

Interviewer: Okay it's the 12th of August 2001 I'm at the 101st airborne reunion and I'm speaking with Mr. Bill Priest and Mr. Rusty Estes veterans of the 101st airborne division about their experiences in WWII. Start with you sir when did you go into the army?

Priest: July 42 and after Fort Benning jump training no after barrage balloon Camp Tyson Tennessee I heard about the paratroopers that had no KP no extra duty and they got paid extra duty so I jumped the barrel. Signed up for the paratroopers and got \$50 extra a month then I found out you did have guard duty you did have KP duty and so on.

Interviewer: It wasn't quite as good a deal as they said it was gonna be.

Priest: Well these stories you hear we heard them for the next three years too. And then I shipped off to Fort Benning for jump training made my five jumps loved it. Got shipped to Fort Benning to the 82nd not to Fort Benning Fort Brag the 82nd airborne 456 parachute field artillery.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: Did a few months in that then the 82nd was going to Africa or Sicily or what have you and they shipped a lot of us over to the 101st. That's how I ended up in the 377th parachute field artillery.

Interviewer: Rusty when did you go in?

Estes: Well October 14, 41 and I stayed exactly four years exactly to the day. And I met this Yankee in Fort Brag North Carolina and we've been friends ever since.

Interviewer: So you two met when you were part of the 82nd?

Priest: No he was in the 101st and I was in the 82nd.

Interviewer: Oh you were in the 101st.

Estes: I spent two years in San Francisco in a coast artillery and then I transferred to the 101st.

Interviewer: Why did you volunteer for parachute duty?

Estes: Because I was working in the side of mountain across the Golden Gate Bridge about 300 foot down on a deep field range finding instrument. You know what that is.

Interviewer: Yes sir.

Estes: And I got tired of it because it was all night work and that's the reason I transferred.

Interviewer: Very good so you two were in you went to Camp Claiborne together from Brag?

Priest: No I didn't mention Claiborne I went straight from jump training to Fort Benning to Brag to the 82nd.

Interviewer: To Brag to the 82nd.

Priest: I don't know why he didn't mention the \$50 extra a month that was the incentive.

Interviewer: Bill

Estes: You know I never really even thought about it to tell you the truth.

Priest: You did at the time I bet you.

Estes: I just wanted to get out of San Francisco. I loved San Francisco but I just wanted to get out of the job that I was on.

Interviewer: Hoping for some better duty if you went to the paratroopers.

Estes: Yeah I've never been sorry about it either.

Interviewer: Very good when did you ship over to England?

Estes: Oh we went over together in what was it October of 43 wasn't it?

Priest: Yeah

Estes: October of 43.

Priest: I guess that's a pretty close guess. My memories not that his memory is much better than mine. So you can ask him some of these questions.

Interviewer: How was life in training for you England?

Priest: Very good a lot of jumps day jumps night jumps a lot of other jumps in between in Newbery and Redding and you know with the Pick a Dilly commandos are you familiar with them.

Interviewer: Did you get much free time to hang out with the Pick a Dilly commandos?

Priest: Yeah that's what I'm saying but we didn't get legal passes we were awl every chance we got at my favorite hangouts and dance halls in London. And a special girlfriend when I was coming to town she didn't associate with anybody but she took care of me fed me and everything. Olive you remember Olive?

Estes: Yeah

Interviewer: Still remember her?

Estes: I remember her I remember one September day yes I do.

Priest: I was always on extra duty for getting caught. MPs in London or MPS in Redding little things not having your collar buttons brings attention to you. Then they found out you had no pass then they send you back to camp your cap underneath here instead of on your head. You're supposed to be setting an example. But we finally got the word to you know where you are confined to camp I forget the name

they give that. What was it they call it when we weren't allowed to leave the base we were like quarantined.

Interviewer: They call it lock down now.

Priest: What the hell did they call that? We were not allowed to speak to the cooks on the chow line or anything guys we knew that we used to go on a pass with we weren't allowed to talk to them. Once we had been briefed about where we were going and we each got our little maps we each got our clicker you've heard about the clicker.

