

Alfred P. Birdwell Oral History Interview

MARK CUNNINGHAM: This is Mark Cunningham. Today is August the 28th, 2014. I am interviewing Mr. Alfred P. Birdwell at his home at the Waldenbrooke Estates in Bryan, Texas. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. First off, right off the bat, Mr. Birdwell, or may I call you Whitey?

ALFRED BIRDWELL: That's right.

MC: OK, Whitey. I want to thank you for doing the interview on behalf of the museum and also, more importantly, I want to thank you for your service to your country.

AB: Thank you much.

MC: And I'm going to start with talking a little bit about your early life, get a little bit of history on you, and then we'll go in and concentrate most of the interview on your World War II service. OK?

AB: All right.

MC: So right off the bat, when were you born and where were you born?

AB: I was born in 1918. I'm a Hoover hound, and I was born in Rush County, Henderson, Texas. I was on what they called a one-[gattis?] farmer.

MC: What's that?

AB: A one-[gattis?] farmer, one suspender.

MC: Oh, OK. Grew up on a farm?

AB: Grew up on the farm, and when the war come along I left the farm and went into construction work.

MC: OK, now let me back up a minute. Tell me a little bit about what were your parents doing.

AB: Well, my mother's name was Ellen and my father's name was Frank. He was a little bitty guy. He could walk under my arm, but he carried a big stick.

MC: All right. You have any brothers and sisters?

AB: I had five brothers and no sisters.

MC: Were any of the other brothers in the service?

AB: Well, I had one brother that went into the service early, but he didn't go to war, and the boy youngest and I, we did. Now he was in North Africa, and he stayed in the army four years. All of us boys had some service. I had one brother that was in England in the air force, and we saw one another quite often. And I had two brothers who were in the navy. Of course, there was five of us in there.

MC: So all five of you served in World War II.

AB: Well, there were six of us served -- well, that's right, five of us served, and the other one was discharged before the war.

MC: OK, now tell me a little bit, where were you when the war broke out? What do you remember about Pearl Harbor day specifically?

AB: Well, I was driving the truck somewhere between Arkansas and Alabama, hauling heavy issue when Pearl Harbor broke out. Germany, of course, we was having trouble with Germany, too, and I wondered what in the world was going to happen for us, you know, because I knew that I was going to have to go in. But I waited to be -- because I was married at the time and had two children, and I waited until --

MC: Boy, you got started early, didn't you?

AB: Well, no, I was in my twenties when I married. See, I was born in '18.

MC: Right, OK, yeah.

AB: Went through high school, and I married my high school sweetheart. Of course, that was back in the Hoover days, and we scratched one another's back then to make a living. So when I got to running the roads and couldn't make a living at that, I went down to the construction work at Beaumont and went to work where they were making synthetic rubber. I had never run heavy equipment before, but that's

the first thing they put me on was a big D8 dozers,
leveling the ground. So I stayed there until the job was
over with, and when I got my last paycheck the next morning
I got my notice to report. I don't remember what the date
was on that, but it was -- I don't remember. You get old,
things slip.

MC: Forty-one maybe. Had the war been going on a while?

AB: Oh, yeah, it had been going on for like a year and a half.

MC: OK. So where did you do your boot camp?

AB: Fort Knox, Kentucky.

MC: OK. What time of the year was that, do you remember?

AB: It was in the late spring.

MC: OK. The weather wasn't too bad?

AB: No, the weather wasn't too bad.

MC: How was the boot camp?

AB: Well, it wasn't bad. It wasn't bad. The only thing about
it was when I went in, about three weeks after I went in I
got a letter from home, and my baby was sick. So I had two
babies, so I didn't know which one it was, so I tried to
get leave to go home to check on them, and they said, no,
let the Red Cross do it. So the next thing I got was a
telegram that my baby died.

MC: Oh, my goodness.

AB: And so I went home and buried my boy, my youngest one.

MC: And he was how old?

AB: Twenty-two weeks old.

MC: Oh, wow. That's tough.

AB: Yeah, that put a chip on my shoulder, and the Red Cross never showed up. And the one thing, had the boy running from Red Cross to go home, he'd pay it back with interest, but (inaudible). So anyway, I had a tough time with my basic training, but I got through it all right without getting in trouble.

