

Neal I. Gummoe
Veteran

Jason Harmon
Interviewer

New York State Military Museum
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Q: The gentleman being interviewed is Mr. Neil Gummoe. Born January 7, 1926. He currently lives at two Reynolds Drive in Horseheads, New York. My name, the interviewer, is Jason Harmon. I'm the collections manager here at the historical society. And, Mr. Gummoe, if you just want to get us rolling here with the particular war that you served in, the branch, your rank and location of service, and we'll take it from there.

NG: Okay. I was in the Army, and eventually when I went overseas, was with the 89th Infantry Division. I went over as a Pfc, and I got promoted to corporal while I was over there. I enlisted when I was seventeen in the program that the Army had at that time. The ASTP program was a training program for inductees that got good grades on the Army general classification test score. The idea was that we'd be sent to college for two to three years. Then we would all have assignments in the engineer and linguistics departments and probably be stationed in the States, or at least in the headquarters area overseas. We probably wouldn't get too close to the front line. And we also would have a chance to go to OCS, the Officer Training School. Well, it seemed like a really great idea until the winter of 1944, just before the invasion, General Marshall suddenly realized that he was going to be short of replacements to take the place of the casualties. So they wound up canceling the ASTP for about one-hundred-thirty students and about seventy-thousand that were in Aviation Cadet Training. The Air Corps at that time was part of the Army. So there are about two-hundred-thousand men they picked up, most of whom had had their basic training and could be assigned to divisions. So all of a sudden, two-hundred-thousand of us that had planned on being officers, and sitting at a desk someplace, all of a sudden we were in the infantry, and not just in the headquarters section. The only places they needed anybody was either riflemen or ammunition bearers, and that's where most of us wound up. It wasn't unusual to have a machine gun squad, like I was in, with the

squad leader, the sergeant, who had maybe just got through eighth grade, and he had three ammunition bearers that were pretty near graduate engineers or on their way of being graduate engineers. That was a really crazy setup.

I was with the 89th, and we went overseas in January of 1945, and were assigned to the 3rd Army, General Patton's Army and went through Luxembourg. It was just past Luxembourg that we went into the front lines, and into combat. Our first big mission, I guess, was crossing the Moselle River. And most of the bridges had all been bombed. Either we either blew them up with bombs from planes or the Germans blew them up on their way back. So we couldn't use them [bridges]. Crossing the river was in little assault boats. I was driving the jeep for our squad, so I got to go over in one of the Higgins boats that we carried around and used a lot. You could back a jeep and a trailer in and go across and get off the other side. Moved on up through the Rhine river crossing. And when the war was... on May 7, we were right on the Czechoslovakian border. There were some troops that got into Czechoslovakia. We didn't. We were stationed right on the line that they had drawn and it said "the Americans would go no further than this." And the Russians were [gestures closing in]. So we waited for the Russians to come for three weeks, I guess. And they never came where we were. Just a little further north of us was where they finally had the meeting of the Russians and them.

Q: What made you interested in enlisting you at the age of seventeen, still before when you had to?

NG: Partly because it looked like one of the best chances that I found to get a college education. I lived on a farm, brought up on a farm. And I've always said, kind of as a joke, although it was really true. My father and grandfather were great men, wonderful men. I couldn't ask for anybody better. And they were very hard workers, but they had lousy timing. They went into the dairy business in 1928, just ahead of the Great Depression, and spent the next twenty years trying to get out from under. So things were pretty lean through the 1930s. But most of the farms were in the same situation, so it didn't really seem that bad. Because if everybody's barefooted, you don't think about having shoes. Not that we were barefooted. And I had always thought, I'd like to be in the military. I was thinking this morning, I used to look through the *Boys Life* magazine and look at the ads for military schools and thought, gee, that'd be fun to go to a military school. It never occurred to me what you did beyond being fun. And so that was part of it. There were five of us. It was a rather small high school we went to, and there were five of us in what was advanced mathematics at that time. Solid geometry, trigonometry. Four of us all decided that we would take this AGCT test just for

fun. And we all scored quite high on it because we immediately got word that they were interested in us. So we all enlisted, three of us in the Army and one in the Navy. He was a smart one. He went in the V-12 program, which wasn't canceled, and he stayed right on at the University of North Carolina until the war was over. He spent the whole war going to school, so he did get his education. The rest of us didn't. But the three of us all got out alive. One of them, just by chance, was sent to a division that was all ready to go over, and he was over there right shortly after the invasion. The 89th that I was sent to was just in the process of rebuilding, and so it took four, five, six months to rebuild, retrain before we went over.

This fella's name was Dick [Richard J.] Tallman. And he played soccer, was a good soccer player and played defense and had a heck of a kick. He picked up the nickname of Boomer. They call him Boomer Tallman. He was in the Battle of the Bulge, got a battlefield commission, a second lieutenant, and happened to be back home when I got out of service. I had a chance to see him. Shortly after the war was over, he got an appointment to West Point. He had that in for a couple of years or more. He was already a second lieutenant, so he had to resign his commission, start over as a plug at West Point. Finished that, came out, worked his way up to Brigadier general and, unfortunately, was killed in Vietnam. So of the four of us, he's the only one that didn't make it back.

Q: In terms of your boot camp and training experience, both the academic and the actual boot camp experience, what was that like? Is there anything that sticks out in your memory in terms of what you had to go through or anything like that?

