

Thomas C. Nicolla
Veteran

Michael Russert
Wayne Clarke
Interviewer

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MR: All right, this is an interview at the New York State Military Museum, Saratoga Springs, New York, the 24th of January 2007, approximately 10:00 AM. Interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clarke. Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth, please?

TN: I'm Thomas C. Nicolla. I was born on April 10th, 1923, in Cohoes, New York.

MR: What was your educational background prior to entering service?

TN: I graduated from Albany High School in 1941.

MR: Where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

TN: I was coming home from a movie at the Palace Theater in Albany with a few friends. As we passed the firehouse, one of the firemen who knew us mentioned what happened. It was on Sunday.

MR: Do you remember your and your friends' reactions about this?

TN: It was just that the Japanese attacked. We didn't know to what extent it was until we got home and started picking it up on the radio. It was shocking because they had two Japanese ambassadors here in Washington. You never expected with them here that they would pull that. And, of course, they had a tough time getting back home.

MR: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

TN: I was drafted.

MR: Were drafted into the Army?

TN: I was drafted in the Army. It was about January 5th or 7th, 1944. I went down to Camp Upton, Long Island, and I was inducted into the Army. Do you want me to go on from there?

MR: Yeah.

TN: From there, I was sent to the State of Washington for my basic training, which is one of the worst places in the world to do basic training because I was there in January, February, March. The greatest rainy season in our country is up in the northwest. It's eighty inches a year on average.

WC: Was that Fort Lewis, Washington?

TN: No, it was Camp Bonneville. It was an old CCC [Civilian Conservation Corp] camp. They had just two barracks and the rest were just concrete slabs with tents, previously. But the fire had damaged everything. So we were given tents.

MR: You mean there was a forest fire?

TN: It was a forest fire. All that was sticking up were charred telephone poles. From there on, we had to have raincoats, rain gear, everything, to do basic calisthenics or marching and everything else. I don't think we had one dry day.

MR: How long were you there?

TN: I was there for three months. The nearest recreational city was Portland, Oregon. It was right across the Columbia River. That was one of the greatest USO centers, I think, in the whole duration of the war. I was in a Hollywood Canteen [club] and things like that. They were so nice. You could stand on a corner and they stopped and picked you up, took you home for dinner, or took you anywhere you wanted to go.

MR: Did you see any name USO shows while you were there?

TN: Oh yeah. From there I went to a sterilization bath unit in Long Beach, California. I was put in with a sterilization and bath unit because before I went into service, I was a clerk. Albany hired me because they knew I was going to be drafted. It was a tractor-trailer, and the trailer part opened up. The sides opened up and the sprinkler heads came out, and there was a wood stair that went up to a platform which flipped down from the bottom of the tractor trailer. In the center, they had this delousing unit. As the soldiers in the field came in, they stripped down and they put their clothing in a cord bag. Then threw them into this thing that pressurized and killed all the pests. They walked through, we watered them down, they soaped each other up, and then we rinsed them off and they went off the other way. But they had nothing to stand on. They just walked into mud.

But the reason I'm telling you this is it seemed that no matter where I went, I had difficulty in my timing as far as going to the latrine. I remember when I went into one public latrine in Camp Upton on Long Island. It was just a sort of a large barrack with toilets on either side and they had other things in there. They had this fifty two-gallon oil drum as a heating thing. Being in January, it was very cold. The work they put us through was through the wooded area where we cut brush and brought it down to where they could burn it. The first day I was there, the first morning, I went to the latrine and they had individual bowls, no separation at all. I came up to one of them and I took toilet tissue to line the seat. I sat down and was next to a fellow and I didn't know his ranking. He happened to be a sergeant. We were talking. He said, Where are you from? I told him. He said, You're very neat. I looked at him and I said, Why? And he said, you lined the seat. So, you know what you do when you're here? You're going to come in here every morning and clean this place out. I said, Okay. So I went in, but all the others were out there freezing. My orders were to clean the place. If they wanted to use the latrine, they used it and got out in five minutes. Nobody came in to get warm. That was the greatest duty I had. I'm saying this because everywhere I went I seemed to get involved with latrines.

I went from the sterilization and bath unit and from there, I was tested and I went up to the Pasadena Junior College for a month. They tested me and sent me to the University of California at Berkeley. I took a ten-month course in engineering. Because they said that once we invaded Europe, the bridges and highways had to be repaired and they needed engineers badly. We had to be busted down to a private while we went to school and when we graduated, we were going to be second lieutenants. I don't even know whether I had a rank when I went there, maybe PFC, I don't know. They had the four units there, the Marines, Air Force, Navy, and the Army. When I finished there, we went before this board of officers and generals. We were told that they had to stop the unit called the Army Specialized Training Program. ASTP, and we would either go into the fighting forces or you could put in for either a doctor or a dentist. I always wanted to be a doctor. We went in, we lined up. We asked people coming out, what they asked you and what they did. They said, they asked if you're a brave soldier, do you want to get over there and fight for your country and everything like that. And you wouldn't want to become a doctor or dentist. They embarrassed the hell out of you. I was next to the last. I went in and, gee, I was very impressed with all these officers and everything. They asked me the same things. I said, I want to go into the Armed Forces. They said, Good, congratulations. We can't make you a second lieutenant because you're going into a unit that's full strength. Once you get involved there, if they have openings, they'll make you a

second lieutenant. This didn't mean too much to me. I said, Well, what about if I wanted to be a doctor or dentist? They said, You don't want to be that. So I came out. The last fellow in line was the only one that I ever met from Albany. He was Norman Paul. He became a doctor in the service, and he became a doctor in Albany after the war. He asked me the same things, and I told him. Then I never saw him after that.

After we finished at the University of California at Berkeley, I was sent down to Camp Cooke, where the 11th Armored Division was just formed. They had been on maneuvers in Louisiana and Mississippi and all those places in the South. They were all gung-ho. We came up. I played some football when I was at the University of California. The reason I'm mentioning this is I don't know if you're a Boston Red Sox or football buff or anything like that. I played with the Army team, and we used to play in the University of California's huge stadium that held eighty thousand people. The services played amongst themselves, and then we scrimmaged against the University of California's football team when they were practicing. I don't know whether we had Super Bowls there or not, but they were going to have to pick one of the services to play the University of California football team. We had the winning record, so they said no. This poor Air Force, the glamour of the Air Force, something like this. So we didn't play them. The quarterback for the University of California was Jackie Jensen. He was an All-American football player, and he also played with the Boston Red Sox.

From there, I went down with the 11th Army Division, and I got into their football program right at the beginning, but we were just training. Our coach was Ellison. He was an All-American at Georgia, and he had a fellow that was an All-American from West Virginia as his co-coach. The team was made up of ex-guys from colleges and everything like that. So when I came in, I couldn't tell them anything other than I practiced out there.

We went out every morning and did calisthenics and this and that. The captain came out with these memos of what to expect when you went overseas. One memo said we weren't to fraternize with any of the foreigners we were over there with. When he got to the word fraternization, he told us to huddle around. There were about thirty five of us. Next to me was a fellow from some other ASTP college. When he [the captain] got to the word fraternization, he mispronounced it. He kept struggling with it, and this guy [next to me] prompted him. He looked up. I didn't have a smile on my face. I had sort of a shocked expression, like, Geez, he prompted the captain. He said to me, Do you want to read this? I said, No, sir. He said, Everybody is dismissed, I want to see you. So I went over to him. He said to me, What's your name and what barrack are you with? He said, From now on, put a towel at the end of your bunk. You're going to pull KP and guard duty every day

that you're here until we go overseas. I didn't know why. Well, gee, the other guy said it. So what happened was, every morning at five, they woke me up and I went to the kitchen. They went out onto the firing range and everything else. I had to clean the latrines. When they finally were ready to go overseas, I got a call from Ellison. I went to headquarters and he said, I understand you're not getting any break from this captain and you haven't had any furloughs or anything like that. Did you get to go home? I said, No. He said, We'll try to arrange that before we ship overseas. He said, Were you ever in track? I said, I did shot put and discus. He said, on Saturday we're going to have a track meet. When he came over Saturday, I was the only one there. He handed me a discus and said, Throw it. I threw it. He said, You won a three day pass. I had a girlfriend at the University of California. She called down and wanted to talk to me. And said it would be nice if I came back for three days. I got the three-day pass. Then I got a call from another First Sergeant. In the cavalry they had troops instead of companies. He was Troop A. I went to see him and he said to me, I don't know what you did to this Captain Woodnell [?], but he was here with his First Sergeant and a couple of other officers going through your records. They even wanted to know your IQ. The thing that you're going to find out is they're out to get you, so watch your back. I thought nothing of it. I said, Gee, that can't be. He's an American. He wouldn't try to kill an American. As it happened, this was true. Everywhere I went, even when I was in battle. I had a jeep driver that...I'll start with the stories when we finally got to Europe. We landed in Southampton, England.

