

**Adelbert [Del] Hayden Sahlberg
Veteran**

**Wayne Clarke
Interviewer**

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WC: Today is the 7th of January, 2011. We're at the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center in Saratoga Springs, New York. My name is Wayne Clarke. Sir, for the record, would you please state your full name and your date and place of birth, please?

AHS: My full name is Adelbert Hayden Sahlberg. I was born in Saratoga Springs, New York at 76 Clinton Street.

WC: What year were you born?

AHS: I was born on July 7th, 1924.

WC: Did you attend school in Saratoga?

AHS: I attended Number 3 School on Catherine Street, which now no longer exists.

WC: And you graduated?

AHS: Then I graduated from the Saratoga Springs High School, which now is another type of educational facility.

WC: What year did you graduate?

AHS: 1942.

WC: Do you remember where you were and what your reaction was when you heard about the attack at Pearl Harbor?

AHS: Yes, I do. A gentleman by the name of Elvin Morris, M-O-R-R-I-S, and I were out with two young ladies that evening. I was sleeping late when my mother came in and tried to wake me and said the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. I said, yeah, sure, but I'm tired. No, she said, it's true. It's true. It's happened. I finally roused up and listened.

Then I got out of bed. I got in the car and ran over to El Morris, who I had been with [the night before], who was just having breakfast. I walked in on his family and said, war has started. The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. I think he thought I had too many drinks. But, as it turned out, it was true. That was how we found out about Pearl Harbor.

WC: What was life like in Saratoga after the attack on Pearl Harbor? Did you notice a difference?

AHS: Not really. Saratoga itself, of course, had Company L. I knew Jack Crowe [?], who was the first sergeant down here, real well. Everybody decided who was going to be going. How old you were, and all this type of thing was making the rounds as far as inquiries. It was rather subdued. There was no mass running up and down the streets yelling.

WC: What about rationing? Did you and your family experience any of that?

AHS: Oh, yes. Rationing. Before the rationing went into effect, of course, most people had a pretty good indication that this was what was going to happen. Along with quite a few other people, that I won't name, had fifty-five gallon drums filled with gasoline to help tide them over. So, other than that, everything went very well and all of the regulations were obeyed. But, the running out stretched out a little longer than otherwise expected.

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

AHS: I graduated from high school in the spring of 1943. I left for Cornell in August of 1943. I was in Cornell for a year.

WC: What were you studying in Cornell?

AHS: I had a general course. At that point in time, I had no particular aims in life to be a doctor or pick a number. Near the end of the school year, I was a part of ROTC. When we got to the end of the year, I had to make a choice because I was being called to duty on March 15th. That was about the time I was going to take my finals. So, I did not take my finals.

WC: You were drafted?

AHS: Yes. I wanted to get some education. When you got your education, you had a chance to be an officer. Without that, they just smiled and looked at you, which in my case was exactly what happened. They said, if you were graduating, you would probably go right into the officer's training. But no way.

WC: Okay. So, you got drafted. What happened next? Where did you go?

AHS: I went down here to Camp Upton, I think it was. Some of this is noted in the Remembrances Portion [document] of the notes that you have or will have. My first introduction at the reform there was to mop up a wooden runway into a building. I decided the best thing to do was to throw a bucket of soapy water up there and mop it down, which I did. Just as the second lieutenant stood up, opened the door, and stood out. I hit him with a bucket of soapy water. It did not go well for the next few days.

WC: All right. You left Camp Upton.

AHS: I went down to Miami Beach. There I took my basic training, and I was assigned to the Air Force.

WC: Did you know you were going into the Air Force?

AHS: No.

WC: They just decided that was where they needed you?

AHS: The only reason I think they did that was because I had a pilot's license when I was sixteen. I was flying out of Lavery's flight operations [Lavery Seaplane Base] on Round Lake.

WC: What kind of airplane did you fly?

AHS: A [Top Rudder] Ruckus and a Piper. It was just light aircraft. I was qualified to fly light aircraft, and I thought for sure I would get in the Air Force.

WC: Do you think that's why they put you in the Air Force?

AHS: I think that's why they put me in, because it was on the record that I had a pilot's license already.

WC: All right. What was basic training like?

AHS: Basic training took place down there in Miami. They took us out on the golf course. There used to be a golf course down there. By the time we got there, there was no grass left and it was just sand. About the time you had a few hundred guys marching back and forth, it was just clouds of dirt and sand coming up. It was, of course, in the summer. We got through in July. It was very, very warm. It was not very pleasant. I was awfully glad when that part of the tour of duty was over with. We all waited for what was going to happen next. My orders came through to go to Chanute Field, Illinois with the 9th Air Force. So, I did. That's just outside of Chicago, as you may know. So, my work up there involved heavy equipment.

WC: Did you get on-the-job training?

AHS: Yeah. The first thing they put me into was an auto car. It was a big truck. I assumed he thought I had some smarts as far as the big trucks were concerned. I'd never been in one in my life at that point. We started out and he said, okay, now stop. Well, you know there's a big difference between air brakes and hydraulic [brakes]. Of course, those were air brakes. When you put your foot down, everything stops. With hydraulic, you slow down. Well, he left the seat next to me, and if it hadn't been for the windshield, he would have gone out over the nose of the truck. He was not very happy with me because he had a big lump on his forehead. I said, I didn't know this didn't work any different than a hydraulic brake. Nobody told me. That was my introduction.

WC: Were you disappointed at that point that you weren't being sent to flight school?

AHS: Very much. I had expected, hoped that I would have a chance to at least try for it. But they said that there were two things. Number one, they were looking for college graduates and I was not a college graduate yet. And number two, I had to have 20/20 vision to even qualify to be a navigator or a gunner or anything else. I couldn't go off the ground unless I had those eyes, and I didn't. I had 20/30. All of my hopes and fears of getting into the flying end of it were just gone. Then I pretty much accepted what came along and so be it. That was it.

