

**Edward Himberger
Veteran**

**Bill Payne
Alan Greczynski
Matt McElrath
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on
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American Legion Post
Saugerties, NY**

BP: I'm Bill Payne and we're here at Lamouree-Hackett Post Seventy-Two in Saugerties, New York. It's September 18th, 2005. Also with us is Alan Greczynski, who is handling our camera, and Matt McElreath, who is handling our laptop computer... And this morning with us we have Edward Himberger. Morning, Ed.

EH: How are you doing?

BP: Alright... And he's going to share his memories of World War II with us. So Ed, were you drafted or did you enlist?

EH: Drafted.

BP: And where were you living at the time that you got drafted?

EH: I was living in Queens, in Long Island.

BP: And... when you got into the army, did you have the opportunity to pick a particular branch that you wanted to do, or...

EH: Well, I went in as a regular soldier, and then... I went into the Air Force.

BP: You volunteered for the Air Force. Why did you volunteer for the Air Force?

EH: I thought it was something interesting. [Laughs]

BP: What were your first days like in the service, do you remember?

EH: Uh, yeah, it was kind of difficult and tough, because you weren't used to it, but – I have something interesting you should know – ... I'm in the USO on Christmas morning, and an announcement comes over, "Is anybody here from Brooklyn?" I was born in Brooklyn, so I said yeah, and they said, "There's a Mrs. Walker who would like to take you to a Christmas dinner." So I'm waiting there, and then this beautiful girl comes in, fur coat on, she says "I'm Mrs. Walker, and my husband is Dixie Walker." Now, Dixie Walker was a famous ball player for the Brooklyn Dodgers. She said he was away on a USO tour, and she took me home to her mansion and we had dinner... She sort of adopted me as a son, and every

weekend I went there and she was a terrific person. That's what I remember about the beginning of the army.

BP: So, even though you were living in Queens, you had been born in Brooklyn, right?

EH: I was born in Brooklyn, yeah... and I lived a block or two away from her.

BP: This was Camp MacLean, you told me? That's where your camp was?

EH: Yes.

BP: What kind of training did you have there? What did you do?

EH: Well... I went to special messenger school, and they had special classes like cooks, and so forth, truck drivers, and so forth. I was in the messenger group.

BP: You remember your instructor, and what they were like?

EH: They were all very good. I don't remember their names, but they were all fond people, as far as I know.

BP: And you got to boot camp okay?

EH: Yeah, yeah.

BP: Where'd you go after that?

EH: Well, then I had an injury. I broke my wrist, which sort of fouled me up.

BP: How did that happen? How'd you break your wrist?

EH: I fell from the extension – the thing they would have up there – I fell down and broke my wrist. They sent me back for a while, and then I went over to Europe.

BP: Now, you were in the Airborne, but you weren't gonna be a paratrooper because of that injury?

EH: That's right.

BP: And instead you went into the Glider Force?

EH: Yeah.

BP: Did you have any training in gliders here in the States?

EH: No, that was all over in Europe, and England. It was very difficult, it was very windy over there – actually, a couple of the practice planes went down. Rough over there, with the wind.

BP: You were taught in England?

EH: Taught, yeah, about a hundred miles outside of London, I think. We never got to run.

BP: You didn't get any leave or anything, eh?

EH: No, no, no.

BP: How did they train you with the gliders? What did you do, get onboard the glider and get hauled up?

EH: Yeah, it was a heavy transporter, two gliders with the ropes, and then they put us in, and they'd cut us loose. We drifted down... of course we drifted down to a safe landing zone, which was a lot different than combat.

BP: And your assignment, you told me, you were part of a bazooka team? How did that work?

EH: Well, I told you about the first thing, we went over there, we went to A Bridge Too Far, which was an operation in the Airborne we were in, and it wasn't doing too well. They sent us to the airport, so the advanced units went in so-called pathfinders and set up the zone. The next three days the fog was very thick, we couldn't do anything, and they called the whole operation off and we went back to camp.

BP: This was in France?

