

**Irwin E. Brown
Veteran**

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Interviewers**

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Rome Free Academy
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Interviewer: I
Irwin E. Brown: IB

I: I'm just going to start off asking you about your home life before you the Army. When where you born?

IB: December 13, 1922. So my birthday is just in a few more days.

I: My birthday's the 12th actually.

IB: Is it?

I: Yes. What did you do before the Army? Were you in school? Were you in college?

IB: I was born in Fulton, New York and went through the Fulton Public School system. Graduated from high school in 1940. I took the entrance exam to Oswego and was accepted, but I didn't feel like I had enough money at that time so I worked at the Fulton Woolen Mill for a year; then during that time I took the entrance exam again and was accepted again at Oswego and entered in 1941. I was able to complete two years before I enlisted in the Army. It was called the Specialized Army Specialize Training Program, ASTP, and went into the Army. I went to the induction center of Fort Niagara and from there went to Camp Wheeler, Georgia for basic training. Then from there we were sent to different universities. I went to the University of Alabama to study engineering and that program was closed down shortly after the invasion of France at Normandy. We were sent to different divisions at that time and I went to the 106th division out in Indiana and trained with them for time and was sent from there to overseas to join the 30th infantry division.

I: Was the Army Specialized Program made especially for college students, and people who were in college?

IB: Yes; not only for people who were already in college, but for people who scored a certain level and would be examined that the Army gave when you first went in. That program was supposed to train people for engineering. The navy

had a similar program; they called it a B7 program and they would take people to train them for officer.

I: So how old were you when you joined the Army?

IB: Let's see. I enlisted in 1942, so I had to be 20.

I: What did you think of your basic training and all the camps you attended?

IB: I thought it was very good. It seemed to me that it was fairly thorough and prepared us for what was ahead.

I: How was the basic training different from the actual fighting? I'm sure it was completely different.

IB: It was different. Yes, this is true, completely different. The only thing I can say is that the basic training prepared us for the action that we encountered. Naturally, it was completely different. You didn't have the sights, the sounds, in the actual action that you met.

I: So what was the actual fighting like being over there?

IB: Well, it was at times terrifying. There were pleasant times. There were humorous times. I recall one of the very first attacks that I took part in and a unit on our left attacking with us. Some of the soldiers of this unit were visible across a field, and I happened to glance across this field just in time to see one of these soldiers get blown up by a mine. This upset me so that I dreamed about this for many, many nights. And as I say at times it was terrifying, the action, but there were times that there was humor and the people that I was with I enjoyed. They were good people and they were nice to be with.

I: Was it anything that you imagined it would be?

IB: Really when I went through basic training maybe I was so immature, so young, that I didn't think ahead... you know, to what was that I might experience. I guess that I just didn't... I just didn't think of the different things that would happen.

I: You were an expert Marksman, correct?

IB: Yes.

I: And what did that mean exactly?

IB: Well it meant that I, for one thing in my training battalion I scored second high in the whole battalion in marksmanship. Later on, in advanced training I was asked if I wanted to be a sniper. I agreed to this and went through the training that they had for it. I carried a rifle with a telescope sight on it. I enjoyed that.

I: How were your officers, and you were a sergeant, correct?

IB: Yes.

I: I know nothing about this stuff; how high is a sergeant?

IB: A sergeant is an enlisted officer. In my case, I was an assistant squad

leader and at one time during the Battle of the Bulge because the squad leader had suffered frost bite in his feet he had to be sent back to a hospital so I became acting squad leader at that time. I guess you would say a sergeant is some place in the middle rank of enlisted ranks: half way up or half way down.

I: How big was your squad?

IB: Our squad... Each squad is 12 men.

I: In your paper you mentioned crossing the Rhine River. Can you tell us about that?

IB: The preparation... Now we, our particular job at that time were to carry boats up. We did this during the night. We carried the boats up to the riverbank and another unit actually went across. The preparation for the artillery bombardment was something that I never witnessed in my life. The skyline was just a constant flashing, just a constant glow of the guns firing, and shells were going over us and landing on the other side of the river. It was just a constant bombard of noise, the flashing, it was just tremendous and the crossing was very successful.

I: How wide is the Rhine River?

IB: At that point it seemed to me... Now it was a long time ago, and I'm guessing at it... But it seemed to me it was something like 500 yards across.

I: You walked across or did you take...

IB: No, we went across in boats afterward.

I: In the paper you said that some of the American equipment was better than the Germans and you also said some of the Germans was better.

IB: Yes. One of the questions that in the letter I filled out mentioned this and it got me thinking about it, and it's true. First, Germany was preparing for this long before we started preparing for it so some of their equipment was much better than ours. I brought this in just as an example, this is a German kit for cleaning a rifle. Now we had... We were issued what we'd call a string pull through; it was just a piece of string with a metal clip on the end, and a patch that you would pull through the barrel of your rifle. Once in a while these would break off and this would be stuck in the bore and you had to get it out somehow. But this kit, this is what the Germans had; this is just a little tool for cleaning parts of their rifle. Whenever we could find one of these we picked them up and threw away our string cleaner. Here with brush, a brass bristle, another brush, and a bore. This is a little container that contained oil, old oil; the other end was a little space for patches. I was fortunate enough to pick this up and one other one. I had 2 of these kits. This was the original color that they used especially for the North African Camp in the desert campaign, and the German Camp. Now that's one example. Our rifle, our M1 Garand rifle, there was probably no other country that had a rifle as good as that one. That would fire nine; it would hold nine rounds of ammunition, and it was a semi automatic. The German rifle was a bolt action rifle, after each shot you had to operate the bolt to eject the cartridge and put a

new one in, so our rifle was a very superior rifle. I think the other thing that comes to mind that the Germans had superior to anything we had was their tanks. Their tanks were much superior to our tanks. Our tanks couldn't stand up to a tiger tank or a panther tank.

I: In your paper you also mentioned a friend you met in Fort Niagara.

IB: Oh yes.

I: Could you tell us about him?

IB: We met at Fort Niagara, Don Joseph, his name was. He had just graduated from Buffalo State. We just seemed to get along together very good, and were fortunate enough to go to the same basic training camp at Camp Wheeler. Then, when we were sent from Camp Wheeler to University of Alabama we roomed together and then we went out to Indiana. He was sent to a different regiment than I was. At that time we separated. He was in the Battle of the Bulge. He was fortunate enough that he happened to see German tanks coming and just at that time a truck, one of our trucks, went by and he jumped on the truck and got out of there so he was not captured by the Ardent Bulge. After the war, well I should say when we were at the University of Alabama, he met a coed down there and after the war they were married. So that was nice. We kept our friendship and usually see each other at least once a year.

I: How long were you in Europe fighting?

IB: I went in... Let's see. I was sent from the 106th division; I went to England and then was sent to across to France and joined the 30th division and that was in, I believe it was in October. They had just broken through Siege Free Line in Germany at that time. Might have been late September or early October, and I was with them until I was discharged in 1945.

I: When you returned from the war, were things different at home? Did anything seem...?

IB: No, things were pretty much the same. I know before the war, of course we had gas rationing, and all of that and after the war there was not the gas rationing. So things were a little bit freer I guess.

I: Well, that was all the questions I had. If you have anything else you want to add in.

IB: I would say this. For many years I didn't even want to think about the war. Shortly after I got home, my wife and I went to Niagara Falls for sort of a honeymoon. While I was out there, I got worried that my brother had been killed... and the illusions... He was a B24 pilot, and he died out there and I think after that I just didn't want to even think about it and it just been in recent years that people began to talk about this, and I began to feel a little more free to speak about it.