Narrator
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Mike Russert
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New York State Military Museum
Interviewers

Interviewed on August 4th, 2004, Approx. 9:00pm
Lawrence, New York

Q: This is a home interview. Lawrence, New York. It is the 4th of August; 2004.The interviewers are Wayne Clark and Mike Russert. Approximately 9:00am.

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

A: Robert C. Baldridge. Omaha, Nebraska. Date of birth November 9, 1924.

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

A: Three years of high school at Omaha Central High. One year at Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, Connecticut and both before the war and after the war too at Yale University, I finally got a BA there in February of 1948 after returning. I had a freshman year there, then the service and then went back.

Q: Do you remember where you were and your reaction when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

A: Yes, it was at Hotchkiss Prep and everybody was just amazed. I read the New York Times, of course and heard what was going on on the radio. It just enthused all of us to get through, get out and get moving and get into the service. Actually, I was not a senior. I was upper-mid or junior year there. I was 16 and a half or just 17 and I was able to get into Yale for two or three terms and then enlisted in the Enlisted Reserve Corps.

Q: Why did you decide to go into the army?

A: Like may boys or young men, my father was a battery commander in the artillery in World War I and he was back in service in an administrative job as a Major at the time in the Air Corps so I wanted to go into the army because of his army service in World War I and I wanted to go into the artillery because he was artillery all the way and had been in Artillery ROTC in World War I. I wanted to follow in his footsteps.

Q: When did you go into the service and where did you go for your basic training?

A: As I mentioned, I had enlisted in the ERC (Enlisted Reserve Corps) which meant that I'd have another term at Yale and I was in the first year of basic ROTC Artillery there. You had a chance enlisting. You could specify the branch of service in the Army that you wanted to so I specified Artillery and, as a result, when my name was called up a few months later I went to basic training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

13 weeks of regular basic training which happened to be Field Artillery. The field artillery training I had at Yale on the old out of date French 75's , I used to kid around with my friends and the Army Sergeants there that maybe this old 75 cannon –the 75 millimeter- was maybe one of my father's batteries from World War I

Q: What kind of weapons did you train on at Bragg?

A: Basic Army weapons such as the M1 Caliber 30 Garand Rifle also Howitzers, of course not the 75's because they were all obsolete but 105's and we got a look at 155 Millimeter Howitzers which are the regular Howitzers that are in an Infantry Division –in the Artillery but in the Infantry Division – three battalions of 105's and one battalion of 155's.

Q: Did you go into officer training at all?

A: No. The one year of basic training of ROTC didn't allow me any preference at all for OCS (Officer Candidate School). While I was in basic training at that time, the Army Specialized Training Program had been put into effect called ASTP. If you had a general classification test score of 115 or higher, at that time you were automatically sent to university for that program. There's no way I wanted that but there wasn't anything I could do about it but complain. I complained and complained and complained and they finally got fed up with me and they said ok you'll be shipped out probably to England. That's exactly what I wanted and that's what happened.

I went over on the Queen Mary which was thrilling episode as far as transportation was concerned.

Q: You went over as a single?

A: I went over as a single on the Queen Mary along with about fifteen thousand other mostly Private soldiers.

Q: You went over as a replacement?

A: Yes, as a replacement. So, I finally ended up after about three, four or five days of processing after having landed in Scotland on the Queen, ended up with the 9th Infantry Division. I was basically in the Winchester area. I went in December of 1943

and, of course, the invasion was the next June of ’44. I was with the 9th and stayed with the 9th right on through the end of the war in the Elbe and the occupation of German until I got home in January of ’46.

Q: Being in England for almost half a year, did you have much contact with the English people?

A: Being a Private, very little. On of my, who turned out to be, very close friends but who was an officer at the time – First Lieutenant Don Harrison who just died a year or two ago. All these fellas, the 9th Division was a veteran Division having gone through North Africa and Sicily and Don Harrison, who sadly died a year or two ago, maybe he was six or seven years older than me and he’d had been at ROTC at Ohio University. It turned out right at the end of the war in Munich he called up his girlfriend who I didn’t know he was involved with at all and married her –very happy arrangement.