NG: The first eight or nine weeks I was at Fort Benning, and Fort Benning is the biggest infantry training base for the Army. It's an enormous place, and it's where the airborne troops were training. The paratroopers were training there, the rangers were training there, and so we were using some of the same facilities. We weren't doing exactly the same training, but it was basically the same basic training that the paratroopers and the rangers were going through. And then after I was in the hospital, I got out and went to another infantry training camp and finished up. But the training at Benning was considerably rougher and tougher than it was at the next camp that I went to. Because it was pretty similar. In fact, we were out in the field whether we were marching or whatever we were doing and pretty near every day we saw planes coming in, the paratroopers jumping out, practice jumps and so on.

Q: In terms of when you arrived in Europe, you said that it was in January of 1945. Can you share a little bit about when you first arrived, some of the early experiences, things like that?

NG: Now, practically all of our regiment was on one ship going over. About five-thousand, which makes a pretty good boat-full. And they're crammed into six bunks, six high with only about eighteen inches between bunks. And the joke was that the top bunk was the best place to be in case anybody got seasick. [laughs] It was a very rough crossing, January in the North Atlantic. Being a farm boy, I had never seen the ocean before. In fact, I had never been more than thirty miles away from home till I got on the bus to leave. We were quite fascinated with the looks of the ocean although it was a little bit scary seeing these big waves that came in. The rumor was that we were going to Southampton and I guess that was right. We were going to Southampton and then they were going to do some maneuvers and so on. We got off the coast of the British Isles. Didn't know it at the time, but there were a lot of subs in the area and they decided that we'd go right on to Le Havre, France and get out there. Well, Le Havre and all of the coast of France, of course, the docks had all been bombed or blown up so we had to go in on LCIs, Landing Craft Infantry, down the side of the ship. For some reason, the Army always does things like that in the middle of the night. And it was January and colder than the dickens. A few guys got wet and then they had to sit there in their wet clothes for the next two hours.

We got loaded in big trucks, tractor trailers with no tops on them. Just benches along the side. It was about thirty, forty miles to the camp. The Army had set up camps right around Le Havre. For some reason they were all they called the cigarette camps. One was Lucky Strike, Twenty Grand, Philip Morris. We went to Lucky Strike. Since we weren't supposed to be there, the only thing that they had been able to get set up was the tents with the top of the tents, no side curtains on them. And they had about eight inches of snow. There was about eight inches of snow inside the tents when we got there, oh, probably two in the morning, something like that. And they had set up a little mess line right out in the field. I don't remember whether it was soup or beef stew or whatever it was. It was hot anyway. We went through the line. The line was probably a quarter of a mile long. You went through and got a canteen cup full, went back around and got in the end of the line. That's what we did. Wasn't anything else to do anyway. The next day we got side curtains and then got cots. But a canvas cot, when there's snow under it, and it's maybe twenty to thirty degrees, is just as cold on the bottom as it is on the top. It was quite cold sleeping there for a while. After we were there a week or so, the weather warmed up. All that snow melted, and made the darndest

mess of mud you ever saw. We spent days and days shoveling gravel. Trucks were hauling gravel in, and we shoveled gravel trying to make a solid road or a solid place to put anything. At least it was fairly safe there anyway. Occasionally a plane came over looking for something to strafe. It wasn't a big problem. The first men that got killed in our division...there was an airstrip, it wasn't being used, it was right near where we were. The Germans had mined the airstrip and the guys in the engineering battalion were clearing it. I think there were either two or three of them that were killed clearing the mines. About the least desirable job in the military, I think, is demining an area.

Q: Now, overall in your regiment, the men that you were serving most closely with in the combat that you saw, were there a lot of casualties? Was it kind of limited to operations like the mine incident?

NG: We didn't have the heavy casualties that some of the divisions did. Some of the divisions like the 1st [Infantry] Division, the Big Red One, one of my friends from Big Flats was in that. They were in Africa and then they went to Italy. Then they came back to England and went on the invasion. And some of the guys that went in the invasion had been all through Africa and Italy. My friend Ike fought with the 1st up through to the Battle of the Bulge and was taken prisoner and was in a POW camp until he got out. So we had a few that were POWs. But by the time that we got into combat, it was a little different than what the fellows had seen back on the coast of France, because we were really beginning to push pretty hard. We had a lot more men, a lot more equipment. Although we had, if I remember right, or someplace in the neighborhood of two-thousand in the division that were casualties. In our platoon, we had two medics in our platoon and the first medic was the first one in our company that was killed. That was on the Moselle River crossing. One of the guys was hit. He went out to try to help him and he got killed. And then our ammunition bearer was shot through both feet. He hadn't been with us too long. I think he went overseas with us, but he hadn't been with us in the States for very long. Anyway, I don't know what happened to him because he went back to the medics and probably went home. I don't know. Our first gunner [Joe Orsini] was a real good friend of mine and rode in the front seat of the jeep with me when we were traveling, when we were moving. [He] was killed and he's buried in the US cemetery in Margraten, Holland. And I've been to that cemetery and have a picture. That was another thing I couldn't find this morning was a picture of Joe's cross. And if you've seen pictures of those cemeteries...anybody that goes to Europe should go to see one of those. There's about eighty-five hundred buried in that one cemetery and there's

six or seven cemeteries. And of course this doesn't include all the ones that came back home and were buried back here.

