Alan Pilot Oral History Interview

MIKE ZAMBRANO: This is Mike Zambrano. Today is August 10, 2010. I'm interviewing Mr. Alan Pilot. This interview is taking place over the phone. He is at his home in Waco, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, and Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to the site. Good morning, sir; how are you?

ALAN PILOT: Just fine, Mike.

MZ: We're going to start off pretty far back here. Can you tell me, please, where and when you were born?

AP: I was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1923.

MZ: What were the names of your parents?

AP: Mabel and Leon Pilot.

MZ: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

AP: Yes. I had two brothers. One died during the flu epidemic of 1918; my other brother, Oliver, about five years older than me, died two years ago.

MZ: I'm sorry. You grew up in the mid to late '20s and the '30s?

AP: Right. I was a child of the Depression.

MZ: Can you tell me a little bit about that? What was life like for you?

AP: Most of us were poor, Mike, so we didn't realize that we were poor. Sometimes we had to combine living and get a couple families together in order to make ends meet. Unfortunately, my dad had a cerebral hemorrhage in 1929 when he was 38 years old, which incapacitated him for about five years during the Depression years. It was tough on my mom, who was a Rock of Gibraltar. She was a great lady, a tough lady. She was involved with raising her kids, but we never suffered; we never were hungry. Most of all, we were happy. It was a good job, even though it was tough during the Depression years. As far as the Depression years are concerned, I graduated from high school in 1941 and went off to college for a short time. Then Uncle Sam got me.

MZ: Which college was that?

AP: It was Drexel. It was an engineering school there. After one semester, I realized I was not made out to be an engineer, so that stopped my education when Uncle Sam called me.

MZ: Had you wanted to be an engineer since you were a kid?

AP: No. I don't know why I chose that. I graduated from a county school, which did not prepare me for the type of study for being an engineer. It took me one semester to

realize that. I would have flunked out if Uncle Sam hadn't gotten me.

MZ: So then you were drafted?

AP: Yes. I was drafted and got word in December of '42, and I went in January of '43.

MZ: Let me back up a little bit, because it seems to me you were a teenager when the war broke out. Do you remember where you were or what you might have been doing when you heard that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor?

AP: Yes. One of my closest buddies had joined the Marine Corps and he had gotten back from boot camp. I was taking him to the station to go back to Parris Island, I guess -- wherever. We heard it on the car radio. It was early in the morning and we heard it. That's where I was, taking him back to the station to go back to camp.

MZ: Do you recall what his reaction was?

AP: No, Mike. He was a laid-back guy and he had a very distinguished career in the Marine Corps.

MZ: Do you remember anything else about that day? Maybe the way people acted, or just something in general about that day, considering America was brought into this war?

AP: Mike -- that basically is all I really remember. It's just hard for me. I don't really remember anything else about that particular day.

MZ: That's all right. Let's zip back a little bit to the point where you are drafted. How does that work? Do you get a notice in the mail?

AP: I got your "Uncle Sam Wants You" letter. I did not volunteer. I was in the ROTC up there, the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, which was mandatory, but a lot of guys joined the reserves so they could stay in college; but that only kept them out for just a few months. I was conscripted.

MZ: When you say you were with the ROTC, you weren't in high school at this point, right?

AP: No, no. Are you talking about still in '41? No, I worked after I got out of high school. I graduated in June of '41. I worked a year so I could earn the money to go to college, and I chose Drexel because it had a five-year program. In other words, you would go the first year, which I had the money for, and then after that you would go and work in your so-called profession for six months and go back to school for six months. It took five years to do that. That's why I chose Drexel, because we had the money for me to go to college.

MZ: You had entered ROTC before you were drafted, right?

AP: That was at Drexel.

MZ: Oh, so they offered ROTC at Drexel?

AP: It was mandatory. You had to take Reserve Officers' Training, and I remember the uniform had blue lapels and ROTC. We used to kid ourselves, and we called that the Royal Ottawa Tank Corps. When people would say, "What is ROTC?" We'd tell them it was the Royal Ottawa Tank Corps.

MZ: That's funny. (laughs)

AP: I only participated the three months that I was in school that first semester, from September, then I got my call in December of '42.

MZ: You get your letter and --

AP: Took my examination. And the ironic part was -- not ironic, but because of my eyesight they had marked down "limited service" on my papers, and I ended up in the Infantry, but as a medic rather than as a Rifleman because of the limited service. I was inducted at Fort Meade, Maryland. Then they sent us over to Angel, Texas, for training there. That's when I went into the 86th Division. The Classification Officer there says, "You're going to the medical tent." I said, "I don't want to be a medic; I want to be a Rifleman." He said, "Well, I appreciate your spirit, young man, but you're going to medical detachment."

MZ: (laughs) So that's how you chose?

AP: That's how I got into the medics rather than being a Rifleman.

MZ: What was the problem with your eyesight?

AP: Nearsighted, just extremely nearsighted. I was wearing glasses in my junior year in high school.

MZ: So that's pretty much what helped them direct you to be a medic?

AP: Yes, because it had "limited service" on my papers, I guess. That's ironic, because there were guys in there in the different rifle companies who were blinder than I was. It's just the way that Classification Officer decided to do it, that's all. Back then they were pretty desperate for people.

MZ: In '42?

AP: In '43 and '42. The Selective Service System was really pushing. I got mine on my nineteenth birthday. I got my notice, which was September, and then you report maybe three months after getting everything in order. And then you report to Fort Meade, which was in January of '43.

MZ: I'm just curious, but did your brother also get inducted?

AP: Yes. He was in the Navy. He'd been in the Navy during the Depression years. Back then you could join on your 17th birthday. He served for three years. He did that first. It was during the Depression. There were CCC. You've heard of those, haven't you?

MZ: Civilian Conservation Corps?

AP: Yes. He had his choice, and it was better that he go into the Navy, which he did. And then he got out and went back into the Navy in World War II.

MZ: At this point in your life, you're designated to be a medic. Where did you go from there for your training?

AP: Right at Gainesville, at Camp Howze. There were three divisions that trained there during that time. The 84th, our division, and 103rd Divisions all trained there during World War II.

MZ: I've never interviewed a medic, so can you walk me through the process of where they start and what they show you?

AP: You mean as far as training?

MZ: Yes.

AP: We took basic anatomy; we took pharmacopeia, learning the different drugs. Our job being a combat medic, which means I would be attached to a Rifle Company once we were in combat, was three things: if you were in pain you'd administer morphine; you would stop the bleeding; you would treat them for shock. Then get them back to the Aid Station as soon as you can. That was basic. We had how to stop bleeding, where the pressure points were, how to apply tourniquets, but we also got a pretty good education on the medical end of it. But basic first aid is what we did on the battlefield, in other words, to get the guy back to the

Aid Station, which was usually about two or 300 yards behind the lines. That's basically what you did as a medic. And I remember lots of the training we would get a slip saying, "Treat this for a femoral artery laceration." We applied direct pressure. This is the type of training that we had, and we went through what the basic Infantry did, the close order drill, and all that kind of stuff. After the training, I was attached to a Rifle Company then, as their Aid Man and, of course. I would look them over before. If they wanted to go on sick leave they'd come to me and I'd okay it or not, take their temperature, send them over to the detachment for further treatment. But I lived with my company, my rifle company.

MZ: How many weeks does this training last?

AP: It was three months of intensive training, and then we went on maneuvers. Later on after that, that's when I would go with my rifle company as their medic and, of course, we'd always train with them. We trained as a Battalion. We'd go out on maneuvers; the Infantry would do their thing and the medics would do their thing. The Aid Station I was talking about was where we had a Doctor that was in attendance, and they were back there with the Litter Bearers and the Doctor and his assistant, and so forth. They would set up 200 or 300 yards behind the line back in

basic training. When you went out on maneuvers you always had injuries -- in fact, even deaths. A number of guys were killed when we were on maneuvers in Louisiana. They were mostly truck accidents. They'd be going at night with no lights. They'd run off the road into a ravine and this type of thing. I remember I was called, and it happened pretty close to where my company was. They yelled for all medics to go to a certain place, and that's where a kitchen truck went down this ravine. It had all this heavy equipment on it and a couple of guys were killed. This happens. When it's live ammunition time, you get guys that shoot themselves accidentally or whatever, which was good training for us, as far as the medics were concerned. We had more hurt on maneuvers, and they were three months long.

