

**Burrell Gardinier
Veteran**

**Hector Allen
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on November 1, 1986
at The Mohawk Regional Teachers Center**

Q: ...works here for the school district. Burrell, you were in World War II. Were you drafted or did you volunteer?

BG: Well I was, uh, drafted in a way. You see I was, uh, drafted and then I was deferred from the farm—

Q: Uh-huh.

BG: —for a very short while and I really wanted to go in the service so I volunteered.

Q: Uh-huh.

BG: I volunteered, and by volunteering you didn't—it's not like enlisting, you just volunteered for services and then you had to go wherever they sent you—Army, Navy—which I ended up in the Army.

Q: Yeah, I've heard of people who—what they did, they volunteered for the draft, they didn't necessarily have to volunteer for anything specific just to get into the draft earlier than their time would be.

BG: Yeah.

Q: About when was that?

BG: '44.

Q: 1944.

BG: I was drafted in May '44 and then my father thought I should be, uh, deferred to the farm, so I went along with that until, uh, in October and I—I wanted to go in the service so I volunteered and went in the Army.

Q: And where did they send you?

BG: Well, first we went to, uh, Fort Dix, and then from Fort Dix we went to Camp Blanding, Florida.

Q: Uh-huh. And this was in the infantry?

BG: Infantry. Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

BG: Yeah.

Q: You went by train probably. Most people traveled that way.

BG: By train, yeah.

Q: What a lot of people don't realize today is how much train traffic—and how important it was during the war. The trains were running—

BG: Yeah, that's about—

Q: Very hectic. Shortage of gasoline.

BG: Yeah. Yup.

Q: Camp Blanding, Florida. I don't suppose that's open anymore. I never heard—

BG: I don't what's—I don't what's happening—happened to that, uh. We was not too far from Jacksonville. Uh. And I can't think of the other name of the town that, uh, but I don't know—it's not there now, I know that.

Q: Yeah.

BG: Yup.

Q: Many of those World War II bases have been closed.

BG: Yeah.

Q: Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky where I took basic training in 1952 is a job course center now, part of it. The rest of it's been torn down.

BG: I understand that most of the camps were temporary, the forts like Fort Dix and—

Q: Yeah, the forts [unintelligible]. So you took the infantry basic training there?

BG: Yeah, we went, uh, I was there for 15 weeks. And, uh, while we were there, uh, it was that time of the Battle of the Bulge and, uh, we were in, uh, we went through there in cycles. You know?

Q: Yes—

BG: You didn't go through with a unit, you went through in a cycle and then when you got through they would ship you out, ship you overseas and put you into, uh, uh, division, uh, or something over there.

Q: Right.

BG: Uh, I recall our cycle that was right next to us was pulled right out. They were gone the next morning when the Battle of the Bulge—they shipped—flew them right out overnight. Nobody knew just what had happened until we found, we found out a couple days later what happened and they were pulled out.

Q: Need a lot of replacements for that one. Yeah.

BG: Yeah. And that's, uh, that's basically what I ended up in was the, uh, replacement for the 106th Division that was wiped out in the Bulge.

Q: That's quite interesting, because my, uh, my step-father was in the 106th Division—

BG: Is that right?

Q: —and he was captured in the early battles there. The very first few days the 106th got pretty badly handled. The Germans came out of the woods and they were gone. And he was put into a German prison camp and he was released by the Russians, probably about May, April-May, the following year.

BG: Oh is that right?

Q: So you went into the 106th?

BG: 106th, yeah. I, uh—

Q: How'd you get overseas? We're skipping ahead—

BG: Well, we, uh, we went to, uh, after we left Blanding we went to Fort Meade, Maryland.

Q: Mm hmm.

BG: After a brief, uh, furlough home. Very brief. Like a weekend, I mean there was no stopping—

Q: Seven days? Five days?

BG: Less than that I think.

Q: Less than that.

BG: And, uh, we went to Fort Meade, Maryland and then they got us our shots and, uh, different clothes. And at that time we wasn't sure which way we were going, but, but we ended up one morning in, uh, Camp Myles Standish outside of Boston. We knew pretty well where we were going.

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

BG: And, uh, we were loaded on the boat there in the Boston Harbor, uh, the U.S.S. George Washington.

Q: I've heard of that. That was a luxury liner at one time too.

BG: Well, it was a ship that was captured by the, uh, the Americans from the Germans during World War I. And, uh, fortunately or unfortunately I happened to get the same ship back home.

Q: Yeah.

BG: Yup. I don't know if you remember it or not or never heard of it, but it burned up down in, uh, a few years later it burned, I remember that in the news. It burned down one of the forts down the South.

Q: I remember the Normandy burned during the war, a big French liner which we were trying to fit up as a troop ship.