Interviewer: Yes

Priest: And we all knew where we were going to land and how we were supposed to assemble. Don't do any fighting don't try doing any John Wayne stuff on your own but gather and assemble and go fight as a team. So he and I landed in a minefield on Omaha beach we didn't see anybody until day break.

Interviewer: So you went in by ship?

Priest: Oh no no we jumped in.

Interviewer: You jumped in but you landed in a minefield.

Priest: I landed on top of a pillbox he landed behind me in the grass the high grass right?

Estes: Yeah that's the reason I can't walk around very good I never did stop. But he dragged me out of the minefield I'm going to make my thing short here because I'm going back to the room. But he dragged me out of the minefield and that's why ever since then we've been buddies. And I appreciate it I sure do I appreciate what he did for me.

Priest: Drinking buddies we've been drinking buddies.

Interviewer: And that was at Omaha beach that he drug you out of the mine?

Estes: We was up about 25 miles.

Priest: No that's Utah beach Utah.

Interviewer: Okay

Estes: Omaha beach.

Priest: We wasn't supposed to land on any beach we were supposed to end inland six or seven miles. Near Caranton we were supposed to land I think.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: We didn't get there for a week or so we kept gathering more men.

Estes: We were cut off there for about five or six days wasn't it?

Priest: We've got to finish telling him about that minefield.

Estes: Well I don't know what to tell him when he found me I was butchered like a stuffed hog but he got me out of there. But I didn't stop we just kept going.

Priest: Yeah he was kind of semiconscious. But I had some experiences before we got to the ground I thought I was 1,000 up. There was lots of backlash and lots of flares and lots of tracers flying around. So I decided I'll dump the air out of the parachute grab the suspension lines turn it sideways get down in a hurry. But little did I know I wasn't a thousand feet I was 500 feet up. So while I'm waiting I was getting ready to let go of the suspension lines so I could float down and I hit the ground. Now this is on top of a big pillbox had it covered with sand the grass was grown on top of it. You would never see it even in daylight you would trip over it you have to go around the back way there's a little dip in the sand where you could walk in the back entrance. If you've ever been to any of the beaches over there

Interviewer: I have.

Priest: You have okay that's just the way they were 55 years ago except there's no armor left in them.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: Anyhow I hit that fucking bunker so hard of course I don't know how fast I was going it knocked the wind out of me and then I awoke or recovered from the shock of landing. And I hear somebody running up on me in the high grass. And I was I played dead because every time I jumped in Fort Bragg or any of the maneuvers I got captured right away. The red and the blue were always against each other I got captured every time. So here I was all wrapped up in the shoot my car beam still on my leg and I didn't have time to do anything. So I just played dead held my breath and started praying. This guy came over to me with his rifle he pushed my helmet back I could tell by the metal against metal. He looked at me and figured I was dead and left me alone. I was pissed off because once the planes went by it became absolute quiet there. You didn't hear any gun fire or anything it was absolute quiet very frightening and I was scared to death anyhow. I was having trouble saying prayers but anyhow I recovered from that and I figured the reason he didn't shoot me if he fired the muzzle blast from his rifle would bring attention to where he was at. Everybody in that minefield the attention of everybody else would have opened fire on him so he let me be I was dead. So he left me I started in the direction to assemble which was away from the water which was inland. And I spent hours over barbed wire fences over sand dunes and all of that. And when I looked over behind me at daybreak I climbed the last fence and every pole had cross bones on a skeleton with a little sign "Attention mine." I didn't know it was a minefield and it was when I came back a little later after daybreak that's when I found him. There was a little road splitting down the center of the minefield going to the beach and going to the that's how they sent out supplies to these bunkers. And a great big building like looked like a chaeta with points on the four corners just like a castle. I found out later when we took that position we got 25 guys together after finding a guy here a guy there less the dead guys that were lying around the minefield. He knows who they were and how many there were he can name at least ten guys that we lost right there. And one was our very very best friend he was blown to smithereens he wouldn't let people look at him.

