

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

ARLOS AWALT

This is Ed Metzler and today is the 6th of July, 2006. I am interviewing Mr. Curley Awalt. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this cite. Let me start out by thanking you Curley for spending the time today to share your experiences with us from World War II. Why don't we get started by having you introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about your early childhood.

MR. AWALT: My name is Arlos Awalt, my nickname is Curly. I was born in 1925 up north of Brady, graduated from high school at McCulloch County and immediately after my graduation I was drafted into the army at the age of eighteen. I was inducted into the army August the 25th, 1944.

MR. METZLER: So you came right out of high school and went right into the army. Is that right?

MR. AWALT: Yes, sir.

MR. METZLER: Did you volunteer? Did they draft you?

MR. AWALT: They drafted me.

MR. METZLER: Okay. Where did you have to go to be inducted?

MR. AWALT: Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio.

MR. METZLER: Now, did you have any brothers and sisters?

MR. AWALT: I had a brother in the service and I had a sister. At that time she was still at home. She now lives in California.

MR. METZLER: Tell me about your parents. What did your dad do for a living?

MR. AWALT: They were farmers.

MR. METZLER: Okay.

MR. AWALT: During the depression years it was a rough time. It was even harder when all of us had to go into the service because all the work fell back on the parents. Then the rationing came along which made it much more of a burden on the families back home. Everything was rationed that you needed, you might say.

MR. METZLER: Tell me about what happened when you went in. You went to Ft. Sam and got inducted and then tell me what happened next.

MR. AWALT: I stayed around Ft. Sam for about five days and then they put us on a train and shipped us to Camp Wallers at Mineral Wells, Texas, for training. Then we were supposed to have seventeen weeks of basic training, they run us short, run us through in eleven weeks. We finished our final day in basic training with a twenty-five mile march. They had a troop train waiting for us from Ft. Worth.

MR. METZLER: Didn't waste any time, did they?

MR. AWALT: No furloughs.

MR. METZLER: No furloughs at that point.

MR. AWALT: Then they had the train waiting for us in Ft. Worth and we went directly to Ft. Meade, Maryland, stayed there for two days. Then they had another train waiting for us and we boarded and went down to New York harbor and boarded the ship.

MR. METZLER: Had you ever been out of Texas, out of the county you were born in up to that point?

MR. AWALT: I had been out of the county but not out of the state.

MR. METZLER: So what was this like to a young fellow like you?

MR. AWALT: It was a new world altogether. I was completely lost.

MR. METZLER: You were lost. So here you are on this ship sailing out of New York harbor.

MR. AWALT: It had taken us seven days to cross went in between Ireland and England. The particular England that we crossed the sun was shining brightly on the white cliffs of Dover. I can remember that very distinctly. When we landed at Liverpool they again had a troop train waiting for us. We went down through England to South Hampton. They had another boat waiting on us. We went on the boat, went out in the English Channel and they dropped anchorage. By then it was raining and freezing and snowing. I don't know what the temperature was but...

MR. METZLER: This was 1944 then, is that right?

MR. AWALT: Yes, sir. Well, it was in the fall.

MR. METZLER: Where did you land on continental Europe, was it France?

MR. AWALT: Le Havre. On this second boat that we were on they brought amphibious boats out and that's how we landed in Europe. We hadn't had rest or sleep and very little food for at least two weeks. So they took us through Le Havre about midnight.

MR. METZLER: Now at this point, are you already assigned to a unit or squad?

MR. AWALT: No, I'm still unassigned.

MR. METZLER: You're unassigned at this point, okay.

MR. AWALT: But within the matter of a week I would be assigned to the 106th Infantry Division. We never did get to ride, we walked everywhere we went. My whole time in the service I never did ride in a jeep or airplane. I was over there for nineteen months and never did see a person that I knew or never did talk to a person on a telephone.

MR. METZLER: Were you pretty good buddies at this point with some of the other guys you'd been through training with?

MR. AWALT: No, I was a lone ranger until I got really attached to my division in the front lines. Then you become pretty close with all of them, you have to.

MR. METZLER: Yeh, that's right you have to. How did you get from Le Havre to England? Were you riding on an army truck?

MR. AWALT: No, a train from World War I, trains 40 and H. Trains 40 and H means forty men and 8 horses from World War I. They were very rough riding and no seats so they gave us two bales of hay to put in each car. We'd sit on that, if we could get a little sleep that was our bed.

MR. METZLER: You didn't really have eight horses in there with you?

MR. AWALT: No, but that's what they called them, 40 and H.

MR. METZLER: So they just crammed you into those box cars and gave you a bale of hay to sit on.

MR. AWALT: No, we spread it out and we sat on the floor.

MR. METZLER: But the food was good, right?

MR. AWALT: No.

MR. METZLER: At this point what are you doing?

MR. AWALT: From then on we had rations every day, that's all we had, C rations and K rations. Needless to say I haven't eaten one since.

MR. METZLER: I bet not. When you were on the troop train going inland, did you have any idea where you were headed or what your duties were going to be?

MR. AWALT: No, no idea whatsoever, we were in the complete dark where we were going and what would be assigned to but we had all completed every phase of this training in eleven weeks. We had to learn the operation of every infantry weapon so whatever they put us in in the infantry we were capable of doing it.

MR. METZLER: So you'd been trained on almost all the possible assignments.

MR. AWALT: Yes. They assigned me to H Company 424th Regiment, the 2nd battalion 424th Regiment. H Company was the heavy weapons company; I was in the 81 mortars. We had to carry everything cause most of the time vehicles couldn't get to us.

MR. METZLER: Now so here you are on the troop train, now you've been assigned to your squadron unit battalion etc., where did you get off the train, where was your first...

MR. AWALT: Somewhere in Belgium, I don't remember the exact point, but we were in several Belgium towns in the battle and around afterwards shortly after.

MR. METZLER: Were you there before the Battle of the Bulge started?

MR. AWALT: No, I was in replacement in there.

