

Alfredo Buentello Oral History Interview

PETER RIESZ: Today is May the 18th of the year 2000. This is 10 minutes after 9:00, we're starting. We're at Mr. Alfredo Buentello's residence on Buentello Road in Victoria. I'm Peter B. Riesz, interviewer for the MOWW group. We're just going to talk about Mr. Buentello's experience. You were born when?

ALFREDO BUENTELLO: January the 12th, 1916, in Refugio County.

PB: Are we in Refugio County now?

AB: No, we're in Victoria. San Antonio River divides them.

PB: Your service number? You know that, don't you. (laughs) I'm not going to use your Social Security Number. I just put that down in case you didn't have your service number. Everyone knows that. (laughs) You went to school up to the seventh grade? That was your highest level?

AB: Yes.

PB: Where's the Anaqua School?

AB: Anaqua School is up in that bend up there. I was a teacher there.

PB: That was a country school, then?

AB: Yes, one teacher for the whole building.

PB: And then you went to work after you finished there? You just went through the seventh grade.

AB: I stayed with my daddy here, helping the farm.

PB: How did you get with the service?

AB: When I went and volunteered. Forty.

PB: When was that in '40; do you know?

AB: September 1940. I volunteered for it.

PB: What caused you to volunteer? You saw you were going to be drafted?

AB: I heard the rumors. Somebody I knew, he was (inaudible). And I really had been hearing that. They said they might have a war preparing for the country. So I went and joined it. I got in this post office here in Victoria where the recruiting office was. I was in town that Saturday when that sergeant came around. He said, "How are you doing?" I said, "I'm doing fine." He said, "Would you like to join the service?" "What kind of deal is that?" He said, "We train you to be a soldier. We pay \$21 a month. And we give you everything you want. If you get to retire, you get your retirement. And you've got hospital, and this and that." He asked me, "When do you want to go?" I says, "If you want me, I'll go now." It was on Saturday. He said, "By god, I'll take you to the bus station and get you taken." And he did. My mother was in town. I went, "Mamma, I'm leaving." She said, "Where?" "San Antonio. I joined the army." (laughter) But I'm glad I did, in one

way. And in another way, I say, "Well, they was going to draft me anyway. The only thing that he said you can choose: your branch of service."

PB: You went right to San Antonio?

AB: Yes.

PB: Where'd they swear you in?

AB: In San Antonio.

PB: You went right onto active duty?

AB: I had to go right away. I went on Saturday; Monday they put me in the Infantry training in San Antonio, Dodd Field. That's where they were training.

PB: D-O-D-D?

AB: Yeah.

PB: That was September or October?

AB: That was September. It was a Saturday.

PB: Do you know the date?

AB: September the 16th was a Saturday. Sunday the 17th.

Monday the 18th. Pretty sure on that.

PB: We can look on your orders later. We can find out from your discharge. So, Fort Sam Houston. And they put you to Dodd Field? What kind of field was that? Training?

AB: Training field, training post.

PB: For basic training?

AB: Yes, because they figured there was going to be drafting. They wanted that place for these guys right here. And they moved me around. They finished it at another base. But I took Infantry training for six weeks.

PB: Where was that located?

AB: In San Antonio, Fort Sam Houston. It was part of Fort Sam, yes.

PB: And the basic was right there?

AB: Right there, yes. It was there.

PB: Where did you go after the six weeks?

AB: Six weeks, they call us one morning, he said, "You are all going to be taken to the Infantry, Engineer, Quartermaster, Medic, but you volunteers got the choice where you want to go. Pick up your service." So then some other guy said, "Let's pick up Medics." So that's why I got in, not that I knew about medics or this or that.

PB: That's where you started your medical training.

AB: Right.

PB: You were the 2nd Medical Battalion of Company C. And that was a unit there at Dodd Field or Fort Sam?

AB: Fort Sam Houston. That was in a division, then.

PB: The 28th Division?

AB: No, the 2nd Infantry Division. It was a medical battalion, but the battalion had four companies. Company A was

supporting the 9th Regiment Infantry. And then the B, and then the C.

PB: Who did you support?

AB: The 38th Regiment.

PB: The 38th Regiment of the 2nd Infantry Division.

AB: Yeah.

PB: So that's how it was organized. The 2nd Medical Battalion, different companies supported the --

AB: The division, it was a triangle. They had three Infantry regiments. And the medics had four companies, three companies supporting each regiment: A, B, and C; and D supported Headquarters out of the division.

PB: How many men in your company?

AB: Close to 200 men.

PB: In each company?

AB: In each company.

PB: Did you have ambulances?

AB: We had 12 ambulances.

PB: Tents and things you'd set up on your own?

AB: Yes.

PB: And that was special ambulance driving.

AB: Yeah.

PB: You started your training in October, I guess.

AB: Yes.

PB: How long did you train at Fort Sam Houston?

AB: We had taken training, advised this and that. And then in '41 we started pulling maneuvers in Louisiana.

PB: When in '41?

AB: July.

PB: You went to Louisiana for maneuvers.

AB: Yes.

PB: The whole division?

AB: The whole division. It was maybe seven or eight divisions. We were fighting like we were fighting a war.

PB: What did you do with your medical training? What did they train you in?

AB: They train you on how to handle a patient.

PB: You were a Corpsman, then. Medical Corpsman.

