

**Henry Hochlowski (HH)
Narrator**

**Wayne Clarke (I)
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on August 21, 2018
Saratoga Springs, NY**

I: Today is the 21st of August, 2018. We are at the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs. My name is Wayne Clarke. Sir, for the record, would you please state your full name and date and place of birth, please.

HH: Henry Hochlowski. Born on September 3, 1925. I presently reside at 30 Downey Ave., Wappingers Falls, NY.

I: Okay, whereabouts were you born?

HH: I was born in Poughkeepsie, NY. 42 Laurel St.

I: Did you attend school in Poughkeepsie?

HH: I attended St. Joseph's Catholic School for grade school and then Poughkeepsie High School for three plus years. Then I went in the service.

I: Now you mentioned that you were drafted when you were in high school?

HH: When I was in high school. That's correct.

I: I'm assuming that they drafted you into the army?

HH: Yes. They drafted me and then I went to Camp Upton which is on Long Island.

I: And from Upton, where did they send you for basic training?

HH: They sent me down with the 65th Division down in Camp Shelby in Hattiesburg, MS.

I: Now was that basically your first time away from home?

HH: Pretty much except other than real short trips around the Poughkeepsie area.

I: All right. And how long was your basic training?

HH: I think it was, if I remember correctly, thirteen weeks, thirteen to sixteen weeks.

I: And you had advanced infantry training there also?

HH: That is correct.

I: Was there anybody there from Poughkeepsie that you knew at the time?

HH: No. There was nobody there, even anywhere. Most of the people there were from the South.

I: Okay. Now once you graduated from basic training, where did you go next?

HH: After basic training, I joined the 26th Division in – they were at Fort Jackson, SC at the time. We were preparing to go overseas.

I: How long were you there before you went overseas?

HH: I am trying to remember the exact day we went overseas. We went overseas like, I'm trying to think of the exact date.

I: Well, that's all right if you can't remember.

HH: I don't remember the exact date.

I: That's all right. Did you go over with the whole division?

HH: Yes, the whole division went over on the Argentina. It was a passenger ship. The Argentina pretty much held our regiment, which was the 104th, and some additional troops.

I: Did you convoy over?

HH: Yes, we were in the middle of a convoy. In fact, the Argentina was the flagship of the convoy.

I: Did you run into any action – subs or anything like that?

HH: I don't know. I know they had fired a five-inch gun that was on the ship at another nearby. I don't know if that was just to exercise and make sure that they were ready to fire or not. But I never did find out whether there was any sort of a submarine around or anything. It was quite stormy. In fact, what they used to do was give you a card that you had to be in line for your breakfast, lunch and dinner at a certain time. If you didn't follow those orders, you had to go way to the back of the line when you got there. We were only two days at sea where they told us to disregard all cards because there were so many people seasick.

I: I was going to ask you that – if you got seasick.

HH: Oh yes. We used to watch from the Argentina back little grace liners that would actually disappear and reappear and disappear and reappear. And the Sarge in there said, "Hey you better stop looking at that or you will get sick." So, I just discontinued to watch those little grace liners go up and down. I was lucky. I didn't get sick, but the cabin, oh man. I spent all the time mostly up on deck. I couldn't stand it. Guys were throwing up all over the place. It was a mess down there.

I: How long was the trip?

HH: Eleven days.

I: Whereabouts did you land?

HH: We landed outside of Utah Beach. This was of course, after D-Day, Utah being one of the beaches they landed on, on D-Day. We disembarked on a landing ship; took the rope riders down the side of the ship and went in. There was no fighting at the Utah Beach around, but there were several roped off areas where there were still some minefields that weren't cleared and unfortunately a couple of people didn't heed that warning went in there. They not only got killed, but some others going to their

assistance got killed. Stupidity. There was a big sign there, "Minefield not cleared." So, we lost people before we were really in combat.

I: So, you moved inland from there?

HH: A very short distance. [unclear] a lot of pictures. We were just outside of there. We bivouacked there for a while and we were in reserve at the Brest Peninsula for a while. There was a fight at the Brest Peninsula. We didn't get engaged immediately. Several days later we started getting engaged and they trucked us some distance but transportation was pretty difficult, getting ammunition up to the troops. They were farther ahead and we walked a good long distance. Then we rode to a point – I don't know what town it was or what, but it was at a point where you could hear the gunfire – and then we got out of the trucks and started walking towards that area.

I: Now you mentioned they made you a BAR man. Was that right from the get-go or was it after a while?

HH: Well, you went through all the firing, you fired the M-1, you fired the carbine, you fired the pistol and I guess I scored well with the BAR, so they slung it on my shoulder and I was big enough to carry it, I guess. Some combination. The funny part about it was the pistol, though. I went [unclear] the pistol's almost sixty feet. "You mean that's the target?" He said, "You want me to give you a little instruction?" I said, "No, that damn thing's right there." So, I took the pistol, bang, bang, bang, bang. I went and looked at the target. Not a single one hit. Then the Sargent said, "Now you want to learn?" And I said, "Yes, I guess I'd better." Smartass. [Laughs]

I: Now were you issued a pistol along with the BAR or just the BAR?

HH: No, a knife.

I: Oh, a knife. Was it a bayonet or some kind of fighting knife?

HH: No. It was a knife. It had what looked like a leather handle. Maybe it was 8-10 inches long. And it had a scabbard.

I: When was the first time you personally were under fire?

HH: Probably, I can't remember the exact date. It was actually the first night that we stayed. We got fired upon – artillery shells. The first night we replaced part of the 104th armored division. Even the armored division had really some infantry type task people and we went right into their foxhole and evidently the Germans had heard the activity. It was night but they heard the activity and then it wasn't very long after that when some shells started firing. Ineffective, luckily, but they fired the shells.