MR: What unit were you assigned to?

TN: Oh, I'm sorry. It was the 11th Armored Division, 41st Cavalry Reconnaissance.

MR: Now, how did you get overseas? Did you take a convoy?

TN: From Camp Cooke, we took a train all the way across the country. I had kitchen duty on the car. I ate well, I slept well. Went through the cars, gave potatoes or hunks of meat. They were hungry. They wanted to buy it and I couldn't do it. He thought he was doing me a bad thing, but he did me a good thing. We got to Camp Kilmer in Jersey or Staten Island. I forgot where it was. We went across the harbor and we got on an Italian liner, the [SS] Conte de Savoia. We sailed out in convoy. They told me when I got on board ship, I was assigned to the Marines because they were the guards, the MPs, on board ship. We got on; these things were crowded. It wasn't too bad. But as we started going and the sea got rough, they wanted to come out on deck. When you went on deck and the door opened, all the lights inside the ship went off because of the possibility of German submarines. So when I reported to the Marines, he said, You're going to be stationed on this deck. Even during the day, you don't let anybody out here. Even if they want to come out and take a smoke or anything like that. We got other convoy ships. He said, You just

light a match and you get a U-boat firing at you. They had to knock on the door because it was locked from my side. When I opened it, the lights went out and he said, I'm captain or so-and-so. I never had a general. He said, I'm coming out to just take a smoke. And I said, No, you're not allowed on. And I closed the door on them. They slammed on the door and everything. The Marine on the other deck said, That's the way to go. Because if you let him out, You go down. [laughs] So from then on, I was sour grapes to all of them. We got over there and did some training at Chippingham, just above London.

MR: When did you arrive in Europe?

TN: Oh, gosh.

MR: Approximately?

TN: I think it was...let's see. Would have had to have been in like November or something of 1944. Because they had the invasion in June, didn't they? It was a month after that when we were sent across the Channel and landed at Cherbourg. The harbor was just sunken ships all over the place so you wouldn't get in. The Corps of Engineers cut up some of them in the middle so that they could be towed away so we could get ships in. Of course, the main landing was at Normandy. We found out we were decoys because we were part of the Third Army of General Patton. This was just a token army. It wasn't even to full strength, but they knew they would draw the Germans to that area, which they did. We didn't have any equipment. We didn't have anything. It was wintertime, snow on the ground. All we had were olive drab dress uniforms and field jackets. Our general, [Charles Solomon] Kilburn, came across on the Queen Mary with Winston Churchill. When we got to England, we didn't have our equipment. It was sent to a different port. An officer in one of the other units, along with one of his men, wanted somebody from the cavalry to go through to Wales and pick out our equipment. They thought it was a crappy deal, so they sent me. It was one of the best deals I had in the world. I went to see Wales and Cardiff, Bath, and all through there. When we finished there, of course, you had to deal with the British with their tea breaks. We were there for about a week. When I got back to go to Cherbourg, some of the equipment didn't even come over with us. Patton was furious. So as we started to get in, they started the Battle of the Bulge. The Germans made the attack. Patton later on, in the conversations I had with him, wanted to cut The Bulge off just as it came into Belgium and Luxembourg. They wanted them to head for Hafele, which was about half of The Bulge. They said that if we cut through there, we could meet The First Army at Hafele's and trap the Germans. I'll tell you this later, but Patton wanted to go and cut it just at the beginning and trap the whole army, and the war would have been over. But I guess he was against Eisenhower's orders.

The next thing I knew, I was told that I was going to be attached to the 4th Armored Division. I said, What am I supposed to do? He said, You're a mortar gunner. I said, I never fired that mortar. He said, That's all right. I went there, and everybody was in their jeeps and armored cars. I said, Where do I go? The guy that threw me in with that fraternization, was the driver of one of the jeeps. He said, Jump in here. So I jumped in there. I sat and he gave me a carbine. It had a bazooka attachment at the top of it. I was afraid to fire it because it looked like I should take it off before I fired it. But that was where he put the mortar round or the bazooka round, whatever it was. I didn't even know where they were. So I never fired the gun. There were hedgerows in France. Every time we went, German planes strafed us. It's funny, you learned fast, you know. You said, Is it an American plane or is it...because they were so fast at that time. They were probably going a couple hundred miles an hour, I don't know. They gave us these fluorescent panels which we put on the hood of the car in a pattern. If an American plane came and he spotted that, as he left, he fishtailed to tell us he was an American, friendly. If they didn't, then you knew he was German. Then you jumped into ditches. Because of the hedgerows, the vehicle couldn't get off. We got in amongst the briars and all this other stuff. I don't know how many strafings we took, and I don't know how many people were killed, but we had no return power. Then finally, as we started getting further up, they transferred me back to the 11th Armored Division, the 41st Cavalry Recon.

How we slept, they had a bedroll in each of the jeeps for each one of the fellows. We came to a place where they stopped. You got a farm or a house or anything and told the people you were going to sleep there. With me, it was an open field. I threw the bedroll out. I didn't know better. I got into the bedroll. I had long johns, and I had an extra pair of long johns in between the blankets and the outer part of the bedroll. In the wintertime, I had weak kidneys. I couldn't hold it. Even when I was sleeping, I'd be soaking wet. I took the things off and threw them out and put the other long johns on. I did that with my socks and everything. Finally, they gave us galoshes. because the shoes were creosoted and they froze. They gave us galoshes, Arctics, that went over them. I threw the shoes away and put the Arctics on. I went to a farmer, and he gave me some sheared wool from one of his sheep. It wasn't clean. There was still blood and manure and everything. I stuffed it in. A Red Cross ambulance driver, a black fella, going by, saw me, and he threw out a blanket. He said, Tear it up and wrap it around your shoes. Which I did. I looked like Bill Mauldin's sad sign.

MR: Did you ever get any other winter equipment, winter coats or anything?

TN: The next thing, we came to this farm. There was about two feet of snow all over the place. It wasn't my unit. It was another unit. They said, we're going to give you these white hoods and capes, so that you blend with the snow. They sent me. I reported to this farmhouse. There was a potbelly stove, some officers and some other enlisted men. He said, put this on. So I put it on. He said, you're part of a patrol. You're going to be the point. See those woods way down at the end of that clearing? Skirt that area here, go along, find cover. If a plane went over, I was supposed to fall flat and show just white. [He said] When you get down to the end, circle around and come back. I had about four or five other fellows with me. I used to love the snow when I was back home. In fact, I got pictures that *Knickerbocker [News]* took when I was shoveling and I had tons of snow on my head. They used to print it in the *Knickerbocker* every year. Then the *Times Union* picked it up. Anyway, I started coming back the other way and out in the field, which nobody told me, there was a small river that went through. It was all covered with snow and ice. There were four little stumps of a post railing with snow on them. So, you could see. As I was coming up, the farmhouse was there, and I said, I think I should go this way to get to the farmhouse, between the posts. It was almost rectangular. When I came up to the thing, I said, let me cross the bridge. When I crossed where the ice was, I went through and I went under. It wasn't that wide, so those guys came over and grabbed me. I was just soaking wet. I said, go the other way. [laughs] We crossed the bridge, they brought me into where the officer was. They were all seated around this potbelly stove and they told them what happened. I went through the water and was soaking wet. He said, Sit here on the floor. He had a chair, everybody had a chair. I had to sit on the floor next to the thing drying my clothes. So from then on I said, Hell, I'm going to be out for myself. Nobody was out for me.

When we started the Battle of the Bulge, when we were continuing on with it, we had a checkpoint. We were told that anybody coming through, American soldiers or what, to get their ID. Make sure they're Americans because there were Germans disguised as American troops. And asked them questions like, Who was married to Harry James?

