Alexander J. Bohen
Veteran

Chemung County Historical Society
Marlene Zeca
Interviewer

Chemung Historical Society, Elmira, New York
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MZ: Can you tell me about the picture
AB: [Holds up a photo of himself] That was taken in a bar in New York City the day I got discharged. Me and another guy, we hit the bars before I went home.

MZ: Do you remember the date?
AB: It's October 19th, 1945. And here we are at the bar [holds up photo of himself and friend]. Cuban Label was fifty cents. Today it would probably be ten dollars. That is a buddy of mine. We got discharged together.

MZ: What is your buddy's name?
AB: Bob. I forgot his last name.

MZ: It will come to you as you go through.
AB: Conklin, Bob Conklin. [thumbs through varies papers] Order to report for induction. That's in Albany. There's my discharge. And here are a couple pictures. And all kinds of good stuff here. [shows a Silver Star medal in a frame] Here is my award, the Silver Star. You can hardly read it. It is starting to fade.

MZ: Would you like to read it off.
AB: I don't want to brag.

MZ: No. go ahead.
AB: Headquarters, 4th Armored Division. U.S. Army Citation. The Silver Star Medal is awarded to corporal, I was a corporal then, Corporal Alexander Bohen, thirty-two, ninety-seven, zero, nine, zero, seven, Armored 35th Tank Battalion U.S. Army for gallantry in action against an armed enemy of the United States, March 24, 1945, in Furfeld, Germany. Corporal Bohen came upon a German Mark V tank coming from a side street accompanied by twenty enemy infantries. While his peep driver, in the armored division a jeep is a peep, the jeep is the larger one, drove the enemy infantry away, Corporal Bohen climbed onto the tank and threw an incendiary grenade into the engine compartment setting it on fire and causing the crew to abandon it. Together with his peep driver, they captured the tank crew and enemy infantry thus saving the remainder of the column from ambush. Corporal Bohen's courage and leadership reflect

great credit upon himself and the armed forces of the United States. Hot dog. [laughs] You think I could climb on that tank anymore? [laughs] I think I would need a ladder. But I was only eighteen years old. It's a little different.

MZ: What else do you have there?
AB: You don't care about the discharge and all that stuff, do you?

MZ: How about your pictures there?
AB: Here is a picture of me with a garrison cap on.

MZ: [holds up photo] So, you trained at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Who put this together?
AB: My father did. It's old. These are the different medals that I won. [screen is black] That's the Presidential Citation. That's the Silver Star. This is what you just wear on your uniform but there is a medal that goes with it. That's a Good Conduct Medal and I know I didn't deserve that. This was the Defense of The U.S. That's the European Theater Operation Ribbon with five battle stars. Instead of giving five, they made it one silver for five campaigns. I think that is the Defeat of Germany. Occupation Of Germany. The French gave me the Croix de Guerre. And this is, I was an expert with the rifle. I was a sergeant. That means armored. And that's my division, the 4th Armored. [screen is visible] And now I go onto the American Legion. Isn't that nice? I had that made up. Ok. That's enough of that stuff.

MZ: Shall we begin? This is Friday, February 7th, 2003. Today's interview is with WW2 veteran Alexander Joseph Bohen. Taking place at the Chemung Historical Society in Elmira, New York. Mr. Bohen is seventy-seven years old, having been born on April 6, 1925. He served in WW2 from June 17, 1943 to October 19, 1945. He currently resides at 17 Skylark Drive, Horseheads, New York. My name is Marlene Zeca and I volunteered to interview Mr. Bohen as part of the Veteran's History Project. Our camera operator today is Heather Wade.

AB: Are we being recorded? Are the cameras on?
MZ: The cameras are on.

MZ: We talked before and I had suggested earlier is following a chronological approach through how you began in your military service and whatever you can remember as it goes through to the end. I know that you were in Brooklyn. Is that correct?
AB: I was born in Brooklyn. Right. We'll just start when I was in high school. I was born in Brooklyn. When I turned eighteen in April, April 6th, I had to register for the draft. That was 1943. I wanted to enlist but my mother insisted that I finish high school. Because a lot of kids were enlisting. I was put in Class 1A. In June, June 17th, I think, they called me down for a physical. I passed the physical and I couldn't pass it down. [laughs] I passed the physical and at that time, each service was desperate for men and they had daily quotas. They had an Army guy, a Navy guy and a Marine guy. Ok, you were accepted, you passed your physical, each had a daily quota. The Marine guy didn't

have his quota, he wanted me and the Navy guy didn't have his quota. A couple of my friends were in the Army and I had an idea that we'd all be together. I didn't know they were all over the country. I never saw them again. I thought we would all meet somewhere. So, the Army guy took me. So that's how…I could have been with the marines. Today you have to enlist in these services. But then, they were very desperate.

MZ: You were actually drafted?
AB: I was drafted. After I was sworn into the Army on June 17th, they gave me two weeks to go back and finish high school. So, I finished high school. I think July 1 or somewhere around there, I had to report to Camp Upton on Long Island for a week. Then they give you uniforms and all your gear that you need.

MZ: Was that what you would call boot camp going to Camp Upton?
AB: No, that's just a service center to give you the equipment. Nothing to do with the Army. In fact, they didn't even call us privates then. In Camp Upton, we were called Yard Birds. Like you were the lowest thing that was on Earth. [laughs] But anyhow, from there they shipped me to Fort Knox, Kentucky. Armored Force Replacement Training Center, AFRTC. Where we were to train to be replacements for armored divisions. Either infantry, artillery or armor, which is tanks. And, I think, we had about sixteen weeks of basic training. We had a tough basic training. We had what they call a range of basic training. At that time, it was considered the toughest one that there was. It was very tough. But, being young, it was good. I enjoyed it, in fact. But it was hard.

MZ: Can you give us an idea of the kinds of things you did during your training?
AB: A lot of marching and drilling. First thing, they got us on the rifle range. I think I told you; I had never fired a gun in my life. And in two or three weeks, I was an expert with the M1 rifle. They said they would rather have it that way, the cadre, the instructors, because they taught me from scratch. There were no shooting coons in Kentucky and coon guns and that stuff. And they didn't make the best shots because they had their own way of shooting. I became an expert with the rifle. Part of the basic training was…of course a lot of drilling and instructions and classes and map reading and night courses and then there was three weeks on the driving range. Being in an armored division, you had to know how to drive vehicles. I had never driven before. But they were also happy with that. In two or three weeks, I was driving peeps, jeeps, trucks, half-track, light-tank, medium-tank. I could drive any vehicle the Army had. It's amazing what they can teach you in basic training. But you had instructors. Then you had to qualify on one vehicle to be licensed. It was just like grabbing a [unclear]. Lucky me I grabbed a Sherman tank, a medium tank which I had trained on. In the daytime we had gone over these tank courses with traps, everything simulated. The test was…it was a night course over the same area we had gone in the daytime but you had a [unclear] with you. Here's a thirty-ton tank and I'm a little skinny kid from Brooklyn. [laughs] But, I got through it. And the tank in front of you simulating combat had nothing in front but a bicycle. You just saw his little tail light. When he disappeared, [motions downward incline with arm] he was going into a so-called tank trap. You had to learn how to double-clutch because the tank was two,

three, four, five and a first, reverse with a big gear shift and you had to clutch. You had to learn how to double-clutch. You came up easy, but when you wanted to go from four to three, the gears would grind. So…I don't know if you have a double-clutch, ok, yeah, but you had to slow the engine down so the gears would slip in. Going along, all of a sudden when I saw the other tank, I knew my trap was coming and I shifted down. You had to gun it to get it up because if you didn't, you could tip over. Thirty tons. It could tip over backwards.

MZ: So, if you weren't going fast enough…
AB: Yeah, you had to gun it coming up. It was quite…I think that is when I started getting my gray hair. [laughs]

MZ: What was the object of this set, you were being tested? Selected?
AB: Yeah, you had to qualify. We could drive all the vehicles, not great, but we could do it if we had to. I could jump in a truck or a half-track and I could drive it. But you had to qualify on one vehicle. Some guys drew trucks. I happened to draw the Sherman tank. The M1. I forget the numbers of it. I passed it and they gave me a license and I was officially a Sherman tank driver.

MZ: It took two weeks to get that?
AB: No. This one test, this night driving test. So, I got the license. Which I never got to use because I didn't end up as a tank driver. Anyhow; I think we had about sixteen weeks of basic training and then we were given a delay in route to go home. It was around Thanksgiving. I went home for about a week. They called it a delay in route. It wasn't a furlough. They give you ten days to delay getting to the next camp, which was Fort Meade in Maryland. That was like a staging area. There any equipment that you weren't up to, they re-equipped you with everything. Helmets and everything. Then from there, I was only a week or two, it's near Baltimore. On the weekends we went into Baltimore. From there in December, I was shipped to Camp Myles Standish outside of Boston. That's a port of embarkation. That's where anybody going overseas, they have different camps just for that. I was there about a week or two. Then we heard the 4th Armored Division was coming in to ship overseas. That's when everybody got nervous. We were all replacements there.

MZ: Why were there replacements for people going out?
AB: A lot of divisions, you're talking twenty-thousand men in the 4th Army…a lot of men when they heard they were going overseas, they went AWOL, they faked sickness, they just got scared, they didn't want to go overseas. They were afraid. And so, they lost a lot of men. Mostly from AWOL. They just disappeared. They didn't want to go overseas.

