

**The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)**

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

**Edward Nielsen
Sgt., 1st Armored Div.
North Africa, P.O.W.**

May 23, 2001

Interview With
Mr. Edward Nielsen

Mr. Misenhimer

My name is Richard Misenhimer. Today is August 23, 2001. I am interviewing Mr. Ed Nielsen at his home at 12098 W. State Rd. 14, Medaryville, Indiana. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific Wars Center of Pacific War Studies for the preservation of historical information related to W.W.II. Mr. Nielsen, I want to thank you for taking time today to do this interview, let me start by asking you, "When were you born?"

Mr. Nielsen

June 28, 1917 in Chicago, Illinois. My parent's names were Niels Nielsen and Elsa J. Nielsen.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did your father do?

Mr. Nielsen

When we got here he become a farmer, and we had an egg route in Chicago. It was all tough times and we did everything we could to make a living.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, two brothers and two sisters. One sister is older and the other is younger.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were either of your brothers in W.W.II?

Mr. Nielsen

One of them served in the Army of Occupation after the war in Germany.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to school?

Mr. Nielsen

A country schoolhouse out in Cass Township, and I went to high school in North Judson.
I graduated in 1935.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go into the service?

Mr. Nielsen

January 1941. I volunteered in November of '40. They called me in January.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do between high school and the time you went into service?

Mr. Nielsen

I farmed and worked around here in this area, North Judson, Medaryville.

Mr. Misenhimer

You grew up during the depression. How did that affect your family? Do you recall?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, about the best I can tell you, we were all poor and we never knew it.

Mr. Misenhimer

You said you had an egg route in Chicago?

Mr. Nielsen

Right, to make a living. Dad farmed. Farming wasn't very good and our farm was poor
My Mom and Dad, my sister Violet and I moved out of the city, but we did all right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you raise the chickens for your own eggs?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, yes, we had a bunch of chickens and we bought a few eggs too, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went in the service in January of 1941. What branch did you go in?

Mr. Nielsen

I went into; well, I went to Fort Knox, Kentucky with armored.

Mr. Misenhimer

Army and the armored?

Mr. Nielsen

Army. Right, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you choose that branch?

Mr. Nielsen

I didn't have any choice.

Mr. Misenhimer

(Laughing) When you volunteered, they told you just wherever they sent you.

Mr. Nielsen

That's right. I was the only one out of the bunch that went there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there others from this area that went in at the same time as you did?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, there were some. The boy that lived right down the road. It was his idea and mine together, we were going to enlist and get it over with and we'd stay together and we did. His name was Dude Gerald Timm.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went to Fort Knox, Kentucky. Where did you actually enlist at?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, I guess at Indianapolis.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you were sent to Fort Knox. How were conditions there?

Mr. Nielsen

I guess it was kind of hectic. They didn't have any induction place for your training. It was a tent city. It was not set up. The men that trained us were men out of the 69th Armored out of the First Division and we went to some of their companies. In fact one of the boys gave me recruit training. I was in all the way through with him.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were basically living in tents then? And how was the food?

Mr. Nielsen

It wasn't that bad. One of the fellows said, "God, all these guys come in and all they ever had was steak. All I ever got was the wrong end of a cross-cut saw" and he was a good soldier too. (Laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

Your first basic recruit training was your basic training, is that right? And what did that consist of?

Mr. Nielsen

Marching, shooting, calisthenics, running and marching and stuff like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that training?

Mr. Nielsen

I think it was 3 months.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you finished that, where did you go?

Mr. Nielsen

I went to a company, B Company in 69th Army Regiment at Fort Knox.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of training did you get there?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, KP, work prisoners (Laughing) and a little army training, but not a lot of the dirty work.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did you have then?

Mr. Nielsen

Private.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you remember what your monthly pay was?

Mr. Nielsen

21 dollars a month. You got about 16 dollars by the time you had your expenses taken out.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you married or single at that point?

Mr. Nielsen

I was single.

Mr. Misenhimer

So did you actually train on tanks or armored vehicles of that sort?

Mr. Nielsen

Oh, yes, yes, yes. They took me out driving tanks. They took me out driving a tank; the first time I had ever drove one, the sergeant said, "Get in and take off." Went through the course and never said a word. Of course I was a good driver and could drive anything. When we got back he said to the Captain, "Don't send him out on tank driving any more, he don't need it." (Laughing) So they put me teaching other kids to drive, tracks and trucks.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of tank was that?

Mr. Nielsen

That was an M2A1.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was a light tank.

Mr. Nielsen

It was a medium. We drove some lights but we just happened to have a couple of those M2A1's. It was a 20-ton tank. It carried a big 37 but they would move out. It had a rotating turret. It also had machine guns. One on the front and on each side, and you stood in there firing them. When they took us out on the range with them, you had to take that gun apart and put it back together and fire a machine gun on each side. Your tank was going across a course, it was rough and bouncy and the target was way out in front, moving too. One of the fellas said, "Ed, I'll help you get through that course." He said "I'll be sure you're gonna keep firing." But I had it set myself, and when I set a machine gun it never quit. It was an old soldier that showed me how to do it and it wasn't the way they did it. I run that course and it just happened to be that my feet kept good under me and my balance was good and I laid that on that target and never took it off, just kept firing. When I come back, our company commander said, "That was some good run, Nielsen." And the Colonel was there and he said, "Soldier that was one hell of a good run." (Laughing) They tried to make a gunner out of me after that.

Mr. Misenhimer

And so that was your position then, a gunner?

Mr. Nielsen

I drove tanks and finally I was a gunner and I wound up a tank commander.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there with this B Company 69th Army?

Mr. Nielsen

We went on the big maneuvers in Louisiana and Carolina for a little over three months.

Mr. Misenhimer

And when was that, do you recall?

Mr. Nielsen

We were just coming back into Knox that morning when the news came on that they had hit Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer

So this was in the fall of '41 then. Is that the time that the soldiers trained with wooden rifles and things?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, some of them had wooden rifles. But beings we went to an old company like that, they had all the things they did. We had machine guns. We had rifles. We had pistols. I made expert with a pistol. I'd fired one before.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was the 45 automatic?

Mr. Nielsen

No, these were the 45 Colt pistols.

Mr. Misenhimer

Revolvers

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, and they were the same bullets but they put them in a little clip. And then the clip just slipped in, but they were a good firing gun.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rifle did you have?

Mr. Nielsen

They had a Springfield 0003. I just fired it once. That was all.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you went to Louisiana for maneuvers, did you take your tanks down there?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel?

Mr. Nielsen

On a train. It was really something to go through the South. We had to have a guard on each car. We took turns. When you went through the South, it was really something watching all the cotton fields and the people and one place one of the boys that was with us we went through his hometown and we thought that was nice.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did it take to go down on the train?

Mr. Nielsen

I can't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

Several days?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, yes it did because I think we were in Knoxville, Tennessee and the train got a hot box and we had to pull in there and fix it in the shops and then we took off.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many tanks were in your company?

Mr. Nielsen

I expect we had about, we were supposed to have about 15, that was full compliment and when we unloaded, we just jumped 'em right off the car on some railroad ties and took off on maneuver.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now what model tanks were these?

Mr. Nielsen

They were M2A1's.

Mr. Misenhimer

All 15 of them?

Mr. Nielsen

They had several. We called them Grants but they called them Lee's. The gun was on the side.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay then a Grant or a Lee

Mr. Nielsen

Yeah, whatever they want to call it. They had a 75 on the side with a short barrel and then they had a 37 up in the turret.

Mr. Misenhimer

So the 75 only fired in one direction, is that right?

Mr. Nielsen

That's right. You had some movement.

Mr. Misenhimer

Some, yeah, some elevation, some up and down, but it was basically fixed on one side. Which side?

Mr. Nielsen

Right side.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they pretty accurate?

Mr. Nielsen

Not too bad, no. If you were a good gunner, you did pretty good with them.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were there on maneuvers, what did you live in there?

Mr. Nielsen

We lived out on the ground, in the swamps and mosquitoes. I kind of enjoyed it. You know it was hot. I enjoyed it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have pup tents?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, we had pup tents. We slept in them when we could but we were moving pretty fast.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the food there?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, I thought with the moving and everything that they did pretty good. I never did knock the Army. Sure there was times that you didn't get food, you know, and sometimes you took sandwiches like two pieces of bread jammed together, but by far and whole, I never knocked the food. We got something to eat.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have hot food there most of the time?

Mr. Nielsen

Quite a bit of the time when our kitchen truck could keep up with us. We had a kitchen truck that followed. They'd set up and cook.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you can recall about the maneuvers down there?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, the tanks got stuck awful easy in that damn swamp. (Laughing) And I never say this very often but Patton beat the pants off of us. He was blue and we were regular and they beat us (Laughing) and I found out how they did that, we ran out of gas and he ran out of gas but he bought gas out of his own money and put in them tanks. (Laughing) He was quite well to do and he was pretty sharp.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any actual direct contact with Patton?

Mr. Nielsen

No, no. I never saw him.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any funny incidents happen down there? Anything humorous?

Mr. Nielsen

I don't know but when we left we had some of our tanks at Camp Polk, we left some of our tanks there. The tank I was on we left there so we were without a tank so they put me driving the personnel truck. I drove a truck all the time then from there all the way through clear around to the Carolinas, North Carolina. That was a good job, best job I ever had. (Laughing) I never stood any formations. I never stood in chow line. Early in the morning the mess sergeant and I would go wherever we had to go and draw rations and come back and go back to the kitchen tent and I'd get my food there, after that just keep out of the way. (Laughing) Keep that truck up, fix tires or something.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you say this was in the Carolinas?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, in the Carolinas.

Mr. Misenhimer

You left Louisiana and went there?