AB: Right, yes.

PB: You weren't stretcher bearer or Ambulance.

AB: Right.

PB: You treated the first aid.

AB: Yes. They had litter bearers that pick up the wounded. And patch them around the way we'd do the best and the way we had trained. And we'd write them on the tags.

PB: You tagged them.

AB: You bet.

PB: Type of wound.

AB: We'd pull the dog tags, because some of the patients was practically out of it. So we'd write it down. Put them on stretchers. Then four guys, litter bearers, would take them to the Collecting Station.

PB: When you hear them in the front lines, actual war, they call for a Medic, you were the one that supported them.

AB: Right.

PB: What sort of supplies did you have with you?

AB: We had bandages (inaudible) and powders, different kinds.

PB: Medicine.

AB: Right.

PB: Mostly to stop the bleeding.

AB: Right, mostly to stop the bleeding. Tourniquets. That's the first thing we would do if you start bleeding a lot, put the tourniquet. And then we'd write on the tag what we did, write what time. And then the litter bearers pick them up.

PB: Back to the Aid Station.

AB: A few miles, and put them in the ambulance.

PB: And evacuate them back.

AB: Right, evacuate.

PB: You didn't have any doctors at all up there?

AB: Yeah.

PB: You had some doctors on the line with you, or were they back in the Aid Station?

AB: We had one with us all the time. But then they were dealing with the Company A men. So they ran out. They called the company, the C Company, because we were supporting the 38th. They furnished the Company A men, so they picked me out. And I went to the 38th Infantry. I helped side-by-side. How much that doctor say I had up there? Hundred and sixty days.

PB: On the frontlines.

AB: Day and night.

PB: Right from June the 7th?

AB: No, that was in August.

PB: We'll get to that later on. You went to maneuvers, then? How long were the maneuvers, and where did you go after the maneuvers?

AB: We used to go up to Louisiana. We came back to the same post here at Fort Sam Houston again.

PB: How long were you out on maneuvers?

AB: Maybe between four and six weeks of training.

PB: So you came back in August, probably, of '41.

AB: Right.

PB: What happened after August of '41?

AB: They take us back to the camp, to Fort Sam Houston.

PB: Camp Dodd?

AB: Yes.

PB: Gave us some more training and marching. Know how to grab an ambulance in case somebody get killed and you have to get in.

PB: Cross-train so you knew other jobs, too.

AB: Right. Then '42 comes in.

PB: Just a second; where did you live at Camp Dodd?

AB: In tents.

PB: You were in a field-type situation?

AB: Right, that's why we took the training.

PB: Mess hall setup?

AB: Everything was set up there.

PB: Did your Medical Battalion have its own mess hall?

AB: No, that battalion was 99. They had their own deal there. They had their own Medics for the trainers and doctors.

PB: Separate.

AB: Separate.

PB: After you finished that phase, what did you do next, in '42?

AB: We went back to Louisiana again for another six or eight weeks, training.

PB: Whole 2nd Division?

AB: Yes, the whole. It was maybe five or six divisions.

PB: Really big maneuvers, then.

AB: Oh, yeah.

PB: Lot of rain and mud, I hear.

AB: Ooh! Then we did the same thing, came back until '43. We went back again. Three years. That outfit was well-trained.

PB: This is the 2nd Division.

AB: Yeah, 2nd Infantry Division, Indian Head.

PB: After you finished that, you came back to Fort Sam?

AB: While we was coming back from Louisiana --

PB: Last maneuvers.

AB: Yes. They stopped the convoy. We had orders. General Robertson -- he was the General of the 2nd Division -- gave us a speech that as soon as we get to Fort Sam Houston, to our home post, we will prepare to move out. We didn't know where, but we're moving out. That was in July. In August, here come the orders: that they will move the 2nd Infantry Division to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. That's across from Madison, Wisconsin. We was going to go up there and take winter training. (laughter) Ski training.

PB: It's hard to get in San Antonio. Did you have leave time? Did they say, "We're going to move out"? Did they give you any leave?

AB: (overlapping dialog; inaudible)

PB: Did you get to come home?

AB: Sure, just tell folks that we're leaving.

PB: When did you leave for McCoy?

AB: McCoy, we took maneuver ski training. And they moved us to Detroit, Michigan.

PB: When were you at McCoy?

AB: In the last part of '43 till the time we went overseas.

PB: You went from there to Michigan?

AB: No, we pulled maneuvers in Michigan state because it was a lot colder than Wisconsin.

PB: Way up north in Michigan.

AB: Right.

PB: Grayling or something.

AB: Right.

PB: That was while you were at McCoy, you had maneuvers. How did you get over to Michigan? Ferry boat?

AB: No, they'd drive us up there and leave us up there for a few weeks.

PB: You got to learn what a Norther was up in Michigan.

AB: Man, I'll tell you, it was cold. (laughter)

PB: Were you in tents, trying to stay warm?

AB: In tents.

PB: Snow?

AB: That snow was coming down. You could hardly see through that. Man.

PB: Getting ready for Europe. When did you leave McCoy, then?

AB: We had orders to move to Shanks, New York.

PB: Camp Shanks. How did you go there? By train?

AB: By train. But we didn't know what was going on until we head up there. Then we had the orders next morning that the next day we were ready to be going overseas.

PB: On a ship?

AB: Yeah. It took nine days to get up there to Belfast, England.

