

National Museum of the Pacific War

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Col. Richard R. McTaggart
United States Army, World War II
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Mr. Whitson: This interview is taking place in Menard, Texas at my residence at 902 Scruggs. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

How should we put your name?

Col. McTaggart: Richard Russell McTaggart.

Mr. Whitson: Probably the first thing that we'd want to ask you is where you were born.

Col. McTaggart: In was born on the North Ranch ten miles west of Menard on the twenty-fifth of February 1923.

Mr. Whitson: Who were your parents?

Col. McTaggart: My parents were Dr. Edwin Hamilton McTaggart and my mother was Jane Russell McTaggart.

Mr. Whitson: Where did you go to school? Did you grow up there and go to school there?

Col. McTaggart: I started school at Clear Creek, a one-room country school about a mile east of the ranch I was born on. Then at the fourth grade level, I came to Menard school. I stayed in Menard school until the ninth grade. Then I went to Schreiner Institute in Kerrville, Texas for high school. From there I went to A&M. I finished two and a-half years at A & M then my number came up for the draft. I was drafted in the Army on the second of February 1943 at Camp Wolters, Texas. I had basic training at Camp Wolters and non-commissioned officers' academy and a temporary duty at Ft. Benning for the basic parachute course. After which, coming back to Camp Wolters I was expecting to wait my turn for officers' candidate school. In mid-April of '43, a bunch of us were given our test. It's a three-hour test and it covered just about everything I'd had in school including Latin and Spanish. Frankly, I went to sleep during part of it. I didn't know why in the dickens this was. The next day at reveille I was called out, along with one other soldier in my training unit, and told we had to report to a board of officers. I wondered what I had done. We duly

reported. It seemed like there were more bird colonels than I'd ever seen in my life.

Mr. Whitson: You thought you were in trouble, didn't you?

Col. McTaggart: I walked in and saluted smartly and all that sort of thing. One of these colonels said, "Why do you want to go back to college?" I said, "I don't want to go back to college. I just came from there." All right. They asked me a few questions about how I'd scored on the rifle range and this, that, and the other. They dismissed me and I saluted smartly and thought that was the end of it. Two days later at mail call which was at 5:30 just before retreat in the evening, the company clerk said, "McTaggart, you better use this weekend to go and check out Mineral Wells, Texas, because you're not going to be here any longer." I said, "Where am I going?" He said, "You're going to Texas A&M." I said, "I just came from there." (laughs) He said, "No, you're going to A&M." Monday morning I got on the train and went to A & M. I got in there at nightfall at the railroad station and here was old Sergeant Minnis (spelling?), one of the non-commissioned cadre at the ROTC department at A&M. He said, "McTaggart, Colonel Welty wants to see you." What have I done? A little background here: I had been for a short time a reporter before I got fired on the campus newspaper. I'd ruffled a couple of feathers during my tenure so they made me an assistant editor.

Mr. Whitson: They remembered you.

Col. McTaggart: Yes. This was a good way to get remembered. The next morning I reported in to Colonel Welty. He said, "We've got this new program, the Army Specialized Training Program. It's just between us, the Navy has a program, the V-12 program. There are a lot of things that people are doing right now because we've got all the manpower we need right now. Secretary Forrestal's idea is he wants to separate out the high IQs and not get them killed off in the early stages of the war." That's the way he worded it.

Mr. Whitson: He was right.

Col. McTaggart: He said, "Now what I want to do here is we're getting all these people in and our job here is to process them and find out what their talents are and whether they are really suitable and send them off to various universities. I'm going to teach to do this in about three weeks and what I'm going to do is I want you to organize a battalion staff. You're the battalion commander." I'm a PFC. He said, "We're vacating a lot of the dormitories and you've got these places to billet these people. Sgt. Minnis (spelling?) and Sgt. McCreary are going to help you to get these people in. You know where the mess hall is

and all this, that, and the other.” I was kind of overwhelmed with it. I mean, here I am and these people are coming in. They were starting to dribble in by the end of the week. Thanks to these two sergeants who did all the work, I got everybody fed and watered and bunked down in the dormitories without any bed sheets, just mattresses. Most of them had come out of some pretty rough training areas and they were very happy to be there. We did get them tested for their various things. Began to send them off to places like Arizona State. We kept some of them at A&M that were engineering types. What they did, they had a basic engineering course for most of them. We were getting people in who had not had a chance to go to college. People with high IQs and people with aptitudes. The faculty were sorting these people out. For the basic courses, the idea was they were just going to be buck privates. They could keep their stripes and go back to their outfits or they could pull those stripes off and go to college. A number of them did seize that opportunity. Some of them I knew later in life, it really changed their lives. Some of them were lucky in that they got three semesters of college. This jump-started the ones that survived the war going to college under the GI Bill. There were a lot of college educations that came out of this program.