MZ: Right, they haven't gotten into combat yet.
AB: No. Everything was ok in the States. But once you heard you are going overseas to England or wherever we were headed, a lot of men just couldn't take it. That's why I was

trained for infantry, part of the basic training, we took infantry training. We had to learn house-to-house fighting. They actually had little cities set up. You would attack homes, kick open doors. That was the infantry training. Machine guns and all that. Part of the tank training…we could go into the artillery. The armored division has three battalions of tanks, three battalions of artillery and three battalions of infantry. And then support units. Tank destroyers, medical units, quartermaster units and ordinance. That makes up the twenty-thousand men. We were trained to do everything at these three combat parts. To get us used to artillery training, they had this firing range where there was a tank with a 75mm gun and then they had targets out there. They taught us to fire at these targets. Two and three-thousand yards away. What you had to do, a tank has the driver, the bar gunner, he's the machine gunner next to the driver, then there is a loader, a gunner and a tank commander. Five men. You had to do all these parts as part of this training. You had to be the loader which is scary. I'd take a big shell and put it in a breach. When you got it in, this breach pushed you away. It looked easy but when you did it you got a little scared. If this thing ever caught my hand, I'm gone. Then you had to be the gunner. When the commander gave you the orders, you did the firing. When you are the tank commander, you see a target, you say "gunner". Say the target is a tank, you say "tank, shot" which is armor-piercing or HE which is high-explosive. You told him what shell. He's got a big rack of like one hundred shells. These are big babies, these are like that high [gestures to doorknob height], 75mm. Then the gunner would tell the loader armor-piercing and then it would go into the gun. The commander with his glasses [gestures looking through binoculars] would give you the range. He is talking to the gunner. The range, left or right, a lot of instructions which are all marked on his glasses. When everything was set, the commander, he's up in the turret looking, he tells the gunner to fire. They press a button and the shell goes out. When you are the commander, when that baby fires, the whole tank rocks back. You throw your glasses up and you can actually see the round in the air. Big shells don't go that fast. You just follow it and see it land. Say the target was a truck or a tank, if you see smoke and you don't see a target, you are short. If you see the target and the smoke is in back, it's simple, you're long. So, the next shell, you try to put it in the middle. You bracket to bracket. I think I told you that. The navy fires that way. One short, one long, [unclear]. If you didn't, you had to sense the round if you were the tank commander. The captain in charge of this firing range, if you threw back [gestures using binoculars] and you couldn't give anything, you missed the round. You didn't sense it. They charged you $17.50 for the round and took it out of your pay. So, if I missed it, I called anything, I'd say short, long. [laughs] Anything. At least I said something. We got good at it. We got so good that after about the second or third week, if you were the tank commander and you got to know the distance, you give the gunner one shot, you were hitting it. That's how you had to hit it in combat. In combat, you don't get the bracket system. You have to hit it because the Germans were pretty tough babies. They knew all the…they had been in France for four years. They knew every range, so as soon as one of our tanks popped his nose out…

MZ: There were five of you in the tank. You all took turns receiving the training at the different positions?

AB: Yes. In case you got in combat, it could take any position. It could be the gunner; it could be the commander. Usually, the commander is a sergeant or a staff sergeant. The rest of them are privates. You had to be ready to do each position. The main thing you had to know what it is to feel like the shell. We were ready for that terror. We were in infantry training. We had to have armor. Driving tanks. So, we were ready for the three parts of an armored division as replacements. The 4th Armor had trained in this country for about two or three years. They had been to Tennessee, Texas, California. They were a well-trained outfit. So, when they pulled into Camp Standish, that was a real ready combat division. And that's when we all got the lump [points to his adams-apple] because we knew we were going overseas. They put me into, I forget…I was replacing the colonel's driver of the 35th Tank Battalion. He had gone AWOL. He left. I was to be the colonel's driver. Which, I knew when I got to England, I'd never get that job. All the old-timers had three years with the division. We sailed out of Boston, freezing cold. I remember standing on the pier there with overcoats…

MZ: Is this is December 1943?
AB: December, 1943, yes. Basic training was over. We are getting ready…we are standing on a pier, it was freezing, it was a cold winter that year. The Red Cross ladies were coming around giving us coffees. I remember one of them, she says "Soldier, would you like a sewing kit?" I couldn't sew a button. [laughs] I said "Sure." She gave me a little sewing kit. I put it in my pocket. What I really wanted to do is go home. [laughs] Anyhow, we boarded the ship and we were so loaded. We had a barracks bag and a duffle bag loaded with everything you own, overcoat, helmet, carrying a rifle, a gas mask bag. I weighed about hundred-fifty pounds then. From basic training, you lose twenty pounds an hour there. There were no fat guys in basic training because they run the pants off you. In fact, to pass the final shot at basic training in Fort Knox, they take you on a twenty-five-mile hike at night. You start out at in the evening and you march until sunrise, twenty-five-miles. You stop five minutes every hour. They have medics come up to break your blisters. Twenty-five-miles is a lot of miles.

MZ: Blisters on your feet?
AB: On your feet, yes. We all passed it. In fact, we had a gung-ho lieutenant who was in charge of my group and he marched us all the way around. He took another route all around Fort Knox. When we got back, they told us we marched thirty miles that night. From sunset to…today I get on the treadmill for half an hour and I'm dead. [laughs] Then you passed. You had to pass that twenty-five-mile hike. I don't know. Everybody did even if we had to drag guys along. I don't know in basic training if it's like getting left back in school, but I don't know. But, anyhow, that was it.

MZ: But you would drag guys along that were falling behind? You had a real team effort?
AB: Oh, yeah. It was a team effort. You practically…towards the end after twenty miles people are pretty tired, so we were actually helping each other. Then when you got in, you went up to your barracks and laid on the cot and medics came around breaking

blisters. Everybody. They were just blanching blisters. Your feet can't take thirty miles, no. Some wise guy told me to wear two pair of socks, it was good for you. What happened is, one slid under the other and made a lump. I'd like to get that guy. [laughs] It's all experience.

We sailed out of Boston and I was so loaded, we all were so loaded with stuff. You had to go up the gangplank to get on this stupid ship. I couldn't make it up. They had sailors on each side of the gangplank. They would grab you one by one. They pushed and pulled you and I practically fell on the deck. [laughs] Because there is a lot of weight there.

MZ: How much weight do you think you were carrying?
AB: I probably carried sixty or seventy pounds with a rifle and all that junk on you and an overcoat and a steel helmet. Everybody was skinny. There were no fat guys in those days. After basic training. We got on the ship. We were two weeks heading for England. Two weeks to go from Boston to England. I think I told you. The German subs were going crazy. We were in the North Atlantic in December. That's a rough ocean! We went up towards the North Pole and back down in a convoy of two hundred ships. It was the largest convoy that ever went over the ocean. Two hundred ships loaded with men. The Navy was protecting us. In the daytime, we could see the Navy ships out there. They were escorting us. So, no subs. In the daytime, they let us go up on deck. The captain would announce "Anybody on the port side, the left side, you watch for icebergs. And the men on the right side, watch for the subs." I said "I'm not watching anything. I'm going down to some crap games down there in the hole." I went down and played craps for almost two weeks. You couldn't eat. Everybody was sick. Everybody was throwing up all over the place. A lot of guys from Ohio, Indiana and all these little…they never saw anything bigger than a lake or a river and here they are on this North Atlantic and the ship [motions up and down with arm] is going under and up. Half of the ship, I think, was in sickbay.

MZ: You did fairly well as far as the motion sickness?
AB: I did nothing. I had been living in Brooklyn, Sheepshead's Bay, which is the Atlantic Ocean, I had gone out on fishing trips. My father had taken me as a kid. So, I knew what rough water was. I never got sick. I think a lot of its mental too, if you let yourself…There were guys yelling "Shoot me! Kill me!" They were so sick they wanted to die. They were actually green. Two weeks of this nonsense. Finally, somebody was like Columbus, every morning guys were like "Where the Hell is the land?" Finally, after two-two-and-a-half weeks being on the North Atlantic in December, we saw the tip of Ireland, I guess. Everybody was cheering like we discovered Europe of something. [laughs] We landed in Bristol. We came down the Irish Sea and landed in Bristol, the Bay of Bristol. That is where we disembarked. When we pulled into the dock, everybody is looking down at the long shoreman, this one little English longshoreman, Limey we called him. He looks up, there is a thousand men looking over the side so happy to be on land, he says "You're a little late, Yanks. The war is almost over." So, one guy, he must have been from Brooklyn, he says "You limey son of a so-and-so, we didn't come to

fight. We came over to get your women." [laughs] A thousand guys cheered. And the little longshoreman, he's looking up. He didn't know what to say. That was the best answer I ever heard in the world. He gave a good answer. We went from Bristol to a little…they railroaded us, my 35th Tank, to a little town, Devizes in England, which is just southwest of London. Then we trained from January into June. We trained on the Salisbury Plains, which was big. It was good for tank training. I never got to be the colonel's driver. Everybody wanted it.

MZ: You had that figured out from the beginning, didn't you?
AB: Yeah, I knew that. I ended up in a recon platoon for the tank battalion. I didn't like that. It was kind of scary when you hear recon. We trained on the English Salisbury Plains which is like the Moors, nothing grows. But that was the tank training. And my platoon, we had a first lieutenant who was the platoon leader and then we had a staff sergeant. We had about twenty-five men. We would go out every day and assimilate looking for enemy positions and where gun emplacements could be. Different, to get experience at trying to find out what an enemy might have. But it wasn't combat. Our lieutenant would find little English pubs and take us there for lunch. We'd play darts. Then he would go back and tell the colonel, oh, we did it. But we really trained.

MZ: What else did you do for entertainment?
AB: Well, at night, the food was horrible in England, it was SPAM every meal. They fried it, they baked it, they tried to trick you. But it was still SPAM. There wasn't that much food, peas and you know food was scarce for the English people. So, at night, the little town of Devises was a mile. We'd all walk in at night after chow and go to fish and chips stores. There were plenty of them and get fish and chips. In those days, they took the fish and they wrapped it in old newspapers and the ink would get on the fish but who cared. [laughs] They didn't have wax paper. We were happy. And you know, the chips. That was basically it. They had a movie in town every night. The guys couldn't wait to get out of camp and walk in. Then we would hit the pubs, naturally. We went to all the pubs and we hung out in certain pubs. We started playing darts. The older English men who weren't in the service would be in there. At first, they resented us. Yanks, you know. Then they got to like us. Everything was beer. We would drink half-n-half which is half bitter and half beer and warm, no ice. I don't think today, you can't get an ice cube in England.

MZ: Yes, you can.
AB: You can? And they don't have air conditioning. They don't have all that stuff. At night we would go in and play darts. After a while, the bartender got to know you if you came there a lot. He'd say "Yank, would you like a drink of Scotch?" We'd say "Sure!" He'd give us some. We got friendly.

MZ: They kind of resented you at first. Did you know why? Was it because you invaded their local? Too many strangers?