MZ: These were the ones in Louisiana you said?

AP: Yes, this was after we got all of our basic and advanced training in Camp Howze. Have you ever been up to Gainesville?

MZ: No, I haven't.

AP: You haven't? Well, if you ever drive up to Gainesville, on the other side of Gainesville you look west and you'll see these old water towers. That was Camp Howze. It was activated during World War II and deactivated right after

World War II. And the three divisions, every one of them ended up at the Battle of the Bulge, the 84th and the 103rd.

MZ: Do you recall about what month you were shipped off to Europe?

AP: We did our basic training and we thought we were headed for Europe then, because they knew that D-Day was coming. But instead, they pulled a bunch of guys out and we had to retrain again. Then we went to California for soft landings on the beach, beachhead landings. We trained with the Marines down in Pendleton for the invasion of the Philippines. That was our official mission. Of course, in December came the Bulge, if you remember your history, and we then were put on orders to go to Europe. We ended up leaving in January for Europe and then we got involved there. We originally were slated for the Pacific, for the invasion of the Philippines.

MZ: But then you ended up going to Europe?

AP: Because of the Bulge they called just about every division. All three of our divisions were called up; they went even a little ahead of us. We were one of the last divisions to get over there, which was fortunate. We got over there and went up on the line in the last of February, the 1st of March, and we fought into Cologne. We relieved the 8th

Division and we fought into Cologne, and then we stood on this side to keep the Germans from coming back over. And then of course the Remagen bridge had been breached. The troops had already taken Remagen. We crossed Remagen but it had already been taken a few weeks before. And they put us into the Ruhr Pocket. It was about 100,000 Germans, elite troops surrounding, and they didn't want to surrender. So one of our jobs was to go into the Ruhr Pocket. That's where we got our casualties pretty bad, because there were a bunch of late troops, (inaudible) outfits that were pretty determined to hold out. So we had to convince them otherwise.

MZ: Let me back up a little bit. Do you remember where you left from the United States? I guess you went straight to France.

AP: Yes. We went to France, we went to La Havre. We disembarked at La Havre. This was in the latter part of February of '45. Then we went two weeks, or about 10 days, in the camp so they could get everything together, logistics; and then we were put on boxcars. This is ironic. A lot of them were old World War I boxcars, forty and eight: forty men or eight horses. Forty and eight they called them. They teach that in World War I. And that's

when we went up to the line. We got as close as we could to disembark and took trucks into the front lines.

MZ: How much time has passed here, from when you land and you actually get up to the front lines?

AP: Maybe three weeks. Two weeks at camp and then another week of getting everything together, moving up to the front lines.

MZ: Did you have any first impressions of Europe when you landed there?

AP: Do you mean as far as going into combat? I'm trying to think. Yes, there was a little town, and after we had gotten to the camp for a few days they gave us a day's pass. We went into the closest town, and my first impression was -- (laughs) they have these outside urinals with just a band that covers you, maybe from the chest on down to your knees, just around this area where you go to the bathroom. And I saw this and I said, "How decadent could you be?" Everybody, guys were going to the bathroom with this band around them. That's it; right out in the open. That was my first impression of the French. (laughs) To me it was dirty, because I know this was war and they had been under German occupation for a lot of years, but I just did not appreciate the French for that. Great first impression.

MZ: My next question was going to be what you thought of the French.

AP: (laughter) Not too much at that time, really. I know that, in retrospect, I look back on it and I know what they had been through.

MZ: Right.

AP: As a young man going in there and seeing it, I said, “Gosh, this place is dirty.” There was a bunch of stealing going on too, there at the camp. They named the camps after cigarettes. Ours was Camp Old Gold. That was a brand of cigarette back then I smoked. And there was Camp Lucky Strike, Camp Camel, all the different camps around there were named after cigarettes. Who knows why.

(break in audio)

AP: Now, remember, Mike, I’m sifting through 65 or 66 years of memory, so it gets kind of vague at times.

MZ: No, no, I understand. If you remember something during the course of the interview that stood out to you, maybe you forgot earlier, please just feel free to stop me and you can relate it and we can tape it here. Did you have any good friends, or did you make any good friends during this period?

AP: Oh, yes. You earn friends that you never forget, and very close, because when you’re in combat conditions or even

training conditions -- in fact, I had three very dear friends. All of them are now passed away. One of them, we were inseparable. One of them that was my closest; he was attached to a different company than I was. The other one was with me all during maneuvers and training in the States, then he went to another company. We were all very close. One from Detroit, the other from Covington, Louisiana.

MZ: Were they medics also?

AP: Yes, they were medics.

MZ: And did you meet in --

AP: Basic training. All through basic training, all through advanced training, maneuvers, the whole bit.

MZ: What were their names?

AP: One was Guy Bachlard; he was a little Frenchman from Detroit. And the other one was [Ed Fielding?]. He had played freshman year at LSU -- big guy. And his folks were in the funeral business over in Covington, Louisiana, which is across Lake Pontchartrain. The three of us were pretty much Musketeers.

MZ: What was your French friend's name?

AP: Guy Bachlard. B-A-C-H-L-A-R-D. It's G-U-Y, but he called pronounced it "Gē." He was always with me. We'd go out on

leave, even after I'd gotten married, which is another story, which is all part of World War II for me.

MZ: You got married during the war?

AP: Yeah, I met my wife up there at Texas State College for Women, which is TWU now. It's a women's university. It was only 30 miles from Gainesville. We found out about this all-girls school there, so that's where we gravitated to, and I met her at a dance. The dance was in Gainesville, but she was in this organization and they brought about 20, 30 girls up to Gainesville at a USO place. I went and met her there, but there were about 200 GIs surrounding the dance floor and there was these 30 girls, so I danced with her a couple minutes, couple of seconds and somebody would cut in. I told her my life story. All she would tell me was her name was Theo. I saw her on campus a few times. We were destined to meet and get married. She had been dating different guys from different units, and so one time this friend of mine said, "I've got a date with so-and-so; see if she can get you a date." At first, she told him, "Well, I don't want to date anyone, because I'm tired of dating." She convinces her to go down and look at him. She went to the top steps, (laughs) she looked down. (inaudible) at the door and said, "Yeah, I've seen him. (inaudible)". That's the way

it all got started, Mike. From then on, I courted her there, I married her there, and we got married February of ’44.

MZ: Wow.

AP: And it’s been going on for 66 years now.

MZ: So were you home on leave when you married her?

AP: No. Camp was only 30 miles from Gainesville. I met her there at the school. We would go weekend passes, and I would go in and I courted her. That’s the way it all flourished.

MZ: That’s a very sweet story.

AP: Yes, it was just destined to be. And there were four other guys who married girls from TSC or Texas Woman’s University. I think there were five of us that met and courted and married girls from there during the time we were in Gainesville.

MZ: Let me get back to you and your friends in Europe. Just to get it out of the way, did you or any other medic ever carry any weapon?

AP: No, we did not carry a weapon. We were not allowed to carry weapons. I did have a knife, and I stuck it down my combat boots that had straps on the outside. I’d use that so I could cut the clothing and get to the wound. That was

the only thing I had, but it was not used as a protective weapon; it was used for cutting the clothing away.

MZ: There was a particular name for your bag, wasn't there?

AP: My bag?

MZ: Your medic bag. Was there a particular name for it?

AP: No, I had two of them. If it was, I don't remember, Mike. They were just medical bags, and you had all your stuff that you needed: different types of bandages, the morphine syrettes which we carried. We'd used Sulfanilamide powder. We used mostly the powder. Each GI, each Rifleman had a packet you carried which had a bandage and Sulfanilamide powder, which you would use. In training they would get us the powder on every wound except a stomach wound. No, they had tablets. We would not give them a tablet, which was a soft, pill-like tablet if there was a stomach wound, which is pretty obvious why. But I remember the two different kinds: the tablets and the powder. They were the soft drugs. This was before penicillin. Penicillin was still in its infancy at the time, we did not have that. We did when we went to the Pacific.

MZ: What else would you carry in your bag?