In my case, I wasn't sure what I was going to do. I had taken all the tests along with everybody else. There was one language aptitude test where you were supposed to translate from an artificial language into English and other sentences from English into this artificial language. I thought this was the craziest thing I'd ever done. But I had studied Latin at Shriner and I'd had one semester of Spanish at Menard High School before I got thrown out of Menard High School. The whole exercise was finishing up and I was still wondering what was going to happen to me. Sgt. Minnis (spelling?) said, “The colonel wants to see you. Looks like you've done what you were supposed to do here.” I went in to see the colonel and he sat me down and had coffee brought in. I wasn't used to this kind of treatment. Particularly, I'd always tried to avoid anything with rank on its collar. He said, “You've done a good job here.” I hadn't actually. Sgt. Minnis (spelling?) and Sgt. McCreary had done the good job. He said, “I've got a real plum for you. I'm sending you to the University of California at Berkeley for an advanced graduate school course in Serbo-Croatian area and language.” Serbo-Croatian? What in tarnation is that? “Yes, sir.” I was kind of detached when I came out of his office. Just what had I gotten myself into? Here were the train tickets. “Go down and get on the train.” Okay, I'll do that. I went down and got on the train and it took me to Houston. I had a few hours in Houston to see *Casa Blanca*. Then I got on another train heading for Oakland, California. It took four days. It was un-air-conditioned and dusty and hot. By then it was late May. Finally got to Oakland, California, and

here's Lieutenant McClain. I still remember him, a very nice chap. He picked me up and said, "Well, I've got bad news for you." I thought uh-oh. He said, "You're not going to be in the Serbo-Croatian program. That's already been filled. What we're going to do is we're going to put you in the German program." I didn't want to show how happy I was to learn that. (laughs) At the same time, I didn't want to act too disappointed because I was afraid they would put me in the Serbo-Croatian program.

In June we started this program. The faculty at Berkeley really pulled out all the stops for us. They had a distinguished group of professors. We had some very comprehensive seminars. We did participate jointly with the Serbo-Croatian program in certain respects. In some things like nineteenth-century European history and World War I, Woodrow Wilson, the Fourteen Points, Dr. Hans Kelsen who was the chief author of the Austrian constitution at the end of World War I. It was quite comprehensive and for me very much like taking a drink of water out of a fire hose. There were twenty-four students in the German program and twenty-four in the Serbo-Croatian program and twenty-four in the Japanese program and twenty-four in the Chinese program. We were all separated in dormitories and fraternity houses together. The first semester was—I still wonder how I got through it because I was hanging on by the skin of my teeth. There was a real objective for studying there because every Saturday morning you had a language test. If you flunked that test, off you went to the Oakland Army Depot to be sent as a replacement to the South Pacific. Of our twenty-eight, seventeen of us survived the three semesters and we graduated. But Cal would not give me my master's degree because I had never finished undergraduate. So, here I am with a whole bunch of graduate credits and as far as they're concerned that's fine, good-bye. We finished the program in the spring of 1944.

Colonel Welty had told me this program was sort of a holding program for high IQ types. I found out how the system was working. In April of '44, my group came to Camp Bowie, Texas, where the 13th Armored Division had just finished its preparation for overseas. We were taken right into the 13th Armored Division. Concurrently, with our coming in, and we most of us were still private first class. We got one stripe for being in graduate school. We filled into the tank battalions, the ordnance, and all the other things.

Now, let me describe a World War II armored division for you. It had a headquarters. Instead of regiments it had three combat commands—combat command a, combat command b, and combat command r or reserve. These could command and direct the operations of the various battalions. There were three armored infantry battalions. There were three tank battalions. There was one engineer battalion. There was one quartermaster outfit. There

was one ordnance battalion. The ordnance battalion, incidentally, was made up of volunteers from the Dallas-Ft. Worth area with draftees filtering in as the program went along. I was around a group of people some of them I'd known of and people who knew people that I knew. We had just settled in when we found out what we were in for.

Most of the private soldiers suddenly got orders to go overseas as replacements. D-Day was approaching. By the time D-Day got there, all the old men were gone and we, the young types, were filling in as riflemen, as tank drivers, and so forth and so on. We had a very concentrated orientation and training. In early summer we were held ready to go. Then things got sort of disorganized because we picked the hottest months and the hottest times to move all the tanks and all the rest of it on the flatbed cars on the railroad to our port of embarkation. Then we went on troop trains to a camp in New Jersey called Camp Kilmer. I actually had three days in New York City. I had been to New York City once before. I got to see *Oklahoma*. I got to see *Carousel*. I got to see a few other things there. In fact, I saw about as much as I wanted to know about New York. I didn't know later I was going to live there. One of the main things you learn sometimes is what it was like to get on the boat train, go down to Hoboken where the troopships were moving. Come up the gangplank. There were Red Cross ladies there giving you a cup of coffee as you go on the ship. Then you go down the hold of the ship and there are bunks there six levels high. The idea is to get the top bunk if you can. You've got your duffle bag; you got your field pack; you got your entrenching tool, your canteen, all the impediments that you carry. You're in an overcoat. You've got woollen underwear on and everything like that. Before you know it, the ship was underway. Then the people who were prone to seasickness become very conspicuous. Some of them suffered rather drastically. When you get up in the morning to go to breakfast, you go down a long corridor where people are being sick on the sides of you. It does things to your appetite.