We pulled guard duty and trained. I was in a 155 battalion under General - Lt. Col. William C. Westmorland. We just did normal training functions that whole six months. We felt we were pretty well trained by the time the end of the six months came up. Of course, the regulars in the 9th Division that had been through Africa and Sicily they already knew what the hell they were doing and I was thrilled to have been a part of a pro division like that because their experience helped save us all from many accidents. Like, don’t fool around with things that could be booby traps. You learn the hard way. Well, they taught us…

Q: How did you feel about Westmorland as a commander?

A: Absolutely superior. The best. Some people outside our division thought he was like a Boy Scout but he wasn’t any Boy Scout. We respected him because of his knowledge and his ability to command the battalion. You didn’t call him “Westy” except behind his back. He was most admired. It was ridiculous in our opinion whether you were an officer or a private this baloney that he took from Mike Wallace as a result of the problem in Vietnam. I am sure if he had to do it all over again he would have made some adjustments in there but I’m telling you we honored and respected that man up to the limit.

Q: Did you have any personal interaction with him?

A: Yes, a few times because he knew that I’d been to college and that set me somewhat apart from most of the guys in the division. It turned out that he had an eye on me. I didn’t know it at the time – or it developed that he had an eye on me at the time- because I ended up getting a battlefield commission – they call it- during combat towards the end of the war. I really didn’t really have any personal…. a matter of fact, he had been promoted several times after Normandy and went on up through

the division. His successor as Battalion Commander who is dead now, Lt. Colonel Alver B. Sundin was actually my commanding officer through most of the European Campaign. He's the guy who sent my name up to Army headquarters to get this commission. I was surprised when I got it. I didn't know that this was in the works at all.

Q: When did you go into Normandy?

A: June 10, 1944 which is D+4 on Utah Beach. Wading in. It was the easy beach.

Q: What was it like as you went it? What was your impression of the beach area as you went in?

A: We had been trained what to expect and we knew from radio contact landed on, I guess, what was an LST, you know where the front "clanks" down. We knew we'd be landing on a beach that was under sporadic artillery attacks – not serious but sporadic. That's what happened. So, going over, the sidewalls of the LST all you could see was the sky and we're all jammed in there so there wasn't much to do for that trip from Southampton over to the beach. We did things like make sure our shoelaces were tied tightly, leggings were tied tightly because we knew that we would be wading in. We didn't want the sand or the water. We did things like that.

When we actually landed, we were in, I don't know, three or four feet of water but it was relatively quite calm. We had no problem just landing. There were MP's (Military Police) and Beach Masters and their assistants and MP's all over the place. We started just walking up. We were not under attack except that sporadic stuff I mentioned. We walked up and hiked around for four or five hours and spent the first night near Sainte Marie du Mont.

Q: What kind of weapon were you carrying at that time?

A: Carbine, the M1 Carbine. The new Carbine. Also, we had 45 Pistols that the Carbine was supposed to replace. The officers had just 45 Pistols.

Q: What was your rank at this time?

A: Private.

Q: So you carried a 45 and a Carbine?

A: Both. Yes. The official thing was just the Carbine but I collected a 45 on the beach and most of us did likewise. I still have it.

Q: Did you carry grenades also?

A: No. No. That was not issued to the artillerymen. No.

Q: With your artillery unit, how were the guns towed? Did they come on the same LST with you?

A: No. They came in on similar or larger boats. It took the division maybe two to three days to get assembled and together. We were not an assault division. In my beach, the assault division was the Ivy, the 4th Infantry Division and the follow up assault division was the 90th Division and my 9th Division was the follow up after that.

The deal was that 4th and the 90th, they were the assault troops and we were supposed to land without too much difficulty which we did and get assembled. Therefore, we would be fresh and would take over from these assault guys who would be tired out after four and five days of rough life. We would be fresh and ready to go to cut the peninsula. We knew that at the time but didn't know about it before we got on the assault boats. We learned about it then.

The whole division is about fifteen thousand men and equipment and it takes a couple of days to land and get together. The command goes out "hey, let's go" which is what we did and the 9th Division was the division that actually cut the Normandy peninsula. We didn't stop. We turned immediately northwest to head for Cherbourg. That was my division but three divisions went up to Cherbourg but it was my division that captured that big general – von Schlieber – or whatever his name was at Cherbourg. We thought we would then get a rest but the 9th didn't. It went further on to the point (Cap de la) Hague which was the tip of the peninsula. That took about four days and killed about 50 guys at least.

Q: How were your guns towed?

A: We had for the landing and for a few months, they were towed by trucks. Big Diamond T Trucks. Big GMC six wheelers or something. Standard large trucks.