AP: I would carry blood plasma on the Jeep. We tried to get them back to the Aid Station for the blood plasma, but I did carry some blood plasma bottles on one of the Jeeps.

Mostly, in there were bandages, painkilling syrettes, morphine, my many scissors, all my different drugs, and I would talk about that. The secret was in those bags. Some of the bandages were pretty good size bandages, because if you had a stomach wound you had to have the larger bandage.

MZ: What was your first experience in combat?

AP: My first experience was, we were relieving the 8th Division and it was pitch dark. We would usually get in during the night. We were running boards, I forgot where, and I tripped over something and I lost my helmet. I groped around and put my hand on a dead German's face and I screamed. Sergeant-Somebody said, "Doc, knock it off!" This is my very first experience running towards where we were going to stay, and tripping over this dead German and not realizing, and then trying to find my helmet -- That was my very first experience.

MZ: I can imagine it was pretty terrifying.

AP: Yes, it was. That's why I screamed. But then we got into Cologne, and we stayed there a few weeks to keep the Germans from coming back over. The other big experience I had was, I was with a mortar heavy weapons company, which had an 81-millimeter mortar, which is the larger mortar. The Cologne Cathedral, which you've read about, we had an outpost up there at the very top. So one day they said,

“Hey, Doc, do you want to go up there with us?” I said “Sure.” They called me Doc, which was, to me, an honor. We climbed up -- it was a shell. We were just hugging the walls, trying to climb up these stairs up to the very top of one of the spires. We could look directly over the German lines and see any activity or movement, then they would get called back down for the mortar squad to fire. But while we were up there, the Germans started shelling and they were hitting down at the basement, the bottom floor of the Cathedral, and all the shrapnel bounced around and I was scared to death. After we got to the Rhine River it was relatively quiet, but after that shelling, I said, “I’m going back down as soon as it’s over,” and I didn’t go back up again. It was scary. Here is another thing: In 1980, I think it was, we went to Europe with some good friends --

MZ: To where?

AP: To Europe on a tour, our own tour. While we were in France and Germany I said, “Hey, if you don’t mind, if it’s not out of the way, I would like to go back and visit the places where I fought through,” which we did. This is a Sunday, and we went over to the Cathedral, which had been completely restored. They were having mass. We were sitting there and I was looking up, around and could still

see some of the pockmarks of the shells, and it was a strange feeling. I had cold chills sitting there during the mass and knowing what happened back in March of ’45.

MZ: I can imagine a lot of people have probably seen those same pockmarks and not really stopped to notice them or even think about what they meant.

AP: Yes. It was so vivid because of what had happened to me, but we went back to two of the many places. One, where we got in the Ruhr, where we got a lot of casualties in this little town, we took on counterattack. Went there and went to the crossing of the Danube at Ingolstadt. We were the first division that crossed the Danube River on that last drive through Germany, and went there where I almost got killed. They were shelling us, and one came by and it didn’t go off. I was 10 feet from it. There again, it was the good Lord looking after you.

MZ: So it burrowed in the ground there about 10 feet away?

AP: Actually, it didn’t. It skipped and went on past; it was strange. It did not bury like so many would. It may have been because this was cobblestone. It may have glanced in. What we feel may have happened was the slave laborers that the Germans had, they had put them in all these factories, they had sabotaged a lot of the shells with the fuse or something and a lot of them didn’t go off.

MZ: Yes, I've heard that, too.

AP: You've heard the stories? We felt like this had to be one of them. But I ran and I got to some shelter, and I just sat down and got shook for a while, got myself together; and then we crossed over. A funny thing happened. There was the combat engineers who did a bang-up job during combat time, they had put a little bridge across. It was a personnel bridge. During the night, we were trying to get across, and we were running towards the bridge. We got onto the little bridge and there was machine gun fire from the Germans coming in, and a big guy in front of me, one of my buddies, he said, "Oh, God, I've been hit!" I grabbed him and said "Keep going, Matt. Keep going if you can." And we got over there and he lay down. What had happened was a piece of shrapnel hit his canteen and he felt this water coming down. He thought it was blood. (laughter) So we kidded him about that after that, saying, "Where's my canteen?" Even in the toughest times there's always humor. That was kind of funny.

MZ: I'm curious now. Were you ever told anything about dealing with Germans, in the regards of being a medic and what to do? And was there a procedure of some type?

AP: I only remember treating one and he was -- I take that back, twice. One time was a sad situation. We were at the

Ruhr, we had all been under fire constantly, lost a bunch of guys. In the Ruhr, it was mountainous, hilly, and you'd have these roads that would go around the side, kind of like in the mountain. These were not tall mountains like the Rockies, but we had access for these roads. We were there and I heard him yell "medic!" I got up and went back, and there were five or six German soldiers, prisoners of war. One of them had been shot by a guy, and he was guarding him and -- "What'd you shoot him for?" I looked down. This guy had gray hair; there's his family. I just felt very bad about that. He was shot by our own guy, which I don't think was necessary. And I know he wasn't going to live, because it looked like it had pierced his lung. I gave him a shot of morphine and then went on back to my unit. But that, and another time. There was a German in a little car, similar to a Jeep, and one of our sharpshooters was quite a ways off, shot him. When we got there, I went to treat him, but he was already dead. That's the only time I treated German soldiers. But they would be treated just like any other American soldier. I heard our main station guys say there's some Germans that came through and they were treated just like -- gave them the same treatment. Does that answer your question, basically?

MZ: Yeah, I was going to lead off to things that I've heard in the field. I know there was a battle during World War II where German and American medics were actually on the field at the same time during a truce of sorts.

AP: That's possible. It didn't happen with us, but I had four direct crosses on my helmet. Front, back, all the way around. I also had two brassards, one on the left arm, one on the right with a red cross. We were well marked as medics. The Germans had these aprons, a white apron with a big, red cross. It covered their whole front and back. They were very well marked. I told the guys don't shoot at them, or they're going to be shooting at me. In the course of combat everything gets heated, so I don't know for sure; but I don't think our guys would purposely shoot a German medic.

Our biggest danger was not being shot at personally, but when you're shelling, they don't know who's out there. If they happen to be on the move and they shell, a medic or a rifleman is exposed to things. I think I know what you're getting at. The difference, the respect for the medics in Europe was completely disregarded in the Pacific. I'm sure if you talked to any of the medics from the Pacific War,

they would purposefully try to shoot them because of the morale factor.

MZ: Right. And then, at least in the Japanese's eyes, a wounded man would draw medics, another wounded man would draw more people in to try to help him.

AP: That's exactly right. And the medics there were armed in the Pacific, where we were not. It was just a different war altogether.

MZ: Another reason I ask was, I've never interviewed a medic before, but one gentleman that was injured told me that he was in an Aid Station during Normandy, where the Germans actually came upon their Aid Station, pretty much saw it was an Aid Station and just decided to move on and left them alone.

AP: It was, if you would call it, it was a more moral war than fighting the Japanese, just altogether different, different attitudes. There was a certain amount of respect for the Geneva con -- all that in the war in Europe. And a German soldier, he was just like us, had to fight. The only ones that you would run into were the SS, the elite groups that were temporized, so to speak, but the Wehrmacht, which is the German Army was just GIs like us. We had to do it. Do your duty, so to speak.

MZ: Other than the two Germans that you treated or that you described earlier, did you have any other encounters with German prisoners?

AP: Oh, yes. At the end of the Ruhr, the Pocket was closed. There were 100,000 or whatever, the remains left in that pocket surrendered en masse. I would look down, I was on a hill and looked down and saw all these German soldiers sitting on the ground, under guard. I never specifically dealt with them. One time, we were moving to another area and we were on the trucks. There was a line of German prisoners marching along the east side of the road. But as far as a personal contact, no.

MZ: I thought maybe to just hand out a bandage, or just something that was fairly simple. Or like you said, basically what you witnessed. Were these long lines of Germans marching down the road?

AP: Oh, yes, because when we closed the Ruhr pocket, there were 100,000 of them there, so there was a whole bunch of them, yes.

MZ: You mentioned --

AP: I don’t know where they were headed, but the opposite direction we were going, because this is when we had to pull out of the Ruhr for the final push through Germany. We were on trucks overnight, and then we disembarked. We

had the privilege of spearheading past the right flank during that final push into Austria, crossing the Danube. We got a commendation from them about what we did and so forth, our Division did. General [Molasky?] got the commendation and he passed it on down to us.