I'm not a bit sure about any of the dates at all. I tried to think of some of them last night. I know that by the time we were on the high seas the Third Army had been activated and had cut off the Cherbourg Peninsula and were heading toward Le Mans and the area there. It was the breakout after the bridge hit, the Normandy bridge hit.

Mr. Whitson: Only a couple of weeks after the invasion.

Col. McTaggart: We didn't know it in my battalion but in our convoy the ship that had the division headquarters and the ordnance battalion conked out in the middle of the Atlantic and had to be towed back to Hoboken. We didn't know this.

Mr. Whitson: That may have been good or bad.

Col. McTaggart: An armored division without its ordnance battalion was not a very effective force. Whenever it was, it was pretty close to the time of the liberation of Paris when we landed in the port of La Havre which was just being developed. I remember we went out in a flat that they called Camp Lucky Strike. I don't know why they called it that. They had camps around there named after all those cigarette brands. Here we are out in pup tents out on this flat which had probably the muddiest mud I had ever encountered. Nobody seemed to know what to do with us until finally somehow the system started working. An armored infantry company, I'll give you a basic outline of that. We had three rifle platoons, headquarters, and an anti-tank platoon. Each platoon had five squads. We were transported in half-tracks which did not have armor on top and had not particularly thick armor on the sides or the front, but for its time it was a very reliable vehicle. We had three rifle squads and three half tracks. We had a machine gun squad and a six millimeter mortar squad. The anti-tank platoon had two 57mm anti-tank guns. There were three companies and a headquarters service company in the battalion.

We were all out there standing on one foot wondering just what's going to happen to us. All we knew is Paris had been liberated and everything like that. Then we got the answer. The French 2nd Armored Division, which had liberated Paris and was moving to the southeast out of Paris, needed to be reinforced with armored infantry. My company, B Company of the 59th Armored Infantry Battalion was designated to be attached to the 29th Cuirassiers Regiment in the French 2nd Armored Division. General Leclerc was the division commander. I knew no French. By this time, I was a squad leader of one of the rifle squads. I had a radio operator who knew some French. One of my riflemen knew some French although he was a Pollock.

Mr. Whitson: You're hoping their translations were right.

Col. McTaggart: I mean, here I am I know all this German. Anyway, off we went to try to catch the French 2nd Armored Division. We caught up with them. Incidentally, it was kind of adventurous finding a fuel dump. A half-track got about two miles to the gallon. We had probably a couple of hundred miles to go. We caught up with the Division between Dijon and Nancy. I have a map here. I studied that. It's not a very good one; it's too small a scale but it'll give you some idea. *Consults map.* Here's France and here is where we landed. We went looking for these people all the way down into here. We caught up with them about here around Nancy. We hadn't been shot at. There was a place called Domjevin where we finally ran into some opposition. That opposition was not where we were but it was to the north of

us. It was a German 88 battery. The 88 was actually a combination anti-tank and anti-aircraft. It was a multi-purpose gun and a very good one. I remember this one was mounted on wheels. It was kind of high and I could see it from where I came out of the village. I could tell that it was working over another one of the companies to the north of us. I had a .50 caliber machine gun and I thought, "Well, I'll throw a few slugs at that thing." I told the driver to be ready to go in reverse in case they shoot back. I don't know what happened but I think I hit a live shell because things started going off and Germans started running every which way. I could see that all of a sudden the outfit over there came out of the village they were in and were heading for it and they were not getting shot at any more. That was my first shot I fired.

Mr. Whitson: A crack shot, too.

Col. McTaggart: I could take no credit for it. (laughs) From then on we would run into pockets of resistance. I've got to tell you a war story.

Mr. Whitson: Okay.

Col. McTaggart: In Alsace Lorraine a lot of the villages are one-street villages with people on both sides. People lived in these villages and went out to their fields. We were coming in to one village. I was following the lead tank. The 28th wore red berets and they never seemed to close up the hatches on their tank and everybody was kind of sitting there on the outside. Anyway, into this village we came. I could see ahead a guy jumped out of a doorway and grabbed a bicycle. I could see he was German. He started peddling down the road. About probably a hundred yards ahead of that Sherman tank I could see the tank crew was discussing this. I thought, "Uh-oh, I wonder what they're going to shoot at him with." Because on the Sherman the assistant driver had a machine gun. It was a coaxial machine gun with the main gun. They also had a 50 caliber. What did they shoot at him with? They shot at him with a 76. They missed him but it convinced him. He threw the bicycle down; threw his helmet down. (laughs) We came up on him and here was my first real-live German. I started interrogating him and I found out that he was actually from the German-speaking area of France. He'd actually deserted his outfit and was staying with some of his relatives in this village. We had nobody to turn him over to. The French sergeant that was the commander of the tank asked me if I'd take him in my half-track. I asked him what his name was and so forth and so on. I put him in with the rest of the guys in the half-track. We kept going and I looked back and I said, "These guys are already bonding." (laughs) The German tried to talk English to them and they're trying to get-. His name was Wolfgang. I've forgotten his last name.