PB: When did you leave McCoy and arrive at Shanks? Do you have that somewhere in your notes? That's probably in the book.

AB: It's in the book. Everything's in the book, everything I'm telling you.

PB: Camp Shanks was a huge camp, I understand. Everyone deploying for Europe went through there.

AB: Right, went through that to embark.

PB: How long were you at Shanks?

AB: Just a few days.

PB: What was the name of the ship you went over on? Was it one of those big liners?

AB: Big liner.

PB: Like the *Ile de France* or the *Normandy*?

AB: Something like that. It was pretty good size.

PB: Did that come right up the river there and dock right near where Camp Shanks was? Or did you have to go down to New York City?

AB: We went to New York City.

PB: The harbor.

AB: Right.

PB: Do you remember the docks along the river there?

AB: No, I don't remember. They had that big ship; you couldn't see nothing. We didn't know what we was going on.

PB: But the ship was actually on the docs in New York.

AB: Right, ready.

PB: There was a place near Shanks where sometimes they brought some of the ships in to leave from.

AB: Right. No, it was up the way.

PB: It was an eight-day trip?

AB: Yeah, eight or nine.

PB: You arrived overseas on October 18th of '43, then.

AB: Mm-hmm.

PB: Was that a rough trip, going across?

AB: (laughs) We eating here, the plate up there with food and everything.

PB: Back and forth?

AB: Pick it up and bring it back tomorrow.

PB: Sick to your stomach? (laughter) The little guy from Texas.

AB: Them Texans, they couldn't stand it.

PB: Your whole division was on the ship. This was all 2nd Division.

AB: Yeah, 2nd Division.

PB: Equipment?

AB: Part of the equipment, too.

PB: Artillery, tanks, all of that stuff?

AB: Part of it. Not all of it.

PB: Several ships.

AB: They had a convoy supporting us to get out of the harbor.

PB: You were part of a convoy all the way over?

AB: Part of it, yeah.

PB: And you zigzagged back and forth?

AB: Right. And then they stopped.

PB: Any submarines on the way?

AB: What do you call them, made out of ice, big?

PB: Icebergs?

AB: Yeah.

PB: You saw those?

AB: We Texans said, "What is that?" (laughs)

PB: You didn't want to hit one of those.

AB: No.

PB: It'll send you to the bottom.

AB: You ain't kidding. They're bigger than a house.

PB: Did they have to stop?

AB: No, they kind of get away from there. They don't travel too fast, but they never know what kind of route they're going to take.

PB: Were any of the ships in your convoy torpedoed?

AB: No.

PB: You got to Belfast in the Irish Sea. Did you actually stop in Belfast?

AB: We was stationed in Belfast. Took more training there.

AB: In Ireland.

AB: Yeah.

PB: How long did that last?

AB: We got in there on when?

PB: Middle of October '43.

AB: We stayed there till '44, I think, in January. The last part of January. Then they moved us to a little island that I mentioned a while ago. What's the name of it?

PB: Isle of... We'll look it up in the book. Off of Ireland?

AB: Let me take a look.

PB: You were doing maneuvering and training.

AB: Yeah.

PB: Isle of Wight?

AB: See right here. Here it says we took training there, airborne train, ski train, swimming.

PB: You were ready for anything.

AB: We didn't know where we was going to go.

PB: What did you do on the island? Did your whole division go or just your Medical Corps?

AB: The whole division.

PB: What did they do there?

AB: They get a man that know more about what was going on, what we expect, and be prepared for this and be prepared for that. Giving advice, what you going to go into. Inside.

PB: About the invasion.

AB: Right. But we didn't know when was going to.

PB: You just did more training there, waiting for the invasion?

AB: Yeah.

PB: When did you find out when the invasion was going to be and where it was going to be?

AB: They said we was going to support the Ninth and the First in Normandy. But some of us, we didn't know where Normandy was until we got on the English Channel. Hey, they start firing them artillery guns the planes coming around.

PB: Did you see a model of the beach or anything like that?

AB: Sure, pretty close.

PB: When you were training, did they show you a model or maps at all?

AB: No, but they did tell us what could happen and why it's going to happen.

PB: When did you load up onto the ships from the island? You were on the island until you left for the invasion; is that right?

AB: Yes.

PB: You loaded the whole division onto the --

AB: Right. Here's Belfast. We come here to this, South Wales. From South Wales, we swung here.

PB: On the sixth of June.

AB: Right.

AB: It looks like you left from Cardiff, the port. All the ships. Everything loaded on. All the equipment?

PB: Right.

AB: What sort of equipment did you have now?

PB: We had plenty bandage, some pills, aspirins, iodine...

PB: Did you have sulfur powders for the wounds?

AB: Right. We used that a lot for wounds. Tourniquets, but waterproof.

PB: Everything waterproof.

AB: Everything. Vehicles and all.

PB: I heard that was nasty stuff, that waterproof, on your clothes. Made you sick?

AB: You bet. We had water when we got out of that LST right here. A lot of guys drowned before they hit land.

PB: Was this very rough, on the ship?

AB: It was rougher when we get from Shank, New York, to here.

PB: This wasn't too bad.

AB: No, but it was bad when it was coming here.

PB: Yeah, the storm came back again.

AB: This time with the Germans shooting.

PB: You came across the south coast and then right into Normandy.