MZ: Do you remember who your commanding officer was?

AP: For the medics, it was Major [Mercer?]. Are you familiar with the basic setups of the Infantry?

MZ: Somewhat, yes.

AP: Back then there were three Regiments that made up the division, plus all the supporting stuff. And each regiment had a medical attachment, had a Commanding Officer, which was a Doctor. That was Major Mercer, a nice guy. Then there were doctors to each Battalion, there were three Battalions. There were some back in the detachment headquarters where Mercer was, but also, as I told you, there had to be a medical Doctor with each Aid Station. They had to have a Doctor there with them. All we do is stop the bleeding, give them a shot of morphine, see that they took their pills and send them back, if we could find a Litter Bearer. I had a Jeep that I used that I could put two litters on the back and one in the front. It could carry three wounded. The walking wounded would get on the best they could. It was hard to find a Litter Bearer.

Well, they were back with the Aid Station and they would go forward. A Company Commander would call and say, “We got to have some Litter Bearers,” or whatever, then they would come. But most of the time, in order to get a guy back to the Aid Station I’d use that Jeep with the stretchers going across. That’s mostly what I depended on to get them back to the Aid Station.

MZ: Do you remember Major Mercer’s first name?

AP: Oh, golly. I could look it up. No, he died -- because he was much older, but he died not too long after World War II. And I remember, of course, my Battalion Commander [Cain?], I remember my Regimental Commander Lindquist, who was an upfront kind of guy. He was upfront with most of us. He got a lot of respect. He got wounded and managed to get him a Silver Star, but he deserved it. He was a good Regimental Commander. He was a full Colonel.

MZ: Did you ever receive any type of wound during the war?

AP: No. I was, if you want to call it that. I got a little piece of shrapnel cut on my hand. I treated it myself and never went back, because it wasn’t that bad. If I had known that I would get five points for a Purple Heart, I probably would have gone back. This is all in retrospect. My wife, I left her pregnant. I don’t want her getting a notice that I had been wounded in action. It was very

minor. In fact, I can't even see the scar anymore across my right hand. It's gone. Lots of close calls, but that was the only one I could say.

MZ: Okay. You mentioned the Ruhr Pocket a few times during the interview, and you said the fighting was pretty bad?

AP: Yes, because the Pocket had been completely surrounded. But these Germans would not surrender, and they said they would not; they'd fight to the death, which they did do. We went in there and we got a lot of resistance. They had these roads that went around, and this is your only access to get to the next town. They would have a roadblock set up there, usually with an 88, and that was the most feared weapon the Germans had over there. It was feared by all of us because it was high velocity, straight trajectory, and they just go bang, bang, bang and it hit. You couldn't hear it coming; it was just such a high velocity. We got so many of our wounded that way, from the 88.

MZ: It was a very effective gun.

AP: Yes, it was. Also, the Germans would tree burst these 20 millimeters, and then it would come down -- I treated a bunch of leg, back legs and back wounds because of the shrapnel coming down from the tree bursts. We were counterattacked with tanks. There was this little town that I went to visit in 1980, didn't recognize anything.

But this is one time, where I would say that I completely and totally lost it -- we were going down this road, guys were going house to house and all that, and then they counterattacked. I saw the German tanks coming towards us. Well, I ran back and cut into what I thought was another street, but it was a cul-de-sac. I couldn't go anywhere. I just slumped down, knowing that this is it. I could picture that German tank coming around for me, and it went right on past. I wasn't any good for quite a while after that. I just had to get myself together, that was it for me. But we talk about the support, our artillery was wonderful. He could pinpoint our 105s, 155s; particularly the 105s, which was closer support. If you call those coordinates in correctly they can pinpoint it, and that's what they did. They pinpointed that fire on those German tanks. There were three of them; the rest of them were crew. That's what saved us on that particular situation. The fact is the German prisoners had heard the guys talking about someone talking to some other assistant. The Infantry was okay, but they said American Artillery, Wunderbar; this is what they feared the most.

MZ: Really?

AP: Yeah. Our artillery, it was very, very accurate; very, very effective. It got us out of trouble a number of

times. It got a good FO, forward observer, who can call in proper coordinates; they can put that on a dime; they can put that right exactly on it. They were good.

MZ: When we first spoke, I said that I would do a little bit of reading on your unit. I just wanted to toss out a couple of names of some cities and see if they might ring a bell.

AP: Okay. Ruhr.

MZ: Excuse me?

AP: That was in the Pocket.

MZ: Yeah, I've got that here. Eibelshausen?

AP: Eibelshausen? No, Herscheid is too small for you to have on there. That's where we encountered the counterattack, and had a lot of guys killed and wounded in our particular unit. That was G Company; G and H Company. That's where we were the second battalion. Yeah, got caught in there. Let me think of some others. Essen, of course; that was all the Ruhr. That was a big deal, as a matter of fact. Let me think of some others. Do you have a map there or something?

MZ: Actually, I wrote down some cities. I'm sorry, not cities but areas where the 81st was.

AP: Eighty what? Eighty-six?

MZ: I'm sorry, the 86th.

AP: If I had my map here ... I can't think of some of the other cities, but they were significant sized towns.

(break in audio)

MZ: We were talking about cities that you'd gone through.

AP: Take the Paderborn and take the Attendorn.

MZ: Yes. I read something about the 86th clearing Attendorn in early April.

AP: Another city was Ingolstadt.

MZ: Ingolstadt.

AP: That's on the Danube.

MZ: Anything stand out about that?

AP: That's where we crossed. We were the first unit to cross the Danube on our final street through. The Germans were trying to get up into what they call the Redoubt area. Have you heard of that?

MZ: Yes.

AP: That's where we spearheaded and got behind them, as the Russians pushed them down and prevented them from getting out of Salzburg. We ended up in Salzburg.

MZ: Do you recall something called the Amper Canal?

AP: Yeah. I think my buddy was involved in that. It was where they found, I think, a passage under it. K Company -- This was my buddy, Guy's, outfit. They found it and were able to get under and on the other side of the canal, without

trying to have a water assault across it. There's the Isar Canal.

MZ: Yes, I think the Isar River?

AP: Mm-hmm. We ended up in Salzburg. We were riding on top of tanks because we were barreling through there. It was snowing. This was May the 8th or May the 7th, and all I know is how cold it was. But we got in and, of course, Salzburg there were no Germans there when we got there. That's where we stayed. Our division and the 101st I think were at Dachau: the death camp. Some of our units were there; thank God that we were not. My regiment was not involved in that situation, but I think that some of ours were, from what I understand. The 101st had already pretty much had gone to Dachau. Some of our units reached there a little later and saw the terrible sight there. Someone went over there, and I said I don't want to go. We were resting. The only picture of combat I have that I've got with me in my memoir book is we had just crossed the Danube. After we got across the Danube, we had very little resistance. Some, but not much. We were barreling down this autobahn, and the Germans had blown all the bridges, but we would go down around them and up. These were not crossing rivers, of course. The Danube was pretty scary, in that the Germans had what they called a "Mimi," a weapon

that evidently went end over end. It gives this horrible screeching sound, just demoralizes the heck out of you. Other than scaring you to death, its explosive thing wasn't that great. I heard that thing and it scared the heck out of me. That and the shell not going off and getting across the Danube there, that's the basic thing I remember about Ingolstadt. We were the first ones there and the first to cross the Danube. We had that distinction in the final drive.

MZ: I forgot to ask you earlier, what was the weather like during your time in Europe?

AP: Cold. Very cold. The famous snow and stuff, the bad weather happened in December and January. We didn't get there until later, but I remember being cold, rainy, and miserable. You fight the elements as much as the enemy. (laughter) But I just remember it being very cold, and that was end of March, first part of April. After we got through into Germany the weather was okay, but like I said, we had encountered snow on May the eighth. It was pretty high country there. We were getting into the Alps and stuff.

MZ: I read that the division actually started making its way into Austria from Germany?

AP: Yes, after we crossed the Danube. Bavaria is southern Germany. We actually started in Munich, because that had already been taken by the 45th division, and barreled into Austria and into Salzburg. As I said, very light resistance then. The Germans had enough, very little resistance there.