Q: Deuce and a half they called them, I believe. Deuce and a half. Two and a half tons.

A: That's right made by Diamond T Company and GMC. That's right. Then, I don't know exactly when but say after a month or so we got what they called Prime Movers which were essentially tractors with a square/rectangular body with a rather thin sheeting of metal for protection- open tractors. They stayed on as the method of movement right through to the end of the war.

Q: When you landed and in this campaign, what was you assignment with the battery.

A: I had various assignments throughout the whole campaign. While training in England and for at least a month in Normandy, I was in the Survey Section which was part of Headquarters Company in my battalion – in the 34th Field Artillery Battalion.

The Survey Section, of course, plots in the guns. You follow the Colonel around, the Lt. Colonel., the commander, who is in charge of selecting the position for whenever you move the new position for the guns. You plot in the guns. You go up with the Colonel who also selects the OP (Observation Post) point for the Forward Observers. You plot that position in. It's a great job. You had to do a little mathematics. I guess because I had been to college they figured that I could do some mathematics.

The Survey Section was run by a Sergeant – a Staff Sergeant. Then there was another Sergeant, a Corporal and about five or six privates like me. We just did everything together. This Don Harrison, who I mentioned earlier, was a Survey Officer. That's one reason I got to know him so well.

Then, after the Survey Section, they moved me around in different jobs. Having been in the Survey Section, I had been up to OP's many many times to plot them in as I mentioned and I began to learn about how a Forward Observer operated and so I became a member of an OP Crew led by a Forward Observer who was always a Second Lieutenant or a First Lieutenant. I carried the radios. Another guy drove the jeep that the three of us – usually a three man crew – Forward Observer, a Lieutenant, Battery Operator –me- and the guy who drove the jeep. So, I had a lot of experience being a Forward Observer and all of the sudden I am put into the Fire Direction Center at Battalion Headquarters. That's where the mathematics are done and the commands over wires -the telephone wires and radios are sent to the guns for firing. I did that for about three months then I got a promotion. I was a Gunner Corporal – a guy that ran a gun underneath a Sergeant who was head of the gun section. Being the Gunner Corporal, I was second and I was the guy who looked through the panoramic telescope and made the adjustments to sight in on the aiming stakes and so forth. I did that for a number of months. That's what I was doing during the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium in the winter which was cold.

(Interruption to take a phone call)

What was I saying there?

Q: You were describing your duties as a Gunner Corporal

A: Yes, I was a Gunner Corporal. I'd been made a month or two earlier a T5 Specialist as a result of my radio work and survey work. Now I was a Gunner Corporal. They're both two stripes. The T5 Specialist has got a 'T" under the two stripes and a Gunner Corporal us just two stripes. Following the Fire Direction Center and the Gunner

Corporal or the Gunner Corporal and then the Fire Direction Center, I was put back on OP Crews for the rest of the campaigns. I became in the latter months one of the Forward Observer Crew's Forward Observer that's when they gave me the commission although I was actually performing the duties sometime before.

Q: In the Bulge, how was your unit called into the Bulge?

A: We were on the Siegfried Line maybe 60 miles north of where the Bulge happened -southeast of Aachen. That night, the 16th, the very first night something like the 16th of December, we heard via radio that there was a (hell) of commotion going on down there and we said, amongst ourselves, the word came down from the officers, of course, the comments, the rumors about this problem fairly close by south to us and it looked big..

Suddenly we saw some roads going south, of course, and on one road we saw some advanced elements of the 1st Infantry – the Big Red One, the 1st Infantry Division – going down there and we knew them of course because we'd been alongside them near them quite a bit by that time. When we saw them going down we said "hey" and right then "bang" we moved "march order" that's the artillery (unintelligible) "move out", "get going" "pack up and move out" Within, I don't know, thirty, fifty minutes we were on our way going south.

Our assignment turned out to be to hold the north shoulder of the Bulge. The Bulge by that time had been going straight on in but there was a north and south point of entry. There were other divisions in the 1st Army – because this was the 1st Army area- down south. The commanders made the decision to hold the two shoulders north and south and let the bad guys go on in until they were stopped.

All of the sudden, after forty or fifty miles whatever it was, we were in a position there and all of our artillery guns were facing and firing into Germany which was straight west.