Mr. Nielsen

Right, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go in the convoy or on the train or how did you?

Mr. Nielsen'

In the convoy, all along the coast, it was really interesting, for me it was just a lot of fun.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now how about your tanks, were they on?

Mr. Nielsen

They moved by train. Tank tracks wear out too much running on road.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you went down, though you all went on the train is that correct but when you came back with the personnel and convoy of trucks.

Mr. Nielsen

Right, right a lot of the boys in the trucks. We had a couple of trucks.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you get your first jeep, do you recall, in the company?

Mr. Nielsen

It was in Knox before Louisiana. We didn't call them jeeps, we called them peeps and the first one we got was the bantam and the wheels turned like this and we didn't have it too long. It was just for trying them out. We had a lot of things to try out. I remember one time, they had a British tank there. We called them Matildas. I never had anything to do with it but I happened to be on guard there when they were running it up and around. It was interesting. That summer we saw a lot of Congressmen, big shots, saw Marshall a lot of times. They'd come down there from Washington. That was the command post for the whole country when Marshall was there at Fort Knox.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mean General George C. Marshall, who was Chief of Staff at that time.

Mr. Nielsen

Right, Chief of Staff there right. I drove a staff car for the top brass. A boy one day said, "Look at me, I'm the best soldier in the United States Army." And I said, "Why?" He said, "The top brass chewed my ass out today real good." (Laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

Been chewed by professionals, huh? (Laughing)

Mr. Nielsen

Well, it was really funny. (Laughing) I can't remember his name now but he was a country boy. (Laughing) And Marshall was upstairs and he happened to be lookin' out the window and this boy was coming in and he walked across the lawn (Laughing) and Marshall come down and collared him on it. (Laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did you have then?

Mr. Nielsen

I was a Private.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you drove all the way back from Louisiana back to Fort Knox in Kentucky.

Mr. Nielsen

Right, I think I was a Corporal then, I don't know. Didn't make much difference to us.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you recall anything else along this time?

Mr. Nielsen

Yeah, well when we were in the Smokey's in the wintertime, we had a little ice and it was real slick and we had a little trouble. A friend of mine was a cycle rider, he was comin' up the road and I was watchin' and he dumped it right where I was and he just got on top of it and let it slide. (Laughing) But when we were goin' through I saw a kid with a cycle loose it and hit the truck ahead of him. Of course it threw him off in the ditch. You don't stop, that's not your job. Just keep goin' and medical evac picks 'em up. Name of that boy of that deal with Marshall was Murdock. (Laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

So you got back to Fort Knox on December 7, 1941 and what kind of an announcement did you have or what about that?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, it seemed like we got it over the radio that everybody would be in for the duration.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you volunteered, how long did you volunteer for?

Mr. Nielsen

It was gonna be for a year of training. I really figured there was a war the way it was lookin' then.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got the word about Pearl Harbor there, what was the attitude of the people? What was the reaction?

Mr. Nielsen

Well it seemed like those soldiers kinda took it as it come, like well, we've got a job to do and we trained harder after that. We had more road marches; of course we worked on

them darn tanks a lot. If there was any dirt on 'em, you had to clean it. gee. There never was allowed to be a speck of dust on 'em. You had to know how to take 'em all down.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now this was the 1st Armored Division?

Mr. Nielsen

It went from the 69th Armored then to the 1st Armored. We were all in one regiment. The 1st Armored Division and the 1st Armored Regiment. We switched from Boot Camp with the 69th Infantry to the yellow of the Calvary. In our regiment, I think there was three battalions, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. I was in the 3rd battalion. We were medium and the 2nd battalion was medium and the 1st battalion was light, that's the way we went overseas. When we went overseas we all had Lees or Grants whatever you want to call 'em with long barrels and we trained with them in Ireland.

Mr. Misenhimer

What caliber were those?

Mr. Nielsen

75's

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this the Sherman tank now?

Mr. Nielsen

We got the Sherman tank afterwards. When we got into England, they said you're gonna draw Sherman tanks. They took us to Tidworth, England, took all the tanks with us. The tanks went on the train and some on truck. When we got there, we switched tanks with a special outfit commanded by Colonel Waters; he was the son-in-law of Patton. I saw him. We got the Sherman's and went back and trained with them

When we left Ireland, they said get ready to go, and of course we fiddled around; not fiddled around, but we were ready, and ready and ready and they brought the boats up in high tide, in low tide we just loaded on them LTC's. They were small ones, Landing Tank Crafts. I think there was four tanks in each one and they just fit in there and the water was about a couple feet high.

Mr. Misenhimer

Back when you were in Fort Knox, who was the Commanding General of the 1st Armored Division?

Mr. Nielsen

I'll have trouble with that, I didn't think I'd ever forget him but I don't remember right now.

Mr. Misenhimer

It may come to you after while. It wasn't Patton then?

Mr. Nielsen

No, no, no. We finally got Fredendall but I don't just remember when we got Fredendall. He was a dud.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who was your regimental commander?

Mr. Nielsen

My regimental commander was.... I didn't think I would ever forget.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's okay; I just thought maybe you'd remember.

Mr. Nielsen

I used to could remember but when we went into battle we had Colonel Hightower and we got him in Ireland, and we kept our tanks clean but he wanted to come around with white gloves and reach back in the back of that motor and come out perfectly white.

(Laughing) We were scrambling for a while and cussing.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you leave Fort Knox to go to Ireland?

Mr. Nielsen

It was in April I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

April of '42 at this point.

Mr. Nielsen

We went from there to Camp.... Over in New Jersey. We did a little training there and got our tanks waterproofed. We were shipped out of the harbor at New York.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go over on a troop ship or what did you go over on?

Mr. Nielsen

We went over on a troop ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then where were your tanks and equipment?

Mr. Nielsen

They were in a big boat. They were in a big ship, tank ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you moved all the equipment over there, tanks, trucks, everything?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you remember about how long that journey might have taken you?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, it took about ten or twelve days, I think. We were in a convoy and there was a big ship to our right, black, Polish. It was a cruiser. We had one sub scare with her. They really went wild with their corvettes. They said they got one but I couldn't tell you, I didn't see it.

Mr. Misenhimer

So your convoy wasn't attacked then?

Mr. Nielsen

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

So where did you land in Ireland?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, right close to Belfast. We were in Belfast, landed there and then from there we went to Ballywalter?... Can't think of what it's called... and there's where we stayed until they decided to move us to England. We were down to Liverpool with all our stuff and I worked for two or three weeks special job moving stuff to the boats. There was a big holding place for 'em and there were ten of us and we moved all that stuff to the docks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Are you looking for the name of the commanding general I asked about earlier?

Mr. Nielsen

Magruder was the commanding general.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay now you were in Liverpool loading up these ships. How did you get from Ireland over to England across the little water there?

Mr. Nielsen

In landing crafts, we went into England at high tide and the tide went out and we unloaded and we went right to where we were going to stay. We stayed in a little camp there.

Mr. Misenhimer

This is where you got the Sherman tanks then?

Mr. Nielsen

Yeah, when we were in England, we got the Sherman tanks. We didn't have them very long.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in England?

Mr. Nielsen

I'd say maybe a month, six weeks. We shipped out of there in November some time.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you loaded up and went to where?

Mr. Nielsen

Africa. We landed at Oran.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's go back a moment to England. Did you get any passes while you were in England to visit any of the towns or anything?

Mr. Nielsen

We were right close to Chester. Went to Chester a time or two and when I was on special duty, oh we worked so hard. Come 3:30 in the afternoon, we were tired and restless and we'd hide our 45 in the bunk, some of them carried them but I didn't want to carry mine and we were in Liverpool. (Laughing) You didn't have to have any money. They'd buy you a drink if you wanted a drink but I couldn't stand it. I didn't drink much. The drink was stout. It tasted like, oh, molasses and water and they wanted you to drink it warm but they were a good old bunch. They were real friendly there. When we loaded up in the harbor, getting ready for the convoy and the convoy took off our ship didn't go. Our anchor was fouled so we worked at and finally the next day or the day after they finally got it loose. They had went this way to go around and the St. Georges Channel was mined. The Germans come in with their planes and mined them. They decided they would take a chance going through there without just the convoy. Two men standing down there and watching going real slow and we made it through.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of ship were you on here?

Mr. Nielsen

It was a troop transport. The Duchess of Asell. We called it the Duchess of Asshole. (Laughing) She was round bottomed. I tell you we had a real rough storm that tore the tables out of the mess hall. Most of them couldn't eat. We had a boy, one of my friends, was from Carolina, Wendolyn May, he said, "Hey you goin' down to get something to eat?" I said, "Are you?" He said, "Let's go." We got down there and they had coddled eggs. Boiled with something soft, you shell 'em out and pour 'em on

your plate and they were more raw than they were cooked. I looked at 'em and I looked at him and he said, "What's the matter?" I said, "I don't like this." He downed 'em and pretty soon they come up. (Laughing) I watched him down 'em again and soon as he swallowed they come up again. I said, "You're nuts." (Laughing) He downed them a third time and they stayed down. I said, "Well, if you can do that, I'll can down 'em." And when I downed 'em they stayed down. I'll never forget that. (Laughing) I never had coddled eggs after that. (Laughing) He was from Carolina and he was the nicest person you could ever meet.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then you landed in North Africa?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, before we landed the storm quit and I was on a special guard outfit. We had one company guard the whole ship. We always were on guard. We were lucky. That way we had a bunk all the time. I came off of guard. I was up in the rear of the ship watching that evening and I come down about 9 o'clock - a little after nine. It was kind of stuffy down there so I laid against the side of the ship. It was kind of cool. Then all of a sudden something, just like a big sledgehammer hit that ship. They started off running that motor wide open all night. It missed us and hit the ship next to us. I don't know what kind of ship it was it tore up, a destroyer or something but we went all night. It was a torpedo. A German sub had slipped along the side.

