

**The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)**

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

**Ernest J. Botard
Captain, 4th Cavalry**

March 14, 2002

Interview With
Mr. Ernest J. Botard

Mr. Richard Misenhimer

I am Richard Misenhimer and today is March 14, 2002. I am interviewing Mr. Ernest J. Botard at his home on County Road 469, Jim Wells County, Alice, Texas. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Botard, I want to thank you for taking time today to do this interview. Let me start out by asking you, what is your birthday?

Mr. Ernest Botard

I was born December 28, 1916. I was born right down the road here. The other side of Ben Bolt, 6 or 7 miles south of Alice on the Scott Ranch.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were your parents names?

Mr. Botard

My daddy's name was W. F. Botard and my mother's name was Anna Botard.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your dad's occupation?

Mr. Botard

Farmer, rancher and Dairyman.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Mr. Botard

I have one brother living. I had 2 brothers and 1 sister.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to school?

Mr. Botard

In Ben Bolt - a little country school out here. Then I transferred to Alice. I finished high school in Alice, and then I went to Texas A & M. I graduated from Alice High School in 1935.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you study at A & M, College Station?

Mr. Botard

I ended up studying and graduating from the School of Agriculture. Dairy Husbandry.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were in the Corps, weren't you?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. Everybody was back then. It was mandatory.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you graduated, you got a commission?

Mr. Botard

That is correct. 2nd Lieutenant in the Cavalry.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go into the active service at that point?

Mr. Botard

No, sir. When I graduated from A & M, I went to work for the U.S. Government in the field of Agriculture down in the Rio Grande Valley. That was 1940. It was 1941, I think it was, when I got called up.

Mr. Misenhimer

You worked in the valley. You grew up during the Depression. Do you recall how the Depression affected things?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir, I sure do. Everybody had a living as far as food was concerned, but that was about all. Everything was hard to get. We were short on a lot of things that we were unable to get, but with farm life as it was, why, it was not as bad as we have seen in the past few years.

Mr. Misenhimer

At least you were able to raise your own food.

Mr. Botard

That is correct.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you remember when you got called up? What time of the year?

Mr. Botard

I was called up just after Pearl Harbor was bombed. February of '42. Kay was born in October, 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you recall where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor being bombed?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. I was in the field working with a gentleman in McMullen County... County agent there.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you went on active duty, what outfit were you in?

Mr. Botard

I was given notice to report to Manhattan, Kansas, where the 4th Cavalry was at the time. I reported in there and did 6 weeks of intense training with horses. I stayed there for quite a while at Fort Riley, Kansas. From there, I went to South Dakota. Units were being called up to go to either Africa or the European Theater. Our call came and we were told to prepare ourselves. Get in position to go to Africa. We loaded on a train. Everything was loaded on train cars. All our people were on the same train, of course. I was in charge of my troop. I had to take care of them and see that everything was all right, traveling on the train. To my surprise, our worst enemy was the cold weather. You would stand out there, just a short time, and watch the vehicles on the train, and a hand would freeze. That was our worst enemy until we got away from Fort Riley. From Fort Riley, we went to California to the desert. We spent between 5 and 6 months in intensive training in the desert right out of Blithe, California. We could see the air port. I was sent from there to Paris, Texas, Camp Maxey. There we did intensive training and preparation of vehicles. We had to put them in good shape, so who ever pick up the vehicles, would have vehicles

that were usable and in good shape.

Mr. Misenhimer

You didn't have your horses any longer?

Mr. Botard

No, sir. We lost the horses when I left Kansas and went to Fort Mead, South Dakota.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, in Paris, Texas, you did more training and got your equipment ready?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. Seems like we were there 6 months or so. Then we shipped out of there to New York.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you recall when you arrived in Paris?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sometime in '43. I ended up in New Jersey. That's a training area.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did you have then?

Mr. Botard

1st Lieutenant.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in charge of a troop?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. I was in charge of D Troop of the Cavalry.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many men were in the Troop?

Mr. Botard

130 men. A troop in the cavalry is about equal to a company in the infantry.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do there in New Jersey?