AB: Yeah.

PB: When did you find out that the invasion had occurred? Did you know the invasion had occurred already?

AB: We could hear the guns and all of that. And then we started asking. They said, "No, they started already."

PB: Yesterday.

AB: The 29th Division, that's the very first outfit that got into war. But this book tells you the day and the experiences I had.

PB: What do you remember? You were on a big ship or an LST?

AB: We was in a big ship, not too big, and then they put us in that LST.

PB: The LCVP, the small landing barges?

AB: Not too small. It was quite a -- soldiers in there.

PB: Thirty?

AB: Or more.

PB: You were in probably an LST, then.

AB: You bet I was in there.

PB: The big door? Did they have trucks and things on it?

AB: After, behind us, they come in with the trucks. They got a different LST, bigger and stronger. To open the doors...

PB: Did you carry a weapon?

AB: No, not Medics.

PB: Did you have an armband on?

AB: Armband. That was a good target.

PB: That's what I heard, especially against the Japs.

AB: That's why I got into Company A men, because they didn't have nowhere to get it except from the company that was supporting them. That's why we were there.

PB: But you went in as Company C.

AB: With the Medics.

PB: Company C of the --

AB: Second Medical Battalion.

PB: Thirty-eighth Regiment still.

AB: Right.

PB: What do you remember as you got up to the beach? The door opens up and all of a sudden there's the beach?

AB: It's just like you fishing in the river or in the ocean. After a while, they said, "Prepare, because we're going to open up."

PB: Out you went.

AB: Out you went.

PB: How close to the shore were you?

AB: Pretty far.

PB: You had to go through a lot of deep war?

AB: Sure.

PB: Was there still firing going on, shells?

AB: You bet.

PB: Around you?

AB: You bet.

PB: Machineguns or just the big guns? Mortar?

AB: Airplanes. They'd zero in with artillery. They got the timed artillery where they know pretty close where we at. So the time, where to bust, and the Army is scattered everywhere.

PB: This was your whole 2nd Division moving in, all in one day. Was there a lot of equipment? Wrecked stuff on the beach?

AB: You see all kinds of things.

PB: Bodies? Clothing?

AB: Yes. Like rocks, I tell you.

PB: Had they had a chance to clear the bodies out, get them out of the way?

AB: They did, some of them. But some of them were completely gone.

PB: Not a very good sight.

AB: No.

PB: Had a lot of wrecked equipment? Smoke?

AB: Lots of wreckage. Horses you see once in a while, dead. People dead. Tanks.

PB: Were a lot of those obstacles that Rommel put in, in the sand? You had to go around?

AB: You bet. They had a lot of mines.

PB: Tank traps, mines...

AB: Booby traps. Them hedge rows, they used to tie a little wire. You couldn't hardly see it. Attached to the mine. When you did like that to lift up a limb to get under, you pulled the trigger of that.

PB: Really had to watch your step then. When you landed on the beach, did you go right up the bluff to the top, or did you get organized down below first?

AB: We get organized. A lot of us, we didn't know where was going to go until the orders say, "We going to go here."

PB: Do you remember going up the bluff to the top? Did they have roads cut through by that time, or just trails?

AB: Yes, they had roads.

PB: The Engineers had put some roads in.

AB: Yes. Bridges in the rivers.

PB: Where did you go after you got up to the top?

AB: The Infantry had a big cannon attack on Saint-Lô. Saint-Lô is a place where they had a lot of ammunitions, a lot of rations, a lot of everything. It was well prepared. And it was hard for the people.

PB: So you went right straight towards Saint-Lô until Saint-Lô finally fell.

AB: Right. They had a lot of killing here. Then here is a bad place.

PB: Do you remember the bombing around Saint-Lô?

AB: Sure. And then we came here. This port was rough.

PB: Brest, yeah.

AB: They had pillboxes made years and years ago. They'd plant trees, small trees or grass in the top of it. If the plane goes, we couldn't find the location. They had the tanks or the artillery. They open the hatchet. They shoot and shoot. Down again. Where are they shooting from?

PB: Never could see them, even.

AB: Yeah.

PB: Did you have a lot of airplane cover?

AB: Lot of airplane. But they had some plane-fighting there, too.

PB: Did you treat wounded all along the way?

AB: You bet.

PB: Was there some story about two fellows you treated?

AB: I saved one. We was coming one day. That day, next day, they take me to the Company A many who was going to pick up the patients. I was in charge of the litter bearers, four men. I told one of them guys, "I'm going to go back this other way. Maybe we can find some guys. You never know." They said, "Yeah, go ahead. But be sure and don't go straight, that route you're taking." They had a compass and all of that. And when I hear some, "Mm, mm," I walked to where I heard it, and I heard it going louder. I started looking around. And here's (inaudible) right here. But he was right here under some trees. So I walk up there and I says, "Are you pretty bad hit?" And he called my name. He recognized me. But he was about gone. He told me that day, "You know what? If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be here. I would be gone."

PB: Where was this?

AB: In France.

PB: Saint-Lô?

AB: Yeah, other side of Saint-Lô.

PB: Before Saint-Lô?

AB: Yeah, somewhere in that area.

PB: What was his name?

AB: Manuel Garcia.

PB: Was he from Refugio County?

AB: No, but he lives here in Victoria.

PB: He's still alive?