WC: Betty Grable.

TN: [Did not know the answer] They would have shot me. Anyway, so I was in a barn and we had the checkpoint there. There was this buck sergeant and another guy. All of a sudden, I heard this commotion, yelling and screaming. I grabbed my carbine and ran out. There was General Patton in his Jeep with the little red plaque on the bumper with the three stars. There were three stars on his helmet. He had three stars on his shoulder. He's got the [gestures to his waist where a pistol would be] I always thought they were pearl handles, but I think they were ivory handles. He corrected everybody. It was ivory

handled guns. He was standing up in the jeep screaming at this buck sergeant who said, ID! He [Patton] said, Don't you know there's thousands of pictures of me and everything like that? I'm General Patton. [sergeant said] I want to see your ID. So I went up to him and I said, That's General Patton, who I saluted. He said, Okay, you can go through. He [Patton] said, Thanks a lot. Let my tank through too. They had a tank right behind him. He said to me, What outfit is this? I said, 11th Armored Division. He said, No wonder we're losing the war. [laughs]

From then on, all we did was, we kept going. Nobody had any point. We were in file going north through the Ardennes Forest. I was in a jeep and I don't know how many were ahead of us. It was dark and everybody was getting sleepy. We stopped for quite a while. The driver fell asleep, I fell asleep, and the sergeant in the jeep fell asleep. The next thing you knew, an officer came up to the jeep. He said, You guys, wake up and get going! I woke up, looked ahead and it was blank. There was nobody in front of us. So we started going and drove like mad. Well, these guys, I don't know what the hell it was, they got to the assembly area and set up a perimeter of guards. We came up and they fired like hell at us. [laughs] We yelled, Americans! We're Americans! That was the way it was. It was a screw-up totally, throughout the whole war. It's the same way with Iraq. Because there were so many GIs killed by friendly fire that Patton issued a statement. He wanted more lieutenants killed than the fellows that are being killed, the regular soldiers. He said he wanted to see every unit that went out led by an officer, not by GIs themselves. That was pretty good.

We were coming to a river just before we went into Luxembourg or Belgium, the Weiss River, whatever it was. I remember being in a jeep. They had the machine gun jeep, which I later became a machine gunner. That was the first jeep. Then there was an armored car, and then there was a mortar jeep. That was the one I was in. What happened, as you came along, the Germans pulled back and tried to get their equipment and everything out. Their 88s were pulled either by a weapons carrier, horses, or anything they found. Most of all, they wanted to get small American vehicles. At that time I didn't know, because I thought I was going to be killed off. As we went along, there was a culvert pipe in an area where it was wooded and you couldn't get off the road. They let the three of us get by, then they blew it. The hair on the back of my neck stood up. You looked back and there was dirt. Then they opened fire with machine guns at us. Of course, we returned fire, but we couldn't get any help from tanks or anything because they couldn't make it through whatever was blown out. I didn't fire anything. I mean, I didn't know what to fire. I couldn't see anything. They wanted to kill us, but they didn't

want to hit the jeeps or the armored car. This happened until we got to Worms. That was on the Rhine.

There were a lot of instances where we were strafed and under German air fighters. We had the 9th Air Force with us, their P-51s. The reason I'm telling this is, we stopped and they were strafing us and everything, so we called. All of a sudden, they ducked down into this valley. Two P-51s came over the hill. They had this regular aerial fight. We couldn't believe it. The Germans did that thing like in the movies, you know. They came to the other side where they had to climb and let out black smoke, like they were hit. Then just as the American peeled off because of the slope of the mountain, they [German plane] peeled off again and came back and tried to get the other P-51. They were going along like that. The guy in the armored car said, I have a box camera, take a picture of it. I said, Okay. I was looking at the viewfinder like this, and I saw these red dots coming towards me. I looked up and the German planes were coming at us, but the P-51s were firing at them and they had the armor-piercing tracer, and the high-explosive shells. The red I saw was that tracer bullet. I dove under the armored car. I don't know what I did with the camera. They [planes] peeled off and continued fighting. I said, The hell with this. No pictures, no nothing from now on.

From then on, there were hardly any German fighters involved because they couldn't get the gas. We got to where the 82nd Airborne was going to jump off and try to get the Romanian bridgehead over the Rhine. It was Christmas Eve and I had to pull guard duty. They were at Soissons [France]. But before we got there, we passed the trenches of Verdun, the battle of the First World War. They're still there. They kept them in shape and we went in them. When we got to Soissons, it was in the evening because we were going to replace the 82nd Airborne. They knew the Germans knew that they were there, and they were keeping an eye on them because they figured they'd be the ones to jump across the Rhine to take care and protect the bridges. As we came in, through the gate, there was a brick three or four story apartment house. At night we came through. The first order I got was to replace the 82nd guard in the guard post. So I went up with my gun and I went up the hill there. It was a little hill, and you looked down at the camp. The snow was coming down and the chapel had been hit with a shell. When the lights went on in the chapel for evening Christmas mass, the light came through. I said, Gee. I wasn't Catholic, and I wasn't even Orthodox. My family was. We were the only Orthodox family in all of Cohoes [NY]. My father couldn't go to church every Sunday because you had to take the trolley all the way from Cohoes to Saint Sophia. Consequently, my father gave us all the things about Christ and everything, so I felt I had somebody on my side anyway. When I was up there, I got the warmest feeling. I said, Gee, you know, this is

really nice. One of the guards came up and was changing the other guard, and he said, They're going to have turkey down in the mess hall. There's nobody there to cut it up. He said, When you get off, go down there and tear off a leg or breast or anything. I said, Oh gee, that's great. I waited for my relief. Finally another guy came to relieve the other guy. I said, Am I getting relief? The guy coming off said, Come with me, I'm going to mass. I said, I'm not Catholic. He said, That doesn't make a difference. Come on down.

So we went down and I always remember going in. It was a little small chapel and the pews and everything were damaged so they piled them in the middle so you were against the wall all the way around. The priest came in, the chaplain or whatever he was, and he started saying the Mass and all of a sudden the snow came through again. Nobody paid any attention to it. It was snowing in the church. I thought that was the greatest feeling I ever had. He said to me, When I kneel down, you kneel down. So I did that. And in my own way, I didn't know any prayers, but somebody took care of me. After it was all over with, I went over and I said, I'm going over to the kitchen to get the turkey. They said, That's all gone, we're leaving. So I got into my Jeep. As we're going out, one of the officers from basic training said to us, I don't know how many people would take an honorable discharge, and not go over? Everybody put their hands up. I didn't, but they did. He said, Listen, when you get over there and you're fighting for your country, you know, you want to be there. So he watched us go out and he said, I can't go with you. I jumped from the half-track and sprained my back. There was another officer down near the gate. He said, I can't go. I sprained my back. Of course, all these guys gave them the boo-hoo. But in that building, this firehouse, were the prostitutes. They serviced the 82nd Airborne, or the French when they were there. They were hooting and hollering. They were waving to us.

When we left there, we started going towards Worms, which is on the Rhine. That time, we got heavy fire, artillery, and machine gun fire. I finally said, Gee, I don't even know how to fire them. I didn't even know what to do. I can't even fire my carbine. They said they need volunteers to be a machine gunner at the head jeep. I said, I'll take it. They said, Did you ever fired a machine gun? I said, No. They said, Okay. I got up and it was a .30 caliber. They didn't tell the driver I never fired it. I got this guy, his name is John Topper, we all called him Topper. He said, Do you know why you volunteered? I said, Yeah, I wanted firepower. He said, No. Before, the machine gunner didn't have this protection in the front of the jeep. They put an angle iron up with slanty notches, so that my machine gun could clear the top of the angle. But when they were downseated, firing, if they had a wire across the road, which they did, it decapitated two of the machine gunners. That's why nobody wanted to volunteer, and I didn't know. I said, Well, I'll take

it. See if they got this angle there, and I'll be sure to watch and keep my head down. All of a sudden, all hell broke loose, and this guy said, Fire! I pulled the trigger and fired, and it jammed. I pulled the thing and it jammed. He was yelling, Fire! Fire! I said, It's jammed. All of a sudden, everything went quiet. He said, When you go to bed tonight, take that machine gun and clean it. You better hold it by the jacket and just cock it where it just cocks by itself. I said, You got to show me how to do that. He showed me how to do it. I had to do it with no lights on from then on. From then on, boy, that was my baby. I took care of it.