MZ: I did read something about the 81st capturing the Crown Jewels of Hungary?

AP: Yeah, I was not part of that. I didn't even know about it until after; not until a few years ago when someone that I read about -- oh, I can pull it up on the computer. I did not know about that at all. I don't even know what unit it was.

MZ: I thought it was interesting. I heard about that.

AP: We also got a commendation from the Holocaust Museum in Washington. Our unit was mentioned for something, maybe Dachau. I don't know. There was a mention of our division in some of their papers there.

MZ: Where were you when you had heard the Germans had surrendered?

AP: We were into Austria. We were riding on tanks, my particular company was. We were on top of tanks barreling into Salzburg when we heard. When was that? Not June.

MZ: It was early May, I think.

AP: Early May, May 8th. May 8th was VE day. We heard earlier than that that they had capitulated, but not the final thing. But we were headed into Austria, into Salzburg.

MZ: How does the mission change at that point? Did the Germans issue a counter after that? Were they already coming up and surrendering?

AP: There were constant big white sheets hanging. Every town we'd pass through, there was big white sheets. And they would say, "All is Kaput, all is over. All is Kaput. Hitler Kaput." The Bavarian people were not dyed-in-the-wool Nazis, even though Hitler's headquarters was Munich. In fact, we had an instance where one of our guys was captured. I heard this later, it was another regiment. The Bavarian people hid him out until American forces showed up. They hid him out. In other words, they protected him from the Germans. Most of the people in that area were not for the war; not for Hitler. I found Germany, in that area where there was not a whole lot of fighting, very clean, very nice. People realized what (inaudible). They were nice people. In fact, we got into Austria and we were on a vehicle, and we crossed this log bridge and some logs came away. All these German people came out and helped. The Austrian people came out and helped us get the truck moving again. They were very

accommodating, very nice. It was a different atmosphere in that area. You go through there and you knew they were devout people. A lot of Catholics in that area, they had little side places you would see little boxes with the crucifix and all; an indication of their spirituality. You don't hate people like that.

MZ: Did you have the opportunity to treat any civilians for anything?

AP: One time. That time when I said one of our guys shot this German who was driving a vehicle. I got there and I treated some civilians. Also, there was a woman having a baby and I said, "No, no." (laughter) But I said, "The Doctor will be by." When you see the trucks come through with the red cross on them, you hail them down. I wasn't about to try to deliver a baby. (laughs) That was the only place I remember because we were moving so fast, particularly on that last drive. We'd get on trucks. We'd move out; we'd come to a resistance, get off the trucks, fight our way through that, get on trucks again. This is what Patton wanted. He wanted us to get there ahead of the Germans so bad. That's why we got the commendation, because, evidently, our leaders did a good job in covering the territory. But I know sometimes we were even on bicycles, Mike.

MZ: Really?

AP: Commandeered bicycles, because we would go from town to town, where the resistance would be in the town. In the open there was no resistance and, of course, the artillery wasn't much in play anymore. We mostly encountered small arms fire, because they didn't have time enough to move artillery. I remember before we knew what a jet plane was, we were in convoy racing along this road and I saw this first lead truck get hit, and then this plane go over immediately. It was so fast. We didn't know what it was. We all piled out and found out later it was one of the German's first jets.

MZ: Oh, really?

AP: Yes. I think it only did it that one time, but we had no idea. I mean it was so fast. We were not used to that. As I said, that first lead truck was hit, and it'd almost beat the explosion there it was so fast. We had no idea, but we found out later that that was one of their jets they got into the air. That was a first for us too, I guess; one of the first to get streaked by a jet.

MZ: That's interesting. They came out with those pretty late in the war.

AP: Yes. Very late. In fact, I don't think they had them until the last few weeks of the war maybe. I read some

articles about other instances using the jet, but very little. Not much from that point of view.

MZ: From our previous discussions, I understand that at some point it was determined that your unit would go to the Pacific.

AP: Yes.

MZ: When did you hear about that? General thoughts about going to fight in the Pacific?

AP: We heard that when we got back. We went right back to France in the same camp that we were in, and we got word that we were going to be the first Combat Division home, only because we were going to the Pacific immediately. We were the first Combat Division to hit the States, and there was a great welcome. We thought we'd won the war. There were so many other divisions, too. They, at first, thought maybe we would parade down 5th Avenue. Our leader said, "Hey, we don't deserve that." The 101st or the 82nd was coming right behind us, and they're the ones that deserved it more. I remember coming into New York Harbor, seeing the Statue of Liberty and tears went down my -- I was just so glad to see it, and all these fire boats and barges with bands on them, welcoming us. One of our troop ships had "ETO to Tokyo" on a big banner. In fact, you can get the newspaper archives. *The Baltimore Sun* -- My sister-in-law

found my name in a list of the guys coming back from the division that was from the Baltimore area. My name is in there.

MZ: Really?

AP: Uh-huh, because we were the symbol of redeployment. We were the very first troops, Combat Troops, back in New York that were going to the Pacific. We were, they said, “The symbol of redeployment.”

MZ: What was the general feeling in the unit? You had just fought in Europe. What was the general feeling about fighting in the Pacific?

AP: There were a few crybabies, but most of the guys said the war is not over. There was no lack of morale; let’s put it that way. We knew that we were one of the last divisions over there, that our casualties were much less than most divisions, and that we also had trained for amphibious assaults.

MZ: Oh, that’s right.

AP: So I think that was earmarked way back, even when they were fomenting the invasion. I’ve got a book now out that’s called *Hell to Pay*; which, if you’ve read it, it’s about the invasion of Japan and all the units involved, what the Japanese had. It is scary as heck. Believe me. If you’re familiar with the invasion there at Kyoto, the southern

island, the invasion into Tokyo. Our division was Coronet -- Operation Coronet.

MZ: Yes, it was.

AP: Our division was going in at the very beginning for that. What they had there for us, Mike, we would not have made it out. It was impossible. You've read all the articles about the staggering amount of casualties. Every time I hear a revisionist say, "They shouldn't have dropped the bomb," I get a little bit upset, because it saved me, my division, and lots of guys. I think that Truman made the right decision. Now that's me, personally.

MZ: Right. I've heard other veterans say the same thing. It was a paratrooper, I believe. I forgot which part of the invasion it was going to be. I remember him telling me that, later finding out what kind of defenses they had, he felt it wouldn't have lasted very long.

AP: As I said, I thank the dear Lord for Truman's decision, because we got home. I just found out that I had a newborn baby. I didn't know it, because I was overseas. We were on the ship when the baby was born, and I didn't know that until I hit the States there at Fort Dix. We got 30-day recuperation furloughs. At Camp Grove, Oklahoma we refilled the division from all the losses. The older guys they let out, and they refilled the division and it went on

to San Francisco for the embarkation. We had just been at sea when we heard that it had been dropped. We thought we were coming home. Of course, they did that but it was still a little bit of time before the Japanese capitulated. But we headed immediately over to the Philippines and did a little clean-up work there. There wasn't much for us to do.

MZ: Right. Actually, I'd read something, and it said the 86th Division was aboard the ship at Leyte Harbor when the Japanese surrendered.

AP: Mm-hmm. I had had my birthday on board the ship. We heard about it when we got into Leyte. They let us all pretty much swim down there somewhere. Then we went on up to Manila, Batangas and our division stayed there. It was the one that had the job of getting the Philippine guerrillas into the Philippine Army, getting ready for their independence. That division was there on their Independence Day. All of us high point guys had been long gone; it was all filled up with new men. We got there and I got my word of going home in December. I didn't get to go until January of '46. The only couple things that I got involved in was, there was about 15 of us on a little outpost out of [Banatawan?]. Bongabon was a little town we were near, and we were at an outpost. We'd go down and get

water and stuff from one of these rivers and bring it back; but we got fired on while we were there. Not by Japanese, but by the Huks.

MZ: The Huks?

AP: Yeah. They were a communist group that was very active back then. I don't know whether you've read any history about those or not.

MZ: The Huks? No, I haven't.

