

**John A. Howgate  
Veteran**

**Mike Russert and Wayne Clarke  
NYS Military Museum  
Interviewers**

**Interviewed June 17th, 2005, 2:30 PM  
Saratoga Springs New York**

**Q:** Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please?

**JH:** John Archer Howgate, date of birth 12/30/17, born in Gloversville New York.

**Q:** What was your educational background prior to entering service?

**JH:** I was a Union College Graduate of 1940.

**Q:** DO you remember where you were, and your reaction to Pearl Harbor?

**JH:** I was listening to a pro football game on the radio. I've never forgotten that because the announcer said oh by the way the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. He finally realized it the second time he said it "Oh my god, they bombed Pearl Harbor!".

**Q:** Did you at the time know where Pearl Harbor was?

**JH:** Yes.

**Q:** Do you remember your reaction to this?

**JH:** Shocked I guess.

**Q:** Did you enlist or were you drafted?

**JH:** No I was drafted; I was at the American Locomotive I was the department head and I received deferments. I began to feel ashamed of myself, so I told my boss I don't want any more deferments.

**Q:** You were in a defense related industry.

**JH:** No, American Locomotive, building trains and carriages.

**Q:** Why did you make that decision?

**JH:** Felt ashamed of myself.

**Q:** You were drafted into the Army, where did you go for your basic training?

**JH:** Camp Blanding Florida.

**Q:** As a college graduate did you get any offers to go into an officer candidate school?

**JH:** No

**Q:** How long was your basic like, and what was it like?

**JH:** Basic was 13 weeks and it was just basic. A lot of hiking, a lot of rifle practice. That was basically it, a lot of conditioning and weapon training.

**Q:** Did you receive any specialized training at all?

**JH:** No

**Q:** Where did you go after your basic in Florida?

**JH:** We went to fort Meade in Maryland, I can't remember how long we were there but then we all went on the Queen Mary. They told me there was 16000 men on there.

**Q:** Were you assigned a unit before you went over or were you a replacement?

**JH:** No I was a replacement.

**Q:** Queen Mary was a single ship?

**JH:** Yes, a single ship no convoy.

**Q:** Where did you land?

**JH:** We landed Scotland, a place called Greenock. We got on a train there went on to Liverpool. There we were issued our weapons and zeroed them in. From Liverpool we went across the channel, landed on the beach of Normandy, with our cars because Omaha didn't have them. We were assigned as replacements to those.

**Q:** Approximately what was the date when you landed in Europe?

**JH:** About the 20th of June

**Q:** So by the tie you got to Normandy is was D+

**JH:** Yeah D+ 14 or so

**Q:** What were the beaches like when you landed there?

**JH:** They were plain; they had done a marvelous job of cleaning them up.

**Q:** When you arrived at the beach as a replacement where did they place you and how did you do that?

**JH:** We got on trucks and went to a replacement outpost

**Q:** How far inland was that?

**JH:** Not very far, we didn't ride very far as I recall maybe 5 or 6 miles.

**Q:** What unit were you placed in?

**JH:** I was placed in the 83rd infantry division.

**Q:** They suffered a heavy loss?

**JH:** Awful lot of losses, as I understand they had gone in shortly after D-Day and took tremendous losses.

**Q:** How were you received as a replacement?

**JH:** Welcomed

**Q:** Were you on the front lines when you joined them?

**JH:** Oh yes, they were in action.

**Q:** Did anyone help brake you in? Or you just found on the job training.

**JH:** Just on the job training.

**Q:** You were a rifleman you carried the M1?

**JH:** M1 yes.

**Q:** After seeing combat how would you grade your training back in the states?

**JH:** If I look back the training was good. You were in great physical shape, well trained with your weapon, and some other weapons. We did have some mortar training so we could fill in, also on the Browning, BAR, I'd say the training was pretty good.

**Q:** How about your uniform, and person equipment?

**JH:** We always had our leggings on. When we got to the combat zone we were told to throw everything away. Throw away the gas mask, throw away the bayonet, cut the shovel.

**Q:** When and what was your first experience under combat like?

**JH:** It's kind of funny in a way, with B Company first day in combat, were in the hedge rows. Sgt. Looks at me and says "you're the number one scout today" I say "what do you mean"? He says "Basic training says number one scouts are experienced trained men." I heard those deathless words the first time, what do you want to live forever?

**Q:** So what were your feelings going out as a scout?

**JH:** Scary, but then we realized the Germans learned our system so they didn't shoot the one or two scouts, they shot at the Sgt. who head would follow us.

**Q:** What was it like fighting in the hedgerow country?

**JH:** That was vicious, if you were defending it was wonderful. The hedgerows were maybe 6 to 8 feet high. If you climbed over one you were a target. That was tough.