AB: Oh, yeah. He was a judge for 23 years or something like that. He's a member of the Purple Heart, too. He goes to the meetings.

PB: Can he talk like you can?

AB: He talks better.

PB: No. I'd love to interview him; do you think he'd agree to be interviewed?

AB: He lost all his leg.

PB: What did you treat? He had a bad leg wound?

AB: Completely hanging like this. So I told that guy, "Don't move it too much. I have to go out there." And I said, "You leave them patients up there. They're not hurt like him. Take him quick."

PB: How did he recognize you? Was he from your same battalion?

AB: We were with the same outfit for a long time. We used to drink together. I noticed his leg was like this, hanging

on the side. After that I said, "No, no, no, you leave him alone. Get the (inaudible) to take to him and do the best he can. Put him on the stretcher and take him right away. And call the ambulance."

PB: You patched him up?

AB: They did.

PB: Did he lose that leg?

AB: Oh, yeah. I don't know if it's made out of plastic or what kind of leg it was. He's got one.

PB: There was another fellow from Wisconsin you treated, I heard, that came down to visit. Same story with him? How did you come across him? How did you find him?

AB: He was a recruit when we was out there on Normandy. He didn't take too much training, he says.

PB: Did you find him wounded along the battlefield, too?

AB: Yeah, but I didn't treat him; somebody else treated him.

PB: How did he remember you?

AB: He remembered because he was with me quite a few days. I used to give him some advice. "Don't take that route. Go back this way."

PB: He was wounded, himself?

AB: I think he's got either one of them (inaudible).

PB: Is that how you found him in the service?

AB: No, he was with me before. He was the replacement.

PB: He was in your outfit. And then he remembered you and looked you up.

AB: Sure, because he was with me quite a few days. But to find me, he went through that book.

PB: When did this happen? Before Saint-Lô?

AB: No, way after. After the war was over. It was in March, April, May. In May it was over.

PB: So after you broke through at Saint-Lô, the whole division headed out to Brest.

AB: Yeah. And then from there we went up to the Rhine.

PB: So you finished Brest off, 18 September. What happened to that General at the surrender? General Ramcke, his name was; do you remember him?

AB: I remember him, but I don't know what happened to him.

PB: Did he commit suicide?

AB: Some of them say yes, he did; and some of them say we don't know. Some of them don't want to tell you.

PB: That was the 2nd Parachute Regiment the Germans had. It was terrible fighting.

AB: Yeah, SS troopers. They had kids. They had young kids, maybe 18, 17; some were 15 years old. And I tell you, they was well-trained. And they don't back out. They must give some kind of pills or something, because they was... No, no kidding.

PB: Hitler told them not to surrender or he'd shoot them.

AB: Yeah. And they used to pick the best women, and healthy, and the best men to have kids and breed them.

PB: Like cattle.

AB: Yeah. That's how those guys got that blood from big boy.

PB: Nasty.

AB: They got it in the blood. And good English. They were better than me. I talked to one. In fact, I put a bandage on one.

PB: So you saw prisoners? You treated the prisoners that came through?

AB: I never did. But that boy I did because I got a little confused. Talked better English than me. I said, "He must be an American." When I get through, he said, "Muchas gracias." I said, "What the hell is going on?" (laughs) I'll never forget.

PB: He must've had training in the States.

AB: No, but they say, "You boy soldiers, US, don't respect the Sergeants. They talk about the Sergeant and about the Officer, and we don't. We'd get killed."

PB: Then you realized he was German. (laughter)

AB: That happened in Brest. You're the first person I ever tell that.

PB: After Brest, you loaded on trains?

AB: No, all of this walking.

PB: You had a chance to go through Paris?

AB: Yeah.

PB: They give you time off, or right straight through?

AB: Straight through.

PB: Did they march you through like a parade?

AB: Yeah, in line. And then people were yelling.

PB: And you kept on straight through.

AB: Right. But back this way was where they have us fight in this area, not here. You would have some here, like in the Rhine and in places. But on the third of March I got hit.

PB: When did you go back into the line again?

AB: Wait a minute, I got hit right here on March the third.

PB: DeMun? That's in Germany, though. When did your division go back on the line here?

AB: It was going here when I got hit. And I went in here. And then when I got here --

PB: Were you up here for the Bulge, though?

AB: Yeah.

PB: Where were you at the Bulge?

AB: Right along here.

PB: Marche?

AB: Yeah. And then up here at night, at ten o'clock, I asked the Sergeant, "You know the password?" He said, "No. Let

me find out." He turns right there. Boom. I didn't see it. I couldn't see it because I was plum out. But they say they tore him to pieces, dead.

PB: And you were right next to him.

AB: Yeah. They hit me right here. The doctor say, "You was wounded on March the third at ten o'clock at night. And you didn't wake up until the next day about eight o'clock. We thought you was gone."

PB: You have wounds on your head?

AB: Right here. You see?

PB: I can't even see them anymore.

AB: No, here.

PB: Uh-huh.

AB: You see?

PB: Yeah. That just tore you up there.

AB: Yeah, and right up here on this other side. I had a big one.

PB: You went to the 165th General Hospital then.

AB: And then they moved me to 44 hospital. I got a tag up there, too. And they released me, that I was going back to the company, not to the 38th, to the C Company Battalion. By the time I get up there, the war was over.