MR. METZLER: So you were some of the relief that got in to help stem the tide. So you're at a camp of some sort there in Belgium or were you in a foxhole, tell me about this.

MR. AWALT: Well, we had some billeting, very little but we didn't last but a day or two until they sent us right on up to the front lines right in the middle of it. We were never at one place any length of time.

MR. METZLER: So they must have filled you in on what was going on when they sent you up to the front lines.

MR. AWALT: Well, they assigned me to the mortars. I had no choice in it which was a good choice for me.

MR. METZLER: So how many in your group were assigned to a particular mortar?

MR. AWALT: Seven or eight. But we had to carry our ammunition as well as the mortars. The mortar weighed a hundred and thirty-six pounds. It broke down in three parts but each piece was a pretty good load plus the ammunition.

MR. METZLER: How many rounds did you take with you, do you remember?

MR. AWALT: All we could carry. Each man had a thing over his shoulders with three in the front and three in the back plus their packs.

MR. METZLER: Tell me again which mortar this was, describe it to me again.

MR. AWALT: Eighty-one mms.

MR. METZLER: Big ones.

MR. AWALT: Yeh. It had a range of over 3,000, 3600 yards.

MR. METZLER: Two and a half miles. Okay, so you're headed in with your mortar company and what is your particular assignment on that crew, are you a loader or does everybody just molt and pass?

MR. AWALT: No, we had a gunner and one was the person that dropped the shells in the tube that the gunner had the top on. He had the instrument so we could direct where our forward that the Germans was calling for shot.

MR. METZLER: How did you maintain communication with the forward observer?

MR. AWALT: Telephone on the stack, big roll of telephone wire. Most of the ??? was the radio, portable radio of any kind there. Every one of us was assigned a medic, I mean each squad had a medic assigned to it also. Most of the time our side ??? was a forty-five colt. We just had no room to carry an M-1 rifle or anything like that. Sometimes we had a ??? machine or breach gun but they were all small in structure. We just didn't have room on our person to carry them.

MR. METZLER: So when you went in to action you were basically marching forward until you stopped and set up the mortar, is that correct?

MR. AWALT: Yes, we'd have to get prepared to dig a big round hole about three feet deep to put a mortar in there to sort of protect it from the weather and the enemy force. We had to more or less live in that hole also. We didn't have any tents or anything.

MR. METZLER: So at this point you were in eastern Belgium, is that where you set up?

MR. AWALT: We were in the Ardennes Forest. There's two ??? there set up in the ???. An ??? in our way of thinking is mountain. There was a plateau between the two ??? and that's how the Germans slipped in on us through the plateau between the two ??? and they slipped in almost undetected you might say. When we would get settled down we would fire twenty-four hours a day. At night we would shoot flares to fixed targets such as a railroad bridge or railroad stations, anything that would stop the forward movement of the enemy force.

MR. METZLER: So at this time we're still trying to stop their forward movement 'cause they're still penetrating westward.

MR. AWALT: Yes. After December the 26th, 1944, the clouds cleared, the sky was blue and the sky was actually black with our war planes. That was one of the turning points in the Battle of the Bulge. Some of these planes would make a sortie, come over us, go into Germany, drop the bombs, go down south to Italy and Sicily, back to England, refuel, reload their ammunition and make another sortie. Some of them would make three a day.

MR. METZLER: That's a lot of flying.

MR. AWALT: B-17s, B-24s, B-25s and B-26s and P38s mostly.

MR. METZLER: When you were first set up and you were firing the mortars, were you subject to fire from the Germans? Did you have any incoming shells and this kind of things?

MR. AWALT: We were subject to their mortar fire just like they were from us. Our artillery behind us they were shooting over us, and then we were shooting over the riflemen up in front of us. The mortars was a very destructive weapon as well as the artillery.

MR. METZLER: Did you ever get messages back that you'd successfully hit a target?

MR. AWALT: Oh, yes, Our Squad Leader kept us informed on how we were doing and we put little sticks like this along the bank and each one of those he's say move over one peg.

MR. METZLER: I see, the weapons with firing system, huh?MR. AWALT: Yes. At night we'd have a flashlight with all light blocked out except a little ole bitty slit. They'd hold that behind the stick and that's what determined the aim on.

MR. METZLER: One stick to the left and one stick to the right. So how cold was it while you were there?

MR. AWALT: We don't know. It was the coldest winter they'd ever had. I do know that it was cold enough that our canteen of water on our belt would freeze solid. Every thing was frozen. The ground was so hard you couldn't dig a foxhole.

MR. METZLER: I was going to say, how did you dig a hole for your mortars?

MR. AWALT: Well, it took about a day to dig it with all crews. We fired as long and as far as we could before we had to move forward.

MR. METZLER: Oh, are you constantly moving forward or frequently?

MR. AWALT: Yes, sir. If we pushed them back we had to stay up with them otherwise it would be murder for our riflemen in front of us. We had to give them that support.

MR. METZLER: Did you ever go through any of the towns or villages there?

MR. AWALT: Oh, yes.

MR. METZLER: Tell me about that.

MR. AWALT: When we would go in the residents would move out. They were for fear of life they naturally would move out. So we might get one night's billeting in their homes where it was actually warm for one night.

MR. METZLER: Where you actually had the opportunity to stay in some of the homes for a night at a time. What were their homes like?

MR. AWALT: Well, they were just typical German homes like simple. They were not mansions or anything like that. They were just common living homes and were comfortable for them.

MR. METZLER: What about some of the local people? Did you get to talk to them?

MR. AWALT: No, we couldn't. It was no fraternization, we could not talk to them. We could not talk to anyone except a known GI. If they caught you talking to especially the Germans you could be up for court martial.

MR. METZLER: Yeh, I had heard that there was quite a few Germans who put on U.S. army uniforms and were aspirating allies to a simple trace of lines, did you ever run into that?

MR. AWALT: I really didn't. We were further back. We were probably a hundred yards back from the riflemen. They were the ones that would have caught them had they tried to get through.