AB: They heard so much about us. The Yanks this, the Yanks that. They didn't know that much about us. The English soldiers hated us because they said we were overpaid and overfed. I was making fifty dollars a month. I don't know what they were making but I was making more. They didn't like us. Naturally they had Canteens and they had girls. The girls like our USO and they would dance with the guys. The English soldiers, the Tommies, they called them, they'd be dancing with a girl. We were used to cutting in. We tap them. [They would say] "We don't cut in over here, Yank." The next thing, pushy, pushy, fist fights, chairs flying around the place. They resented us. We were overpaid and we probably ate better then them and we were getting the girls. The girls thought we were terrific. Because we had cigarettes, chocolate bars, gifts, things from home. They dropped the English soldiers. Not all of them. We danced. We did the Jitterbug and they liked all that. They really went crazy for the American soldiers, the girls did. The British guys hated us. In fact, after a while, the things got so rough in the dances, the Canteens would have signs out [that said] Tommies and Canadians welcome. Underneath, Yanks not welcome. Here we were over there, three-thousand miles to try to save them from Hitler. And they wouldn't let us in the Canteens. There were a lot of hard feelings. A lot of it was our fault. The para-trooper guys, they were always looking for a fight. The British guys fought this old way. [holds up fists] By the time they did that, they were knocked out. They fought like…they were gentleman.

MZ: I remember when we were talking before, you had made a comment about when you thought about going into the service, that you thought it was just another big fisticuff fight. Guys were on the streets of Brooklyn, you know. I'm not implying that you were part of a gang but it was a kind of…it was part of your youth. You had to be kind of rough and tough at home as a teenager in high school.
AB: Yeah, I told you I was brought up in the streets. And if you couldn't fist fight, you were a sissy and everybody picked on you. I was just six years old when my father bought me boxing gloves for Christmas and he taught me how to box. You didn't have to be good, you just had to show that you would fight. We got black eyes, bloody noses. Nobody got killed or hurt. It was part of growing up. Who's the toughest guy in class, who's the toughest guy on the block and he'd always be getting challenged. Nobody got hurt really.

MZ: Going into the service, you sort of had this impression that it's another big fight, but at what point did it change?
AB: When we realized that they were using guns instead of fists. It was just another big fight. That's the way we were brought up. In cities like that in the street. We were all poor. I was brought up in tenement type houses. Everybody was poor. Kids would fight each other for the heck of it. We would wrestle. It was something to do. We didn't have little leagues and all these little things these kids have today. We played baseball in old fields with rocks for bases. The outfield when they came in, we switched gloves, it was nothing. Old baseballs. When you hit them, they came apart. It was a different generation. We were brought up…we liked to fight. Not to kill anybody. We liked to box. That's how boys are. I will go on then. That was part of it. I'm glad you brought that up.

So, we weren't afraid to go because here is another fight. And we are going to win. We are going to beat those Japs; we are going to beat Hitler. But not with fists. [laughs] When I saw those tank shells flying, I knew it wasn't fists anymore.

We had to go through infiltration course as part of basic training. They had machine guns, live ammo. They had a wire meshing. You had to crawl across and he was firing live rounds over your head. You had to crawl across, like one hundred yards. You had to go like that [gestures crawling on elbows] and cradle a rifle. They had mud in there and simulated dead cats to scare you, you know. If you had to creep at night in combat. These bullets are winging over your head. If you stood up, you were dead. They were just spraying the whole area. If you stood up you were dead. I never heard anybody get killed. I know I wouldn't stand up. But, a lot of guys panicked and they could jump up. And you would get killed. When you got to the end of it, there was a lieutenant there and you had to fire a round with the rifle. Boy, I said "here we go." I know I had mud in the barrel. Me and him are going to get blown to smithereens. [motions firing a rifle while turning head the other way] I put it like that and it fired. Thank God it fired. I thought the mud was going to blow the whole gun up. To top it off, we were going across this thing, the infiltration quest they called it, and he is firing this way. Then they had a tougher one at the end of your training, you had to crawl towards the gun. It's scary stuff. But we were trained for that. You had to pass all these tests. Basic training was tough. We had to swing on ropes over streams like you see. If you let go, you ended up in the water. You had to climb over walls [points to ceiling] that high. Run and try to get over. It was very hard. Being a kid, you could do all this stuff. As I said, in England, everything was training for the invasion. We didn't know when that was coming. We trained from January right into June in England there. When the invasion was on June 6, 1944, you couldn't land an armored division. They had to be inland.

MZ: When you are talking about the invasion, is this Normandy.
AB: Yes. It was the Normandy invasion. It was Omaha Beach, Utah and the English had Gold Beach or something down. They gave them the easy beach. [laughs] They weren't great fighters. They had fought hundred-year wars over the centuries but they were not terrific fighters. They were not gung-go to fight. I'm belittling them. They lost a lot of men too. The 1st and the 29th Infantry Division hit Omaha and the 4th Infantry Division hit Utah Beach which was a little further down the coast. We couldn't get our 4th Armored Division until they were well inland at least five or six miles. We landed around the end of June, the division. When we landed, this 4th Infantry who had hit Utah, they were still bringing their dead back and piling them up on the beaches because they were the front line. When we saw that, we knew there was a war going on here. It was getting kind of scary. We could hear artillery fire in the distance and machine gun firing at night. They brought us into apple orchards just to keep cover because the Luftwaffe would come out at night and strafe. You didn't dare light a cigarette or anything. They would just drop a bomb right on that spot. Not only in my division, but they were pumping men in by the thousands. There was only a small area because the front was only maybe five or six miles inland. It had stopped at this little town of St. Lo. That's where the Germans held

and it was a stalemate at St. Lo. We just waited around for something to happen. We knew we were going to relieve this 4th Infantry because we were armored and we could move. This one day, we were inland, we heard this droning of like ten-billion bees. Everybody is coming out of their tents and looking up and we see fortress bombers, liberators all coming across the channel bombing the front line of the Germans at St. Lo.

MZ: Was this our Air Force [unclear]?
AB: Our Air Force. Hundreds and hundreds. They would drop their bombs, go back to England, load up. This went on practically all day long. It was the biggest air raid in the history of the world. I'm just…we don't know what's going on. We knew it was to bomb the German lines. To break this breakthrough up. The little fighter planes scooting in and out, protecting. The Luftwaffe didn't come up. The sky was so filled with planes, the anti-aircraft from the German guns, you couldn't miss. There were so many bombers. And they were hitting the bombers. A lot of them. Not all of them. We would see a little puff of smoke coming out of the bomber and hopefully you'd see little chutes come out. A lot of times, you didn't see the chutes and it was just right down, you know. It was unbelievable. You had to see it. You couldn't believe this was happening. The sky filled with bombers all day long going around. The lines were so close, when they dropped their bombs, they killed a lot of Americans. Because, they just can't pinpoint bombs. They did a lot of damage to the German lines and that's where my division moved in. The 4th Infantry, we relived them. And we broke through the lines. We had them [the Germans] on the run through northern France. We got out of Normandy into Brittany. Then we started capturing cities like Rengis, [unclear], different names just below Paris. But we never got into Paris. That was politics. De Gaulle wanted to come in first and all that junk. The French wanted to liberate it. We kept going. We liberated cities like Olean. Joan of Arc was born there, she was the Maid of Olean. Nancy and we had the Germans on the run. We stopped and fought a lot and there were casualties. But basically, we had them going back.

MZ: Did you work with the French resistance at all? Or come into contact with them?
AB: We did, but we had a bad experience with them. We kind of disregarded them, the French Underground. They gave us so much bad information. They would tell us, say we were trying to capture the city of Nancy or Olean, big cities, they would tell us the city is clear, there are no mines, all the Krauts or the Germans had left and there is no sniper fire. My platoon, we would go in ahead of the main column and my best buddy, he was in a peep in front of me, he was a driver, he got blown up right in front of me by a mine. He got cut in half with the steering wheel. A couple of men were killed. From then on, we hated the French underground. When they came and said…we said go away. It's not like the Hollywood movies; they are all doing such great work. It's a lot of baloney. They did nothing. Take it from me. They were no help at all. All they wanted from us was American cigarettes and blah, blah, blah. If they were any good, they would have stopped Hitler in the first place. We wouldn't have been there. I think the Maginot line had two-million men facing Germany. Hitler walked around them. They went to the Ardennes where they had no protection, Belgium and he got in back of them. He was in back of

them. That was the end of France. He took Paris in about a week. If they were so good, what good were they in the underground. We were there to do our job. We had very bad experiences. In fact, a lot of times, it's not like Hollywood where they are blowing up German trains and they are doing this and they're great. If they blew up a German troop train and any German soldiers got hurt, the commander of that area just went to the nearest town, took all the men out, lined them up and [gestures machine gun fire]. That was that. So, what did they gain killing a few German soldiers? They were blowing up munition dumps. But Hollywood gives them this big buildup which is a lot of crap really. A lot of junk. My opinion. I was there.

MZ: The Germans in retaliation would then go into a town, civilians and whatever…
AB: Kill the men and they would just blow the town up. So, what good did they gain? This underground, it was actually FFI, Free French of the Interior, they called themselves. It was useless. They were no help to us. We did our own reconnaissance work. After they gave us some bad information on some of these cities, and then we would get into them, there was sniper fire, the German's hadn't even left. It was crap stuff.

MZ: Was this when you first encountered your own sort of hand-to-hand combat or close combat experiences was in France or was back on the beach?
AB: I'm ahead of myself. In Normandy when we broke through, we ran into the hedgerows. I don't know if you heard that. All Normandy is like wine fields. But they have these hedgerows with hedges as high as the ceiling. Been there for a thousand years and they have roots and the tanks couldn't get through. The tanks, what they had to do was put like a big fork on the front of the tank and try just keep pushing and make an opening to push some of this hedgerow so the armor could get through. Armor can't stay on the highway. You are a dead target for planes, so you have to go through the fields. The fierce fighting was in the fields of Normandy. The Germans, as I say, knew the range. As the Sherman tank would pop its nose and [imitates firing a shell]. Hundreds of Sherman tanks were laying all over Normandy. All over the fields due to this hedgerow nonsense. They couldn't get through in groups. They had to come through one or two at a time and they were getting picked off. The Germans had this 88mm gun which is the most-deadliest gun, I think, man every created. We had a 75mm on our tanks which was bouncing off the German tanks. It wouldn't even penetrate them. This 88mm, they were armor piercing. It could go right through the front of a Sherman tank [shows thickness with hands] which is a lot of armor. Go right through, decapitate the crew and even come out the engine in the back. That is the velocity of this gun. Tremendous gun. We feared it. It was a horrible gun. Had we had that weapon, it would have been a short war. But we had these 75mms. This 88mm could actually hit a Sherman on the side and tip it, a thirty-ton tank and tip it on its side. A lot of men were getting killed. We called them steel coffins. Thank God, I ended up in a recon platoon and not in the tanks. My job was tough enough but I didn't want to be in a steel coffin. Anyhow, hundreds of Germans were laying all over the fields in Normandy. We had the States…they were sending them over luckily…you can't win a war without a mass-producing country. A manufacturing

country. You can't win. You have to have replacements coming over. For equipment and men even. There was fierce fighting in those hedgerows. Finally, our division and other divisions, we broke through and we started the rat race across France. No more hedgerows, it was just plains and city after city we captured.