PB: On the 28th of March it says, "Concussion on the head; abrasions to the face." But you stayed in the hospital

longer than that. When did they let you out of the hospital; do you remember?

AB: It was close to the war was over.

PB: The war was over May the eighth.

AB: No, May the fifth or the seventh.

PB: May the seventh. So you were end of April, probably, before you traveled.

AB: Right, it was end of April when I was going up when the war was over.

PB: Tried to catch up with the 2nd.

AB: Right.

PB: Where did you catch up to your old division?

AB: In Czechoslovakia, Pilsen.

PB: So you're just transferring from one area to another, trying to catch up with them.

AB: Right.

PB: Did you have orders that you followed, where to go to, or did they just tell you?

AB: The guy that was in charge of the group, he had a roster: where it's going to be delivered or where you're going to go.

PB: One point to another.

AB: Right.

PB: And, "Okay, they're going further on. We keep going."

AB: And we was glad.

PB: So the seventh of May, Signing Day, that's when you caught up with the 2nd Division again.

AB: Right.

PB: Was this area all torn up that you went through? Lots of bombing?

AB: Not too much. From here was the worst.

PB: Over in France?

AB: Yeah.

PB: Were there a lot of displaced people on the road? Refugees and things like that?

AB: Around Paris, yeah, was most.

PB: How about Germany?

AB: Germany was pretty quiet at the time.

PB: Were they against you or just quiet about it?

AB: They looked kind of like they didn't like us. But I had talked to some that talk good English, perfect English, better than people that live here.

PB: They must have taught that in the school there.

AB: Yeah, he said, "We went to school." He was a Captain. And later he said, "The war is over. Let's talk." He said, "They pick out so many, and they check how smart you are. And if you're really smart, then they teach you more. And then they sent you to talk different language," because

they didn't know if this soldier was going to go to Russia or was going to go to some foreign country.

PB: Not one German knew Spanish. (laughs)

AB: But that guy says, "Muchas gracias." I said, "What the heck is going on?" (laughter)

PB: Then you looked at his uniform and he had a swastika on it.

AB: Yeah. Young blond kid. I think he was maybe 17. When you have three or four Americans here, you don't know what is who. So I went and patched him up. He said, "Muchas gracias."

PB: Then he says, "Vas ist los." (laughter) What did you do in Pilsen?

AB: In Pilsen, they call their roll call. And the First Sergeant said, "We don't know yet who is going first back to overseas, back to United States."

PB: When did you hear that the war was over?

AB: They make an announcement. You can hear all the people in the back hollering the war was over, and throwing this and that.

PB: Did you have a parade or anything like that?

AB: They did. We left right away because of high points. Each soldier, if he had so many points, he can go first. And we did, me and two Sergeants with the highest points.

PB: Because of your time in service and where you had been.

AB: Right.

PB: And you had wounded, probably got points.

AB: All of that.

PB: Right away, you could turn around and start for home?

AB: Right. But that got slow.

PB: Did you have orders, a group of you together?

AB: They called the names, they delivered to Fort Sam Houston. Some big Officer was in charge of the whole thing.

PB: Where did you go from Pilsen? What port did you go back to? Le Havre?

AB: Yeah. And then we got in here.

PB: What was this, on a Liberty ship or a small ship?

AB: I was so messed up with my head that... It was pretty big.

PB: One of those big liners?

AB: Big liners.

PB: Back to New York?

AB: Yes, back to Shanks, New York. And from there we came by train.

PB: Was that a rough trip?

AB: Rough trip, both ways.

PB: At least you didn't have to zigzag going home. You could go straight. (laughs)

AB: Right, because the war was over.

PB: Did they talk anything about the 2nd Division being redeployed to Japan? Any of the units be on alert to ship to Japan because that war wasn't over that?

AB: We hear that, and they want (inaudible) that part of us. Part of the guys that went in the ETO, they was well-trained. They want them. I heard the orders. Sergeant Shepherd, they said they're going to make him a Tech Sergeant if he goes up there. I said, "Bull. I don't care."

PB: (laughter) "Make me a General."

AB: No way.

PB: "I got my points."

AB: Yeah. I said, "If I didn't get killed then, I'll kill then." The guys that went up there, if you came back, would come all to pieces. No leg or no arm. He said, "How in the hell you got out of this?" I said, "Well, I didn't volunteer for that up there." (laughs)

PB: No, you learn in a hurry not to be a volunteer.

AB: Not like that. You went up there for the... You got a life. Why do you want to get killed up there?

PB: You went to Shanks; did they process you at Shanks, or did you just stay there and head for home?

AB: Just one or two days to kind of turn in what we had and do new clothes.

PB: Back home.

AB: Back home.

PB: Train? Right to Fort Sam?

AB: Train, right.

PB: Then they processed you in Fort Sam Houston.

AB: In Fort Sam Houston.

PB: When were you discharged?

AB: On June the 25th, I believe. I've got it in my papers here.

PB: Did you stay in the Reserves at all?

AB: No, I didn't want to stay in the war. (laughs) Hey, I remember, "Muchas gracias," I said. (laughs)

PB: That's right, that's what you told them. "Muchas gracias. Give me my paycheck. I'm heading for home."

AB: And still I got them headaches, because I got a plate here. I got a plate.

PB: To cover that wound up.