MR. METZLER: So who was your commanding officer? Tell me about your leadership there.

MR. AWALT: Well, we had a captain that was a company commander I don't remember off hand what his name was but our division commander was Major General Allen Jones. They had regimental posts set up all along behind the headquarters of course.

MR. METZLER: Did the officers have experience in combat or were they...

MR. AWALT: Very little, we were known as the greenest team in Europe. It tells you that in that book right there. We were the greenest best and the Germans knew that so that's one reason they hit us first. They knew we were the greenest division in Europe.

MR. METZLER: And they weren't green. They were really...

MR. AWALT: No, they were well experienced. A lot of them had come from the Eastern front fighting the Russians and they were well experienced. A lot of the SS troopers were in with the ones in the Bulge and they were the main ones.

MR. METZLER: Did you ever get exposed directly to any of the Germans or see any of the prisoners of war?

MR. AWALT: Oh, we had thousands and thousands of them after the war, prisoners of war.

MR. METZLER: I'm talking about during the battle of the Bulge.

MR. AWALT: No, like I say, we were back, we could catch flak from them but we were not facing them you might say.

MR. METZLER: So how long were you out there in the field in your frozen condition, until December the 26th I guess when things changed?

MR. AWALT: Well, the battle started December the 16th and ended January 25th which is approximately six weeks and that's how long we were out there.

MR. METZLER: So after the skies cleared and the air force could come into action, how did things change for you guys?

MR. AWALT: It just made it possible for us to advance because the bombers were wiping out their back force you might say and reinforcements to the back of them. Our bombers, both bombers and fighters, were cleaning all that out for us. So they had to retreat back because they had nothing coming to relieve them, so they had to start retreating back.

MR. METZLER: So you guys started moving forward at that point?

MR. AWALT: Yes.

MR. METZLER: And continuing to fire the whole time, huh?

MR. AWALT: Yeh. The battle lasted for six weeks and of course we could not build a fire so we didn't have any hot food for six weeks. We ate C rations and K rations for six weeks, cold, too.

MR. METZLER: And really cold, too, everything frozen.

MR. AWALT: There was a ??? bar that came in one of the rations, think it was a K, chocolate bars. Had to take a trench knife and shave it into a canteen cup and have cold chocolate instead of hot chocolate. We would have to put one of the little pills like an aspirin in the canteen to purify the water.

MR. METZLER: Right, probably a chlorine tablet.

MR. AWALT: I forgot what they called it now.

MR. METZLER: What about casualties in your battalion?

MR. AWALT: Well, I have a roster over at my house of the company before we started and here is a picture of us standing on the Siegfried lines and you can see the dragon's teeth here that we're standing on. This is me right there.

MR. METZLER: We're making reference here to some photographs that Curly has of his group on the Siegfried Line. He's in the back row of the photograph. So this is after everything was over.

MR. AWALT: Yes, sir, that was our company roster showed us with a hundred and fifty-nine and there's thirty-eight or thirty-nine left.

MR. METZLER: So thirty-eight out of a hundred and fifty-nine, so the rest of the guys were either wounded or killed.

MR. AWALT: Or captured.

MR. METZLER: Most of that from enemy fire or artillery?

MR. AWALT: Most of it was shrapnel. Shrapnel was our biggest hitting ??? because we were further back from direct rifle fire. Normally if we could we would shoot over a little mountain where they couldn't shoot directly at us. It had to come from above and drop on us. This master sergeant right here just returned to us from the hospital in England after his being wounded. He'd just returned to us.

MR. METZLER: Well, he survived, though.

MR. AWALT: Yes.

MR. METZLER: So what does it sound like when a mortar round is coming in from the German lines toward you guys?

MR. AWALT: It whistles.

MR. METZLER: It whistles?

MR. AWALT: Yes. Then they had another thing that was called a screaming mimi.

MR. METZLER: I've heard of that. What is that?

MR. AWALT: Well, it's a series of about sixteen tubes and they were designed to scream not so much destruction as it was to lower your morale.

MR. METZLER: Psychological warfare.

MR. AWALT: Yeh, it sounded like women screaming. If you didn't know what it was you'd start running.

MR. METZLER: So you heard that a few times.

MR. AWALT: Yes. We had an armored division on our left that captured one of those and when they would capture enough shells they'd save them up and they'd shoot them all off.

MR. METZLER: Send them back. Give them a taste of their own medicine.

MR. AWALT: Yes.

MR. METZLER: Did you ever see one of those?

MR. AWALT: Oh, yes.

MR. METZLER: What do they look like?

MR. AWALT: Well, they're mounted on a tripod just like a mortar.

MR. METZLER: A bank of them.

MR. AWALT: Yeh, there's sixteen and they're real fast like a screaming woman running through the forest.

MR. METZLER: So was your clothing sufficient for that cold weather?

MR. AWALT: No We had one pair of pants, one shirt, one pair of long underwear, our helmet and helmet liner, and a pair of socks and boots and a pair of galoshes and a raincoat and that's it. If they could they would pull us back maybe every two weeks or something where we could clean up a little bit.

MR. METZLER: Did you get back and clean up a little bit a couple of times?

MR. AWALT: Yes, they would have, of course it was raining and snowing and freezing. They'd have two big tents set up there; they would be probably thirty-five feet apart. You'd go in the first one and undress, then you'd run across to the next one through that snow and cold and freezing for your shower. There'd be another water bag hanging there, you'd soap up and then push that little button down there and get the cold water.

MR. METZLER: No warm water, huh?

MR. AWALT: Oh, no.

MR. METZLER: Cold water and everything is snow and ice all around you.

MR. AWALT: We would run back to the other one back through the snow and ice to get us other clothing. They might have lasted two weeks or might have lasted a month before we'd get another set. We must have smelled bad. You don't know whether the smelling bad was me.

MR. METZLER: Everybody smelled the same so what does it matter. I'll bet you've not taken any more cold showers.

MR. AWALT: No, I don't want them.