We noticed our brother division the 1st they were in and around us and their assignment was also the same to help hold the north shoulder. Their assignment was to fire into the Bulge. Their guns were firing due south and we were firing due west. We stayed there right through to the end of the Bulge a month later. As an example, when that famous Malmedy massacre occurred, which was only 15 miles from us and we heard about it immediately. It just upset everybody and we said we will go down and get those – we were only twenty or thirty miles from I forget the name of the little town - Malmedy. We had maps, of course. We were only twenty miles from there and we said "we're going to go down and get those guys". Of course.

It didn't happen. We stayed right where we were and kept firing straight into Germany. We didn't move at all. Other troops that were in that area were assigned to do that job.

By that time, Montgomery had been given command of all of the forces in the northern part of Bradley's Army there and he was sending some of his troops down. That's why we didn't have to go although we wanted to – to that area.

Q: What was your gear like? Did you have winter gear at that time?

A: Yes and we were all acclimatized because we had been living in the field ever since the nice summer and then the fall. It was cold then but we were acclimatized to living off the ground, washing in streams. We got water delivered to us in jerry cans. It was freezing cold. Some days were sunny and so forth. Other days weren't. The reason I mentioned we were acclimatized, we had sweaters and field jackets plus the standard O.D. (Olive Drab) overcoat. We tried not to use the overcoat until it really got cold. We used it as a sort of a blanket in the pup tents that we had. Then we noticed a lot of guys during the day wearing overcoats. They were from brand new divisions who weren't acclimatized.

We could tell whether a guy was from our division – a guy two hundred yards, three hundred, five hundred yards away. If he was wearing an overcoat in the daytime, he was from a recruit division. We didn't need it except at night.

All you had to do was to be careful not to touch the barrels of the guns or your fingers would stick to them.. The only way you could get them off was to tear the skin off your hands. We learned about that but we were acclimatized. Nobody caught cold or anything like that. The worst part of it was not to let the snow – we were in three to four feet of snow all the time – not to let the snow get into your socks. We didn't get the shoe packs – the rubber boots until later on. All the guys in the rear were getting them. We didn't get them until later on. We had to be careful – we were advised to do this and knew it – we just had extra socks that we would carry around in our hip pockets. We'd try to dry them overnight and keep the socks, keep your feet as dry as possible so that you didn't get "trench feet". A lot of the guys in our division still got "trench feet" but a lot fewer than the guys in the recruit divisions who had been told how to handle this but just didn't know how to do it until they learned our way.

Q: Did you ever have any problem with being resupplied with food, ammunition and so on?

A: Ammunition, yes. We had plenty of food - the can – the K-Rations, the C Boxes or whatever they were. We never went hungry but we were under – several times – under severe limitations on shells, the shortage of ammunition for the Howitzers. That was, of course, we were told how many rounds we could fire. The experts in the Fire Direction Center knowing from headquarters further on up how many rounds we could expend depending upon the targets and the problems at that time.

The shortage of ammunition at times was as serious as the shortage of gasoline which everybody knows about. But that finally got changed and we had plenty of ammunition by the time we hit the Rhine River.

Q: How long were you consecutively in combat?

A: The entire time till V-E Day which was close to a year with the exception of a rest period of just several days after the Normandy Peninsula was cut and solidified. Between, say, the end of June we had a rest period there of three or four or five days. Otherwise, we were in the line continually until the end.

In the line to us meant that divisions were kept in the line constantly. To give some rest, you'd get pulled back from the front line maybe a mile or a few miles but you were still in "combat ready" under the possibility and probability of being shelled by enemy fire plus the V1's and the V2's and all of that. Then you'd go back into the front lines. Then another one of your regiments or another division would get some period of rest where you just weren't under direct fire attack constantly.

Q: Did your group suffer many casualties?

A: Yes, I can look up in my book. I've got it. We suffered thousands of them. Only two divisions suffered more casualties than the 9th. If you want to cut that off for a minute, I'll look it up (reaches for book, pause while reading information from book)

Q: When you were in the front line, how close were you to the front in your battery?

A: Well, that's easy to answer because we're supposed to be hitting the enemy – the battery is – and if you're in the battery and not a forward observer, the guns could shoot as far as sixteen or seventeen thousand yards. They would usually be going over the front line as opposed to trying to hit the front line. So, if we could hit the enemy so could they hit us. So we are talking about from a few thousand yards to maybe ten (thousand) on the average.