WC: They had you operating trucks and heavy equipment?

AHS: Yes. My specialties were heavy equipment. Auto cars, Reos, Federals. If you know anything about trucking, you know those are brands of heavy equipment. With twenty five or forty trailers, you had to know how to back them up, load them and make sure your loads were right. Then you took them out and learned to drive.

WC: How long were you at Chanute for?

AHS: Let's see. I had just about finished up. I'm trying to think how long I was there. About two months, three months. I was expecting to graduate with my class when I got the word that my grandmother, with whom I lived, with my mother and dad, had just died. [and they asked if I] Could I come home? I went in and the chaplain got a seven-day pass for me to go back to Saratoga. Which I did, of course. Then when I got through with that, I returned. But by then, the class I had been with graduated and were gone. So, I just sat around for several more weeks doing nothing because nobody knew what to do with me. I wasn't assigned to anybody. Finally, I got the word that I was being assigned down to Albuquerque, New Mexico. Down there, I was expected to be assigned to a squadron. It turned out, yes, that was the way it worked. I went down there and they were

just forming up the 43rd Squadron. They were just filling the ranks and they needed a heavy equipment crash crew. I had experience by then with the crash crew. That was what I was assigned to do there, the motor pool, heavy equipment operator, crash crew. That was how it was when we got the word that we were shipping out. When that came, we went east. We thought we were all going to go to the Pacific because____

WC: The whole unit went together?

AHS: The whole squadron, yeah. The repair unit part of the squadron went together, and then the administrative portion of it went together.

WC: Were they part of the 9th Air Force?

AHS: Yes. When we got there, we weren't part of anything when we started out. We were replacements. The 9th Air Force up to that point had been down in Africa. It was heavy bombardment, B-24s. As the African campaign wound down, this is all hindsight now, it was the Supreme Commander's decision that to invade France, they needed an Air Force to cover the invasion, very specifically. The 9th was brought up from Africa, converted from a heavy bombardment to an attack squadron. B-25s, 26s, and like that. Bombers.

WC: Before you left to go overseas, did you come home for a leave?

AHS: No, I never got home.

WC: Where did you leave from?

AHS: New York City.

WC: And did you go by convoy?

AHS: On the [RMS] Queen Mary. Do you remember the Queen Mary almost rolled over in September in a storm? It made the papers. It hung up within five degrees of capsizing. Guess who was on it?

WC: Oh, you were there, huh?

AHS: We didn't know it except everything fell apart. All of a sudden, you were looking at the sidewalls and you were going to sink. We didn't know until later on how close we had come.

WC: Whereabouts did you land?

AHS: Greenock, Scotland. When we landed up there, that was the first sign of any war physically we had seen. We had a couple alerts going over. They sounded off the alarms that subs were in the area. The Queen Mary, which is what we were on, went faster than

any of the subs could and they took evasive action all over. We all had to get on deck and put on our life preservers. Then we stood in rows about six or seven deep on deck until after the emergency was over. I'm surprised that nobody got hit. Nobody got hurt. That's the way it was. At Greenock, Scotland, when we got off, we caught the night train and headed south. On the night train headed south, we had the curtains up. All of a sudden, their ack-ack [anti-aircraft fire] was going off. It was a raid by the Germans. Bombers were coming in. Immediately the train slowed right down and all the curtains were pulled and nobody was allowed to peek out, which they all did, of course. That was the first real sense that there was a war.

WC: So you arrived safely at your destination?

AHS: Yeah. We arrived safely at [RAF] Grove Air Force Base. When I say Grove/Wantage, W-A-N-T-A-G-E, Grove was on this side of the street. If you walked down the other side of the street, you were walking in the village of Wantage, which was a little unique in that we don't do that over here. But over there, everything is compressed. In fact, I still have a very dear friend who lives over there in Grove today. We communicate back and forth.

WC: What happened at that point in Grove?

AHS: I was with the repair squadron. When an aircraft was down anywhere for whatever reason and they couldn't fly it out, then I took a crew depending on what type of aircraft it was and what kind of damage was involved. I took either a twenty-five foot trailer, an auto car or a Federal or a Reo, whatever the tractor happened to be. Or the forty-footer depending. It was the job of the people I took with me to disassemble the aircraft or pick up the parts or whatever it was. My job was to see that it was loaded properly and brought back to the base.

WC: This base was located in England?

AHS: This was in England, yeah. If you know where Oxford, England is roughly, then we were to the west of that about fifteen miles. Me and everybody used to go into Oxford a lot. We got into a bit of a tussle with the bobbies, unfortunately. Windsor was the estate of the King and Queen up there. I was bringing back a P-38 that had one engine shot out and had landed up on a British base. My crew finally got the aircraft. We loaded it. It was very wet and with little extra weight on it, the trailer sank into the ground. So, we had a heck of a time getting it out of there. Our jeep driver was supposed to find the best way back to our base. Well, it didn't work out that way. We couldn't get through. When you got up close to Windsor Castle, the road narrowed down to maybe twenty feet wide at the most. Even with the outboard sections taken off, the wings of the P-38 went out to around

twenty four feet. We couldn't get through. So, we had to cut across the King's estate. This caused almost a civil war. Because by the time we had gotten three quarters of the way across it, leaving tire tracks about a foot and a half deep across those beautiful lawns and the hedges and all that, the bobbies were coming down on us. You know what I mean, the bobbies?

WC: Yes.

AHS: They were all over us. There must have been seven of them or more. They put their bikes up against the front of our tractor and said, you can't go any further. We were three quarters of the way across. I tried to explain to them that if we turned around, we were going to make a bigger mess out of your King's estate than if we just get through the rest of it. Well, they couldn't understand that. So I finally just put it in gear and I drove right over their bikes. Then we had a bit of an altercation. Finally, we got through to the road on the other side. As you might guess, there was a lot of hell to pay over that. But when they got through listening to all of the sides of what happened, I didn't have any choice. I was driving the tractor-trailer. It was my job to get it home. That made for an interesting episode. We did more damage to Windsor Castle and the estate than the Germans ever did the whole war.