MC: Now where did you go after basic?

AB: Well, we went into further training. We went up into, let's see, where did we go after basic training? One of the forward camps. I don't know, I don't remember exactly where it was. Up in one of the northern states. But we went up and took terrain driving.

MC: OK, so you were being trained to drive a tank.

AB: Right. I didn't have any trouble learning to drive a tank, because I was used to the job when I went in.

MC: That makes a lot of sense.

AB: Yeah. Well, they said that that's the reason they wanted me up there, because I was a diesel operator, and they had one diesel tank, and they put me in the first tank, and it was a diesel tank.

MC: OK, tell me about driving the tank. I never talked to a tank driver before.

AB: Well, mine was a little bit different from the rest of them because the rest of the tanks in the outfit used that 90 octane gasoline, and they had a big muzzle flash out the back exhaust, and they couldn't work at night on account of it. But I didn't have any exhaust flash, so I did the night work. I was the first tank in the first platoon leading it, me and the colonel, Colonel Lovelady. He was too big to get in the tank [yet?], so he rode in the jeep, and there were times when they were faced with a little bit of trouble, he'd come get behind my tank, and I'd have to protect him.

MC: Right. Now how many men in that tank?

AB: There was five in that tank. There was the driver, the assistant driver, and the tank --

MC: And which side did the driver sit on?

AB: Pardon?

MC: What side did the driver sit on?

AB: On the left side.

MC: OK, just like a car.

AB: Yeah, and the gun was on this side. The tank commander and the gunner and the loader, the radio tender, we called him. There were five men in the tank.

MC: Right. Now tell me something, that must have been a heck of a sound when those guns went off. Did you have any ear protection or anything like that?

AB: Nope.

MC: Do you have any hearing problems as a result?

AB: Yes, I've had a little hearing problem, but mostly from the machine gun, coaxial, and it was about eight inches from my ear on the right side, and that's where the gun was, was on the right side of me, right between the driver and the assistant driver.

MC: Now what did the assistant driver do?

AB: Well, he just assisted me, and they happened to me when he'd take over. We used to have a .30-caliber machine gun in front, but they discarded that because if he fired the gun he'd have to fire it through a periscope, and that wasn't very accurate. So we just used the coaxial gun on there.

MC: Now were you looking through the periscope much at the time?

AB: No, not very much.

MC: You had an opening.

AB: I would drive with the open hatch with my head sticking out about that far.

MC: OK. But that kind of makes you a target, doesn't it?

AB: No, what it only did was ruin your eyes. (laughs) See, that thing was hot in the summertime and cold in the winter. It pulled air in because of the cooling, but the oil baths was the only coolant we had in there, and it was in the back of the turret. It turned with the turret. It got hot in there.

MC: Yeah. OK, now how long did your training last?

AB: I had 18 weeks, because I had -- I had 22 weeks, because I had to go home and delay it out, and I had to switch from one company to another to finish my training.

MC: OK. Now did your tank crews generally stick together, or did you pick up new crews as you went along?

AB: Well, it was just according to whether any of us got wounded or not. We swapped tank commanders quite often, but the rest of -- and their assistant drivers, but the rest, the other three of us, stayed together all the way through.

MC: Where was this tank? What was the tank commander's position in the tank?

AB: Well, he was to give directions on where to drive and to give the distance of inbound.

MC: OK. Was he in the turret?

AB: He was in the turret with his head sticking out a little bit to where he could see or looking through the periscope.

MC: OK, and there was a loader for the big gun?

AB: A loader for the big gun sat on the left.

MC: OK. And what does the other fifth man do?

AB: He was a tank assistant driver. There was three men in the turret, the tank commander, and the gunner, and the loader, and the radio tender and loader. He was two jobs.

MC: There was only one machine gun, is that right?

AB: Only one machine gun.

MC: And the .30 caliber?

AB: Yes, it was a .30 caliber. We had a .50 that we sometimes mounted on the turret ring for air force, when we had an air raid we had the .50 on a turret ring mount, but we never used it very often, because we had anti-aircraft with us. It was three tank platoons in the company, and we had two extra tanks with us because it was an air corps observer and an artillery observer, and they was in a tank with us. So there were 17 tanks that was capable of firing, but the two of them was commanded by the artillery observer and the air force.