Mr. Misenhimer

And the sub bumped you all is that what it was?

Mr. Nielsen

The sub fired the torpedo and it just missed us and hit that ship and the detonation sounded like it hit our ship. Most of the boys never even woke up. They were sleeping down there. And the next day when we landed in Oran, I saw them bring some nurses in

that were in that ship. They were wrapped in raincoats. But the corvette and the destroyer stayed and picked up what they could but the whole outfit just kept going.

Mr. Misenhimer

But this wasn't a troop ship they hit there though; it was a destroyer or some such?

Mr. Nielsen

No, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else happen on the way over?

Mr. Nielsen

That's a bout it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you landed in Oran were you opposed by the Germans at that point?

Mr. Nielsen

No, no. It was taken already. It was in December but the first wave had been in and part of the time they were fighting the French, see. When we got in there, we didn't have any tanks for a while. We were just out there in the mud and the rain. Finally when our tanks come, we were ready to move out and they brought in a big tank mover, an LTC. It was British. You see we didn't have any of those boats yet. They had some and they moved us to Phillipville and there we jumped off. We were going toward Tunis. It was a long trip but it was interesting. We got through Kasserine and then the fighting started.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you there for the Battle of Kasserine Pass?

Mr. Nielsen

I was through Kasserine once and they drove 'em back through Kasserine the second time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you involved in that?

Mr. Nielsen

No, I was already out. We were ready that one day and we knew we were going to be in a tank battle because the Germans come through the Pass and we didn't know where they were and my Lieutenant, Lieutenant Horn, Gilder S. Horn, he was from the DMI and he was a good little officer. He said, "It's your turn. You get the first shot. You're runnin' the spearhead."

Mr. Misenhimer

You were the gunner at that point?

Mr. Nielsen

I was Tank Commander.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what rank was that then?

Mr. Nielsen

Sergeant.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sergeant. Three stripes?

Mr. Nielsen

Yeah. And he said, "You take us out and you move up, just move up slowly." And the last thing I heard him say, he said, "Sergeant Nielsen, slow down a little, " and I did.

Pretty soon, bang! The firing started and a slug hit the side of our tank. The tank would be like this and it hit it about like that and it cut a groove all the way along there, didn't come in but the sparks, oh, man. I said to my crew, "The honeymoon's over."

(Laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

Now if you were standing, were you standing up in the turret?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And looking out from there?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, yes. You almost had to stand up and put your head out if you were going to see anything. We were having quite a battle.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now this was a Sherman tank you're in at this point?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes. I had four hits that day. Every one that we made. I just happened to be looking out and my lieutenant right there on the right about 50 yards and I see the 88 hit his turret and I see it go right in and I stopped and about a second or two later it exploded and blew the whole turret off. Never saw any of them again.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that was your lieutenant there then?

Mr. Nielsen

Yeah, and when it was over I think we had two tanks left in our platoon.

Mr. Misenhimer

Out of 15?

Mr. Nielsen

In our platoon, we lost nine tanks.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the German tanks? Did you get any of those?

Mr. Nielsen

I don't know, you couldn't see too good. It was a time you were looking right against the sun. I knew where their guns were because that shell that hit my lieutenant I could see where it come from and we fired there.

Mr. Misenhimer

So this was fixed artillery pieces not tanks?

Mr. Nielsen

Tanks dug in and guns both. Because we talked to men that fought that battle afterwards in Germany. In fact, one of my friends was a chef and they had some doin's up at the head office and this young German had one arm and this kid could talk a little German and he said, "What happened to you?" He told that it was that battle and they talked and he said, "We were just ready to pull our when you guys backed off."

Mr. Misenhimer

So if you had hung in a little longer, they'd have backed out. What day was that do you recall, approximately or month?

Mr. Nielsen

It was in the last of January somewhere.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of '43.

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, I was on the front about a month.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that was your first action was that?

Mr. Nielsen

Right. Like they say, it was quite a battle. When we got back to where we called the suda and formed up and they didn't come after us. They were not in position to do that. We had one artillery gun with us and I didn't even know it, and he pulled off to the right a little bit back of us and run into a salt marsh. There he sat and when we went back through there he said to me, "Will you blow my gun up for me?" I said, "No, I won't do that." Well the Tank Commander said, "I'll do it." I thought they should have at least tried to pull it out.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a cable or something you could have hooked to it to pull it out?

Mr. Nielsen

Oh, we had enough cables and I think we had enough power but we were still within German range. Those 88's they dug into the side of the hill. They had a long range.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was a wicked weapon wasn't it?

Mr. Nielsen

It sure was and the sad part of it is we could have had it. They said we didn't need it. We never did get a gun as good as that. They were supposed to put a 76 on these Sherman tanks but we just got a few of them toward the last, not very many. It carried more wallop.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you think the 76 was more powerful than the 75?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, yes, there was no comparison.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did this battle last?

Mr. Nielsen

Gosh, I couldn't tell you exact but long enough. An hour or so or two hours. Like I say the battles there were pretty wicked. We fell back to what we called the Suda and there was infantry there, the 26th Infantry, Big Red regiment out of 1st Infantry Division. They were that way a ways we was bivouac and that's where we stayed and did a little firing. One night they got in trouble and we went in and pulled them out. We were firing and about dark and the Lieutenant I had then said, "Nielsen, take your tank and go down and help get a tank that blowed up and they want to pull it back. You help them pull it back." I wanted to say, "What business have I got in there?" but you do as you are told. Got back in there, they had the track blowed off and the sprocket blowed off. A shell would come in once in awhile. We backed the tank in and I was the middle tank, we had three tanks hooked on to it, put it in just a low gear and we were moving out in good shape and our driver said, "Our clutch is slippin', another minute or two of this and it'll be burned out." So I jumped off and stopped 'em and told the tank ahead to back up a little bit. I jerked the cable, pulling them we had a big cable from there to there and from there to there you see and we were held in there real good. When I jumped down I started taking them off and throwing them down and the Lieutenant came up and said," What the hell

are you doin'?" I said, "I'm unhooking, our clutch is burning out." He said, "You stay in there." I said, "I'm not stayin' in there, Lieutenant." And I unhooked and I got away from it. Our company commander didn't like it very well but I wasn't gonna disable our tank.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of engines did those tanks have in them?

Mr. Nielsen

Wright Whirlwind.

Mr. Misenhimer

A rotary aircraft engine.

Mr. Nielsen

Right, right, air-cooled, 9 cylinder, about 400, 450 horse.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of a transmission?

Mr. Nielsen

One of them had a transmission made by Chrysler, another would be GM, and ours was made by Caterpillar. They were heavy and they did good.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many gears forward and how many back?

Mr. Nielsen

Five.

Mr. Misenhimer

Five forward, one reverse.

Mr. Nielsen

One reverse

Mr. Misenhimer

And by the clutch there was this hand stick?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, and if you knew how to drive 'em, you could drive 'em. That first gear was what was called a creeper. I didn't know why this clutch started to burn but it did and you could smell it but I got away with it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they ever get the tank pulled out or do you know?

Mr. Nielsen

Don't know, I got to hell out of there

Side two of tape # 1

Mr. Misenhimer

The Lieutenant was pretty sore at you for pulling your tank out, when you got back to the Company Commander, what did he say?

Mr. Nielsen

He didn't like it but he didn't say much.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you really didn't get in trouble over it then?

Mr. Nielsen

No, it was a mark against me but I was doing it on my own and I felt like I was doing what I had to do. I told them, you can bust me if you want to. I had a new Lieutenant, John T. Jones, the first one was killed, and the second Lieutenant was a good guy too. We got through that and they must have pulled it out, see they had more tanks. It was just a skirmish we had. We pulled in and fired and bring them back out. I could not understand why they sent me to do the dirty work so then we were bivouacked out there and shells were going back and forth and artillery was firin' all the time. One day the Lieutenant came and said, "We have to pull a reconnaissance, our platoon." Well guess what, our platoon had three tanks in it and I said, "You need us to take off?" And we did, we got back to the German lines, see it was so big, that country was so big and there were so few people there. Now this is one thing that was real interesting, we ran across back there an Arab family with their flocks like they tell in the Bible with a tent, skin tent and all the people. I never got out of the tank and I never let them get close to the tank but back there where I was there were tracks, there were tracks from a German tiger tank. That's their big tank. So when we got back, the Lieutenant said, "You go report that to the Captain being as you saw 'em." When I did the Captain got pretty sore, he said, "Sergeant, G-2 said there are no tiger tanks in this area." Of course I argued with him I said, "Captain, I'm pretty good at tracks." And I was and I know what it was and in a few days we found out. (Laughing) The size of those tracks were wide and you could tell it had a tremendous weight on it see. A few days later for some reason or other our company commander thought we were going to have some problems. General Eisenhower was up there the night before right in our C. P. and he said, "Things are not just like they should be but he said everything's fine." About 2:30 in the morning we were up, loaded up and ready to go and pretty soon you could see across the valley there, you could see so far when they started the attack. G Company was up there and it didn't take them long to go through them but I could tell the different sizes of guns they were firing. I knew it was an 88 and they led the attack with those big tanks. They had the Americans knocked out before they knew what happened. And I hate to say this but the Captain of that company jumped out of his tank and ran and kept running. A friend of mine was the driver there. Several of them did that I know of. In our company they all

stuck, we had one that never got too close to it. Seemed like he'd get lost. He was from Brooklyn.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they do anything with the Captain who ran away?

Mr. Nielsen'

He was captured.