BG: Yeah.

Q: And that capsized right in New York Harbor, that was a big news story.

BG: Uh, George Washington had, uh, they sent about 7,000. 75 hundred.

Q: 7,000. How many days did it take—did you get right directly to France or England first and then—

BG: Well, we went over in a convoy. There was, I don't know, you know. You look out there and there's probably about 40, 50...ships. And, uh, we went to, uh, off England, uh, and you know, it took I think it was something like 10 days to go over because we were zigzagging. And we, uh, our first stop was in England, uh, off shore and then we crossed the channel at night. I remember that, uh, because we had, we, we got, we got [German word]—

Q: German submarines—

BG: —going across the channel at night, I think that's why they only crossed at night because of that. And, uh, we landed in Lahore, France and we got off in these, uh, landing crafts, landing barges. There was no—

Q: LCIs?

BG: Yeah, there was no docks or no, uh, nothing like that.

Q: Probably pretty well shot up.

BG: Yeah, everything was but, uh, they were equipped for us and that's what they were [trails off]...And, uh, we was loaded on forty-and-eights and started out across—

Q: Those are box cars. French box cars. A lot of people might not know that.

BG: Yeah.

Q: 40 men or 8 horses they would hold?

BG: 40 men or 8 horses, yeah.

Q: Or any combination thereof I suppose.

BG: Right. [Nods head]. And, uh, we went across, we shipped across France. Found them. And, uh, I'm not sure, I don't remember just the name of the town, uh, [Shakes head] but it was near, I remember we, we crossed the Rhine River at Nice, France. There was still, you know, soldiers' bodies in the water of the Rhine River. They had a bridge across there for the GI's put up behind [unintelligible], a railroad bridge. And, uh, my first stop was at a German prisoner of war camp of [pauses] 60,000 prisoners there.

Q: Yeah.

BG: And that was a very short stop off so I, uh, had—

Q: You were on guard duty there?

BG: Two nights. And I, and I, uh, moved on. Um, uh, I was on guard there two nights so I rode in a jeep with, uh, a machine gun, you know, on the—

Q: How would you watch 60,000 people? If they wanted to get out—

BG: Well they had tours every so often and they had the fe-fe-fence ten, twelve feet high and a double fence and, and, uh, I had to be in a jeep riding around, you know, but, and, uh, SS, the SS troops. In fact, one night, the first night I was there one of them tried to make a break and he didn't make it and, uh, but after—I wa—I was there a very short time. I know I only pulled guard duty there a couple nights and, uh, and we were shipped out, uh, to the 106th and, uh, the 106th, uh, was sent into St. Nevers, France. It was a small pocket of Germans that never give up. So they had to go back, they went back and they, and they, uh, stayed there. There was a couple guys killed there, stepping on a landmines and so forth.

Q: Your submarine [unintelligible] was there, that's probably why the Germans were trying to keep open—

BG: Yeah.

Q: —toward the end, yeah.

BG: They wasn't exactly willing to give up.

Q: I'd heard of that.

BG: Yeah.

Q: The 106th had a patch like a lion's head or something.

BG: A lion's head, yeah.

Q: My stepfather had those...

BG: Yeah, uh, under the third army I was also, uh, assigned to that, the third, the 106th division in, in—they was under the third army and, uh. [Long pause]. I forgot that we went, uh, after that we went to, uh, up around—I don't—uh, out in the boondocks, I was in the woods. And, uh, they sent us up there organize—uh, uh, actually they got the 106th division together under Colonel Tuttle. I remember that, yeah, and, uh, got another 106th division organized and we trained there for, for the Pacific.

Q: Oh.

BG: For, uh, well, along, about August. Well after, uh—

Q: Well let's see the Germans surrendered about the 4th or 5th of May, something like—

BG: In May, but then we, we were there until the Japs surrendered.

Q: That was about the 5th or 6th of September.

BG: Uh, yeah, August or uh—

Q: Well the atomic bombs were dropped in August—

BG: Yeah.

Q: —the surrender ceremony on the Battleship Missouri I think was the 4th, 5th, 6th of September, in that range.

BG: Well we—they, uh, they [unintelligible] after that and the 106th division was dissolved. And, uh, I guess went back to the states, on paper. But then, then I was, uh, I was sent to the, uh, 14th FOB in Heidelberg, Germany.

Q: FOB, what's that?

BG: Uh, uh [thinks a moment] the Field Observation Battalion and, uh, they had mostly, uh, a few weapons, but mostly vehicles. And, uh—

Q: You were gonna be in occupation?