Now a Forward Observer would be up close in the range of yards or a few hundred yards. Occasionally, you'd be on the point. Sometimes when I was a Forward Observer – depending on the geography and the position of the enemy – you might be out in front of the front line.

The front line in World War II was different from the front line in World War I which was the trenches and a very specific area of no man's land. We had no man land areas too but they were much bigger.

Q: How did you feel about the German 88's?

A: What wonderful weapon. Absolutely fabulous. The weapon was an anti-aircraft weapon and a direct firing artillery weapon just by lowering the barrel. It could hit a plane up at twenty thousand feet. We were under fire of the 88's quite a few times and if you heard them you were alright 'cause the one that got you, you didn't hear.

Q: After the Bulge, you followed the front through into Germany?

A: Yes, the next real target area was the Rhine River. Of course, there was a lot of feeling about getting a bridge safe without it having been blow up by the Germans across the Rhine.

The 9th Armored Division accomplished that and my division happened to be right close to them and we were the second division over the Rhine with the 9th being the first division over the Rhine – the 9th Armored Division. The 9th Armored Division's assignment was to stay on this side of the Rhine to contest and continue battling on the Germans that were in that area. There was a whole German army down there on our side of the Rhine. The 9th Armored Division was assigned to handle that.

The 9th Infantry Division – I went over the very second day something like March 8th that the bridge - the Remagen Bridge- was actually captured. We were the first infantry division, the first division after the 9th Armored to get over and the first infantry division which was needed.

I was on an (unintelligible) Crew at the time and went up to a big hill and set up and OP Post up there and stayed there for about ten days firing into Germany firing targets that we could see. It was a wonderful OP Post for visibility

From there, I saw seven or eight days after we'd gone over, saw that bridge collapse all of the sudden from bombing that had weakened it further and kept weakening it. By that time, we had a lot of pontoon bridges that were ferrying troops over or that troops could go over on. There were Engineers - Army Engineers- working on trying to shore up that bridge. Of course, all of the sudden, that bridge collapsed and about thirty or thirty eight, as I recall, thirty eight engineers died and drowned as it collapsed and I saw that happen on top of this hill. They were maybe eight hundred maybe a thousand yards at the most away. I heard the noise and saw all of this dust coming up. That was the end of the bridge. But we didn't need the bridge anymore and, in fact, weren't using the bridge because everybody knew it was unsafe at the time.

We lost three of our casualties who were nearby at that time from the strafing that the German planes had been doing on that bridge since we had first taken it. That strafing included the new planes, the new jet planes that the Germans had.

Q: What did you think when you saw those?

A: Oh boy – another super weapon like the 88 that they had. One of his secret weapons – Hitler's secret weapons. We didn't know what the hell they were. We had earlier been subject to the V1's. The "V" stood for in the German language stood for the ("vengeance") weapon – the V1's and the V2's.

So, those were the ramjet pulsing engines. The pure jets, of course, were not "pulse' jets and you could (see) how fast they went. Our pilots at the time, our own Air Force pilots, they learned how to avoid them and hopefully come down on them from the top. Our own pilots learned how to down and they did down these jet planes if they were able to get up high enough above them to come down on top and figure out where they were headed for and before the jet pilot could really see them.

Q: Following Remagen, where did you go from there?

A: Due west into Germany and participated, along with many other divisions in encircling the Ruhr River Valley which was a big industrial area of Germany. That was encircled and then that was cut up. That's where the German commander Model, I think it was Model -Field Marshal- gave up. He didn't surrender. He killed himself because a Field Marshal, we learned later, doesn't surrender. A German Field Marshal doesn't surrender.

He wasn't going to surrender his army. This is quite a story that we found out later. He knew that he was completely surrounded and that to stay fighting just everybody would be killed. He wanted to surrender but he couldn't so he issued an order to his army dissolving the army and saying to everybody in the army, whether officer or private, that the army is dissolved so you can, in effect, go home if you can escape. Then he went out with his jeep driver into the woods somewhere and shot himself and was buried right there. He was found about twenty years later and was properly removed and buried wherever his family was buried. That was Model. He saved a lot of German lives by dissolving his army which had never been done before but he didn't surrender. As a result, his family and he and the army wasn't in disrepute or failed.

From there we went on through to a mountainous area that wasn't too far from the Elbe River. That's where we went through and visited that terrible Nordhausen Concentration Camp where the V2's were being made. Wernher von Braun was the genius of that camp – the technical genius..