Mr. Botard

Not too much. We shipped out. In about 10 days, we were gone. The ironic thing of our being in New Jersey in the staging area, was that we were loaded with all our equipment and everything and started out for England. We go to the English Channel, where it's widest, to go in and then go up into England. We encountered the submarines right there in the entrance. We had 4 battle ships with us. It was a big deal. They had put them together over some time. There were a lot of different types of units. There were a lot of different types of equipment. Battle ships went along to protect us. It was decided that we would turn around. We came back down here to get away from the submarines. Then, we lay around for about 10 days. Regrouping and then we went back. We ran into them again, but we didn't stop. We went on in. Ever since he went through a submarine attack, he didn't want to go through another one. They would drop torpedoes and your boat would almost turn on it's side. If you weren't seasick from natural causes, you would be from the submarines.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were any ships in your convoy hit by submarines?

Mr. Botard

No, sir. Not exactly. Some of them dropped depth charges and some people were swept off. The bunks were eight high.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it a passenger ship that took you over?

Mr. Botard

No, sir. It was a British built troop transport.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you know how many men were on your ship?

Mr. Botard

I'd say, close to 20,000 people.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did quite a few of them get sea sick?

Mr. Botard

Oh, yes sir. What a terrible thing that is. You have people up chucking and you had people working with mops, trying to clean up the area. As soon as they got it cleaned up, it was already back in the same condition it was before hand. It was quite an ordeal.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you recall how long it took you to get across?

Mr. Botard

It took us 17 days. That's getting out of the harbor, out of the way of the submarines and then across. It took us 5 days coming back. We came back on the Queen Elizabeth after the war.

Mr. Misenhimer

I don't want to embarrass you, but did you get sea sick?

Mr. Botard

Well, I'd be silly if I told you I didn't. It was bad, because the British were handling the ship and they believed in eating fish. So often, their meals were fish. The fish had an odor, like they'd been caught the week before. Everything smelled like fish. We had mutton, but that wasn't so bad. You could stand the mutton, but the fish was unbelievable.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall about the trip over?

Mr. Botard

No. Nothing but the anticipation by all of us. We wanted to get off of the water and get on the land. Since, we were all land people we didn't care about riding on the water anymore.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you land over there?

Mr. Botard

We landed at Portsmouth, England. That was a staging area that we were landing in.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got off the ship, where did you go?

Mr. Botard

We moved into a staging area where we took care of the needs of the individuals first, and to locate themselves and insure that we knew where the material was, where the vehicles were and all that. We had to do this in the staging area so we could begin to prepare ourselves to get ready to move out whenever they said that we were going to cross.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did your troop have a number?

Mr. Botard

Troop 4. 4th Calvary.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did you stay at this staging area?

Mr. Botard

I'd say something like 3 months. We did some more training. Not so much exercising, but training on any new equipment. A lot of the equipment we never had until we got there.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of new equipment did you have?

Mr. Botard

We had jeeps, scout cars, light tanks, heavy tanks, assault guns, mortars - both the 88's or the equivalent, 2 ½ ton trucks for hauling of equipment, personnel and food. All the troops had this equipment. The only difference in the troops was what was your main thrust. If you were an assault unit, you'd have the assault guns and so forth. If you were infantry, you had equipment that was capable of aiding the infantry.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you left there, where did you go?

Mr. Botard

If you can visualize in your mind, that water is right outside and it just gets deeper and deeper. Then you're in the English Channel. That's where we were. We were in that group of people that started in the initial thrust ... the first to come across. When we got over the English Channel the land began to come up. When we got there, there had been fighting and the air plane dropping bombs in the days before that. Everybody was equipped and we were on the jeeps and trucks and what have you. The tail pipes were straight up about 10 feet in the air. They were positioned so water wouldn't get down and kill the motor, because most of the trucks were going to be covered by water. We watched the first truck drive off the landing craft and it disappeared. We unloaded right where a bomb had dropped. I don't have any idea how deep it was, but that truck never surfaced for a while. We found where we could get some footing for the vehicles. We had personnel that staked it out. We came off of that landing craft following the stakes to the coast area there. Some of us were pinned down immediately. Others of us were not pinned down. We began to have casualties immediately. I'll never forget one officer. He said, We didn't waste no time getting in the middle of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now D Day was June 6th. How long after D Day was this? Or was this D Day?

