

Abbott L. Wiley
with comments from Mr. Wiley's wife, Ruth
Narrators

Wayne Clark
New York State Military Museum
Interviewer

Interviewed February 19, 2013
Home of Abbott Wiley
Valley Falls, New York

WC: Today is the Nineteenth of February, 2013. We are doing a home interview in Valley Falls, New York. My name is Wayne Clark, I'm with the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs. Sir, for the record would you please state your full name, and date and place of birth please?

AW: Abbott Lansing Wiley, birthplace is Pittstown. September 18, 1916.

WC: Wow! Did you attend school in Pittstown?

AW: I attended a district school, which had about twelve, thirteen or fourteen kids. Then later I went to Lansingburg High School, which involved a trip four miles to the railroad, and then thirteen miles on the railroad to high school.

WC: What year did you graduate from high school?

AW: I graduated in 1934.

WC: Once you graduated from high school, did you go on to college?

AW: No, I worked on a farm. We lived on a dairy farm. From [age] 17, when I got out of high school, to 24, I was on the farm. I intended to be a farmer, but in 1940, Congress passed the draft. We had just built a new cow barn on the side of the milking herd, but I decided I wanted to get the year training over with. So on April 3, 1941, I joined up; that year lasted until February 6, 1946.

WC: You enlisted in the Army?

AW: Yes.

WC: Why did you pick the Army?

AW: I don't know, rather than what?

WC: As opposed to the Navy or the Marines?

AW: Well, there weren't many Marines then, and I'd always done rifle shooting, hunting and trapping and all that, so I think it was natural for the Army.

WC: Did you have any relatives that fought in World War I?

AW: I had cousins in World War II. My brother joined the Air Force while I was still in basic training.

WC: Now where did you go for your basic training?

AW: Camp Wheeler, Georgia. They were just building the camp. Our company, half Tennessee and half New Yorkers, was the first company there. I remember that because a whole bunch of us got sick and had to go to the hospital, and the hospital was just being built. We were in a big room on cots. I was really sick. I said to one of the orderlies- it was about 2 AM- "Boy I don't think I can make it till morning, is there a doctor here?" He said no. "Is there a nurse here?" He said, "No, I'm the only one." He'd probably been in the Army a couple of weeks too, he was a medic. I said, "I'm in tough shape," but he said, "I'll tell you, I shouldn't do this, but when I left home, my grandmother gave me a bottle of medicine" –she was in the mountains of Tennessee- "and she told me if I ever got sick, to take a couple of teaspoons of this." He went and got the medicine and gave me a couple of teaspoons. I don't know what it was but I went to sleep and didn't wake up till the next morning. So that ended that deal, the next day I went home.

WC: So how did you get along with those boys from Tennessee?

AW: Well, we got along good. I remember one Sunday, one of the guys said, "All you guys really ain't that bad, the only trouble is you're all goddamned Yankees." [All laugh]

WC: Was that your first time away from home?

AW: Yeah. So then training was normal, all the rifle training, you know. I always remember, they talk about women getting into combat today, but when we were at bayonet training, if you stick a guy with a bayonet, you'd turn in 90 degrees and pull it out. Did you know that?

WC: I didn't, no. Were you training with the old WWI Springfields back then?

AW: The Springfield¹, yes. We shot with a Springfield, and of course we had a lot of map reading, and health, a lot of night marching, compass reading and so forth.

¹ Springfield 1903, a 30-06 bolt-action rifle. The standard American rifle until replaced by the semi-automatic M1 Garand

WC: Once you finished your basic training, did they send you to an advanced infantry school?

AW: No, they sent me to the 113th Infantry [Regiment] in New Jersey.

WC: Whereabouts in New Jersey, was it Fort Dix?

AW: It was Fort Dix, yes. The commander was Colonel Schwarzkopf, the father of General [Norman] Schwarzkopf, from the 1991 [Gulf] War. While there, they made me a radio operator, which I didn't really know much about. Then after there, we went to the Carolinas for maneuvers. We were there for quite a while; I think that was in the summer. So on the way home from maneuvers, we stopped I think in West Virginia overnight. Me being on the radio, I got the message that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor. Of course, you write out a notice and give it to the commanding officer. But while we were eating, I couldn't keep it to myself, so the guys got mad at me for starting a rumor. But then we were called out after eating chow on the side of a hill, and a major explained to us what happened, that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor, and we probably wouldn't be going home- which we didn't.

Then we went fast back up to New Jersey, walking guard on the Jersey coast. This is the funny thing about walking guard. See, in January, Hitler's submarines were working off the coast. We were walking guard without any guns, and I wanted to bring my deer rifle from home so we'd have a gun; that's how well-off we were. But I remember walking guard one night, and seeing five fires out to sea. The Coast Guard tried to get their boats through a six and seven foot surf, to go out and pick up what I presume would be people. After that, gee, if I keep telling all this, you'll never be able to go home.

WC: Well, I've got plenty of time.

AW: Well, then, this was the headquarters battery that we were in- of the 113th Infantry. My job was just the radio. They were lousy radios compared to today. I was a corporal, a T5²- you know, a technician? Our first sergeant was Sergeant Monaghan. He'd been in the Army six years- a short, Irishman with black hair. He wanted me to be a corporal. To do that I had to take a test- a written test. Then I had to go before a board of officers. I took the written test, and then I went before four officers. There was a captain, and the rest were field officers. So because they were all from the city, they found out I was from the farm, and they were kidding me about making hay and milking cows and that kind of stuff.

Finally they said, "What do you think of the outfit?" I said, "Do you want me to really tell you what I think of the outfit?" They were all for that. I said, "The first thing, we're walking guard and it's so cold, [and] we don't have any clothes. I wear everything that's issued to me, and half of some other guy's [when I'm] on guard. The eats are leftover from World War I, and they're

² Technician Fifth Grade, also called Tech Corporal

all so tiny. Another thing: I have an engineer in our company, and if we're going to win the war he should be in the engineers. There's also a telephone man, and he should be in the Signal Corps." Then, I shouldn't have said this, because these guys were all field officers so they were a little out of shape- I said, "We're really not in shape for an infantry outfit, we should be doing more calisthenics and walking." So I was dismissed.