AP: The Philippines have always had problems, politically. The war is over; we don't want to get fired on. Another very interesting thing that I was involved in: have you heard of Baguio? It is a seaport town, a resort town on the western side of Lausanne. There had been reports that the Japanese were coming in and raiding the ones that would not surrender, raiding the town Baguio for food; so, they went in and they dropped leaflets over Baguio saying that if you would surrender, we'll give you safe conduct. They didn't want to surrender to the Philippine army. Most of them were in resistance units. We took off. They wanted me to go along; there were five of us in the Jeep. We went across this mountain road and we came into Baguio. In his opinion, maybe the Japanese would surrender, which they never did. But they had not seen American troops before, so they wined and dined us for two or three days until the

Lieutenant said, “Hey, we’ve got to go back. Enough is enough.” That was interesting. As medics, we were given a choice of weapons, and my choice would have been the [carpe?] because it’s a lighter weapon. That would have been my choice, but thank God we never had to be armed. The 86th did its after-war duties over there. I had a couple of times that I had gone out into different guerilla camps and inspected them for sanitation and things like that. I was there as a medic, and I was with this small unit. It was just time on our hands and waiting to come home, because we were all High Point men.

MZ: Did you ever treat any Japanese while you were there?

AP: No. I treated civilians up there in Baguio that had been wounded, but no Japanese. The way I got my sword was through someone else who didn’t want to mess with me, carrying the bag. He said he took it off of a Japanese Sergeant. Some of them had not surrendered. Our division did a little work on convincing the Japanese in the area to surrender. That was around Manila; that’s where we were. I’ve got another interesting story, in that I found out my brother’s ship was in Okinawa and was going to be there a while, so I went to Clark Field. I got the okay from my CO and hitched a ride to Okinawa on a PBY -- You know, one of those things that can land on water and so forth.

We got into Okinawa and that big hurricane had just hit there, and just devastated the island. This was after the war, it was in December of ’46. I got off, went to the first base of operations, Naval operations, and asked about the ship. They said, “No, it wasn’t on their log. Just go across the island and there’s another.” So I hitchhiked across the island, which, as I say, was pretty devastated, and asked over there. They said, “No, the ship had been in, but it had left because of the hurricane.” So I missed my brother. Here it was, I had been on the road over 24 hours, I had not eaten or anything and it had been raining; it was miserable. I saw these lights at the harbor, so I went over there. It was a CB unit, and they were on these barges. I said, “Hey, guys, what’s the chance of getting something to eat?” They looked at me and they said, “Come in here, Dogface. We’re going to treat you right.” They fed me, beer and everything. I went to bed between sheets. I hadn’t had that since the States. The Seabees, they could accommodate anything and everything they wanted because they were our Construction Battalion, and also did a lot of logistics work. I slept there that night, and the next morning they come up and they said, “How do you want your eggs, Dogface?” They called me Dogface. (laughs) So

I had three or four eggs over easy, bacon, and then they sent me on my way. I forgot what field it was I went back to, but it was close by there. I took a C-47 back to Manila. That was an interesting trip. Didn't get to see my brother, but hitchhiking from the Philippines to Okinawa was quite an event.

(break in audio)

AP: That's where I flew up there to see my brother. We had discussed that pretty thoroughly, about me flying up to Okinawa, hitching a hike up there to see my brother's ship, which he'd had already left because of the...

MZ: Right. And you ran into the Seabees and they treated you very well?

AP: Yes, and came on back through Clark Field.

MZ: So what other experiences did you have while you were in the Philippines? How were the people?

AP: They were all very nice to me. What's interesting is my daughter, who got her Ph.D. in biology, she's in research up at ... Oh, Mike, my old man's brain. Anyway, she met him at her work. His family was from the Philippines, and all professional people. Her in-laws were pharmacists in the Philippines and worked for a company there; came to the United States and her husband was -- It's horrible when you get old and you can't remember. But anyway, they married

and it’s an outstanding family. As I said, they’re all professionals; they’re doctors, they’re lawyers. Take Asian people. When they come to this country, they’re going to get their education. We’re so blessed as an American family. We saw a lot of the treatment of the Philippine people after I left the Philippines. My vision of when I was there was there were some primitive people and so forth. In fact, we had one houseboy when we were up there on outpost. He said, “I want you to come to a funeral.” He said there will be wining and dining for three whole days. I went to that, and it was very interesting, the way they celebrate going to heaven. It was quite a party, I remember that. Generally, the Philippine people were very neat, very nice. I remember the little kids when we were back (inaudible) goes through the chow line there. These little Philippine kids stand there with a bucket. A lot of the guys would just take their food, dump it in their buckets, and go back in line again. It was pretty sad. My wife’s father-in-law was a young man near where my outpost was, at Cabanatuan. He was about 15 or 16 years old, and he told stories about his occupation and what they had to go through to survive. Very interesting. They are a nice bunch of people, they really are.

MZ: When did you find out that you were going to be coming back to the States?

AP: I got my word in the last part of December that I was on the list to go back as soon as they get transportation back. I left there right after the first of the year.

MZ: And what year was this?

AP: This was in January of ’46. It would have been five or six months. As I said, most of it was doing nothing. The main part the division played was getting the independence of the Philippines, helping them to get ready and processing guerrilla army into the Philippine Army in a few clean-up spots. But that was the only time I got involved, was that strip of the Baguio. I did more drinking hooch than anything else. Didn’t have anything else to do when we were out there on an outpost, just the 10 of us. We could do what we wanted, when we wanted. I remember going into town one time and all of us proceeded to get drunk. The MPs caught all of us and then they looked at us and said “You know, you guys, it’s a good thing all of you are High Point men of combat or I’d throw every daggone one of you in jail. Get your tails out of here, and don’t come back.” (laughter) It was just too much time on our hands. I wrote these sad sob stories home to my wife, and she’s still got the letters. I said, “I don’t want the kids to

read these." She's still got them down there in the storage.

MZ: What rank were you at this point?

AP: Oh, that's another story, Mike. I came up pretty fast at the beginning. Are you familiar with technical ratings?

MZ: Yes.

AP: T5s, T4s?

MZ: Yes.

AP: I became a T5 right after basic training. I was one of the first ones. I was eager and I took care of my Company. He taught me real well, the Logistic Copy Commander over there. After getting married, while we were in Alexandria, Louisiana, that's where we got off maneuvers, and I did not get up to go back to camp. I stayed over Sunday. Well, there was one particular non-commissioned officer that didn't like me, and he was trying to get his buddy promoted. But when you get to the TO, at a Table of Operations, you can only have so many of these, so many of that. He came down Sunday morning, because someone had said they didn't think I was in. I hadn't come back yet. The Commander, he said "If you can find Pilot before Monday morning, I won't bust you." And I got busted to Private.

MZ: Oh, you did?

AP: Yeah, I got busted.

MZ: I think I missed the beginning of it. He just had it out for you?

AP: Well, I think that. I don't know why. He just wanted to promote his buddy. For some reason he did not like me, and I did not like him. And I guess we made it known; you know how things are. He made a point, and he had got word somehow that they didn't think I had come back to camp. So he went to my office with the E Company then and the Copy Commander. He had been trying to cover for me, because he and I were buddies. I took care of his guys real well, we were buddies. He tried to cover for me, but it didn't work. He persisted and got me off, put me on the AWOL. I got busted when I came in Monday morning. I had found out I made T4. I had just put up for it. But he says, "You're not going to get that. You're going back to Buck Private." That was Mercer doing it, but he was only doing what he had to do. I was young and didn't think I'd get caught, so I got busted. I made back -- when you're overseas in combat for so many days, you're automatically PFC; so, I became PFC.

MZ: So this is the same Captain Mercer that we talked about that was --

AP: Major Mercer.

MZ: Major Mercer, I'm sorry.