WC: All right. What happened next? Did you stay there? Obviously, you moved around quite a bit.

AHS: Yes. I got to travel over most of England just because of the nature of my work. We used to go up to Coventry. That was one of the worst trips because Coventry had been a munitions manufacturing town. The Germans had laid waste in their bombings. People were living in piles of rubble. But the Americans had been using it for coal heating. There were, I don't know how many tons, huge piles of coal in these barbed-wire enclosures. Our job then was to take a smaller truck, a six-by-six, drive in there and load it up. Then we drove back to our base down in Wantage. Here were these tremendous piles of coal and these people were standing there shivering, freezing to death, and they couldn't have it. They didn't have any fuel up there, like coal. Well, the kids figured out what they would do. When you pulled out, kids, maybe five to ten years old, suddenly ran out in front of your truck. They sat down into a prayer position and looked up at you. They just sat there and watched you come right at them. At the last second, they rolled off to the side. If you don't think that didn't break up a lot of hard-boiled guys. [They said] I ain't going back there no more. We had to go back, but it was one of the worst things that I experienced because you were looking at these little girls, little boys, and they're kneeling right there in front of you and you were going to drive right over them. And they [commanders] said, if they don't get out of the way, run over them. We'll

take care of it here. Well, that was a hell of an attitude, but those were our orders. You do not stop for anything. Run. Go. So, we ran. But, to my knowledge, nobody ever ran over any of the kids. They were there until that last split second and they rolled to the side. Little girls right along with the boys.

WC: What was the purpose of that? So you'd slam on the brakes and the coal would fall off the truck?

AHS: You got it. You understand. That was what would have happened. And then the older boys and girls ran around and picked up all those pieces of coal and threw them into their little bags, and went home and used that. But I saw more than one guy go on sick call because he said, I won't go back there and do that. He said, I can't live with myself if I hit one of those kids.

WC: Where did you go next?

AHS: Well, they asked for volunteers for special hazardous duty. At nineteen, I was more courageous than smart. I stepped forward and they said, okay, you are leaving in the morning to go to Mine and Booby Trap Neutralization School. You will be responsible for all the airfields once we cross the Channel. You will go in first and clear the area of the airfield of any enemy ordnance or booby traps where our squadron will be.

WC: This is prior to D-Day?

AHS: Prior to D-Day. You have papers here with the story of my going there. I don't know where...I don't have it in front of me. Maybe you got it there. Anyway, that's what we did. The story of my being there and taking the course.

WC: June 1944?

AHS: Yeah, you were going to make a copy of that. That's my only copy, so I would need it back.

WC: I gave you a couple copies.

AHS: You're right. Yeah. Okay. Yeah, that was April 16th. It was the mine and booby trap. That's this one here. The British were trying to teach us in two days how to neutralize Czechoslovakian, Austrian, German, British, American, Italian mines and booby traps. I have here in my pocket right now my original notes that I made at that time. I've carried these for years. Everybody has a lucky coin they carry around. I have this. I've carried that for years in my pocket. [shows his notebook from mine school]

WC: That's your diary?

AHS: That's how to neutralize and how to find booby traps before they find you.

WC: Okay, all your notes, huh?

AHS: Yeah, well, there are a lot of pages of them. [shows his notes in the notebook] So that made me a specialist. And then later on, I was asked if I would do the Waterproofing school, which I agreed to. That was in June. I think you have something on that too.

WC: What was that school like?

AHS: That was of interest.

WC: That was to ready the vehicles to____

AHS: For wet landings. Fortunately, we didn't have to do it on an actual landing on Omaha Beach. The school itself had these great big long trenches and they were full of water. There were two of them. They said, you're going to go to school and learn how to waterproof the equipment. If we have to make a wet landing, You can waterproof the equipment before we have to disembark. So that was fine. The cleaning up was rather horrendous. When we got there, they showed us what we had to do. I had a Jeep to drive. When you drove into the water, after you had waterproofed the Jeep to do so, that was your graduation from that vehicle. You drove into this long trench and then you drove up the other side. You stood up in the Jeep, reached your hand way down to hold the wheel and had your one foot locking the pedal accelerator and the water was up to here. [gestures to his chin] You tried to hold your head up, looked to the side, drove and steered the Jeep with one hand way down here. Very interesting experiment. Then the next day, I drove a truck. That wasn't half bad. The water was up to my knees sitting up in the truck. The idea being that if we had to disembark from the LSTs and they couldn't get into shore all the way, you had to disembark and go for it no matter what happened. If you took a few losses in the process, don't worry about it. We made them up later. Unless you were one of the losses, of course. So, anyway, when we got to doing the actual disembarking, our worst part of going across was that there was another ship in the middle. I stood on deck. I wouldn't go below because they were still talking about the Germans having air raids on the shipping at night. They also had some submarines supposedly in the area. I don't know if it was true or not, but that was what we were told. Everybody was going below decks, not me. I stayed up on deck. If we got hit, I didn't want to have to worry about climbing a ladder to get back out with twenty guys hanging on my back trying to do the same thing. But we didn't lose anybody going through. There was one truck, it was a six-by-six with all of her cargo laying on its side off to the right of the floating docks, about eight by twelve feet, something like that. They were hooked together, but you stayed exactly in the center when you were driving. If you got over to

one side, you did this. [gestures listing to one side] You were putting hard rubber tires on hard, slippery, wet metal. Sliding was the easiest thing in the world. That worked out, we didn't lose anybody going ashore. Then we went in. Some of these things that I have left here with you tells the story of how that worked and where we were and all the rest of it. We went through Saint-Lo after we disembarked.

WC: Were you under fire at that point?

AHS: No. No, the front had moved up further.

WC: Was this D-Day or D-Day plus 1 or 2?

AHS: D plus 30.

WC: Oh, D plus 30.