Estes: Lewis LaBrock

Priest: Lewey LaBrock from Massachusetts so we came back the next day after getting 25 guys together. We found one officer a lieutenant Slazenski and I found one of the guys I clicked and he didn't click back and I clicked again and he didn't click back I yelled the challenge he didn't answer me so I started firing in the woods where I saw a movement. Sergeant Rodgers yells to me hey Priest it's me. He recognized me I couldn't see him he was in the woods. So I approached the woods and I said where is everybody and he said well there's only a few of us. He said lieutenant Slazenski's over there in a hedgerow. So I went over to report to lieutenant Slazenski that guy was so fucking scared he couldn't talk. His teeth were chattering and he was no help at all. So we decided to go back I told the story to the guys that the symbol there. We decided well to do something to strengthen which was more to fight as a team. We went down that road to the pillbox we started going down that road and a guy comes out with a red and white flag wants to surrender. And this was where I had landed and he come out and he said if you will treat the wounded he had wounded that would surrender to us. They were gonna have to surrender to us anyhow. And they did and what did we get we get 135, 145 guys?

Estes: I told Bobby this before he passed away it was 169.

Priest: Wow I don't think it was anywhere near that.

Estes: I don't know.

Priest: But we got a lot of guys out there. All of our officers that were in that building when the invasion really started they got in them bunkers with the rest of the troops. And they came marching out after we shot they brought this one guy out he was in shock and the medic we had with us treated him and he was just he was a goner he didn't do much. So then they started coming out we had to take there was only 25, 35 of us we had a hell of a bunch of prisoners. We still were marching them back and we bumped into the 4th infantry division guys that were coming up the beach. We turned them over to them and then we got more of our guys and went on to different skirmishes.

Estes: Nice to meet you I'm going to

Interviewer: You going to have to take off? Alright

Estes: I'm going to the room I can make it alright.

Interviewer: You sure?

Priest: You don't want to finish this interview?

Estes: You go that way don't you? That way

Priest: Make a left and right. You don't want to finish this interview?

Estes: I'm through.

Priest: What about Bastogne and what about Holland?

Estes: You tell him I wasn't there.

Interviewer: I'm sorry that Rusty had to leave us. I wanted to ask how you managed to get him out of the minefield without blowing the two of you to smithereens.

Priest: Just first of all he was near the road it split the minefield in half. I didn't have to I was a much stronger person I was much heavier. But I didn't pick him up bodily I dragged him out and then some other guys came along too and they helped took over. He was kind of disoriented he had you know some wounds here and there pieces of shrap metal. He wasn't split wide open or anything like that. But he was disoriented and semiconscious like I guess you would call it shock.

Interviewer: Sure

Priest: He didn't want to leave the minefield.

Interviewer: Probably didn't want to move he was afraid to move. Yeah he was afraid he was going around like this with a trench knife trying to he wanted to get the hell out of there before he ended up like our other buddies did. I don't remember him doing that he said he was doing that or he was doing it before I got there. But he was I don't know how he could be because he was too dopy when I got to him. Anyways it might have been pointless to the story a little bit I don't know. But I didn't realize I was in that minefield at the time. I never dreamt that I was in it but I sure knew after I talked to him about Lewey and all. And I saw every pole every single pole had the crossbones and the skeleton and the attention mine, that was enough for me. I wasn't about to go back in there. But then after we turned the troops the prisoners over to the 4th infantry division we had to decide what we were going to do, do some damage. So I climbed a tree of course this was a forest now this was the edge of the beach in a forest. By the way that was Omaha beach no it was Utah beach but it was a section called Ravinoville it's a little town called Ravinoville. And a sign here says Ravinoville beach that's how I found it when I came over here in 94. I was looking all over for where I landed and when I found it it was unbelievable emotional. And a few days later I found the place up near Port Hawk where my foxhole was a house where I dug my foxhole where a guy was shooting at me from a window a sniper or something. Every time I found a place where I had been it was very emotional. But anyhow we turned them over these guys over I climbed the I don't know I left out something. I climbed this tree and I saw this corvette going up and down very close to shore this is a boat that can get close to shore.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: And I told the sergeant there who taught us back in the states how to signal like the boy scouts. He climbed up on that bunker we took only took one shot to capture the fucker too. He got on top of it the Navy was still firing these great big fucking things from a big mole out in the channel. When they would land anywhere near us sand was coming down like snow for like ten minutes. There was one German in a gun turret that was on top of the on the side of the bunker one that swung around. Shoot at airplanes dive bomber if it strafed or something he was buried up to his chest in sand. Of course they had been doing that so long the sand built up like snow so he was covered in sand he looked like a statue there. And we signaled to the navy that was taken airborne and the firing stopped right away.