MR. METZLER: Oh, my. Did people get frost bite, pneumonia, tell me about that?

MR. AWALT: Oh, yes, I was in the front line hospital twice, once with pneumonia and once with my feet. I ended up having frost bite on both feet and both hands. I still carry it.

MR. METZLER: Does it still bother you?

MR. AWALT: Very much.

MR. METZLER: How does it bother you today?

MR. AWALT: Hurt, burn, sometimes I feel like I could have my feet on a bucket of coals and they wouldn't burn any more than they do. Then other times they're so cold I can't get them warm.

MR. METZLER: All of that sixty years later.

MR. AWALT: Sixty-one years.

MR. METZLER: How did they treat you for frost bite back then?

MR. AWALT: There's nothing they can do for it. The nerve endings were frozen, nothing they can do for it. Neurologists over at the hospital told me, "I'm sorry there's nothing I can do for you, just take more Tylenol or something." I said, "No, I'm not

going to do that I'm not going to get addicted to something." So I just suffered with it. It's getting worse. Days now it just tires me, it hurts to stand for any length of time.

MR. METZLER: Okay. Strictly your feet then that are bothering you.

MR. AWALT: My hands don't bother me as bad as my feet do. I had a big hearing loss also. When we dropped the shell in that mortar that shell would come out and all that concussion would come right in the ears and we had no hearing protection at all, nothing. And so I have a great hearing loss. I've tried hearing aids but they don't seem to help me.

MR. METZLER: And the pneumonia. Tell me what did they do for that? Did you just kind of wait?

MR. AWALT: They kept me in there one day with it, filled me full of meds or something and sent me back to my station. Same way with my feet, they didn't even keep me overnight. You've got it, we can't help you, go back to your position.

MR. METZLER: So now we're pushing the Germans back and you and your Company are continuously progressing headed towards Germany. Okay, let's pick up the story and tell me what happened.

MR. AWALT: Well, we just kept pushing them back and finally on December the 26th they declared the battle over. That was not the end of the war, so we kept on fighting the Germans in northern; they were not as severe as they were in the Battle of the Bulge.

MR. METZLER: The Battle of the Bulge actually ended sometime in January.

MR. AWALT: January 26, 1945.

MR. METZLER: So all of that was still before you actually got to German soil then. This was all being fought on...

MR. AWALT: Belgium and Luxemburg.

MR. METZLER: Right. Describe the terrain, was it hilly, wooden, open...

MR. AWALT: Well, it was hilly right around St. Vith and St. Lowe, Bastogne Normandy where the fighting took place, it was all kind of mountainous.

MR. METZLER: Lots of woods, heavily wooded?

MR. AWALT: Yes, Ardennes forest similar to our David Crockett forest (several words typist could not understand) We had to cut pine trees in a lot of instances before we could get our trucks through and most of the time we were walking though. When the snow started melting in the springtime I've seen our six x six trucks with the steel wheels on the front axles and, of course the sixty six on the backs, the lowest gear you could walk and stay up with and they were going through snow and mud I guess close to a foot deep.

MR. METZLER: Did you see any knocked out German equipment as you advanced?

MR. AWALT: Oh, yes.

MR. METZLER: Tell me what you saw.

MR. AWALT: Well, their tiger tanks, their 81 artillery weapons and all type of sniper weapons and their handguns.

MR. METZLER: Sniper weapons, like what?

MR. AWALT: Just what the snipers used. They could shoot a long distance with them.

MR. METZLER: Did you have any trouble with snipers as you...

MR. AWALT: No, we didn't.

MR. METZLER: Fortunately the guys up front took most of them out, huh?

MR. AWALT: The Germans were down to where they had to not sacrifice anyone but the ones on the front lines. They had to have everyone on the front line fighting as hard as they could to keep us from pushing them.

MR. METZLER: I understand a Tiger tank is a pretty big thing.

MR. AWALT: It was much larger than our Sherman, and the 88 weapon they had just a few years back was recognized as the most famous weapon of World War II.

MR. MERZLER: German 88, 88mm.

MR. AWALT: Yeh, they could shoot at you point blank, anti aircraft or artillery. It was very wicked. Their gunners on these 88 weapons, if they got zeroed in on you had better get down on your knees and start talking.

MR. METZLER: Now during this period of time, you and your buddies are kind of banding together.

MR. AWALT: Yes, we're having an annual reunion October the 9th through the 14th up in Louisville, Kentucky. I'm hoping to get to go. If one of my sons can go with me and help me drive, I'll go. I want to go because the last one I went to was in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and it was very enjoyable.

MR. METZLER: How long ago was that?

MR. AWALT: About five years ago. They have them all over the East coast over in there, the 9th Division, 116th Division is having their reunion about the same time and it's in New York and New Jersey.

MR. METZLER: That's a long way.

MR. AWALT: Yes, it is.

MR. METZLER: Maybe you ought to have one in Fredericksburg sometime.

MR. AWALT: Yeh, Luckenbach or somewhere.

MR. METZLER: Just somewhere close by, or Kerrville. A lot of them have them in San Antonio.

MR. AWALT: Well, you have to put in, a city has to put in for them about five years ahead of time but they still have good attendance and the reunions are very enjoyable. They have real good side trips for us.

MR. METZLER: So did you have any particular buddies that you got close to?

MR. AWALT: Yes, had one who was my best front line buddy. His name's Curtis Lindsey; he lives in Waco. He's deceased now. The last time I talked with him he was ninety-three years old. He was raised over near Waco and he had two small children and he owned a dairy. They still drafted him when he was nearly thirty years old.

MR. METZLER: Yeh, he would have been one of the older guys.

MR. AWALT: He's about twelve years older than me.

MR. METZLER: He was the pappy of the group, huh?

MR. AWALT: Well, he was one of the guys that everyone liked. He was just a good leader for everyone even though he wasn't high in rank or anything but he was high in morale.

MR. METZLER: So you were closing in on the Siegfried Line when the war was over, is that correct? Tell me about when the war was over.