Before we got to Worms, they told us that the tankers were coming and we had to go see what was in there. Whether there were tankers or German soldiers or anything like that. Topper and I were the only two. We went closer to the Rhine to get to them. The airport was west of Worms. All of a sudden, these tankers came up and they were shooting the planes. I didn't know whether they were fighters or what. They were firing at the thing. I said, Holy God. I said, Duck into the Worms, the city there. And it was just the end street before you hit the part of the river. We came around the end building, got in. Everything was quiet. There was nobody running around, there was nobody. I said, What the hell's going on here? Topper said, Get one of the houses and stay there. I'm going back for ammo and gas. I said, Okay. When are you coming back? He said, I'll pick you up in the morning. He went back to get food and everything at the chuck wagon. I was stupid, I had K-rations and that was all.

It was still daylight out, and I started walking around the streets. This German who looked like he wasn't a soldier or anything like that, was an official. He didn't have a uniform that an Army guy would have had. I'll show you pictures of the Bürgermeister. It almost looked like a military uniform. He came to me and said, Are you going to come in and take the city? I said, We already took it. It's an open city. I didn't know what was going to happen. He said, We know what you American soldiers do. You come in, rape and loot and kill our kids. I said, Oh, no, no, no. He said, I want to show you something. There was a huge building. He took me inside, and I was a little suspicious. I didn't have a weapon with me. We got up there, and it was this big lab. I didn't know whether it was part of a college complex or what, but they had this glass showcase with microscopes in the whole thing. It was just loaded. I said, God. In Albany, in my high school class, we just had one for the whole school. Anytime you had to look through it, you had to file past and look at it. He said, We'd appreciate it if you didn't touch them or loot them. I said, Lock up everything. This is an open city. Sure as all hell, the word went out that it was an open city. They wouldn't even come in to look around. When I had to leave, he

came over and asked, What is your name? I said, I can't give you a name. I was going to give my name and serial number or something like that. He said, We want to thank you.

They put up a pontoon bridge across the Rhine near the Remagen. Tanks and everything were using that. Smaller vehicles went over this pontoon bridge. So we crossed right around south of Frankfurt. There was shelling and things like that, but it was hitting in the water. You never knew whether it's friendly or not because it seemed that they said there were no Germans around, then all of a sudden you got mortar fire. When we crossed, I'm a little vague because supposedly the Germans switched the signs on cities and roads or anything. Because of my intelligence, they gave me a map with a foil over it and there was a crayon. It went from J to O. They wouldn't put the name of the city or anything like that. If you were going to be captured, rub that out, so nobody would know what it was.

We started going along and I said turn left up here, go right. As we did this, the Germans, in pulling back, were trying to get vehicles. We were being fired at constantly. The machine gun jeep had a metal shield in front of the driver and the copilot. They had a little opening where he had to look through. I could look over it. Of course, I had to fire over that angle. I remember I had five canisters of shells. I started firing, and he said, Over to the left, in that wooded area, in that house, up in that window. I fired away. When we stopped, I was knee-deep in casings from the shells. I said, God, I need more casings. Will you go back and get me more? I wound up at the end of the war with twenty two canisters. Every place I went, I didn't care who it was, what it was, I fired away. The only beauty part of it is when we entered a fairly large city or town, we had to be careful. Because Eisenhower had dropped these leaflets, If you want to surrender, put out some white sheets. So if you came into a town that didn't have any white sheets, you had to be suspicious. So rather than go down the middle of the road and start looking either way, I called for the infantry. I had direct radio with the 9th Air Force. I had the [Piper] cub plane, the spotter for the artillery, and I had the MPs and the medics. When I went in, I said, I think we need the tanks or the infantry. I called the infantry who went ahead of us. The 21st Infantry was with us. The guy was a First Lieutenant. He was the only officer I ever admired. He got in the middle. All he had was a pistol. His men streamed along each side of the street. The guys on the right side looked at the windows and everything above the fellas on the left side and they looked vice versa. As we went along, if anything was suspicious, and it was too much, they yelled and pointed to the window. If they spotted somebody, like a soldier or something, I opened fire. I emptied a whole canister in these buildings. Then all of a sudden, the white flags and everything came out. They continued on through. We got down to the end. My driver said, Get a place to stay and I'm going back for ammo. He asked, Do you need more canisters? I said, Why can't I come back

with you? He said, The infantry has surrounded the whole town or city. I didn't know he was part of that unit there. They were trying to get rid of me. I said to myself, he's got that shield and everything in front of him. They're going to get me because they wanted the Jeep. So I was especially careful.

So the next thing, we went to where the tanks were behind us. I was the machine gun leader. All of a sudden, the machine gun opened up from the rear of a barn. It was a farmhouse over on the left. The road came up and sort of bent to the right around a little knoll. As we came up to it, the barn was set up a little high and they were firing through the wooded area there at the tanks. The tanks couldn't swing away and they couldn't fire because of the trees. They had to swing out and get over to the area where the farmhouse was. Where the road bent, they had these Germans with the 88s and everything trying to fire at them as they came around. The reason I'm saying 88s, [was because] as I came around the bend, laying on the ground at the bend, there must have been fourteen, fifteen German soldiers laying down with their helmets on, with bazookas. They had some light brush there. As I turned around and looked, [I thought] where's the machine gunner? My driver said, Fire, Tom. I said, Where? He said, Those guys in the field. I opened fire, and that was as close as I ever got. They must have been two hundred feet away. When I hit them with the shells, they jerked up. They almost popped up, you know, and I just emptied it like that.

But when it stopped, I still heard the machine gun going off. They said to me, What did you do? I said, We got the guys, are they still firing? He said, Yeah, from that barn. Go down and see what you can do there. We drove down. We came to where the barn was. There was a farmyard, and a wooden gate. We came up and the gate was on a post that you had to push in. Then there was the gate to the barn door, which was about thirty feet in. We came up to the little road that the farmer had. I said, I can't fire through the gate and the barn door to get to them. I said, Wait a minute. I jumped down, ran up and pushed the gate open. I ran back to get on the machine gun and he said, It's closed, Tom. Get back to it. I said, Holy geez. It was on like a swivel. It closed itself. So I got up there, opened it up and he jumped up on the machine gun. He said, Lean back as far as you can. I pushed back on this gate. He fired a whole canister into the thing. In fact, he fired so much, the door came off and was hanging off the hinges. There were cows, horses, and soldiers in there screaming. I came back and everything went quiet. The guys in the tank called and said, Did you get them? I said, I'm going in to look and see. The driver said, You wouldn't get me in there if you paid me as much money as there is in the world because I don't want to see what's in there. So he told them, All clear. The tankers came

through. It always happened that way. They felled a tree across the road to stop us. The tankers were behind us, of course. Do you want me to continue on?

MR: Yeah.

TN: Oh, okay. Before that, let me tell you this. We came up on Kulmbach and the great thing there was they had the brewery. They made Kulmbach beer and everybody knew about that. Nobody wanted to destroy that, so they got the kegs of beer and everything. But they told me to go south to Bayreuth. They didn't name it, but whatever the code name was for it. We went down, and as we started turning into a little wooded area on a high hill just before we could see Bayreuth, there were two German officers standing there. I said to them, Are you surrendering? They said, No, we want to speak to your officers. I said, Okay. I called back and said they spoke English. He said that his general wanted to surrender his regular troops. The Burgermeister wanted to surrender Bayreuth, that's the way you say it. When they came in, there was a Jewish friend of mine. He spoke Yiddish, which is sort of a dialect of German. He questioned them, and he couldn't get too much out of them. Our colonel that had Combat Command B, Colonel Yale, had a code name Doc, D-O-C. Of course, when he talked on the damn radio, he called me by name, Nicolla. Consequently, if the Germans ever captured me, I was Nicolla and they knew Doc was my officer and things like that. The reason I'm saying this, it comes to play___

WC: Okay, let me stop here. We'll change tapes. Okay.

