

**Barton Tudman Wilgus
Veteran**

**Rachel Recido – Interviewer
Frank Mazzeferrel – Camerman
Rome Free Academy High School**

**Interviewed on December 3, 2001
Rome, NY**

RR: First, we'd like to start off with what you did briefly before the war started. Where were you working, any jobs?

BW: I worked at Revere copper and brass as a metal inspector and received my draft notice. About 3 different times, I had been called, and the quota had been filled, so I didn't have to go, but this was very disconcerting because I would get all ready to go, and then they wouldn't take me. So I volunteered, and of course, I went on the 8th of July 1941, and I went on to Governor's Island. I was sworn into the army on the 9th of July, and I was there for about maybe three or four days, and then I was transferred to Fort Dicks, New Jersey. We were there for about a week and a half before I was assigned to a training center in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and that was Battery D of the 14th Field Artillery Training Center, and I was there approximately 2 years. I served my 13 weeks of basic training and then was kept on as an instructor in artillery, and I stayed there until sometime in September. They were disbanding the training center, so my commanding officers thought that rather than stay and be assigned to the infantry, I should transfer into a division. I transferred to the 28th division, and that was at that time stationed at Camp Picket Virginia. When I got to Camp Picket Virginia, I was an excess section chief, so to decide who was going to be the fourth section chief, we had an exercise in the field, and we fired a couple of problems, and at the end of that, they decided that I was the man for the fourth section. So, from that time on, I was a member of the 28th Division, Battery B, 108th Field Artillery, which was a 155 mm howitzer, and I was with them throughout the entire campaign.

RR: How effective were the howitzers, as far as the damage they can do and their accuracy?

BW: Oh, very, very. A howitzer is a weapon that fires a lob shot, which goes in a high arc and drops down behind enemy lines. It was great at interdiction fire, which is usually on crossroads or troop movements, things like that. As opposed to the 155 rifle, which has a very low and long trajectory. That's the difference between the howitzer and the rifle.

RR: Can you get pretty accurate with them?

BW: Very, very. Depending on the forward observer. They had a person, or people, I should say, that usually consists of three forward observers that were up where they could observe enemy concentrations or convoy movements or anything that we had to fire on. They would give us the coordinates, and we would lock them into our panoramic sights and then fire the guns, very effective.

RR: Where were you on your first day of combat?

BW: We landed on Omaha beach on the 22nd of June, and we moved into an apple orchard, and we vivo acted overnight. The next day, we moved out, and that night, we came under an intense bombing from German planes, and we lost quite a few people. That was my initiation to fire, very scary.

RR: You mentioned vivo acting, what was that?

BW: Well, it's where we pulled into an area where we would park the guns and dig a foxhole and stay overnight, that was campgrounds.

RR: What was your transportation?

BW: We hauled the gun with a diamond te, which they call a 6 by 6 truck, which was for heavy equipment. We had that until about the last year of the war, and then we were issued a new prime mover, which was a track-laying vehicle, and it was something new, but it didn't work out.

RR: Where were you when you heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

BW: I was in Pinehurst, North Carolina, playing golf, and we stopped in Salisbury North Carolina, for dinner that night, and the radio was blasting all personnel report to Fort Bragg immediately. Well, we had supper, and then we went to Fort Bragg. I ended up walking with the guard the entire night; it was quite a situation. They issued us live ammunition, and we had all sorts of rumors that paratroopers landed; it was just quite an evening.

RR: What did you carry on yourself as far as small arms and self-protection?

BW: I carried a 45 small arm and a carbine 30 caliber rifle.

RR: Did you ever encounter Germans in close quarters, like POWs?

BW: After the war, we were given what we call DP, displaced persons. We used to find people that were displaced and tried to get them back to their homes or back to their families and get them oriented; they were like lost sheep; they didn't know where they were or where they were going. We did that for about 6 months before I came home.

RR: What about your aerial bombing experience? You mentioned that in your paperwork.

BW: The only bombing that we went through was, as I indicated in the BIVAC. That was a horrendous experience, the noise and the pandemonium was really something.

RR: You mentioned you were in the Ardennes in Reinland in the Battle of the Bulge. Which, in your opinion, was the worst for you and your outfit as far as casualties and such?

BW: Well, in the Battle of the Bulge, we didn't lose any people. We were in position on the 16th of December, and we got orders to put thermite bombs on our guns and destroy them before we left because we didn't think we would have time to take the guns with us. At the last minute, they called and said no, we were taking our guns, so we hooked the guns up to the prime mover and we moved out. When we moved into the town of Diers, where we were stationed during the Battle of the Bulge, all the citizens were waving American flags, and they were very happy to see us. When the Battle of the Bulge started, they all got out their swastikas, and they were waving those, and they were booing us as we left town, so it was quite an experience. We went 32 days that we didn't have showers or were unable to take care of our personal needs, and when we finally got back to an area where they had showers, they burned all of our uniforms and issued us new uniforms because they were just in such terrible shape.