AB: And then they took CAT scan because I can't get well. Sometimes I could be talking, and then next minute I don't know what I'm saying. And I don't know where I'm at. And then I get headaches. They took CAT scan. That's why they find out I had two little screws. And I didn't know.

PB: How did you get most of your meals on the frontlines? Were you on C- and K-rations?

AB: We had K-rations. Plenty of that. No hot coffee or nothing like that.

PB: Hot meals at all?

AB: Once in a while.

PB: And your uniforms, you just wore your OD and helmet?

AB: Yeah. Helmets and all, all the time. They didn't give us a break or take a shave or take a bath.

PB: How'd you brush your teeth, shave, wash your uniform?

AB: Sometimes we didn't have no time for that. Days and days.

PB: You just kept on going. Was there a way to wash your uniform? Underwear? Clean up?

AB: I don't know how they do it, but once in a while they give us the new ones.

PB: So you turned the ones you had in.

AB: And I don't think nobody wants it. (laughter)

PB: Rotted off of you. You'd just get a new issue.

AB: Yeah.

PB: Did you wear insignia patches on your uniform for identification at all?

AB: Some of them guys didn't, because they didn't want -- the division was in the combat in that area.

PB: So you didn't have to wear those badges.

AB: They had orders, but some of those guys did take it off.

PB: Did you wear your rank all the time?

AB: Some of them did.

PB: Was there a lot of discipline, saluting, in the front lines?

AB: We didn't have time for that saluting, I tell you.

PB: Did you get paid along the way, or did you have all your pay sent home?

AB: They sent it home.

PB: For your medical care, you had Aid Stations?

AB: Right.

PB: And Aid Stations went to an Evacuation Hospital?

AB: Right, right. You're very right.

PB: And then back to a General Hospital.

AB: Right.

PB: And they'd try to patch you up as much as they could at the hospitals and send you back to your unit.

AB: Right, for the second time. I see some guys bad and back again. We asked the guys, "How come you didn't get them other guys coming in?" "Oh, they don't know nothing what's going on. You are well-trained."

PB: It's true, replacements later on weren't very well-trained as you guys were.

AB: No, we had a lot of training. That's why a lot of us guys got killed up there. I know a guy went three times. Three times.

PB: Did you get any time off at all while you were there?

AB: Maybe once a month, a day. But a day, just overnight.

PB: When you were on the active lines, would the units rotate out? Would your unit be on the line and then rotate out?

AB: No, if a company of 3rd Battalion was in the frontlines, then either they'd get some men from the same outfit or another outfit to release us. And then we release them. Like the 1st and 2nd.

PB: How long would you be relieved for? A week? Or just a couple days?

AB: No, we had two days. Back again.

PB: Were you always supporting the 38th? They'd watch their men sometimes and supported them.

AB: Right. The whole division worked together. If the 23rd needed help, the 38th would have to go, or the 9th.

PB: Do you remember much about the weather?

AB: The weather was kind of foggy, drizzling all the time. Wet in England.

PB: Brest, I hear, was very nice weather.

AB: Was very nice fighting, too. (laughter)

PB: Yeah, all that fighting. How about up in the Bulge? Do you remember much about the Bulge?

AB: At Bulge was rough, I tell you.

PB: Heavy fighting, bad weather?

AB: Heavy fighting. Winter. The weather was cold. The Sergeants said, "You see why they train us up there?"

PB: Yeah, McCoy.

AB: McCoy.

PB: Did you treat a lot of frostbite, or would they go back?

AB: We'd treat them and then they'd go back again.

PB: Trench foot, all that?

AB: Right, trench foot. I seen some guys bad hurt, but some of them people, they didn't care. They sent them back to the lines. "You don't have to go to the hospital." In the hospital, they had a call. They said, "Boys, you're going back to the States." Next morning, the weapons, about 50 weapons, got in the front of the hospital. Out called the Navy to jump in the truck. "We're going back to England." And the Sergeant was holding the door of the weapons. I said, "Sergeant, you're going to the front lines." From there, if you belong to the first, and the first wants a man, they're going to pick you up. That's the way they was doing it. I said, "You ain't going back to the states, man. You're going back to the frontlines. When the division needs you, you're going to go." You're going to go to the pool, they call it, a bunch of different organization together. But each one belongs to each a

different outfit. If the First need a man, or Three of Four...

PB: They'd send him. They didn't care if he was trained or not.

AB: No.

PB: They just needed the bodies.

AB: Right. Needed somebody up there for target.

PB: (laughs) Did that guy ship out, then? They put him on the truck?

AB: Sure.

PB: Did you ever get a medal from the French government?

AB: I got some; I don't know what they are.

PB: We'll look at them. Any other unusual things you remember at all?

AB: I'm going to let you take this book. Look at it and take your time.

PB: With pictures.

AB: See the cow? Normandy.

PB: Look at that cow. Normandy. I bet there weren't any cows back when you were there.

AB: They keep them cattle inside doors.

PB: Better than their wives. (laughter) What's your real first name? Alfred?

AB: I went in the service as Alfred, but if you want to put
Alfredo, A-L-F-R-E-D-O...

PB: What is the C for?

AB: C is Chavez, like Senator Chavez in New Mexico.

PB: This is your Purple Heart?

AB: You belong to Purple Heart, too?

PB: No, Military Order of the World Wars, it's called. It's
for Officers in any of the wars.