Mr. Misenhimer

By the Germans?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, so whatever happened I don't know. I can remember his name too, Captain Johnson. In that battle the Germans were coming down this way and they come down the road. I Company left the road and we went out to meet them here on that flat prairie and I didn't know it but our first platoon they ran their tanks and his radar didn't work and the Company Commander - they're good friends, anyhow - and he said, "Well, just watch my tank and what I do, you do." Well, we were out here and goin' and he had his head out and an 88 took his head off. He fell down and the driver saw that and he jumped up and got out of that tank and ran and ran and ran. The driver said, "Well hell, he's just runnin' on back." So we all went back and there we were. Just before that another tank in our platoon was right along side of me when it got hit and I saw them jump out in a cactus patch and those cactus were pretty tough and I didn't know what happened then cause we were fighting forward. We hit one tank, I was on the gun at the time, it was long range and it stopped, I'm not sure whether it stayed stopped or it kept on going, but pretty soon, I was waiting for orders but nothing was comin' over. All I had was a receiver and pretty soon some tanks came up on the left side of us and started shooting. The lieutenant said, "Nielsen, take care of those tanks on the left side." Well, fine, but what happened, we fired our gun and the next shot it wouldn't fire. It jammed the shell in there. My assistant gunner was a real strong Polish fellow and I said, "I'll fix

that." I knew what I was gonna do if it jammed, I'd figured it out myself. When they're jammed in that tight, you can't push 'em out so I had a hammer, a heavy ball-peen hammer and I'd taken a block of wood and cut it and it was like this and you do it in there like that and that part did not touch the firing primer and I took that hammer and beat that shell in. Soon as I got it all the way in, it went off by itself. It wasn't all the way in. We had a mark, one hit where it came through the turret and just before that we had one come through the back of the turret where we had the big radio and all of our stuff crammed in back there just like a shelf and there was a 47 that come through there, threw me forward and it hit the front of that thing and it come around the corner like this and it hit the gun. I said, "Where did that shell go?" I looked down and it was down there on the floor just spinnin', white hot. I said, "Kick it off down below." Then pretty soon we had another one come through. We were movin' all the time. We were movin' back just as fast as we could and then one came in and stopped the tank and I hollered, "Bail out." And I got all of 'em out but the driver when he went to jump off the tank a shell hit the other side and spun him around like that and knocked him out. I went over and picked him up and carried him over to the tank track, when we got over there he come to. We took off a runnin' and the lieutenant got turned around and stopped and picked us up and we were out there firin' just goin' this way and firin' this way. Pretty soon one came through the tank and their gun was out. It was floppin' up and down in the back. They had the turret turned the wrong way and it was a floppin' up and down. When they got out, one of the boys was burnt. His hair was burning, just bright red. I stayed to see everybody got out and I grabbed him and I put it out. I had a pair of gloves on. I thought everybody had got out and we got down in a little ditch there and the gunner said, "Ed, you've got two men in the tank." So I jumped up and he jumped up, he jumped up the side to turn the turret because when I got up there to lift the door, with the turret turned to the back you had to be just right or you couldn't get the door up, so when he turned it, I jerked the door up and I grabbed a boy. He had overalls on like a tank man and I jerked him but he had a belt on so I reached down to get the belt and someone said, "I'll get the belt, you get him." And he let loose of the belt and I jerked him straight up and he wasn't a very big boy and we got him straight up he come to. He was out. The powder burns were on his face, flesh was hangin' you know and then we got down in the ditch and I

said to the lieutenant, "I'm going to go back as far in this ditch as I can go." I was taking charge till you learned what you was doin' and they just stayed there even my crew. I should have called and got one of my men to go with me but I went back down, a half or three quarters of a mile on my hands and knees and I had taken and put those tank helmets, you know how they are? I took and put weeds in them so they were hard to see and I really went just as fast as I could go. I got back there and I looked up around and there was two tanks comin' up. Well, I only saw two, and I went back to warn them and I got back there I wanted to move 'em back but never got 'em moved back farther, these two tanks – here's the ditch , here's where we were layin' and I stayed back a ways and when they got up here they saw some of the boys up there and they started shootin' 'em with a pistol, and I raised up a little and I said, "I'm gonna get two of them, Lieutenant." He said, "Nielsen, don't be foolish, throw that damn gun away. Throw that gun away." I threw it down and I looked to my left, just ten feet from me was another tank. That's all she wrote. But all five of them boys were burnt pretty bad. What are you gonna do? I'd never dreamed that I would ever be a prisoner. That was the start of another story.

Mr. Misenhimer

So what day was that when you were captured?

Mr. Nielsen

I'll never forget, February 14th, Valentine's Day, 1943

Mr. Misenhimer

Did the people in the tank capture you or who captured you?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, the tank stopped, yeah they captured us, but what was you gonna do? I still think I was the only one that had a gun. The gunners and that they stripped off their guns but I kept mine all the time. Like I said the Lieutenant said, "Don't do anything foolish." And told me to throw it down so I dropped it and kicked dirt over it. So they took us up to Suda for a while and there set two beautiful tiger tanks and the one they must have put a

truckload of shells back in it. 88 shells. I was standing right there with the German soldier. "Let me go over and touch that," I said. I just went over and laid my hand on that damn thing just wanted to see how it'd feel. It was a new one, beautiful. You couldn't come close to them. The strange thing of it is our niece married this young man that served in the Navy, and he was in the Navy as high as he could go in the intelligence branch. Well, they put him in Viet Nam, there was only one other man in there, they fed him in from a submarine on a rubber raft and when he got back he went to gunnery school in Golden, Colorado. He had time off so he'd go in Golden and work for a shooting range there. He was learning to work on guns. The guys name was kind of German and he said to him, "You a German?" He said, "Yeah." He was telling him that right about then he was in that battle and they got new shells. He said, "Ha, they'd go in an American tank on one side and come out the other." Those 88's. So that's the way it was. Their 75's were better than ours and the light ones had 47's with big long barrels with a lot more velocity. You gotta do what you gotta do. They took us back in a truck a ways on a hill and there was a couple colonels, maybe one was a general, I don't know. He asked us questions. I wouldn't answer anything. They brought in a weapons carrier with a dead soldier on it, American. I said we ought to bury that poor boy. He was really in bad shape, so they give us a shovel and we buried him and when we had the hole dug deep enough I jumped down in there and I said, "Hand him down to me." I took the blanket and rolled him in it. He had a jacket on him, a light jacket and one pocket was big and I said, "Oh looks like he's got a roll of toilet paper, how lucky." I reached in and pulled out, it was a roll of bills. He'd been lucky at a card game. We had invasion money. There were francs and it looked like toilet paper was on him a big roll. I just gave it a flip. I didn't care. They'd just take it away from us anyhow. But I understand the Arabs afterward, come along and dug them all up and took their clothes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now this weapons carrier was it a German truck or American truck?

Mr. Nielsen

American. A weapons carrier, they were Dodge and what they had was a 37 mm cannon on them. That's what we called a weapons carrier and there was one in every company, and they traveled with the headquarters company, the first sergeant and them guys.

Mr. Misenhimer

But this is one the Germans had captured then?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, and when they picked us up off that battlefield, we got in an ambulance; two soldiers and they right away put powder and stuff on those boys that were burned so bad. I was lucky, I was burned slightly on my arm but I never paid any attention to that. My crew all got... I saved 'em all and they got out. From there we were unloaded and we loaded back up again and put a trailer behind it and had one of the tank commanders from headquarters layin' in that little trailer. His leg was just hangin' here, and every time he turned you'd have to take and turn it. He wasn't bled to death yet but we took him to the hospital and we got out and walked the rest of the way.

Mr. Misenhimer

How far did you walk?

Mr. Nielsen

From there to Tunis. You know and I talk. I say, you know, you don't know what you miss, what your Momma and people do for ya'. At home your Momma has a plate for ya and you got everything so handy, here we were walkin,' nothin' to eat. I said, "Aren't these son of a guns ever gonna feed us?" The third day they fed us some rice and it tasted pretty darn good.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about water? Did you have any water?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, we had water. And I learned that the Germans, wherever we were forced marched, we'd go three days without any food. You had to have a little with ya of some kind. And then we had nothing but a tin can pile. Had to go get a tin can out and clear it out real quick and scour it with sand and you didn't have no spoon nor nothin' and that's how you started.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's what you ate out of then?

Mr. Nielsen

That's right. You come down on earth real fast.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was this march to Tunis?

Mr. Nielsen

I can't remember but it was several days, yes three or four days. I have no idea how many miles. Some of those boys it was hard walkin, you know. I never did get tired of walkin'.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many of you were there?

Mr. Nielsen

Right then there was just about ten of us, a small bunch. They didn't have them all together yet but they were movin' us forward. They got two of us and we were put in jail. An animal must have used it. Oh and for the floor there was a little dirty straw. And then they interrogated us. I saw Colonel Waters there.

Mr. Misenhimer

This is Patton's son-in-law.

Mr. Nielsen

Yeah. They took me out to be interrogated. I didn't have anything and I didn't tell them anything. They said, "What do you think of the American tanks now?" I said, "Well, they'll come along." He said, "You are supposed to salute me, I'm an officer." I said, "Oh, if you're an officer, alright." He said, "What'd you do in your home." I said, "I'm a professional soldier." (Laughing) I wasn't gonna tell him, I didn't do anything.

(Laughing) They went through everybody like that. He said, "Look here, I can tell you your name, I can tell you everybody in your company. I can tell you what company it was. I can tell you everything about it." He had it all. The Arabs would go back and forth. The Arabs would sell information both places. They were sharp.

Mr. Misenhimer

You think they got that from the Arabs then?

Mr. Nielsen

Part of it, they must have got some of it from somewhere cause he had it all. I just shrugged my shoulders.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank was he?

Mr. Nielsen

He was a Colonel.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was the German?

Mr. Nielsen

Yeah. He could speak English.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they mistreat you at all?