MC: OK. Now, after your training, your 18 weeks of training, where did you go then?

AB: Well, I went to -- oh, my goodness, the name just slipped me.

MC: It was stateside?

AB: Oh, yeah, it was stateside. I went to two different camps stateside, just moving forward.

MC: Yeah. When did you go overseas?

AB: On January 1st I got on the *Queen Mary*, on January the 1st, and landed on January the 7th.

MC: Forty-four?

AB: Forty-four.

MC: OK.

AB: No, no, '42.

MC: Forty-two?

AB: Forty-two.

MC: OK, where did you land?

AB: Landed in Le Havre, France. We all floated there, and that's where we got our tank assignments.

MC: OK. Now D-Day --

AB: Well, D-Day was before this. I didn't make D-Day.

MC: OK. All right. So from Le Havre, France --

AB: Yes.

MC: All right. Is that where you joined a 3rd Armored, or were you already with the 3rd Armored?

AB: I was already assigned to the 3rd Armored. That's where the 3rd Armored went, there. That was where they had a shallow harbor, and where the British were pressed up in there at

one time, and they were trying to get in there and get them out.

MC: And that's southern France, isn't it? Is that southern France?

AB: No, that was on the British side, just right across the channel.

MC: Right across the channel.

AB: Yeah, from the British.

MC: OK. So you got there on January 7th?

AB: Yeah. I left Boston Harbor on the 1st, we loaded that night, and got there on the 7th and off loaded, and we had those assigned to our duty on the 7th.

MC: OK. OK, tell me about what happened to you going across Europe.

AB: Oh, across Europe? Well, we went into --

MC: Let me back up a minute. OK, by this time you did have a tank crew, right?

AB: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

MC: OK. Now did all of those guys make it all the way across with you?

AB: No. Some of them didn't make it. The assistant driver got his arm shot off because he was outside, further down the line, and he got it shot off in a mortar fire the same day I got wounded with mortar.

MC: OK. OK, what happened to you when you landed? You're in Le Havre. Now where did you go then?

AB: Well, we went up in an apple orchard and spent the night in four inches of snow under our tent. They just stretched the tent over the snow, and that's where we (inaudible). We couldn't have a light or call anywhere. That was the end of the light until the end of the war. You couldn't have a light nowhere in the nighttime.

MC: Wow. It was cold.

AB: Four inches of snow, and we slept on it that night.

MC: Wow. Now were you in the elements the rest of the war? Were you outside the rest of the war?

AB: Outside the rest of the war. We went up that morning to one of the chateaus and had breakfast, and they hauled us out and lined us up and give us our assignment. I was the last one, about the last one who got my assignment, but they carried me to the front tank, and I led all the way through. I didn't -- everywhere we went, I was in the front, leading.

MC: The lead tank?

AB: Yes.

MC: So you got shot at a lot.

AB: Well, fortunately, when we first got into Germany, after the Bulge, I got a piece of extra armor put on the front of

the tank, and my tank run like a [Bradley?] that way, because I added about three and a half inches of soft armor on the front of it, because I was in the lead, but I had several gashes in that thing. When those [88s?] would hit you, they would knock you back about three foot, and the dust would just fly.

MC: When what would hit you?

AB: Eighty-eights. The Germans used 88 guns, and they were wicked.

MC: You could feel it?

AB: Feel it?

MC: Uh-huh.

AB: Oh, yes, you could feel it.

MC: And it moved the tank?

AB: Oh, yes.

MC: You obviously didn't take any devastating hits, right?

AB: No, the only one I had was -- what happened was by putting that soft armor on there, those shells coming through there, they're hot, and they had the rifles in their barrel. While we shot an over trajectory, they shot a flat trajectory like you were shooting a deer, and that bullet would be red hot. It hit that soft armor, and it would bore in, but it would clog up. Then there was air space

about that wide before it got to the tank. I had one that went in and cracked the hull, but it didn't come through.

MC: Wow. So that would put you -- what happened? Well, tell me what happened from there on out.

