around there. There was some tank outfit that was there. A couple of guys from a couple of tanks. One tank that was there. They were from the 10th Armored which happened to be there too. They were just standing there. They weren't doing anything. So we moved into this town and the company commander was looking for a CP. He couldn't contact the regimental headquarters but this guy with the radio went back out of town a little ways and he got up a little hill and he was radioing, trying to get contact with us. He said, "No. I can't get a hold of them." So he started coming back to the CP and in the meantime us guys set up a little defense line, four, five, six of us. That's all that was left. A guy with a bazooka here, another guy with a bazooka over there.

Pretty soon I heard this rumbling, rumbling. There were two [German] Tiger tanks coming down the hill. Right for the middle of town. Where the T, cross in the road, the little river there. Oh boy! The guy let him come closer and he knocked out one tank. Then they opened up on us. Pretty soon next to us there was a little pile of woods like from here across the corner over there. Here a whole battalion of Germans were sitting in there. They made an attack and all hell broke loose. They blasted that company CP and I think they killed a company commander. I heard that he was captured and executed later on. I wasn't sure. One officer said, "Boy, you guys gotta get out of here! Just run for your life. Drop everything and run if you want to live." So we all took off in the direction we came, through the fields and they

were shooting at us and the tanks were shooting. Knocking the houses down and everything. Oh boy! All hell broke loose! We survived getting out of there. Half of us got out of there. The other half were all captured or killed.

T: What was going through your mind? This was a pretty intense situation. What was going through your mind at the time?

W: You gotta survive. You gotta run and live.

T: Really? Survival instinct took over?

W: Yes. You gotta do what you think is the best. Run.

(2, A, 351)

T: Do you have time to be afraid when so much is going on?

W: You're afraid automatically and you don't realize it. Everything is all combined. You just wonder what's going to happen if you don't... We had that experience in Normandy so we knew what it was going to be like.

T: Was that one of the scarier times for you personally?

W: Oh, yes. That was the worst one. Yes.

T: You were lucky to get out of there then.

W: Oh, yes.

T: Let me ask you about luck. There's a couple times already when you said, boy, you were lucky that the tank hit the tree and now you were lucky. How do you explain luck or good fortune?

W: Maybe that guy up there was taking care of me. Who knows? Premonition. I believe in premonition. There's two cases that happened to me. In Normandy one kid was sitting right next to me. Like you and I are sitting now. We just off a patrol. This was after we took Carentan. We were relaxing. We just got off a patrol. We went into town before and we had one guy from another platoon that could speak French so I took him with me. We went down and we got to this farmhouse and right by this farmhouse there was a pile of woods. Right around the corner of the woods there was a small town with a church. Every little town in France had a church just about. We stopped and I asked this guy, ask the French people what's what. Ask if they've seen any Germans. And this woman, this farm woman, came over and said they were in the steeple observing. Observation post in the tower. They knew the Americans wouldn't shoot the church steeples down. The other

parts of Normandy we sent guys up from the bottom but they wouldn't shoot them down.

So we went back and I reported to the guy and this one kid that was with me, his name was Trevino, he was sitting next to me. We were talking. Pretty soon the German artillery started coming up. They must have seen us. It started coming up and somebody hollers, an officer because I could tell the voice, "Well, you guys better scatter because they're coming in close." I just got up to move and this Trevino that was sitting with me says, "Don't move. I'll take care of anything that comes. I'll stop anything that comes." And he did. The shell came there and I just got nicked and he got it. Bingo. Killed just like that. He had a premonition. Why would he say that?

And then this other guy, before I went to Bastogne, when we got called in the morning to go to Bastogne. We had to pack our bags, all our personal stuff we put in our bags and left in camp. It was taken care of then. Your personal stuff. You just took what was necessary.

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 384.

W: He says, "You take care of this stuff for me and send it home." I says, "Why?" and says "I'm not coming back." I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "I'm not coming back." I tried to convince him. I knew what would happen because if got your personal stuff in that bag and you don't come back that goes to the graves registration. They take care of it and they take any personal stuff. They throw away all the pictures, letters and they throw all that away. They don't send anything back because they don't know where the letters are from. If it's a married man and he was getting letters from a girlfriend or something. But he had stuff and pictures and he was a single man anyway so it wouldn't make much difference. I said, "No, no, no." His name was Gothier. He was a Frenchman from Rhode Island. He said, "You gotta do this for me." I said, "Okay. I promise I'll do it. I'll take care of it." And he never came back. He was one of the guys that knocked out a tank. He ran out of shells. He tried to knock the tank out with a rifle. They blasted him.