AHS: Yeah. Our job was to take care of the fighters and the medium bombers as soon as we established an operational base. As that front line moved, you wanted to keep fueling and repairs or whatever of the 9th Air Force. Because they were the sustaining Air Force and kept the front, shall we say, moving forward, from the air. That was our prime thing. I was the crash crew. When we got ready to move to a new base, I took four guys with me. I was sent to go in. We had a map of where we were going to go and where the airbase was and what part of the airbase we had been allotted for our squadron. My job was to go in first and clear the area of any mines and booby traps, which I did. never sat down and made an exact count, but it had to be close to one hundred over the period of time that I had to neutralize in one form or another.

WC: What rank were you?

AHS: That was an embarrassing situation. They gave me corporal stripes when I got out. It was an unfortunate situation that occurred in Paris. I was on leave in a little café enjoying a drink by myself. I got jostled, and spilled most of my drink. I told the guy, watch where the hell you were going. He said, you don't like it? Keep out of my way. I couldn't let him get away with that, so I threw the rest of my drink in his face and I hit him as hard as I could. He went down, shook his head, and got back up. I knew I was in big trouble. I gave him my best shot and all I did was make him mad. I grabbed the chair and I let him have the chair. He ducked. The MP came through the door and I hit the MP in the head with the chair. He did not appreciate that. There was no humor in these people. I was close to being court-martialed, of course, for assaulting them. I had a clean record and I wasn't a troublemaker. I didn't have any previous time. Plus the fact that they didn't have anybody else to go in to clear the mines and booby traps. So, finally, I got turned loose, but I went back to being a private for the most of the rest of the war. Then I

got to be a PFC. I was doing everything I did before, but it was a very unfortunate situation. It's nothing that I intended to have happen at all. [laughs] What do I say? It's all history. They gave me a corporal rank when I got back up.

WC: So, you were clearing mines and driving a truck and picking up aircraft?

AHS: Picking up aircraft. We were picking up aircraft when The Bulge broke out. First of all, we were moving from Melun up to Laon. Laon-Couvron is the actual airbase. Not the foot of it, but the hill is like a sore thumb sticking up out of the plain. On top of it was the village of Laon, L-A-O-N. I was up there with the crew. We had a Jeep and a six-by-six. I was doing the cleaning up. As I did so, the rest of the guys were tidying things up after that. I had to clear an area and be sure that was all neutralized. If there was any question about it, it was left for me to move it. I could neutralize most of these things. The worst thing that the Germans had, for us anyway, were the Butterfly Bombs. That was always a gamble. You could hardly ever make a proper assessment. What they looked like...it is a big bomb that opens up at the top. When they dropped it, it opened up, then all of the outside leaves turned into shoots and it rotated. A Butterfly Bomb was about the size of a large can of tomato juice. The shoots were full of these little bombs, bomblets if you want to call them that. The device to detonate them looked like sixty clicks on a wheel. When it opened up, the chute opened up, and all these little bomblets came flying out. When that happened, the cover opened up like this. [gestures back of hands together, fingers pointing down] It rotated and spun as it came down. If it hit sixty clicks and hit the ground, it detonated. If it hit the ground at fifty clicks, it didn't detonate. But if you went [blows a puff of air] pfft on it, it detonated. See what I'm saying? The only way you could get any intelligent feel for how these bombs worked was to lay down and look underneath them. If the open shell was down and you looked underneath it and saw daylight, then you were probably not more than fifty five clicks. You took it and went [gestures grabbing quickly and slamming shut] and that locked it. You had to do it just as fast as you could for obvious reasons. If it was close to fifty-eight, fifty-nine, or sixty, it went off. There wasn't much you could do except to get off, lay down behind it, and fire a couple of rounds into it, which either jammed the mechanism or detonated it. They left a lot of those around, a lot of those. They were the toughest ones that I ever had to deal with because there were no guarantees. There was no set pattern. Each one was different depending on the altitude it had been dropped from. The airfield was littered with them. I felt bad because if I had been able to work faster and clear more, I would have saved two guys. They came in from the 8th Air Force and landed down below from where I was working. It wasn't until the next day, I was still working up there and I heard a tremendous explosion and screaming and yelling. I ran down to where they were. One guy lost his left leg from halfway up between his knee and his ankle. His right leg, I don't

think he saved that either. It was just shattered. This other guy was over there and had some shrapnel in both arms. They didn't know. They were two gunners on an 8th Air Force plane. I was talking to the lieutenant who was in charge of it. They had been instructed to land somewhere in France behind the lines because [they were told] all the airfields were safe back behind the lines. That wasn't true at all.

WC: Yeah.

AHS: They couldn't get back because their airfield was socked in. They just planned to land, sleep, spend the night in the plane and fly back home in the morning. They got out and here was one of these mines. Anyway, they were playing pitch and catch, back and forth [with the mine]

WC: They had no idea what it was?

AHS: They had no idea that it was a mine. They had no idea whatsoever. It was just something. A chunk of something German. Here, catch it. I don't know what it is. Of course, one of them dropped it. They dropped it and that touched it off. Blew his leg off. I imagine he lost both legs. There were some interesting times there. Then we got strafed really bad one time. They had a Focke-Wulf Fw 190. You could always tell that by the sound of the engine. You didn't even need to see the plane. You knew it was a Focke-Wulf Fw 190. They had a radial engine that had a very, very unique sound to it. The first time they came over at night, we of course all got up and went to the edge of our shelters. All he did was circle the air field. In the meantime, across on the other side of the airfield, there was a medical unit that had moved in over there. I don't know who was doing their work for them. Anyway, it was another night or two later when he [Focke] came back. He had already circled a few times and done nothing. Then all of a sudden, he started strafing. He was strafing the unit on the other side of the airfield. Oh, my goodness. This was incredible, absolutely incredible. There were two rows of six-man tents. In the center between them, they had put up, out of wood crates, a wooden walkway and walkways coming off each tent. When he strafed, he went between those two tents. There were nothing but pieces of kindling all the way down between the tents. He never touched a tent, never touched a man. Absolutely incredible. This was at night. This was at night. If I hadn't seen it, I'd be tempted to say, no, I don't think so. It really, really happened. That was when he came around and almost got us because we ran outside when we heard the strafing. We were out almost to where we would normally go to get into another area of shelter. When he came back, he was strafing our side. We were climbing up each other's faces trying to get back into our building because he was strafing across the [unclear] 44.19 right in front of us. That was an interesting night. After that, if we heard anything, we quickly got our clothes on instead of being lackadaisical about it.