And after our first medic, George Pendleton [?] was killed. Usually we were the first squad, so we were the first jeep in the platoon when we were moving. And so we called him Whitey. Almost everybody had a nickname. And he rode with us, usually rode back on the trailer, sat on the trailer. And at the time that Joe got killed, Whitey got hit. Wasn't terribly serious. In fact, he got hit in the butt. And one of the other fellows and I half carried him, half walked, got him out there, and he said, what am I going to tell my girlfriend when she says, where did you get shot? [laughs] At that point there were only two left in the squad and that was the squad leader and me. But as it turned out, that was April 12th, the same day that President Roosevelt died, the same day that General Eisenhower went to see the concentration camp at Ohrdruf, which was right next door.

We were just outside of that. And so anyway, that's the one that I personally saw. As we went along, lots of times the armor was in front of us. When we got to a town or came to an entrenchment or something, the rifleman came up and we set up the machine gun.

And after whatever fighting there was, was over, usually there were dead Germans here and there. I've been asked how many civilians were killed, and I don't know except for the area that we went through. I suspect there were more civilians killed in the bombings, we certainly didn't [do it] intentionally. And I don't remember any.

What was strange, when I got back home, and my mother and father were very active Grange members. You don't hear much about the Grange anymore, but it was big. That was where all the social activities were, out in the farm country. And I remember going to the Grange, meeting and talking to people there. I told them that we really liked the German people, but we sure didn't have anything good to say about the Russians. And they said, this was backwards. We were supposed to be friends with the Russians. And they said, you just wait a few years and you won't be feeling that way. But the German people are so much like...what's no wonder, because my grandfather was German. How they got into the situation they got into, nobody knows. It's hard to believe.

The day before Joe got killed; no, it's about a week before. April 4, we had been hooked up, attached to the 4th Armored Division. This was the second or third time that we formed a combat team with part of the 4th Armored. Our battalion and the platoon of heavy weapons as a combat team. Apparently, we didn't know

where we were going. We couldn't read the road signs anyway, we just followed whatever was in front of you. But Patton was really anxious to get to Berlin. Of course, he never did. But he was going to get to Berlin ahead of Montgomery. General Bernard Montgomery was head of the British forces. This is shortly after we went across the Rhine. And as I say, you never knew what you were doing. They just said, we're moving out, moving out. And we were hooked up again with the 4th Armored. We took off in a convoy with some of the tanks up front. One tank would take the lead for a while, then drop back and somebody else would, rather than have the same one up in front all the time. We went through quite a few little towns. Eventually got out on the Autobahn. Well, we went on the Autobahn, and we found it had been blown up. So we went out, went around, and got back again. And all we knew was that every time we tried to stop and catch some sleep, you just about got to sleep, and somebody said we're moving out again.

But in our platoon, I only remember it in our platoon. I had to get the other drivers up; gave them a boot or something. We used to say, "Let's roll". If you remember 911. The plane that went down in Pennsylvania, the guy talking to his wife said to the other guys, "Let's roll". When I heard that, I got the funniest feeling, because that's exactly what we used to chase each other out, we said, "Let's roll". We finally stopped at Gotha, and at that point, we know now that we were about fifty miles ahead of the front of the line. The front lines! We just pulled way out, and that was what we were supposed to be doing. Breakthrough. Blow up everything in sight and keep moving. But we were running out of gas. Tanks were running low, and we had to wait for more fuel. Where we stopped at Gotha was probably just really a few miles from the Ohrdruf concentration camp. That same day, some of our battalion that were out on patrol came upon this concentration camp. Then some of the 4th armored came in. In fact, there was a big fence and a gate, and one of the tank destroyers came up and just drove right through and flattened the fence. That was what first started people knowing about the concentration camps. So by the time Eisenhower got there, we had already kept right on going. We were twenty to thirty miles further up into Germany by the time he got there. But I've got some pictures of it if you want to see them.

Q: Sure. I can do that later on in the interview, but I would love to come back to that. Now just about life while you were in the army, while you were overseas, can you talk a little bit about everything from how you kept in touch with your family

to the food to what you guys did for entertainment, just kind of what you remember about just general life while you were in.