My platoon, what we had to do…an armored division, when they attack a city, they form three combat commands. CCA, CCB and CCR, which means combat A, B and R means reserve. When they attack a city, say you are attacking Horseheads, they would come in, A and B would come in on two sides attacking and R stays back. In case one of them is in trouble, they can move in. A lot of times, the Germans were smart, they would come around and attack CCR. They were supposed to be in reserve and they had the most fighting. But it happened. That's how they fought. Every day you were put in a different combat command. G2, which is Division Intelligence, would tell you up ahead is the 4th Panzer Division, there's a mocked infantry, all German. They would tell you what you could expect to meet. Then they would form the combat commands. Every day you are in a different combat command. Two companies and tanks from the 35th tank, two battalions of infantry from the 51st infantry and that formed maybe five-thousand men and that was a combat command. That's how they fought. Our job in the recon platoon in the combat command, we rode with a light tank company. Ahead of the main column and we can recon in order to see what is up ahead and actually to draw enemy fire. That wasn't a lot of fun trying to draw fire. Like asking a guy, would you shoot at me. But we got skilled at it.

We had to be good map readers. We had to know our maps and compasses. Every day we would get a map. From the aerial photograph, they would give them to the division and they would be handed out. Every morning you had an objective. Today, we are going to capture Elmira. Sometimes you got a hundred yards, if you were lucky. Some days you did capture it. That's how it went from town to town, city to city. Our platoon, we had a reconnoiter. A lot of times, the enemy would let us through because they know we are just a small unit and they didn't fire at us. We would report back that we saw nothing and the column would start to move. And they got the heck pounded out of them. The fight started. We would be out on a limb and we couldn't get back to our main unit. We weren't fighters. What we had was peeps and we had a half-track, an armored car. Basically, it was just twenty-five men and no heavy equipment. We had no heavy guns. We had machine guns mounted on the hoods, thirty-caliber. We had no windshield. We had to lay them down flat in order…the gun was on a swivel on the hood. With the windshield you couldn't fire. We had no windshields. So, when you are driving in the cold weather, everything is hitting you in the face. Our job was not really to fight but a lot of time we had to fight. We ran into enemy recon units going the other way. We kind of avoided them if we could. We let them do their job and we will do ours. Sometimes we met head on and we had a lot of fighting, a lot of fighting. Machine guns, rifle fire and sometimes we fixed bayonets and charged them like in WWI. That's when I said "Jeez, I wish I was home with my mother" when they charged me with a bayonet. You get tougher and tougher as you go through. We were lucky though. My platoon…a P51, our

plane, had been shot down in the field. He had to land. We rode over there and luckily the pilot was ok. He was about a twenty-year-old kid, our pilot. He was alright. The fighter planes have fifty-caliber machine guns in the wings. We were able to get one fifty-caliber off of his wing and we mounted it on one of our peeps. We ran into German platoons. The thirty-caliber machine gun is [imitates gun fire] duh-duh-duh. This baby, just the noise of it would make you surrender. [puts arms up in a surrender] Fifty-caliber, that is a big baby. It was three inches. It could pierce armor. That fifty-caliber bullet was a good [size]. We ran into these patrols. Once we fired the fifty, they all came running out. "Comrade" [imitates soldiers surrendering] They had enough. They thought we had a secret weapon. There was a lot of fighting. There was a lot of killing on both sides. That was basically our job, recon. Constantly going ahead of the column. Running into a lot of…we lost a lot of men. My recon platoon turned over three times with killed and wounded. Three times we rotated. They'd be sending us kids over from the States as replacements. Kid was in New York City two weeks and here he is up in combat. A real green kid. I was nineteen and I guess I was a corporal then and they put some men under me and I'm trying to protect these kids. Keep me alive and them alive. I was combat experience. If you're in combat, you get good at it. You become a real…and then you are a soldier.

MZ: What did you do to become corporal?
AB: In France, my corporal, his name was Joey DePaulo, he got killed. I heard the shell come over. When the tanks are fighting, we are in the back, maybe a mile or two in the back. But when tanks miss each other, say a Tiger Tank would fire at a Sherman, if he didn't hit it, that shell keeps going. It would land in the rear lines where we were. Even though you weren't on the front lines of the tank fighting, you could still get hit by a shell that missed. High explosive or armor piercing. Armor piercing won't hurt you because when it lands it just digs into the ground. High explosive hits the ground, [throws hands up and makes exploding sound]. That's a big baby. These are 88mm, they are big shells. We heard this when we were in the field. I was talking to some guys and I heard it go over. My corporal was with a group over there and it landed right near him. I think it took a big shrapnel gash out of the side of his head. They whisked him into an ambulance and they said he died going back to the rear.

MZ: So, they made you corporal?
AB: I was standing around minding my own business. I was his rifleman actually. He had a driver; he was the corporal and I was the rifleman in the back. The lieutenant said to me "You are now corporal." That is how I made corporal. Later on, I made sergeant when I think one of the buck sarges, I forget whether he got killed or wounded. I didn't do anything to get promoted, except men had to die. That's the way a lot of promotions were. Somebody had to take the jobs. I still think of him, Joey DePaulo, young guy. My best buddy was the one that got blown up going into this city where the French had told us…and he got blown up. You lose a lot of your friends. And they keep pumping these kids over. I try to use my experience to teach them when to duck when not to duck. We get so experienced at it; we could almost smell the enemy. They had to know that maybe

probably we did too. There was an odor. We could almost smell that they were in this town or in this field. We'd asked the French, they weren't a very big help, we called them the Frogs. We could speak the language because when we went to France, they gave you a little booklet with thousands of American things to talk and then the French next to it. We'd say "Où sont les Bosch?" The Bosch were the Germans. Where are the Germans? The Frogs would say "Je ne sais pas." The Germans had just left ten minutes ago. If you didn't have the right accent through your nose, they didn't know what you were talking about. In fact, I saw a guy one time, he was a big guy from the 88th Infantry. He's asking the French in this little town; he's asking them for eggs. "Avez-vous des oeufs?" Have you got any eggs? All the people gathered around, all the Frogs. "Je ne sais pas." They don't know what he is talking about. Finally, he squats down and [imitates flapping wings like a chicken] and clucks like a chicken. [Throws hands up in understanding] Why didn't you tell us in the first place. The poor guy. He got his egg. [laughs] They were no help because even though we had the little book, jeez, you got to say it…in each town in France has a different dialect. They were really no help. We'd ask where the Germans are. They knew nothing. So, we'd say "You got any wine? Give us wine and eggs and forget the whole thing." As we drove through each little French town we were liberating, it was a nice experience because they had been under Hitler for almost four or five years. All the town would be out as our tanks rolled through. The girls are kissing us and jumping on the vehicles. They were giving us wine and vegetables and old dark brown bread, that's all they had. We welcomed it because all we were eating was K-rations and C-rations and they are not delicious. They really appreciated us liberating them. We went from town to city. Occasionally, the Germans would decide that we are fighting for this town. We had a lot of fighting. Tanks had to come in and infantry. We rolled right across France. As I say, the longer I was in combat, the smarter I got. Better chance that I got to live. You can live a while because you get to sense things. You know if a shell is coming in, you know where to look for enemy emplacements and you get good at it. Like everything else. It's a job and if you do it over and over, you get good.

Then we went into Alsace Lorraine going right towards Germany. Alsace Lorraine is right between France and Germany. They speak both French and German. I don't know…every hundred years they go a different way. All of a sudden, we stopped and it was getting into the rainy season. We had the Germans on the run. We could have gone right into Germany across the Siegfried Line and we would have been rolling. They were running. We stopped in Alsace and nobody knew why. The whole division and not only our division buy many divisions stopped. We found out that Montgomery was still fighting back on the coast of France. Caen or Calais or one of those cities. Fighting tank battles with the Germans and he needed the gas. Patton was furious. All I'm telling you was Patton's 3rd Army. He was furious. He hated Montgomery. So, we stopped for a couple weeks and he got all the gas so he could come up. This was politics. He wanted to be even with our lines. We were a hundred miles ahead of him. When we stopped, the Germans stopped and they dug in. The rain came and the tanks were having trouble with mud and everything. The fiercest fighting of WW2 as far as I'm concerned in Europe was Alsace Lorraine. They turned it into a nightmare with more men killed and wounded.

Because the Germans dug in and we stopped and they regrouped. I'm talking armies. So, when we decided that we finally got the go ahead, it was tough going. We were getting towards their homeland and they fought like buggers. They weren't ready to give up and Hitler was telling them that they were winning. The average soldier doesn't know what is going on. He only knows what he hears. There was fierce fighting near around Metz and Lunéville. A city named Lunéville. The Germans pushed us out [tape skips]
We were looking [gestures looking through binoculars], am I dreaming. They were about a mile up the road and they were ready to attack. And they did. They attacked. They pushed us out. A town called Lunéville. You'd think all the nuts were in there, but they wanted it for some reason. When they decided to hold it, they held it. So, it was fierce fighting. My platoon lost some people.