We kept Wolfgang until we got to Strasbourg which is on the Rhine River. We ran into sporadic resistance. Meanwhile, Wolfgang is with us. Wolfgang took to doing the laundry and everything else for the guys. We expected that we would run into quite of opposition when we got to Strasbourg, but the Germans just apparently decided they'd be safer if they just went across the Rhine. Now I don't remember what the condition of the bridge across the Rhine was. I never saw it. I had the feeling that it had probably had a span or two knocked out. What we did in Strasbourg, we occupied a French military billet, a *caserne*. The war seemed to be over. Yes, we could see Germans across the river. They didn't shoot at us, so we didn't shoot at them. By then it was late November. I don't remember what day Thanksgiving was. But anyway, here we are in Strasbourg and for all practical purposes we're in a peacetime army again. This is where we got rid of Wolfgang. We found out where his aunt lived. We took him there.

Mr. Whitson: He kind of disappeared.

Col. McTaggart: Yes, he kind of disappeared except that his aunt baked us some cookies. I mean, it was pure surrealism. This went on. The *Messiah*, Handel's oratorio was going to be in the main cathedral. Two of my guys had pretty good voices and they had been rehearsing with this choir. I mean, we'd just been shot at enough so that we kind of considered ourselves veterans. We had no casualties or anything like that. The weather was cold but it wasn't really a factor.

One morning, and I don't know what morning it was, I came out of the barracks and there was a 9th Armored Division jeep in the courtyard. There was a major in it and he asked where our company headquarters was. I took him down to see our company commander. He had some very distressing news for us. The Germans had begun a major offensive in Belgium and they were rounding up any and all stray units like us to go in to try to defend against this offensive. At the same time, there was some excitement among the French. What also was going on was that the Germans had initiated an auxiliary offensive south of Strasbourg. The Germans were still in possession of an area around Colmar.

Very quickly the French battalion commander called the officers and NCOs of my company in and told us that they were pulling out to take part in containing this offensive in the south. The 9th Armored Division had taken us over and we were going to go and try to help bolster the defenses in Belgium. We got on the road as quick as we could. We ran probably fifty or fifty-five miles an hour.

Mr. Whitson: Pretty fast for a half-track.

Col. McTaggart: Nowadays they try to run convoys at say twenty-five or thirty miles an hour. We didn't. We went all night. We went through Luxembourg and came into Bastogne which at that time was not surrounded. Went through Bastogne and up to the northeast of Bastogne. Of this area I can recall certain road signs like Houfalize, H-o-u-f-a-l-i-z-e that gave me an idea of the area I was in. Major Desobry had us—that is, they had pulled us as a platoon. They had pulled us with three infantry, three rifle squads, mortars, and machine gun squads, and one of the anti-tank guns from the anti-tank platoon. This major was in charge of I'd guess about a five-mile frontage where he was grabbing people like us and throwing us into various defensive positions. There was never any close combat involved in this. We were simply trying to slow up this German advance. A lot of the problems the Germans were having was our artillery because we'd see them come out of the woods and all of a sudden there would be air bursts all around. What Major Desobry was doing was just trying to keep these strong points that we would set up. What had happened up ahead, one of our divisions, the 106th, about two regiments of that division had surrendered. But not all their people were anxious to go into a PW camp so a lot of these guys were coming through. Some of them were just—no weapons, nothing. They were in a state of panic. Some of them you couldn't stop. They were just going to go on. Others were so damn mad that they were anxious to join up with us.

Frankly, in those five or six days we were involved in this, we got so mixed up. Some of my people were someplace else. I had some of my people. It was about five days, I guess. I don't know when Christmas was. I think Christmas was sometime during that. We were running out of ammunition. We'd already lost our anti-tank gun. We had our half-tracks taken off to haul supplies and what-not. My people were down to their last ammunition belt. In fact, I gave my belt to one guy and my rifle. I went back to find Maj. Desobry and see if I can get some ammunition. I found the medics bandaging him up. He told me that he'd already contacted his division headquarters and we were supposed head kind of north, north west and just keep going until we ran into some of the units from the north that were coming down to strike the right-hand side of the German offensive. That was easier said than done.

It was late afternoon when I got this word. I went back and rounded up everybody I could find and told them, "Follow me." I wound up with seventeen people, twelve of whom were of my platoon and the other five were guys from the 106th division. I thought the best thing to do would be to try to move at night and hold up in the daytime. By then we were hungry; we were cold. Major Desobry gave me his .45 pistol and that was all I had.

Some of the guys had their rifles but all the machine guns were gone; the mortar was gone; everything was gone. It was kind of a plateau area criss-crossed with streams. I got up on a hill and I figured this would be the best place. By then it was morning. So I placed my people in a perimeter and we stayed all day and then that night we'd move again. I didn't even have a compass. When I had given the guy my belt with the ammo, my compass was on it. It was foggy. You couldn't see the sun. My best guess was northwest and we weren't sure about the people. It was a fairly thickly settled area. We weren't sure about the people because we had heard stories about villagers tipping the Germans off where we were. Another factor--

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Mr. McTaggart: --whose job was to mess up our deployments and so forth. This was headed by an SS Lieutenant Colonel by the name of Otto Skorzeny whom I later met in Afghanistan. That's another story. This business, and I don't remember how many days, we would hold up in the daytime and move at night. One day we were in a pretty constrained area--