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

AHS: Not really. I can't really tell you a good answer on that.

WC: Were you in Germany when the war ended?

AHS: Yeah. Yeah. It was...names slipping.

WC: Was it Achen?

AHS: No. It'll come to me in a minute. It was a long name. It was near Kassel, K-A-S-S-E-L. There was a small town just south and west of it. That was where we ended up, in the small town. But Kassel would be the one you would look for to see on the map. What we found was particularly of interest was that where we were staying was adjacent to a German airfield. It was a German experimental airfield. We got a chance firsthand to examine glider bombs, new types of powered engines. They just left them there when they retreated. We got the chance to see some of the new... the [Me]262, which was a jet. Their equipment was so far ahead of us.

WC: Do you recall the name of the town or the airfield?

AHS: It's Kaufungen, K-A-U-F-E-N-G-E-N or G-E-A-N. If you look at a map that has Kassel on it, here's Kassel coming towards me. You look at it right here. It's a little long name like that. It's Kauf something. I don't speak German. We ended the war right there. Then, of course, we were able to get out. Nobody forgives me for this. The war was over. We were waiting to go home. All of a sudden, P-47s came in and landed at this field. They were letting them roll and roll and roll. Brand new, all silver. They didn't have any markings on them yet. We got them all there. We got orders. I personally, with my crew, destroyed one hundred brand new P-47s that never had more than twenty hours on the tac [tachometer]. That was my job.

WC: To destroy them?

AHS: To destroy them. What were you going to do with them? Ship them back home? We already knew that there were jets coming along that made the P-47 obsolete. You were going to ship all of those aircraft? You were going to have to disassemble them?

WC: How did you destroy them?

AHS: I took a crew. There were about six of us altogether. My job was to get down and pull up in front of the airplane. They were in very neat rows. The instrument boys got in and took all the instruments out. Then I hooked onto the front of the aircraft, the nose,

and they took off the prop. Then I raised it up and they brought up the wheels. Then I set it back down. Then the boys with axes chopped holes in the wings. After we had rows and rows and rows of this, then the bulldozers came in. [gestures crushing]

WC: So you kept the propellers and the instruments?

AHS: We took the propellers. A P-47 had a big prop. If you tried to lower that down, you couldn't drop it. It would sit like this. [gestures sitting nose up at an angle] They wanted them flat on the ground so the guys could take the axes and chop holes in the wings. After that, they bunched them all up together. I don't know what they did with all the engines. I didn't have to worry about that. It's been a standing joke with the guys who knew me. Hey, you're an ace many times over. Yeah. Trouble is, I destroyed all our P-47s and they weren't German. I found that out later. [unclear] 49.35

WC: How did the German people treat you when you were in Germany?

AHS: Very nice. We did not run into a lot of the younger troops. They were all either dead or prisoners. The older people, my age category or whatever, food....when we were in France and these other places, the people stood outside the American lines with buckets. If you had something left over in your mess kit, you hit the slop bucket and put whatever slop you had in. If it was mashed potatoes and gravy mixed up with beans and meat, you just slopped it in. Man, they loved it. They just gobbled it right down. The Germans were doing exactly the same thing because they had nothing left. They had nothing left.

I had an interesting thing there. Just outside of Kassel was a large POW, prisoner of war. The Americans were putting the German soldiers in there. The war was over. They [the Germans] were coming in. [Saying] comrade, comrade. They had barracks. They had food. They had a warm place to stay. They were living better than when they were fighting the war, and all at American expense. They had rows of them. The gates had double-width barbed wire gates on them. They were open twenty four hours a day with two MPs who checked the Germans in and out. They came and went as they wanted. They were supposed to go back in there at night. They were happy. They were getting fed. They had a warm place to stay. Man, they never had it so good. it. While I was there, these guys came in and some of them were still carrying the guns and laid them down. I saw a nice German automatic .32 caliber. Emblazoned into the muzzle of it was a big swastika. I liked that, so I took that. I brought it home. I've had it for all these years. Earlier this year, my oldest son now has it. Then there was another instance where this guy was an older man. There was no question he was not young by any means. He was in full uniform. He had a German Cross hanging here. [gestures his left shoulder] The

German Cross was one of the highest awards for valor. He was an old man. I walked up to him and I ripped it off his uniform. He went bananas. He came right at me. The Germans guys grabbed him and held him back. I don't know what he said. I'm sure he wasn't saying thank you. He was just wild. They dragged him down the line. I had to do it. My kids have that cross today. When I looked at it, it's a cross from World War I. There were three levels of the cross for heroes, magnificent heroism and so on. He fought in World War I according to this. It was like a Congressional Medal of Honor winner in ours. I ripped it off his uniform and took it away from him. I destroyed his World War I medal. He was so proud of that. He didn't care about anything after that. Then I understood it, the reaction. My kids have all these things now. I'm turning these things over as I go along.

WC: Did you encounter the Russians at all?

AHS: No. I was hoping to get to Berlin, but I never did. I never got to Berlin. I got to a good many places in Germany. Of course, I got up all over the northern part of France. I got up and went through Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, and Germany.

WC: How long did you stay in Germany before you were sent back home?

AHS: Oh, probably two months, six weeks. It was all on points, of course, as you would know. We had that. That worked very well. I couldn't complain about that.

WC: How did you get back home?