BG: It was occupation, yeah. From then on it was strictly occupation. And, uh, I was in Heidelberg, uh, oh I don't know, probably like—well I sp-, I spent, uh, a summer, a winter—I was there, oh I must have been about a year. And then I was sent to, uh—that outfit broke up, the 14th went back—I mean, that's what happens with a lot of outfits, they dissolve and then went back to the states on—

Q: You got transferred, yeah?

BG: Yeah. And then I went to, uh, the 3rd regiment which was with the 81st airborne in Berlin, Germany. And the, uh, the 3rd army regiment today is out of—well it—well then it was the oldest army outfit in the United States Army. And right now it's guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in, in Washington. Uh, if you ever see 'em you'll see 'em they have this strap, braid on their shoulder and a [unintelligible] on their hat. That's the 3rd army regiment. And, uh—

Q: Regular army?

BG: Yeah.

Q: What did the, uh, uh, territory in Germany look like after the war? I guess from some of the pictures I've seen—like here's one of Wurzburg, Germany. I don't know if Joe can get that. [Camera pans to an image on the wall behind the interviewer]. That was right after the war, the place was pretty well destroyed. I—

BG: I, I've seen 'em worse than that, uh. Schloen. Stuttgart. Dusseldorf. I mean, I mean if you could imagine, uh, it was just like going through and piling snow. Instead of the snow it was just rubble, bricks.

Q: It was just bricks and stones and stuff, yeah.

BG: There was nothing. Just—Stuttgart was—

Q: Wreckage. Terrible.

BG: Yeah.

Q: People suffered considerably that first winter, I imagine, after the war.

BG: Yes, yes they did. I mean, we had, uh, uh, in different outfits we were, you know, they would never mess your outside, uh, uh, the kitchens where they'd have their garbage cans, you know. We'd go through the mess line and dump our garbage in the cans and—

Q: Yeah.

BG: —the kids would be right there to—

Q: To eat right out of the garbage cans.

BG: Yeah. They didn't, uh, they didn't have no heat, no coal.

Q: Right.

BG: And, uh, they had it hard.

Q: Of course they also—on the other side, were the concentration camps that they had and the POW camps were—some of them were quite bad. Did you see any of that?

Except for, I mean, you said you guarded a, uh, our prisoners—

BG: The Germans. Yeah.

Q: Did you see any of the prison camps the Germans had operated? Or the concentration camps?

BG: Uh, no. No I didn't, but, uh, yeah, you know, if we were close enough to 'em that I heard about 'em. I—

Q: Yeah.

BG: I heard a lot about, uh, uh, the Jewish, the camps where they killed all the Jews, you know, and, you know, and like piled up like cardboard. And—

Q: Yeah.

BG: And, uh, a lot of that. Heard a lot of that. But I didn't, I didn't see none of it. Uh, and from Berlin I went to Bremerhaven and, uh, got on the same ship back.

Q: The George Washington?

BG: Yeah, the U.S.S. George Washington.

Q: I imagine Brem-er-hay-ven was—or ha-ven, hay-ven, however you say it, I don't know—

BG: Brem-er-ha-ven. Yeah.

Q: Brem-er-ha-ven. That was probably pretty well bombed. Wasn't that a Navy base? Some base, too?

BG: Well, that—again—I didn't see much of that because, uh, uh, we come in there at night. I mean, that was a long trip, as I recall. From-from—that was on, uh, the train to— from Berlin to, uh, Bremerhaven. And I remember we traveled all night on that, that was, uh, you know there was no accommodations. You just sat on wooden seats in the whole—It wasn't—It wasn't forty-and-eight, uh, passenger—

Q: Regular railroad carts.

BG: They were, you know, not up to date at all. They were—compartments and everything made of wood. And of course we didn't—we certainly didn't get the best, that's for sure.

Q: No.

BG: And, uh—

Q: The infantry doesn't ordinarily ride in too much style.

BG: No. [Laughs]. No. But, uh, uh, Berlin—I mean, everything was—things were really beginning to get very restless in Berlin at that time with the Russians.

Q: That's right. Yeah, you were there when—

BG: —it was divided up with the French and, uh, and the British. And, uh, we—we come in, we come right in through Russian territory and right up on a pedestal they had, uh, you know, the Russians claim they were the first ones that entered Berlin, but right there on that big pedestal sat our tank, American-made tank, you know. But, uh—

Q: Of course we gave them quite a bit of material.

BG: Oh yeah. Lend/lease, yeah. All their—they had all our, uh, vehicles. They had, uh, Army trucks that was Studebaker-made. Studebaker and, uh. Uh. But, uh, there was our boys, uh, went over in the Russian sector and they didn't get back and we were warned and told not to go over there.

Q: [inaudible]

BG: No, you didn't get back—

Q: Did you ever get to see very many of the Russians or anything like that?

BG: Oh yeah. You was, you was in close contact with them there.