TN: Two officers went alongside this friend of mine who spoke Yiddish. He got some information, but nothing important. Doc came up with this tank and said, Nicolla, go down in and get the Burgermeister. I said, Where should I go? He said, Go into Bayreuth. I started the machine gun and started down, and there was a road that ran parallel to the first building, which was, we found out later, a political prison. As we came up to it, the guards and everything in there saw the white star of the Jeep and thought they were liberated. Some of the guys were coming out of the jail, whatever it was. They did all the work on TV. They invented the TV, the fighters, and everything. These guys were intelligentsia. So anyway, all of a sudden, machine gun fire opened up. There was a bridge right there with a dirt road going down next to it. I saw tracks. We were up kind of high and there were German soldiers who had mined the bridge. They were running up their contact wires to these detonators. I called back and I said to Doc, We're being fired on. Shall I return fire? He said, No, go in and get the Burgermeister. [laughs] I said, Okay. We started down and the German soldiers were running up to the far end. There was another bridge.

We were traveling and we got in there and they had these huge barricades. They pulled a post and cable together and they had stone in it. They only had openings for a little small car to go through. When we got through one of them there and saw German soldiers around, SS soldiers and they were watching us carefully. We got through there, what I thought was City Hall, but the British had bombed the City Hall. This was sort of the temporary City Hall, but also the SS Headquarters. The Burgermeister came out with his staff and introduced himself. He said, I want to surrender. I said, I can't accept your surrender. You have to come with me and I'll bring you up to the officers. He said, Can I bring anyone? I said, No, only you. So I seated him back with me, near the machine gun. We went up the same way we came in. We got up to the field where they are and I said to the driver, I want to take him over to Doc. He said, I'll take him over. He left the Jeep, got the Burgermeister and they went over. They started talking to Doc and the other officers, whoever they were. These two German officers were there. The driver came back and he said, Doc said go in and get the general. And I said, oh, okay.

So we started in the same way we came out. This time, The Germans on the tracks were all there and the detonators were at the next bridge, ready to blow. As we came up to go past that prison camp, to get down that road, these refugees came running out. One of them ran over to me. I turned the gun on him and he said, Wait, I can help you find the general. I said, You can find the general? How the hell did he know I was looking for the general. I said, Okay. He got in the driver's seat and I was still on the gun. We came to this bridge and the driver handed him pliers, and said Get out there and cut the wires. [laughs] He went out there and he was cutting the wires and the German soldiers were running. I said, Why wouldn't they fire at him? Because he was cutting the wires to the thing they had there. After he got that, I saw him on the hood of the Jeep and he was straddling that angle. My machine gun was right at his head. I told him this. If you aren't who you say you are___He said, I'm Yugoslavian. I said, We're going to call you Yugo for short. We started going down. He said, Go so many kilometers here. I said to myself, Boy, this guy's a phony. We got to a spot and all of a sudden, standing in the middle of the road was a German SS officer. I stood up and I put my hand on the machine gun and I said, Everyone is surrendering. Follow us. Yugo said he can't understand that. He said something to him and said to me, Take your hand off the machine gun. They had foxholes and all these SS soldiers got up. And the staff sergeant, I took it to be a staff sergeant, ran over to him and gave him the Heil Hitler salute. I said, Oh, geez. I had that sinking [feeling] I said, This is it, John. We've had it.

When we were driving down, somebody fired a shell into Bayreuth, I think. Or it may have been an explosion of one of the bridges that the Germans were blowing up. But I

heard Doc on the phone, and this guy heard it too. He was sitting on the hood of the Jeep as we were going down to the, he said, Whichever artillery unit fired that shell, pull them off the line. We got men in there negotiating surrenders. He didn't know who the hell we had in there. He didn't even know what was in there. We got down. The SS officer came over and he sat in the seat and the staff sergeant sat in the space between the passenger seat and me. I made a U-turn, we went under the Autobahn and we came into Bayreuth. There was a big square and a big building that was their headquarters. We pulled in and German soldiers and SS swarmed around us. They got out of the Jeep, left the driver and us alone in the square with all these German soldiers around us. They went in to get their equipment. In the meantime, I heard the Cub plane spotting German Tiger tanks getting onto the Autobahn and they were heading east. He said, I can't believe it. He was a New Yorker. I used to call him a New Yorker because we couldn't mention names or anything like that. He knew I was a New Yorker. He said, Those Tiger tanks are so wide, they take up the whole road. In back of them, were American vehicles. They had the white star on them. I said to myself, Jesus Christ, they captured all these vehicles. He said, There are more American vehicles than German vehicles. I don't know whether the Germans painted white stars on their equipment or anything like that. We were supposed to pull out, get on the Autobahn, and come up behind them. As we came out, we went under one of the bridges they had mined. We came up and got onto the ramp going to where we got onto the Autobahn. They blew that bridge. I estimate it went two hundred feet in the air. Concrete, dirt, everything imaginable. I'm telling you, that was a scary thing knowing that maybe you were going to get killed too, with that thing going off.

I told Yugo, What are we going to do? He said, We go wherever the officer wants us to go. We were going along, going along, and came to a ramp going on the Autobahn at maybe a few, maybe four or five miles down the road. As we started to get in line with the tanks, a staff car pulled up and there was a German major general stopped with two officers. His officer's staff, whatever. I didn't know what rank they had. Yugo said to me, This is Major General. He didn't give me a name. He said, He wants to talk to you. He didn't ask for the SS officer, but the SS officer got out and went up. I went up with him. I saluted him. He got out of that staff car. He had this long gray leather coat. It was soft as silk. You could see the way...there wasn't a wrinkle or anything in it. He had these high leather boots. He had this peak cap leather. He had a riding crop. When he came up...I saluted Patton like that. But I'm telling you, if they told me they'd shoot me if I saluted them, I'd salute them. He got out of there and the two staff sergeants on either side spoke English. I saluted them. He touched his crop to his cap. He didn't want to give the SS Heil Hitler thing. I found out later why he didn't. He asked the staff sergeants what rank. I said, I made myself a corporal. I didn't know what I was, but I said corporal. He said,

They sent a corporal to surrender? He said, We're surrendering an army in the south part of that area down there. We still want to, is there any way we can get officers? I said, no, we're here to negotiate the thing. I said to them, what are you going to do with us? Yugo answered, you're coming with us. I said, well, you can't because I figured it was about four o'clock. I said, at four o'clock, they're going to start shelling the city if we're not back. He said, No, they're not. I heard Doc on the radio say that no more shelling because we got men negotiating. I said, Goddamn. All of a sudden, the Cub plane spotted the little conversation we were having. He said, I think I've located Nicolla, but I can't get down low because they've got stuff that can reach me. He said, What are they doing? He said, I don't know, they're talking. Doc got on the phone and said, Hello, Nicolla. Hello, Nicolla. This is Doc, over. I'm up there trying to negotiate our release. I said, You can take the jeep if you want, but get us back to where our troops are because just as soon as that happens, all hell's going to break loose. Our division will be in Bayreuth.

The major general was arguing with the SS general. This was going on. All of a sudden, I still heard this jeep that was only about thirty feet away. The driver was frozen to the thing. I said to him, Turn the radio off. I went over to him because they were talking back and forth, the SS and the Major General. I went over and I picked up the phone. I put it to my ear. The staff sergeant ran over and put the pistol to my head. Yugo said, Put it down or he'll kill you. I remember putting it down. Then he said, The general wants to talk to you. I was on the driver's side, which was away from the general and my knees locked. All I can remember is, God, I had to get moving. Don't show him that you're afraid. I came around, looked at the guy and got them [knees] unlocked. I went over to them, and the Major General through his interpreter said, The problem we're having is that according to the German military code, when others surrender, any officer, enlisted man or non-com who wishes to continue can assume command. The highest ranking man. He assumes command and decides whether to release or not. I said, they're going to open fire regardless of whether we get back or anything like that. So they conveyed that to him. Finally, Yugo said, Okay, you can leave. I said, With the Jeep? He said, Yeah.