NG: There were two particular things that I have remembered and thought about a lot, and it kind of falls in the fun category. Just about a day or two after May 7, I'm not sure just what day. Our transportation corporal and I were both in ASTP, so we're good friends, and for some reason, we were up in the company headquarters. We had been sitting there for several weeks. Then we kind of got settled in. We had a mess tent set up and so on. We were in company headquarters, and our company commander was Captain Izzo, Edmund Izzo. And I just learned he lives in Vermont. I'm going to try and run him down next summer, if he's still alive. He came in and we were just chatting a little bit, and he said, hey, when did you guys have a furlough? And he started laughing. He said, you gotta be kidding. He said, no. I said, I never had one, neither one of us. We had a couple of delay-en-routes and a three-day pass, but we never had a furlough. And this is what, two years, I guess, since we got in. And he said, well, I just got a notice here that there's a certain number of men from the battalion that we can send on a leave, and we're supposed to send one officer and two men from Company M. And he said, I think I'm going to appoint myself to go. He said, you guys want to? I said, sure, why not? He said, let's not spread the word around too much. So a day or two later, we just left. The company clerk knew where we were going. The [rest] didn't know what we were up to or where we were going or anything. It turned out we were going to the Riviera down to Nice. We took the train down to Nice, and we were there for ten days, I think. The situation that we had run into when Joe got killed, what it was, was a trap. There were two Tiger Tanks that were camouflaged on the edge of the woods. I blame the platoon leader. He pulled around the corner and stopped and left me sitting right on four corners, and you never do that. Joe jumped up to yell. Howard Merrill was driving the platoon leader's jeep. We called him PV. [Joe] stood up and he said, "PV, get the hell out of here." And just about that time, they opened up, and he was shot right through the head. [He was] sitting right next to me. But anyway, we piled out into the ditch, and they proceeded to shoot up the jeeps, and we couldn't get the jeep out of there. Mine wouldn't run. We had to get back up into the woods because we had nothing to fight tanks with. Everything was with the riflemen, and they were quite a ways away. So they came down and they drove one or two of the jeeps, and they hooked onto mine and towed it away because they wanted the gas, wanted the fuel. They knew there were cans on the back of the jeep and in the trailer. Also all our clothes were in the trailer. So we didn't even have a shaving kit. Everything was gone except what we were wearing. And we managed to get a new suit of what we called ODs, olive drab wool. So we

wound up on the Riviera in combat boots with wool pants and wool long sleeve shirts. [laughs] But anyway, we were there for ten days. Just a day or two before we're ready to leave, Captain Izzo showed up. He said he didn't know if we were having a good time. He said, I just found out the division is moving. They're going back to the coast, but they're not shipping out. And we haven't really been officially notified that they're there. So he said, I'll get back to you in a couple of days. A few days went by, and he came back up, and he said, the division was back in Camp Lucky Strike again, and they're going to be sitting there a while. So he said, I think we'll go up to Holland. We got the whole bunch on a train, went to Holland, checked into a rest camp in Holland, in [unclear] 35.00. He said, tomorrow, or the next day, I'll send a message to the division that we're up here and ask them where we're supposed to go. That took three or four days, so we were in Holland for three or four days. Eddie came down and he said, well, we're supposed to go back. Supposed to go to Paris, and then they'll send trucks up for us. We went to Paris, and we waited a couple days to let them know we were there. So we spent three, four days in Paris and finally got back to join up with our company. And these guys said, where in hell have you been? We told him we were on the Riviera, Paris. But I certainly remember that. That was a lot of fun. It was kind of worth waiting to get a chance to do that.

Q: How did you stay in touch with your family while you were over there? Was there any communication back and forth?

NG: Yeah. It wasn't too much of a problem up until the time the whole division pulled out to head for Luxembourg. I've got a big shoebox that I found after my mother died, all full of letters that I sent her. And I haven't been through any of them. I should, but there's a gap, I think, from about the time we left Camp Lucky Strike until the war was over. There wasn't much of any place. Well, you could, if we went back into the reserves for a day or so, we got a chance to write a letter and we gave them to the company clerk and he got them mailed. And then sometimes they brought up a sack full of mail. But for the most part, we were able to communicate back and forth pretty well.

Q: In the field, you mentioned arriving and it being twenty degrees and eight inches of snow. What was the food like over the long haul?

NG: Well, it wasn't much to brag about. In fact, the surprising thing was that they were able to get anything to us. Although it was sort of an unwritten rule that nobody ever claims that a meal is any good. That was against the rules. You have to complain about it. And you hear, even today from the guys that I have coffee with. I say I'm having chipped beef on toast tonight. [laughs] And they say, didn't

you get enough of that? I said, you know what, really, it was pretty good. I didn't complain too much about it. The rations that we had, the K-rations. The D-rations were really for emergencies. That was nothing but a chocolate bar so hard you couldn't hardly chew it. K-rations weren't too bad. And C-rations were like canned hot dogs and beans, canned beef stew. If you could heat it up, it wasn't too bad. I was lucky that I had the jeep so we could carry a couple of cases of C-rations in the jeep or in the trailer. And since it was my trailer, I got most of the hot dogs and beans, which were the best. [When I] started out in the morning, I put a can of hot dogs and beans on the manifold under the hood and within an hour I had a can of hot hot dogs and beans. And we carried a little gas stove. I'm not sure where we got it. Those little gas stoves. We could put a pan of water on and heat it and make coffee. We usually had coffee to carry with us. We were better off than the riflemen because we had the jeep to carry things in.

I don't remember how often, but we've been up in the line for two or three or four days. Usually they rotated out and rotated back into reserve. And if we stopped in one place long enough for the kitchen to come up, it was amazing. We got back and they had beef stew, is what I remember. They had beef stew. But I had pretty good meals. I told the grandchildren. I wrote a little thing about what I did over there.

When our ammunition bearer, [R] DeZeeuw, got shot through the feet. At that time, they were also shooting at the jeep, too, and we were trying to get our machine gun set up. We knew that it was a sniper because you could tell from the sound what it was. You got so you could tell an M1, you could tell a grease gun, the old machine guns, and you could tell a Burp Gun because nothing sounded like a Burp Gun. You could tell the 88mm shells when they went over. They don't sound like they do on television, and bullets don't sound like they do on television. [I guess they are] trying to make it sound good. They snap. If you hear a snap, just like a broken twig, you know there's one pretty close to your ear. Anyway, the jeep and I've got it if I can find a picture here. [looks through a photo album] Yeah, there we are, right there. The jeep I drove was just like that. [shows photo to interviewer] I took that over in Holland. People in Holland, in France have gotten these old army vehicles and restored them, fixed them all up, and they've put them in parades and things.