Mr. Botard

It was about 24 hours. The second day.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, they hadn't advanced too far inland?

Mr. Botard

No, sir. We all think of it as D Day took quite a while. I think they were giving us credit for D Day.

Mr. Misenhimer

What beach did you land on?

Mr. Botard

Utah. We did every thing sort of backwards.

Mr. Misenhimer

You landed on Utah Beach. Then, what happened next?

Mr. Botard

We landed on Utah and immediately we were in contact with the Germans. We didn't make any headway the first day. After a day or a day and a half, we started moving into the interior of France. We made some strides and then broke through the defenses of the Germans and move on in. Then, an American unit, the Texas National Guard, saw that we would be relieved and that we would be given permission then to move out and see who was in front of the whole area....depth and width and power. We moved out, and lo and be hold, we ran into stiff resistance by the SS Troopers. They had the area well fortified. They just decided they didn't want anybody going through them. The thing that would catch you thoughts, was that in France, they had what we called fences rows, that would be bothering tanks moving from one area to another. They had hedges planted. They used hedges instead of fences. The hedges usually were kept pretty well trimmed and they filled up with dirt. That hedge was anywhere from a couple of feet to 4 feet high. When we got in there with our tanks, we were immobilized because we couldn't get past the hedge rows. The tank would run into the hedge row and it would automatically stop your tank. So we returned to the job of being infantry soldiers again. We became pretty well immobilized for a period of 2 or 3 weeks, until we sent all the way back to the United States and got the old bulldozers. They had been used for brush clearing for years. We got those bulldozers plus some tractors that had been thought of by some of the people. When those bulldozers arrived, that was the awakening of letting us through the fences and we went on through the country and the hedge rows.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they mount bulldozer blades on some of the tanks?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

What weapon did you carry at that point?

Mr. Botard

I carried an M 1 30 caliber carbine and a .45 pistol.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you started advancing once you got the bulldozers?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. We went down below Paris. The engineers had constructed a crossing over the river there. We crossed there. We had pretty good sailing across because we were ahead of the German forces. We had kind of slipped out and swung around to the right and then pulled to the left again. Then went on down toward, we were always headed toward Berlin. That was our desire.

Mr. Misenhimer

After you first landed, did you go up to the Cherbourg Peninsula?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. In fact D Troop. I lost control, not in a sense of inefficiency. They pulled me out of D Troop. Our Unit was all Indian, American Indian. The unit that landed and assaulted Cherbourg, was mostly all American Indians, that were serving prison terms because of the way they presented themselves and their attitudes. They were given the privilege of either being in this unit (that was on it's way to assault the Cherbourg Peninsula) or they could serve their sentences. But, they all desired to be part of the unit.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were these sentences from civilian life or from the army?

Mr. Botard

No, since being in the army. We all were of the thought that this area was heavily mined. But, for some reason, the Germans never mined that area. There were a few booby traps as they went up the cliffs to get up to the level land. I think one man was hurt, pretty severe, from a land mine. When they got back and we reorganized all the units, they were given their status as any American soldier.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the purpose of this unit?

Mr. Botard

The purpose of this unit was that we thought that this island was heavily fortified. They were told that and they were given that information. The officers that were in charge of that unit that went in there were given that

information. They expected heavy losses.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you with that unit?

Mr. Botard

No, sir. Sometimes I wish I would have been. I was picked up and put on the squadron staff. They needed another person, so they said, there's one. We'll just get him.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who was the commander you were under at that point?

Mr. Botard

Lieutenant Colonel Jack Rhodes and Lieutenant Eddie Dunn. I was on Ed Dunn's staff until he got, somewhere in the melee of us getting by Paris (we lost so many people and the burden was so great), Eddie lost his bearings. But, he regained it and he came back and retired in Fort Sam. Jack did, too. But, Jack was 2nd in command in one of the other squadrons. So they brought Jack up in Eddie's place and put Eddie down. He was in sick bay. Then Jack Blackstone and I came up to S 4 and his squadron. S 4 was a supply squadron.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about the officers' being West Point.