I: Do you want to tell us about some of the close calls you had?

HH: Well, one particular one was shortly after that. Engaged in a... I was firing and I was looking in and the bullet went between my hand that was on the rest of the BAR and my chin and landed in the back of the foxhole. I jumped up and my wrist landed on a hot barrel and got a blister. That was the first little scare. Then, a couple of days later, we were on a night attack and I was the only one, the BAR men were the only ones with ammunition, the others had fixed bayonets. A machine gun opened fire and the lieutenant yelled to me, "Hock, hit 'em." It was my task to answer automatic fire and I

fired back and forth together and it felt like something kicked me in the side. I thought somebody kicked me and I said, "Watch what you're doing," and then we fired back and forth and then whether I got him or not, it silenced him in any case. I didn't look over here on my left side until the next morning. The shells – BAR magazines are stacked in your belt, two side by sides. The bullets had gone through the two magazines through my jacket, through my shirt, but not my undershirt and went out through the back. The magazines from that action were about twice the width they normally are, but I thought probably they would have exploded if they did that, but I guess they don't. There was powder all over the place.

I: Well, you were pretty lucky there.

HH: Oh, very lucky. Next, this was after we crossed the Moselle and now we were in France. We were gathering all the BAR crews together to take care of some machine guns up on a hill that were preventing people from crossing a bridge over the canal, so they wanted to silence the machine guns so they were getting the crews together. It had rained quite a bit the night before. The ground was quite wet. And a shell had landed within three feet of me and didn't explode, but it took a piece of sod and hit my right side. I was [unclear] tea kettle and I was black and blue from one end up, but I couldn't even look down to see the shell. The shell had sucked down through the mud, I guess.

I: Just disappeared?

HH: Disappeared. I couldn't see what approximate size it was. Then we were on the attack one time and we ended up on the side of a hill. My assistant gunner was up to the right of me and I was down on the lower part luckily. A mortar shell landed in between us. All the shrapnel whizzed over me and unfortunately for him, because he was higher on the hill, it raked him along his left side and all you could see, you could see his clothing was all rattled and ripped, and then he took one step and died. One step, dead. I didn't have a scratch. And there were several near misses. I think that's normal for an infantryman. You're going to have near misses and the other guy is not. So, I was lucky from that standpoint.

I: So, after you crossed the Moselle, where did you go from there?

HH: We went into France, in several towns and villages until we – this was around November, November 10th, 11th – sometime in that time frame.

I: Of '44?

HH: Yes. We were going pretty easy, no one was resisting us. I said, "Something's wrong here." We were not engaged with anyone. We kept going and going and going. We got into the town of [unclear] and outside the town were six German tanks over there, evidently were in support. No action, no artillery, no nothing. We got outside of [unclear], we dug in, we were on the left side of the road, and M Company and K Company were on the right side of the road. We were battalion strength. Engaged in the battle was L, K and M but with I, like I said, in reserve, so we dug in. No action right away and then I heard through the night, I heard our tanks rev up. Sometimes, they just revved up just to run the engines a bit and shut off. No, they pulled out. So, I didn't think anything of it. Then all of a sudden, I remembered when I originally dug in, I was real near a tree. I said, "Christ, I ain't going to dig into those roots." So, I moved out a

bit away from that tree and dug my hole. The first shell that came over, guess where it hit?

I: It hit the tree.

HH: It hit the tree. I got bark on me and stuff. The tree, about maybe three feet high, was just all shattered. I would have been underneath that tree. But luckily, I got away from the roots and I was far enough away where I just got a bark burn, is the best I can describe it. And it was the only shell that landed near me. I guess they were just zeroing in. All the other shells were going into the town. Then the artillery silenced and over the hill came the infantry. We were able... They were open targets. We didn't have much trouble repelling them. They attacked several times and each time we were successful in knocking them back. And then we heard the other side tanks open and start up. We couldn't see them. We could hear them, but we couldn't see them. The infantry had gone back and stayed back. We could hear the tanks going, but we couldn't see them for the longest time. Then all of a sudden on the left, there were the tanks. You could see them in the distance. They were going, they went past us and they went up into the town... Unfortunately for some of them – some of the guys were in the cellar - the tanks were sticking their muzzles down into the cellar and firing. I don't know how many people got killed and the like and the funny part, I forgot very much what happened after. The psychiatrist said that when something's terrible that happened, your mind wouldn't let you remember. Because I don't remember the battle from that point on. I know from the reports that a lot were killed. But everybody's telling me how horrible it was and I can't remember. What actually happened to this day, I don't know, from the combat. I remember, because what I always told the lieutenant, I said, "Well, there's two things. I don't mind dying, I'll die. I don't want to go blind and I don't want to be a prisoner of war." I told that to the lieutenant. After several days of battle there, I was in a foxhole and I heard, "Rausmit," which means 'up' in German. I spun around the BAR and almost was going to blow the German's off. But alongside him was the sergeant, "No, no, no, no. We surrender." "What?"

I: They surrendered to you?