When I went back, First Sergeant Monaghan said, "How'd you make out?" I said the written test wasn't too bad, but then they asked me what I thought of the outfit. He said, "Well, what'd you tell them?" When I finished, I thought he was going to have a stroke. He sat down in a chair and for two minutes he couldn't stop laughing. He said, "In all my life, that's the funniest thing I've ever heard, you telling them what you thought of the outfit." He said, "You know what you've done? You made"- you know what it is- "the shit list. I've got to get you out of here." I said, "Well get me in the Marines." He said, "No I ain't going to get you in the Marines. I'm going to put you in for Officers' School." I said I don't want to be an officer. He said, "You let me handle it."

Well I had learned enough from being a private in the Army that if a captain or a lieutenant tells you to do something, you could always get out of it by telling them you didn't understand it. But if the first sergeant tells you to do something, you better do it, because he could make life so miserable for you the next two days you'd wish you'd never been born. A couple of days later somebody said the first sergeant wants to see you. I went up and he said, "I got some papers here for you to sign. You better read them over." It was for me to go to school at Fort Knox³ for Armored School. So I signed the papers and that went along for two or three days. Then he wanted to see me again. He said, "Now this afternoon, you've got to be down to 113th headquarters. You've got to meet Colonel Schwarzkopf. And for gosh sake, get the mud off your shoes and if you have a clean pair of pants put them on, and be shaved and you'd better brush up on your 'Yes sirs' and 'No sirs.'" At 2 o'clock I was down at headquarters.

There was a corporal there and he said, "What do you want?" I said I was told to report here. He stuck his head in the door and said go on it. I went in and standing behind the desk was this rather medium-sized man, and he had a mustache under his nose just like Adolf Hitler's. I said, "Private reporting as ordered, sir." He said, "Sit down." I sat down, and he stood up and said, "The other day you took a test for corporal. You took a written test," - I found out the written test was what he used to give the New Jersey State Police when they were trying to get in- "you passed the written test, very highly. But on the oral test before the officers you didn't do so good. Tell me about it." So I told him exactly what happened, and he probably already knew it. But after, he said, "Well, you're dismissed," so that was it. I was glad to get rid of that. But then three

³ Kentucky, near Louisville

days later, first sergeant wanted to see me again. He said, “Here I have a pass for you. You can go home for three days, and when you come back you’re going to Fort Knox.”

So I took a day to get home, and I was home a day, and then went back. When I reported back he said everything changed. The Army said I was too high in math. [First Sergeant] said “You’re going to Fort Sill.⁴ I’ve got your train tickets here, I’ve got your meal tickets here, pack your stuff and we’ll take you up to the railroad and you’ll be off.” That was the last I was on the East Coast. I don’t know how long I was on the train, but it probably took a day or more to get to Officer School at Fort Sill. I remember when we got there, the officer said, “We’ve got a year’s worth to do in three months. The day starts at five, and ends at eleven. You never walk: if you’re going anywhere you run.” That was it. So three months later I got out of there.

WC: As a second lieutenant?

AW: Yeah, as a second lieutenant. Then I came home and I had orders to go to Oregon. They were activating the 91st Infantry Division, and all new guys were going in there. They had jobs for second lieutenants and captains and everything else. I went there and this is a funny thing. They took me out of the infantry and put me in the artillery because of my math. But when I got to the artillery, because I was from the infantry, they put in me service battery, which I was upset about. But later in combat, I realized that I had the best deal: I was on the go, by my own self, and not staying in one place.

WC: So you were assigned to the 91st Infantry Division, when did they send you overseas?

AW: It must’ve been in the first part of ’44. I know [in] the 346th Battalion and the 347th, we had all the guns and equipment on one train. It came straight through to Newport News⁵; never stopped. There, a couple of days later they brought all the troops in and they had to check all the equipment on the boat. Then in 21 days we landed in Oran.⁶

WC: Did the whole division go over by ship together?

AW: Yes.

WC: And did you go in a convoy?

AW: Yeah, it was a lot of ships. The captain would let us go up in the lookout, and as far as you could see to the front, right, left and rear, there were ships. I think they went down to the West

⁴ Lawton, Oklahoma. A historic, still active fort built in the 19th century

⁵ Virginia

⁶ A city on the Mediterranean Coast of Algeria

Indies, and across to Africa, up along the coast of Africa, through the Straits of Gibraltar, to Oran. What we were supposed to do there was train for landing operations, and of course the rumor was that we were going to land in southern France. We were there a month or so. Oran had been taken, between the British and Americans. One little incident happened there. Our army had to capture Oran from the French.⁷ I know when they were unloading our guns, they dropped one so it bounced. The colonel was looking overboard and yelled about it. Well, they dropped the next one so it bounced a little bit more, and I remember the colonel grabbed a carbine and shot four or five times over their head; that ended the dropping.

From there, the Navy took us across the Mediterranean to Italy. We thought we were going to southern France but in the middle of the Mediterranean, they opened the orders, and we were to go to Italy. One little incident I remember was the captain of the boat said the officers could eat in the officers' mess- I was a captain. He said when we did, we needed ties. Our Colonel Lynn said to him, "Just where in the hell do you think we got ties? Everything we have is on our backs." I remember climbing down that big rope ladder- it was a hundred feet wide- down to the landing craft. This was near Naples. The British army had taken Naples. So we got in the landing craft and I always thought the guy was afraid of getting mud on his boat, because he let us out in about four feet of water. When we got to shore we were all pretty wet. But then nothing really happened until we got north of Rome. The British Eighth [Army] had taken Rome. I remember north of Rome we got news that the landing on June 6 from England to northern France had started.