MR. AWALT: The battle we had crossed the Siegfried Line. We were up at Cologne in that area on the Rhine River.

MR. METZLER: Let's pick up then toward the end of the Battle of the Bulge. What was the last action...

MR. AWALT: We got where we could more or less not be on our toes so hard knowing that we could walk around freely. We were not having to fire as much ammunition and wasted less. We were always running short of ammunition and fuel.

MR. METZLER: How were you re-supplied?

MR. AWALT: Well, they would get the supplies at Entwerp off the ship. That was the only port of supplies and that's what the Germans were trying to do cut us off from that. They failed, of course, consequently the Germans running out of fuel and supplies also and it was just more or less a softening up point on both sides. We had had enough of it.

MR. METZLER: Both of you were getting worn down.

MR. AWALT: Yeh, it's one of those things that you just got tired of cause being out in continually bad weather for twenty-four hours a day with no hot food and no billeting you didn't even have a tent to sleep in.

MR. METZLER: How did you hold up under all of that?

MR. AWALT: I don't know. If we were not on a draw we tried to find a pine tree that artillery had shot the top out of it. Then we'd gather the branches and put them on top of the snow, get in our sleeping bags, use your steel helmet for a pillow, wake up the next morning and be covered up in snow.

MR. METZLER: Snowed on you during the night. Did you see any of the people who get combat fatigue and just kind of break under all the pressure?

MR. AWALT: Not altogether, everyone was getting near the breaking point. We saw casualties and you saw what you had to think of was the innocent German soldiers just lying every where, then it kind of got on your nerves. You had to feel like that some of

them were just innocent people that were doing what we were doing. They were doing what they had to do.

MR. METZLER: Doing what they were told to do, like following orders.

MR. AWALT: Yes.

MR. METZLER: What about civilian casualties, the people who lived in the areas? Were they able to successfully get away?

MR. AWALT: We didn't encounter many civilian casualties because we tried to stay away from the towns if we could and avoid the civilian population. Naturally there was some civilians but we tried to avoid all we could.

MR. METZLER: How long were you there before the famous arrival of General Patton and his tank corps and everything that you read so much about and hear so much about.

MR. AWALT: Well, Gen. Patton with his 3rd army was down in southern France. The Bulge had been going for a couple of weeks so its said they need all the reinforcements they could get. So they contacted him and he said he'd be there as soon as he can or he runs out of fuel. So he got in on the end of the Battle of the Bulge. He got enough time in there that he was recognized as being in the Battle of the Bulge or his unit. Europe was divided up geographically. Today you might be in Eisenhower's army, next day you might be in Bradley's, or Montgomery's, ???

MR. METZLER: Depending upon where you were then.

MR. AWALT: Yes.

MR. METZLER: I see.

MR. AWALT: You might be in one today and another one tomorrow if you were pushing fast. Gen. Patton got up there toward the end. The last town that I was stationed

in Germany after we got rid of all the prisoners of war and displaced persons, I was assigned to a headquarters company.

MR. METZLER: Now is this after the war was over or still the war is still going?

MR. AWALT: It was after the war had been declared over. They assigned me to a Headquarters Company and I was stationed the first assignment was in the little red schoolhouse in Rheems, France. That's where peace was signed.

MR. METZLER: Really.

MR. AWALT: I worked on the same floor that peace was signed.

MR. METZLER: The little red schoolhouse. What did that look like?

MR. AWALT: It was just a red brick schoolhouse in the middle of Rheems, downtown Rheems. It was kind of made like a U go up the front entrance, walk up the long stairs outside stairway getting up and if you kept on walking you'd walk right in the room where peace was signed. It was always open, the long peace table was still there, chairs were all tucked underneath it, all walls still covered with maps just like they get up and and walked. Seven or eight months later they decided to move that headquarters. Again I asked if I could come home and they said no, personnel goes with the office. So they moved us to Baden Auheim, Germany.

MR. METZLER: To where?

MR. AWALT: Baden Auheim

MR. METZLER: You gonna spell that for me?

MR. AWALT: It's Auheim.

MR. METZLER: Okay. Thank you, sir.

MR. AWALT: Bad first.

MR. METZLER: Oh, no, I mean bath in German.

MR. AWALT: Baden, Auheim.

MR. METZLER: Auheim. Where is that located then?

MR. AWALT: Really I don't know.

MR. METZLER: Somewhere close to Cologne?

MR. AWALT: No, it's down further south.

MR. METZLER: Further south.

MR. AWALT: They moved us up there and the office was in the Grand Hotel, that's where General Patton's office was.

MR. METZLER: Really.

MR. AWALT: I worked in the same building with him.

MR. METZLER: Did you ever have a beer with him?

MR. AWALT: No, you couldn't see him.

MR. METZLER: I guess the common soldier wasn't getting close to him.

MR. AWALT: But anyhow that's where he was killed.

MR. METZLER: In an auto accident or something wasn't it?

MR. AWALT: Yes. A lot of people don't know exactly how but I do.

MR. METZLER: Well, tell me.

MR. AWALT: Baden Auheim was kind of down in a hole. He had a villa up on the side of the mountain. His driver was bringing him to work when an icy spot in the road rolled down that mountain. He lived for three days before he died. He had just made his fourth star when he got killed.

MR. METZLER: You were there in the area when all that happened?

MR. AWALT: Yes, and it was always his wish to be buried with his men so they buried him in the cemetery in Luxemburg, the country of Luxembourg. They had enough forethought knowing that it would be a lot of visitors to his grave so they put it outside (end of side A) Naturally someone of his magnitude. He had the greatest funeral of all times. He was a great general. In fact several years within the last four or five years I read in the paper where he was declared the greatest general of all times, even greater than General Washington. He was deserving of that respect.

MR. METZLER: Did he have that reputation amongst the enlisted men like your self?

MR. AWALT: If you made him a good soldier you had a good commander. Just don't mess up.

MR. METZLER: Alright, that's fair enough.