Mr. Nielsen

Oh, I don't know. I got along better than most people. At times I was threatened. This one small camp we moved to to work about three months, one day the one soldier they had in charge of it, he said, "If I had it my way, I'd beat you with a club." I just laughed at him. They moved him. He had been in Russia and he was wounded, and he limped, he had a scar on his face, and he held his head to the side. The boss of the whole thing one day said to me, "I want you to work with me." I cook one day and go out one day. Johnny and I took turns cookin' but all you had to do was boil some potatoes. He said, "You know we're tryin' to figure out who is boss of the Americans." I said, "Oh?" He said, "I've got it pretty well figured out. It's you. Every time there's something goin' on they all look at you." And I learned to speak German cause our interpreter who was German, his mother come from Germany, his father come from Germany and they met in Minnesota after they were grown so they talked German at home all the time. He was American, he was really a nice fella and the way I really learned to talk German was from him.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was he a prisoner or was he in the German army?

Mr. Nielsen

He was a prisoner from Minnesota. 168th Infantry. He was from the engineers, Combat Engineers.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did they keep you in Tunis, when they first captured you there?

Mr. Nielsen

It must have been two, three, four weeks. Then they decided to move us out and I moved out with a bunch, and we marched to an airport. I can only remember – I don't think any

of our buddies were with me, I'm not sure. We got down to the airport and the air raid sirens come off and so we were scrambling around there and the fella said, "You just lay down." Just lay down here and that's all you can do and the bombs come in but they fell on the other side of the airport. While we were layin' there, a little old Arab came sneakin' up and callin' out, "Hey, buddies." And he had a goatskin full of wine – vino. Some of those guys took off their helmets and he gave 'em some. I wouldn't drink it. I knew what it was, terrible, terrible. One of my men got drunk on it one night and I happened to be in the tent with him and he'd throw up and I'd grab him and just shove him under there and when he quit heavin' I'd bring him back. He was in bad shape. I never turned him in either. We got in that plane layin' on the floor in a JU-52, the safest plane in the world but we thought "My God, look at this crow, this old crow that the wings flapped" and those boys got sick and threw up all over. I was so mad. One thing I saw that was interesting, we were lookin' out the window when we got right close to Italy. I was lookin' down and saw a submarine comin' out. A German sub. We landed at the airport in Naples, Italy. We loaded up on German trucks and they took us through the city and I remember that the Italians throwin' rotten tomatoes at us. We got out there to that camp and you just laid on the ground. You just didn't have any place to sleep, and wire, barbed wire. We got fed something then, though. It was then they said, "We delouse your kleider." Delouse your clothes. We took 'em all off and I was lucky enough to have a pair of long underwear cause it was cold at night. They run it through what looked like just heat to me but when I got my underwear back it looked like the color of horse manure. (Laughing) But I kept it; I wore it till there was nothing left of it. It was really cold. Then we got kind of used to it. It got kinda' summery there and then they said, "You're movin' out tomorrow." And we loaded on trains all the way through Italy and I saw the mountains and I said, "We're gonna have one heck of a time goin' through Italy," and we did. When we went through Brenner Pass, it was snowin', snowin' to beat the heck and it was kind of nice to look over when it was daylight you could look over into Switzerland. When we landed, I don't know how many days, at 7A camp up near Munich and then we were there a while. It was an interesting camp. The Russians were in one section but the rest of the section was all American, American flyers, French, and what have you, prisoners from other countries. They give us a Typhus shot when

they deloused us. You lined up. I'll always remember him, a little fat German medic, came down the line laughing. The syringe he had, it was a big needle, big as a regular nail and you held your tit, and he jabbed that in there and give you about a cc and on to the next one and when he filled it he filled the same one, same needle. That shot hurt more than any shot I ever had in the service, but I knew what it was for and I was glad to have it, because I saw later these Russians that got Typhus and it was just terrible.

Mr. Misenhimer

Back when you were in Tunis, did they feed you there or what did you get?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, we got bread and water.

Mr. Misenhimer

Bread and water about every day?

Mr. Nielsen

Oh yes, we had a piece of bread every day.

Mr. Misenhimer

A large slice of bread?

Mr. Nielsen

No, a small piece

Mr. Misenhimer

Maybe an inch and a half something like that, two inches, that's all you got once a day?

Mr. Nielsen

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

After you left Tunis how about food then?

Mr. Nielsen

That was what we stayed on, the main staple was bread. I was glad to get anything and I had somehow or other in my mind knew that it was going to be like that. When I was a kid I'd read about the 1st World War, this fella that was a prisoner, and it told about how they tried to get along.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then when you were in the camp near Naples, did you ever get anything besides bread?

Mr. Nielsen

Once in a while you'd get some potatoes or something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

You can survive on just bread and water then, huh?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, well usually. When we got to 7A we'd get some kind of a soup you know, not much but you'd get a little and you'd get hot water. When we were at 7A they'd put about 15 Russians in the pen next to us and you'd flip a cigarette over there, and they'd fight to see who'd get the cigarette, and the German soldier in there would watch too then he'd go over to the Russian and crack him on the head with his rifle butt and take the cigarette. So one day it was in the afternoon and they were bringing Russian prisoners in. Well I happened to be up close to the gate, I was up on something and they were marching in five abreast. They were all big men; quilted coats clear down to here, quilted caps, boots. They were ready for the winter. They were caught around Leningrad. They marched in five by five with the German soldiers walking along side of them. They'd better not make a misstep or they'd whack them on the head with the butt of a rifle. They had a

way of carrying it and, man, there was a lot of them. We had cigarettes and we'd give cigarettes to the Russians.

Mr. Misenhimer

And where did you get the cigarettes from?

Mr. Nielsen

When we got there, there was a contingent of British there and a big old British 1st Sergeant said, "You Americans are our buddies and anything we got we'll split right in the middle with you." Made us feel pretty good to know we had somebody with us and we got some stuff from their Red Cross parcels and we got some cigarettes. (Laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

Approximately how many Americans were in that 7A?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, I couldn't tell you that but there had to be quite a few. The interesting thing, I met a Master Sergeant from the Air Corp there and I said, "What in the heck are you doin' here?" He said, "Well I was ferrying a plane in Africa over the hump and we got low on gas and run out of gas so I landed it and pretty soon the Germans were all around it." That was kind of interesting. He was a young fella.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now do you think there were more than 1000 Americans in that camp at that time?

Mr. Nielsen

There probably was a 1000 in the camp at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the British, how many of those?

Mr. Nielsen

I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

More or less than the Americans

Mr. Nielsen

Less, less, but there were all kinds. In fact for two cigarettes I got shaved from a guy who had been a king's barber in one of them countries where he had been the king's barber. Boy, that was really classy. I didn't smoke see.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use them to trade for something else, cigarettes?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, you could. After a while they were better than money, when we got situated. We had to trade with the Frenchmen. When we got to 3B there were a lot of Frenchmen there, and they go and come without guards. They'd go out and work in the morning and come back. I don't want anybody that's French to take this, but it was just for them Frenchmen. They could steal more accidentally than any Yank could on purpose.

(Laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in 7A then?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, 7A, we weren't there too long because we left there when it started to get warm there and went to 3B, that's Furstenberg-on-the-Oder. That's where I stayed most of the time, spent 3 months or so out in this little camp with 3 of my buddies and we were gonna make an escape. By the time we got everything all together we had to have, we had a Frenchman come in and he give some from the Germans. We had maps and I had a little jeweled compass that I didn't get from anybody but out of the American Red Cross

box. It was stuck in there somehow and that was a big help. Then they come in one day, posted up on the board, anybody caught escaping will be severely punished or shot. Now my buddies said, "We're not going." I says, "Well, I'm not going by myself." There was a couple of other bunches the same way, they said they were not goin'. But the other fella said, "Ed let's you and I go." I said. "I'm ready if you want to go." He was in the combat engineers and he was pretty sharp. He was 6 foot 6. So we worked and we waited and waited our chance. We knew when the guard would change at just about dark and we knew who was comin' on. We called him Little Willie and he loved those German girls. He was makin' passes at 'em. (Laughing) We knew he'd be comin' on a little late and we cut the bars on the window under the stairs. There was one bar. You cut it and you could take it out and you could climb right up. It was a big brick barn and some places the brick would stick out and you could climb right clear up to the second floor and you'd walk along the edge of that and jump off outside the fence. We got that done, while we were doin' that a couple of the boys were runnin' up and down the stairs with their shoes makin' all the noise they could and we got away. We were supposed to get on with some Frenchmen who would hide us out for a couple of days but when we were goin' down this road we were dressed in French clothes. A girl and a young man came down on their bicycles and pretty soon the girl said to us, "Hey, they said you were all supposed to be locked up tonight." They had word that there were saboteurs being dropped so they locked them all up and we knew then that we were in trouble. Now we had some exciting times, we got on a little ways and we could hear somebody coming from that way and somebody coming from that way. It was just about dark. Right here was a road going this way and here was a ditch with some willows in there and we got down in there and laid under those willows and pulled some over us and just laid real still. They met there and come to stand and was talkin'. Pretty soon a guy walked over and shined his flashlight right down on us and never saw us. So then they decided they'd split up and go back and forth and one guy stayed right there. He stood about ten feet from us for an hour and then they decided to call it off and we took off. We really made some time. (Laughing) We had so much fun. Bill smoked and I didn't and he said." Ed, let's stop and smoke." You always traveled in the shadows when you could and there was a woods there so we crept in the woods and walked in the woods a ways and he was