HH: No, we surrendered. The Americans surrendered. I got up. I was so goddamn mad that they didn't announce anything that I wrapped my BAR around the trunk of that damn tree. The German who was the sergeant came at me and was going to butt me in the head and I put my hands up and instead of hitting my head, he hit my shoulder. I can still feel that damn shoulder to this day. "No, no, no, no, no." He was evidently an old-time soldier and was going to teach me a lesson. So, he took me in one of the houses there, where there was a whole bunch of bodies. One of my sergeants there was hands down with his face blown away. He was talking. And that haunted me for the longest time. How the hell could he talk? He had no face. It haunted me for a good while. But what he was doing, because all he did was go to the front of the house and the back of the house, ending up in the same place by going around. He was teaching me a lesson, saying, "Hey soldier, you could have been one... Don't be so goddamn tough, you could have been one of these guys." I'm assuming that's what he was doing. We were taken to Linburg.

I: How many guys were actually captured?

HH: I don't know the full number. I can only tell you the thing I heard about – the division had a paper called “Yankee Doings” and it came out with an issue one time and said, “What I want you to do is say a prayer for a couple of guys that just were issued the Medal of Honor and for the 3rd Battalion of the 2nd Regiment, 104th Regiment that was destroyed at Rodalben.” That was my announcement – what happened in Rodalben. So, all I know – what is it destroyed the battalion. And that was my introduction to it.

I: Where did they take you from there?

HH: When they caught me? They took me to Linburg which was like a distribution center. What they did, they purposely broke you up. They didn't want groups of the same individuals going to the same camp, so they broke you up.

I: Now did you have to walk or did you ride?

HH: We rode for part of the way and then we walked. We went to New Brandenburg first, which was a large prison camp. There were Russians, English, all kinds.

I: Now the little group that they took you there with – how many guys approximately?

HH: Oh, I don't know, it was a small group and we were even broken up in the camp, so I was the only one actually physically in that one barracks they put us in. From there they took us to – what was the name of that next camp – I'll think of it. Anyway, it was a former Jewish prison camp for women they put us in. I can't think of that camp – it's outside of Berlin – Dünnewald, Germany. It was a small camp, had maybe seven or eight barracks and one of them was for the German guards and the kitchen, and it had an electrified fence around it and a German guard with a dog that walked around the camp. Me and my buddy Joe, we used to time how long it took him around because we were thinking, “Well, maybe we can get out of this damn place.”

I: Now, what date would that have been?

HH: It was November, November 10, 11,12 right around that timeframe.

I: '44?

HH: '44. They put us in the camps in the barracks and the main food was a loaf of bread which eight of us shared and there was... I found out later. I saw sawdust on the outside. I thought they just used it like you use flour – when you make bread and you roll it in it. The bread itself was 40% sawdust. But we didn't know it at the time. It was funny how we did it. There were eight on a loaf of bread. So, what we had worked out – the guy that cut the bread in the eight pieces would get the last piece. And we rotated that decision.

I: I've heard that before. The guy that cut it probably got the smallest piece.

HH: Well, what we perceived as the smallest piece – he would stay over that god darn thing and make sure it was about as even as possible because he knew what we perceived as the [unclear] piece, the smallest piece was his. And that's how we used to do it. Once in a while, we'd get a potato and then we'd have meat day. We were four people on a slice of bologna. That was meat day.

I: Really, wow. What about soups? Did you get soup, too? Did you get a watered-down soup or anything like that too?

HH: Rutabaga.

I: Okay.

HH: The rutabaga was like wood. We'd use it to wash our hands. I defy you to eat the rutabaga. They would grow so big that it was like wood. There would be a slight color to the water and that would be about it. And, once in a while, they gave us a potato. Guys would even steal their peelings from their potatoes. Try to get in the kitchen and steal and cook their peels.

I: Now did you get any Red Cross packages at all?

HH: Yes, a little bit, what they didn't abscond by the time they got it.

I: So, the Germans would steal?

HH: Yes, some. Sometimes, you'd get cigarettes. Cigarettes and chocolate were better than money. You couldn't buy anything for money. Money didn't mean anything. Cigarettes, cigarettes, coffee. I always remember one story about this one German guard traded for a tin of coffee that was in a Red Cross parcel, about yeah high [spreads thumb and forefinger about one inch apart]. We asked him the next morning, "How was it?" He said, "Ach, American coffee, German schnapps," and he made out like he was drunk. What the hell's the matter with this guy? He had taken the whole dam tin, which was probably twenty cups of coffee or twenty-five, and put it in one cup. And that's why the god darn thing, he was saying, "American coffee, German schnapps," you know. Then when he found out that it was many cups, he was more mad at himself. So, you could barter. So, you did get the Red Cross parcels once... Christmas was of course, very, was a real special, special time, even had red wax paper around dates. They had powdered milk, chocolate like almost like a... D-ration for you when you're in combat was an emergency ration. It was chocolate so dense that you could break your teeth trying to bite it. And the Germans searched us when they captured us for D-rations. I made sure I devoured my D-ration before they came and searched us. They didn't find one on me. I devoured it. And there was some of that in the thing, and there were several other things plus extra cigarettes and the like. It was quite a thing. And for some reason it got you pretty hooked.

I: Now did any of the Germans celebrate Christmas?

HH: Yes, Christmas was honored by both sides. Most areas, no fighting at all. For some reason, everybody honored that.

I: Now, overall, how were the guards in the POW camp? Did they treat you decently or were they pretty rough with you?

HH: Most were, they were older troops, not combat troops. They were older and generally, and some of them, towards the end especially, said, "Me, no Nazi, me no Nazi."

I: They knew what was going to happen.