MR. AWALT: Of course you was in there to be a good soldier. He was no coward and he rode in his tank standing up and down. He was a tough hombre.

MR. METZLER: Do you remember when you found out that the war was over? Where were you at the time? Or do you remember that?

MR. AWALT: When the war was over I think I was in France somewhere. I don't remember just where it was. I've seen so many small towns and places.

MR. METZLER: That must have been a happy time then.

MR. AWALT: Oh, yes, and one of our towns a little town in Redmay(sp?) France and that's when President Roosevelt died.

MR. METZLER: That was April of '45.

MR. AWALT: I remember all the flags were flying at half mast. We didn't know for a day or two what it was all about. Then shortly after that we had a ceremony out at the

airport and we were going over there to get our two regiments back that we had lost in the first three days of the Battle of the Bulge.

MR. METZLER: You say lost, you mean casualties?

MR. AWALT: Yes, we lost two complete regiments the first three days. They kind of tricked us. Of course we never did get to ride but they said okay we're going to give you all a thrill today. We'll let you ride, put us in the back of those 66s. They went out about five miles and they said okay you all unload, we're going to go get some more then we'll come and pick you all up and take you a little further. They forgot about us, so we had to walk the twenty-five miles.

MR. METZLER: How could they forget about you?

MR. AWALT: I don't know. They never did show up.

MR. METZLER: Your ride never came, huh?

MR. AWALT: No.

Mr. METZLER: Well, that was a long march.

MR. AWALT: Well, it wasn't for us. We walked everywhere we went anyhow.

MR. METZLER: Business as usual.

MR. AWALT: When I got ready to come home I left from Bremerhaven in Germany on a navy boat, a victory boat, which is really a short boat to be going across the ocean.

MR. METZLER: Rough ride, huh?

MR. AWALT: First night we were going down through the English Channel and run into a terrible storm, very rough, no one could go outside or anything. Then we were sick again for seven days.

MR. METZLER: So old soldier boy not used to that.

MR. AWALT: Six or seven days going over, seven days coming back. Whew it was terrible sickness. Oh.

MR. METZLER: You made a mention earlier about displaced persons and prisoners of war and handling that situation. What were you referring to?

MR. AWALT: Okay, we had big compounds that displaced persons or civilians that were actually captured by the American forces either in groups, might not refer to it as captured, but they were detained by us but they were put in these compounds also.

MR. METZLER: Now these were all in Germany?

MR. AWALT: Well, we had them in several different locations. My group had one or two of them and we were full most of the time, maybe 10,000 in each one.

MR. METZLER: Are these men, women and children?

MR. AWALT: Yes, all together.

MR. METZLER: That sounds like a big responsibility watching over all those folks.

MR. AWALT: Well, they didn't want to go anywhere. When we first opened camp there we didn't even have barbed wire fence yet. You had head lights shining in each direction from those jeeps. They didn't want to go anywhere. They knew they were safe but later we put up the double wire fences.

MR. METZLER: Some of these were prisoners of war as well.

MR. AWALT: Yes.

MR. METZLER: And then some of them were displaced civilians.

MR. AWALT: Yes.

MR. METZLER: And the POWs didn't want to go anywhere either.

MR. AWALT: No, they were glad that they were captured by the Americans instead of the Russians, so they were happy to be on our side.

MR. METZLER: That means you had to feed them and give them a place to stay.

MR. AWALT: Well, it was an open field.

MR. METZLER: There weren't any tents or anything.

MR. AWALT: No, most of them would take what they had and make big squares like an adobe house. They had slip trenches out there for bathrooms. It might seem horrible but it was the best we could do and it was better than they were getting anywhere else.

There was no hypocrisy or anything like that. We were not mean to them, by no means.

Every one of them had to be indoctrinated before we could release them. They had to speak the German language as well as English. If they thought that they were capable of being turned loose on the street again then by the Geneva Conference of 1918, we had to get them as close to their home as we could. The ones that were questionable were the Italians until they could be transferred and further interrogation. That took us about ten months to do all of that.

MR. METZLER: Did you have any direct contact with any of them?

MR. AWALT: Oh, yes.

MR. METZLER: What was that like, how were they to you, how did they feel about...

MR. AWALT: Well, they were just happy that we were there with them 'cause they knew they weren't fearing for their lives. They would offer us say a watch if we would bring them some extra food or something which we could not do. That wasn't ethical we didn't think. Some of them went through it, I will admit that some of them did, but it was an unethical thing to do. We felt that they were humans and would like to be treated like

a human. We felt like the German people were a good race of people they had bad leadership.

MR. METZLER: That's the truth.

MR. AWALT: The average German people over there were good hard working people. They maintained their property, their farms well; they made a living for their families. They didn't depend on anyone so that tells you something about them.

MR. METZLER: What about the German soldiers, same way?

MR. AWALT: They were good soldiers and the German soldiers had good morals. They understood their position that they were in our possession and we had to take care of them. So we treated them like people.

MR. METZLER: So this was how long after the war was over that you were playing this role?

MR. AWALT: I'd say three or four months. We started pulling them back from the detention camps up in the front lines and bringing them into our camp. That was their final destination; we either released them or detained them.

MR. METZLER: So this went on for how many months after the war was over?

MR. AWALT: Took about ten months.

MR. METZLER: So we've gone from May of '45, we're into '46 now.

MR. AWALT: Well, it's maybe not that long 'cause I got out in '46.

MR. METZLER: So what was the last few things that you were doing before you came back to the U.S?

MR. AWALT: I was in Headquarters Company.

MR. METZLER: So that was when you were in the area with Patton?

MR. AWALT: Yes.

MR. METZLER: What were your duties at that time?

MR. AWALT: As a clerk in the office. We had several officers in the building, it required clerks. They would be like a major or captain or ??? colonel, and they had to have aides and clerks and file clerks and dictation and getting out letters and things just like an office with...

MR. METZLER: Just like a business.