just about to light a cigarette when a German soldier lighted a cigarette about 35 feet from us. Boy, we dropped to the ground and when we were goin' out of there they were having maneuvers, see. This one German soldier come right up close to us, he knew we were there, he said, [in German] "Halt! Halt! Sit down." And then he took off, turned around and ran just as hard as he could. Must have been a recruit. (Laughing) We got on our hands and knees and we crawled out of there just as fast as we could and we got clear away. It would have been kind of sad to be caught right away. That country was shut down so tight, every road crossing, they had guards on and every little town had a guard on, now, just like we have a cop, they were all armed, and when we were going through that one and all of a sudden we stopped and heard something, somebody loading his rifle. He knew there was something close but he didn't know what and we stopped and crawled away from that place. So we went as far as we could that night, you traveled at night and you slept in the daytime. And the next night we come to a canal and we were gonna cross the bridge but there was a guard there so we went back down a ways and Caton said, "I'll go in first, I'm taller than you are." He was 6 foot 6 and he got in and he said, "Come on in the water's fine." I went in and it was over my head. I thought he was gonna die laughing. (Laughing) We crossed all right and got out and we come to a town and there was a railroad station at the other end. He said, "Let's just walk right straight through the town like we owned the thing." There were people up, it was about 1-2 o'clock in the morning but they had what you would call a black out lights on, just a little blue light. We did and we got down to the railroad station and we walked by girls and guys walkin' on and on. As we walked down past the station, the train was in there, everything was set. There were three German soldiers, airmen, as we passed them, we heard them say, "Well, what the hell are they doin' here?" And about that time they jerked their guns out and come runnin'. Well, we ducked back of the station there was a potato patch. I said, "Lay down, you lay down not that far away from me and I'll lay down and cover yourself with vines the best you can." Cheeee..... they ran up and down that potato patch for about an hour and never ran over us. When they got done with that, we walked down to the other end of the patch there was a little car comin' down the road and we got down in the ditch. He was driving in and out you know, so he could see with his lights, flashed his lights right above us but didn't see us. It rained one

night. It really rained, and we come to this little village and we run into a fence, a big fence there. They had somebody in there and we were tryin' to figure out what we were gonna do and all of a sudden it was pourin'. Down the street come a guard, you could hear those old hobnails you know, walkin', walkin' and there was just a little bitty tree there and we pushed back against that, he walked right by us and he didn't get any more than three feet past us and the lightning, bright as day so we got out of there. We got into a marsh where they had cut hay and they had willow bushes, big willows you know those stuck in there and we were soaking wet so I said, "Let's just carry one of these shocks of hay in there, this wild hay." We did that and we covered up our tracks. We took our clothes off and we laid in that hay and laid our clothes out so they'd dry and pretty soon I said, "What's that noise?" There was a guy fishin' over here about fifty feet from us, castin', he was a soldier. We just laid there. About the middle of the day, four or five kids came and had a dog

This is the end of Tape I.

This is Tape II of the interview with Ed Nielsen.

Mr. Misenhimer

So these kids come along with a dog, you're sayin'

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, and they stood there at the outside and yelled. "Kommen sie aus. Wie haben ein hund mit." You can understand that can't you? "Come out. We have a dog with us." We just laid real still and they went on to the next one and they had a light plane they were diving on everyone so they knew there was somebody somewhere. When it got dark, we took off again. We got along pretty good that night and found a place to sleep. The next night we were lookin' for a place, and it was startin' to get light and we were hurryin'. We made about 65 miles in the time we were out. We were really walkin' and it was startin' to get light and we were along side the railroad and didn't know what it was. We were in the shadows and walkin' and all of a sudden a young fella stepped out

with an Enfield rifle, a British rifle and yelled, "Halt." He was ten feet from us. He was a young German soldier so we were lucky and he called the feldwebel of the guard - that's the sergeant of the guard - when the sergeant of the guard got there he really chewed him out for not shooting us. At the post if you saw anybody come across you were supposed to shoot them, but he was just a young fella, a nice lookin' kid and he just shrugged his shoulders so he thought, well, he could talk to us and he said, "Well, you stay here." And he called for another guard and put us in a room and he told this guard that we better not escape and don't talk to 'em and don't fraternize with them just keep your distance. There was not window in there and he shut the door and no light and locked it. The German soldier was young probably 22, blond. Sat his rifle down and I thought he was gonna hug us to death. He had a brother in Texas in a prison camp and he wanted to know all about that. Now that was one thing that was lucky, they hadn't searched us and we had all that contraband, German money and stuff, so we gave this boy everything we had and he took care of it. They didn't really know what we were. They were looking for saboteurs. The little village there, the gendarme, the city police was a big fella on a bicycle. He came and he's takin' us to the jail. He kept that pistol in his hand, cocked, and I looked at him and saw those bullets in there and he never took it off of us. He took us up to the jail and people started gathering around, you know wantin' to know what's goin' on, and we finally got it through their heads that we were prisoners of war. We had our tags with us, so he was gonna search us. Now this Caton, you'd have to know him. He was a daring fella. When he got out, he never got out, he stayed in and he went to CID and he got to be high. He rubbed shoulders with Kissinger and the President. He pulled us in there and he stood there with that gun pointed right at us, right at our heads, everything was to be put on the table so we did, and I said that sucker's not going to get all of my cigarettes so I looked him in the eye, I'd steal back two packages, just what I'd put on, and Caton saw me do that and he thought hell if Ed can do it, I can too but he got caught. (Laughing) Gee, you ought to have heard that big guy cuss and swear at us. So all the way through that again, and wound up I still got 2 packs of cigarettes. (Laughing) His build was bigger than I was and he watched him closer than me. (Laughing) But that was funny. Then they decided they were gonna take us and put us in a Jewish concentration camp, that's where we went from there. There were two

Colonels that interrogated us and we had decided just what we were gonna say. We both said the same thing. You just stop, snap to salute and tell 'em, "It's for my niece." - It was my duty and they understand that stuff. And we set there almost all day. Now those guards not only had a gun, they had a pouch and everyone of them carried a bull whip. And I asked him, "Are they gonna throw us in here?" Pretty soon towards the end of the day a couple of guards came and put us on the train and took us back to the big camp.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, what Jewish camp was this?

Mr. Nielsen

I don't know. I wouldn't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was in Germany or France?

Mr. Nielsen

In Germany. In Germany. We were in the Northeastern part of Germany. Remember I said I had clear view of the Oder? So then we went back to the home camp. We thought it was funny. We came in the camp just at quittin' time, and Caton knew this Captain, this German Captain and when he saw us he laughed and, "Ha haaa, my buddy come back home," and he talked to him and he asked us some questions. There was a fat German that run the place and when the Captain left he said, "You search 'em." And when they give a search that meant take all your clothes off and a skintight search. The Captain hadn't any more got out of the door when the German said, swore and said, "The hell with him." (Laughing) And they put us out and we spent ten days in what they call the verschocken barracks and eighteen days solitary confinement, bread and water.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, did this Caton speak German?

Mr. Nielsen

He could a little bit but he was good at French. He could speak French.

Mr. Misenhimer

How do you spell his name?

Mr. Nielsen

C A T O N He's dead now. Bill Caton. We were so fortunate, we went West and he was in San Antonio and we stayed with his wife and him and he said, "Ed, of all the times I had in the Army and all the cases I've had, I never had so much excitement as we had as when we made that escape." And like I say, "We didn't get any punishment, what the heck's that?"

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you gone on your escape?

Mr. Nielsen

About four nights and four days"

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you get to eat along the way?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, we had saved some D-bars from our packages. In fact when I went to crawl out that damn window, I couldn't get out the window. I had too many D-bars and too many cigarettes. (Laughing) I had to leave some of them, which I hated. We figured those cigarettes would buy us time outside if we contacted some prisoners but we just never did. But like I say we enjoyed it when we hashed it over again. He's passed away and my other friend that I was with almost all the time through prison camp, passed away. He stayed in the Army, Bill Bannister, and when he came back he made Warrant Officer. Then they put him in the job you know counting stuff, and back to company duty, he

wound up in Korea and when he got in Korea the Colonel said, "Bannister, you are gonna either fight a company or at least a platoon." Bannister says, "Colonel, I'm a Warrant Officer, they don't fight." The Colonel said, "You will, you son-of-a-gun." (Laughing) and he come out a Captain. He wrote me from there. He said, "They don't fight like we did in Africa." He said, "There's nothing like that." When the Chinese attacked the line, the tanker dug in. We fired all our ammunition and we just rolled 'em dead out there. When we had to leave, we blew our tanks and we got out that night on foot. He was a good boy. You would never think of it of him. He couldn't cook a damn thing. He couldn't fix anything. If we got anything fixed, he said you fix it. But you'll never have to do a dish; I'll do all the dishes. I'll clean up anything you do. (Laughing) And he meant it. Like I said, he was a Southerner from Louisiana and I was a damn Yankee from the North but we never looked at each other like that. We were good friends.

Mr. Misenhimer

Back when you were in 3-B, what did you live in there?

Mr. Nielsen

Barracks. They were pretty crowded.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many people for one barracks?

Mr. Nielsen

I don't know. You had your cots three or four high whatever it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

A fairly large number of people in each barracks then?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, yes we were crowded.

Mr. Misenhimer

And the food there again was just bread and water?

Mr. Nielsen

No, you got some soup. You wouldn't have lived if you didn't but if you got a Red Cross package you could cook and make do and we would. Like I say, we traded a little from the Frenchmen if we could but of course their prices were awful high, the stinkers. But if you could get a potato or two you could fix you up something pretty good, learn how. Stoves you call 'em, they were really a blower. You didn't get much wood, you just got a few shavings you put in there and turn it and all the oxygen makes your heat. We made it, of course the longer you was in, you lost weight. Then once in a while they'd come in and come tearin' in with a couple squads, set up a machine gun and shimmy it up there. Everybody out and they'd go through the barracks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get Red Cross packages very often?