AHS: When it became my turn, of course, I was young. They took the older men first, which was fine, I didn't have a problem with that. I pulled guard duty because down at the foot of the hill where Kassel is, it's on a mountain. I guarded the forty-and-eight [boxcars]. You know what a forty-and-eight is?

WC: Yep.

AHS: A boxcar. This was how we traveled, in the forty-and-eights. So, we were taken down there and loaded on. The train literally crawled across Germany and back into France and to Cherbourg. When we got ready to board the ship, we were all lined up. People will probably shoot me for this, but we did not have a very good relationship with the Red Cross. I still don't today.

WC: What happened?

AHS: Well, you were a lowly enlisted man. If you were caught trying to smile or anything like that to one of the Red Cross, you got disciplined. They were strictly offered, as we called it, officers' meat. I can vouch for that personally because I took more than

one lieutenant and his Red Cross girl into London or into Paris and picked them up in the morning at hotels. But for me to be able to have anything to do with them, no, I could be court-martialed. Then the other thing was, we were being told that back home, everybody was donating to the Red Cross for coffee, for donuts, and all that. Bull. They had tin cups at the beginning and at the end. Rattling the cups for donations from the troops. Money.

WC: For the coffee and donuts?

AHS: For coffee and donuts. They wouldn't refuse to, but they would suggest to you. When we got ready, I'll tell you how bad it was. I had no use for them over there. I could tell you a lot more about it, but I don't think it's really necessary or appropriate. I took the officer and his Red Cross girl into Paris or wherever they were going and then picked them up the next day. That was part of the game. When we got off the ship...I'll go back one more step. When we got ready to board the ship at Cherbourg, the officer stood out in front of the column and said that we would not be allowed to take any foreign money back with us. If you were caught, you could be delayed and held for that. You wouldn't get to ship out with your buddies. You would stay there for a little longer because you disobeyed orders. Well, nobody wanted to do that, so they were pretty good about emptying their pockets. So, they emptied their pockets out in front. There were three Red Cross girls there. Then as they were just finishing emptying it, they said, all of the money that you are now donating is going to go to the Red Cross. Everything went quiet and nobody moved again. They said, if there's more, we're going to donate it. What are you going to do? Dead silence. Nobody moved. All of a sudden, this one guy at the far end from where I was, walked down through, took some matches, lit it and put it into the pile of money that was out there. One by one, everybody else came out, took their money, and put it into the fire. The girls were standing there, tears running down their faces. We burned our money before we would give it to the Red Cross. That was how we felt we were being treated by them. Knowing some of the inside things that went on. That didn't make your papers here, I'm sure. But no, that's it. I'll put my hand on the Bible and tell you that.

WC: Well, I've heard similar stories.

AHS: You've heard the same? Well, then you know I'm not telling you something you've never heard before. When we got back, we came over on the [HMS] Westminster, which was a tired old ship. When they told us we were docking, we all were to be clean-shaven and all, which we were, ready to go. A day and a half later we got there. So nobody was in a good mood. Pouring rain. When we came off the ship, there was the Red Cross with two tin cups here and a tin cup down here. Rattling the tin cups, handing out coffee. [They said] Taking any donations, any donations. Guys just looked at them and walked

away. They wouldn't take the coffee. Or some of them took the coffee, poured it on the ground, dropped the cup and walked away.

WC: All right, I'm going to stop you here because I have to switch tapes. Okay, you mentioned coming back on ship. And you've got a photo of what the accommodations were like.

AHS: Yep.

WC: Looks like they were pretty tight.

AHS: Exactly right. When you were rolling in an old tub like the Westminster, you bounced all over the ocean. Of course, we went through our storms, as always. The guys on the top bunk got sick, up chucked and it trickled down over the guys in the lower bunks and then they got sick. Pretty soon you couldn't walk on the floor because there was so much vomit and everything. You were sliding around in it and falling down. It was one hell of a mess.

WC: All right. Whereabouts were you discharged from? Was it Fort Dix?

AHS: Yeah, down here outside New York City.

WC: Fort Dix, New Jersey, or Camp Dix at the time. Was it Camp Dix where they discharged you?

AHS: Yeah, and I went in from there into New York City because my older cousin was working with Eastern Airlines. He was the guy who was the navigator here. Then we were discharged from there. He took some time off and drove me back up to Saratoga. His wife was there too. They're all gone now. I'm the last of the senior group. This is one reason I wanted to get some of this done and recorded because I don't know how much they did. I don't think it was very much.

WC: Did you make use of the GI Bill?

AHS: Yeah, I made it. I went back to Cornell and talked with the guy. He said to me, you were here? I said, yeah. He said, okay, you finished your freshman year? I said, well, yeah, except that my call to active duty coincided with my finals, so I said I wouldn't take the finals. He said, you didn't take your finals? Then you'll have to take the year over. I said, I was passing and everything else. I couldn't say no to the government. They weren't going to listen to me there. He said, well, I'm sorry. That's the way it is. You'll have to take your freshman year over. I'm afraid I used some language I won't put on tape. I told him what he could do with it. I got up and walked out. Never looked back. I've got some good friends there. I belong to a Sigma Phi fraternity. It's a great fraternity. The one I

belonged to that first year before I went to war. I support that, but I still have a little bitter taste in my mouth. When I got back from there, I went to Albany Business College and concentrated on business law and accounting and finance and so on.

WC: Is that the type of work you did?

AHS: Yeah. I've been an officer and a member of the board of directors of several corporations. Now retired. My house is still up for sale down in Elmira, New York, if you would like to buy it. I'll make the financial arrangements.

WC: Did you join any veterans organizations?

AHS: Well, I have. I'm a member of the VFW. Time and circumstance...I'm a member, but I was never a good member. I never acted. I had a number of other things I was involved with. That's just the way it was.

WC: Did you stay in touch with any of the people you were in service with?