**Q:** How long were you in combat?

**JH:** About 3 weeks. (Unclear) Arial bombardment. The army thought it was to slow, it took too long to take a hedgerow. Anything that could fly they got into the air. I remember they woke us up one morning, about 4 in the morning just to move us back a mile or so, dig a hole then it'd get quiet again. Once daylight came you could see some fighter planes dropping smoke. I've never seen anything like it in my life. These hundreds of planes would come over just wave after wave just began dropping bombs right over our heads, of course the momentum would take them over. It was really something to see after a while you couldn't hear you couldn't see the air was so filled with dust. That broke the back after that, we went on the attack after that we ended up somewhere in the lower valley

**Q:** What regiment were you with?

**JH:** I don't remember my number

**Q:** What did you do during you R&R

**JH:** Nothing much, absolutely nothing. Did some hiking sightseeing.

**Q:** Was that area secure?

**JH:** That was secure

**Q:** When you were in combat did your platoon suffer heavy casualties?

**JH:** Yes

**Q:** How did you like the M1 as a weapon?

**JH:** Wonderful, very dependable weapon, never jammed, a little heavy. But a marvelous weapon very accurate.

**Q:** After your R&R where did you go?

**JH:** We headed toward Luxemburg, there was a lot of fighting in Luxemburg and Belgium, and then to Germany.

**Q:** Where were you during the Bulge?

**JH:** Germany, we had progressed as far as the Black Forest. The area was knocked out of action. My squad and I were on what was left of the house on its foundation. Of course the Germans knew we were there. They brought up a tank and shelled us. Caused me certain back injuries and I was sent back to the states for surgery. First to Hamburg then to France, when the war ended they sent us back

**Q:** How long did it take you to recover from that?

**JH:** (Unclear) care, sent me to a hospital in Boston. A local general hospital, which use to be Camp Devens, Fort Devens and that's gone now. I recovered, maybe a month I was fine.

**Q:** What was it like in Hurtgen Forest?

**JH:** That was horrible, the tough part was the shell fire, these tree bursts, you couldn't hide. You couldn't hide from it you weren't safe; you certainly weren't under the trees. Then when they shelled you the shells would burst over your head. Yeah, that was tough.

**Q:** Was it confusing there also?

**JH:** No not so much we knew where the enemy was they knew where we were, but the weather was terrible. You'd wake up in the morning in your hole and you were half submerged in water.

**Q:** Did you have any gear for that type of weather?

**JH:** Yeah, we had those rubber over-shells and the shelter we had. I didn't carry much because it'd just way you down. I'd just roll up in the shelter we had; dig a hole and that'd be it.

**Q:** Did you have C rations that you survived on?

**JH:** Not C rations we had the K rations, they came in a crackerjack box they weren't bad.

**Q:** You think you were treated well in the hospital?

**JH:** We couldn't have had better care. Funny story on of the surgeon's name was Yamazaki he was third or fourth generation Japanese. Lived in white plains NY. He was at an aid station at the time of the bulge; Germans overran the aid station and captured him. He said they told him that unless he went back and worked at one of their hospitals, they were going to send him to Japan. He said "I was terrified I'd never been to Japan in my life."

**Q:** You said in the form that you thought the greatest impression was the constant exposure and daily combat. Then all the sudden death around you. Could you do into

more detail about that.

**JH:** It was always a tossup weather you'd live out the day. I remember one fella he and I dug a hole together it didn't go very well. When they attacked the next morning he was promptly killed by a sniper. Then you wonder why the it was him and not you. Why the sniper took him and not you. I'll give the sniper credit he had (unclear) because, we all stopped dead and fired at the tree we knew he was in and he dropped out of the tree.

**Q:** When were you discharged

**JH:** Christmas eve 1944

**Q:** From the hospital?

**JH:** No I recovered from that by then I sent to Fort Dicks New Jersey

**Q:** After your service did you ever make use of the GI Bill.

**JH:** No, I went back to my job. Before working for American Locomotive I worked for a commercial credit corporation which at that time was the fans company. I had gone back to American Locomotive until commercial credit called me back.

**Q:** Did you ever use the 5220 club

**JH:** No

**Q:** Did you join any veteran organizations

**JH:** Yes, I belong to two now, I don't go to meetings I belong to both the AFL and the American Legion.

**Q:** Did you ever stay in contact with anyone you served with?

**JH:** Yeah a friend of mine out in Chicago, his name is Fenski. Makes you wonder how the Army does things Ernie Fenski was a German veteran as you can guess from the name. His family went back to Germany in the summer, his family ran a little newspaper he was a college graduate. Makes you wonder how the army does things, he should have been in intelligence he spoke German like a native.

**Q:** Have you been to any reunions?

**JH:** No

**Q:** How do you think your time in the service changed or had an effect your life?

**JH:** Oh it's something you'll never ever forget. I use to have nightmares when I first got out and that's the funny thing nothing I had ever really experienced. A nightmare was I got a machine gun and I was out of ammunition, the enemy was attacking and I kept yelling for more ammunition and no one brought me any. My wife would wake me up night after night, finally it wore off I stopped having them. It stays with me I always think about it, well drive past a field and I'll think gee that's a good place for a machine gun to go or something like that.