Q: Can we set that aside so that we can get a close up later on?

NG: This windshield folds down. See how the little arm comes down there? You unhook two latches here. The windshield folds down flat against here. And then a

canvas cover goes over it. And that made a dandy place to hide things or stick things. And I used to carry my mess kit in there and just stuff the mess kit in. And if we ever got a place where we were going to get a hot meal, I had the mess kit. And several days after DeZeeuw got shot and we got to go back and they had a mess line set up. I went and got my mess kit out, and it had a hole in it. [laughs] Went back and looked. Sure enough, there was a hole through the canvas, too. Put a hole right through my mess kit. Kids thought that was kind of funny. There's one of our 89th. [shows photo to interviewer] That's at Margraten Cemetery.

Q: Now I know just from talking in the preliminary interview, I was wondering if you could share a little bit about your Christmas tree cutting adventures while you were in Europe.

NG: Yeah, that was after we had this great escapade of going through Riviera. Then it was back to work. I was driving the jeep, but I had a license, and believe it or not, the Army made you have a license before you could drive anything. An army license. Of course, I had an Army license. I could drive up to two and a half ton trucks. Of course, I knew the guys in the motor pool and so on. So, I started driving a two and a half ton truck, and I had a picture. That is the one that I was driving. [shows a photo to interviewer] We were hauling people, troops that were going through on their way home, and they gave them a twenty-four hour pass to Paris. We hauled them in the trucks, and then after twenty-four hours, we rolled them all on the back of the truck and hauled them back. I don't think their mothers would have been happy [about the state] some of them were in.

But after that, we were separated from the 89th. The 89th originally was going back to be re-outfitted and go to Japan, and that's what they were getting set up to do. I had enough points so that I wouldn't be going back, which was a good deal. I wasn't the least bit crazy about touring Japan or Okinawa or any of those places. So those of us that had enough points not to go, were going to be in the Army of occupation. Well, they never told us. We just turned out that way. But we one day got ready to ship out in Forty-and-Eight cars. [pages through a photo album] Have you heard of them? Well, they're French. They were famous from World War I. It says forty hommes and eight chevaux, which means forty men or eight horses. And I know I've got a picture. Here it is, right there. That's what we rode in. [shows a photo to interviewer] That doesn't show much of it, but they were the most primitive things. No springs or anything, just bump, bump, bump. Anyway, here were all these Forty-and-Eight cars, half a dozen bales of straw in each one. So we climbed aboard, and it took us, I think, three days or more to get

to Austria, which is where we were going. Because they pulled off to the side and let a train through. Then we pulled back out and away we went again. Ate C-rations. That's where I learned to play bridge, on a bale of straw. One of the fellows was teaching us all how to play bridge and sat around with a deck of cards.

That took us up to St. Florian, the monastery in Austria. [shows a photo to interviewer] Our platoon just happened to get assigned to guard the monastery. We were there for three, four months, I guess. Weren't very many people in town. We pulled guard duty. I was back driving my jeep then. In fact, while we were there with the 83rd division, I got my corporal stripes and was acting as motor pool sergeant. I was expected to get my third stripe as a sergeant most anytime when I suddenly got shipped to Vienna. I don't know why, but I went to Vienna. It was in St. Florian that we met Peter. Peter, F-u-c-h-s, Peter and his sister Kathy and his mother. And there's a letter that his mother sent back to my mother. And this little Carl was a sharp little guy. He was ten, maybe, I guess someplace around ten. Always came over and hung around with my friend Jake and I. We guarded the monastery. They were living there in a little apartment. They were refugees from Yugoslavia. It's funny that if you go back a couple of years when we were having the Bosnia Serbian, it's exactly the same thing. Only they were monarchists, they were loyal to King Peter, and they conscripted his father and brothers. And so they got out of the country and got over into Austria. They were displaced people, really. Carl had learned some English and he wanted to improve his English. He came up and as I said in the letter, we taught him to play blackjack, taught him to play poker, not for money, but just for fun. And of course, we always gave him stuff. We used to take him through the chow line in the mess hall, and I guess I don't have a picture. Anyway, wherever GIs went, they were always picking up kids or dogs or both. And we had Carl. We also had a nice little dog that Jake and I kept there. He used to ride around in the jeep with us, and Carl did. And as I say, as it came up to Christmas time, and one day we said something about it. Did they celebrate Christmas? And he said, oh, yeah, we're Christians and we celebrate Christmas, but we aren't going to have a Christmas tree this year because, well, there just weren't any. I don't even know if you could have bought one anyway. But there was an estate just out of the village there, a little ways, not a plantation, but just all kinds of trees, a lot of little pine trees. And we said we'll go up there and cut one. And he said, we're not allowed to go up there. We said, maybe you aren't allowed. But they couldn't tell us that we are not allowed. So Jake and I went up and we cut a tree for Carl, and we cut one

for the mess hall and brought them back down. Then we went to church on Christmas Eve.

Jake was catholic, so we went to church. [shows a photo to interviewer] Where these two big spires are, the church is right under there. It's just an enormous place. There were about twenty monks there in that whole darn place. I guess it's still there today. I'd like to see it again, because it was really impressive when you came up the road. Big thing.