EH: No, this was in England, and then the next operation was about the middle of December when the Bulge [occurred]. We went into France and we got attached to [General] Patton's tanks, and we were in the Bulge for about eight weeks. What I remember about the Bulge was the bitter cold, tremendously cold, and the Germans [from the] forts had white uniforms. Our brown uniforms stood out like a sore thumb, and you could step on the Germans and you wouldn't know they were there. I don't know whether the whole army was like that, but the ones we faced had complete white outfits. We were there for about eight, nine weeks before they called us back into France.

BP: You were in combat during the time you were in the Bulge?

EH: Oh yeah, all the time, all the time.

BP: Did you have casualties in your unit?

EH: Oh yeah... and one thing that always stands out with me, it was so cold that you had to take your shoes off when you went to sleep or else your feet would've been frozen to the hard leather and the shoes, so we had to take our shoes off and then to try to fly bare in the morning was a difficult thing. And then, we came back to France and we had a couple of weeks off, and then we got ready for the jump into Germany.

BP: Now, you mentioned to me before that, during the time at Bulge, you actually helped and relieved a hundred-and-first Airborne, was that Bastogne?

EH: Yeah, they were surrounded in Bastogne, remember you had that famous saying, the guy Nuts [General Anthony Clement "Nuts" McAuliffe]? Yeah, and we had tanks in our infantry, we liberated the town of Bastogne.

BP: You used your bazooka during that time?

EH: No, no, no, I didn't use the bazooka at all during that time.

BP: You were a rifleman then, right?

EH: Yeah... Well, I was still a bazooka team, but we never had the opportunity to use them.

BP: You had to carry a bazooka and all the ammunition?

EH: Yeah. [Laughs]

BP: So then you went back and had some time in France, and then came to jump across the Rhine?

EH: Yeah, yeah, they were going across the Rhine River, the British commandos were fortifying the river, and they dropped us about ten miles into Germany. Our mission was to hold any reinforcements from coming to the Rhine River, and they said that we'd be without food or contact for at least three, four days, so we all packed a few rations and candy bars in a little packet... So then the glider comes, they told us that "As soon as the glider lands, get out of there as fast as you can." The glider comes down and I unhook my seatbelt, which was very big... and the next thing you know we hit a stone wall, and I went flying into the pilot's section, and I was unconscious for a few minutes. Basically, in the confusion and all, I lost my food pack, which I thought would be very desperate. But, my stomach is so churned up that I didn't miss the food for three days – I could have gone another three days. And then we joined up with the British in about four days, but it was difficult because there were Germans in front of us and Germans in back of us. One instant we were told we were gonna get reinforcements, so in the night we see this bunch of soldiers coming up, they go right through our lines... and they were Germans, and they just walked right through our lines, with their infantry, of course. Also, as I say, I was part of a bazooka team, and we were in this ditch... the lieutenant comes over and he says, "There's a tank coming up the road, go down the road." So we get out of the ditch and we go down the road, and we're there about an hour and there's no tank, no nothing, so we decided to go back. We went back, and by the time we left and came back a shell fell in the hole – and it was a big hole, I just missed it. We were on occupation duty until July...

BP: And this is after the Germans surrendered, huh?

EH: After the surrender, yeah.

BP: Do you remember, where were you when the surrender came, and how it was announced?

EH: No, it passed very... nonchalantly, as far as I could see. We didn't know too much about it, and I can't remember anything about it.

BP: You got put on occupation duty?

EH: Then we were occupation duty, me and my two friends were stationed in a hospital guarding some official German officials in the hospital. It was pretty easy doing it for about a month... Then we got called back to France, and there the division got split up. Half of it went to the Honor Guard with the 101st in Berlin, which was the softest job in the army, everybody wanted it... Fortunately for me, I didn't get it. They were gonna send us over to Japan... On the boat ride home the war with Japan was over, so I got my furlough and I had enough points, and I got

out – as they say, very early for a twenty-year-old – in November. The guys who went to Berlin, they were in there for about another eight, ten months past me.

BP: You got out early, huh?

EH: We got out early, and that's my extent of my honor duty.

BP: You've got some pictures I see here, right? [Gestures to photographs]

EH: Right.

BP: Take a look at this one here... [Holds up photograph] This is, I see, you've already had your Glider Assault Badge on in this one. You get a close look at that, here? So I guess that was taken probably after you went into Germany, huh.