So, we got in the Jeep and started to go. Yugo had a big smile on his face. I said to him, Yugo, you want a word of advice? [laughs] Get back in your soldier uniform. It certainly will help. If you go up there like that, you're going to be a dead man. He was still smiling and he waved. We took off and we were going along. I was standing up in the Jeep because I didn't know where we were, whether there were still German soldiers around. All of a sudden, a motorcycle with two German officers came up alongside. I couldn't get the machine gun around the side. I turned around and said, Anybody surrendering, follow me. [laughs] They had a perfect British accent. They said, Blimey, man, we were in

Africa, prisoners of war, those limeys, for two years. We had enough of that. We don't want any more. They made a left turn and took off. We got back and nobody came over to us and asked what happened. What are they going to do? Or anything like that. The driver had the jeep. He left. I sat in the jeep, waiting. In the meantime, when we had gotten him, brought him out, he was still in the field all alone. No Americans or anything like that. There were a few German prisoners that either surrendered, they were off to the side near a wooded area. So I came along and said, Jeez, where the hell is everybody? I walked over to the burgermeister and said, What are you doing here? He said, The two German officers had a car. They took off. They went. The rest of them went to the other side of those woods. I said, What about you? He said, Don't you know you were the one who brought me out here? I have no way of getting back in. I drove the Jeep over and said, Get in. I drove him back to where I picked him up. He was so grateful. He said, All these regular Army guys want to surrender. The SS, we don't know, they were getting drunk.

He took me into what I thought was the city hall. He said, I want to show you the birthplace of Richard Wagner. We have the Richard Wagner Opera House here. He and I were alone. We went over to the Richard Wagner Opera House. There was a woman there who said it wasn't open. He showed it to me. I had read a book on Franz Liszt, whose daughter married Richard Wagner, so I knew a little about what was going on. When we got into the theater, the audience was very small. It only held about two hundred, two hundred fifty [seats]. But the stage, you wouldn't believe it, was about three times the depth of the audience area. They had these stage drops that could assimilate anything. If you wanted a waterfall or a road or anything moving, they dropped them. I said, Could I go back and take a look at it? They said yes. I went back and I was amazed how deep it was and the different stuff you could do. They had these costumes; you could be a dragon and all this other stuff. Anyway, after leaving there, he wanted to take me elsewhere. I said, No, I've got to get back.

When I got back, the next command I got was in the morning. I slept in the Jeep in the field. The next thing I knew, [they said] You have to continue on to some other place. I didn't know whether it was that road we came up. As we went down the road, I got a call from Doc. [He said], Nicolla, this is Doc. I answered him. He said, The Burgermeister is up here and he wants to give you a decoration. He said, You can't receive any enemy decorations. I said, That's okay. Thank him. That's all I said. We left. The reason I'm saying this is later on when I did visit, it's quite an interesting story. But anyway, the war part of it is we just took off and I didn't hear of anything. It didn't even come out in our

division's history about Bayreuth and all this. I said, What the hell is wrong here? Then I got a call from fellas whose lives I saved.

One time, we came to this town. It was a very large town. The road went along the edge, and then they had these roads going off at right angles. As we came up, they sent another platoon in. Lieutenant Towsley was a very good friend of mine. I heard on the radio our captain said to him, Go in there and get through to the other end of the town. See if it's clear. He started through and all hell broke loose. I called him back and I said, You better send tanks and things like that in there. He said, No, he's all right. He just called. I called Towsley, and he said, Tom, they have 88s at the back part of every one of these streets. We were fast, so they missed us, but they were firing away. This captain said, Continue on through to the end of the town. I said, We're coming in after you. So he started up to the rear and went out the back road. I came in and told the driver, When you come up to that first intersection, just ease it, I want to take a peek. I looked around and saw these guys loading the 88s. They were either horse-driven, or anything like that. Once they shot them, they couldn't get it out of there. I said to him, Spurt to the middle of the street. I'll fire and you take off to the next street. He got there and I fired away. These guys were dropping all around. For some reason or other, the back street went at an angle. The ones that were left, shot down to the next street. When I came up to that one, I shot down that one. Finally, I got to the end of the road and I said, Where the hell is Towsley? I called back and said, We can't find Townesley. He said, Continue on through the end of the town., he's probably at the other end of the town. The road came out the back and started climbing. There was a hill, a little wood on one side and the other dropped down and looked down into a valley and it looked like a church way down at the end. I said , Geez, we're wide open here. As we started to pull up, Towsley's Jeep was over on the bank side of the road. They had put a ditch, then a road, and then it fell off into that valley. The Jeep had straddled the ditch, and Towsley wasn't there, but his driver, Frank Brantley, had six shots in him and he was screaming, Help me, help me. I jumped out of the Jeep to help him. My driver backed up, left me there all alone. I got to him and said, Where's Towsley? He said he was up ahead on the road. I thought he meant he was alive. I told the driver to get the medics. I said the medics will be coming up shortly. I got in the ditch and I went up and saw Towsley laying face down in the middle of the road. He was spread eagle and his helmet was off. I turned him over easily. I couldn't see anything. All I could see was a little tear in his jacket. I opened his jacket, and it hit him right in the heart. He didn't know what hit him. It took the top of his pen off when it hit him. I said, Oh my God. I went back and said to Brantley, Let me help you until the medics get here. I said, I'll start patching up. They told you not to use your first aid, use his, but he had six wounds in him. I said, I'm gonna ease you out of the Jeep. I had blood all over me. I

eased him down onto the pavement and started cutting his pants. I used mine [first aid kit], I used his, and all of a sudden from underneath the Jeep these two packets were thrown out. I looked under there and there were two German soldiers. I said, Stay there. I used theirs. In the meantime, the medics came up. I helped put Brantley on the thing and I told them about Towsley and I was on the jeep. He said, they told me that they want you back. I forgot about the guys under the jeep. I said, oh, hell, they'll know.

When we got back in the States, I got a call from Brantley thanking me about the thing. I said, Did anyone ever tell Towsley's wife? They said, Yes, she's going to call you. She called me. I said, Didn't you contact the captain of our outfit, Troop D? She said, Yes, and he said to get a hold of you. She called when I was back home. I was twenty two or twenty three. I didn't know how to handle it. I said, Yes, but I wasn't actually there when he was shot. She said, Oh, any bit of information. Did he suffer or anything? I said, No, he didn't suffer. She said, Oh, thank you.

Then I got a call from our first general who came over with Winston Churchill. He was a brigadier. Patton tore the stars off his coat because when we came to one of the smaller rivers, I told you we were all in line going up. They had pontoon bridges so you could assemble them. We came to a small stream or thing like that with a tank, you wanted them up close to the front as possible. He had them at the rear. With the hedgerows, you couldn't pull everything to the side like that. So when he came, they were stopped, and this general was trying to figure out how to get this pontoon bridge up, whatever it was, Patton came up and said, You stupid...and he called him names. He tore the stars off. He said, Get those things up there and get those damn vehicles off the road. They got them off the road until they got the bridge built. I remember crossing it, but I didn't remember that part of it, that he busted the general. I didn't know what the generals were up to, until the last one. He called me at my home, and his wife was General Patton's daughter. She still goes by the name of Mrs. George Patton Jr. Holbrook. The general was Holbrook. He called me at home and he said, We're writing a history of the division and we want you to let us know what the experiences were. I said, Were you in the war? He says, Yes, I commanded the 41st Reconnaissance Company. I said, Well then, you write about it and I hung up on him. I know I must have been suffering from some sort of shock because, you know, I went through the war, I don't think I slept more than an hour each night. I just dozed off. I was down to one hundred fifty two [pounds]. When I went into the service, I was one hundred seventy seven.

Anyway, I never heard of anybody. They never invited me to anything or anything like this, because most of them realized that the stuff that they were doing, they looted, they

raped the women, just what these Germans were saying. When they got to this place where the tree was felled across the road, it was four-foot in diameter. As we came up in the jeep, we had to stop. I looked back and I couldn't even see the tanks. I got out and all of a sudden, a tank came up. Ellison, my football coach, came up and said, Tom, we got a chain. Throw it around that log and we'll pull it out of the way so we can get by. It was a situation where if the road fell off, the tanks would have been exposed. So he was getting the chain out and a Jeep came up with a captain. Ellison was a lieutenant. He came up and he had his trench coat on. The log was on the slope because they had that ditch. I was starting to put the chain on and he said, Make sure you put it underneath first, so you can pull it. If you put it on top, it's gonna roll. I said, Okay. So I bent down to pull it from underneath, and the machine gun fire opened up. Oh, hell broke loose. The captain goes down and I go down. I was behind the log. He was too. But he was on the upper part of it and they must have had a sniper or a sharpshooter. They got him, the same spot they got Towsley. They got him right through the heart. He dropped down. I was waiting for the thing.