At that time, at the end of the war, there were still a lot of, particularly SS troops who were the worst of the bunch. And they just disappeared, got rid of their uniforms, and put on old clothes. I've never seen any pictures, and I sure wish that I had [my camera]. I lost my camera with the jeep. I had a lot of good film, I think. The last of April, May 1, the main roads leading out of Czechoslovakia, Poland, were just a solid stream of DPs, displaced persons. We watched them go by all day, maybe half the night. Then they just went over in the field, laid down, went to sleep and got up. They didn't know where they were going. As they got back into our rear area, they [Army] were trying to round them up into camps and feed them. And that was a real problem, too, because what are you going to do with them afterwards? But that was basically what Carl and his family were, displaced persons. And they found that some of the SS troopers would get into old clothes and then mix in with the DPs to get back into Germany someplace. And I'm sure a lot of them did. We sat there and watched them and to see if we could pick any of them out. That's what we were doing up there, was patrolling the roads, and we were afraid that some of these guys might be like the bombers in Israel, who knows? We didn't know that they would. I don't think much of that happened. They just disappeared. Of course, they hunted down some of the ones they really wanted. We never had any trouble up there, fortunately. But I kind of had some fun. You just mentioned it. I remember the Christmas I spent in the monastery I was going to show you. [shows a photo to interviewer] Oh, there's Carl's sister Kathy, and there's the Christmas tree we cut down. That's us out there, and that's a picture of Carl that his mother sent us after he had grown up. We just don't know where he went after, we kind of lost touch with him after that.

Q: What I'm going to do is I'm going to take a short break here, and we'll switch the tapes, and then we'll keep going.

NG: Okay. Well, I'm having fun if you are.

Q: Number two of the interview taking place with Mr. Gummoe on Monday, December 16, 2002, here at the Chemung County Historical Society. My name is

Jason Harmon. Mr. Gummoe, I want to kind of shift gears a little bit to the time your service was coming to a close, your last days. Is there anything that you can recall about how you were feeling or just the process of your service coming to an end?

NG: Yeah, just threw me a little bit when you said you wanted to talk about my last days. [laughs]

Q: I apologize.

NG: I spent the last three months, I guess, the time I was in Europe, in Vienna. I found most people, I don't know why they'd be aware of it, but they're not. Along with Berlin, Vienna was a four-power city. It was in the Russian zone. It was split into four sections. There was a French zone, English, Russian, and American zone. And once you got out of the American zone, you were in Russia or in the Russian area of Austria. So I really couldn't go too far. Going back and forth, we either did it in convoys or on the train. But having a chance to be in Vienna was really nice. There we had taken over a restaurant, which had been a restaurant, bar, sort of a nightclub, really, as our mess hall. And we had Viennese cooks and Viennese girls who waited on the tables. And on Friday nights, they had a Viennese band. I think it had an accordion and a bass, maybe a saxophone or something. But since Vienna was the home of Strauss and the Strauss waltzes, they played everything to the same beat. No matter what American song it was, it was all to the Oom pa [beat]. But that was alright. And I was in Vietnam when I finally got enough... you were awarded points for being in combat, length of time over there, and different things. [If you] got enough points you got shipped home. So I shipped home from Bremerhaven and into Fort Dix, New Jersey, and then was discharged from Fort Dix to go home. One of the things I had said was that when I get home, one of the first things that I want to do is get myself a motorcycle. I had a chance to ride motorcycles a little bit. So sure enough, that was one of the first things I did, was I got myself a Harley Davidson. Had a lot of fun with that. Because we had the GI Bill, that you're probably familiar with, I applied to Cornell and Penn State. I wanted to take AG [agriculture] Engineering. I hadn't heard from either one of them. It was getting close to the time to go to school, and one of our neighbors' sons called me and he said, I'm looking for a ride to go to Alfred. I said, where's Alfred? He said he had an interview up there. And he told me about it, and I said, I'll go up. Let's go up. He had an interview with the head of the AG engineering department, who was a good friend of his father's, and that's the way things happen sometimes. We were up there on Saturday, and we got a tour of the AG engineering building and all around the campus and so on. I think the man's name was Mr. Hinkle, and he said, I've got

two openings left. I've been holding that for Bob to come up and see if he wanted to go. Being a GI, he said, you'd be at the front of the list. So he said, if you want to go, tell me and we'll put you down. So I said, this looks good to me and I signed up for AG Engineering and started that fall. I was there for two years at the AG Tech School and met my wife there. The second year I was there, I sold the motorcycle. I told my kids I sold the motorcycle because I couldn't afford a motorcycle and a girlfriend both. [laughs]

Q: So after college was there...

NG: Yeah, I took two years of AG Engineering and got a job with International Harvester. That was, to me, the greatest agricultural company there was. The best machinery, and this was really great to get a job with them. And I was with them a year, just about a year, and became quite disillusioned with the way the company was being run. I was an assistant zone manager, but could see enough of what was going on to think it wasn't what I wanted to do. I wanted to be in the service area anyway. And they had me selling refrigerators and freezers, which wasn't what I trained to do, at all. And I guess I was right, because two years before I would have retired, they went out of business. Completely out. Sold off what was left, the case, equipment and so on. We were living in Ohio, and I just decided that was enough. So I quit, resigned, and we took off and went to California. We were out in California for a year and a half. I had worked for a short time before I went to college for a new organization that was just getting started in Pennsylvania. It was a dairy cattle artificial breeding cooperative. When I went out to California, I wanted to look into that. I did, talked to several people, went out and rode with one of the fellas. Even at that point, they were way behind what Pennsylvania had been, and I could see it was going to be quite a while before much of anything was going to happen in California. So I wrote to Cornell and got a letter right back saying that they were expanding and hiring, and if I came back, told me who to get in touch with. We said heck with this. We packed up and came back. I went out to Cornell right away and hardly missed a day's work for thirty-seven years.