MR. AWALT: Yes. So it was quite an experience for me 'cause I had never been around anything like that 'cause I had just gotten out of school.

MR. METZLER: You were a farm boy.

MR. AWALT: Farm boys, yeh, I had barely turned nineteen when I went into the Battle of the Bulge. We didn't get a furlough until after the war was over.

MR. METZLER: Didn't get a break; and they didn't pay you overtime either, did they?

MR. AWALT: At that time I was making I think fifty-two dollars a month.

MR. METZLER: And couldn't spend any of that.

MR. AWALT: No, wasn't anything to spend it on.

MR. METZLER: That's right, or any time to do it either.

MR. AWALT: Oh, no, no, we couldn't talk to the Germans and we were pretty much on our own.

MR. METZLER: So how did you find out that you were going home when you were released?

MR. AWALT: Well, they came up with a system. I don't know who came up with it or who was in charge of it. I knew about a month ahead of time that I was coming home. A

funny thing about that, the whole time I was over there I never did see a bottle, no cans of American beer, or a bottle of American whiskey which I didn't miss. When I was notified that I was gonna come home in about a month, they had a pinch drawing and I drew a bottle of American whiskey. I said, okay, I'm going to put this down in my duffel bag and I'm going to drink that on that boat going home and celebrate. Well, I did, I put it down there, never did break the seal or anything. When we left Bremerhaven that first night like I told you when we went into that big storm. Well, I knew I was going to die so I gave my whiskey away and never did get a drink of it.

MR. METZLER: You were pretty sure you were dead man anyhow or at least you felt like dying.

MR. AWALT: Oh, goodness.

MR. METZLER: Whiskey was the last thing on your mind.

MR. AWALT: Have you ever been seasick?

MR. METZLER: I haven't.

MR. AWALT: It's terrible. That ole boat that we went over on was the Louis S. Pasteur, a French boat with an English crew. The food was absolutely horrible, no seasoning at all.

MR. METZLER: I would think the French would have done a better job.

MR. AWALT: No, it was the English crew.

MR. METZLER: English cooking got you, huh?

MR. AWALT: Oh, me, and everyone was sick. You had long tables that old ship would come up here comes a bunch of mess trays by, you just grab one and hope that yours when it came back by.

MR. METZLER: Take your choice; they were all going right by you. I guess that's what they call cafeteria style.

MR. AWALT: The hand rails were all slick you could hardly get up and no bunks in there. If you could find a place you could hang a hammock in between the steam pipes otherwise you slept on the floor.

MR. METZLER: Well, at least that toughened you up for what was coming, I guess, in the Ardennes. So how did it feel to be going back home after all of that even though you were seasick?

MR. AWALT: Oh, it was great to get back with my foot on the New York property. I landed back in New York harbor. The ole lady out there in the harbor looked good.

MR. METZLER: Yeh, with her hand up in the air with that torch, huh? When you were over there were you in contact with your family back home, was there letters being written?

MR. AWALT: To my mother, yes, but we might not get a mail call for thirty days. They couldn't find us. You might have a stack of letters that high when you'd get them.

MR. METZLER: When you did get them you had a lot of reading to do, huh?

MR. AWALT: Yeh, before I went into the army I chewed tobacco. Well, what little training I had, I still chewed tobacco. My mother would send it to me and it would be just like this table be so dry. Finally I wrote and told her don't send me anymore tobacco, so I quit tobacco deal. That was a good move.

MR. METZLER: And the food, the food you were eating out of C rations and K rations the whole time?

MR. AWALT: No, just during the battle of the Bulge.

MR. METZLER: So when you got into some of the office work and what have you later on...

MR. AWALT: Yeh, we had regular cafeteria style.

MR. METZLER: So food got a little better anyhow.

MR. AWALT: Yeh, a little better. Of course it was still some of the army food. Some of the States they eat a lot of mutton. I was talking to an ole boy, I believe he was from Montana, and I asked him where are you from? He said, "Baa a a a Montana."

MR. METZLER: For the transcriber that is a sheep sound followed by Montana when you're trying to transcribe this. Did you get your fill of mutton and lamb over there?

MR. AWALT: No, when they get there I just turn my mess kit inside. It was never prepared right.

MR. METZLER: Mass produced I think.

MR. AWALT: And it was always old mutton. You can't get that odor out.

MR. METZLER: Yeh, that's true. So when you came back to the States, you must have been what twenty-one years old?

MR. AWALT: I was twenty.

MR. METZLER: You were twenty. You weren't even legal drinking age yet.

MR. AWALT: Oh, I was then, even before I went to the army. When I was in high school we'd go over to a little town over there at Eden and sit there all night and drink beer.

MR. METZLER: I said legal.

MR. AWALT: Well, we'd go right in there and...

MR. METZLER: The legal drinking age back then was eighteen.

MR. AWALT: Nobody even had a legal age or not.

MR. METZLER: Nobody even thought about that at the time. So you went over basically as a high school graduate and you came back when you were twenty. Now, how did the war change you as a person?

MR. AWALT: Well, it made me understand to be more responsible and more respectful, I think. You know when you were an enlisted man you had to respect people such as your officers. It was expected that you're always gonna be because it was one of the regulations. If you didn't you could get degraded or you certainly couldn't get a promotion if you went around with a chip on your shoulder and everything.

MR. METZLER: Do you feel like you came back a different person?

MR. AWALT: Yes, I do and I would do it again if I had to if they would take me. Course I don't think they will because of my physical condition. I'm very grateful that I did go fight for our country and I think it was a good experience for me. I think the military as a whole is good for our younger especially our young men because it teaches them discipline, it teaches them responsibility, and how to get along with other people, how to be a leader. I think it's just good for them.

MR. METZLER: When you think back over that period of time overseas, what was the most trying or the toughest moments to you?

MR. AWALT: Well, the closing days in the Battle of the Bulge, we knew that it was coming close. Two soldiers in a command car driving down this road direct close to us and hit a land mine killed both of them. I've often thought if it could have only been two days later they would have been alive. So that was one of the disaster things that I saw. I think it stood out more than any one other incident.