EH: Yeah, right, right, that was Germany.

BP: And this is a picture of you here by the Rhine River? [Shows another photograph]

EH: Right.

BP: Now, you got back to Fort Dixon and you got out, right?

EH: Right.

BP: You weren't moved there at all during the time?

EH: No, no, no.

BP: And you were awarded the Glider Assault Badge... Did you get the Combat Infantryman's Badge?

EH: Yeah.

BP: And also the European Campaign.

EH: Yeah, right... and the good conduct medal. [Laughs]

BP: And the good conduct medal, I never got one of those... And the World War II victory medal.

EH: Yeah, right.

BP: When you got out of service, then... did you get back in touch with your family, were you able to do that?

EH: Yeah, I went back and I stayed with the family until I got married in 1950.

BP: During the time you were at war, how did you keep in touch with your family, how'd you do that?

EH: Letters...with letters, yeah.

BP: Did you have enough to eat while you were in the service? Were the supplies adequate, or...

EH: Yes, I learned after the war that we were fed very well in the Airborne, much better than the regular army.

BP: You remember feeling any big stress, during the time you were in?

EH: [Laughs] I guess you could call it that. Actually, I didn't feel anything until about eight or nine years after the war... And I used to travel in crowded subways to New York City to work, nothing bothered me. Then one day I'm on a train, and I break out in a cold sweat and my heart's palpitating, I think I'm having a heart attack. I get off the train... well, to make a long story short, years after that I had this nervous, so-called, disorder, and I couldn't stand in crowds or something, and it probably had something to do with the army. It took me years later, and I got over it.

BP: During the time you were in the service, is there anything you did for good luck, particularly?

EH: Anything for good luck? Well, I had the Bible with a plate on it right next to my heart, yeah, I guess everybody had one of them. [Laughs] And that's about the only thing, except my prayers every day.

BP: What'd you do for entertainment? Did you get any entertainment during the time you were in?

EH: ...Well, I was in the band before the war, and I got to play in a couple bands while I was in the army, on the side. We played at officer's dances... so I did a little of that on the side.

BP: What did you think of your officers and your fellow troops? What was your opinion of them?

EH: The only thing I can say, they were all pretty good... The only problem I had, I had a sergeant – this was in the Airborne – and he was a Southerner. I think they only taught him to wear shoes when he went in the army. [Interviewers laugh] I came from the New York area, so we didn't get along too well, let's put it that way.

BP: Did you keep a diary?

EH: No, no.

BP: And... can you remember any humorous events? Any funny stuff that happened?

EH: When I was in the army? ... No, it was all pretty routine and all, we had a lieutenant that was very nice, and we're not supposed to fraternize when we're in Europe and Germany, he did and he got detention and he had to work hard on that. That's the only thing I can remember about that. He got some sort of detention for that... He just couldn't talk to any female.

BP: That was a rule that was pretty much broken frequently, I heard.

EH: Well no, not too much. Not where I was, anyway. It was pretty strict about that.

BP: Especially in the occupation of Germany, I guess, right? Strict about no privatization?

EH: Maybe I shouldn't tell you... one thing, I took German in high school, I know a little German. So this was during the occupation... a group of guys come up and they said, "This group of women here, they're trying to tell us something and we can't understand, could you help us out?" I said yeah, so I go to the other part of the camp and basically, they wanted to [Laughs] they wanted to go home and sleep with the guys! I guess they hadn't seen men in years, or something like that. I interpreted for her, like "That's for you guys." [Interviewers laugh]

BP: Did you use your ability in German? You said you were guarding some German officials in the hospital there?

EH: Yeah.

BP: Did you ever speak to these guys you were guarding?

EH: No, no, no. It was strictly, no talking to 'em or anything... But, the one thing I remember about that, that this hospital was situated here and all around the hospital, maybe twenty-five yards from the hospital, were all bombed-out houses, which showed me the so-called efficiency of our bombers. It was just a tremendous sight; they didn't touch the hospital, but all around it was devastated.

BP: Where was that located? What town, you remember what town it was in Germany?

EH: I think it was Dresden, I'm pretty sure it was Dresden.

BP: Now, when you came out of the service, what did you do after you got out? What was the first thing that you did?