MZ: Can I ask you to comment a little bit on General Patton?
AB: Oh yeah. I saw him two or three times. He formed this 3rd Army in France, about fifteen divisions. An Army is three-hundred thousand men and twenty-thousand men to a division. He picked our division because they were so well trained in the States to lead the Spearhead Division; to lead everything across Europe. When he was forming the 3rd Army, he went to each division. He was up on this big platform and twenty-thousand men in my division and we are out in this big field. We see the shiny helmet and the revolvers and he is giving us a speech. All I remember, he says "I know you guys don't know why you came three-thousand miles from home to fight this goofy thing over here. I will give you a good reason. What American boy doesn't like a good fight? As long as we are here, let's kill every son-of-a-b that we can." Twenty-thousand men cheering. I don't know what I was cheering for but it sounded; but he gave us a reason. We liked a good fight and that's how we were brought up. I think the kids on the farm…because in basic training…in Brooklyn, if I went twenty blocks away from my neighborhood, that was a big trip. If we went to Jersey, it was like going to California. Here I was meeting kids from the south, the north, California, Arizona. We trained in basic training and they came from all over the country. You got to know different things. They all had the same story. Basically poor. Brought up liking fights like all boys did in those days. Now the boys like to rock and roll. [laughs] And chase girls.

MZ: You didn't chase any girls?
AB: A couple. We hated girls. I think until I went into the Army, I didn't even care for girls. Everything was sports. The girls were made to jump rope and do their thing; play jacks. A different story today. Anyways, I saw him then and I saw him in Alsace. It was so muddy. They have a rainy season. It's unbelievable. All the vehicles were getting stuck. It was a big crossroad and they were jammed. Next thing you know, they said that General Patton is up ahead at the crossroad and he is breaking the jam up. Sure enough, he was. He was in his vehicle and he was directing traffic. We came to him. I told my driver "Hit the gas and get the hell by him!" He broke the jam up. So, I saw him two or three times just going by. He wasn't leading the troops. He was a great general. He believed in quick strikes. You lose less men. The British were always slow. Let's not lose too many men. They didn't care if the war lasted fifty years. We wanted to do it, get it

over and go home. In fact, many times going through France, we would run into British armored divisions, four o'clock in the afternoon, with shells flying overhead and enemy around, they'd climb out of their tanks, get a little stove going. They were having tea. Four in the afternoon. We said "What is this?" We can't believe this. It's true. They are having tea. I said "Jeez." A couple times, we'd run into their British units and they would be held up at a crossroad, a couple of 88s were shelling the crossroad. They were stuck there for a couple of days; they wouldn't move. Our tanks would come up, go by them. And in an hour, we knocked out the guns and we were right through them. So, they were really no help. That's why Eisenhower hated the English. He hated Montgomery. Patton hated him. They all hated them because they are not aggressive fighters. It's just like they are dancing. Little tea dances. We went over there and we were jitterbugging. That's why the girls liked us. We were different. Different personality. We weren't reserved like them. They were brought up like Little Lord Fauntleroy. But that's their country. They were just as foreign at that time to us as Germany was. They spoke the same language but it was another world in England, you know.

MZ: On your progress through France and Germany, you ended up in Czechoslovakia towards the end of the war?
AB: I'm getting close to that. When we were in Alsace, that's when we were kind of re-grouping. Getting tanks sent up that we had lost and new men coming in. Getting the division up to strength to really go deep into Germany. And The Bulge happened. [Gerd] Von Rundstedt broke through in the Ardennes just like Hitler did with France. It was opened and he went right through troops we had up there. He was really doing great. They had about a half-million men in the Ardennes. The Battle of the Bulge. Patton got the word, from I guess Eisenhower, to move the 3rd Army quickly north to stop the Bulge. Because they were getting beat badly. The Germans were trying to get through to get to Brussels. And they thought…they could have done it. They had enough equipment and men. So, we were down in Alsace-Lorraine and we had to march over one hundred miles to get up into Belgium. Let's see, this is December, December of 1944. The roads were getting icy and everything. It never was done before, but today it could be done. We moved our whole division, tanks and everything. In twenty-four hours, we moved one hundred miles which was unheard of in those days. In twenty-four hours, we went from Alsace-Lorraine, forced march, the whole division. We got up to Belgium and then the Germans started throwing shells at us. We moved up and Bastogne was surrounded. The 101st Airborne was surrounded. And they were holding the Germans up because they needed to get through Bastogne to get across Belgium to complete their encirclement. The 101st put up a heck of a fight. They held them off. Our job was to break through the German ring around Bastogne. That was the worst winter that Belgium had had in one hundred years. Snow like crazy. We had to keep pulling the bolts back on the machine guns. Even the oil would freeze, it was so cold! I'm just saying my division, but we had infantry divisions on all sides. In fact, the 35th Infantry was on our right flank moving towards Bastogne. That was Harry Truman's old WW1 division. He was a captain in the artillery. Harry Truman. It was a good infantry division. We respected all the infantry divisions because they do the real house-to-house fighting. They do the hard work. The

Doughboys. We got up and through it all, our division finally broke through the Germans and we got into Bastogne. That was the end. We broke the Bulge. The Ardennes. The Battle of the Bulge was really over. The Germans were defeated.

From there on in, we went into Germany. There was some fighting. Like where I won that medal, that was in Germany. We had to capture city after city. [unclear] We crossed the Rhine and the Luftwaffe came out again. We crossed the Rhine on pontoon bridges that the engineers set up. They put up smoke things because the Luftwaffe was strafing near the bridge. That was kind of scary going over the Rhine. There was a lot of fighting in Germany. They fought because it was their homeland. But we were just too superior. They were running out of gas. They were having horses pull their artillery pieces. It was turning into a ragtag army. It was sad because sometimes we would just be picking them off [imitates shooting a rifle] like you were in a shooting gallery on Coney Island. It's the old story. It was kill or be killed. That is the story of war. Kill or be killed. Patton told us that. That's the name of it. It is not Hollywood. It's kill or be killed. Twenty-four hours a day. My division was in combat three hundred days. The Gulf war lasted, what, a week? Three hundred days, night and day, contact with the enemy. They were fantastic with mortar shells. Artillery shells you could hear them. They whistled when they are going over. If you hear like a freight train coming at you, you better hit the ground quickly. It's like a wind tunnel. That's the shell cutting through the air. They were terrific with mortars. The mortar…they just pop a shell in and it would only go maybe fifty yards. But they could drop it down in your hat. They were so good. And you couldn't hear them. All you heard was pop and then you said "Oh, boy, I better get out of here." [unclear] It did a lot of damage. I had a mortar shell land near me, I guess ten or fifteen yards [away] it landed. Luckily, no shrapnel hit me but I got thrown up against a wall about twenty feet away from the explosion. A lot of men don't get hit with shrapnel but the explosion will kill you. The concussion will just shatter your brains. Your body can't take it. I think more men got killed from concussions then they did from the shrapnel. And shrapnel, shells are funny, if a shell is coming this way and it hits, the shrapnel is basically going to go that way [motions with hand of stuff going away from his body]. If you are on the ground, with any luck the shrapnel will fly over you. But if you happen to be standing up, you're gone. I've seen so many men with shrapnel. In my platoon, one man took shrapnel in the stomach and his intestines were hanging out. I tried to push them back in. He died before the medics could get to him. Shrapnel is horrible stuff. It's just big pieces of steel and it's got so much velocity it just… [gestures something rocketing through]

MZ: Cuts right through you.
AB: Cuts right through you. Anyhow; I never got wounded but I got hurt a lot. The Luftwaffe would come strafing right at you and I jumped in a ditch and I hurt my shoulder. The Germans could throw airbursts where they could have a shell explode over your head rather than wait until it hit [motions the shape of an umbrella] …they timed it, it was just like an umbrella. Even if you are in a slit trench or a foxhole, it would come down on you. If you are in a slit trench or a foxhole and the shell hit the ground, it's going to go over you, so you are ok.

MZ: I remember you talking about how medals were handed out.
AB: I'm going to get to that. A lot of times these airbursts would hit the ground; the shrapnel would hit the ground and throw dirt and stones which hit me in the face. It hurt. But it wasn't series wounds. Medics would want to give you a Purple Heart for that. If I hurt my shoulder jumping into a ditch. It was due to enemy action, strafing. I said "Nah". A buddy of my had to lose his eye or had to get killed or lose and arm or leg to get a Purple Heart. What, for a cut on my finger. They were handing them out like it was coffee and donuts. The medics were. They really cheapened it. It wasn't fair to the men that deserved it. You will read in the paper, always a veteran, he's got the Purple Heart with two clusters. He's walking around fine. He's playing golf. There's nothing wrong with him. He got cut on his finger and he took them. But I goofed because I could have maybe had ten Purple Hearts. Coming home, when the war was over, it was a point system. Purple Hearts were worth five points. If I only knew I would have taken them. [laughs] I would have taken every one I could get. They'd give me a handful. But they cheapened it. They cheapened a lot of medals. Like the Bronze Star. We had a cook. He was bringing hot sea rations to us at night in a lull in the fighting. They gave him a Bronze Star. You don't know what to believe with these medals. Each division wants to give out so many medals. I won't go into that.

When we went into Germany and as we got deeper into Germany, we were capturing all the cities. The poor German people…Hitler's propaganda, he was telling them that we were still back at Normandy. That they were holding us off. Here we were ready to get into Berlin. He organized what they called the Volksarmee, the people's army. He wanted them to fight with pitchforks and shovels against armored divisions and infantry divisions. What they did, we said we will have none of that. So, they let it be known as we went into each town or city or hamlet, we wanted a white sheet hanging out the window. There was no fooling around. Civilians weren't going to be shooting at us for Hitler. If we didn't see one, say we pulled into, say Horseheads, if there were no white sheets out, we just pulled the Sherman tank and stuck his barrel through the upstairs window and fired one round. And goodbye house. And you wanna see the sheets coming out. Coming out like crazy. They didn't know. They thought they were winning even up until the end, the poor people. The thing I want to get into is, as we went through Germany, we start hitting the concentration camps. They were all over the place. Dachau and all the big ones you hear about.