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Col. McTaggart: There was a hell of a lot of fighting going on we could hear. We knew that there was a lot of action going on to what seemed to be the south of us. We weren't seeing anybody until this morning that we were hold up on this rather small plateau area overlooking what looked like a road, but it was not a road. It was a firebreak. We heard things rattling. One of the guys crawled over to me and said, "There's a bunch of horses coming." I got to where I could see and yes, there was. It was a German field artillery battery, horse-drawn. Apparently, they thought this firebreak was a road. So, off they came into it. The wheels of those guns went right down to the hub. It was mud. And of all the German cussing. They were trying to get out of there. They'd go and unhitch the horses on the back guns and bring them up there. I counted sixteen horses they had hitched to one gun to try to get it out of that mud. They were the better part of half-a-day getting out of there. One of my guys thought it would be fun to shoot at them. I put the kibosh on that very quick because those guys were mad. No telling what they'd have done to us. They left.

The very next day we came to a cross-roads sign that said "Malmedy." It looked like there was too much flat land there and I decided, "No, we're going to go to this next hill to hold up." It was good thing I did make that choice because in Malmedy the Germans had captured a headquarters battery. They had executed them. We could have been a part of that. I don't know if

it was the same day or not.

The following night we kept going and I was getting a little uncomfortable because the countryside was kind of flattening out some. I'd seen some civilians, some villagers, but I didn't want them to see us. It was just getting daylight. I decided I haven't got a good place to stop, we'll just stop here anyway. I saw what looked like an organized group coming our way. I didn't have any binoculars or anything. They didn't look German. That was good enough for me. I told my guys to stay there and I took Willis Moses from Norman, Oklahoma, with me. We made our way toward them. We were probably a mile away. We got close enough and I could see that they had dishpan helmets, so I knew they were Brits. I started waving. I had a white handkerchief. I guess they were less than a quarter mile away when I was signaling to them. They went down. They were aware of this Skorzeny group behind their lines. They were afraid that Moses and I were Krauts. They motioned to me to stay there, so we waited for them to come up. One of them said, "Who are you?" I said, "We're Americans. We were cut off. We'd been moving back to try to find some Allied unit." I could tell they were real suspicious. One of them said, "Are you armed?" I said, "Yes, I've got a .45 pistol and Moses here has a sub-machine gun." He said, "Well, put those things down and you all come forward." We came to within about fifteen feet of each other and he said, "Alright stop." They've got these Enfields pointed at us. He said, "If you're Yanks, what's your name and rank?" I said, "I'm Sgt. Richard McTaggart." One of them said, "That's a good Scotch name!" (laughs) It was a battalion of, I think, the Seaforth Highlanders. I didn't have a piece of paper to write on or anything else.

They took us in. I remember the company commander was a major. I had to look up at him. He must have been 6'8". They gave us tea and sympathy and all that. We stayed with them all that day. Several other individuals showed up who were like we were refugeeing out of the combat zone. One of them was a Lieutenant Morris. I'll never forget Morris. He was one of the 106th that had sneaked out. He was one mad individual. He said there was no goddamn use in their having surrendered. He was going to tell somebody about it. Morris was good enough about finding out where some American unit was and they did send some trucks for us. They took us to the town of Spa, Belgium, which had been a rest center. We got showers. We got hot chow. We got to sleep a day and a-half. Then we started a kind of a get-lost operation to try to get back to our unit. By the time we found them, they were somewhere in the neighborhood of (?) in Normandy. They had been gathering back all these units that had been taken out of the division and attached to other forces.

We got back to Totes. I believe it's right around in here north of Rouen. That was where we re-organized. We got new half-tracks. We got new machine guns. We got blankets. We got overcoats. We got all sorts of luxuries there. It took several weeks. It was well into February before we were brought back up to the lines again. Even then, we weren't getting shot at. In fact, we came back through the old World War I area. Chateau Thierry, Belleau Wood, all of these places that the World War I veterans had talked about, Pont-a-Mousson.

By then, I had some French. What I had done was I found a wrecked school house where I found a French grammar in there and a French/English dictionary. So I was beginning to talk a little bit of French. It got into March before we had much seriousness to do. We got to the Rhine between Frankfurt and Koblenz at a place called St. Goar. We crossed the Rhine there. The engineers had put in float bridges. I was an engineer officer later in my career, but at the time I didn't trust those things at all. When we got onto the ponton bridge, I thought, "I don't like being in this half-track at all." So, I climbed up and sat on the hood. (laughs) It was real adventurous because it's going like this all the way. Somewhere about three-quarters of the way across that goddamn bridge, the engineers were on the pontons making sure that nothing was coming apart, somebody hollered at me. "Dick, what in the hell are you doing here?" I looked back and I couldn't recognize whoever it was, but I'll bet it was somebody from Menard. I don't know.