T: Did guys get in a mindset like that sometimes that was just depressed or pessimistic?

W: Yes. They must have known their time was coming up. That's it.

T: Did you ever have a feeling like that yourself?

W: Maybe. I probably got it and then I said, well, that tells me I gotta move.

T: You got the premonition?

W: Yes.

T: Can you describe briefly what your experience, how you experienced, the Bastogne episode? From your perspective.

W: It was rough. It was hell. They were really hell. I can say hell. They were always attacking us. Always attacking us. They wanted us to surrender, too. And when we got that newsletter from our division commander when he told that German general "Nuts!" and all that stuff, we made Merry Christmas newsletter and sent to all the guys that were on the front lines because we didn't know what's going on. They were in downtown Bastogne. We were on the outskirts. My gosh, what's the matter with those guys. They got a (***) and they didn't know any better. That poor guy. Poor so-and-so. They got us surrounded. Which made the guys get mad. We weren't trained that way. They told us from scratch. You're a paratrooper. You're going to go way back there. You never know what's going to happen. Like in Normandy. We had carried supplies for three days. We had more ammunition and stuff on us that you could hardly walk. They trained us. It made the guys mad. Let them come. Let them come. We'll take care of them.

T: Were guys feeling hopeless around you?

W: Yes. Some I suppose. They didn't pay much attention to them. They were quiet. We knew it. Everybody was the same. Some would be this way, some would be that way.

T: When were you evacuated out of Bastogne? How long were you actually there?

W: We were there till... When Patton came in from the south they relieved us. But that was no relief because we kept on fighting. Our worst fighting was just coming up, after that. When we got in there and got supplies and everything because they dropped supplies by air. Patton came in with tanks behind us. Then we got spread out and my regiment had another tough one to go through called "The Woods." President Eisenhower's son, John, wrote a book called "The Bitter Woods." It was about that area there. That was pine tree after pine tree every two or three feet.

T: Was that the Huertgen Forest?

W: Not the Huertgen Forest. Well, it was the Huertgen Forest. It was another part they called "The Woods." It was Les Jacques or something like that. That's what they called the woods. That was the big part. That was tough. The trees and oh boy! The cover was so good that you had to walk just about from her to that wall away before you ran into the enemy.

T: It must be hard to...

W: It was hard to get through there. No tanks could get through there. You had to go on these little roads and they were laying for you.

T: When was it that you got back to France this time then?

W: From Bastogne we went and got on the trucks and they took us down to Alsace-Lorraine which was two hundred miles south of there. The 42nd Rainbow Division was there. They were getting, I don't know, they were having a rough time or what the deal was but we took their place on the front lines. I had to laugh because the guys see us coming down there and he says, "Oh, boy!" That's where we got the nickname, you know that we picked up in Bastogne. He says, "Here come the battling bastards of Bastogne." That's what they hung on me because we didn't know what they were talking about. That's what they hung onto. The *Stars and Stripes* [Army newspaper] and all those other people.

(2, B, 483)

T: They picked it up too.

W: They called us guys coming down there on trucks. We stayed there for about a month, something like that.

T: Was this less intense down there in Alsace-Lorraine?

W: Oh, yes. That was less intense. Yes. That was just a holding line. That's all it was. So the for something, maybe for a big push or something. We were all beat out. We went down, way low on supplies, recruits, new replacements. I suppose they figured that this was going to be just a holding pattern and rest for us until they got things lined up.

T: How long did you stay in Alsace-Lorraine?

W: About a month and a half. The biggest thing we ever did there was one company from our regiment that made a raid across the river. They made a night attack across the river just to pick up the enemies and stuff like that for information. When they went over we took their place and boy! That was the worst place to be because as soon as the Germans found out they were coming here comes the artillery. All we did was run from the top of the house down to the basement. All night long like that.

T: Where were you then when President Roosevelt died in April 1945? You were out of Alsace-Lorraine.

W: Yes. We went back to Mourmelon.

T: You were at Mourmelon when the President died.

W: Yes.

T: How did you and those around you react to the news that President Roosevelt had died?

W: We felt bad. We felt bad about it. We had known him since before we got into the service. How he got this country back on its feet and everything. We felt bad about it. He was a nice guy. A real nice guy for us anyway. Most of us were from the street and we didn't come from any well-to-do homes. We were just working men when we went in the Army and now we were working men again and we felt bad about it.

T: Where were you when the war against Germany ended?