Then we were on the Italian Campaign. I don't know how much time elapsed there, but we were to take over for another division that had been in the line. I'll tell you this, this is a funny story. [For] A new outfit going in the line, the custom was for the officers to go up for a day with the other guys, the old outfit. I think it was the 34th Division we were replacing. An officer from the 34th took us out and we were driving through the countryside- no noise, no nothing. Finally he stops. He said, "This is as far as I'm going, but that ridge over there," -about half a mile away- "that's German territory. If I were you, I would sit around here and listen to see what's going on." There was no battle noise. It's different than on TV when they've got guns and racket, bombs bursting- there was no sound, no nothing. I was with another captain, Captain Ben, from headquarters battery.

So we sat there probably for an hour and there was nothing there. Between us and that ridge, there was a house. We thought we'd go over. So we went over to the house and were there maybe a half hour- no noise, no nothing. This house was dug into the side of a hill and it slanted out, so I thought I would go around the back of the house and climb up on the roof to see what was going on. There was a red chimney there I remember. I just scrambled up the house on my

⁷ Oran was under the control of the Vichy French government

belly and got up next to the chimney; my ear was up against the chimney, looking around, still no noise, no nothing. All of a sudden near me on the chimney there was a little *ping*, and little bits of mortar hit my cheek. Then I heard a sound- I didn't need an education to tell me that was a bullet. So I scrambled back down the roof and went inside and told Ben what happened. We stayed there for a while. Then there was a little window in this house that had little panes, about four or five inches square. So after a while I thought I had to see out of them, so I got along the right side of the window to look out. That went on for four or five minutes. All of the sudden, the next pane over from me disappeared. So I got out of there. Captain Ben said, "Did you ever play baseball?" I said yes, I'd played a lot of baseball. He said, "If I were you, I'd watch for the third strike."

WC: [Laughs] So that was the first time you were under fire?

AW: Yeah. So anyway, we didn't do much else. That afternoon we wandered around a little and ran into a squad of Japanese out of Hawaii, the 442nd Regiment.⁸ They had been on patrol that night I think, and were all sleeping in a ditch- they had their blankets over them and had one guard. He was sitting on the chest of a big, dead German, eating his K-rations. The German had been hit with a shell, and I thought to myself, *Boy he must be pretty hungry to be sitting there eating that K-ration*. The little Jap said to me, "Boy this guy really got hit didn't he?"

Afterwards we went on back to our Jeep and that night, we were going to sleep in a ditch by the Jeep. I was pretty near sleep and I looked up and silhouetted by the sky is somebody who says something. I look up and I can see he's got an M1 rifle, so I thought it was okay. He said, "Look guys, you'd better get out of here. Intelligence tells us the Germans are supposed to attack here today, we've got it covered with artillery and mortar fire. We're pulling out and leaving it to them." So we pulled back and then the next day we went to our outfits.

WC: So what happened next, did you stay in that area?

AW: No. The British had the line, and it takes a little while to prepare for battle- you've got to get a lot of ammunition up and that stuff, you know. The war in Italy was mainly artillery and sniper fire. There was a lot of artillery.

WC: Now you weren't fighting the Italians at all, just the Germans?

AW: No, the Italians had surrendered.

WC: You mentioned an incident where one of your men shot and killed a German colonel.

⁸ A highly decorated unit made mostly of Japanese Americans, some of whose families were in internment camps.

AW: Oh, that was later. Maybe I can tell that, it wouldn't make any difference where it is. This happened at the end of the thing. The British Eighth Army had a lot of different nationalities: there's Canadians, Gurkhas, Sikhs. The Gurkhas were from northern India, and the Sikhs were big tall guys with beards. There were Hindus. The Gurkhas, their religion said nothing would happen to them till the time came. I remember one instance, I was going across this bridge, and the Germans were shelling it, so we stopped and didn't get through. But the Gurkhas came up and walked right through it. They didn't believe anything would happen because everything was predetermined. The Sikhs had their own live goats with them and they didn't have utensils, just a big bowl where everything was cooked; you used your fingers. They asked me to have something to eat with them one night- you just reach in the bowl and pick something out, and that did away with all the extra utilities.

WC: You mentioned an incident with a German Messerschmidt- you were strafed?

AW: Maybe I should tell you about Sergeant Riley and the Messerschmidt. One day- Sergeant Riley was one of my better men- one day I remember asking him to do some detail. I said, "Take your friend Rayban to do this." He said, "Oh no I can't take Rayban, he's reading the Bible." I said, "Reading the Bible?" He said, "Yes, last night while he was sleeping a shell hit terribly close to him, so ever since daylight he's been reading the Bible. I can't use him." I said "Okay, get somebody else, I'm glad somebody's reading the Bible." Then one day I was talking to Sergeant Riley out along the road. He's got his back up the road. About a half a mile up the road, around a bend, comes a German fighter. They had two machine guns in each wing and he had the tracers lined up on the road, so there's just a sheet of flame coming down the road. I jumped in the ditch and Riley jumped on top of me. It was only seconds when bullets were hitting around us and digging up the dirt. This is the funny thing about the mind: while I laid in the ditch, my mind returned to when I was nine or ten years old, and we had a terrible hailstorm at home. The wind was blowing at about the same angle as these bullets were coming. Every time a hailstone would hit the ground, it would splash water; the only difference was these bullets were splashing dirt. Anyway, after probably forty seconds, I said to Riley, "Get off of me." So he stood up. Knowing that he had his back to the plane, he couldn't see it; and since it was traveling the speed of sound, he probably couldn't hear it. I said, "What the hell did you jump in there for?" He said, "I jumped because you jumped." That's a trained soldier.

WC: You also mentioned another fellow that was late for pay, and you sent someone to get him, and when he left his tent it took a direct hit?

AW: Yeah. I don't know how much you want me to talk.

WC: As long as you feel up to it, we can go for a couple hours if you'd like.