Q: Now, working up at Cornell, what capacity were you serving in?

NG: The last twenty-five years, I was living in Big Flats as an area manager. In our area, which at that time was New York, all of New England, about half of Pennsylvania, and a division in California. I had very little, about twenty-five to twenty-eight men working for me, all scattered through the southern tier, northern tier of Pennsylvania. They were actually doing the inseminating or delivering semen to farmers. Today, most of the big farmers have a herdsman

right on the place that actually does the breeding. The co-op delivers the semen to them. It's quite technical these days. My job was hiring, training, firing, if necessary, and public relations. Spent quite a bit of time on that, working with dairy farm groups, putting on some programs and goodwill things.

Q: Over the course of your years after the service, have you joined any kind of veteran organizations specific to your regiment?

NG: Yeah, this is the main one. This is the 89th Division Society, and that's wherever there's 89th Divisions. They just had their summer national get together in Indianapolis. I probably would have gone, but it was the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth, and I was due to go to the hospital on the twenty-seventh for a knee replacement. So that was the end of that. I belonged to the VFW and the American Legion, never was particularly active. I hadn't had any desire to be a post commander or anything like that.

Q: From the time that you served in the military overseas, through all of your boot camp experience, is there anything in all of your experience that reshaped something in a way that you thought, or that's influenced you even to this day, years down the road from those experiences?

NG: Yes, I think so. I don't know whether you've read any of Tom Brokaw's books. He's written two books, *The Greatest Generation*. That was the first, and the second was *The Greatest Generation Speaks*. And it was really a collection of stories doing just exactly what you and I are doing here, about different ones. And I've known a lot of veterans.

Heck, the coffee group I have that I meet with at three o'clock in the afternoon. There were five of us that were veterans. One of them was in submarines. One of them was a bombardier on a B-24 for thirty-some missions. Two of them were in the navy. One of them was in submarines. One of them was in the Seabees building landing strips and docks in the South Pacific. Pretty well covers the whole area. One of them didn't get in World War II, but he put in twenty years as a mechanic and eventually [became] a first sergeant in the supply area. So it pretty well covered it. But as I look at that group and at the people I know, most veterans, I think, learned to be quite self-sufficient. They rarely complain because something didn't happen just the way they thought it should. I think, for the most part, they have little patience, either with the government or with the companies they work for that put effort or money into something that was trivial. They don't have any patience with trivialities, really. A lot of them, in fact, the biggest share of them that were eighteen to twenty-five were depression era children brought up. Quite often, we get to talking about that. Even to the point where I remember

some of us sitting around, each one trying to outdo the other one in telling how poor we were. Well, my father was so poor...but not complaining about it, but they learned to do. I think over the years, employers would lean a little bit towards hiring a World War II veteran because they had a little more maturity. It's hard now to look back or to look at seventeen and eighteen year olds, like my grandson, who's a great kid. I think I was only a year older than him when I enlisted. I couldn't have been that [immature]. I think I had more maturity. I grew up on a farm. Things that had to be done. I think that it was a great three years, both for the experience of seeing different things, but also it matures you in a hurry. Either it either matures you in a hurry or you're washed out. And that happened. There were a lot of guys who washed out. Basic training is what it is in the Army. I remember, the only one I think of offhand was a fellow that was about two thirds of his way through law school. Why they ever drafted him, I don't know. He had a wife, two kids. I think all he'd been doing for about three years was sitting in a classroom, and he was in terrible physical shape. On marches, we took turns carrying his rifle or took turns carrying his pack. And finally one day, the first sergeant, I don't know what he was doing out there because he never walked much. But we were carrying his pack, half carrying him, and we said, sergeant, you got to do something about this. He's never going to make it. And of course, he yelled at us, "make him carry his own pack." If he doesn't, you'll have to pick him up because he'll be in the middle of the road. He soon shipped out, and I think he got discharged. So there were some that were a big mistake. And basic training was tough enough so that those that made it were tough enough to do what they had to do. I think it toughened us all up and made us able to take whatever came along. As if you're in the working world, some days are going to be pretty good, some aren't going to be too good.

Q: Well, that's pretty much all that I have. Is there anything else that you'd like to add on, anything that we didn't touch on or anything like that?

NG: I can probably think of a half a dozen things. On the way home. I guess the thing that I really enjoyed the most was being able to drive vehicles. I drove trucks from the time I was probably ten or eleven years old. In fact, it was when I was ten that I learned to start our tractor. I could start the tractor by putting the crank up on top, and then I could get up and jump on it to start the tractor and go out and drag or whatever we had to do. And I drove the truck on the farm. We used it for everything. And I drove it a good share of the time. So when I got to the 89th Division somebody had to drive in our squad, and nobody had the experience that I had. In fact, there were any number of guys in our platoon that came from the city, never did know how to drive. They'd never driven anything at

eighteen years old. They just weren't any good at something like that. Most of the drivers were farm boys or close to it. They're the ones that wound up driving the trucks and the tanks and so on.