HH: They knew what was going to happen. So, [unclear] there was one guy, a member in our group, a very fine individual. His father was a Vice President of the Pennsylvania Railroad; the Baltimore & Ohio, I guess it was called, and he was going to celebrate Christmas in a fine style. He had taken that red wax paper that the dates were in and he made a candle out of it, made a makeshift candle holder and stuck it in, and lit the top and he had saved some little precious things over the days you know, and was going to have them. And this one guy from Arkansas, I'll never forget him, he was celebrating the same, this guy from Arkansas, a real nice guy, reached over and put a can on the top and was going to heat it in front of him and he was so polite that all he did was one of these [looks to side silently]. I took the guy and moved him out and said, "Get the hell out of here." He thanked me like [unclear]. Never said a word. Just too much a gentleman. Just one of the funny things that happened. We used to try to find ways to annoy the Germans. They had us out digging stumps. They were going to put some type of small gauge railroad through – for what, I don't know. And they would dig the stump and they only wanted us to go so far with the root and chop it and we would go and then they'd say, "Chop." We'd say...[Shrugs shoulders] Then we'd keep going. "Ach, ach [unclear] Americans, shit!" [Throws hands up] Just something to piss them off. We had to do something. But then we got up one time, I remember an incident, we got up and this guard had enough of it and took this one guy out and he was really lacing into him. And the guy was just looking at him. And he said to him, "Yes, I had one but the wheels broke." And this guard got really mad, took his gun and pointed it at the guy and the rest of us were ready to charge him. He looked at us and he said, "Yes, I'll get him but I don't know about these other guys." He put the gun down. We shut up. He got his message through.

I: Now in the barracks, obviously you were there in the wintertime, did you have enough heat? Were you cold?

HH: We were always cold. What we did, we took, the trees had a tap root. It was pure turpentine in the tap root almost. We used to cut that tap root off and make it into little slivers like and put it... Because the cold was, I think it was more stone than it was cold. It wouldn't burn too much. We put those tap roots in there and we could get that damn pot cherry red because they would burn no matter what, cold burns or not. That's how we kept them hot with the tap roots.

I: Did they give you blankets?

HH: Yes, one.

I: One blanket.

HH: I just froze.

I: Did you sleep in bunk beds?

HH: No, it was a bed as long as this table, straw on top of wood and that was it. And the blanket.

I: Everybody slept on...?

HH: The straw. Itched like crazy. That was it. The one blanket. Except the one time when a guy from Geneva came, from Switzerland. They issued... We were wondering,

“Hey, they’re getting kind, giving us more blankets.” That was because he was coming to visit.

I: Then, did they take them back after he left?

HH: Yes. That was it.

I: When were you finally liberated?

HH: Well, we had more interest before that. I escaped.

I: Oh, okay, that’s right. Yes. Tell us about that.

HH: Well, what it was, I told you the guard was going around. And what there was, it was two guys’ duty to take the can where we urinated and defecated during the night and there was water in there and you’d do your job in there and then you’d carry it to the outhouse which was back in the thing. Joe and I, when we used to go together, took it, we always got interested in that one tree that had a limb that went pretty close to the outhouse. And we said, “I wonder if we could run down that and jump and catch that branch? If we missed... [Nervous laugh] What we were doing we were timing the guard going around, how long it took him. When he passed us, how long to come around the thing. So, one day we were carrying a can and during the night there was a big storm and evidently knocked the power out, and that branch we were idolizing - one part of it was on the outhouse and one part of it was on the fence.

I: Was it a snowstorm?

HH: No, just a storm. There was no unusual amount of snow on the ground. It was probably freezing rain or some goddamn thing. And it had this hump on it. And we were saying to one another, “Well, we can walk across that, but the first guy that walks across it is going to tumble,” because most of the tree was on the other side of the fence. He said, “We dare run in unison. You know, one in back of the other. It’s worth a shot.” I said, “It’s a gamble.” We did and by God, it was just like an elevator, as we got toward the other one [makes slow descending noise] bup! And we were down there just as graceful as graceful as could be. The log, though, went woo, woo, woo, woo, woo – where it landed, I don’t know. [Unclear] From running it – we actually ran. From running it, it gave it that energy and it spun and then of course the first thing we’re doing was... we thought the alarm was going to go off. Nothing We ran for the longest time and then we said, “We don’t hear any alarm. I don’t hear anything. I bet you they don’t even know we’re gone.” So, we slowed down because we were getting exhausted. So, what we knew, we knew there was a railroad nearby because we could hear it and we could see smoke and soot. We said, “Well, if we travel along the railroad, we know where the direction of France was, anyway. If we follow, not next to the railroad, some distance off, we should be able to get to France.” Not knowing that France was way, way, way away and we weren’t going to make France. But we were using it as a guide so we went away and we found out how they stored their food. What they did, they did like a pyramid, with the top cut off. So, what they would do is put straw first, they would pile the potatoes and other vegetables, carrots and stuff, in piles and then put straw and on top of the straw, dirt, and that would protect them from the cold. So, we found out we could dig in there and we could get carrots and potatoes and also rutabaga, but we didn’t want any part of those goddamn rutabagas. We’d get the carrots and the potatoes and

we got food, no problem. We got a little bit of moisture out of the food, but we weren't getting any water. So, we're going along and going along and we're not running into a stream. We're not running into a stream. Following the railroad and then we came to a farmhouse. I said, "Oh boy, that's our saving." I said, "I know. I worked on my uncle's farm. They'll be a primer there of water and we could prime this well and get all the goddamn water we want." No, there was no water there for a primer. Well wouldn't work. I don't know if you've ever been on a farm. You have to prime the baby, otherwise well isn't going to do anything. "Well," I said, "The next best thing, is, my uncle and I, we use to put a milk can down there into the water and use it as a refrigerator. We did get a can of milk and we devoured what there was of it. But that was the last water we got. We were eating all right. We were eating raw potatoes, raw carrots and got plenty of that, and did get some moisture because the food had it and we were going and we were going and we were going and we were going. "Where the hell is this?" Now we were gone several days. We saw a farmhouse.