AB: Well --

MC: What stories stick out in your mind?

AB: Well, I don't know if there's any one that's any worse than the others. The only one that stuck out in my mind was when we would drive in a column, the Germans would always get the third tank, if they knocked us out. And they'd try to capture the front two and carry them off, and they were prisoners. But we learned right quick that if they shot the third tank that one of us would turn our gun to the left, and the other one to the right, and that way we protected the whole company. We had firepower on both sides.

MC: Did you ever get in a position where you couldn't move?

AB: Well, several times in the Bulge we did, because it was snow about three foot deep, and it was cold. You couldn't touch the tank with a bare hand, it would stick to it. You couldn't have a fire. It was --

MC: Now did you sleep in that tank? (pause in recording)

MC: OK. All right, we're going again. All right, now you're out in the elements. Did you sleep on the ground or did

you sleep in the tank? Was it possible at all to sleep in the tank? To use it for protection?

AB: It was almost impossible, but we did a lot of times sleep in there because when we was in the Bulge, in the snow, we had no place to lay down, so we cramped up in that tank. We didn't get much sleep.

MC: And did the Germans hit you at night?

AB: No, they didn't bother us at night. The only thing was the strategy was to locate us at night and then work on us in the daytime, because at night we had infantry around us, and the Germans couldn't get to us. But they would try to locate us at night and jump on us in the daytime.

MC: Is that people out running around, scouts trying to find you and stuff like that?

AB: Yes.

MC: OK. All right. How about food in a situation like that? Did you get any decent food?

AB: We got food, hot food, about every 30 days.

MC: Whoo. The rest of the time it was K rations?

AB: The rest of the time was K ration.

MC: You couldn't gain much weight on that diet, did you?

AB: And you couldn't have hot coffee to go with it unless you heat them in daytime, (laughs) because you couldn't have a

light. You couldn't smoke a cigarette; you couldn't have no lights at night. Very dangerous.

MC: All right. Which directions did you head out after you landed? Where did you go?

AB: Went toward Berlin. I went the first time, I went into Germany along the Siegfried Line, knocking out those little pillboxes that they had along the Siegfried Line. We would up in a valley over there. We had half the town, and the Germans had half the town, but the German that was the head of the army in Africa, they were losing their battles in Africa so they brought him up into Germany. He came up there --

MC: Now who was that? Rommel?

AB: Rommel, yes. They called him the Desert Fox. There was a big dam across this valley up there ahead of us, and he threatened to break that dam, and we had to get out of there because if we didn't we'd have been covered in water in about 30 minutes, if that dam broke. So that's when they pushed us back. The hardest thing about it was going into battle is just like going through a big pool of water. Once you get the wave started to break in front of you, you could go. But if they ever backlashed, you know, that's when you get stalled, because you get waterlogged. Same way in battle. As long as you got them moving, you can

move. But if you ever stopped, they would come back on you, because they would, you know, get a foothold and try and come back on you.

MC: OK. Who was in the overall command of the 3rd Armored? Was that Patton?

AB: No, he was the Third Army.

MC: Third Army.

AB: Maurice Rose was a one-star general. He was the highest ranking Jew in the Army. He was killed, let's see. I come back from the hospital, and he was killed that same day I come back from the hospital. We was on the Cologne Plain, near Cologne, and he got some bad information on a roadblock, and the Germans killed him.

MC: OK. I want to talk about when you got wounded, but right now, before we get there, tell me a little bit about how you were equipped. Were you properly equipped for the cold weather? Did you have cold weather gear?

AB: Oh, yeah. We had helmet liners, we had a cold suit to go over, and we had galoshes to go on our feet. But that didn't protect us too much, because after you wear them for a while, you know, they absorb the cold, and it was still cold.

MC: OK. How about the personal weapons that you were carrying?

AB: Well, all we carried was a .45 on our shoulder.

MC: You didn't carry a rifle?

AB: No. We had a rifle in the tank, but we couldn't carry a big gun because jumping in and out of the hatch we had to have something that we could carry close to our body, so we carried a .45.

MC: Now did you get up close and personal with these guys, or were they off in the distance most of the time?