AW: I'll tell you the whole story. My battery was in this area, about two or three acres. Between Florence and Bologna was all mountains, and there was one road- Route 65, it was a good road-

and going up it was three infantry divisions: the 85th, 88th and 91st. When we moved into this area, the firing batteries were off to the right, in front of us was a big hill, and to the left of the hill was what used to be a path- probably for cattle, but the infantry used it for their Jeeps- then off to the left there was a river. Across the river on the other side were other divisions. When we moved in there, I got a message at 10 o'clock at night that nobody's on your left, and Route 65 was behind us. So I got up and looked out and boy, it was terrible dark. You couldn't see anything. So I thought, *I don't think the Germans can see anything more than I can*. I knew my sentries would be holed up in the cab of a truck, and they didn't like guys running around who weren't supposed to be there. So I thought we could wait till morning so I went to sleep.

Everything went along, but one thing I did after being there for a few days: I looked in some of the foxholes and they had snow and mud in them, so I gave the first sergeant orders that I would be around before dark, and every man should have a full foxhole. That was one of the best orders I ever gave. I had a tent, probably six feet wide and eight feet long. There were two lieutenants and I, and we were playing some kind of foolish game with matches. We had a candle. We had about probably six or seven months of good artillery fire, so we were pretty well-tuned to artillery. While we were playing there, we heard a heavy gun sound, and then we heard the shell. I'll never forget, all three of us froze, because there was no use in running. It seemed like it almost skidded against the tent and went into the ground: it was a dud. I always said if I ever ran into the slave-laborer that made that fuse, I would kiss his rear-end in St. Peter's Square.

Then they started shelling us and that went on for six minutes; boy that was heavy stuff. After a little while there was a pause, and then I thought I'd better see what's happening. But then they started shelling us again, another six or seven minutes. After that, there was a stop and I thought, *I'd better get out of this hole, you're a damn coward, you've got to get out and see where your men are*. I started out on the right side of my area and I passed a couple [of men] that were in foxholes. You know from being in Vietnam that when you're being shelled in a foxhole, you only take up about six inches of the bottom. So as I went on a shell landed in front of me- now this is big stuff- and dirt went all over me, shrapnel went passed my ear, and I don't really know what happened.

The next thing I know, there was a light shining in my eye and I came to after a while. It seemed like dawn was breaking in the east. I realized I was in a hole with another man. He was a Montana sheep herder. He was snoring, and I couldn't believe that; how could he be snoring with all the shelling going on? Finally, I came to a little bit more, and I went out across the battery area and I ran into one of my sergeants. He tried to tell me something, his lips moved but I remember no noise. So I went on and ran into more people and had the same problem: they tried to tell me things but there was no noise. I thought, *Boy, these guys are really shook up*. Finally I found a guy that could talk, and he said- one of the sergeants had dragged me back into the hole with the other guy who must've been knocked out- they shelled us two more times for six or

seven minutes, and only one guy was wounded and we got him to the hospital. I thought, *Boy, somebody knew we were behind that hill.*

Finally I got my Jeep driver and I went up and told Colonel Lynn I had to move, so he said find a better place if you can. So I looked around but couldn't find a better place, so I sent a truck back to pick up sandbags. I told the guys we were going to stay here, but we're going to sandbag ourselves in. After a while, probably ten o'clock, the truck came back with sandbags. We started sandbagging where we slept. Some of them we dug into the hill. I said I wanted three feet of sandbags around the sleeping tents. I got right in and helped them. I probably didn't let anybody sit around because I thought work would be the thing to do. I remember it was noon, or afternoon, and this Corporal Slater holding a sandbag and I had a shovel pouring in the sand. He looks up at me and says, "Now, we know why you've been such a son of a bitch all morning, we feel better already."

After that we did pretty well, but a day or so later, down the corner of this hill comes an infantry Jeep and they've got a German officer as a prisoner. I couldn't believe my eyes- here's a German officer in full dress, with a hat on, full uniform, everything, a monocle in his right eye, his boots are as black and polished as could be. I looked at my boots, they were mud and snow, I'd probably had my trousers on for three weeks, but anyway, I thought I must be in the wrong army. They went on with him, but a day or so later a platoon of infantry had been brought back to go get some new clothes. Quartermaster had an exchange back there, where you'd get a gallon of water and you could shower and change your clothes with some other outfit that'd had it done before. Anyway, when they came back through, the platoon was all jumbled up, and I ran out and told the lieutenant to spread his men out, because when they turn that corner they may get a shell from German artillery. He came back with the dumbest answer I'd ever heard: he said "We're not afraid." Twenty minutes later, the medics brought four guys out of there on litters. Whether they were killed or just wounded I never knew, but that lieutenant was really nuts not to spread those guys out. You should never take a chance if you're an officer; if you have any little bit of information, use it. I had told him what might happen, but there was four guys gone.

WC: How often were you able to get a shower or fresh clothes or even a hot meal?

AW: This is a funny thing. Two-thirds of the way through the Italian Campaign, our battalion had fired a million shells. I know the Germans fired half that many back at us. So, it was quite often on observation. Now, you asked me about this guy. This was December [1944], the Army set up the payroll, which was real silly, because there was nothing to buy. It would be Italian Lira they would pay us with. I went around and paid all the guys, because you couldn't call them together- you kept them separated as much as possible. The guys that were dug in the side of the hill with their tents, I went down to them. When I got near the next-to-the last tent- you've got to always play your hunches- I was in the tent and got those guys paid, and said to them, "Now you scam out of here and tell those guys in the last tent to come on over here." So they came over

and I paid them. One guy was missing, and it happened to be Corporal Slater. He'd been on guard that night and he was sleeping in the tent. So I sent his sergeant over to get him. So he goes in the tent, wakes him up, brings him outside the tent, and they're about eight feet outside the tent, when a shell hit directly inside that tent. Because the guys were protected by those three feet of sandbags outside the tent, they didn't get hit with any shrapnel. So Slater came over to me and said, "Captain, you keep the money." I said, "No, I want to tell you something- this is the luckiest money you will ever have. Please don't spend it, just keep it."

WC: The colonel wanted a radio and then you got the surrender of Bologna?