I: Now, during these seven days, did you see any German soldiers?

HH: No. Saw nothing. And we would duck to the right every once in a while to see if the railroad was still there. We heard activity and made sure that we were following that railroad, giving us some sense of direction, anyway. We didn't hear anything, but we did start hearing and we knew they weren't talking German. Is it French? It didn't quite sound like French but it didn't sound like German. So, we said, "Can we take a chance?" I said, "Well, we can't keep going, we've got to get water sometime. If we don't run into a goddamn stream, we're in trouble." You know the little amount of water we're getting out of potatoes and carrots and stuff aren't going to survive us. So, we said, "Ah, we'll take a chance." So, we go up, tell them what we are. "We're prisoners of war." Well, they could see by our clothes. "Oh yes." "Do you talk English?" "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Go up in the barn, there. Go up. Sleep up in the loft. We'll get you some food and water." "Oh, okay." So, we were exhausted and we went to sleep. And the next thing we hear, the famous words, "Rausmit." And this time, they were German soldiers pointing a gun at us. Evidently what they did, they turned us in. Oh boy. So, they take us in and... It's a town Parchim. It's where they... Parchim had the German jet. We never knew about them before. This is the first we'd seen them. We'd see them off in the distance. Couldn't see any goddamn propeller on them. And we didn't know anything about jets. But we knew the engine sounded funny, you know, see them go by. So, they didn't take us where the planes were, they took us in a regular German jail which is a little different, of course, from what we were used to. In the German jails, they had an L-shaped lock. In other words, the lock wasn't on the door you went in, the lock was around, like, a little turn, like an L. It was locked over here, where you couldn't really reach it and couldn't see it. And when we went in, there was just concrete, nothing but concrete and a little window way up high. And, oh boy, I went in and lay down and in the morning... Okay, a guy came in the middle of the night "Schiessen in the morning." Not scheisse; schiessen which in German means shoot. Scheisse means defecate. Oh, they're going to shoot us in the morning. Unknown to us, this was after the Great Escape, you probably know about that one. Hitler had issued an order; all future escapees would be shot. In other words, the orders were to shoot. Come the morning, this is it. I outsmarted myself this time. Nothing, they're talking to us. They gave us a little bit of bread, a little bit of things, back in the cell. They didn't shoot us

that morning. The next morning, the same thing. When they told us the night before, “Schiessen in the morning,” you know. This went on for several days to where we didn’t believe them anymore. Because you say it so many times, it loses its effect. Okay, so then they took us to a little town of Schwan, which is near Parchim. It was just two buildings and there were three guards, three guards, and there was a wooden building, and we’re two escapees joining others that were in there. There’s maybe ten in the barracks, twenty in total, with a barbed wire fence with u nails. Here’s two escapees that they threatened to shoot and they were putting them in the building with barbed wire and u nails – real secure. So, we asked the guys, “Hey do you guys go out?” “Oh no, we can’t go out.” What do you mean? These are goddamn u nails.” And no, they didn’t want anything to do with it. We said to ourselves, “Hey, there’s something wrong, [unclear]. Let’s not do anything right away.” So, we didn’t. And the next day, we went out and around the fields and there were these Polish workers, women and men working out in the fields when we were out there. And it’s funny how they were, they didn’t worry about hiding when they took a crap, they just pulled up their [unclear], along with the men. Wow. They didn’t care for nothing. They just... At night they went there and I said to Joe, “Hey Joe, you want to go visit those broads? Joe said, “Why the hell not?” So, we found something to take the u nails out and we started visiting the girls over there until the Polish guys were getting very jealous because the women were paying more attention to us than they were to them. We said, “We better cool it here or we’re going to get in trouble.” So, then we spent most of our time... Now we knew how the hell they stored their food, so we used to get food for the guys. We’d go out at night, but we made a mistake that we dug in the same place all the time. Guess what happens after you dig a lot of carrots and potatoes up – boop! Of course, they found out what we were doing, but this was even near the end of the war and we kept seeing more and more Germans coming down the road heading towards the American lines which were pretty close to there and we said, “Oh boy,” and then one day came and a guard came and said, “You’re free to go.” This was right about this time, right about this time.

I: Well, the war in Europe ended...

HH: No, it wasn’t ended. But what was happening was the German troops were going to the American lines. When we got to the highway, there were tanks, armored cars, soldiers for as far as the eye could see, coming down that road, surrendering to the Americans.

I: So, they weren’t going in the opposite direction.

HH: They had their cannons in reverse position and they saw us and they said, “Would you come with us and tell the Americans that we’re surrendering?”

I: So, basically, they surrendered to you guys?