W: We were still in Mourmelon because we were withdrawn from Alsace-Lorraine, my regiment, to make those special jumps on those prisoner of war camps. They figured the Germans were going to execute those prisoners. We stayed there until that was solved, then the rest of the 101st went from Alsace-Lorraine to southern Germany. They got to Berchtesgaden about the same time. Then we came in by train and by truck. We rejoined them in Berchtesgaden.

(2, B, 527)

T: So you were in France when the news came that the war against Germany was over.

W: Yes.

T: How did that news hit your unit and you personally?

W: It felt good. I felt relieved. Now we're going to go home. We thought.

T: Did you suspect you were going to go home or did you suspect that in reality you were headed for the Pacific?

W: Yes. We thought the Pacific. Our division commander when we were in Berchtesgaden he called the whole regiment. We were spread out, one regiment here, one regiment there. We happened to be right there in Berchtesgaden. Some really fancy barracks where the SS troopers were. He came in and told us. He said, "What we've got to do, we're going to head for the Pacific. We've got three options. We go right straight to the Pacific. The second option is to go straight to the United States and through the United States and to the Pacific and train over there. Or go to the United States and take other training, and then go over there. To the Pacific."

T: All three options took you over there.

W: Yes.

T: So you were clearly going to go to the invasion of Japan.

W: Yes.

T: The war against Japan ended rather quickly in August. This meant you weren't going to the Pacific any more.

W: Right.

T: Had you adjusted really to the fact that you were probably going to the Pacific war in your mind?

W: Yes.

T: How were you dealing with that?

W: Disgusted I suppose. Gee whiz. What we all went through already. Now we've got to go through that again. We heard about the Japs. My gosh, that's going to be worse. We'll never get out of it. Less and less every time. I think when we were in Berchtesgaden in our platoon there were only six that survived the whole works. Some even missed some of the campaigns because they were in the hospital. So I figure there were about six of us guys that were from the original platoon.

T: And how many was a platoon?

W: Thirty-six.

T: Those aren't good odds.

W: No.

T: So you had to think in your mind if you're going to Japan what are the odds that...

W: There will be nobody left.

T: So the war against Japan ending probably felt okay.

W: Oh, yes. That was real good.

(2, B, 563)

T: When did you become aware that we had used atomic weapons to end the war against Japan?

W: I don't know if it was a regular meeting or a formation of somebody of Berchtesgaden or the papers. Anyway somebody came out with it right there. We

didn't know what this was all about when they said atomic bomb. What's this? What's an atomic bomb? We didn't know anything about it. They explained to us. Either a newspaper or somebody explained to us. *Stars and Stripes* or something. Couldn't believe it. What kind of a weapon is this?

T: How have your feelings developed on atomic weapons since 1945? I mean it ended the war. How do you look back on that now?

W: I think it was worthwhile because from my point of view the strength of our armies was real low, real low. I even noticed that in Berchtesgaden when we got some replacements there. They were way at the bottom of the barrel.

T: As far as being trained?

W: Yes. Trained and young and everything else. Used to wear glasses. When I went in nobody was wearing glasses. We got some guys that couldn't even write English. Can you imagine that? They couldn't even write a letter in English. They were from the West Coast. Mexicans I suppose from California. Poor families.

T: They were taking a broader range of guys now.

W: Oh, yes. That would have been a bad one. Everybody I talked to then, even now, we always talk about it. Especially the guys that were in the Pacific. The veterans from the Pacific say that. The same thing from Europe. It's a bad thing to do, but what are you going to do? I think myself that they get to know what our strength was. They didn't tell you what was what. Probably figured it would be the same as when the war started but no way. We lost millions of guys. Millions.

T: You returned to the States. You did some months in France just basically killing time?

W: Yes.

T: And you came back the end of 1945. November I think it was you came back to the States.

W: Yes.

T: And within a month you were discharged. What was your initial reaction, Walt, to being out of the military?

W: Glad. I was really glad. Single. I figured well... I could have stayed in. They wanted me to reenlist when I was in Sens, France. In fact they made me a noncom but I was just a noncom in name only. No pay and no stripes or anything. They did the same thing to me in Normandy too. They made me a corporal but they didn't give me the pay. They gave it to somebody else. I was an acting gadget all the time.

When we were in Sens there after the war they said I had the combat experience and a lot of training. They said they were going to give me a platoon, in charge of a platoon. Give me a staff sergeant rating. We'll give you a furlough. I don't know how days a furlough was, ninety days or something like that. And I think it was a thousand or two thousand dollar bonus to re-sign, to sign up again.