The tanks started opening up with the machine gun fire and cannon fire. They were backing up, but they're hooked onto the log. So it was starting to come towards me. In the meantime, before the firing opened up, there were French prisoners of war in a nearby town, who came up and were trying to hug and kiss me. When the firing started, I told them to jump in the ditch. So they jumped in the ditch. The tank started backing up and I couldn't jump on the other side or I would have been exposed. So I jumped over the chain and I tried to tell the tanker to stop; don't pull it anymore. Because they were pulling it onto the Frenchman in the ditch. But they were still firing away. I said to turn the gun. So they turned it across. They turned it, locked the track, and pulled the trunk apart. The only way I had to jump and not be exposed. I was laying underneath the tank; the tank was up on the road. The tracks are almost right about here, [gestures just over his head] and I was underneath like this holding my helmet. They were firing away, firing away. When they stopped, I yelled out. You couldn't hear me, you know. Stop firing. I'm here. All of a sudden, they open up with their 75mm. I was looking around. What the hell are they firing at? I saw a German dispatcher on a bike on the road way up. They were firing at that guy. He was going so fast his shirttail was sticking out. Finally, they stopped. I said to them, God, you almost killed me. They said, We saw that they killed the captain. I said, Yeah, but send the infantry in. Don't you fire. So they sent the infantry in and the infantry caught one of the machine gunners who was a fourteen-year-old German soldier, a kid. The guys and the tankers were coming up. I went over and took care of this Frenchman and his shoulder. I said, When they get the medics up here, have them take a look at you. He spoke a little English. They got up and they started walking to the town.

All of a sudden, a jeep with four, five or six tankers was driving up. I said, Where the hell are you going? He said, We're going to get the SOB that killed our captain. I said, Why don't you get the captain's body? He said, The medics were going to take care of that.

My jeep driver took off. Next thing you knew, I was walking down with the Frenchman. They came back and they had this kid on the hood of the car. I had a brother who was just fourteen years old. I said, What are you going to do with him? Get the MPs. They said, No, we'll take care of him. I said, Look, he's only a fourteen year-old kid. I started crying. He said, We'll take care of him. We'll take care of him. I had no radio communication or anything to bring the MPs to stop these guys. Later on, as we're walking down, one of the tankers came up to me and he said, You know what those guys did? They took that kid up into the woods and each one of these guys walked past and shot the kid in the head. I couldn't believe it. When we got down with the Frenchmen to this little town, they were so appreciative. There was one girl in that group that was a prisoner. She sat me at one of these outside café tables. She got up on a table and she started doing a dance, a pirouette, and her skirt went up. From different colors, the tricolors of France, she had made panties, and she wanted to show me that she was French. [laughs] Some of my stories are like that.

But anyway, the reason I'm telling you this is because when I was going to the Riviera, I'll tell you this part because it's so strange. All they said is, they'll accept cigarettes, pistols, or anything, mostly cigarettes. I was going up on the train that was going from Paris to the Riviera, Nice. The driving shaft broke, bent, and punctured the boilers. We had about a three or four day layover in Paris, which I enjoyed. I remember our French teacher talking about the Café de la Paix near the Opera House in Paris. It is renowned for, if you're there long enough, you'll meet somebody that you've met, somewhere in the world. You always meet somebody you know. So while we were there, I couldn't go because it was off limits to GIs. Off the main drag of Paris, they have these little cabarets with a little light out. At night, they turned the lights off, you know, blackout. When I came up, I said, Gee, I'll go to one of these bars. I was alone. I walked out. The light was still on, but it was getting dark. As I came up, three drunken American soldiers were coming out of the cabaret. They were from the 17th Airborne. They were attached to us. They became our infantry. They saw my patch and they said, Oh, here's the big hero. They were really drunk. I said, wait a minute, I'm just coming to get a drink. [They said] No, we're going to show you who the heroes are. Out of the shadows of the building across the street, because they were narrow, cobblestone, this gendarme stepped out and motioned to them, like that. [gestures to stop] They still kept coming. He motioned and out of the other doorways came plainclothesmen. They were brutes. They looked like

they were wrestlers. They came out and the three guys turned around and went back into the...I said to the gendarme, Thank you very much. He said, I've met you before. I said, You have? Where? He said, You remember about the tree? I said, Yes. He said, I was the one hurt. He explained about his dislocated shoulder. I said, I can't believe this. All I wanted to do was get a drink. Café de la Paix, he said. I said, Well, can we go there? He wrote the name of the maitre d', the head guy there. He said, Don't pay with American occupation money. [Pay with] cigarettes, only. He said, When you get the bill, say, 'Combien? How many cigarettes?' I had Camel's [brand]. So when I went there, at that time, up to the time we liberated them, they had a provincial government in Vichy, France. Marshal Pétain was the head of it. Once we got there, I think it was somewhere just before the end of the war, they got back to the Parliament and de Gaulle got in there. I went to the Café de la Paix and when I gave them the name of the guy, they sat me down right near a column and I could see the whole thing. All of a sudden, waiters all came over to me, because he had told them what I did. They told me that the Americans treated them worse than the Germans. They thought they owned Paris and we were just foreigners. I said, well, they don't know much about the history. I told them my French teacher told us about Paris. It got to where everything was political. Then when I wanted something and I couldn't find it because I wasn't familiar with the menu, they said they would bring it. When it came to the end, I said, Combien? I took out a pack of cigarettes and put it on the table. The guy said to me, Two. [holds up two fingers] Two cigarettes. I thought he meant two packs. It was open. I said, Two? He said, Yes. So he picked it up, took out two, and put the pack back down. I went out of there, that was great. What were the odds of meeting that guy, that gendarme? I had a wonderful time. I went to the Riviera and everything else. After that tree episode, we got involved with...I'm sort of losing the sequence it came in. Is it getting too late?

MR: We have about twenty minutes on this tape.

TN: Okay. Let me just check it here, [pages through a notebook] because we start running into these...oh, I know what it was. After we got past Bayreuth, we went...which I didn't know at the time. There was a city there, Flossenbürg. It was a collecting point for all the concentration camps around Bayreuth. Also, it picked up all the refugees, displaced persons, or Holocaust victims from Dachau and Auschwitz and everything. They were trying to get them down into Austrian camps. When I came to Flossenberg, it was a regular community, manufacturing type of place. The apartment houses were red brick. We came in and were coming alongside the road at the edge of the city. The next turn, it looked like there was nothing there. You had to manually turn around this building. I called back and I said, Where do I go? Because the end of the road was there. He said, Turn left. And I said, That's the main drag into the city. He said, Yeah, turn left.

So I turned left in the middle of the road. I was getting used to this middle of the road stuff. There were two women, one standing up with her hands and she was screaming with pain. And there was another one kneeling down next to her, hugging her waist, and blood was just oozing out from under their skirts. At first I thought it was a ploy to get me out there. I checked the windows and everything like that. All of a sudden, I saw three women in the window, and they were motioning to me that they came down to take care of it. I said, okay, come on down, like this. [gestures waving them onward] But I was watching all the other places in the meantime. They came down and I said, This must be real. I called the medics and said, You better get down here. There's some women. I didn't know what had happened, but they were bleeding and screaming about the pain. The three women came and started taking care of them. I said, The medics are coming. What happened? They said that they were girlfriends of the officers that were in that building, the SS or whatever. They marched all the Holocaust victims down this road. The girls didn't have to go down with them because they were actually probably German girls or I don't know, refugee girls. They didn't want the American soldiers to have the pleasure of them, so they shot them into their womb.