AP: He was a Sergeant and a medical Doctor. I think his name was Eugene or something, I'm not sure. He went back to his practice. There were a number of guys that were medics that became Doctors after the war. Three or four of them did, because some of them had been in one year, two years of college, and pre-med. And, of course, they saw that and put them in the medics. But a number of them became Doctors who were aid men like I was, who were in detachment. The unit overall, the IQs were better than normal, but for a couple of things. I think it's because we had a bunch of anatomy, pharmacopoeia and other things we had to study. Some of them were pretty dumb. They made them Litter Bearers. (laughter) It was a great adventure, Mike. I'm glad I did it when I was 19 and 20 years old. It was a young man's war. I look back to see what I went through, and you had to be young to survive. You hear all about this post-traumatic syndrome. We guys, I'm talking about World War II: 400,000 casualties. Nothing was said about that when we got back out of the service. You went on with your life. I went back to finish my degree. Don't misunderstand me, I think the guys that are fighting now deserve everything they can get, I'm sure. We had one guy in the unit that got battle fatigue. They had to send him back to a unit that was not front line. Two of them,

really. Two that I know of that suffered severe mental conditions there. They had to relieve them and send them back off of the front lines. But most of us guys, it was just all part of what it was all about. Did you read the book *The Greatest Generation*?

MZ: I've read parts of it.

AP: It depicts the guys. They went to war, they fought a war; they came home, many of them went to college. I found out the division was having reunions. This wasn't until 1990-something. The kids didn't even know anything about it, because I never talked about it. We all got together, of course, we had already fought the war. We had our own mini-reunions, which was our detachment, which means the First Sergeant got ramrodded. The most we had there was 15 of us and we were having them in different places. One place was up in Gainesville, so we all went out to see where the old camp was. That dwindled down now. I think of that group of 15, I know the First Sergeant is still living; I really don't know of any others that are still alive.

MZ: So I take it that you don't have the reunions anymore?

AP: No. The 86th Division had their last one last year and it was ramrodded by a guy who was a college professor and a writer, and he kept things going. He was always on the

division's association's staff, the reunion staff. But he did more than keeping (inaudible). He's out of Florida, and he is a college professor. I still get the magazine from the association. He's still seeing that that's being done. Got the last one here a while back, but the 86th Division stopped having them this past year. What he's tried to do is get regional guys that would volunteer to get things done, say, here in the Texas area or something like that. I haven't heard any more about that. I'd be glad to work with them if they want to, because I know of 10 or 15 guys here in Texas. They all (inaudible) the association's membership. As I said, we're all 85, 86, 87 or so. In fact, I'll be 87 next month.

MZ: You mentioned that you went back to college when you got back. Did you use the GI Bill?

AP: Yes. Well, actually I did mine not on the GI Bill, but Public Law 16, which is Disabled Veteran. I got a disability when I got out and I went on that, which is not much different than the GI Bill. It was basically the same, only that you can pursue your education beyond a bachelor's degree if you wanted to, which I did not choose to. I was a very lazy student. I studied enough to get by. I got my degree from University of Maryland. I went back there and got my degree there. My wife did the same

thing. She had been going to TICW, but she finished up in Maryland. In fact, we both graduated together in 1950. The *Washington Post* had gotten word of the two of us graduating together and they tried to hunt us down to get a story and it never happened. They couldn't find us.

MZ: Oh, that's too bad. (laughs)

AP: Yeah. They were four great years in Maryland, a bunch of old, old GIs, ex-GIs like myself: poor. Most of us had at least one job. But we had a ball in Maryland. There were family units there that we stayed in, and at a very reasonable cost. We would party there every Friday and Saturday night. (laughter) Had fun.

MZ: What was your degree in?

AP: In economics.

MZ: Why did you choose that?

AP: I don't know; I took some tests. This was part of the Public Law 16. They give you these tests to see maybe where your interests were. Why economics? I wish I had got my degree in accounting, but I got it in economics. It doesn't really get you much of anything. You may go to work for a bank, but I came back to Waco, which I chose after I got out of Maryland. I chose to come back here because I wanted to get away from the East Coast for some reason. My wife was from here, of course. In Waco, I got

into the insurance business, and I stayed in it for many years. Things happened, I got disillusioned, and I went to work for Uncle Sam. I went to Department of Defense. My old employer was in defense contracts. We administered and negotiated defense contracts for all services. It was an interesting job. Then I retired in ’85. I’ve been retired now for 25 years. I retired early at 62, because things were getting pretty hectic and I needed to get my job done. I got tired of the red tape, so I’m going to take the earliest out that I can, and I did. It was interesting work, though; very interesting.

MZ: Just real curious -- When you came home from the Philippines, I assume it was by ship?

AP: Yes.

MZ: Okay. And where did you land when you got back to the States?

AP: The port out of Los Angeles. Did you know that there was a transportation strike going on then?

MZ: No.

AP: Yeah, I was originally supposed to go by train. They induct you and process you out at the same place; that would be, for me, Maryland. Well, we got lucky. They said, “We’re going to fly you.” I had contracted ... I don’t know if it was dengue fever when I was in the

Philippines, when I was out on outpost. I was sick as a dog when I got off that ship. I got on a plane, and this was a civilian plane. I remember the stewardess came by, she said “Soldier, are you all right?” And I’m shaking, just shaking with fever and chills. She said, “We’re going to put you off at so-and-so.” I said, “No you’re not. I’m going home.” I refused to get off. Got to Mead, still feeling bad. My parents came down and met me there that same day. I remember it because it was cold. It was cold; it was January. My father said, “Are you sure? Let’s go home. Go home for a while.” My wife was there. She must have come up from Texas to be in Maryland. We went home that night, and I was so sick. I said, “Dad, I think we’d better take me back.” So they took me back to Fort Hood and I got my discharge about two days later; and that basically was it. A guy came in and says, “Anybody want to join the reserves?” Most of us there just gave him the big finger. (laughter) We didn’t want any more of Uncle Sam’s Army. I was discharged, came back, went back down here to Texas, and I had no idea what I wanted to do. I know the first month or so all I did was have parties and see my old buddies. The one I told you about, in the Marine Corps.

MZ: Yeah. From the very beginning?

AP: Yeah. He went through most of the battle in the Pacific. My other great buddy, he was a Marine. He was there and we wined and dined. There were six of us, three guys. I was outnumbered by those two Marines. I couldn't get a word in edgewise. But every once in a while, the women would all stand up and say, "We're tired of listening to your war stories." I didn't do anything but wine and dine for about two or three months. Finally, my dear wife says, "You've got to make up your mind about what you want to do." Well, then they found out that I had been awarded my disability. So I said, "Hey, I'm going back to school." It was pretty sizable, at that time. And so I went back to school.

MZ: What was your disability for?

AP: I think probably because of that fever, I was so run down and so debilitated, evidently. I took my final exam and I didn't even know I was going to get it. They never said anything then. I was down to about 125 pounds; and evidently my nerves were, because of all that, pretty bad. So I found out about two months later that I had been awarded 60 percent disability; which, I didn't know why, but I took it. I think that's the contributing factor. Although, I did have an eardrum that burst overseas that I never did report, and it was draining a lot. I finally went to the doctor and he cured it, but they didn't look at

that, I know. I enjoyed the month. I still got a 10 percent disability. They whittled it down to that. I'm 87 next month and I'm in pretty good shape. I've had a couple of bypass surgeries and a minor heart attack, but I'm pretty good.

MZ: Well, you've got a good, strong voice. You've remembered a lot during the interview and you sound like you're pretty healthy.

AP: Yeah, I am. We're very fortunate, my wife and I. We've got 66 years of married life together and did the things that we wanted to do. Never made a whole lot of money, but that's all right. We're financially comfortable in retirement, we're fine.

MZ: So how many children did you end up having?

AP: We had three children. Unfortunately, we lost our son at age 42 with a heart attack.

MZ: Oh, I'm sorry.

AP: Yeah. I've got two girls; one in Chicago and the other in Cincinnati. Abbott Laboratories is what I always try to think of. She's a research scientist with that laboratory; she has really gone up in the lab. She's one of the top ones up there and has done very well with her doctor's degree. My other daughter, her husband is in public relations director for the Cincinnati Bengals.

MZ: Oh, really?

AP: Yeah, so both of them have done well.

MZ: Good.

AP: My son was a salesman and type A; you know, “charge, charge, charge” -- a lot of hypertensive energy. It finally got him. He left three children, which we helped raise. We ended up bringing them here to raise, and we educated them. They wanted to go to college, and we helped them out there. They all turned out real well.

MZ: Well, that’s good. I’m glad. Do you have anything else that I might not have asked you about the war that you recollect and might want to add?