AW: No, I don't know about the surrender of Bologna. But the radio, you know the *Table and Organization of the Army* is that big book they have. So the colonel wanted another radio and the supply officer didn't think he could have it, and he asked me. The reason he didn't think he could have it was that the *Tables and Organization* said he wasn't allowed, so he came to me about it. I said, "You go get the colonel's radio, I don't give a damn if you even have to steal it, just get it." So he did get his radio.

WC: You mentioned Monticelli, won by the courage and daring of the 363rd Infantry, and you were stationed at Sabbione?

AW: Sabbione, yeah that was outside. I'll tell you a little story about my Jeep driver. He was about 18-19 years old, and I think the reason First Sergeant Wes talked me into using him was because he could never find him to do any work. But anyway we got along well. His job was when we moved, my job was to get everybody organized- the kitchen, the latrine and see that was done and they were spread out- he would find a place for our Jeep. Anyway, this little town where Highway 65 went through, on the outside of it, it [the road] went around a hill. Out at about 11 o'clock across the way, about three quarters of a mile, the Germans had an 88 gun dug into the middle of the mountain. The 88 was probably the best gun of any army in all of WWII. It was a 3-inch gun, and they used it for anti-aircraft, they used it against tanks, and they would shoot at a man with it, because they figured if there was one man there was usually another. Well, they had an area outside this town that was under observation and had a man on this gun. Whenever a truck would go across this 200-250 yard area, he would shoot at them. After a while, we knew what that area was. So when we got up there we would stop, look for shell holes, and then go as fast as we could over that area. But this morning, for some reason or another- I must've been asleep- the sun was out bright and early, and we were about a quarter of a mile across there when I woke up. My driver was only about a quarter of the way across and I said, "Get this damn Jeep moving." Just then, about thirty or forty feet ahead of us, a shell landed in the road. Edge says, "Look, if we'd been going faster, we'd have caught that one." So we got to the other end and we had a one way discussion that never again would a shell land in front of us while we were going over there.

I got even with him a few days later. Now down below us was a house. Edge and I had taken it over- it was right near the shelling but it was near the front. The Italian houses were built in the side of a hill. There would be an entry-way and a middle room, then another room, I guess a bedroom. The Germans did a lot of stuff that seemed to be by clockwork. One day, below this house at about 4 o'clock, they dropped in one shell. Then they moved up to the road with the whole battery shelling. So this one shell would give them an idea of where they were hitting, and of course the other guns would move their sights with that gun. The second day the same thing happened at about 4 o'clock- why I happen to remember that I don't know. But then another day, later, for some reason or another, I was either reading or doing some paperwork in this house, in the room to the front- it was the most open. I looked at my watch and it was about 4 o'clock. I thought, *Maybe the German data is a bit better today-* they'd been eighty yards below the house, then they were forty. So I moved out of that room and Edge was in the middle room, and I said, "Edge, come on out of this room, maybe this guy's data is a little better today." But he didn't move. So I got to the entrance room which was right off the ground. I got there and who runs by me but Edge, and he's covered in mortar. He said, "You can't believe it, that room you just left ain't there anymore." That was pretty lucky. Just playing hunches I guess.

WC: That was towards the end of the war?

AW: No, we were still in the mountains. At the end of the war we were crossing the Po [River], the rivers.

WC: That was with the 5th Army and the 10th Mountain, plus your division and a bunch of other divisions that were involved?

AW: Yeah, the 10th Mountain was on the other side, and the 92nd, which was Eleanor Roosevelt's division, all colored troops. Most of the officers were white, but it was a colored division. The 10th Mountain was over on our left. At the end of the war, we were combat teams, and I remember we had a regiment of infantry and a battalion of artillery. The orders were to go up this road and go as fast and far as you can. Pay no attention to anybody on the right or left and just get through the German army. If you can get behind them the war will be over. Well, in front of us it seemed like there was a bigger unit of Germans retreating, and they would leave out units of rear guards once in a while. They would stop us with firefights. This one time, they stopped for a little firefight. Of course, the artillery is in a line, one behind the other. I remember talking with the guys, bullshitting with them, you know. I had new lieutenants and new replacements. This new lieutenant had been in the Pentagon all during the war. [Pause for tape change]

WC: Go ahead, we're on our second tape now.

AW: We were in a combat team of infantry and artillery. So we're stopped for a little firefight. Evidently, the Germans were retreating ahead of us and leaving a rear guard. So we stopped there. I had this new lieutenant. Everybody knew the ones you had the most trouble with are the

ones who've just come in. The old soldiers knew to stay right on that road. Out about ninety degrees to the road was this wind-break, out probably a hundred yards. Out at the end of this wind-break to the right this lieutenant called me out. He'd heard something back at the Pentagon about living off the land and thought there was a pig or a sheep or something. He had his pistol out and he calls me up, so I'm thinking that there's some animal out there. I walk right out of the hedgerow, a little unconcerned. I get to the end of the hedgerow and off to my left, probably twenty-five or thirty yards, is a German gun emplacement manned by two German soldiers, each with a light machine, now aimed at me. The only thing I can think of- there's 2,500 to 3,000 men within a quarter mile of me, and they really didn't want to start a war. But the only thing I can think of, I remember sliding into second base when I played baseball and the umpire would stretch out his hands, and that's what I did. They laid the guns on the edge of the earthworks, and I waved this lieutenant back to our column. When we got back I explained to him that if wanted to go get himself killed that was his business, but to call me out there, that was a different thing. I said he should stay in line there or I might shoot him myself.

I hadn't gotten over that, then this other new guy was of German descent. He hands me this German Luger, and says, "You're a captain, here's a gun for you." It's all engraved with gold. I said, "Where in the devil did you get a gun like that?" He said over here in the gully. He said there was a German colonel that wanted to surrender to an officer. You know there were two departments of the German army, the old German Army and the Nazis. So I said, "Did you bring him in?" He said, "No, I shot him." I felt bad about that. I was all ready to ball him out for shooting a guy when I realized they had sent him over from the States to shoot Germans; so that was that.