AB: Most of the time they were off in the distance. We had to fight the 88s and the tanks. The one thing we had, and they were really scared of it, that was white phosphorous shells.

MC: Did you shoot those out of the tank?

AB: Pardon?

MC: Did you shoot those out of the tank?

AB: Oh, yeah. We shot it. It was made into a shell, and we shot the German tanks with it. That white phosphorous, I don't know whether you've had any dealings with it or not or know how it acts. It does not go out; it burns through until it burns itself out.

MC: So when it hit the tanks, it just consumed them.

AB: If it hit the tanks, it set them on fire. Of course, the German tanks had, on the turret rims where they turn, they had about that much space in between, and that's where we

would hit them, right at the turret rim, and it would go all inside.

MC: OK. You were operating the Sherman tank, right?

AB: Yes. Yes.

MC: All right. The Germans were operating Tiger tanks.

AB: Right.

MC: All right. Now talk a little bit about the difference between the two.

AB: Well, the difference between the two is they were more powerful, but they were slow and clumsy, and we have knocked them out by outrunning them in our tanks around. They could not converge their guns as fast as we could go around them, and so we had knocked them out by going around them, outrunning them, around them.

MC: Now I read somewhere something that they were vulnerable from the rear end.

AB: Right. Right.

MC: That was their weakest point, is that --

AB: And the track area, that was the weakest two points. If we could, that's where we would hit them was in the --

MC: Now were you head to head with the tanks most of the time?

AB: No, I didn't. The only ones that hit me or shot at me was from bivouac, from where they were [head out?].

MC: OK. All right, now, how long were you in combat when you got wounded?

AB: I'd been in about 28 days, on the line, when I got wounded.

MC: OK. Tell me about that.

AB: Well, you see, the way we operated was we were called the spearhead division, because we would go through and cut the line and push the Germans back, and the other two companies on the other outside would come along and clean them up. That was the idea of the whole thing, and we were called the spearhead unit.

MC: So you're going right smack in the middle of it?

AB: Right smack in the middle of it. My radio went out, and we got to this railroad track, and we didn't have much information about terrain or nothing ahead of us. So they said somebody's got to go up on the hill and observe and see if, you know, if they can spot anything, any danger ahead. So I was the one that was elected to go up there.

MC: In the tank?

AB: In the tank, took the tank up there. So everything was very quiet when we got there, and we decided there wasn't nothing around there, so some of us got out. The assistant driver got out and was throwing -- now we had haystacks all around us. So he was throwing hay on the tanks when mortar

fire come in, and it got him before he could get under the tank or away from them, inside the tank.

MC: Killed him?

AB: No, it just got him and mangled his arm. He was out in la-la land, and there was mortar coming in, so I said, "Well, we've got to get him somewhere," and there was a foxhole there. I said, "If I can get him in that foxhole maybe he'd be safer." So I jumped out and pushed him in the foxhole, but the mortar fire was coming in, hitting all around in the foxhole, so I said, "Well, mortar's going to get in here in a minute, and it's going to get both of us. But if I get out and move, I can move before they can traverse on me, not expecting me to run." But when I got out of that foxhole my foot slipped on some hay, and I fell across on him, and mortar come in, and I got 131 pieces of shrapnel, small pieces, in my butt and back area, legs.

MC: How did you get out of that mess?

AB: Run. (laughs)

MC: OK. You couldn't drive your tank?

AB: Oh, no. I couldn't. The tank, but I was outside the tank (inaudible).

MC: So did that put you out of combat?

AB: Well, yes, but it didn't put the tank out, of course. That was just a squad of Germans that was over there doing a

delay, trying to delay us so they could get together over there a little bit further.

MC: And that was about a month after you got there, right?

AB: Oh, no, this was, let's see. I went through the Bulge, and this was way up in Germany, on the Cologne Plain when this happened.

MC: OK. What time of the year was it?

AB: I think it was in about June, somewhere along there.

MC: OK, well, how did you get out of that fix? I know you ran, but with all that shrapnel in you, that's pretty tough, isn't it?

AB: No, it didn't go in very deep. It just put the running in your mind, so you run. That just got you wound up to run.

MC: How did you get help? Medics?