Q: Yup.

BG: And, uh, they wasn't a very, uh—at that time, in a way, uh, we certainly didn't—there wasn't a very sharp dressed person or, uh, you know, they were not, uh, neat and clean or any, any of that, you know. And, uh, but that had already started when we were there. The conflict between the—

Q: The conflict.

BG: Yeah.

Q: That came about I think in 1948 when they shut down the roads and canals and—

BG: Yeah. It started the Berlin airlift—

Q: Airlift, yeah. '48 over to '49, because I was in high school at that point in time.

BG: Yeah. Yeah. [Nods head].

Q: You ever see any prominent leaders? Ever see—

BG: Well, I'm glad you mention that. Uh, I was in Heidelberg when, uh, in, uh, I viewed Patton's body.

Q: Oh really?

BG: And, uh—

Q: After he got in the accident, huh?

BG: Yes, uh, I was in Heidelberg and he got killed right up the autobahn from—oh I don't think it's more than 15, 20 miles, uh, from where I was in Heidelberg and he was up towards Darmstadt we he got killed—or when he had the accident.

Q: He didn't die for—

BG: No, he didn't die right away. No. And, uh, they had him lay in the state in

Heidelberg there for a short while and then they, uh, they brought him through town there on, uh, on a half-track. Uh, his casket was loaded on a train there at the Heidelberg train station.

Q: And you were there?

BG: Yeah. Yeah. [Nods head]. Yeah, and, uh, I believe he was shipped back to France for burial. I think it was buried in France.

Q: One of the military cemeteries.

BG: Yeah. If I recall, yeah...One cold, cold December day...[trails off]

Q: I saw a TV special on that just recently with George C. Scott.

BG: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Did you see that?

BG: Yeah. I saw.

Q: I'd never known it was a very simple accident, just a—kind of a fender-bender—but I guess it snapped his neck forward and—

BG: Yeah.

Q: —and broke a vertebrae or something and paralyzed him.

BG: [Nods head].

Q: Well, you got back alright into the States.

BG: [Nods head].

Q: And they discharge you right away? Or they keep you around?

BG: No they, uh, I ended up in the hospital, uh. Let's see, I got, uh, we went to Fort Dix—we went to another camp before, but we got off the boat in some other little camp I forgot the name of it was in Jersey. But then they shipped us out of there—

Q: Camp Kilmore maybe?

BG: Camp Kilmore. [Points at Q in affirmative]. And, uh, then they shipped us from there right into, uh, Fort Dix. And Fort Dix—Fort Dix—while I was in there they put me in the hospital and I was there in the hospital for, until, uh, oh two months, I think. I wasn't officially discharged until December of '46. I was discharged in December of '46.

Q: By the time you came back all the parades were over. All the celebrations. And everybody was starting to forget—

BG: Yeah.

Q:—about the war already, I suppose.

BG: Well, uh, you know. I guess we didn't, uh, carry as much of a burden as some of the guys did that, uh, lost their lives.

Q: You know.

BG: [mumbles under breath]

Q: You ever, uh, correspond with anybody you knew during the service?

BG: I did, uh. I did, I had a friend of mine out in Oklahoma and another one in Ohio. And, uh, uh, the funny thing—I, uh, the last time, the one in Oklahoma—I, uh, kinda lost—you know, he just quit writin' there after a while, but I had a friend out in Ohio, uh, he got into a—when he got out the service he bought himself a tractor trailer and he was

haulin' steel and I—I forgot how it went—I guess I sent a Christmas card and, uh, his mother s—uh, wrote back to me and told me about his death. He got killed, he got thrown off the road with the truck and the steel shifted [makes hand gesture]. He got killed and, uh, so that's—that was kinda the end of that. I—For a few years I sent Christmas cards back and forth.

Q: When you came back did you take any of the G.I. Bill or any of the 52-20 Club stuff? Or did you just go back on the farm?

BG: No, I, uh, I didn't. I didn't take any of the training. There was training—

Q: Yeah.

BG: I started out on a 52-20 Club, then, uh—because I didn't have no job at the time and I, uh—My brother was home on the farm—my *two brothers* was home on the farm, in fact—and, uh, so I, I tried to get 52-20 but, uh, living in the country I was, uh, late getting there one day and—because of a snow storm in the wintertime—and—

Q: They cut it off?

BG: Yeah. If you couldn't get there by 3 o'clock, you know, if you couldn't get there you don't need the money, so—

Q: Oh!

BG: He give me a hard time so...

Q: That was not any way to treat the veterans.

BG: Well I, I told him I didn't need it that bad either if that's the way he felt.

Q: Alright. [Laughs]. Well thank you very much Burrell. This was interesting, thank you.