MR. METZLER: What was a light hearted memory or were there any?

MR. AWALT: Well, when I was in Baden Aheim we had some time for relaxing there. It was a goodly bunch of buddies that I fought with and we did time there and wished we had a office right close by. Had a G.I. club there, we'd go there Saturday night you might say and not get in any trouble. We were all old enough to not get into any trouble.

MR. METZLER: Knew better, huh? I think I'm most tickled about your story about your whiskey that you figured you were gonna drink that going back. You got so darned seasick you thought you were gonna die so you just gave it away. How do you feel about the Germans after all this was over with some sixty years later?

MR. AWALT: Well, I think they've had some bad moments in the past years but I think they are on better grounds now.

MR. METZLER: You don't hold any bitterness or anything?

MR. AWALT: No, not for the people there. I can't hold these people as a whole responsible for their actions there. It was more or less a forced thing on the people and if it were to be in reverse why I would feel the same way about us. I don't think the German people would have been out there shooting at us if they had not been...

MR. METZLER: Had a crazy man up there.

MR. AWALT: Exactly.

MR. METZLER: Well, what about you? Bob, do you have any questions for Curley while we're on line here?

BOB: No, I'll wait until we get offline.

MR. METZLER: One question I had is when they bring you in to change clothes and you took the shower, did you put the same clothes back on or did they issue you new clothes?

MR. AWALT: No, they issued us new clothes that lasted us until we could get back again, might have been twenty or thirty days until we got back.

MR. METZLER: Didn't know whether they had a laundry there?

MR. AWALT: Oh, no.

MR. METZLER: Did they issue brand new clothes, were they brand new?

MR. AWALT: I don't remember whether...

MR. METZLER: But they were clean clothes?

MR. AWALT: They were clean and we got them at least every other week. We were in mud most of the time and of course they were filled with mud.

MR. METZLER: And everything else, huh?

MR. AWALT: Yeh.

MR. METZLER: Well, Curly, are there any other things that come to your mind that you would like to share with us? I know you brought several pictures and some books and you brought your bronze star medal, certificates. Any of those things you want to make comments on?

MR. AWALT: About eight months ago I guess it was now the mailman rang and I went out to the mailbox and it was a little package for me. I hadn't ordered anything so I didn't know what it was. I opened it and it was two medals from World War II that I had never received.

MR. METZLER: Never, and they just now got around to...

MR. AWALT: Yes, sir.

MR. METZLER: And what were the medals?

MR. AWALT: They were issued by the Belgian government, both of them, I have the names of them over there with my other medals. One was...

MR. METZLER: Your shoulder kind of your arm...

MR. AWALT: Uh huh, and one was a little red medal. I haven't gotten them framed. I have all my others framed but those two I haven't got around to it yet.

MR. METZLER: That's a story. Was there any sort of a letter or anything that explained?

MR. AWALT: No, sir. And then about two weeks after I got those I had a letter from the Army Review Board telling me that I was eligible for the bronze star.

MR. METZLER: And that's what led to the bronze star?

MR. AWALT: Well, if you were in the Battle of the Bulge, received the Combat Infantryman's badge, then you were eligible for a bronze star. Their letter, like the two medals, was sixty years late, and I'd had this hanging in my entrance hall for about ten years when I ordered my medals.

MR. METZLER: Now this here says it's dated the 13th day of May, 2005.

MR. AWALT: Yes, they just got around to issuing that. I had the medal before they issued that.

MR. METZLER: And they never got around to giving you the certificate.

MR. AWALT: Right.

MR. METZLER: I guess they finally got around to it. Well, anything else come to mind? I do see these photographs here of you guys in your mortar positions hip deep in snow.

MR. AWALT: That's at Saint Vius, that's where the main battle took place around St. Vius, Tanklo, Bastone, that's all in Belgium. There's a big monument in Bastone now that portrays the list that taken place in the Battle of the Bulge and the number of casualties and all of that. I don't know whether I told you, in the beginning in the six weeks of the Battle of the Bulge we had 82,000 casualties, the Americans, the Germans had approximately a 100,000. It was the longest battle in history and it was also the highest number in casualties of any battle there's ever been.

MR. METZLER: Well, let me take this opportunity, and I think I speak for a whole lot of people, and personally thank you for what you did for us during that period of time. I think even though maybe we don't show it often enough all of us are really appreciate of what you did.

MR. AWALT: I really think that more of the veterans should get out and talk to the schools and talk to the children because that's the only way they're going to know about this history. Unfortunately they're not teaching in the schools like they should and the ones that I've talked to are hungry to hear this directly from the person not on a movie or something because they know it's genuine.

MR. METZLER: That's right, you were there.

MR. AWALT: Yes.

MR. METZLER: And saw it with your own eyes.

MR. AWALT: I get to talk to some of the high school students and I've offered to get on the agenda to give a class talk on it. The high school teacher at that time didn't return my calls on it. Some more veterans and I went to this school over at the old Methodist Building over there by the...

MR. METZLER: Private school.

MR. AWALT: Yes. The school started in England and there were three other veterans and I. They have a program, days before Veterans' Day, every year. They have a program and they have veterans talk. I was invited back last year but I was in an accident and couldn't make it. They were very, very well disciplined children. When our program was over the narrator told us, okay, we're all going downstairs for refreshments. We went down about ten or maybe fifteen minutes later. They said, "Okay, all adults out, children stay for questions and answers." We four were standing on the front and the students would point to us and ask us a question. Whoever they were gonna ask a question they'd point to one of us. They asked very intelligent questions, so that showed us that they were interested and very interested in learning what we went through. It was quite an experience for us.

MR. METZLER: Well, okay, I think I will take this opportunity to close this interview.

Thank you again, Curly, for spending the time and sharing your thoughts with us.

MR. AWALT: You're sure welcome.

MR. METZLER. And thank you again for what you did for our country.

MR. AWALT: Thank you.

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