AB: Oh, the company was down in this valley, so I got down there. They sent me out in a half track, back to (inaudible) at Belgium.

MC: Back to where?

AB: Belgium.

MC: OK. To a hospital?

AB: Yes.

MC: Was that a field hospital?

AB: Field hospital, yes.

MC: Now did they take that shrapnel out?

AB: Yeah, they popped it out and picked it out, and I was back there 10 days. It was just like being in a briar patch. It doesn't hurt all that bad.

MC: Right. No infection or anything like that?

AB: No infection.

MC: Have any scars from it today?

AB: No, not today. They were all gone. I did have a bunch of scars to start with, but, you know, your body gets old and the scars move, so I don't have any scars left. It was just superficial.

MC: OK. All right, now did you go back into combat after that?

AB: When I was --

MC: After you recovered?

AB: Oh, yes. I went right from the hospital back to Cologne and got in my tank again.

MC: Same tank?

AB: Same tank. Well, I was -- the colonel, I was his protection, and we worked together pretty good. He was a big roly-poly guy and couldn't get in the tank, so he rode in a jeep.

MC: He was what?

AB: He rode in a jeep.

MC: But again, what was he -- because he was so big, is that it?

AB: Yes. He couldn't get in a tank actually.

MC: Because that was -- he was fat?

AB: Yes. Well, he was just short, heavy set, you know.

MC: Oh, OK.

AB: So, in fact of it, some went AWOL from the hospital back there, because the lieutenant back there was, I don't know, we didn't get along. He said, "I'm going to send you to the infantry." I said, "OK." So I caught a gasoline truck that night and went back to --

MC: Back to your unit?

AB: Back to my unit. I was up there 30 days when they found me. So the --

MC: Did they court martial you?

AB: No. They come up to get me, and the colonel told them, "Well, if (inaudible) soldiers, not enough of the front line to come back, they damn sure wasn't going to get him." So I stayed up there. It's not even on my record, but that's just something that happened, you know.

MC: Right. So you were absent without leave for 30 days, is that right?

AB: No, no, about six days.

MC: Oh, about six days.

AB: Yeah.

MC: Oh, OK.

AB: But they looked for me about 30 days before they found me.

MC: OK. Let's see. All right, now you had a wife and one child at home, right?

AB: Right.

MC: Now did you -- I assume you all wrote a lot of letters during the war.

AB: Well, when they could get them to us, yes. We'd always get about six or seven letters at one time.

MC: Right. They'd all stack up?

AB: All stacked up.

MC: OK. Now how about your outgoing mail?

AB: Well, we could send it out, but we didn't have time to write.

MC: Oh, OK.

AB: And we had to be very careful about what we wrote, because if they got in the hands of the Germans they could always figure out where you were, and we didn't want the Germans to know anything about us, of course.

MC: Right. Now was your wife living by herself, or was she living with someone else, family or whatever?

AB: She lived in the vicinity of her family.

MC: So she had support?

AB: Yes, and she had kind of a (inaudible) live with her, her and the baby.

MC: OK. After you got wounded, and you got back to your unit, where did you go then?

AB: Well, I went back to Cologne and vetted my tank. I crossed that river on a pontoon bridge.

MC: Now which river was that?

AB: That's the Rhine River.

MC: Rhine River.

AB: Yes. It's wide and deep and very swift, and the engineers come up and put pontoons, [had?] the engine in and put their track across it. So they said go across it and see how it works, and so I --

MC: Were you the first one across?

AB: First one to cross.

MC: Wow.

AB: I drove the first tank across the Rhine River in our outfit.

MC: That's great. Now, on the other side, you're in Germany. What are you seeing over there? Tell me about it. What was it like?

AB: Germany was about the same all over. I don't know. They're good people. I enjoyed it after the war was over with, after we got rid of all the Nazi Party. We had a lot of those people over there that didn't believe in Hitler,

(inaudible). They were very nice people. So we had no trouble after the war was over with, no trouble at all.

MC: OK. But you fought your way through Germany?

AB: All the way through Germany.

MC: Did you make a -- they stopped short of Berlin, right?