Mr. Botard

When I was notified that I was to leave Ft. Riley to go to Ft. Meade, South Dakota 4th Cavalry Unit, the only man in the unit was the commanding officer, General Tulley. All the other officer personnel in the unit were regular army officers from West Point. The ironic thing about this whole deal. You talk about getting harassed and, in a way, having fun and yet making it real rough on a shave tail 2nd lieutenant. I was the only officer from Texas and from Texas A & M. They had all known and had heard of Texas A & M. They had all heard of the tales that Texans have told over the time. So, I didn't get much room to breathe there at times. Sometimes, you would kind of feel that all the details and problems were given to a shave tail and especially to a shave tail from Texas. It seemed like that. They were a wonderful group of people; people that were real sensitive and would help you in any way, shape or form if they could. Especially, their regard for a newcomer to come into their area of domain

and to be a part of them. Soon disappeared and we all became very, very close. We were good friends. Colonel Jack Rhodes, who eventually became the commander of the 4th Calvary Squadron, was hurt by enemy fire, just before we got pretty close to Berlin. We carried on. By this time, it was Dunn who had gotten hurt, immediately after we landed on D Day. He had regained his composure and feelings and all and he became the commanding officer of the Squadron again. I think of Jack as a brother and not as an army officer from West Point, because of his desire to want to help you and taking into consideration of what you were up against, to give you the benefit of the doubt. Edward Dunn was the same way when he came back. Of course, I had known Edward Dunn before I got to know Jack. General Tulley, who served as commander of the Squadron for the entire term, also, before we reached the outskirts of Berlin, he was transferred to General Patton's Staff. So we lost a real ally in fighting our war, but that's the way war was. Somebody had to be used for the areas they could do the best in.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's go back to when you left the Cherbourg Peninsula.

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. We skirted Paris and then went on in to Belgium, because we had to by pass the Germans and get on over on the flank. The 1st Army was in control of that flank and we were 1st Army troops. ?????????? to do the work for them.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were attached to the 1st Army?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was Omar Bradley I believe, who was head of the 1st Army.

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. Bradley. And then along with Bradley we had — sorry. I can't call his name.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were on the flank then of the 1st Army?

Mr. Botard

We preceded on that flank until the time of the break through. At the time of the break through, it was confusion, malaise and all. The day before the break through, I was in charge (picked up again and moved and put in charge) of the reconnaissance, over our unit. We were watching and the Germans moved. They were across the Rhine River and they were moving along and we were wondering what in the world they were up to. We tried to contact. We made contact to try to capture a German soldier and get some information from him. But, we didn't do any good the first day. The second day, we got two. We brought those people in and sent them to head quarters. They were interrogated at Head Quarters. They had told their people the day before that the American soldiers were getting ready to do something because they were building. What we did is we took tanks ... we took heavy tank. We took light tanks. We took scout cars. We took 2 ½ ton trucks. We took some of the kitchen trucks. (I got hell for that.) We put them all in a column and just stayed on this side of the Rhine River. Then we went back and to our left away from the area. They told their people that we were building up an offensive, they figured. These vehicles were being assemble and so forth. And then, the next day, is when they eventually started. You can imagine the troops, being in position and all. All types of engineer troops, fighting troops, infantry troops, calvary troops, recon troops. We were notified to leave that area immediately and move to the rear, that we were expecting a thrust. That's what we did. We started taking out. The most hilarious thing I guess, that I experienced in my life time, was - we traveled all day that day, because there was no roads that specifically went from where we were the day before back to the staging area we were told to come to. We just dropped everything and picked up and moved - the shortest , quickest way. Late in the afternoon it was about 24-25 degrees weather then, so it was a cool time. We were moving the units and we couldn't move down some of the areas we hoped to because the Germans had moved in. So, we kept skirting them to get back to where we wanted to go. As we did that, we were getting closer, but roads were playing out. So we put the big tanks ahead and everybody else followed. We got almost to where we wanted to be. We didn't know where it was. We knew where we were, but we didn't know where they were. We didn't know how to go. We were told that the radio would all be canceled out. There wouldn't be any radio activity at all, but I came in and I said, Look Jack. I don't know what the hell else to do, but find out where you are and I don't know where you are. He said, Are you on road so and so? I said, Right now, that's where we are.