T: Okay. They were making it worth your while.

W: Yes. My points were up there where they could have taken my points. All ready to go for discharge. And I said, "No, no. I want to go home. I don't want to." "You're going to go anyways." "No," I said.

T: They put the pressure on.

W: Oh, yes. Some guys stayed but I said no. They promised me this and that. They got kind of pushy. They sent me to noncom school in France, in Sens. There were a lot of noncoms, corporals, and sergeants and first sergeants. I was the only private or PFC in there. The company commander called me one day. He said, "I want to see you in noncom school." I said, "Noncom school? I'm only a PFC, a private. I don't want to go." He said, "You're going. Otherwise I'll court-martial you." So I went. I got that certificate downstairs I think.

T: So you went through that but you still weren't convinced to stay in.

W: No.

T: The war was over. You could have stayed. A little money.

W: They made good money.

T: Why didn't you stay, Walt?

W: I suppose I had enough of it after three years. That Army camp stuff. The BS they give you. They gave it to me from Normandy all the way through there. I said, "No." Maybe if they would give me a rating right away after Normandy. In Normandy when guys get wounded they get sent back to the hospital and get busted right away down to private. They were allowed only so many sergeants on active duty so they had to do that. Then if he comes back they get. What they want to keep is the officers. They keep the same rating in the hospital all the time. I said, "How many times have they told me that stuff?" They're going to give me this, give me that. No. I was single. Maybe if I was married maybe I would have stayed in. I don't know. I was making good money though.

T: Actually a couple thousand dollars.

W: In the airborne we were getting, base pay was fifty some dollars. Then fifty dollars a month jump pay. Whether you jumped or not. But you had to jump. Make sure you jump when they tell you to.

T: So three years was enough.

W: Yes. I think so.

T: What was the hardest thing for you readjusting to civilian life?

W: I don't know. *(three second pause)* Maybe missed some of the guys I used to be chummy with in the Army. Miss some of those guys. Get together and BS and stuff like that. Otherwise I don't see anything special.

T: You were back in this area pretty soon after you got out. Were you bothered by bad dreams or things like this at any time after the war?

W: Sometimes. Occasionally. It wasn't very many.

T: You were fortunate there. What was easy readjusting? You stepped out of uniform. What did you find that was an easy thing to do?

(2, B, 658)

W: It was hard to get good civilian clothes, too. A bunch of us guys, we were all single, we'd go up and get paid. We all worked in the mines. We'd get paid and we'd go to Hibbing. There were a lot of clothing stores. Look for this and look for that and sometimes you couldn't find it. I remember a topcoat. I looked for six months for a topcoat. I couldn't get one to fit me. I remember this one guy and I went to Hibbing and we looked for it. He said, "That would fit you." I tried it on. It fit me okay. So I'm going to pay the owner and I didn't have any money on me. I told him I would pay him at payday. "No, no, no, no," he says, "I gotta have cash." I asked if he could charge it up and he said he had to check my credit rating. So I didn't think anything about a credit rating. I always paid cash for everything. So he checked and said I didn't have a credit rating. He went through a credit bureau. He said he couldn't give me any credit because I didn't have a rating, so my buddy gave me twenty bucks to buy the topcoat. But after that I got a credit rating. I charge every chance I get so I get a good credit rating.

T: Yes. But finding stuff was not always easy. In this case it was a coat. You couldn't always get what you wanted even if you had the money.

W: Yes.

T: How about renting an apartment or getting a car?

W: No. I didn't think about a car at all and I was living with my folks. I was still single.

T: So you didn't have to worry about finding a place to live.

W: No.

T: To conclude. When you were in the service when you were in France or the Netherlands or Belgium, what did the war mean for you personally? What was it really all about?

W: It was a good experience. One I would never want to go through again.

T: Would you say you were there because there was a job that needed to be done or was it kind of a moral crusade?

W: I suppose it was both. You read so much about what the Germans did to the civilians and what the Japs did to the civilians. You figure it's something... guys my age at that time were still too young to realize what freedom was until after it was happening. Then we realized.

When my wife and I went back to France in 1994, I was really surprised how those people treated us, even those little kids. Waving the American flag and everything. And they'd say, "Merci, merci." The older ones, you could see tears in their eyes and they touched you on the shoulder and gave you a hug. They were smiling when they did that. So you know we did a good job. They still thank us over there, especially in Belgium, in Bastogne, and in Holland. They appreciate it. They still appreciate it. They thank you all the time. They offer to help you, to take you where you want to go. Don't cost you a penny... They treat you like a king.