I know that Wernher von Braun and a hundred of his guys came over to help start our program down there. He knew what was going on in Nordhausen. He was down there all the time. True, he wasn't in command of the SS guys who ran Nordhausen. He wasn't giving any orders to work these poor guys to death which is what they did. But,

he knew about and, I guess, he couldn't or felt he couldn't do anything about it and he didn't. So, I don't want to hear anything about Wernher von Braun knowing and seeing what he, in effect, he allowed to continue on.

I had been down our three centers where they make the stuff and where they shoot it off and where the command center is. I had been to all three of those. I've got books on Wernher von Braun's history and I always felt that America- I wrote it up in my book – America - did American close its eyes to what Warner von Braun had been doing merely to get a hundred experts over to save a few months time in building our space program? My answer is yes. America did close its eyes to bring him over and allow him and everybody else to become American heroes.

Q: How did you feel personally when you saw these camps?

A: Revulsion is the word that everyone uses. General Eisenhower, when he saw some camps in the Nordhausen area he describes it in his book and he had Patton with him. They got sick in their stomachs and he sent out an order to all combat divisions. When they captured in any of these areas like the Nordhausen area – Nordhausen was the name of the city there – to parade every single person -German civilian- through the camp. Every person including children over something like ten years old. If you were a child under ten years old, you didn't have to go but ten year old children and up everybody was paraded through those camps. They all said "well, we didn't know" -the standard expression -'We didn't know what was going on"

We saw that. It was a huge camp and there were many other camps, of course. Here are these huge camps that were run by the SS Troops and they needed civilians, technicians, civilians to come in to lay wire, do technical work and do things like that and those civilians would go back. What do you mean they didn't know what was going on. What a bunch of…..We felt pretty strongly. I felt pretty strongly about that. "We didn't know" – that was a hell of an answer. They got the answer to that as a result of the trials

Q: Do you think von Braun should have been tried?

A: All I know is that I don't think he should have been glorified and sent back to American with a hundred guys right away to help our space program get developed a few months earlier than it would have been.

We had plenty of guys like Goddard. The Space Center. We knew a lot about it. Not as much as he did and the Germans did. But, how long would it have taken? I say a couple of months to have developed a V2 type of program. So, I don't know that he should have been jailed or anything like that. Now that you ask me that question, I think he should have been tried in some way and let off – tried in some way with his sentence a small sentence or let off instead of bringing him back to make him a hero.

He's no hero to me.

Q: How close did you get to the Elbe River?

A: Right on it. All of the divisions were on it.

Q: So you were halted there. What did you think of having to halt there and wait for the Russians?

A: We got bored. We wanted to go on. Actually, we didn't want to go on. We'd been through a lot. We knew. What I meant was that we knew that we and the other divisions could have gone on and taken Berlin ahead of the Russians time wise.

But, its in the books, Bradley told Eisenhower it would be at the cost of one hundred thousand lives. That's in Bradley's book. By that time, we were just sitting there waiting for the Russians. We knew that we couldn't go over the Elbe. We were waiting. Everybody knew this that the Russians would be at the Elbe soon and we weren't to go over the Elbe. So, we didn't care. It just got boring.

Q: Did you every have any encounters with the Russians?

A: I never did, no, but my division, the 9th Infantry Division was right along side just to the left just to the north of the division that first met the Russians which was the 69th Division. All of our divisions were just along the Elbe in a stream and we were next the division- the 69th. Actually, our guys, our officers met the Russians the day after the 69th first met them. I think it was at that place called Torgau. I, my battalion were probably maybe 3 miles north of Torgau when we contacted the Russians for the first time.

Then, it was amazing to us, but obviously it had all been worked out and planned before. The day after V-E Day which was May 8th or May 9th, we packed up and moved back to the Autobahn and went right down to the Munich area where my division, the 9th, was assigned to occupy in a big circular area around Munich. That was a nice assignment. I was in that area for six months until I left to go back home on points.

Q: Did you have much contact with the German people when you were in the Munich area?

A: That was a joke. Yes and no because the orders from Army headquarters to everybody was no fraternization – absolutely no fraternization. That order turned out to be impossible. Consequently, it only lasted maybe only two or three weeks. Then you could do whatever fraternization you wanted to because the Germans they were so glad that we were and not the Russians were occupying them. They couldn't have

been more friendly.