HH: No. We did not go on the tanks. We just were a little uneasy. We said, “No we don’t want to.” Probably if they had totally insisted, we would have been a little bit skeptical, but no. But anyway, I missed Joe for a while and there were a bunch of Polish troops that were part of the American army that were also prisoners of war with us and they had some pretty good stuff. When we were driving down, I heard this goddamn jeep coming and there’s Joe driving a jeep, running down the road. “Hey, hey come on, I’ve got a jeep here.” “How the hell did you get that?” “There’s a bunch of them down

there.” So, I got in. The only thing I hated about Joe – a couple of the Polish troops wanted to ride. ‘Let them ride.’ “Ah, screw them. I’m going.” And, he wouldn’t let them on. Joe and I didn’t think alike after that. I thought it was a cruel thing to do. Anyway, we went into town and of course, now were going to eat like lords. They put us in this hotel, threw all the Germans out and took all the POWs and put them in the hotel in various rooms and we were ordering steak and the like. All of a sudden, an officer came in. “No. no, no, no, no. Can’t give them steak and all those foods. They’re going to just live on certain things until they get their body strength back.” So, we were dreaming about all these steaks. We had to eat very slowly to get our digestive system back to where it could... Because you could kill yourself, devouring these steaks. Your body couldn’t handle that now. They slowly got us back to things. We had souvenirs and pistols until some of the guys stupidly were riding the train, shooting – boom, boom, boom. [Points upward towards ceiling.] They went through the goddamn bunch of us and took all our weapons that we confiscated away because we were going nuts. From there, they took us to camps. They were all named after cigarettes, Camp Chesterfield, Camp Lucky Strike, Camp Campbell and the like and they put us in these camps. The war was coming to an end. It hadn’t ended yet, but it did shortly. Then they came to us; they gave us a choice. We could go to a furlough that wouldn’t count against furlough time to England to wait for a boat trip back, or be on the list to go back now. I chose to go back now. They put us on the boats to go back. I ended up, I always remember the name, the Mormacmoon. It was part cargo, part passenger. There was about 180, I guess, of us passengers in one part of the ship and some of us were assigned KP. The only problem, the poor lieutenant had trouble keeping us there. We just went – what the hell was he going to do? We just went out there and laid down. “You’re supposed to be on KP,” he’d yell at us. We’d just look at him and say nothing. We didn’t argue with him, but we didn’t go to KP either. He didn’t know what the hell to do with us. What was he going to do with us? Shoot us?

I: So, was the trip back any better?

HH: Oh, the trip back was better, yes. The cooks were mad at us because they had to do all the KP and the cooking. I don’t know what the hell they did with the food. We were always wondering what they were going to do for the food for us – whether they were going to spike it with something. But they didn’t. They said, “Ah, we don’t blame you.” We got an agreement, but we didn’t go back to KP. We just weren’t going to do it. So, we landed in Fort Dix, Trenton, and then we went on to Miles Standish, MA, which was a camp they were using for all the troops coming back and I got assigned – my task was a very difficult one. I was an emergency jeep driver every third day. So, what we got smart of – there was three of us, so we got an agreement where we were off for nine days, one guy would take it, and then we would go on furlough. The only trouble is we burned up a hell of a lot of money.

I: So, at Miles Standish, basically they were waiting for you to get healthy again before you were discharged?

HH: Well, they had used us to bring the commanding officer to headquarters. The other guys went on to other bases and stuff and we would drive... Our job was to pick up the commander at the train, bring him to headquarters to sign in all the troops, then take him to his barracks, and then go back to sleep. Maybe it would happen twice a

night, three times a night. That was our only job. Then we went to the Port of Boston and we stationed there for a while doing pretty much nothing. Then we went to Taunton, MA. Then I went home on furlough, for rest furlough for 81 days that wasn't counted as furlough. Then I got paid fifteen months pay for the time I was in combat, POW and the time intermittent and I had to report to Lake Placid after the 81 days to get reassigned and be ready to form another outfit to go to Japan eventually.

I: Oh boy.

HH: Well, Japan wasn't over. But one day, I decided I was going to take a trip to Coney Island. I was headed to Coney Island and this guy was on the radio with one of these boom boxes in those days – remember those damn things – big huge things. He said, “Hey soldier, it's saying here Japan may surrender.”

Tape changed. 1:00:56.

I: Okay, you mentioned somebody had a boom box radio.

HH: Yes, and he said, “Soldier, word is that Japan may surrender.” I said, “What the hell am I doing going to Coney Island?” I got off at the next stop, turned around and headed to Times Square. I got into Times Square with very little activity there – nothing going on, nothing going on, and then all of a sudden, there was the Times Building there and they had that electric sign that went around with a message. And all of a sudden, the sign comes around, “Japan Surrenders.” Now Times Square was basically empty. It wasn't two minutes until it was jammed full of people. Very few soldiers, most of them are still overseas. A few sailors there, a few soldiers and a whole hell of a bunch of women.

I: So, you were in uniform?

HH: I was in uniform. All of a sudden, the sign comes around. I look up out of these buildings and women and a few men pouring out of the buildings, coming right at me, and got their arms extended and the like, and happy and they said, “Soldier, go ahead wherever you want and have fun. You deserve it.” I don't know what they meant. I took some liberties and I had a ball. Keys were passed. They were saying, “This is where I'm staying tonight, if you're interested.” I said, “Well no, I'm having a ball here.” I didn't accept any of them, but a lot of temptation. I guess I could say some of my fellow buddies, might be their wives and stuff. I'm staying away from there, the touching and the kissing and all that which I did plenty of anyway. I had a ball. I had drinks given to me. These bars that had nobody in them, you couldn't get in. The way you got a drink, you ordered it out here and it got passed. Of course, I didn't buy any drinks. They were all handed to me. I had a drink in both hands and another, third one, being offered to me. I can't, I had no place to hold the third one so I said, “Here, in fact I don't even want two. It's too damn hard. I can't hug the women.” I said, “The hell with it.” If you want to take the drink or the woman, I'll take the woman. And I was having a ball. And that was a time, if live to be 192, I won't forget. It was just... I was lucky being one of the few men in the first place and also a few soldiers where the women were interested. They said, “Oh, you poor soldiers,” and they could see I had the combat infantry badge. Some of them knew what it meant, a lot of them didn't but some did. Their husbands were

probably over there in some cases. So, that was probably the most unforgettable day I ever had.