When we went back, we had that ceremony at Omaha beach. The cemetery at Colleville. That's where I saw that one kid that I told you about that got killed right next to me at Normandy. Trevino. He was buried there. I broke down; I cried. I'm not ashamed to admit it. And there was another one there, he was killed when we were making that attack on Carentan. He popped his head over the hedgerow and he got shot right between the eyes. From me to you away (*two feet*). He just fell right over. And a couple others. One of my other buddies that was shot and was badly wounded, and couldn't move his legs.

When I got to Colleville there, there were those three guys. Another one a sniper got; his name was Wilson. Another one was Malley. I saw all three of those graves there at Colleville.

They had a big ceremony at the time. They had American names there. I grabbed one of those sheets of paper and I was looking for where the graves were marked. I had a list from one of my Army guys from division headquarters of where all the Americans in my outfit were buried in France. I had them all marked down. I had to get the map from the cemetery to find out where the plots were. I found that spot and took some pictures. My wife took some pictures with me. I sat by that monument right in the middle of the cemetery, and I was trying to change the film in

my camera, and I was crying. Some guy came, a young guy, and asked me what was wrong. "Can I help you?" "No," I said, "I went to see my buddy." And I wondered, sitting there, if anybody from his family ever came to see him. I wondered.

They had the option in 1948, the family did, to bring the people back. Then I went to another cemetery... [My wife's] brother is buried there next to General Patton in Luxembourg. We probably were the first relatives to go and see him. Visit his grave. I feel bad. It's fifty years, but you still feel it.

Holland was a good one because I'd never been there. Every year they have a reunion in September. They go back to Holland and they have different regiments or units go up to different places where they were at. In Bastogne they do the same thing. They have that big marker for [General] MacAuliffe [of Bastogne fame] over there in the square. I never went there [to Holland] but other guys tell me, you've got to go there.

T: Walt, what's one way that the war changed your life?

W: Probably changed me and I don't even realize I was changed because I was a teenager, seventeen, when I went in the [CC Camp and twenty when I went in the] service. I don't know how you could compare a teenager. It made me more serious minded. Raise my family not carefree like some do. More serious. Dedicated to doing a good job. Take care of your family and your relatives. They depend upon you.

T: You were only twenty-three when you got out of the service. What I hear you saying is that you were a lot older than that really.

W: I think mentally I got older. It's hard to compare. I think I was.

T: Is there a memory or a story you wanted to add that I didn't give you a chance to or something you want to add before we conclude?

W: I can't think of any.

Wife: I think the thing I remember best is when we went back in 1994, how we went to visit all the graves where you had buddies that had died near you in action. How it was kind of a relief for you to at last have time to mourn them when we went back. Like you said, in battle, they couldn't stop if they got hurt or got killed. They had to keep moving on. This time in the cemetery there at Utah beach he had his time to mourn for each one as we stopped at the graves. I think that was a great relief for him.

T: *(to Walt's wife, in next room)* Your brother was killed in the war?

Wife: Yes.

T: Was he in the Army?

W: He was in the Air Force first and then the infantry. He got shot up pretty bad but they needed guys so they took him out of the Air Force and put him in the infantry. He was crossing the Rhine River someplace near Remagen when he got killed. He probably never fired a rifle for months. Who knows? Later on after the war was over, her other brother got killed in a jeep accident over in Germany while he was in the service.

T: In a jeep accident?

Wife: Yes.

T: So you lost two brothers.

Wife: One war time and one peace time.

T: Well thank you so much for that. That last bit, that must be hard. People you haven't thought... you couldn't mourn for them. You didn't have time.

W: That's why I say, you watch these movies and everything. *Band of Brothers*, that was the 506th Regiment of the 101st Airborne, my buddy from North Carolina called me up when that first came out. He said, "You know, Walt, did you read that book?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Don't you remember we went through the same thing, only the names were changed." I said, "Yes, that's right but what they had in the book made it more gruesome and awesome sometimes." Especially the swearing was terrible. We swore in the Army but not like that. These guys getting wounded. I said, "No, I've seen a lot of them and they weren't like that. You won't see anybody like that."

T: You were in the 501st and *Band of Brothers* was about the 506th, right?

W: Right.

T: That's written for an audience and that author, Stephen Ambrose, he writes for his audience.

W: Even after that he got called up on some of that stuff. Somebody else was writing it for him and he was just putting his name on there.

T: Walt, let me conclude by thanking you for your time this evening.

END OF INTERVIEW