I said, those bastards. I got so mad, I said to the driver, Go around. Which way did they go? He said, Down this way. We raced down the road. On the right side of the road was a little ditch, and you saw these guys with the white and blue striped concentration camp uniforms on. But they weren't emaciated. They were in a fetal position into the ditch, head down. But as I came up to them, I could see a bullet hole in the back of their heads. About thirty feet ahead, there was another one, like in a row. There were about six of them. I said, Gee, that's strange. We continued on. I called back and I said, They're dead, but they are victims, can you do something about them? They said, We'll send MPs. We continued on. As we came up in the field, there was a large farmhouse. There were scattered trees. Then the road went to the left and turned, and there was a hillside. It came around, and then he had plowed fields over here. When we came up, I said to the driver, Go slowly, let me get a peek. Even if I have to get out of the jeep, I want to see what's on the other side there, around the corner. We eased around and just as soon as the jeep got out, on that whole hillside were all these refugees screaming in glee. I said in my story, it was like the first time I went to Yankee Stadium and the Yankees came out on the field to play the Detroit Tigers when I was fourteen years old. They screamed, and I got the chills all over. They came running down, tried to jump in the Jeep. They were trying to kiss me and everything. I even put my gloves on because some of them had scabs and everything all over them. I didn't know if I was being disrespectful or anything, but they didn't care. [They cried] Americana, Americana. All of a sudden, this German, one of the refugees, jumped up on the hood of the Jeep, stood up. I said, You get down. He said, I want to tell

you, and when you get back home, you scream to the world that this is the true German culture. I said, Who are you? He said, I'm one of them. The driver said, he's another Yugo, German dressed. They had them located at places as spies to make sure everybody wasn't trying to escape or anything like that. You couldn't get anywhere.

All of a sudden, the infantry came honking their horns. They got out of the way for the infantry, but for us, we couldn't move. The German sentries, the guards, broke the wood stock so that we couldn't use their rifles. But they were still attached to the sling, the eyelet there. They were on the street or in the field. I started going up alone and telling them to get back down and go up the hill and said the driver was giving food out. He was giving K-rations out to these guys. So I got up to the edge of the woods and these old fellas were sitting along the road eating. They had a little cloth pouch with oats. That was what they had to eat. When we came up I said when the MPs get here, they will get food from the farm and feed you people. There must have been fifteen hundred, two thousand people on that whole hillside. I couldn't believe it. So finally, when I got up to the top of the road where it turned, there was a pond. There was a German soldier, one of the guards, had been shot in the stomach by one of the infantry guys. He was screaming for a medic. I was so taken, I even broke out in tears. I picked this son of a bitch up. I was going to throw him in the pond when a German officer came out with his hands up. I thought he had a holster with a pistol in it. So I just dropped the guy and I went to him because all I had was my pistol, but I didn't have it out. I said to him, Keep your hands up and start walking back. He said, I'm surrendering. I said, Okay. Give me that. He said, No. I pulled it away and it was binoculars. I still have them, [laughs] which I mentioned in my story. He started walking with his hands above his head, and these people sitting saw him coming down. He must have been one of the guys that shot one of the women. As he was going down, they all got up and started grabbing the muzzle parts of the guns with the sling. They went towards him and he turned towards me and I said, You're the son of a bitch that shot the women. [He said] I didn't shoot them. All of a sudden he spoke pretty good English. I didn't shoot him. I said, Okay, then go in. The MPs will take care of you. He started going in. They [people from the field] pounced. You ought to see them coming off of the hillside, jumping on this guy. You know what he screamed? For his mother. Mutter, Mutter, you know, like that. They killed him.

When the MPs got there, I said, Don't let them [people from the field] go to the farmhouse because they don't know that these guys are liberated. They'll shoot because they think they're escaping. I said, Besides that, they'll eat themselves to death. He said, We can't control them. They're already down there. They got hunks of cheese and everything. They were just gouging themselves. They told me hundreds of them died

after that. But when I called back for the MPs, I said, How are the women? He said, One died and the other's iffy. He didn't think she was going to make it.

After that, we started running into more of these concentration camps in Austria. I liberated one. Our men didn't want to go. There was one in particular I was going to... there was one about the women there I thought. I had a woman's husband typing all these stories. When it was all finished, they said, When are you going to bring more stories up? I said, When I get more information on where I was. so I could tell the story. She said, Every time my husband typed it, he had me edit. She said, I cried at every story you told me, in particular about those two women.

Now, to get more information of where I was and what happened, I contacted the German Consulate New York. They invited me over in February 2003. They were going to pay all expenses. They wanted me to come over because they were celebrating the liberation of Bayreuth. They had it as April 14th. I had been there on the 13th, and they wanted to honor me. That was the first part of February. In the middle of February, they called me up and they said, Tom, we're postponing until May. I said, Why is that? They said, You're going to attack Iraq in the middle of March. I said, No. They had that Ritter on TV locally here. He was one of the inspectors, you know, and there were no weapons of mass destruction and all. I said, No, they can't. Then there was the United Nations injunction. He said, Tom, you're going to invade Iraq. The French and the Germans had to pull all the people running the oil fields out because the way they put it was, the French and the Germans managed the oil for food part of the thing. Then when they invaded, he said that they had contained Saddam Hussein. He had no weapons of mass destruction. He knew nothing about weapons of mass destruction. He had the United Nations part of it, he was hoarding away money, building castles and everything else. But the thing about it was, he called later on and he said, We have to cancel the one in May because they had that SARS flu epidemic in China and all international flights were canceled. I missed that. Then all of a sudden in 2005, they called me up. They wanted to honor me. I got newspaper headlines. In Bayreuth, they got plaques up in the opera house. The tour guides mention, if there are Americans going through there, that Tom Nicolla was the first American to liberate Bayreuth and the Richard Wagner Opera House. I was at a luncheon for retirees in Delmar, and I was talking to a friend of mine. He said to me, I know you were at Bayreuth during the war and you went over. He said, My granddaughter is over there for a month with the University of Delaware and they're going to be in Bayreuth and Berlin and Vienna. She's going to be in Bayreuth with a French family. They had one family that gave them lodging, and the other fed them. This was the way they can learn German fluently rather than through a cassette or anything

like that. I said, Gee, that's great. I said, I've got to contact the Bürgermeister of Bayreuth. We were very good friends because he was the one that honored me there. I will call them and I'll tell them about your granddaughter. He said, Gee, that'd be fine. Then I had to call the tour guide I had, because he often called me and said, Every time I take the people on the tour of the Opera House...I didn't finish that part of it.

There's just a little segment there of the Opera House. When I went over, the tour guide took me to the Opera House, the old one. They had the new one, but it had university classes in it. We couldn't see that one. But the old one was the one I went in. So when we went into the lobby, there was a big hulking guy there, and I told him who I was. That I was the first American to liberate and everything like that. He said that he wanted to see the opera house inside. He said, Okay. We went inside and I saw the audience part again. It was stripped down because they took a lot of the artwork up to the other opera house. I said, Gee, I'd love to see the back part, the stage. He went out and got the director, that hulking guy. The guy came out and he said, No, you can't go back there. He said, I want you to come out into the lobby. So he took me out there. He had this celebrity plaque and he wanted me to put my name and the date when I was there, April 13, 1945, and all this other stuff. Then you can go back. So I went back and I saw the back part of the stage and everything. When we came back out, he had sent some people. This Burgermeister had written books about the liberation of Bayreuth. I'll make this fast. What happened was, I had to sign books. They were five dollars, something like that. They had my picture in this showcase of all these books. Everywhere I went, they came for autographs. But the part that I wanted to bring out was when I said to the guide, Why does he want me to sign all these things? He said, You know the woman that showed you this place at the beginning? I said, Yes. He said, That was his mother. [laughs] He said, To this day, every time he takes tours there, the director told the guide...He called me Nicolla. Mr. Nicolla, American, came here first. [laughs]

MR: Well, thank you very much for your interview.

TN: I don't know whether that was...I don't remember what you were asking.

MR: Yes.

WC: Excellent.

MR: Now, when were you [tape skip]

TN: At Newport News, Virginia. But coming back, I'll just say briefly the attitude of a lot of the American soldiers, not the Northerners but the Southerners in particular, Midwest, everybody was a nigger. When I liberated one of the concentration camps, they were

burning the bodies. I was the first one to actually see, and I still am, the actual burning. It was a live concentration camp, they were burning bodies, and it hadn't been liberated. What happened was, the point I was going to make is...oh, when I was there, I called my captain, but it turned out it was Al [Albert J.] Kosiek. He was a staff sergeant. Because they were all looting and everything, so he was the only guy that...I said, get the MPs. I want everybody within ten miles of this place to come in here and start cleaning up. I want the medics in here and everything. This guy got on the phone, he said, You don't want to do anything. You will just find mud houses. They're a bunch of kikes. So we went on, but we came back and I made sure they got it cleaned up. The people there remember the fella that started cleaning up. So, when I was over there for the Austrians, most of the history never had anything about me.