We crossed the Rhine there. We headed up this way. The Ruhr area was cut off, the industrial area on the east side of the Rhine. We got about to a place called Hirschfeld up here when we were stopped and told to come back. We were going into the Ruhr pocket. Well, we came back to Frankfurt. Then back up the Rhine here to a place called Siegburg. From there we were directed to punch through the west part of the Ruhr pocket. Our objective was Dusseldorf. In the Ruhr pocket there were probably more than a quarter of a-million German forces. The whole area was plateaus with streams cutting them. On all of these high places they had anti-aircraft 88s. But they had them placed so that they could also be used as an anti-tank. We set a record one day. We had forty tanks disabled. One day.

About the fourth day into that, the Germans started surrendering. I lost my hearing in a place called Neanderthal, Germany. Yes, like the caveman. I'll never forget Neanderthal for that reason. We had a tank destroyer supporting our platoon. It was a light tank with a 90mm gun on it. I was talking to the lieutenant that was in the tank destroyer on a sound-powered telephone. I'd heard and I thought I could see a German track vehicle and I was telling him where it was. I heard him say, "I've got it." I didn't know that the muzzle of

that thing was right over my head. So, that's why I'm wearing hearing aids now.

To make a long story short, we got into Dusseldorf and we wound up with over 250,000 PWs.

Mr. Whitson: They were everywhere.

Col. McTaggart: I mean, just two or three days after we'd secured the place. We just counted them by acres. I was beginning to get some hearing back by then when one of the people from Division headquarters showed up and said, "Where's Sgt. McTaggart?" "I'm here." He said, "We've been hunting for you for three months." "What have I done?" "You speak German?" "Yes." "You're supposed to be in the 513th Counter Intelligence Corps detachment." Okay, so I say goodbye to my buddies and I go up to Division headquarters. "Alright, take off those stripes." I put on officers' brass. "You're not an officer but you're going to be acting like one. Your job is to look for Nazi party functionaries in the area that we go through." The division is going to go from the Ruhr area down toward the Danube east of Nuremberg." We start out and there are three of us in this team. Then it became four. There was Clark McBurney (spelling?). Actually, he was a staff sergeant but he was wearing lieutenant colonel insignia. I'm a mere buck sergeant and I'm wearing 1st lieutenant insignia. By then we'd picked up my roommate from Berkeley, Doug Stephenson. Doug is 2nd lieutenant. Going through Aschaffenburg, we picked up one more guy they'd been hunting for and made him a 2nd lieutenant. That was Henry Kissinger.

On our operation all the way down to Regensburg. We weren't keeping up with the people who were getting shot at. We didn't get shot at actually until we bypassed Nuremberg and hit Regensburg. The engineers were great sign-painters. We came to this little bridge that they had put in the night before and there was this sign there that said, "The Danube, just another goddamn river." (laughs) We crossed there with almost no resistance. We headed southeast. We moved sixty miles one day, occasionally running into scattered pockets of resistance. We didn't get stopped until we hit the Isar River at a place called Plattling. The Germans had dropped a bridge there and it took us about two days there to get the float bridge equipment up there and get it in and get across.

We kept moving. I remember towns of Eggenfelden, Simbach, and Braunau, Austria, where we made an assault crossing. I didn't, but the infantry did across the Inn River there into the town of Braunau, Hitler's birthplace. That's where we finished the war.

We went on into Czechoslovakia but the war was over. We went up as far as Pilsen and waited for the Russians to come. Then somebody somewhere decided that they had better get us back. So, we came back into Germany and back into the area that we had taken before. The war was over. All of a sudden, the war is over, you know, and we're alive! It was a feeling that I can't describe. This was early May. We spent May and June in that area. Of course, our gang was busy rounding up Gauleiters and war criminals. We were making arrests. We did a couple forays into the Russian-occupied area to pick up some intelligence targets and some mapping equipment and stuff like that that the engineers wanted real bad.

In late June we were told that we were going back to the States, our division. That was the good news. The bad news is, that we were going to the Pacific. For my sins, I was put on an advance party. Again, the good news was that I would get to the States. Actually, I had a chance to spend several days at home before I went to Seattle, Washington. Seattle to Fairbanks. Fairbanks to Okinawa. When we got to Okinawa, by then I was supposed to have been commissioned but the paperwork hadn't caught up with me. I mean, really commissioned. (laughs)

When we got to Okinawa, we were brought in to see the operation plan for the invasion of Japan. It looked like an awful nightmare. The next day we were kind of asking what kind of hell are we in for this time? We hadn't really seen a great deal of combat compared to a lot of the units but we had seen enough so we knew what it was like. The next day we heard that the Air Force had dropped a special bomb. Then the next day there was over the news that there was a possibility that Japan might surrender. Several days later, that was confirmed. Now, you talk about an island that went into relaxation. It was nothing compared to the way we felt. (laughs) We always seemed to be kind of an oddball outfit.

They were looking around for volunteers. I did volunteer to go with the outfit into China. We flew to, I've forgotten the name of the peninsula that sets out in the Yellow Sea across from Korea. Then we went up into Manchuria to the town of Harbin. By then it was an OSS outfit. Our job was to disarm the Japanese. It was a railroad center. We were to put them on trains to go to Vladivostok where they'd be transported back to Japan. I don't know what happened to them. They got to Vladivostok but I don't imagine the Russians sent them home. The Russians weren't in the habit of doing that. Anyway, I managed to end my war by coming down with amoebic dysentery, hepatitis, and malaria. I don't know much of the details of how I got back to the States.