Q: What I'd love to do is to take some time and spread out some of the items that you brought. So we'll go ahead and we'll move into that part.

NG: [shows images from a photo album] These are two pictures of the monastery and a couple other pictures of this big monastery in St. Florian, Austria. Our platoon was there from October to January to guard the monastery, to make sure that it wasn't damaged by any SS troops or anybody else wandering around. Nothing happened while we were there. There were very few monks there. There was a big church. The only thing we really found out was they made excellent wine and we had a deal with the brothers that they'd provide us with a certain amount of wine if we didn't go down and take any ourselves. So that's what we did. We had a good relationship with them.

This is a GMC two and a half ton six-by-six truck that I drove in the summer of 1945 when we were in Camp Philip Morris right after the war was over with. We hauled troops and that, mostly troops from one place to the other. This is a picture of me later when I was in Austria for several months from February until May, when I was discharged.

[shows certificate] This was sent by the Holocaust Memorial Council to all of the 89th Division Infantrymen that were still alive that they knew of. The reason was that in early April of 1945 our battalion happened to be the ones that stumbled on the Ohrdruf Concentration Camp. And at that time, those were the first American troops to get into one of the major concentration camps. And this was at Ohrdruf, which was part of Buchenwald and that was big. They usually had about eight-thousand inmates at Ohrdruf. There weren't that many when the 89th Division got there because they had tried to get them all out of there as much as they could.

[shows battalion history war diary booklet] This is my battalion history and it's kind of interesting. We are really fascinated with what's politically correct today. And you have to be very careful how you speak about any minorities and rightly so. I don't have any disagreement with that. But fifty or sixty years ago it was perfectly natural, in fact, the newspapers had such things as how many Japs had been killed or so on. And the Germans were called Krauts along with a few other

names. Now, this would kind of startle people today. This was the motto of the battalion. [shows a page that says "Go Forward, Kill Germans."

[shows page in booklet with names] I just ran down here a while ago. The names that are in our company from the time we went overseas, replacements and so on. And look at the interesting names. There's Earl Okamoto, Rosalini. Steiger was German. Christophides was Greek. Berkowitz, Roksnitus, Lem Soo Hoo. I guess he was Chinese. Cervantez. Of course, we got a Smith in there. O'Toole and O'Brien. And Joe Orsini was Italian. So just about everything you can think of. Irish on.

[shows The 89th Division Society brochure] This is the division monument in Colorado Springs. This was put up in 1980 someplace, I think. This is where the division was activated. They were a mountain division to start with.

[shows ribbons & medals mounted in a frame] These are the ribbons and the campaigns. This is a Europe, Asia, Middle east campaign. Actually, the campaign ribbon and then two stars means three different battles. So actually there's three battles here, but one is the ribbon. These are the patches of the divisions. This was the ASTP patch when I first went in. This is the one that I'm probably the proudest of any of them is the combat infantry badge. And you won't see very many. Just this bar with the rifle is an expert infantryman, and occasionally you'll see them today. And anybody that's got them knows what it is with a wreath around it. You only get that if you were in combat for thirty days. There's some funny cartoons about the guys that are in the rear echelon are just far enough back or in a group, because it was given by the battalion regiment. And you see guys back in the headquarters area wearing them. [laughs] Anyway, those are my corporal stripes. This is our governor, George Pataki, engineered, awarded these to combat veterans.

[shows photo] And this isn't the jeep that I drove, but it is one exactly like it. And there you can see it with a windshield folded down, and that was the way that we usually had them. It also doesn't have a wire bar on it. Most of them, in fact, the ones that were up in the front lines, had a bar. We welded a piece of angle iron from here right up like this. And then at the top there's a notch cut in it and sharpened so that if you hit a trip wire or if you came to a tripwire, and they'd have them set up just high enough so they'd miss this windshield and catch you under the chin. That was the purpose for it.

[shows and points to places on map] And this is just a map that was in General Patton's memoirs. And I marked the concentration camps that were right here in a row. And all of those were discovered because this was the front lines, right down through here. They were all discovered within just three, four days of each other. Ohrdruf was the first one, because we happened to be out in front, and Buchenwald was there and Nordhausen. The British were at Bergen-Belsen. And Dachau Concentration Camp was down there. Interestingly, this is Mauthausen right by Linz, and I was stationed in Linz for a while after the war was over.

[shows photo] This is an American cemetery in Margraten. There's about eight-thousand, eighty-five hundred graves there, all of them marked with a cross with their name. This is one of the 89th Division [crosses]. And this isn't a picture of it, but there's one there for our first gunner that was killed, Joe Orsini. I did get to the cemetery. With eight-thousand crosses, that would take you a long time to go around. I happened to get there on a Saturday and there wasn't anybody there. They have a register where you can look to see where it is. There wasn't anybody there, so I couldn't look up Joe's. But I did find this one and took a picture. Joe's would be just the same thing as that. I do have a picture of it now. It's a black and white. I guess that's about all of my goodies, except for my luger, which I didn't bring down.

Q: Well, thank you, Mr. Gummoe, for your time and for the interview.

NG: Well, I hope this was fun. [laughs]