AB: No, we went right to the Elbe River. When we got to a place called Schogetten, we didn't have any opposition getting there. But the thing about it is we let down, and we wasn't on guard, and the Germans come in on us there. I was the only tank that they didn't have captured.

MC: That must have been right at the end of the war.

AB: Oh, yeah, right at the end of the war, just before we got to the Elbe River. I told the captain of the tank drivers, take my tank, and I took my rifle and went out and [hacked this evergreen?]. So if the Germans could get in on him, well, he went out in the barley field, in the open, so he could see, and then I was the one that guarded his tank. I was in a graveyard, I'm laying down between the graves shooting at the Germans. He got out in the middle of that field, and they decided, well, we'll go back and pick me up, so they got back, and I jumped the fence and got in the tank, down beside the tank, and we went over there. And after this a bunch of Germans passed through, and everything quieted down. They had the captain and the

colonel and all in a cellar, and so when the Germans found out that they didn't capture us all, they let them go. No problem.

MC: Wow. Now, by that time you're into Germany, close to the end of the war. Were you basically, with the exception -- how was the combat during that time? Was it fierce, or was it light?

AB: No, it was light at that time.

MC: At that point in time, it was almost all over?

AB: We had, well, the fact of the business is when we got through the Bulge, we broke their backs there. Then the only thing was just the cleanup effort after that. But we had quite a few battles, because the Germans would get together and concentrate forces, and we had some pretty good battles there with them. But basically after the Bulge it was over with.

MC: All right. I want to go back. We didn't talk about that much. Where were you when they hit you in the Bulge?

AB: I was in [Bonson?] in Belgium. We went back to Belgium, into [Bonson?], and separate units went into different places, but we had connections close together.

MC: Right. Now how far did they push you back?

AB: Well, they pushed us back all the way from Germany to Belgium before we could -- and then we didn't have any air support, because of the snow and so on.

MC: Now that was in December, right?

AB: Oh, yes.

MC: December.

AB: Yeah. Of course, after the fog lifted where they could see, man, they turned the air force loose on them, and that's when they tore up everything. We were driving I don't remember where, but anyway, the ground was shaking. We looked up there, and there were airplanes was going over, those bombers were going over. Oh, I don't know how many was up there. But they was high, and they was going over, doing their bombing.

MC: Now did you have any -- did your crew, your tank crew, sustain any injuries during that period of time?

AB: No. No, we were doing all right.

MC: You did all right. OK.

AB: We had several close calls, just enough to give us a good scare. They had what they called a Screaming Mimi, and the way it was built, it was just built in a big tube. The powder in it was built in a circle like that, and they just had rows of powder. When they'd fire that thing it would come over about tree-top high and just whooo, whooo, you

didn't know where it came from or where it was going. It had no [shrapnel?] to it at all, but the concussion would kill you, if it got there. But it had one heck of an explosion, and we had several of those that shook us up pretty good.

MC: That was during the Bulge?

AB: Yeah. No, this was after the Bulge when they --

MC: I'm sorry?

AB: That was after the Bulge when we got up on the front.

MC: Oh, OK. All right. Where were you when the war ended?

AB: I was in a place called [Schogetten?], way up next to Berlin.

MC: All right. But you didn't go into Berlin?

AB: No, they didn't let us go into Berlin. The Russians had Berlin.

MC: Right. Yeah. What was the reaction when you heard the war had ended?

AB: Oh, well, what can you say about -- you been fighting all that long, and it was just a relief, and that was all.

MC: And when the war ended, where did you go then? I mean, did you --

AB: Well, we started back. We had a big job to do after the war ended. We went into an SS rest camp in the hills. It was log cabins and a beautiful place, and we stayed there

about a week till we got rested, before we went and took our place where they were assigned by the military government.

MC: And where was that?

AB: We went into Mörfelden, by Frankfurt on the Rhine, and that was our first assignment after that.

MC: And what were you doing there?

AB: Well, we were going house to house searching, taking up the guns, and everything that looked like it would hurt you. We just took control of the area. We were just the government with that area until everything, well, as long as it was necessary.

MC: Right. Now, how long did that last?

AB: Oh, let's see, about four months. We was in Mörfelden, and then we moved down to another little town, and we stayed about three months in the other little place. I don't remember what the name of it was. But the last place before we broke up, we were down in Schwäbisch Hall, down in Stuttgart.