I: Did you make it back to camp sober?

HH: Home, I was home at the time. Had come home on that 81-day leave. I had a ball. I didn't, like I said, go to any hotel with any of the women. I had fun. Finally. a good part of the night, how late at night, I don't know, but it was pretty late. I got home, like I told you. My mother got [unclear] good time they were having in Poughkeepsie. I said, "Mom, I'm not even going to try and explain it to you." She looked at me, "What happened to your shirt?" There was rouge and lipstick. I was a mess.

I: Now how did you get back to Poughkeepsie – by train?

HH: Train. And the trains, if you were in uniform, were free. You just went on. The conductor just gave you a thing for your destination, no charge.

I: After your leave was over, where did you go?

HH: After my leave was over, which interestingly, I went through fifteen months pay, one of which I spent going back to New York by taxi. Taxis then were not like today, where you have frequent trips to New York. You went to New York in a taxi, you went the old roads and it was extremely unusual. Me and Ed, a buddy of mine that came over, jumped in the back of a taxi and the taxi driver said, "Where to?" We said, "New York City." I had a buddy that was in the Air Force whose mother owned a hotel, I think [unclear], in New York. We were going down to visit him. And the driver, when I said New York, turned around and said, "I have to call in and find out if I can do this. He calls in the they told him, "Providing the money's upfront, go ahead," and I forget what it was. We paid him money plus a tip and we went to New York and we started having fun in the room, some room women came up and the like to entertain us. And first, the clerk came up, then the guy's supervisor came up, telling us to tone it down, and we didn't pay any attention to them, and then the mother came up and the mother said to the son, "Get the hell out of here and take your two friends and don't come back." The guy said, "Don't worry, I know another hotel." We went over there but we were a lot more quiet. And then, by the time I was going to Lake Placid, I was totally broke. I don't think I had a quarter in my pocket. I said, "Oh God, what am I going to do? I got nothing." So, I had the bus ticket that the Army had provided to me, went up to Lake Placid and they immediately took me in this office and said, "We're going to give you your subsistence pay." What they did, they gave you money for the 81 days – subsistence pay, so much a day. "And, by the way you get paid for those 81 days too." I was saved because I didn't have anything. I stayed there. Lake Placid then was the place for the multi-rich. The menu was in French. I had to ask the waitress what the hell it was – you know food and the like. It was delicious and stuff. And we were getting rides to everywhere. They were taking care of our teeth and checking how we were. We were going along and they came to me one day and said, "How would you like to be an MP?" I said, "I'd hate it." He said, "Well, we need you to be an MP driving the trains from New York to Washington." Evidently, they were having trouble with the troops coming back, riding the train, they were – once you're in combat you're half wacko, you know – and they were throwing MPs off the train and being very rowdy. Not all of them, but on occasion. So, they found out if you had an infantry badge, a combat infantry

badge, you were somewhat respected and you could handle the troops pretty well and they were trying to get ex-combat guys to ride the trains. My buddy who I knew from Western Printing came to me and he said, "You want to get out of that – MP?" I said, "Yes, I don't want to be known as an MP," and he got me out of it. So, then I ended just going up and hanging around Miles Standish again until they I had enough points to get discharged once the war ended, but I couldn't get into Dix. They asked me if it was all right if I got discharged out of Fort Devon, which was outside of Worcester and again, the Major that was... He wanted to make me a drill sergeant and I didn't want any part of being a drill sergeant either. I wanted to get the hell out of the army. He was trying to convince me and I got a little boisterous and he reminded me, he said, "Soldier, you're not out of this army yet." I said to myself, "Wait until you get the paper in your hand before you start getting wise," and I shut up. He said, he got the message that I wasn't going to be a drill sergeant and so he signed the papers and I was discharged. I went on a train from Worcester into Albany and from Albany back down – I was living in Poughkeepsie at the time. My family met me at Poughkeepsie, and they looked at me, "Oh, you look all right." They were looking for some emaciated POW like they saw in pictures, some of these Japanese prisoners of war, emaciated. I was in pretty good shape, even in Schwan, I was eating fine, I knew where the hell their food was. It was raw carrots and raw potatoes, but it was hearty food. I got plenty of it.

I: Now, once you were discharged, did you make use of the GI Bill at all?

HH: Well, not much of it. I went to work the next day. We were not that familiar with GI Bill and what we were entitled to. We just wanted to get the hell out of the army. Don't forget the nearest VA hospitals, the nearest one was in Watervliet, near here or the Bronx, New York or Manhattan, New York. That was where you went to. Castle Point was a TB hospital at the time. Later on, they made a VA center of it. But I went to work the next day. I worked at Western Printing a while until I got tired of that place and then went to IBM and worked through the ranks. IBM was very good at letting you study and advance yourself, and I got, without college, got to manage a manufacturing/engineering department. I had college graduates working for me. I had gone through all these IBM schools and I had gotten experience in manufacturing by working on the line, being a repairman on the line and being a manager on the line and then being manager of manufacturing/engineering. So, I worked through, studying with IBM's permission to go to school on my time but on their buck, so I made out pretty well.

I: What year did you retire from IBM?

HH: 1990. I was 64 years old and they wanted me to come in as a staff advisor. My last five years with IBM I went from manufacturing /engineering to advisory capacity. I would go to – IBM was having vendors do some of their work then – and I would work with the vendors, setting them up and agreeing on the cost of a price of their manufacturing efforts. I would negotiate the hours with them and the like.

I: Now, did you stay in touch with anyone you were in the service with?

HH: Oh, yes. Our regiment has a reunion every year.