RR: Could you describe your experiences in the Rhineland

BW: I don't recall mentioning the Reinland. We never did get that close. I don't recall anything that was pertinent to the Reinland. I know that shortly after we were told that the war was about to end, but that's my only experience with that.

RR: What were your buddies like? What did you do with your free time and such?

BW: Well, they were all good boys. I had 12 people in my section, and they were from all over

the country. The 28th Division was a Pennsylvania National Guard outfit, so there were a lot of people from Pennsylvania in that outfit. When I joined the division, they were from all over the country, and they were young boys, and they needed a little guidance, and I tried to give it to them.

RR: Did you ever do any sightseeing, like out on the town in the countries that you went to?

BW: The country that impressed me most was Belgium. I spent some time in Brussels on RNR, and that's a beautiful city. It hadn't been touched by any of the bombing or such; it was in good shape. The other cities, Paris, of course, we paraded through Paris when the city was taken. That was quite an experience to ride through the center of Paris, and everybody turned out to be quite an occasion.

RR: What did you think of your officers?

BW: They were all very capable people; they were from all walks of life. My commanding officer, the last commanding officer I had, was a gas station attendant in civilian life, and he had joined the National Guard, and he eventually ended up as a captain. So, you never knew what walk of life they came from, but they were all very capable.

RR: What did you miss most about home?

BW: My wife. I was married in 1943, and I was overseas for two years, so shortly after we were married, I went overseas, and of course, I didn't see her for almost 2 years to the day, and I missed her all right.

RR: Would you like to show us your pictures?

BW: [Shows Picture] Yeah, this picture is of our unit and was taken in Tidworth, England, and it shows the entire battery, and I'm right here. Can you pick that up?

[Shows Picture] Then this one is a picture of our training unit in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. You can see there was quite a few people undergoing 13 weeks of basic training. This was the 6th cycle of people that had gone through basic training, so this was probably in '42. The date was June 3rd, 1942. You got that one?

[Shows Picture] The other is a picture of one of the other training cycles. This again was taken at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and this was probably this was the training 13 weeks training session that I was in, and then, as I said, I was kept on as an instructor in the artillery firing, but that's about it

RR: Any other things you might want to mention, anything you found particularly interesting?

BW: Well it's been a long time I can recall when we landed in Boston the first thing I was handed in the left hand was a pint of milk and the second thing I was handed in the right hand was a dixie cup of ice cream and there I am holding milk in one hand and ice cream in another hand and I couldn't get at either one of them but I made out and we were in Taunton Massachusetts when we landed back in the states and my mother was in the hospital had undergone surgery and so the red cross got me home I didn't have to spend two weeks in quarantine and it was nice to get home.

RR: Anything else you want to mention about your experiences in Europe?

BW: Well on the way over we left Boston on the 27th of September '43 we sailed on the Santa rosa which was a pleasure ship but there was 16 people to a state room and the cots were very close together there was four cots high and I grabbed the bottom bunk thinking that would be a

good deal and I'm claustrophobic so when I got in the bunk the fellow on top of me came down and the bunk was right just almost on my nose I couldn't hack that so I got out of there and I went out into the hallways and I said to the guy you want a bunk and he said yes so I said go right in and take mine and in the process I stepped on a soldier's foot and he said jeekers watch where you're going well it was only one world fellow in the world that ever used the word jeekers and I had gone to school with him and neither one of us knew that we were going to meet up on the ship so we stayed up all night and we talked about all of our experiences and it was quite a reunion but that was about the only I met quite a few fellas overseas that I had gone to school with but that was about it.

RR: Anything else you want to mention about your battle experiences?

BW: Well, being in the artillery we about our harriest moments were the beginning of the battle of the bulge and seeing the tanks and the artillery come over the hill towards us was quite an experience but other than that I didn't have any close calls I didn't receive any injuries I was very fortunate although we lost quite a few people but thankfully I wasn't one of them.

RR: Is there anything else you think you want to mention?

BW: No, it was a great experience. I was in four years 3 months, and four days, and I wouldn't want to do it again, but I wouldn't have missed it for the world. It was quite an experience.

RR: What did you do when you got home?

BW: First thing I did was go and see my mother in the hospital and then a friend of mine or course I didn't have a car friend of mine took me to Onida where my mother was in the hospital and he said on the way to Onida what are you plans what are you going to do and I said I have no idea I said I can go back to Revere but I'm not looking forward to that and he said well we have a job at the Rome Sentinel if you're interested and I said well it sounds fine I had no experience but I said you know I can learn so I ended up after I was discharged working at the Rome Sentinel and I worked there 8 years and then I transferred to Utica to The Observer dispatch and I worked there 30 more years so I'm retired from the Observer dispatch and I've been retired 22 years so I'm having a good life.

RR: Well, thank you very much.

BW: My pleasure.