He said, Just keep coming. I'll meet you shortly. That's all that was said. No sooner than we got through with that, my scouts reappeared that were out in front of my unit. They came back and told me that there was a German column coming down that road on the left hand side. What do you do? Do you step out and get in a fight? I said, Well, let's just see. So, I notified everybody to send the information back to the unit and told them to get up to at least 30 miles an hour and it'd be better at 40 miles an hour. Just keep coming. If we lost them, we lost them. Well, we met that German column. That German column met us. We went down the right hand side of that road and they went down the left had side of that road. We both passed each other and never fired a shot. Of course, we did fight. Our unit lost quite a few people in that melee with the break through.

Mr. Misenhimer

The break though happened about what month?

Mr. Botard

I want to say, late January or early February.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, this was after the Bulge?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. They had broken through before.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, you all were involved in the Bulge?

Mr. Botard

Well, yes. We were involved in the Bulge.

Mr. Misenhimer

The Battle of the Bulge was in late December of '44. That's when the German offensive came through and really pushed a big hole in American line.

Mr. Botard

That's right. I made a boo boo on my dates. It was in December of '44. Eventually, then, we finally regrouped after the Bulge. We went to that town of the Rhine, where that big Ford Factory is. I didn't think I'd ever forget

that. Anyway, we crossed. We had the engineers come in and a jeep went across the Rhine River before our unit started across. Then, we started up a big hill and the air planes were there. They had gotten the information that I had and relayed back. They were there and using those napalm bombs... white phosphorous. There was a whole column of Germans, coming down the hill on the other side - the high part of the hill was on their side. Our planes dropped those bombs. We went by and the people, sitting in tanks, looked like they had been reduced in size by ---- well, they looked like 14 or 15 year boys. It just fried them right in their seats. Then we went on and General Rouges, which was one of the 1st Army Infantry tanks, got killed. We got up on the rise and had gotten over the hill, and that's when he got killed. But, we kept on going. We by passed a lot of stuff because that wasn't our mission. Our mission wasn't to fight somebody, because we didn't have sufficient man power. We wanted to just get by and find out what was in front so we could tell the people in back of us what it was going to be.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were reconnaissance or scouts?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. That's right. We opened up into a kind of plain, going toward Berlin. We weren't given the privilege to beat the Russians. No, we weren't given the privilege to go into Berlin. That was our lost cause that we wanted to do. We felt cheated by not getting that privilege, because they said that when we made contact with the Russians, we had to stop. We would not advance any further. We would not engage the Russians in fighting. There were hundreds and hundreds of German civilians that were coming down on the roads, because the Russians were back of them. And the Russians, if you can imagine, -----On this road, the people - 10 to 20 abreast, women, children, soldiers and what not, ----The Russians never waited for them to get out of the way or anything. They just drove right through them. We went to Frankfort after we got there and they wouldn't let us move. We were having little skirmishes with the Russians and so forth. Not getting along. So, they pulled us back from there to Frankfort. In Frankfort, Germany, we were pulled in. We were reorganized. We replaced people that we had lost. Then, we were waiting for information because we were to go back and regroup in some area that was not designated at that time. And, we were to go to Japan. When word came, that the war was over, the biggest part of us were in the staging area in Paris - that Cherbourg area, waiting to get our orders to go to Japan.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's go back here. Talk to me about the Siegfried Line. Did you ever cross the Siegfried Line?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. This was an unfortunate deal. We crossed the Siegfried Line. Our people crossed the Siegfried Line. We were 60 some odd miles inside the Siegfried Line. We ran out of gasoline. We had no gasoline so we could not continue to maneuver. We were dropping back slowly, trying to let the gas catch up with us. But, we were having a hard time doing that, because of the fighting and encounters that we were having and not having any gasoline. They finally just pulled us completely back and we came back on this side of the Siegfried Line. Then, we had to fight twice as much to get back across it the second time as we did the first time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any particular battles you remember in crossing the Siegfried?

Mr. Botard

No, I really don't.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you all in the Ardennes Forest?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. Ardennes Forest was close to Frankfurt, Germany. We were in the Ardennes Forest for some time.