AHS: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I did until I ran out of people. You see, I was the second youngest guy in my squadron. My birthday was in July and Johnny Beeks' [?] birthday was in September of the same year. We were the two youngest in our squadron. He was younger than I. Johnny is in bad shape now, bad shape.

WC: Have you attended any reunions?

AHS: No. I was never great on reunions. They had a couple of them. One of the things was, that during my work with the squadron, I only got to really know maybe five or six guys because I was gone. I was on the road traveling. I was out picking up aircraft. I was out on some special run. What I was doing for a living with the outfit. It wasn't like I was on the base working with all the guys on the base day in and day out. I was on the base for maybe half a day or a day or something, and then I was off. I was all over Europe. Near the end, I could take you almost anywhere in northern France and Belgium, up into Holland without a map because I'd been all over the place. Same with England. I drove all over. Some of them drove officers in a Jeep. Some of them were with a crash truck picking up another aircraft. You've seen the picture of Eisenhower shaking hands with the paratroopers?

WC: Yes.

AHS: Okay, I was right there twenty four hours before that. That was where I was. I was there working on detached service, readying the [Waco] CG-4A [Hadrian] gliders that were part of the assault. I assembled those using their crash truck and the crane and moved all the heavy equipment around. I suddenly got almost in the middle of one of

those things. They came out and said, Sahlberg? Get your gear and go home. Get back to your squadron. I said, well, I got this thing. We had a conversation. I just stopped what I was doing and went home, went back and picked up my stuff, drove back up, and woke up the next morning. [Someone said] Hey, did you know the invasion was on. [laughs] That was how close I came to D-Day.

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

AHS: Well, certainly I went from a know it all, what do you think you know, attitude as a seventeen, eighteen year-old male. You were never that young, I'm sure, yourself. But I learned an awful lot. I learned when you don't talk back and when you keep your mouth shut when you'd like to do something more about it. And not to throw drinks into people's faces in a closed bar, which didn't turn out too well. I gave you that story. But it cost me, it cost me dearly. Because of the promotions that I would have received, I never got because of that incident.

WC: Let's take a look at some of the memorabilia you brought. I'm going to stop this for just a second.

AHS: Okay. On April 16th, 1944. I went to the mine booby trap school, the [unclear]

1.09.56

WC: Right.

AHS: It was a beautiful estate, but outside the windows was this big field. They had messed up and plowed the grass out there. They set up tables similar to what I'm looking at here. They had all of these mines and booby traps. There were Italian, German, and French. I think they didn't have any Japanese, but that was the only thing they didn't have. Our job was to learn how to neutralize these because we were going to be the ones who were asked to go in first to be sure that they had been cleaned up. They did a good job. We had a chance to do all of our questions and one thing or another. They finally got to the end of it after the end of the second day. They said, well, anybody got any more questions? Nobody said anything. He said, good. Well then, I guess that takes care of the classes. Everybody started getting their stuff. He said, oh, of course you have graduation. You see that big field out there? There are live mines and booby traps in it. You'll each be assigned a row to go down. Your job is to find it and neutralize it. Dead silence. Somebody said, are they live? He said, the main charge has been removed. The detonator is in there. It won't kill you, but you'll lose your hand. [Someone asked] Now? [He said] Right now. [He said] The first five, you each pick a row and start the mind detector probing. I was glad that I had my little pad that you just saw. I had my notes. When it came to my turn, I did my probing and all that, I found the mine, and I got it cleaned off

enough to see that it had one booby trap attached off to the side. The rest of it was all snug and nice.[?] 1.12.08 Because of my little book, I knew exactly where to go and [how to] neutralize it. One guy tracking out lost most of the fingers on his left hand because when he did it, it was booby-trapped. He thought he had cleaned it up, but he didn't. The charge went off and blew that much of his hand off. [gestures part of hand and fingers] One of the Brits said, well, it's not all bad, he gets to go home now. [I said] Yeah, well, I guess I'll stick around a while. I don't think I'm ready to go home in that bad shape yet.

WC: Without your fingers, right? Yeah.

AHS: Yeah, so that was a story on the mines. Is there anything else?

WC: The books you've got, do you want to briefly explain? The first book there, it's got the German flag on the cover and I see we've got the you brought the flag in with you, and we have that spread out on the table. [camera pans to show large Nazi flag and helmets]

AHS: That's right.

WC: With some helmets. Do you want to explain the flag to us, where that came from?

AHS: Yes. At your leisure, I'll go through the explanation of it. Just a little pamphlet that I have right here with that on there.

WC: Hold on. Just a second. Let me see. Go ahead and continue.

AHS: [shows his pamphlet, explains about the story in the pamphlet] This pamphlet here that I made up. The flag and some kids that wanted to see it, and that's how I got that done. Inside of it, I put it in here, I want that flag. Now, I start out on September 15th, 1944 about our leaving England. The first part of the story is our trip over the Channel and all of that good stuff. [thumbs through pamphlet] We headed for Chartres. In doing so, the weather changed dramatically. We had one heck of a storm. Rain, thunder, lightning, wind. As we got into Chartres, France, the orders came down to seek shelter and form up in the morning. So that was what I did. I got out and there was a beautiful château. Big, broad verandas around it, big picture windows, double doors with stained glass. How it ever escaped the war, I don't know because there was an awful lot. Anyway, I went in and it was full of GIs getting out of the rain. It was crowded except, as I walked down the hall, there was one great big room. It was probably twice the size of this room right here and it was totally empty. There was tape [gestures a zig zag] down the doors. It had a big sign that said, "mine and booby trapped, stay out". Well, nobody was bothering to go in. I thought, geez, pretty good. I stood there and I looked in. Here was this fireplace ...as I came in the door here, it was right against that wall there.