I no more than got over that and the firefight had stopped. Up above the road, there was a town about three miles up. Colonel Lynn, the artillery commander, said, "I think we'll be up to that town. I want you to go up there and pick out a spot for the battalion to come in." So I went out to the right of this main road, found a dirt road, and got to the town. There were some civilians there and they were glad to see us, but I went outside the town, found a good place for the battalion, and after looking that over, I went back to the road, and who comes by but an infantry scout. He's all alone and he's coming back- we were on kind of a ridge. He said, "Watch it guys, that valley there is full of Germans." So we went back to the town.

The road I came in on and the main road come together in a Y. So I situated there because I had been told to stay there till the battalion got there. The townspeople wanted to talk, but it started getting later. I told them to get inside and stay inside, because I had a machine gunner on the Jeep, and if we see anything move we may shoot. I told them to stay inside and if there was any firing, to get in the cellar or something. It's pretty dusky, and who comes in to pick us up but this Captain Ben. He calls me up and says, "Wiley, what the hell are you doing up here? Follow me." Captain Ben was a guy who always smoked cigars, which I thought was a funny thing. Actually, most of the time he was out of cigars but he had about a third of it in his mouth. I went back the

road I'd come up and when I got back I said, "What the hell are you so excited about?" He said, "Here I was trying to get something to eat and the colonel said, 'Wiley's up there waiting for us. Somebody's got to go get him.' So he looked at me. I went back and found out which way you went. I got my Jeep and driver and started up the road. In front of me was a column of vehicles, so I told me driver to pass them. In the dusk, we got about halfway up the column, and I looked up and everyone had a German helmet on. I told my driver to jump this ditch and we went around and got up to you." That was probably a column of infantry. Can you imagine?

WC: Do you think they were getting ready to surrender?

AW: I don't know, they were still moving north to the Alps. I think about three or four days later we got word that they were surrendering.

WC: Do you recall where you were when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt?

AW: No, no.

WC: Where were you when the war ended?

AW: Gee, I don't know. Right around northern Italy somewhere, I can't say which town. At the end I was at Gorizia, which is on the Yugoslav border. There was just a little creek between us a Yugoslavia.

WC: Was there any kind of celebration when you got word that the war had ended?

AW: No, everything was as quiet as it could be. It was a funny thing, no celebration. Everyone wonders about flags, I don't ever remember seeing an American flag in all of combat because you were just telling the Germans where you were.

WC: What about occupation duty, did you have to pull any of that?

AW: No, we were just getting there. I think they were planning to send us to Japan. That's what happened to me. They had an order that the captains down that had so many points could go home. I had about a hundred more points, so I said to my colonel, "Well, it looks like I'll be going home." He said, "No, you won't be going home. If I have to go to Japan, you're going to go." But this I never understood either. I was a captain all the time. When we went back, we were at Consorta, Italy, getting ready for a boat to come in and pick us up to go to Japan. I remember I'm sitting on a cot talking to Captain Ben. A German prisoner walked by. He said the war was over. I said, "How the hell do you know?" He said, "It came in on my radio." The boat had come in to take us to Japan and he was two days late because he'd stayed in New York to wait for milk to arrive from Wisconsin. The next day we loaded on the boat and it turned around and brought us home.

WC: You came back and in 1946 you were discharged?

AW: 1945 I was home and on furlough. Then I had to go back and help deactivate the division. I met Ruth and then thirty days later we got married. That was 67 years ago.

WC: You mean to tell me you'd only known her for thirty days and then you got married?

AW: [Laughing] Yeah. The new went back to deactivate the division and get all the stuff that we took overseas. Somebody had to sign for it. The battery commanders and so forth had to go back.

WC: When did they make you a major?

AW: Well, I'm getting out of the Army and on my page he has, "Major." I said, "Jesus, don't put me down as Major. In New York state if I'm a captain I get \$250, if I'm a field officer I don't get anything." He says, "You've been a major for a long time." I said, "I have?" He said, "I got the orders right here." I never got the orders. But the only thing I can figure is when my colonel said I wasn't going home; a major wouldn't get to go home. I was probably in for major then and didn't know it. The paperwork going overseas would be separated from us and was all screwed up. Then again I owed them some money because my sister was getting an allotment from home and they paid me \$250 for my allotment. The finance officer down in Camp Rucker, Alabama said, "Here's all the papers where you owe the Army." That must've been the orders. I said is this all the paper? He said yes. So I threw them in the wastepaper basket and never heard from them again.

WC: Did you get any back pay for being a major?

AW: No, I didn't get anything.

WC: So you got discharged February 6, 1946. You came back to New York, then what happened? Did you go to school?

AW: I stayed around the farm. From Alabama we came home. It was about Thanksgiving time I guess. Then this guy that owned this business in Valley Falls, New York, he and his partner wanted to sell the thing and came to the house two or three times to see if we wanted to be involved in buying it. Of course, there were sixteen million guys in the army and there weren't going to be too many jobs. That's when we bought this business in Valley Falls. It was a feed and coal business, something new. This is a funny thing. When I got out of the Army I came to Albany, got a bus up to the end of the bus line and walked home. Then I stopped at my brother's on the farm in the morning for breakfast. I said to him, "Boy, these eggs don't have any taste." He was quite insulted. Of course, the eggs we had were probably six months old, they were dried.

I'll tell you a funny story. Going up Route 65, through the Apennine Mountains, there was no motorized stuff, just infantry and artillery. Of the three divisions, there would be two on the line- the artillery would stay in line, but they would change the infantry. This one time, for one reason

or another, in the 91st, the artillery came back, and the next morning one of my lieutenants-we must've been five or six miles behind the line- said, "There are orchards here, and they've got peaches." So I beat it over to the mess sergeant and said, "Suppose I got some peaches, could you make peach pie?" He said, "I think I could. I might have to substitute something but I'll try it." So I said to Nick Marcella, who spoke Italian, "Take some trading stuff and go get some peaches." He came back with about a bushel and a half of peaches. The kitchen help went over to start peeling them, and I went over and sat down with my jack knife and was helping them peel peaches. It didn't take as long as I thought because everyone would come over and say, "What are you guys doing?" and I'd say "Can't you see we're peeling peaches? Don't you have a knife?" So they'd help us. It wasn't long before we had all the peaches peeled. Sergeant Hall, the mess sergeant, had them all in the square pans, ready to put in the ovens.