AB: "Muchas gracias." You're the only person I tell what that
paratrooper told me. When I got through bandaging, he
says, "Muchas gracias, amigo." I said, "What?" He said,
"German. SS trooper. Paratrooper, SS."

PB: (laughs) He was bleeding, just like the next guy.

AB: It was rough on them kids.

PB: Did they haul them away to prison of war camp, then?

AB: Yeah, they did, some of them.

PB: Lot of them came back here to Texas. A lot of camps in
Texas.

AB: Yeah. Wonder what they did that for.

PB: They needed the labor. All you guys were out of work, and
they needed someone to work in the fields. So I think
that's why they brought them to Texas, all the crops and
things here, to help harvest the crop. A lot of them
worked on farms. What else you got here? I got your

books. What's this in here? Let me see what that is. Do you have a uniform? Hat?

AB: No.

PB: Military Order of Purple Heart, okay. You showed me that. I saw all this.

AB: This is him and the letter he wrote me. He's a smart man, and friendly.

PB: Did he know the shrapnel was in his heart? Didn't even know it.

AB: Nobody knew it. That's doctors from the Army. And he wrote back to that guy. I got a brother-in-law in Victoria. He said, "Will you tell Buentello if they do come, of course, to come and see me?" But they did help me.

PB: What is this? Request for records?

AB: Yeah. I got everything. Got all the medals.

PB: Yeah, I want to see your medals. Do you have your Silver Star in here?

AB: Yes, I believe.

PB: And this is your DD214, copy of it.

AB: Discharge.

PB: Yeah. In 32 it should say your campaign was Normandy. "Position and campaign: Normandy." That will get you your medal. Oh, yeah, Purple Heart. This is the Silver Star.

Golly. Do you have the citation that goes with me? Should be in writing.

AB: In writing? No.

PB: There should have been a citation with the Silver Star. That's a high medal. A lot of them got Bronze Star. This is the Combat for Europe Theater. Which one is this? This is the American Campaign medal. It was hard to get these medals, wasn't it?

AB: No, they send me the medals quick.

PB: That's the World War II. I was in eight years and I finally found one medal, National Defense Medal. I can wear one medal after eight years. I didn't get anything else. (laughs)

AB: What is that?

PB: I cannot read it. Defense Medal. That's American Defense Medal.

AB: That's close to "Muchas gracias." You're the only man I ever said that...

PB: That's an amazing story. Well, he was bleeding just like we were bleeding.

AB: I thought it was an American. He was a younger blond.

PB: Good Conduct Medal.

AB: And when I get through with him, he says, "Muchas gracias, amigo." I said, "This ain't no Mexicano." (laughs) When

he got up, I see the SS on him. I said, "Hey."

Paratrooper. Well-trained guys. Blame it on Hitler.

PB: Against you. I'm going to take your Indian Head, the Silver Star. There's a citation I want you to look for with that medal. There was a citation that said, "To Alfredo C. Buentello for action here, there, and the other place." There should be. I wonder if the veteran group can find that for you.

AB: I hope I can get anything. Who else you interview --

PB: This is the first Silver Star I've seen. I think Judge Crane has a Silver Star. The students interviewed him; I haven't seen him yet. A lot of Bronze Stars, but not many Silver Stars. That's unusual. Was that for one specific thing you did, or just your general action during the whole war?

AB: Because I had some Sergeants that was well-trained. Of course, I never did train with the 38th Regiment until I got up there.

PB: You think it was from all that action you did?

AB: Yeah, because I take care of a lot of patients up there, and with dangers. And sometimes I don't even want to talk about the war.

PB: Right on the frontline, yeah, all you saw. I know. I've got three other fellows that were in Normandy that didn't get a certificate.

AB: Who are they?

PB: Ed Warren was with the 116th Regiment of the 29th, went in on D-Day. They were attached to the 1st Division.

AB: Right.

PB: Easy Dog Beach, Red Dog Beach. There were two others, also. Who were the others? Laddy Janda.

AB: Nothing from Refrigio?

PB: No, it's amazing how many people there are from... Are you working for the college or what?

AB: I was a little kid in World War II. I was born in 1933. So I was a little kid in World War II. We collected scrap to zap the Jap and stun the Hun, paper and all those things. And I had a scrapbook of all the military campaigns in Europe, where the frontline was. So I was interested in World War II from my childhood. After I did my medical training -- I went to medical school in Philadelphia. After that, I went into the army. It was between the Korean War and the Vietnam War. I went in the army for two years and went to Orléans, France, which is south of Paris. And we got to visit the beaches a number of times, so I became interested in Normandy, the history

of the invasion and all those things. And I've always been interested in people's stories and things. Last Christmastime I heard about a high school in Washington state where the students were interviewing veterans. So many World War II veterans are dying now. There aren't left of World War I. And the World War IIs are dying. So, I said, "Oh, that'd be a good idea." So we had this Military Order of World War. We're part of the Veterans Council. I went to our Commander and I said, "Why don't we do a project?" And the whole organization would really like to do it.

So, we decided we'd take this on as a project. So, we contacted all the schools. We've had 16 veterans interviewed at Stroman. We had 12 that were interviewed at Victoria High School. And then we had one of the classes at Victoria College interview 10 veterans. We did a few on the side, too. So we've had about 40 veterans that we've interviewed. So the students had the experience.

END OF AUDIO FILE