[gestures ninety degrees left] Here was a great big beautiful flag over the fireplace. I just got through going to school and learned how to neutralize mines and booby traps. I'll give it a try. You're talking about a nineteen, twenty year-old. Hey, you know. Today, I'm going the other way. [away from danger] I went in and as soon as I climbed through all that network of tapings, everybody yelled at me, called me all kinds of SOBs. Get out of there? Get away from there! What's the matter? Are you crazy? There are mines. I said, yeah. I'm a specialist. I'm here to clean it up. Everybody disappeared. There wasn't anybody standing around that room even. I had that room to myself. [refers to pamphlet] This is the story of the step-by-step process that I did when I got into that room by myself. It was one step at a time, from the time my feet walked to the next board, to the windows, to the fireplace. The fireplace was the tricky part. I did it all and I couldn't find it [mine or booby trap]. I just spent the night in a beautiful room all by myself. These other guys were all crammed in together out there. Again, on a step-by-step basis, how I took that flag down off of the fireplace. It wasn't until after the war that I knew where I had got this from. If you go back and you get on the internet, you find out that the Lehr Panzer Division had been on the Russian front and they had not been treated kindly. Hitler was bringing them back. Lehr in German means instructor, teacher. These were the crème de crème of Hitler's tanks. They were the instructors. There was one small detachment of them down near Omaha Beach on D-Day. He wanted them back because he was now expecting, obviously, that the Americans and French or the English were coming. There, it talked about the Lehr Panzer Division in Chartres.

WC: So that's where you were?

AHS: That confirmed it. I didn't know it when I took this. I knew it was something big because this is the type of thing that you find out in the backwoods. Anyway, that's my basis for saying that this came out of the headquarters of the Chartres.

WC: Do you want to show us the other books you've got?

AHS: Yeah.

WC: That one there in your hand.

AHS: This one? Okay. This one here is my cousin. He's six months older than I was. He stayed at Cornell, he only had two years to go. So he graduated and went into the Navy. He studied to be a pilot, the Whistling Death. It was a Corsair. That was the plane he learned to fly.

WC: What was his name?

AHS: [shows photograph] Robert Adelbert Knapp, K-N-A-P-P. He was the younger brother of Lohnas Hayden Knapp, which we will look at in just a minute. He was home on leave, before shipping out as the war wound down. While he was home on leave was when they dropped the bombs on Hiroshima and the Japanese surrendered. His job when he came back from leave, or would have been...he would have shipped out. He would have been part of the invasion of Japan. He died this year, a couple months ago. I don't think I got a picture of...yes, I do. Louis Hayden Knapp.

WC: He was the older brother?

AHS: [shows photograph] He was the older brother of Bob. He had already graduated from Cornell. He was a squadron navigator before he got through. He got the Purple Heart. And he got some awards because he got wounded. Here's a story of how he was wounded. [thumps through scrapbook]

WC: And when did he pass away?

AHS: Lohn passed away about five years ago.

WC: And he was a native Saratogian?

AHS: Yeah. He went through grade school and high school just like the rest of us. He was just the older one of the two. Here is, well, there's a picture of him. [shows newspaper article]

WC: Okay, and that's his wife?

AHS: That is his wife. They got married. This is the picture taken at the time that he was getting married.

WC: Okay. All right, got it.

AHS: They're both dead now. Bob's gone. He just died this year. [shows newspaper article] He made the headlines here in Saratoga. See this headline across the top? His story of his life in the war. Who the people were, the friends that were killed, missions he was on. These are actual listings taken from the war military records. [shows copies of military records] This one has the Air Medals, the DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross]. [points to his name listed] Here's Knapp listed under the Purple Heart. Here's Knapp listed again under the DFC. He's over here under the Air Medal. He also got an oak leaf cluster and a second cluster. These are all actual records. The real actual records. Obviously copies of them now. But these were not made up after the war as to what happened. These are real McCoy. That's why they're so valuable as far as I'm concerned.

WC: That booklet there.

AHS: This is on the remembrances. What I did, of course, was not copacetic as far as the military was concerned. I kept a record of what I did, when I did it, by date. This book is made up of my life in service from the time I entered it, to the time I went overseas, to the time I came home. Right to the end. [shows photograph] There's a picture of Omaha Beach. This was taken either the second or third day after D-Day. The large markings in there are knocked out American tanks and heavy equipment. The little tiny marks that you see all over the place are dead GIs killed trying to cross that beach. So, it's very special to me. I'm sure there are some others that feel the same way. [thumps through his book]

WC: Oh, let's see that shot of you. Do you want to hold that up?

AHS: [shows his portrait] Yeah. This was taken...My outfit had just crossed Omaha Beach. We were being held up for some reason. I don't know what. It was a little village there. It was Saint-Quentin, France. Saint, S-A-I-N-T-Q-U-E-N-T-I-N, Saint-Quentin, France. There was a young girl standing there. She spoke a little English. This is the receipt over here. [shows the receipt for the photograph]

WC: Okay. And that's, that's for the photograph?

AHS: This is the receipt. Here's the back of the receipt which shows how much I paid.

WC: Oh, okay. All right, got it.

AHS: This was the front of the receipt. My outfit was stalled there and we were just standing around. This young girl came over and said something to the effect of, would you like your picture taken? She said it in fairly good English. She had a little studio. That's what you're seeing on the receipt.

WC: Oh, I see. She developed the film?

AHS: She took the picture. All of them were standing there talking. I paid her. That's the receipt. She said it would be ready in a couple of days. I said, I may not be here. She said, I will keep it for you until you come back. Well, it was probably four or five weeks before I was in that neighborhood again. I went back and sure enough, she remembered me. When I walked in, she said, I have your picture.

WC: Wow.

AHS: That's the picture that you just took of me. That's what I looked like when I went into France.

WC: Well, I don't think you've changed that much. You might be a little bit older.

AHS: Yeah, a little bit here, a little bit there. I'm leaving these things with you. These are yours.

WC: Okay. We appreciate it.

AHS: Put it in your files and whatever you do with these things.

WC: All right. Well, thank you so much for your interview.

AHS: I thank you for giving me an opportunity to at least put a few things down for history.

WC: It's our pleasure, believe me.