MZ: But there were smaller ones, a little less know.
AB: Names you never heard of. All over Germany. We would break into them. The Germans had left. The big one we freed was Buchenwald. That was the big baby. We came upon it so quickly, the Germans after they gassed these people and put them in open pits from here to [points way in the distance] a mile down the road and covered them up. But they didn't get a chance. We came so quickly. We pulled into these camps. Thousands of men just laying there looking with their eyes open and they are all dead. They just piled them in. They took them out of the chambers. We saw the chambers. But

there was still a lot of people who were…I don't know how they lived. Some of them weighed like forty pounds. Their eyes were way back in their head. They were like skeletons with a little flesh on them. But they survived. I don't know how they did it, but they did. Then you realize what a horror what Hitler was. He was horrible. They were making lamp shades out of people's skin. Cutting gold out of dead people's teeth. We saw the chambers. It was sickening. I was so hard then. It didn't strike me until later on I realized what a horrible thing it was. You become very hard in the Army. You see a lot of fighting, a lot of killing. You become hard. I think I told you. Things got so bad; I was almost wishing to die. It's a quick way out. I only had my mother, a couple girlfriends were writing me letters, no wives. That's why I was a good soldier. Because I took chances. I didn't care if I lived or died. I'm not criticizing married men, but they don't make the best soldiers. The best soldiers are eighteen to twenty-two single guys. They don't care if they live or die and they take chances and they win the wars. They shorten the wars. But married guys, not that I blame them…one guy in my platoon, he was out on a flank. We were patrolling and we knew enemy soldiers were out there and he ran. He's yelling "I got a wife and a kid." He's running up the road. In WW1, I could have shot him. That's what they did in WW1. If you were a coward, they didn't call it combat fatigue, they called it cowardice, you were yellow. They just shot the guy. We didn't do that. They guy cracked up. A lot of men were sent back to the rear and they had to get medical treatment. They couldn't take it, especially if you had kids. They didn't want to die if they had a wife and kids. Single guys are good soldiers. I guess I was a good soldier because I didn't care if I died. But I didn't die. In fact, I wished I could get a leg wound. Enough is enough. You are sleeping in a field. Day and night. You are sleeping under vehicles. You are always cold; you are always hungry. Trying to get eggs. Trying to find a lose chicken and cook the chicken. You get lice. If you sleep on the ground long enough, you get lice. Every once in a while, they would bring trucks up with hoses. You would walk through. They were spraying us with…

MZ: De-loused?
AB: Imagine today? The FDA would go crazy. [laughs] They were de-lousing us. You walked through this truck and this spray would hit you. It was probably…I don't know what it was. It's a wonder it didn't kill us right there. But, to get the lice off you. You are filthy all the time. You're grimy. You never sleep in beds. You're sleeping in fields, you're sleeping in vehicles, under vehicles. It's not a fun game.

MZ: Holidays come and go.
AB: On top of all this, you got a nut trying to kill you twenty-four hours a day. Night and day he's trying to kill you. I used to sleep, God, I had to sleep with my hand on my .45 to sleep. If I had a dream, I probably would have killed myself. You had to be always ready.

MZ: I remember asking you about Christmas. You were going through Germany at Christmastime.
AB: That was The Bulge. That's when we broke through. We broke through on Christmas Eve of 1944.

MZ: There was nothing different about Christmas day?
AB: It was just another day. Going back to The Bulge. The Germans had our uniforms. They were wearing…we didn't know who was who. They had captured some P-47 fighter planes. Planes would come over. We thought it was ours and they would come down and strafe us. It was pretty messy stuff. In fact, when you challenge a guy for a password, I'd say to you "Lucky' and you knew you had to give me the counter sign, you'd have to say "Strike". Or old, gold or Heinz, ketchup or something like that. So, you knew that was an American. But in The Bulge, you had to be trickier when challenging a guy. You'd say "How many homers did Babe Ruth hit?" Or "What goes with peanut butter?" It had to be American. And only an American would know that. Even though the Germans spoke perfect English. He didn't know how many homers that Joe Dimaggio hit. Things like that. Americans would know these things. That's how we picked up a lot of them that tried to infiltrate our lines. They had our uniforms and everything but they didn't know the passwords and the counter signs. It was tricky stuff. You think it's your own buddy in the uniform and actually it's a German soldier. It was a well-planned attack that Bulge. They really put a lot into it. But that was Hitler's last stand.
We went through this little town, Furfeld, where I got my medal. I got a medal for that. But I did hundreds of things that was an every day job for me. Going up against tanks. Going up against enemy patrols. Doing things. Am I overrun on my time here?

MZ: No. Don't worry about it.
AB: One time, a tank battle was going on. Our tanks were fighting a Panzer division. We were in the rear as usual. We can't fight with small units. We are not into tanks. Every so many tanks had a medic in the tank in case anybody is hurt, he would take care of them. Or go to another tank. The tank got hit by an 88mm. It killed the crew and killed the medic. So, they needed another medic up in the front. The colonel came to our platoon leader, he was a second lieutenant and said "We have to get a medic up to replace the one that was killed." The lieutenant said "Who's gonna go?". I volunteered. And my driver turned white. I don't think he wanted to go. And I don't think the medic wanted to go. So, we went up. All this tank fighting, we drove right up into where they are throwing shells, a tight battle going on. I'm riding around. I couldn't get any of their attention. All the tankers, the hatches were down, they were buttoned up. Shells are flying all over the place. I said "Why the hell did I volunteer for this?" The poor medic must have been dying because he knew we were going to drop him and then we were going [back]. To get their attention, I had to drive in front of one our tanks, a Sherman tank, I stood up in my peep [gestures waving both his arms] and I'd go like this. And he was firing shells. Finally, he got the message. He opened his hatch, stuck his head out and he waved me. The medic climbed up. We got him into the tank and we got out of there. Me and my driver and the medic should have gotten a medal for that. That was bravery. But that was an everyday event. I didn't think anything of it. If I didn't volunteer, one of the other guys, the other buck sergeants or somebody [would have]. It had to be done. They needed medics up there. That was like everyday stuff. We did house-to-house fighting when we got into Germany. If the Germans were defending a town or a village, we had to go in

and get them out. We would go through an apartment house. You kick open the door, machine gun it. The poor family would be cowering in the corner, men, women and children. Hitler told them we were going to kill them all. You'd have the machine gun, and I would see the…it wasn't their fault. Imagine how those people felt. How would you feel if someone shot your front door down and came in. We would go house-to-house. That's what house-to-house fighting is. It's rough stuff.

MZ: Were you taking prisoners?
AB: Sometimes we would find a family was hiding a soldier, a sailor or a navy guy in the house, we took them prisoner. Unless he was… It was messy because, some days we had found that some our tankers were captured. They all didn't get killed, but the abandoned the tanks. Sometimes the Germans would capture them. A lot of times they killed them. We heard that they lined a bunch of our tankers up against a wall who were prisoners of war and just killed them. And word got through to the division. The next day word went out, no prisoners today. Which is bad. Because you are supposed to take prisoners. As the Germans were coming out of their foxholes. They come out like this [gestures arms up in a surrender pose], uh [pause] we killed them. It was retaliation. We didn't look on them as people. They were animals. They probably thought we were animals. It was such a hate. You can't imagine the hate you build up when somebody is trying to kill you night and day, day after day. You hate that guy and you want to get him. Then word got back to division headquarters. You can't kill them all because if they know you are going to get killed, there's no surrender. This war would go on for years. They will fight to the last. If I was going to get captured and they're going to kill me, I would fight. So, we had to back off. I'm not going to say it didn't happen a lot. It did happen a lot. It's retaliation. People have to realize that it's not a fun game. From basic training on, they get you hating the Army. In fact, they hate your mother for having you. You hate everybody. And you take this hate into combat. It's hard to understand that you can get that ferocious. I'm a mild-mannered guy.

MZ: Well, without it, would you have survived?
AB: No, I would not have. I took chances and I survived. I was lucky too. It's the breaks. A lot of men came through, a lot of men got killed, a lot of men got wounded. I credit my surviving to being experienced. I knew when to duck and when not to duck, where the enemy could be, where it wasn't and with a lot of luck. When a mortar shell lands fifteen yards away from you and you don't die, that's luck. I got hurt, but…So, anyhow, enough of me.

MZ: We want to hear about you.
AB: That was everyday stuff. We did things like people get medals for one thing. We were doing things like that, not me, but a million men, infantry men doing their job every day. Going into foxholes, fighting hand-to-hand sometimes. That was their job. They weren't getting medals. It's what you were there for. But occasionally, they'd pick something out like I did. They said I saved the column from ambush. Well, maybe I did, but I didn't turn it down. I took it. That was five points coming home too, the medal.

MZ: How much longer now, towards the end of the war? How much further did you have to go?
AB: We went through all the towns in Germany and we captured all the cities and we got right near Berlin. We were ten miles from Berlin. We were all so happy! Chemnitz and Dresden. Have you ever heard where they make Dresden Dolls? That's a city near Berlin. We went through there and we are ten miles from Berlin. Next thing you know, we are veering around and we are going into Czechoslovakia. That's politics again. We weren't allowed to go [into Berlin]. Eisenhower and Churchill, the Russians, the whole group had to fix it up so everybody would get into Berlin at once. So, we went into Czechoslovakia and the war ended there. We ended up in a little town of Pisek. I guess that was around April when the war ended. My platoon was in Pisek.

Oh yeah, before the Russians came, this German general came, a field marshal like you've seen in the movies. A red hat, red cape, big guy, everything red. He controlled an army. He came into this town and he said "I have any army out here; we are running from the Russians and we want to surrender to the Americans." I said "Surrender, who cares." But I was only a buck sergeant. He said he would only surrender to an officer. Here I am with this field marshal, one of the biggest guys in the German army. I said "Take your men and go back and surrender to the Russians." To keep this from happening, we found him a second lieutenant from a cavalry group. And he formally surrendered his men. He was still playing the war game, this general. So then, his men started marching through this town. It must have taken a week. They just kept coming through. Horses pulling them. Ragged men wounded with crutches. They were beat. But they didn't want the Russians to capture them because the Russians would have killed half of them. It had a sad ending, anyhow. We didn't know what to do with all these men. We told them to march to the rear. There was a big field. We told them to put up your pup tents and stay there until the MPs can decide what they were going to do. We were finished. Right after that the Russians came in. We met the Russians in Pisek. They were a ragtag army. They all looked like Mongolians. All eighteen little kids with Mongolian features. They looked like a bunch of cannibals. We were dirty looking as it was. We had beards. But they were worse than us. They had tunics and you could see all the food [motions to soils on his shirt] They were slobs. A dirty looking crowd. So, we met them, their officers. I was only a buck sergeant. But they must have thought I was Eisenhower because I had some stripes. They were a bunch of idiots. We had parties. They were throwing us parties. We were drinking vodka; we were toasting Stalin. We didn't know a word of Russian. We are saying [unclear] Stalin. They are saying [unclear] Roosevelt back. That was it. We were all drinking. We are buddies for about a week. Next thing you know, we weren't carrying any weapons, the war is over. I just had a .45 I would stick down my belt. I just couldn't go unarmed. I was so used to having weapons on me. I had a little .25 in my boot. I had knives all over me, hand grenades. I just couldn't…I felt funny…so I had. We would be walking through this little town of Pisek downtown at night and you would hear the bolt come back on a machine gun. And you hear, he's challenging us, the Russian in the doorway with a machine gun. We yell "Amerikanskiy, Amerikanskiy." And he would

say "Ok, go ahead." We said "What the hells going on here?" They are out posting the town. There was a bridge going over a little river, we drive over there at night. There is machine gun fire. They are firing at the vehicles. Politics came in. We left Pisek. The Czech people were crying, they were so sad.