I was taken to Ft. Meade, Maryland. Johns Hopkins had a tropical/exotic disease ward. That was where I did my recuperating. That's where I met my wife. She was doing volunteer work. After I recovered, they kept me around Baltimore for a few weeks doing various things with the homeland CIC detachment. Then they asked me if I wanted to go back to Texas. I said, "Yes, I would like to go back to Texas." I was sent down to Dallas to the Security Intelligence Headquarters there. Walked in and who was commander but my old history teacher at Schreiner.

Mr. Whitson: Small world.

Col. McTaggart: Yes. He sent me to San Antonio. San Antonio sent me to the field office at Hidalgo on the Rio Grande. I had kind of a low-key job there rehabilitating German POWs who had sneaked into Mexico. They were now coming back because they wanted to get back to Germany.

Mr. Whitson: You had to sort through them to make sure.

Col. McTaggart: Yes. I did that until the last week in February when my number came up. I went back to Dallas and to Tyler, Texas, Camp Fannin where I was discharged. That was my war.

Mr. Whitson: When did you get back from the service?

Col. McTaggart: I came back from the service in the spring of 1948. I came back and went back to A&M and finished my undergraduate and got my bachelor's degree. Then Berkeley said I was qualified so I got my master's at the same time. I went to New York to enroll in a graduate program of Russian. In the summer of 1947, Verla and I got married. She was going to art school at Pratt Institute of Art in Brooklyn. She was encumbered with drawing boards and things like that so we lived near Pratt in Brooklyn. I took the subway up to Columbia in Manhattan. I did one semester of that. During that semester, the Russians blockaded Berlin and the Berlin airlift started and all that. I thought, "Hell, here comes World War III." I went down and asked about volunteering. I thought I'd never do that but it looked like the glorious post-war era wasn't going to be all that glorious. Verla went along with it.

They took me but said it would be several months before an OCS class opens for you. "What we're going to do is keep you here with the local CIC and we'll find something for you to do." What they did, they detailed me to the New York City police and I spent six weeks with them. What an experience that was. (laughs)

Mr. Whitson: What an adventure you had.

Col. McTaggart: I did part-time in the fingerprinting. I learned finger prints and all that sort of thing. Then they brought me out to 1st Army Headquarters to get back in the Army again. I went to Ft. Riley, Kansas in the fall of '48. I finished OCS in April of '49. Here I am a genuine second lieutenant trying to (*static on tape*). By that time, all the Russian nonsense in Europe had all subsided. Everything's hunky-dory and I'm on orders to go to Germany. Here I am; I'm stuck again. I did go to Germany. I found that our Army there was not exactly a first-rate fighting force. After the war the draft is over and we tried a volunteer Army but we weren't getting the best people. Most of the wartime people that stayed in were the people who couldn't hack it in civilian life. So, the officers and the NCOs weren't top-flight by a long shot.

I remember getting to this engineering battalion, by then I'm an engineer, 54th Engineers, and I was assigned to C company of that battalion. There were just two officers. Myself and the captain, a West Point graduate by the name of Otto Steinhardt. Otto was a brilliant man but he had no feel for command at all. The troops hated him and they thought if they could get rid of him since I had been an enlisted man things would probably be nicer. What they did, they ran the VD rate up and sure enough, he was relieved. I wound up commanding the company. By then, I was mad as hell. So what I did as soon as I took over the company, I took them out in the field. I kept them out there six weeks. I kept them putting in a float bridge and taking it out. I kept them doing every engineering task, every dirty work I could think of. I was isolating who were the eight balls, who were the trouble-makers, who were the crooks, black marketeers, and what not. I worked up the paper work on all these guys so that they could be discharged as undesirable. But it cost me about, I'd say, one-seventh of the company. But I had people left I could kind of rely on. I started turning it into a team.

About this time, we were told that anybody that's on active duty who wants to leave active duty, can do so. I thought this was the kind of an offer I couldn't refuse. I thought I could get my doctorate at Tubingen University. I still had my GI Bill. A hundred-and twenty-five bucks U.S. in Germany at the time had a lot of purchasing power. Verla was kind of keen, too, to get some more art school. I just about had all this set up when Korea broke out. Of course, there was nothing of that sort.

I did a couple of turns in Korea. Back to Germany once. When the Korean War ended, I went to French Indo-china on a survey team to see what we might do with the French. I was a 1st lieutenant and I was thirty years old. When I came home, the drought was on. It took me about forty-five minutes

looking over my place to see that I couldn't make a living. I contacted the, excuse the expression, University of Texas Law School and got myself admitted. I called the Army to ask if they could release me early so I could catch the spring semester. They said, "Well, just a minute." This guy in personnel said, "I was just looking over your records. How would you like a regular Army captaincy and a chance to go to law school on the Army at Penn?" "Or," he said, "you can take this provisional assignment with the Army Map Service. If you have a successful competitive tour, they called it, you'll be sent to graduate school." I couldn't make a living in Menard County. I could see with three years of law school. I'd be thirty-three years old by the time I came out. I'd have a starvation period to go through. That was going to be like ranching. So, I said, "Sign me up."