Munich, as I mentioned, we were stationed at a little town called Pfaffenhofen which is a suburb of in effect of Munich maybe ten miles away fifteen miles away. Most of Munich had just been flattened. Not by fighting over but by bombs over the years. There was nothing there and in many other towns. Dresden's the famous one. Cologne, any big city like that had been flattened by bombs for years and there was no -nothing was working. There were no post offices. No shops open. No banks. Nothing was operating. The people that lived out in the farms they were supplying…. money and our pay and German Marks didn't mean anything. You couldn't go into a store and buy anything. Currency of any kind was useless.

It was a barter system that allowed the Germans to survive. You should have seen the kids that would like up at the end of meals would line up to get whatever you had they could to eat. Somehow or other, food got into the city dwellers. They say it was a barter system that lasted three or four…. Cigarettes, the money was cigarettes- worth more than gold. We had these little packs of cigarettes that came in the C-ration cans. They were all over the place. There would maybe be ten or twelve's. I don't know. I never smoked so I gave my cigarettes away. That was currency used for bartering. That got straightened out, of course, in due time, but you were talking due time in six or eight weeks.

Q: When did you return to the states?

A: On points. Like everybody did. General Marshall set that plan up. I often thought, as a recall, my point score was, I think, ninety. You could go home first at something like eighty five for an enlisted man or any officer could go home. No, the enlisted men could go home if you had eighty five, the officers maybe the score was ninety five. Here I was ninety, I had more points and often thought why did I accept that battlefield commission? I should have said no. Here because I accepted it I got more dangerous time as a Forward Observer and here I am still sitting, I could be home by now.

So, then my point score came up where I was eligible to go home and I didn't have to take so much baloney anymore because I was on the eligibility list to go home but I couldn't get home because there was no transportation. The ships were all used. Everybody. All the ships to take you back were returning with divisions – whole divisions -that were scheduled to go to the Pacific and any other ship was on its way to the Pacific to carry our troops from the west coast to the Pacific .There wasn't any shipping so you just had to stay there.

I remember dad, my father, who by that time was home, and he'd spent two years in the Balkans and he finally wrote me a letter telling me to stop complaining. I am eligible to go home and I can't get home – stop complaining, that's all you write

about.

I wrote him a letter back and said “dad, it’s ok for you to write me to stop complaining about not being able to get home, but you’re home.” So, he layed off any more such letters and I finally got home in January after spending three Christmases overseas. I should have been home the previous September.

Q: Did you make use of the GI Bill at all?

A: Absolutely, everybody did. It was great – at Yale. They were all setup to take it. The time I spent at Yale which was two and a half years to finish up. I don’t think it cost anything.

Q: Did you ever use the 5220 Club? It was 20 dollars a week for 52 weeks kind of an unemployment insurance.

A: I never needed that. I never got that. No.

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

A: Oh yeah, the 9th Division still has a nice Division association.

Q: So you joined that?

A: I joined right then early and have been to six or seven reunions. They have a reunion every year and I’ve been to maybe six of them after the fifty years.

Q: Did you join any other veteran’s organizations?

A: I am a member and former director of what’s called the National Order of Battlefield Commissions. We have reunions every year. It’s a smaller group and all I can say is that I was on the young side. All of the members of my division having been through North Africa and Sicily as I mentioned. They were all, on the average, six years older. They’re dying off pretty fast – good now. Same thing with the National Order of Battlefield Commissions.

I was one of if not the youngest. I think I was the second youngest guy that I knew of to have been awarded a battlefield commission.

I am seventy nine now but all of these guys all my friends and everything else are eighty six and eighty eight. It’s sad.

Q: Thank you very much for your interview.

A: I would only like to say one other thing if you have time.

Q: Sure.

A: What helped me a lot during the war was these pro's that I was with in the 9th Division that I mentioned. But the other thing was the ROTC – the Reserve Officer Training Corps – high school and college.

Now I had it in high school – infantry – I learned how to do the manual of arms and what military life was like in high school. I only had it one year or one term at Yale as I mentioned but I learned a lot from ROTC that helped me in later service after that.

I don't want to hear anything about these college kids not wanting ROTC on campus because the Defense Department is against gays. I don't' have any feeling about that but have a feeling but that shouldn't stop the right kind of kid wanting to get into ROTC which has saved our country several times beginning with World War I when it was first instituted.

Well, thank you.

Q: Thank you.