Mr. Nielsen

When I was there, we weren't getting any. If anything happened; "Ha! Americans bombed the train, no packages." (Laughing) Course they could do anything they wanted, see. But if there was gonna be a Red Cross representative there you'd see things straightened out and you could get cigarettes from home. I had my folks send me cigarettes. They said, "Boy you must be smokin' a lot," but I wasn't smokin'. The only reason I used 'em was for tradin'.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about mail? Did you get mail from home very often?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, not very often, but we got some mail and I'd write to her.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about you sending mail out?

Mr. Nielsen

Every so often you'd get to send one out. When I wrote to my mother, see they read them pretty close. I wanted to know how I could let her know that I'd escaped so I figured it out. I had a good will through Dutch who was with Patton. All I did in there was say, "I was close to Dutch last week, Mom" and she figured it out right away.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now how long were you in this 3-B?

Mr. Nielsen

I'll tell you how we left it. It was a bitter cold winter in '44 and the first part of '45. I think it was January the 29th; they come in and said, "Midnight tonight you're walkin' out."

Mr. Misenhimer

This was '45?

Mr. Nielsen

Yah, '45. You're walkin' out. You're gonna have to walk So, alright we will. Of course we could hear the guns. We knew the Russians were comin'. In fact when we were in prison, when we were doin' bread and water, solitary confinement, there was a Russian soldier in there that just was brought in and he was he was givin' those German guards a workin' over. He was a big fella and he said, "We've got guns and shells that big."

(Laughing) And they wouldn't let us talk to him but he'd be talkin' you know. I can understand a little Russian. I got to where I could understand and talk a little bit. It was hard cause of the different alphabet.

And they said, "You're goin' out, you better be ready." Everybody got a Red Cross package to divide with his buddy, if I remember right. Come midnight we marched out and came to meet a fella here years later that came in from the other way, he was an S.S. trooper.

Mrs. Nielsen

Ed Welker, did you know him? Ed Welker?

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh yah.

Mr. Nielsen

I got to talkin' to Ed one day and he said, "Yah, I came in the same night you marched out." But Ed was young and he was also very lucky. He never had the mark on him that the S.S. troopers had. And every time they put the mark on, he was doing some crap detail, you know, being he was young and a private, and the last time when he was goin' through the old German doctor said, "No, no! You don't want that damn thing on you." He was smart. But everybody that had that thing on did five years hard labor if they lived through it. So we marched out. It was cold and windy and it kind of warmed up a little and I think we were on the road two weeks but we were fortunate at that because some of them were on the road longer. We came to 2-A and we were in the tents there, big tents. They were just right close together and they were rotten. The wind would blow and they'd tear or pull the stakes up. On our end there were only two guys who could tie them and make them hold, that was me and another guy that had been a logger. (Laughing) So every time they'd go flat they'd call one of us. Every time I heard the wind blow after that it'd about set me off. There was another thing, I'll never forget, the day the Russians... All of a sudden the German guards left and the Russians came blastin' through with their tanks. They had some German and Russian tanks. That first night, machine gun fire, rifle fire all night long you know, bursts, and all around that camp there were fires, buildings burning, just burning. Nobody would get out and put them out, they were afraid because the army came through right where we were. And

those women. God Almighty, they were screamin'! They were tryin' to look for their husbands and couldn't find them. But the Russians were hard on the German people and they weren't very happy with us. At that time, this other friend of mine was Polish and he spoke Russian real good, he and I would go out together. We went out with a couple of the Russian squads and went through the houses and went with them there. If you can talk the language, it makes a lot of difference and they were good guys. I remember coming back into camp that one day - we would come in the back way, sneak in. There was a beautiful blonde gal, lived there, and her mother, her husband had been an S.S. officer, "(crying out) This is the sixth time my daughters been had by a Russian." (Laughing) Another funny thing, several things. We said let's go down to the railroad yard this morning, started walking among those trains, there wasn't anybody on them right there so they had 20 mm cannon holes and 50 caliber shell holes and we stepped around the end and the Germans had a bunch of prisoners there. The Italians had given up and they put them in with us, the Italians and French and all the young German women, they were putting them back to work in Russia. I said, 'Let's get to hell out of here, and we did.'" And one morning going in we'd go a different way you know and there wasn't hardly anybody around here but just some houses and all of a sudden we stopped and we were kinda hid, and two German soldiers carryin' their rifles yet come sneakin' along there till they got to a house, and the women grabbed them and jerked them in there and the Russians had taken over for already a week and they'd found their way home. We never told on them.

Mr. Misenhimer

So actually Russians liberated you, you just stayed in the camp for a while then.

Mr. Nielsen

We stayed in the camp. They said, "You do not leave." Some of them left right away but several times we tried to get out. The guards said, "Get back and stay in." And the reason I got out early, we were kind of together and knew what we were gonna do. We had an American Captain in charge of it and he said, "You guys kind of stay around here."

Mr. Misenhimer

So the Americans came in then?

Mr. Nielsen

He was there.

Mr. Misenhimer

He was a prisoner.

Mr. Nielsen

Yes. And that one evening here came maybe a half a dozen American trucks with rations for us and so all us guys that were first we loaded up on those trucks and away we went. Of course all the fighting was around there. Wherever we went there were crosses off to the side of the road where they had buried the Russians. The ditches were full of dead Germans and some of them were dead Russian prisoners, they had killed them too, all swollen up. The Germans couldn't get out and bury their men. One evening there, you talk about horse troops, there was a brigade of Cossack Calvary, I mean their line of horses must have been a quarter mile long, they had them tethered there. All horses were one color. They had bright red uniforms. Then one day about towards the last before I left, we'd sleep different places and we slept along side what would have been the kitchen. Just about six o'clock in the morning a plane came down real low. Machine guns...it must have been a Focke or something... it sounded to me like they were 20 mm. MG... and knocked the chimney off of the building where we were sleeping there. Just made one pass and that was it. One day right after it came through there, they had a brigade of artillery at the edge of town, and they were firing. Harry said, "Let's go down there." "Alright." We just about got there and a ME 109 came right down on the bottom deck. He didn't pull up until he almost hit the ground and then he come back up. The Russians were firing at him with everything they had, pistols and everything. Back up he went and came back down again, whether his guns wouldn't fire or what, but he got away.

Mr. Misenhimer

He didn't shoot anybody then? He didn't shoot at all.

Mr. Nielsen

No, his guns evidently wouldn't work. You know how it was. When we got on those trucks, we got into American hands then.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what day was that, do you recall?

Mr. Nielsen

No, I don't. And we stopped there and then we got on trucks and crossed the Elbe on a pontoon bridge. We were heading for the Elbe, to cross the Elbe. We had all kind of ideas about crossing it, you know when we escaped. It's a big river, I'll tell ya. We crossed it on a pontoon bridge. We were taken off to an American camp they had and we loaded up on C-47's and they flew us right over Paris right close to the Arc de Triomphe and the big tower and we landed at Le Harve, and we were there several weeks. In fact, I was out on the tarmac where they landed the planes and the American that's in charge of the Air Force was there, I can't remember his name now. I didn't think I'd ever forget it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Hap Arnold?

Mr. Nielsen

Hap Arnold, right, yep.

Mr. Misenhimer

You got to see him then?

Mr. Nielsen

Yeah, yeah, he was there.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you weigh when you finally got liberated there?

Mr. Nielsen

140 pounds.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you weigh when you first got captured?

Mr. Nielsen

I don't know. I was probably 160, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you lost something like 20 pounds or whatever?

Mr. Nielsen

Well at one time I was down to 135 when we had a tough time in 3-B with nothing to eat. I always tried to keep in shape. We got out there and walk around or play ball or something. Nice thing about it, most of the Americans, they were pretty good guys.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did many of the American prisoners die in the camps, do you know?

Mr. Nielsen

A few. Had one shot down right along side of me one day when we were marching.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, we were tired and he stopped off the edge of the road, and we'd had trouble that day anyhow. When we started out we didn't have our wounded and those that couldn't walk with us. They made us start out anyhow, and pretty soon a motorcycle came along and said, " Well, they're all dead." They didn't know what happened, whether Americans bombed it or a Russian shell or something hit it. They had those sick boys that couldn't walk in a little schoolroom and the explosion killed them all. Now that was the story. This friend of mine was just ahead of me a little ways and he was going to quit walkin'. Well he cut down on him, and that bullet went right past me and went right through his head and of course blew his brains all out, and when I went by him I just picked up his coat and covered him up. One of my boys couldn't make it. I said, " Give me your blanket." So I grabbed the blanket and grabbed him and they cut us off at a dead run you know. They ran us till everybody couldn't run. But the saddest part about that was them boys who couldn't walk, they were from the Bulge. Some of those boys we fought with in Africa, from the first big Red One and I went and talked to a couple of 'em. I said, "Yeah, I was with you guys there." No way they ought to get killed like that. One day, it was in the morning rather early, this one little kid I knew, he could hardly walk and he was up ahead so they had a German farmer come along with a wagon and pick them up. This German farmer came along and sittin' on the back of the wagon wavin' to us and talkin' to us was a Jewish fella, Star of David. He got down to this friend of mine and the German said, "Get off." Pulled a pistol, put it to his head, and blew his brains out. Blew the Jew's brains out right there, just like there was nothing to it. I saw it before when we were walkin' on the road, they had Jewish with them. There was a Jew layin' there dead with a bullet in his head.

Mr. Misenhimer

They didn't have any use for them did they?