So probably twenty minutes later he came to me and said, "I can't bake the pies, because I got orders that the general is going to inspect the kitchens." We were in the back. He said what'll I do? I figured we might have a few hours, so I said bake the pies. So he started baking the pies. Then probably twenty or thirty minutes later, who comes driving in the yard but the general, my Colonel Lynn and of course one of the general's staff and the driver. The general drives up to my kitchen, hops out, walks up to the kitchen, and is met by Sergeant Hall, the mess sergeant, an old army man. The general says, "Sergeant I've come to inspect your kitchen." Sergeant Hall says, "But I'm baking pies." The general says, "Baking pies?" He turns to Colonel Lynn and by that time I'd appeared on the scene and he said [To Colonel Lynn], "Didn't you tell this man I was coming to inspect the kitchen?" He said yes, there was no argument. Then he turned to me and wanted an explanation. I told him just what happened. He seemed a little bit perturbed. Now this general was a full-blooded Iroquois Indian and I don't think he was known for his humor. I think he was really perturbed. I would say on a number one to ten, he was perturbed about a ten.

Anyway, he went back to his Jeep and got in. Colonel Lynn got in and he wasn't smiling either. Then when they drove out, even the driver spun the wheels. I always think the reason the general was so perturbed, that morning he probably got up and went to get a cup of coffee, and a new man on the job gave him lukewarm coffee and the dried eggs weren't up to snuff; he couldn't find his kitchen inspecting gloves; his staff told him he had to inspect the kitchens; he gets out and there's dust on the star; and driving over three miles to the 347th Battalion over roads that Julius Caesar had built and no one had done anything with them since. He picks up the colonel and probably thinks, "Of the 300 or 400 kitchens in the 5th Army, I had to pick this dummy who's baking pies." Well, the next day Colonel Lynn says, "Well, you came the nearest to getting courts-martialed of anyone I ever knew." I know the general was after the colonel three different times- I learned through the grapevine- to relieve me of command. I always wondered why the general didn't relieve me. But you know around a general's headquarters, there's usually a *Stars and Stripes* reporter, or one from the 5th Army. I can see the front page of *Stars and Stripes*- "Captain gets relieved of command for giving his men peach pies." Well, I never heard

more about the peach pies till Colonel Lynn- he and I had always exchanged Christmas cards- said coming back on the boat- he came from the upper crust of the Army- that the funniest thing that happened during the whole Italian Campaign was the peach pies. It must've been a tale the colonel told, because on the Christmas cards, his wife would write out, "Merry Christmas to the man who thought enough of his men to give them peach pies."

WC: After you got home, did you join any veterans' organizations?

AW: I've been a life member of the VFW and the Legion. I had so many new things with being in business. Then I was in politics. First they wanted me to run for supervisor, so I was supervisor of the town for six years. Then we were running this business with my brother and I was president. Then we moved over to where we are now with what was a wholesale hardware and lumber center. That was a lot of work. Then I got involved in the county legislature, I was finance chairman. Then I was a Hudson Valley trustee. According to my wife I spent a lot of times away from home.

WC: Did you attend any reunions or stay in touch with any of the men?

AW: Ruth and I went back to see Colonel Lynn down in Florida one time. With this business and everything I had to make up for the five years I was missing.

WC: How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life?

AW: Well, sure it changes your life. It's funny; seeing the guys from Iraq come back and they have stress, but I never had stress. I always wondered this: when I went to district school they used to call me the "laughing fool." When I went to high school under my picture they had a bit of mirth, and in the history they said, "Whenever there was a bunch of guys having a lot of fun and raising a deuce and laughing, Ab would be there." And probably a year or more ago- probably two years- I met a girl working in the bank whose grandmother had been a friend. I said, "Remind your grandmother you saw me." She came back a couple of weeks later and said her grandmother was so happy that I was always the one laughing and having a good time. Now, my wife has never seen me laugh and never heard me cry. That's kind of a funny thing, how do you figure that out? It's a mystery. So it's changed me.

Another thing is moneywise, the values of money. That brings up another story. When I played baseball, there were six of us. We had an old car and we had an accident. One guy wanted some money because we had bent his fender. Between six guys, we had six quarters and one fifty cent piece we gave him to fix up his car. The opposite of that, we got to the Po River to cross it. The engineers had been trying to work to build a pontoon bridge. The Germans had three fighters and they kept strafing them, so they had to quit during the daytime and wait till night. We were all waiting to cross for a mile around there. The Germans had a lot of equipment there but they'd got their troops across. So each one of my men either had a German horse or German car they

were monkeying around with. But there was one big covered truck there, and the doors were closed. I remember one of the guys started opening it and I yelled, “Don’t touch it! It may be booby trapped.” So we hooked a rope on it, tied it to my Jeep, got a hundred feet away and opened it. It was full of money; the same money Uncle Sam was paying us- Italian Lira. The guys had piles of it three feet high burning it to warm their hands. There were Italian citizens there going crazy, like *Here’s these crazy Americans burning money to warm their hands*. That I learned: money, if you can’t use it for something, it’s not worth anymore than the Troy record. We better leave it at that.

WC: [To a woman off screen] Now did you have any questions?

Woman off screen: I didn’t know if you asked him about medals?

WC: Oh yes, I understand you received the Bronze Star and got some combat stars too.

AW: I got three Battle Stars.

WC: Did you get the Combat Infantry Badge too?

AW: No.

WC: Is there anything else you’d like to add in closing?

AW: No, except after I got home, my wife was my best partner.

WC: Did you have any children?

AW: Oh yeah. Ruth’s done so much for me, we were lucky on that. We got home, and then lived in the [Hudson] Valley. Our two daughters were born, and Bill, our son. Ruth did most of the parenting I have to say, I guess I worked a lot. Ruth, why don’t you say something?