Mr. Misenhimer

In the Battle of the Bulge, what did you all do in that?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. That was when I told you that we took those vehicles and made that circle and they saw those.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay. That was part of the Battle of the Bulge. The 101st Air Borne was surrounded around Bastogne. Were you all anywhere close to Bastogne?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. Very close. The 101st Air Borne people would fight a circle around anything or through anything. They

were very good people because they had the Air control and the radios that we could step in and talk to them. We could tell them what we were running into and they could be more accurate with their firing. In Bastogne, we had a lot of hand to hand fighting and, I'll say again, it was a bad time of the year. We had ice and snow that was anywhere from 5-6 feet in places. We had to have bulldozers push it out of the way so we could get by. Most of that Bastogne fighting was done with SS Troopers and they were a very elite group of people. They were very capable of doing what ever they wanted to do. And, they took some of ours. The 101st was even immobilized as far as the Air Force was concerned. They had to use ground troops.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, you mentioned something about concentration camps?

Mr. Botard

Oh. When we were on our way, after General Rouges got killed. We were getting in that area where trains and all were moving to Berlin. Everybody was on the retreat. The Germans were on the retreat. Our plane knocked out a troop train - they called it a troop train. Call it what you may, but the doors were locked. The people couldn't get out. They had people that to survive, they had to eat human beings and all and we tore those freight train doors open and let those people out. Then, as we went on, past those trains. That's where they went way up in the mountains and the trains had to slow down. When the air boys saw them slowing down they had their day, because they could make more accurate estimates of their firing. Dachau was this side of Berlin. I've never seen anything like it. We opened the doors for that camp. They had people lined up in piles, like we would down in South Texas, like cord wood. It was just unbelievable. Someone told me, Er, I just can't believe what I saw back there. I said, Look. What you saw. Don't let it affect you, because you and I are interested in going home. So, let us put our emphasis and thoughts behind, watching out so that we are careful. What ever we do, we do a good job of so that we can make that trip back home. Just don't worry about it. I agree with you that it's unbelievable.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you all liberate Dachau?

Mr. Botard

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now on this train. That was Jews being transported there also?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. They were going back. They were picking up people that they had taken over and loading them up and getting them out of the area, so they wouldn't be against them.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you all liberated Dachau, were there living people there also?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. A lot of them were in bad shape. They had those that were fat and sassy - SS People, Soldiers and Personnel that were carry out their orders. But, it was an area of desolation. An area that I don't know how they attempted to live their lives within the compound where they were working.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you capture any of the guards there?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. They were waiting. They were happy to turn themselves in. There was no fighting. Oh somebody would fire off a rifle, but it was over before it began.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do with the guards you captured?

Mr. Botard

They were sent back to head quarters.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you liberate any American or British prisoners?

Mr. Botard

There were a few American prisoners there in the camp, but not many.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me go back and ask you some other questions. What uniform did you wear over there?

Mr. Botard

Well, you're looking at one right here - khaki pants and shirt. Of course, wool when it was cold. We wore combat boots and the picture that you saw of me - change it from cotton to wool - and that's what we wore.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they all long sleeved shirts?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the food? How did you get food while you were there? Was it cold or hot?

Mr. Botard

Alright. I asked Jack one day, what in the world did you do now? About the time I get myself situated, you pull something like this. I'm getting tired of not having something to eat. I want something to eat. Food - that is a requirement of S4 - supply. I had 3 young boys that were mainly just looking for this food. They found the food. They would radio from headquarters to let us know where the food was. Then, we would dispatch vehicles there to pick it up. The food was good. It was C Rations all the way from D Day until we got out and around Paris and got started toward Berlin. Then our kitchen guys came in.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the front line troops? What were they getting in the way of food?

Mr. Botard

I would say all the food we received was bearable. It was good food. We may have had to use some C Rations to supplement meals, but the majority of the food that our soldiers received, was excellent.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about in the cold weather? Did they have warm clothes?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. We did not have the over coats, but your body exerted a kind of grease like because you were dirty. You didn't have a chance to take a bath every day - just wash your face and hands. It was cold, but it was suitable.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they wear the field jacket, too?