RR: I was going to ask something about you said you used, howitzers was there any other types of artillery that your division used during the war when you were over in Europe?

BW: Oh yes, yes I was in a USO CLUB in England I can't think of the name of the town and as I was coming into the club they the club was in a castle and had a winding staircase and as I walked in I looked up the staircase and down came a friend who I was in school with and of course there again we spent quite a bit of time and then just before we went overseas over the channel I heard a story that there was a red cross lady in Salsbury England and so I asked the first sergeant if I could go and see this girl her name was Jean Wiggins and her father was a wheel in Revere and they lived on north George street and I think its 508 north George and which is right next to the Y so I had not known her before I knew the name but I figured somebody from Rome I got to see her before I go overseas so I got transportation to Salisbury and met her and she was very gracious we had dinner together and spent a few hours talking about Rome and different things and that was a unique experience I enjoyed that.

RR: What was the USO club?

BW: Well, it was a bunch of entertainers that would go overseas, and they would be singers or dancers, or it was a place to go and relax, and they gave you coffee, donuts, Coke, Pepsi, whatever, it was just a place to relax and hang out. It was very nice, they were all over the country, all over the world.

RR: What was it like during the liberation of France?

BW: When we went into Paris I think every person in the country of France turned out because the division was the first American division to enter the city of Paris and so they put on a parade and we paraded down through the city center and we didn't do anything other than just go through and we set up on the other side of Paris in fact it was on the lawn of the Versailles palace and that is a beautiful palace and the grounds were just extraordinary and here we are with great big trucks and guns and everything parked on the long of the Versailles palace and that was quite an experience.

RR: What about Corporal William Weight? You talked a little about him. Do you want to embellish a little more?

BW: He was the battery medic but he chose to travel with our section and he was a character he was young I think bill was 19 when I met up with him and of course being a red cross medic he wasn't allowed to carry any guns or weapons and I had a constant fight with him because he had picked up a m16 rifle that he had stashed in the truck that at that time the Germans were noted for harming the medics they didn't recognize the red cross so my constant battle with him to leave his gun in the truck was quite a thing but I don't think I would have been alive today if it hadn't been for bill because he dug all of my fox holes and while I was getting the gun set up for firing I didn't have a chance to dig a foxhole and they were very essential believe me and bill always took care of that chore.

RR: You received some medals while you were in during WWII. You want to talk a little about the medals that you got?

BW: Well, actually, the only medals that we got were for the different battles, and I honestly don't even know where they are. My wife probably has got them stashed away somewhere, but the only one I was proud of was a good conduct medal.

RR: I have a question with all the recent movies and media that's been placed on WWII, do you think that it's been a long time coming that people have started to actually like veterans have started to actually talk about what really happened in the war, do you think that's a good thing?

BW: I think so I have not seen any of them because I just I just m nit interested that may sound funny but I lived it once and I don't want to live it again but I think that the country has been very negligent in alerting young people who have no idea of what war is like and if this will fulfill their needs to know I'm all for it because it's something that we hopefully never have to go through again were in a conflict right now that is could be endless and it it's not fun it's really it's hard to explain you want to be there yet you don't want to be there and you do what you have to do.

RR: When were you at Normandy

BW: We had the beaches at Normandy in the 22nd day after D-day which would make it the 28th of June and there was on the bluffs of Omaha beach there was a lot of soldiers were killed there wasn't too much action there we landed fairly freely there was no fighting or anything like that but the battle lines were only about a mile and a half inland from Omaha beach so that when we

pulled into this little apple orchard that I spoke of we didn't even bother to dig foxholes because we figured you know it was we weren't going to be there that long and lo and behold we were strafed by a measure smith that night about 6:00 well dirt flew for about an hour because everybody started to dig in.

RR: What was the measure smith

BW: It was well, it was a reconnaissance plane, it was a German fighter, and they just strafed down through the area, and luckily, they didn't hit into anything, but at least they alerted us to the possibility.

RR: What about your experience in the Ardennes?

BW: This is great. We were in the Ardennes for about maybe 10 days and we were in water the guns were in water it was a swamp really and very uncomfortable our feet were never dry and while we were in the Ardennes they issued the overshoes this was during the winter of course and we had overshoes so we all got spot where we could dry our feet and put on dry socks and put on our overshoes and we had them one day and the phone rang and the commanding officer says we have to turn in our overshoes the infantry needs them so of course the infantry had first priority on everything because they were they were in deep trouble so we had overshoes for about one day and dry feet for about maybe 10 hours back to the wet feet again but every shell which weighs 95 lbs had to be carried in that couldn't be trucked in and we probably had to carry the ammunition maybe 500 yards to keep our guns supplied and one night a P38 American fighter flew over and that was the first time I had ever seen a P38 which was a twin fuselage plane and we weren't sure whether it was American or German there not having any knowledge of the plane but that was about it.

RR: All right, well thank you very much.

BW: My pleasure.

RR: Very interesting.

BW: Thank you.