Ruth: [Off screen] I was going to say we were neighbors to Jodie.

AW: She’s taken care of me all these years.

WC: I’m sure she’s done a fine job!

Ruth: I’ll tell you I don’t regret any of it.

AW: My wife is my best partner.

WC: And how many children and grandchildren?

Ruth: We’ve got seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren, with our second daughter.

WC: Let me just put the camera on you for a second. [Camera pans to Ruth] What did you do during the war?

Ruth: I worked at Montgomery Ward. I was there eleven years and a day. After I met him [Abbott] he said, "You quit your job." I said I can't quit, I've got to work. He said, "No, if I can't afford you I won't marry you."

WC: During the war, what was it like working at Montgomery Ward? Was it a busy place?

Ruth: It was mostly all women. All our guys that worked with us when I first went in, they never came back. They were young.

WC: Was that the Montgomery Ward over in Menands [New York]?

Ruth: Right. The School of Hard Knocks I called it.

WC: Now what about rationing, were there a lot of shortages?

Ruth: Oh yes, there were a lot of shortages, and blackouts. You've heard of the blackouts?

WC: Oh yes.

Ruth: I lived right near the arsenal. They were watching that pretty close.

WC: So you had the blackout curtains at night?

Ruth: Yes, no lights showing anywhere. The whole city was blacked out, it was scary. They had people out on the hilltops watching for planes. You don't remember any of that, how old were you?

WC: No I'm old but not quite that old. I wasn't born till 1948, a few years after the war.

Ruth: That's the same year my daughter was born. Actually '47 she was born. They missed it all.

WC: Alright, I'm going to switch back to your husband now. [Camera pans back to Abbott] I've got some photographs, can you just hold this one up in front of you? [Hands Abbott a picture] You're in your dress uniform. You were a lieutenant in that photo. Now Jodie do you have some more photos?

[Woman off screen hands over two more photos]

WC: I imagine that was taken shortly after you guys met. And then the photo below looks like it was taken fairly recently. Were there any photos on the back? Can you just spin that around? There's some more WWII photos of you in uniform. Then there's one of a military vehicle, a half-track I believe. Okay, got it.

AW: I've got another one out. Here's one taken in Florence, Italy.

WC: Very nice, got it.

AW: And here's my better half. [Holds up an old picture of himself and Ruth]

WC: Alright. Well thank you so much for your interview.

Ruth: I knew he could talk but I didn't think he could talk constantly for two hours!

[Camera momentarily shuts off, then back on]

WC: Now you mentioned about a fellow being wounded, and then sticking his rifle in the ground to hold the plasma bottle?

AW: Right. Then he wouldn't go on, because the medics had a Jeep with a platform on it and they would pick them up. But he'd gone out on another one. See most of the stuff was from artillery and snipers.

WC: You also mentioned about tires being changed.

AW: When we were attacking or something there would be more artillery from the Germans. During that period, I think the maintenance unit of our battalion changed 155 tires in eight days, from Monday to Monday.

WC: They changed tires because they were just worn out?

AW: No, shrapnel. See, a shell could come and hit near a truck and not do too much damage, but it would blow the tires from the shrapnel. One little thing I probably should've had, but this Sergeant Riley- the one that was with me with the plane- I remember him one day. Our trucks used to go down through Florence, then on to Leghorn, the depot, to pick up ammunition for the artillery. They would have four or five tons on the trucks. Coming back through, the first one got hit with a shell- it blew his tire and the driver jumped out and left the truck there. So the guys behind him were all stacked up, although they'd been spaced. They were all there and the Germans had been doing quite a bit of shelling in that area, right at the spot where the trucks were. So I looked and I thought when it got dark we'd get the trucks out of there- the other drivers had go out too because they couldn't move. After a while, I got a note from headquarters to move the trucks. Well, I took a look again, and the shells were coming in pretty heavy. I thought, *If headquarters wants the trucks moved they can come right out and move them themselves.*

So that didn't last very long- half an hour later they said I had to move the trucks because they wanted to get tanks through. Not thinking- Sergeant Riley happened to be there- I said, "Sergeant, we've got to move them trucks." And he said, "Captain, I don't have the guts to send

a man in there.” I said, “Sergeant, if I go, suppose you can find a couple of men?” He said yes. So, he came back with a couple of men- they weren’t too enthused about it. But I said we’ll go over as near as we can, because you know shelling in an area, there’s dispersion. So we got as near as we could and I picked out what trucks we were going to take. Now these Germans do everything by clock, we had to check them. So I took my watch out and for two minutes, the shells would be coming in real fast, and for two minutes they’d be slack. Then two more minutes there’d be shells coming in fast, and two minutes they’d be slack. So I said, “The next time after shelling, I’m going to yell *Go*. We’ve got two minutes to get the trucks.” And we got the trucks. I should’ve written up a citation for those guys, but we were so happy to get out of there we didn’t bother with any citations.

WC: Alright, any other stories you can think of off hand?

AW: Well, probably quite a lot.

Ruth: How about that time you met Bill?

AW: Yeah, a man that used to work for us, Bill Aiken. We were up in the Apennines [Mountains] and my mother wrote and said he was over there [in Italy]- he was in the engineers. In combat, there’s times when it’s slack and times when it’s tough. I said to the colonel I know a guy who used to work for us. So I went back to Florence- I think they were over near the Tower of Pisa. I went over and picked him up, I asked his captain and we went back to Florence and spent the day. That night, the battalion had a room at a hotel to stay and eat. So I took off my combat jacket and put it on Bill- he’d hardly shaved yet. We go into the hotel and there was all tables with three little chairs at each. All the tables were filled except this one with one general at it. So I said to the general, “You mind if we sit down?” He said no. He said, “I’ve been in twenty years and I’m only a brigadier general; here’s a guy that’s been in two weeks and he’s a captain.” [Referring to Bill] Bill didn’t dare look up.

[All laugh]

WC: So the general was wise to you! Well thank you again.