AP: Not really much, Mike. You got a pretty good lowdown on it. I might be thinking of things later. As I said, to me, thinking about specific situations, I’m so glad that it turned out the way it did. So I’m very happy, because Coronet, we would not have made it. My division was slighted to be the very first, and I just don’t think I would have made it. You’ve read some of the articles about what was... You’ve got to get this book, *Hell to Pay.* I can’t think of the author, but --

MZ: I think I’ve seen it. There are a few books in the last year or two that have come out about Coronet and Olympic.

AP: Olympic and Coronet, yes. It's an eye-opener, and it almost made cold chills go down my spine when I read some of that stuff; what they were going to do, what they had prepared for us. Pretty bad.

MZ: Yeah, it would have been. It would have been pretty nasty.

AP: Yes, it would, Mike. Do you live in Fredericksburg?

MZ: No. Actually, I live in Round Rock so I'm about a couple hours away from you.

AP: Round Rock, yeah. How did you get involved over there, over at the museum?

MZ: I had visited the museum a few times and I just happened to be on their website one day and saw that they needed some volunteers for oral history. I just called, and as they say, "The rest is history."

AP: Great. How long have you been doing it, Mike?

MZ: Gosh, I think since about 2006.

AP: Really?

MZ: Yeah.

AP: Well, what do you do with our tapes now? What's going to happen?

MZ: Basically, what will happen is I'll submit it to the museum so someone will transcribe it. They will send a copy to you.

AP: Oh, great.

MZ: Actually, there are a couple of forms that I need to send you in regards to --

AP: You'll send it forth?

MZ: Yes. One form involves if you want people to be able to access your interview. You can say "yes," or you can say "no." There are a lot of researchers out there that like to read these and get some more information on certain areas.

AP: I have no objection to that. I told you before I did it, the Texas Veterans Land thing -- I did an interview with them. They called me and wanted to know if I wanted to be interviewed. I said it'd be fine, so this is the second one.

MZ: Well, good. It's a good thing, I think, that veterans come forward and tell their story. I know sometimes, for some that I've interviewed, it's been hard for them to relate some of their stories.

AP: Well, some of them went through a lot more than I did, and I can understand that they're reluctant. What we went through was bad enough, but wasn't anywhere near so many of them. I didn't talk about it until, as I said, 10 years ago or so.

MZ: Let me see if I've got this straight. As far as rank, the highest that you got was T5?

AP: That’s right.

MZ: All right.

AP: It was supposed to be T4, but it didn’t happen, Mike.

MZ: (laugh) And that was due to Major Mercer?

AP: Yeah.

MZ: Let me see really quick here if I’ve got anything else. Where were you when you heard that the atomic bomb had been dropped?

AP: We were on the high seas headed for the Philippines.

MZ: And what did you think?

AP: We thought we won, man. The war’s over, we’re going to come back. Ironically, the ship did turn around and go back. We thought we were going home. The ship had some repairs it had to do, had some emergency, turned around, went back under the Golden Gate Bridge, again. (laughter) We really thought we were coming home, but we were out at sea for a short time and we heard it. The ship turned around. “Hey, we’re going home.” But it didn’t happen.

MZ: Where were you when you heard that the Japanese had surrendered?

AP: We were still at sea, because it took us two or three weeks to get down there. We were still at sea when they finally surrendered. They were convinced this was in the plans before they dropped the bomb that our division was going to

go to the Pacific; to the Philippines in preparation for the invasion of Japan. That was in the works. I'm sure (inaudible) was already there, so them we just kept on going, didn't come back, even though we saved (inaudible).

MZ: We discussed earlier how medics were viewed by the enemy in the European theater and the Pacific theater differently. Before you went out to the Pacific, had you heard any stories or did you understand that those rules were a little bit different out there?

AP: Yes. I had read enough, and then we were oriented. They said that the medics in the Pacific were armed and the reason why. And we wrote down our choice of weapon. But basically, we went to orientation on that.

MZ: Were you surprised?

AP: No. I was in the States long enough before I went to Europe to read some of the terrible stories about what the Japanese had done and so forth. I was pretty aware of that. A medic in Europe had a higher casualty rate; I'm talking about the Combat Men than the Infantrymen did. But when they look up statistics, the medics had the highest casualty rate. Because we were told, "You don't put yourself in unnecessary fire." But when you are with your company and they're your guys, you would take care of them, Mike. And you do things not out of heroics, you do it out

of instinct, and because you don't want to let your buddies down. So, yeah, I got exposed a few times. Scared me to death. But I did it. (inaudible) I've got the Combat medic's Badge, which I'm very, very proud of.

MZ: I could imagine. Sometimes through the books I've read and other veterans I've spoken to, the attitude is somewhat of a, "Hey, my country called on me. I just wanted to do the job and get home to my family."

AP: Mm-hmm.

MZ: Do you think that's a correct assessment?

AP: I think so, Mike. I had no regrets that way. I would have gone in the service; I would have joined, particularly after I flunked out of school. I would have joined the service, yes; because the attitude back then was, "This is just the thing to do." I don't know if it was patriotism or when all your buddies were off to war. I had some of my high school buddies that had gone to the Pacific who had come back home already.

And to see this type of thing, this type of atmosphere, yes, most everybody that I knew of either volunteered or were conscripted. I didn't know of any of my closer buddies or even acquaintances that were not in World War II, unless it was physical. I've never heard any griping or grousing, even coming back from Europe. We still knew we had a job

to do. I wanted to be with my family, particularly my new family, but I knew we had a job to do and just accepted it. Didn't like it, but accepted it, yes.

MZ: All right. I think that pretty much does it for all my questions today.

AP: (laugh) We've had a long interview and I've enjoyed every moment of it. I can say, years ago, I wouldn't have enjoyed talking about it. I'm like you, in that people need to know what World War II Veterans went through. Do you realize that some of them went overseas and were there for three or four years?

MZ: Oh, yes.

AP: Never came home.

MZ: Yes.

AP: That's unheard of today.

MZ: I find it interesting, because it was a situation where we're not only putting large amounts of men overseas, but even at home you had --

AP: You had your home front people that were behind to help tremendously, yes.

MZ: Exactly. Everybody played a part.

AP: Absolutely. It was total commitment. I'm glad they can do this, because it's an all-volunteer Army. But since they volunteered, they're paid very well. My first check was

$50 a month, and they're paid pretty well. They are professionals, but they also recognize that they are able to put them over there for so long and bring them home. That's good that we can do this. Back then you couldn't. We had six or seven different fronts that were fighting all the time, and in fact, in *Hell to Pay* it brings up scraping the bottom of the barrel, as far as getting men to be built up to do what they needed for the invasion of Japan. They were very concerned that they would not have the people to do it, because they were at the bottom of the barrel, as far as young men. That was when your 19th birthday was right after that; that was when you got your notice that you were going to serve Uncle Sam. But it was like I say, Mike, it was total war, total effort. The people supported it, most people did, and we saw the danger. Nowadays, we got this radical groups over there that are creating the problem, and I'm not saying we should stay over there. I've always supported our guys and supported our nation in what they had to do, but it's still a radical bunch over there. It can drag on forever.

MZ: Yes, that's true.

AP: Somewhere we've got to have a solution, I'm hoping. Then again, you have to put your faith in your leaders.

MZ: Yes. One last question: do you recall the company that you were in? I mean, what letter designation it was?

AP: Yes, it was Company E for a period of time, and then Company H, 343rd Regiment, Combat Regiment. There's a book out by a Regimental Commander wrote before he died.

MZ: Really?

AP: Colonel Bloomquist, it's called *My 343rd Combat Team*. It's a great book, and it tells his specific experience as Commander of the 343rd Regiment.

MZ: And his last name was Bloomquist?

AP: Bloomquist.

MZ: Okay. I'll look it up.

AP: Yeah, look it up, because I don't know whether the book's still available; but if it is, it gives you pretty good insight. He got a medical discharge. He was ill the very last part of the campaign over there, and he got a medical discharge right after that. He was our Regimental Commander, Full Colonel, which is head of a regiment. He was a Frontline Commander.

MZ: I think that pretty much does it for today.

AP: Okay, Mike. It's been very enjoyable.

MZ: Well, thank you for your time. I appreciate that you're sharing your experiences with the museum, and with me.

END OF AUDIO FILE