EH: Well, I worked in an advertising agency, in New York City.

BP: Had you done that before you went to service?

EH: Yes, I got out of high school, we went to school during the holidays, Christmas holidays, and we got out earlier because everybody was joining up. I gout out a seventeen and a half, and I worked in the agency for about six months before I was drafted.

BP: What agency was it?

EH: ... Foote, Cone & Belding, which was a big advertising agency. I worked there for a number of years, and... then I got married, do you want me to go into the private life after?

BP: Yeah. You had the job waiting for you when you came out, right?

EH: Yeah, yup. Guys didn't get jobs for a long time after and I waltzed right in – in fact, I got out on a Thursday, and I went back to work on Monday.

BP: Did you go for any further education or training or anything like that?

EH: Well yeah, I went to New York University and took advertising courses at NYU.

BP: You get GI Bill, right?

EH: Yeah... And then, the GI has helped me with my mortgages... I got a mortgage on my first house, on Long Island. And then I came to upstate New York, because the paper I worked for was on strike.

BP: What paper was that?

EH: The Long Island Daily Press, in Long Island. They were on strike, so I came up here and I told them about the situation and they gave me a GI loan for a second house, which was sort of unusual, but I guess the circumstances were there. So I got a GI for a house up in Saugerties.

BP: And then you continued working in the advertising field?

EH: Yeah, I worked in the newspapers around in the area.

BP: And you got married.

EH: I got married in 1950, and I'm still married today, fifty-six years later.

BP: Did you keep in touch with the fellows you served with during the war?

EH: Yes, I did. I had two buddies that were very close that I went to the hospital with. I worked with them, and I keep in touch with them, and the two of them have [unclear] disease.

BP: And, you have gone to reunions with your unit?

EH: I went to the last one up in Ellenville a couple years ago, that's where I got this shirt. [Points to shirt]

BP: And you've gone to a veterans' organization, right?

EH: An All-American Legion, right, for a number of years.

BP: And you're active in the post, you're the bugler for all our funerals.

EH: Yeah, I'm a bugler for all the military funerals, for the last, about two years, I guess.

BP: Have you played your instrument after, you kept playing even after the war and everything, right?

EH: Well, I played in bands before the war, and then... I call it great, I played with Dick Stabile, and Dick Stabile was the musical director for the Martin and Lewis Comedy Hour on television. One time, we played the USO, and we followed the common Caballero Orchestra... Now that was a very Latin, a very high-ranking Latin orchestra, and we were only a small act, but it was sort of intriguing. And then I had a good job, and I didn't follow music anymore, for five years 'till after I got married. Then, of course, money was a little short so I took up weekend jobs at a trio group we had. Then, I gave it up, and then my son bought me a horn a couple years ago, and I took it up again.

BP: Well, we're glad you did... Now, how do you feel like your war experiences affected your life, and how you think about the service and that type of thing?

EH: Well, I have some good things and some bad things. I've had my bad thing, was my nervous condition serving for a number of years, it sort of held me back. But otherwise, I mean, the army experience was very good for me as an individual and I think more young people today should get in there, take a couple years in there, find out where they're going in life.

BP: Anything else you'd like to add?

EH: No... I had good experiences and all, laying life on me and what I could do in the army. I met different people and different types of people... Southern people, I found out, they are a little bit different in the South than they are up here. This fellow, he was shipping out, and he says, "Wanna go out with this girl I've been going out with?" And I thought, "Yeah, all right, I'll date her anyway," and it turned out she was about a thirteen-year-old girl. So things are a little bit different down there. [Interviewers laugh]

BP: You know, that reminds me, you and I had another conversation, you told me that when you were a kid you remember seeing Civil War veterans in the parades. Could you tell us a little about that?

EH: Yeah. I guess it was about 1935, and Memorial Day in those days was a real big day compared to today. I remember Civil War veterans riding in a car, they all had beards on and they all had a cane sitting with the can like this [Hunches over], I saw a couple of them and... I'll always remember that.

BP: That was on Long Island?

EH: That was on Long Island, yes, about '34 or '35...

BP: Well, thanks a lot for sharing your memories with us, we appreciate it.

EH: Thank you, thank you.