MZ: Is this like a territorial thing? The Russians [unclear]
AB: [nods yes] This is politics. We pulled back. If we stayed there and started fighting, WW3. A lot of people said "Why we didn't stay there and fight the Russians?" After three-hundred days in combat, I really wanted to go back to Brooklyn. I didn't care about Russians. Me and a couple million other guys didn't want to start another stupid war with the Russians. They pulled us back to a city called Strakonice. When we left, that was the beginning of the Iron Curtain. Czechoslovakia, the Russians took it over. We pulled back to Strakonice. They took all of this poor German army that surrendered to me, they took them prisoner before our people could do anything with them. All the displaced persons from Upper Silesia and deep in Germany, the German people, they were running from the Russians too. Men, women, children pulling wagons. Thousands of them coming towards us. Hoping to get to us. We didn't know what to do with them. So, we put them in makeshift areas. Jeez. And the Russians start taking over the town. They would go into this camp at night. We would hear the screams of the women; you know what was going on. Then we would hear gunshots. Oh, they were killing them. I said "Holy, Jeez, these were our allies!" But they were revenging for what Germany did to them. War makes a cannibal out of you. We were back into Germany for occupation. I was in a little town named Mainburg. Our whole battalion was spread there, but my company was right between Munich and Nuremberg. A little town in between the two cities. It was like a hotel that the SS Troops, which is Hitler's elite, that was their hotel. We took it over. I was a sergeant, so I had my own room. There was nothing to do, we were just waiting to go home. They had little schools to prepare you for civilian life and stuff like that. They had a swimming pool in the town. They put me in charge of a German prisoner of war camp. Every day I would have a list of who is getting discharged. I rode out to the camp. I had a little German jeep. I liked it better than our jeep. I would ride out there every morning. There was a major in charge of the camp of about fifty-thousand men in there, all prisoners. I would give him the list of who was to go and give them work detail. Go out and cut down trees, just to keep them busy. I got very friendly with him. In Germany, they gave us the German book. So, I spoke pretty good German. If we didn't know, we could look it up. I got to speak pretty good. [speaks German phrases] All little stuff.

MZ: Could you understand when it was spoken back to you?
AB: Yeah. Enough. He would do it really slow. He would talk slow. So, I got to speak pretty good. All the German soldiers would gather around me and they would talk to me. They told me the two reasons they lost the war was the M1 rifle, which was our semi-automatic rifle, and the P-47 fighter plane which was used to strafe them. We were up against tanks, they were in the woods, Panzer tanks. We couldn't get them, our tankers. They could just radio to the P-47s and they would send up eight fighter planes and they

would just drop a bomb right in the woods and knock them [panzer tanks] out. They [P-47s] would strafe the highways.

MZ: So, you had an opportunity here at the end of the war which gave you an opportunity to talk with some of the German soldiers? And now you could sort of…[unclear]
AB: Oh, yeah. They were asking me questions. We were friends. It was all over. Nobody was killing. The war was over. We're friends. They were asking me all these questions about the States. But they told me two things, if they had the M1 rifle which was a semi-automatic. In other words [imitates shooting a rifle] you had a clip, eight rounds, you put the clip in, the bolt went forward, you fire a round, the gas kicked out the shell. The gas used to get wasted. What he did, this [John] Garand who invented it, the gas of the explosion came back, pushed the bolt back and kicked the empty shell out. So, you were semi-automatic. It didn't go bup-bup-bup-bup [imitates rapid bullet fire]. It went bup---bop---bup. Our infantry men could get that clip off in a few seconds. The Germans had the bolt action. They had to fire a round, pull the bolt, eject the shell, it puts one back in the chamber. By that time, you're dead.

MZ: Did this opportunity you had to talk with these German soldiers and not to fight one another but to share your opinions of what was going on, did that help to get rid of some of the hate you had been carrying for them? Were you putting it behind you?
AB: Yeah, it was over. I would ask them…they had lost. They didn't think Hitler was such a great guy. But when they were winning, they could conquer all of Europe. They were ready to take England over. If they had gotten the British Navy, you and I wouldn't be sitting here today; we'd be talking German. Everybody is with the winner. But when it was over, he was no good. None of them were Nazi's. They didn't know there was concentration camps. They wouldn't want to admit it. I would ask them. I would throw questions right at them. You were killing our soldiers. Of course, we were killing theirs too. Its still war is hell. Kill or be killed. I learned a lot from them. I was amazed. It was more that beat them than the M1 rifle and the P-47 fighter plane which supported the units. Our bombers would Polaski oil fields. We were bombing all the oil fields in Europe and hitting their cities. They had no supplies. They had no gas. At the end, they were pulling artillery pieces with horses. It was sad. We were still mechanized. We still had tons of supplies coming across to us from the States. That's why I say, if you don't have a manufacturing country, never start a war. Because you have to replace. If one gets knocked out, you have to have one on the way. Otherwise, you are going to get beat. It was interesting. Gradually, I got rid of them all. They got discharged, we gave them a sandwich and a bottle of water and said "Go!" These poor guys that were going home to German cities that were just dead, burned right out. They didn't know if their family was alive. You really felt sorry for them. They were just like us. They were drafted and they had to fight whether they liked Hitler or not, they had to fight. They went home and God knows what they were going to find at home. But they had to walk all the way across Germany. We just gave them a sandwich and…

MZ: No transportation?
AB: No. They were discharged. We said goodbye. The war is over. Go home. And what they went home to? Look at what they did in twenty, thirty years. They had a brand-new country. You can't beat the German people. Boy, they are tough cookies. Basically, that was it. Then they started sending us home on the point system. It started with ninety points. The only ones that had ninety points really were the first infantry division. Because they had fought in Africa, Sicily and Italy, that's three, and Europe, that's five. They had eight campaigns, five points a campaign. Points for days in combat, points for medals. And they had ninety. Then they kept dropping it. They got down to I think sixty-five. I really wasn't in the service a long time. Two years and four months. I was going home. I got sixty-five with my medals and all the days in combat counted, days overseas counted. They had a regular system. And the five campaigns were twenty-five points. When it hit sixty-five, I got shipped out of Mainberg. We enjoyed that because we got to meet the German people in the occupation. That was nice. We really got to know the people. Of course, they were all in denial. They didn't know. They didn't like Hitler; he was bad. Everybody was bad there. And they didn't know there was concentration camps. Some people lived a mile down the road from it. And you could smell it ten miles away. You could get the smell of death and bodies rotting ten miles away. And these people lived down the road. They said they didn't know what the camp was. In denial, see. What could they say. If they told anybody they shouldn't be killing the Jews, they'd get shot. Every house we went into had a picture of him in the living room. Every house. Every house. The first thing I did was pull out a pistol and put a hole in the picture. That got rid of him quickly. [laughs] Then I got shipped from Germany into…I will interrupt that.

From the occupation in this town of Mainberg, the war ended in April and I didn't get home until October. That was the occupation. I had a choice of a week pass to Paris or Berchtesgaden, to see Hitler's house and all that. I said "Who wants to see his house. I want to go to Paris. I went with a bunch of guys and we had a ball in Paris. The only thing is, we had pistols galore. When this German army came through, we just told them to throw their pistols in a truck. Those Lugers and P-38s and all kinds. I just filled up a little duffle bag with pistols and I carried two lugers on each hip. They were beautiful guns, the Lugers. When I got to Paris, the guys who had been there before said to bring some cartons of cigarettes. If you run out of money, go into any French bar and he'll give you two-thousand francs, at that time was forty bucks, for your cigarettes. And if you want to bring some pistols in, you can sell them for five-thousand francs, which was like a hundred bucks. Of course, in Paris, the guys I went with, we were hitting the bars, we were spending money like crazy. So, I did go broke. I had my little bag of pistols. I really shouldn't even tell you this. But I didn't know anything. This black colored guy was sitting in a truck in Paris and I said to him "Hey, any of you guys like to get a souvenir?" He said "Hey man, whatya got?" I said "I got some German pistols." I sold them to this guy. I often thought, where did those guns end up? I never gave it a thought. They were going back to the States. God knows what they…maybe they were just taking a souvenir. He said "I will sell them to my buddies." Maybe they were just normal G.I.s. Like I took a Luger home and a Ladies .25 and stuff like that. What would I want with a lot of guns

and stuff? To top it off on my way back from Paris, I guess I was drinking everything in Pigalle and Montmartre, all these little bars all the G.I.s used to go into. I was probably was drinking gasoline and they were calling it Cognac. I got Yellow Jaundice. I got back into Germany and jeez the guy, my buddy says "You got a yellow color." I went to the medics. And the dopey medic said to me "What's the matter with you, Sarg?" The captain there, who was a doctor, he says "You're some medic, this man is as yellow as a crayon and you are asking him what's wrong." [laughs] So, they sent me to…I was completely yellow. When you get Yellow Jaundice, your liver backs up.

MZ: It affects your liver, exactly.
AB: The poison from the alcohol probably backed up. I was drinking rotgut. I didn't know it. I was just having a good time. Backed my whole system up. My eyes went yellow, the blue and the white were yellow. It was just like the color of a deep yellow crayon, my whole body. I got scared. They put me in a hospital in Regensburg, Germany. The Danube River flowed right underneath my window. It wasn't blue, it was muddy, it was a muddy river. I was sick for about two weeks. This army nurse, she'd just say, every morning would come in, a tough guy, hold a mirror up, "What do you think soldier, how do you look?" "I'm a little less yellow." There was no cure. It just had to work its way out. They had me on a bland diet. I was in a ward with guys who had Yellow Jaundice. It was like an epidemic. You can get it from greasy mess kits. The way they wash mesh kits in the Army, they shoved it in a barrel full of hot water and shoved it in a rinse and that was it. There was soap and a lot of grease left so a lot of guys got sick from dirty mess kits. I got mine from drinking, really. One guy in my ward, he was so bad, they flew him back to England. He died. When we heard that, I got kind of scared. But I got over it and came back home.