I went to the Army Map Service and it was a fascinating tour. We were just getting into the computer business at the time. We had a UNIVAC computer that took up the top floor of a fairly large building in northwest Washington. Vacuum tubes, clatter, clatter, clatter, and all that. We had a crew running it that were mainly mathematicians, people that later on went to NASA when NASA was formed. A Dr. O'Keefe, whose son is now the head mogul at NASA. They were a very unworldly lot. They were great mathematicians but they weren't very practical. Of course, this was before satellites and what we had was a program of teams out all over the world with a radio and telescope. What we were trying to do is get an accurate picture of the actual shape of the earth. We knew we were going to go into guided missiles. The earth is not exactly as even as it looks. What these guys would do is they'd wait until a star went behind the moon and they'd radio the time. We'd get it from all over and Dr. O'Keefe and his crew would pile it into the UNIVAC and things would go clack, clack, clack. It was a wonderful two years.

By the time it came time to leave and go to graduate school, I'd decided that my strong suit was area and language. They took me for a graduate program and the University of Pennsylvania specializing in Southeast Asia, the Hindustani area and language. This involved everything from Afghanistan to Burma. Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Burma, Ceylon, and India, of course. That was very much like the Berkeley program. I came out of that in 1957. Went to Pakistan and served two years there in various jobs. The fascinating one was Peshawar where we were building the airstrip that the U-2 reconnaissance planes took off from. During that time, I took a vacation and went to Afghanistan.

Mr. Whitson: Kind of an unique vacation spot.

Col. McTaggart: Yes, vacationed in Afghanistan and I fell in love with the place. After that

was over, of course I had to come back and pay the Army back for all these wonderful tours. I went into the Pentagon as an area officer for Southeast Asia. This was the time that Vietnam started hotting up. I spent four years in the early stages of the Vietnam thing. During that time I never served a full tour in Vietnam but I went over on several temporary duty things. It was pretty easy for me actually because I had been there at the end of the Korean War. The normal tour was supposed to be three years but I was held over a year.

Then I had to get out of there. I was completely burned out. They did agree to let me go to Korea. I had an engineer battalion in Korea. I built roads; I built dams; I built any damn thing that I could get my hands on for a year. I came back and I was immediately reassigned back to the Pentagon. I was assigned as special staff officer assistant to the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, General Carroll, three stars. My job was to collect everything that went on overnight and come in at 7:30 to Gen. Carroll's office and tell him what catastrophes had occurred in Vietnam. I did that for a year. Then I was selected for the Command and General Staff College at Leavenworth. Not the penitentiary.

I did that and then I came back to the Pentagon. It was just about the time communist China was beginning to bubble over. The great proletarian cultural revolution. They wanted to make up a team like the one they had on the Soviet Union for China. They asked if I would take it and I did. I had that for three years. At the end of three years, I'm pretty well burned out on that one. It was a fascinating thing. Just like Vietnam was although it was a (?).

I was selected, instead of going to the Army War College, I would go to the State Department's equivalent. So I went there and did that as an exchange student. Then they told me, "We're looking for somebody to take the job as defense attache in Afghanistan." I called Verla and said, "How would you like to go back to Kabul?" She said, "When do we start?" So, I had a short course in the Persian language. I knew Urdu and I knew some Pashtu. The vocabulary is pretty common.

I wound up in Afghanistan in the summer of 1970 and I served three years there. While I was there, I had the additional duty of being chairman of the International School which had about the same numbers-wise enrollment that Menard has. High school and grade school. They were Americans. They were members of the diplomatic corps. They were aid workers' kids. Dr. Red Duke was the embassy doctor at the time.

Mr. Whitson: I didn't know that.

Col. McTaggart: He's crazy as a pet coon. (laughs)

Tape one, side b ends

Tape two, side a begins

Mr. Whitson: For you as a youngster, what was the most overwhelming? Getting on the ships or getting to Europe?

Col. McTaggart: On the ship going up the gangplank was kind of tough.

Mr. Whitson: Kind of final almost.

Col. McTaggart: For everything else, it seemed like I had already kind of—you know, once you go up the gangplank then you get into a different outlook.

Mr. Whitson: While you were talking, when you all were sitting in Okinawa waiting to invade Japan that was probably a very stressful time.

Col. McTaggart: That looked bad. That really did. What it looked like was just the worst place in the world to put an armored division. I could see tanks bogged down. I could see fanatical resistance and all the rest. It didn't attract me very much.

Mr. Whitson: Is there anything else you can think of that you'd like to include?

Col. McTaggart: Not really. As I was saying before you had the tape on, I'm sure I've forgotten a great deal. Day-to-day things and stuff like that. The Belgian thing was also concentrated. I don't remember sleeping. I don't know how many days it was. I don't know when Christmas was. I don't know when New Years' was.

Mr. Whitson: There's nothing else I can think of.

Proof

Bonnie Day Rush

August 3, 2011

Dublin, Texas

Tapes 1369 a and b