Mr. Nielsen

Nope. Just like you'd shoot a cat or something or less than that. But the Russians paid them back; they killed a lot of Germans.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see the Russians kill any Germans around there?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, the dead Germans were there. I know, Harry and I were with a group of Russians, they were with a patrol and they were all from Asia. They were Genghis Kahn. They would come up about to my shoulders, dark; hey, we were having a good old time. Hey, let's go through these houses. They didn't kill anybody, but boy those Germans were sure scared to death. A German farmer says, "What the hell are you guys doing with those guys?" Harry and I could both speak German pretty good but he could speak Russian. You get so hard, you know, but we didn't do anything wrong, him and I, no way.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got to Le Havre then what happened there?

Mr. Nielsen

We waited our turn to come back to America. It took a while. All we did was loaf and eat.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you leave there to come back?

Mr. Nielsen

I can't remember. When did I get back here?

Mrs. Nielsen

It was in April wasn't it? April of '45?

Mr. Nielsen

No, I was still with the Russians in April. It was the middle of the summer.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you when Germany surrendered?

Mr. Nielsen

I was in American hands. We were talking about it, you know. We were with Americans.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were at Le Harve then?

Mr. Nielsen

We were not at Le Harve yet. But I remember one thing that happened. The Air Force wasn't supposed to fly any more. The Lieutenants would get up and really turn those planes loose, so the commander of the airport - there was an airport right there - grounded them all. Pretty soon there was a plane up there just really turnin' it on, doin' everything. When it came down, they called him in. He was a mechanic. He had tuned it up and he was just tryin' it out. (Laughing) He could fly it as good as any officer. I remember that real well. I remember real well, we had a young fella in the Air Corps shot down, prisoner two days, and they wouldn't send him back to his outfit. He was really pissed about that. You see when we were in a battle we didn't have any Air Force. Any. We were under General Anderson, the British General at the time, and he took them all away to use them someplace else when they attacked.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that Alexander?

Mr. Nielsen

No, Alexander was over all. Our General was about 100 miles back. Fredendall. He never wanted to get any closer than that. Bradley had been before that. Bradley said he

was never so damn cold in all his life, and he said he was never so scared in his life, either, cause they'd taken him out to the front and these Germans back in the hills - it was all mountains and the valleys - and they'd have their guns set on these road crossings and when you got to these road crossings they'd cut loose with the fire. So he got a lesson learned right away. (Laughing) You know we couldn't bring anything up to the front in the daytime. We'd have to bring everything up at night because they'd be out bombing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Germany had control of the air at that point there in North Africa?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, yes, the British said they didn't, but I say they did.

Mr. Misenhimer

You should know.

Mr. Nielsen

By God, yes. That's my buddy Johnny. He said, "How am I getting' the hell out of this? I'm not gonna do anything." (Laughing) So he got a job driving a General, the one that stopped and attacked at the pass. I can't remember his name now but then just before that it hit them and blew the General's leg off. Johnny was the other side of the jeep and he didn't get hurt. It was a long road. It's all over.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you left to come back to the states, what kind of a ship were you on then?

Mr. Nielsen

Liberty ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did it take? Do you have any idea?

Mr. Nielsen

I imagine 10 or 12 days I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

The war was over in Germany by then.

Mr. Nielsen

Yeah. We landed at Camp Miles Standish, Boston. Then we got on a train and went all different places. Close to Indianapolis there was a camp.

Mr. Misenhimer

Camp Benjamin Harrison or Atterbury?

Mr. Nielsen

Atterbury

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in Boston?

Mr. Nielsen

Not too long. They had that train ready in pretty short time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Less than a day or?

Mr. Nielsen

A day or two.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you got to Atterbury, what happened there?

Mr. Nielsen

We were all segregated up, you know, on where you were goin'. That took some time. It wasn't too bad though. When I got to Indianapolis, I was going to stay overnight and then come home, well I placed a phone call to one of my friends mother, his folks lived there. He wasn't captured and he had just got out of the Army and so they come and picked a couple of us up.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when did you get discharged?

Mr. Nielsen

In the fall some time, wasn't it, honey?

Mrs. Nielsen

Yes, September

Mr. Nielsen

September or October, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you all get married?

Mrs. Nielsen

December of '45.

Mr. Misenhimer

From the time you got back till you got discharged in September, what did you do in that time?

Mr. Nielsen

Well, I did a couple weeks down in Miami, rest, R&R.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did you have when you got out?

Mr. Nielsen

Just a Sergeant.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a lot of back pay coming from when you were in prison camp?

Mr. Nielsen

No, I think they sent the checks home. I had it set up for my sister to get most of my money while I was overseas, that was better than half of it. I knew there wouldn't be a lot of places to spend it. (Laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned Ed Welker. He lived here near Francesville and he had been an S.S. trooper over there. Tell a little bit about him.

Mr. Nielsen

Well, I don't know that much, but Ed was lucky. He was captured by the Russians and he lived right on the border of Czechoslovakia, was it? And he told them he was a Czech which was smart, so all he did was a year in Russia and they were sending a hundred back and he was the hundredth man they sent back. Ed was a pretty sharp boy.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did he get over here?

Mr. Nielsen

He must be some relation to the Gutweins.

Mrs. Nielsen

See, Gary and Norman were real good friends with our Curt and Kevin and they were visiting there and they got to comparing notes and that's how we knew that one came in the camp and the other one leaving.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did he have, do you know?

Mr. Nielsen

I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was he an enlisted man, do you know?

Mr. Nielsen

Oh yes, he was. He was young.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything else you can think of?

Mr. Nielsen

Just glad to be home. (Laughing) We marched, but somehow or other it didn't bother me. I was in good shape, but our Lieutenant marched 600 and some miles, but you know they were officers. They just practically left them march by themselves. The guards didn't give a damn what they did and in fact he told me the Captain in charge of our I Company went in with some sick people in a house. He just went in there with them and said he made an escape then, you see. And in fact that fella told all about his escape and I told him what my lieutenant told me. Mmmph. Cause I didn't like him.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask another question. What medals or ribbons did you get?

Mr. Nielsen

Didn't get anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get a purple heart?

Mr. Nielsen

Nope. Like I say, I pulled those guys out of that burning tank and all I know, oh, I was glad to see them get out, and my crew, some of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

But no rewards for that or no ribbons or anything.

Mr. Nielsen

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many battle stars do you know?

Mr. Nielsen

I just got two but battle stars don't mean anything that means the theater you participated in.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you didn't get any decorations of any kind? Good conduct medal?

Mr. Nielsen

Oh hell, I got all that bullshit. (Laughing)

Return from break in interview.

Mr. Nielsen

From Atlanta, Georgia, big tall soft spoken Southern boy and he worked in the maintenance and you know he looked like he was a little clumsy but put him on first base with a glove and nothing got by him but you know what he always said, "All I want out of this so and so war is my ass and all it's accessories." (Laughing) That's what he said and that's the way I am. J.D. Vaughn. He was such a nice guy. He made it through. All our maintenance they all made it, but our battalion men, most of them were captured because they thought, oh hell this ain't gonna be nothin'. Before they knew it their tanks were blown up and the Germans were all around them.

But like I say anything could happen like this one guy I got to know. He was a big husky fella, German descent, and he could speak German and he was old, he just got in under the wire and there when the Russians went through he went out in the town and got him a woman. She was a rich woman. She had diamonds and she had jewelry and she was givin' him and showin' him, boy oh boy. Now what happened to him, see, don't know. They disappeared.

Mr. Misenhimer

Unaccounted for, huh?

Mr. Nielsen

My assistant gunner, he was a private. He wound up in Italy, well they landed him first in Sicily and when they came through there they brought him to Italy. When the Italians capitulated they were guarding the camp, they just took off and Wally said, "I ran as hard as I could." He got far enough away and he was out two and a half months and people would feed him and take care of him. He got in with a farmer who had a couple of daughters and he had to leave there cause the farmer thought he ought to marry his daughter. (Laughing) But where he was hiding he would go down at night to this farm house and he would come back up to an orchard like, and there was an old well there kind of camouflaged and he'd watch out there, and one of these underground guns that

shoots these rockets was just about 600 yards from him. So when he got back with the British he reported that and the British said, "You were lucky you got away because if we couldn't find that, we were gonna blanket that whole area with artillery shells." And he and two South Africans, English, made it through the lines, but there were several people I know that didn't make it. One of the boys I knew, him and another fella, got in with the Italians and the Italians said they would take them through the lines but the Italian at the last minute decided not to. So he killed the one American and took and turned the other one in. The one he turned in was my friend.

The officers, the big officers - not the field officers but the brass - They never get killed, never get anything....and if they were ignorant... if they were lousy, they stayed lousy through the whole daggone war.

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]

The staff officers had it made compared to the boys in the field. It's just like me. I had lieutenants and captains killed right out and I was lucky enough to live through it and I was generally ahead of 'em. There's no rhyme or reason. Tanks are not a safe place. (Laughing) Nothing was a safe place.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned earlier about the 47 mm. shell came into your tank and ricocheted around and things. Where did that come through. Some armor?

Mr. Nielsen

Yes, it went right through the armor. On the back of those Sherman tanks there's a ledge there to carry your radio and some stuff. We had just a receiver, a big heavy deal and the rest of the stuff we had jammed into bags and a bunch of 50 caliber ammunition in metal casings and it slowed it up enough that it went here and it went right around here and I was standin' here and when it hit back there it just slammed me to the front of the tank. I've got a little scar yet right here from it and like I say, I saw where it landed and we kicked it down and got that gun straightened out.

Mr. Misenhimer

It wasn't explosive ammunition then?

Mr. Nielsen

No, it was a regular slug, what we called a slug.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what caliber was it?

Mr. Nielsen

I'm sure it was a 47-millimeter, a light tank. It was a tank gun.

Mr. Misenhimer

And it could penetrate the armor in the back of the tank.

Mr. Nielsen

Oh, yeah, it could penetrate the turret anywhere.

[End of Tape 2, Side 2, and the interview]

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Arlene Sanders

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