Mr. Botard

Yes, we wore the field jacket. We wore anything we could get our hands on. At times, you'd see different types of uniforms or make up or types of protection from the weather.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's go back to when you landed on the beach. What were the conditions on the beach like?

Mr. Botard

It was melee. The Germans were pretty well taken care of by the air planes. But the stunning of the surprise and all and then our people. After they got to a point of being able to see a buddy fall right beside of them and they didn't let that bother them too much, why we went right on.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there a lot of wrecked equipment on the beach?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about landing craft?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. There was just a tremendous amount of equipment, tanks, vehicles, 2 ½ tons loaded with different kinds of equipment - rifles, ammunition, mortar and so forth.

Mr. Misenhimer

When Germany finally surrendered in May of '45, where were you?

Mr. Botard

Well, there comes another time. You know it developed over time of the war, we had people who committed atrocities even Americans still somebody would do that. They had people that hadn't sent money home or anything and their folks didn't have any money. Somebody had to prosecute those people and handle the situation.

This had built up over a period of time. I was picked as one of the officers that would see to it that these people would serve their due - their sentence. They put me in that court for about 6 months. I was on that detail. I might be here this week and some where else next week - just where ever they needed me.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just all over Europe?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

And this was before the war was over or after?

Mr. Botard

It was after the war was over.

Mr. Misenhimer

The day Germany surrendered, did you hear about that?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. We heard about that and it was a period of time that just about every body went berserk. You know the funny thing about being a soldier in World War II, if I asked any soldier what was the purpose of being there that day. He'd tell you, I've got a wife and some children at home, and I want to see my children and wife taken care of and see them go to college and get a college education. They lived by that and they lived for that. I made the statement several time ----- the people in America were wonderful. They did things that were inhumanly possible in a lot of places. As far as factories were concerned and where they built the tanks and air planes, but they still didn't know what a war was. I wonder sometimes whether or not some help shouldn't have been given to the fellow that carried the weapon and they should be given a little credit by the people back home. I don't think the people back home really understood what the World War II soldier went through

Mr. Misenhimer

I think you're right. Let's see. Did you get mail when you were over there?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. I got mail and got it pretty regular.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever have the USO shows or anything like that?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. We had some of the big name shows - actors and actresses and singers - and they were wonderful. But, if you were a unit that was attached to a main body, it appeared that the main unit was a little hesitant about getting that information on down to the attached units. So, these attached units kept on with what they were doing and didn't even know about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were these in England or Europe or both?

Mr. Botard

They were in both England and during the war in Europe.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the Red Cross? Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Botard

I, personally, had no experience, but I did have people who were under my command who had experience with the Red Cross and it was very satisfactory.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the highest rank you got while you were over there?

Mr. Botard

The highest rank I got was a Captain.

Mr. Misenhimer

And how long did you get that before the war was over?

Mr. Botard

My application for Major was in, but I didn't get it before the war was over. I'll answer you like I did a few, I wasn't interested in that Major's rank; I was interested in was being able to be safe and sound and be on my way

back home.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you ever wounded?

Mr. Botard

No, sir. I never was. I got the Bronze Star for activities taking care of the entire unit

Mr. Misenhimer

What do you consider your most frightening time over there?

Mr. Botard

When I met that column of Germans coming down one side of the road and us going down the other side. I'm telling you - that was peculiar.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, that column of Germans, were they tanks?

Mr. Botard

Yes sir. They had tanks and we had tanks. They didn't shoot at us and we didn't shoot at them. At times we were 10 or 15 feet apart. Pretty close. Too close.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all ribbons did you get?

Mr. Botard

The Bronze Star. I guess, I don't know. The commanding officers were not a unit that wanted to show the world what we were or anything. We weren't issued the ribbons like a lot of people were issued ribbons. There were units, that immediately, after they entered battle, ribbons were presented. That's fine. I have no problem with that, but I do think we should have been a little more lenient about giving more ribbons to soldiers. They earned them, but didn't get them.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about battle stars? How many battle stars did you get?

Mr. Botard

Seven that I know. They're all in that book.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then, when did you finally come home?