MC: Say again.

AB: Schwäbisch, Schwäbisch Hall.

MC: OK.

AB: That's where we turned everything over to the military government. Of course, then we had rotations that men went

home on rotation an extra long time, and they were sending recruits in, and we had to train the recruits in all this stuff, you know. I went to the transportation department after that to have something to do to keep from getting in trouble, I'll tell you. When you're in battle that way, and you get out of it, you look for something to do. Like they say, the idle mind the devil works on. So I went up, and the warrant officer in charge of transportation and moving DPs, he'd been there for a long time, and so I took his place and turned in the tanks, and we decommissioned the tanks and all this stuff. We turned in the tanks before we got ready to come home. I was the last one left there, and they told me if I would stay there and complete the transmission, that they would send me to England and I could intercept the outfit there, but they didn't do it. They sent me to the North Sea. I don't recall the name of the town now, but --

MC: In England?

AB: No, in Germany.

MC: In Germany?

AB: Up on the Black Sea. I was there about, oh, I guess about 20 days before they --

MC: When did you come home?

AB: Oh, boy.

MC: Was it on a troop ship?

AB: No, it was on one of those liberty vessels.

MC: OK. You remember the name?

AB: No.

MC: A bunch of guys on it?

AB: Oh, it was loaded, packed, jam packed.

MC: Did the sea trip take -- did that bother you?

AB: No, it didn't bother me. I was used to deep sea fishing, on those boats. The trip across didn't bother me, either way.

MC: OK, now you must have made a lot of buddies during that period of time.

AB: We didn't have any buddies. No buddies at all, except for your unit. If you had a close friend, and he got killed, what kind of reaction would you have from that?

MC: Now, have you had anybody that you kept up with after the war?

AB: Oh, yeah, I've got a friend, you're going to interview him. He's from Holland.

MC: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

AB: You're going to interview him, and he was in the Bulge, in the (inaudible), but we was together. Of course, I didn't know him over there. He didn't know me. He came over here, and we met. We've been close buddies ever [since?].

MC: Now when did you finally get out of the service and come home?

AB: Oh, let's see, in '44, somewhere around the first of '44.

MC: OK.

AB: I was in the -- battle area from '42 to '44.

MC: OK. Where did you, when you came back to the States, where did you land?

AB: We landed in Boston.

MC: That's where you went out from.

AB: That's where we went out from.

MC: OK. How'd you get home?

AB: On a train. They shipped us out to different areas, and we boarded that train and come south and get on another train and go to our area.

MC: Were you discharged in Boston?

AB: No, I was discharged in Tyler, Texas.

MC: Tyler, Texas. OK. I assume you were happy to see your family.

AB: Overjoyed. Overjoyed. In fact, of business, I didn't know what to do with myself.

MC: What did you do when you got home?

AB: I just rested and took it easy and tried to plan my life after that. But after the war there was nothing to do,

nothing to do. So I had to join what we called a 52-20 club. I got \$20 a week for 52 weeks to help.

MC: When did you finally get work?

AB: About two years after I got out.

MC: Wow. So the country was still struggling.

AB: Oh, yes. Very much so.

MC: Where did you go to work?

AB: I went back to Texas City and went into carpentry, construction work. That's what I retired from is construction work.

MC: OK. Now let me just take a quick check and see if I've asked you everything I wanted to ask you. Following -- when you got home, today you hear a lot about guys with post-traumatic stress disorder. Did you experience any of that when you got home?

AB: No, not really. It was a different life, you know, because I had a family to support me, and I did real well. There was a lot of boys got in trouble after they come home, because after you've been into that, through a war, well, it's just kind of hard to catch hold of a decent life again without being masterful, you know.

MC: Right. But it sounds like you managed pretty well.

AB: Well, I had the family support and all this stuff.

MC: I think we just about covered everything, unless you've got something else you want to share with me.

AB: Well, I've told so many stories, I don't know what else I can tell.

MC: OK. All right. Well, I tell you what. I think we got a pretty good view of your military service, and I want to thank you again for doing the interview.

END OF AUDIO FILE