I: Okay, so you attended reunions.

HH: An interesting story about the lieutenant that surrendered us, he didn't come to the reunions for thirty-four years. He knew I was unpleasant with the surrender. I was even asking permission to do it on my own. He told me he couldn't give me that permission and if I did that, I would be court-martialed. So, I had to stay. That's why I was so unhappy when I found out we had surrendered. And he was worried, but he didn't have to worry. Very few of the guys were left and I was one of the few left, in fact the only one after a while. I remember that thing in Yankee Doings. I had PTSD pretty bad and I was having dreams. In fact, I got over for a good while. My boys had taken me, before the honor flights, to Washington to visit the WWII Memorial and the Memorial has the stars – one star for every five hundred killed during WWII or something like that. On that particular day how the sun was, and I was sitting up on the step with my boy and how it was reflected off, it was reflecting red and I saw that sergeant's face there, a blown-up face. I said, "He wasn't talking. Somebody else in that cloud was talking. He wasn't talking." I had this big relief of this bloody face actually talking to me. It wasn't him; it was somebody else [unclear]. Maybe he was about to die but he wasn't that guy – that guy was dead. And what a relief. I got a nice relief for a long time, many years from that point on. I almost passed out. We were going to go visit someplace and I told them, "I can't move." I got a great relief and it lasted until that letter came out, you know that article in the Yankee Doings. And I talked to the psychiatrist that was treating me and I was telling him about it. I was having difficulty with it. That I had never really made peace with that lieutenant, even though he came to the reunions towards the end. We more or less acknowledged one another but never really made peace. I understood his position; he understood mine. And he said, "Well, if I were you, I would go visit him. Take your boy and go visit him." That's what we did, thank God. The poor guy was a basket case. He was re-living the surrender – what was left of the troops - wondering whether he did the right thing or not. And he wasn't going to the reunions and he was suffering and I found out from his children – had two boys and two daughters – that he was suffering. So, what I kept telling him, "You're my hero, you did the right thing." I kept trying to reassure him because he was beside himself. He was hugging me, holding my hand. I kept complimenting him. As I look at, I was one guy. What was it to me? I was escaping myself. I was putting my body out. I had a right to do that. But what I wanted him to do, also, [unclear] was other bodies that maybe weren't willing to do that. And he had the authority and the burden for those guys' lives. I didn't, I had no responsibility for them. Thankfully, it gave him a point of relief, like the kids told me after. "Oh, boy, thank you." It relieved him. I kept telling him, "You're my hero, you're my hero." And luckily, three weeks later, he died. The boys gave me the article and thanked me again. They said, "You don't know how that relief was for that last three weeks of his life. How he [unclear]." But the problem was I still can't forget that battle – I can't remember it. And the psychiatrist said, "You're just hiding it." I said, "Well, maybe it wasn't that bad." He said, "When somebody tells you your battalion was destroyed..." There was one other guy – he only came to one reunion. He was from Chicago. When he came in, this was about midpoint of our reunions and it was obvious he was looking for somebody. He was going there and he was going there and he was asking questions. And everybody was pointing at me when he was asking questions. What the hell's going on here? He had his wife with him and he came over directly to me. And I knew him. He was in my platoon. I forget his name now. He was from Chicago. And he said to his son, "I want you to meet a real soldier." What the

hell's he talking about. I want you to meet this guy – he's a real soldier." Never saw the guy again. Saw him on and off at the reunion. Never came back to a reunion. What he meant by that, God only knows. I didn't know him. I don't know what he was referring to. What's a real soldier? I don't know to this day. Evidently it has something to do, because he was in Rodalben, something to do with him, but what I don't know. We went out trying to search later for him. It was very difficult to get people... There were very few of us left from the Rodalben attack. There were many guys that came later, you know, that were soldiers because they replaced us. But that were actually in that Rodalben battle... In fact, at the time when I went out, the lieutenant and I were the last two in that battalion. Once he died, I was the only one left in that, not battalion, but [unclear]. The rest are all dead. What the hell it was with – I don't know.

I: Did you end up joining the VFW or the legion?

HH: Yes. I joined just about all the POW groups and the like. But for the last twelve years, my wife had Alzheimer's and she required twenty-four hours. It was funny, twelve years ago when I was in the VFW, there were a number of WWII guys around and the other places too, but for twelve years, I didn't go near there. I was home with my wife every day. I couldn't leave her, take her to the doctors and the like. She died May 11th. And I'm saying a few days later, I'll take a walk over to the VFW. I used to belong there. I probably still have membership, I guess. So, I walked in. I had a WWII hat on. I could see everybody looking at me – it was dark. I had to ring the buzzer. I didn't have a card. They were looking at me, looking at me. What the hell is going on? "Are you a WWII guy?" "Yes." "You belong to the VFW?" "I guess so." They're looking me up. "No, you're not a member here. We'll get you a card though." They gave me a card. I met the guys and we were amiable, you know, we're talking. And boy, the whole group's there. "Meet this WWII guy." "Sit down. See you tomorrow. We'll have the card for you by tomorrow." "Okay." I came in tomorrow and there was whole new group of guys, and everyone's saying, "Hi Hank," "Hi Hank," "Hi Hank." I didn't meet these guys. They all knew me. They said, "Hey, we got a WWII guy now." Evidently there wasn't any around or very few. Yes, everybody knew me. And they still, now, say "Hi Hank," when I come in. It's funny. So, I do belong. And of course, I did find out that I did belong to all the others but for some reason I didn't keep up my dues for this particular VFW which is two blocks from me.

I: Well, thank you so much for your interview.

HH: Okay.