Mr. Botard

In December of '45. That included the time that I earned in addition to combat. That's when I actually landed at Fort Sam. Because, I was given the detail of bringing all of our people out of the camp at New Jersey to Fort Sam. I unloaded them here and got them checked into Fort Sam so that everybody would get their credit. I got everybody to Fort Sam and I had a chance to become a reservist.

Mr. Misenhimer

You say you came back on the Queen Elizabeth?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that ship to come back on?

Mr. Botard

Oh, it was wonderful. It was beautiful. You could get up there on that stern and you didn't have to worry about rolling off or falling off or anything. It was a beautiful trip. We left from France. Le Havre, I believe.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard people speak of Camp Lucky Strike or something like that?

Mr. Botard

I was in Camp Lucky Strike.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, in December of '45, is when you came back and landed in New Jersey. How long were you there before you got back to Fort Sam?

Mr. Botard

About a month.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were finally released in April of '46, then?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did you have then?

Mr. Botard

I was still a Captain. I got home and I had to get in the reserves. They had me tied down in too many places, so I got in the Reserves and then I got my promotion to Major. I served 28 years in the reserve. I got a Lieutenant Colonel Rank.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you serve in a reserve unit here in Alice?

Mr. Botard

Corpus. I had the mother unit in Corpus. I had a unit in San Antonio. I had a unit in Lubbock. I had a unit in New Mexico and I had a unit in San Angelo. Those units would meet with the main unit when ever we would all come together for active duty. Then we would disperse again. Homer Dean was in my unit. Homer would remember a lot of those dates much more accurate than I do. I'm not making excuses. I know I'm wavery, but I've had a couple of heart attacks and a couple of strokes. That shakes you up pretty bad.

Mr. Misenhimer

What unit was that in Corpus?

Mr. Botard

That was the 406th. What it was, if we had a war like with Castro, I was sitting on an airplane instead of in my office in Corpus. My staff was on the air plane, too, and it was ready to go anytime they needed us. They had called us up, but they hadn't given us the go sign. We would go into an area and set up a government in that area - economic conditions and so forth. Survey your situation and set your people up so you could help the people in the area take care of themselves. It wasn't a combat unit.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got home, could you see much difference in this country?

Mr. Botard

Not really. Of course, you were interested in your family. I had a daughter that I hadn't seen her since she was born - walk into a hospital room and see her and that's all.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you over seas?

Mr. Botard

I went overseas in '43 and got home in '46.

Mr. Misenhimer

When President Roosevelt died, did you hear about that?

Mr. Botard

Yes, we heard about it. Everybody was feeling good that Mr. Truman replaced him as President, but nobody wanted to give up President Roosevelt for anybody else.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there quite a bit of mourning for him?

Mr. Botard

Yes, sir. There was. Time and again, people mourned the death - not because of the way he handled the troops and so forth - but the respect that they felt he knew what he was doing. And, he was an honest United States supporter - a patriotic American.

Mr. Misenhimer

Mr. Botard was in Troop B (Baker) of the 4th Calvary. Of the 4th Calvary Group - S 4.

Mr. Botard

I would like to comment on one direction only - Wives of the soldiers in World War II - We think that the soldiers gave up so much of his life for this country. I think it's a misnomer. I think that a lot of praise should be given to the women, who stayed home and took care of the children and saw their property taken care of, during the time of

absence of their husband. I think they deserve credit for the wonderful job that they've done.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's right. I agree with you. I'm just looking at your Christmas Dinner menu of 1942, when you were at Fort Meade, South Dakota. Quite a menu. You had fruit cocktail, oyster soup, relish, sweet mixed pickles, stuffed olives, roasted young toms (turkey), cracker dressing, giblet gravy, cranberry sauce, Virginia baked ham, mashed potatoes, candied yams, creamed peas, scalloped corn, combination salad, hot rolls and butter, pumpkin pie with whipped cream, minced pie, old fashioned fruit cup, coffee, milk, ice cream, oranges, apples, grapes, mixed candy, assorted nuts, cigars and cigarettes.

Mr. Botard

It was quite a meal. The unit chef prided himself in presenting a meal at this time of the year, because he was always under the gun, preparing meals for soldiers, especially those that are living in Barracks. So, he was putting on his show that day. It was necessary for him to see that everybody got their fill and then come back at night to finish it off.

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