MZ: Have you had any problems since then? No residual as far as your liver?
AB: No. When I first got home, the doctor told me my liver was enlarged due to the damage done. I never had any problem with it. I goofed too. I should have put in for a…when you get discharged after everything is finished…there is a guy sitting there and asked if any soldiers want to make claims against the government. Some guys were putting claims, because they got acne, their shoulder hurt them. The government was handing out checks then for disability like they were donuts and coffee. Dopey me, I wanted to get home so fast, I never mentioned the Yellow Jaundice. I could have gotten a pension for life for that. For a while, until it cleared up. But I just wanted out. I made a lot of mistakes, but I was happy that I was alive.

Then we took the ship home. We went through Camp Lucky Strike in France. That's the big camp of a million guys waiting for ships to take them home. While you waited there, there was nothing but crap games and card games and anything to keep busy. Finally, I got on a ship. It was a Liberty ship. Guys were loaded with money. A lot of men were on the ship who had been prisoners of war for like three years and they were getting all this lump back pay at once. A couple thousand dollars in those days was like a hundred thousand today. I had a lot of back pay. When you are in combat, you don't get paid. I

had plenty of money and I loved to shoot craps. Being from Brooklyn, that was our number one pastime, was craps. [laughs]

MZ: This is on the boat back home?
AB: Yeah. I think it was a Liberty ship. There was nothing but card games. They were playing guys with poker for like fifty dollars a card. Crap games. Crap guys were shooting a hundred…so I got in a crap game and I had probably the roll of my life, I had hit about seven or eight passes. You don't know what craps are?

MZ: No, I don't.
AB: I hit about seven or eight passes. But luckily, I got a little chicken…probably I could have been a millionaire. I got chicken, I pulled off some money. I pulled and then I shot what was left and I crapped out. But I won about two thousand bucks. And that was my money for going home. I said that was the end of that. I made enough. But some guys had a lot of money and they went home broke. A lot of guys said "I'm going home, I'm going to open a gas station" I'm gonna open a small farm" "I'm going back to the farm and buy a tractor". You know, guys from all over the country. And they got cleaned out on the ship.

MZ: What did you do when you got home?
AB: I got home and it was no big deal. I got home and that picture you saw, I got discharged at Fort Dix. You see the chaplain. After he discharges you, he's in a big hall and all the guys are there, he says "Now when you guys get home, you've been living like animals now for two and three years." He said "War is over, you are going back to civilized people, so when you want the butter, you say please pass the butter. Don't say pass the effing butter." [laughs] That was a big joke. I always remember that. He was a chaplain. But he was right. Every word out of your mouth is a foul word when you are in the field. There is no clean language. F… was a big word in combat, you know. Anyhow, I came home. No big deal. Me and my buddy in the picture decided we would stay in New York City, we hit the bars and we had a good time. We said goodbye. I never saw him again. Sheldon was his name, Bob Sheldon. Then I took a cab from New York City to home. My family had a sign out there. They lived on the third floor.

MZ: This is Brooklyn?
AB: Yes. Brooklyn. The cab driver, he dropped me off. Big sign, welcome home. And that was it. My mother went crazy seeing me. She hadn't seen me in almost three years. They had a couple parties and all the relatives were there. Everyone wanted to know about the war and I didn't tell them.

MZ: You wanted to put it behind you?
AB: Anything I'm telling you; I wasn't telling them. It didn't concern them. They were home. My father was an air-raid warden. They did have air raids. At night you had to have curtains in case. They never got bombed. But just in case. He was an air raid warden. He gave blood. I don't know how many gallons of blood he gave. So, he did his

share. That was it. The relatives and I had a brother and a sister. I looked up some of my old girlfriends. I didn't want to go to work. I could have gone to any college in the world for free. But after all I went through, seeing burning cities, people walking along the road, displaced persons, concentration camps, school seemed so small. It didn't mean anything to me. That was another goof of my life. I could have gone to any college I wanted for free. I bummed around. A couple of my buddies were coming home and they had the fifty-two-twenty club. The government would give me twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks. All veterans. You had to sign up and they would give you twenty dollars. So, we bummed around and we had a good time. We were chasing the girls around and hitting the bars. Doing the things, we should have been doing from eighteen to twenty-one.

MZ: Making up for time lost.
AB: Three years of good times. I did that for a while. Finally, my mother starts dropping hints. She said "Do you think you want to go to work someday?" I said "Maybe." So, I went to work for a food company in Brooklyn. I was about twenty-one then, I guess. At twenty-five, I got married. My wife was working there. She was only nineteen. Then I did go back to college. I went to community college for a couple years. Then they [the food company] transferred from Brooklyn in the sixties to, they moved upstate. They asked me to move with them. I didn't really know whether I wanted to or not.

MZ: This is still with the food company?
AB: Yes. They said we are going to Horseheads. I said "Where the hell is Horseheads?" Is that a funny name. They guys were calling it the Horse's ass. One guy called me up, I was the first director of purchasing, he called me up one day and he says "What is this? Whorehead?" I said "No, it's Horseheads." [laughs] And there were all kinds of jokes about poor Horseheads. They gave us a week to look it over. So, I brought my wife; we had two little kids then. We drove around. She had a very good job with Chase Manhattan, right in downtown Manhattan. A very good job. We had to kick that around a lot. Did we want to move upstate. She had a good job and I could have gotten another job because I was a purchasing director. I had good experience. We finally said it would be a new life for us. And the city wasn't going any place. Not at all. The neighborhoods were starting to get a little bad. So, we moved. I had a house in Dyker Heights, it's Bay Ridge. It's still beautiful. I sold my house when I moved up here for twenty-three thousand. I couldn't give the thing away. A year or two later my son calls me and he said "Dad, your house just sold for a hundred-thousand." He kept calling me. The last sale was four-hundred thousand. I said "Steve, don't call me anymore. I'm getting sick." [laughs] But you see, people are buying neighborhoods. It was only a brick house, it was attached on one side, it was nothing fancy. People are buying neighborhoods in the city now. The house isn't that important. Is the neighborhood safe to bring up kids in. In this day, we lucked out, the mafia lived in that area, Dyker Heights. If you were an undesirable walking the streets at night, the mafia guys would want to know what you are doing here. And you better have a good answer. So, we lucked out. Irish, German, all the nationalities, they actually were protecting us. I'm not sticking up for them. The

neighborhood is gorgeous today. Every time I go down and visit my daughter, we drive through. It's beautiful, but it's protected by the mafia. I had nothing to do with them. But we lucked out that we moved into the right neighborhood. People don't know these things, you know. It's funny.

MZ: In closing here, if you would be willing to share some of your thoughts about, just in general about war or the military experience? If you want to share that.
AB: It's something I wouldn't have wanted to miss. I wanted to be a part of it. I was gung-ho for the country. In fact, I tell my wife, if they need me today, they can have me. "I'm an old recon man", she said, "You have to be kidding me. You wouldn't go past your basic training anymore. You're in a wheelchair" So, I am gung-ho for the country and I believe in it. I am proud to have served. As much as I went through, I would gladly do it again. I would die for the country. I was willing to die. That's how I feel about it. I feel what I did, although it wasn't the nicest work in the world, I did the job they wanted me to do. They had an enemy that was trying to take over the world and was putting people in camps. They had conquered France and were ready for England and I wanted to be a part of saving that. I just wanted to do my share. Me and millions of other kids. It was an experience. Unfortunately, we lost three-hundred-thousand men in WW2. That's a third of a million kids. They're kids, they are kids, they are not all men. When you think about that, they deserve the credit and they are not here to take the bows.

MZ: I think we pretty much wrapped things up. Did you have anything more?
AB: No, I think I am getting hoarse.

MZ: We've gone way beyond our ninety minutes.
AB: Once I get started, things keep coming back. I'm talking fifty years ago. More than that.

MZ: Sixty.
AB: Sixty? I went into the service at eighteen.

MZ: In the forties and here we are in 2003. So, it's sixty. I did the math on that before I came in.
AB: Boy, you did your homework. As I say, a lot of things I forgot. I forgot names of places. I do keep contact with three men through our division association. We get a monthly bulletin and each chapter is a part of the country. Three of the men from my company, we corresponded. I met one guy who was in my platoon in Phoenix. We took a plane out to see the Grand Canyon and I met him. We corresponded. I think most of the men in my platoon are probably dead now. Unfortunately. And here I am.

MZ: I just want to tell you that it has been an honor for me to hear your story. This is live history. It really has been an honor. I'm glad that you were willing to share it.
AB: Ok. Well, I try to help. I really went into the ins and outs. What people don't know about basic training and different things like that. Dealing with the English soldiers.

Through it all, it was ok. We did some things…had we lost we would be on trial for war crimes, but luckily, we won. It's kill or be killed and war is hell. That's what General Patton said. It's not a Hollywood movie at all. And that's the trouble. Hollywood puts out these ragtag movies of John Wayne. When you die, you have a cigarette in your mouth and give this letter to my girlfriend. Not so. It's shrapnel and pieces in their heads. It's not Hollywood. People who haven't been in combat have no conception of what it's like. Even that movie of D-Day and all that, that was good and everything. Sergeant something?

MZ: Saving Private Ryan?
AB: Yeah. It would never happen. They would never send men looking all across the country looking for somebody. It's Hollywood. It's not real war. But it's over and I'm here and I'm thankful for that. I did pray a lot. I prayed a lot. I'm a catholic. I always had rosary beads with me. I prayed a lot to the blessed mother. And I think she was watching me. That's it. Ok.

MZ: Thanks very much. Before you go, I wanted to bring in this tin that my mother had. I think it commemorates Pearl Harbor. I'm not sure. But if I show it to you, you might recognize it.
AB: Did we photograph any of this stuff?

MZ: Yes, we did. We did the medals. You read the medals.