Interviewer: That's good

Priest: And then we kept gathering we captured these 25 or 30 guys and we were trying to march and fight with like a patrol through the path through the woods.

Interviewer: Were these guys artillery also or were they from different units?

Priest: No they didn't have any artillery with them at that point if they did they had a tank with them at first. I forgot about that guy with the tank there was an officer sitting on top of the tank when they came down on us. We had taken a position I don't know whether they took credit for it or not but this officer was sitting on top of the tank and giving directions for where it should fire. We told him well there's a machine gun over there so he turned around and fired a shot over there. Meantime he's sitting on top of the tank and not in the tank. The bullets are bouncing off that tank like mad and he's sitting there like a beach chair on top of the tank fucking bullets are bouncing off the tank. So he doesn't deserve a citation but I'm wondering if he took credit for capturing those prisoners because we turned them over to him.

Interviewer: He was with the 4th infantry?

Priest: Yeah and it was nowhere near 165 maybe 135. But considering it was only of few of us. So one of those guys we captured was the guy that pushed my helmet back and left me for dead. But some of them spoke English and they were glad to surrender they were. First of all they weren't Nazis they were Pollocks and Czechoslovakians and stuff they had captured when they took their countries. Amongst those were SS troopers and real nasty bastards and arrogant you could tell them. You had to put a gun to their head to get them to do what you wanted. I took one into the bunker and I came out with all kinds of souvenirs. I let him open the cabinet doors and stuff because we were taught watch out for booby traps and stuff.

Interviewer: Sure

Priest: So I came out with a lure gun another folding trigger gun the trigger folded up into the gun and there was no circle to put your finger through and it was a little I don't know what the fuck it was. About a 22 I guess beautiful luger which I lost in a crap game a month later. I couldn't buy it back the next day for \$500. So then we joined with the 4th we had little skirmishes along the road we had to head for the woods and duck behind hedgerows. Bullets would be popping all around you and you didn't know where they were coming from. I finally spotted a guy up in a tree and I started firing from the hedgerow where I was and this officer in the 4th infantry said to me cut it out cut it out. I was scaring his troops but I said alright I went down this path to where I saw them and there was a bicycle. So he was I guess someone would run around on a bicycle and climb a tree and whatever. But by the time I got there I had stopped firing so he got down out of the tree in the meantime. This officer kept me from concentrating on him. He only had a folding stock car beam anyhow this guy was pretty far away. And then we started going through hedgerows again I saw another machine gun set up at the crest of the hill as we crossed this path going this way not that way. The path went up the hill so we crossed the path and I saw three guys setting up a machine gun. So I stood up and got ready to fire and this sergeant that made signaled to the navy he said what are you doing and I said there's a guy setting up a machine gun let's knock him off. You go ahead you keep going then he stood up pop pop pop pop with this car beam that couldn't possible reach the top of the hill. But we all discarded the car beams and grabbed all 3s and gerans when we come across guys that were dead. Because those things we had weren't worth a shit unless you were going from one hedgerow to another hedgerow.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: I don't know how far they fired. Do you know?

Interviewer: They are accurate as I understand up to about 100 yards. They were more of a pistol than a rifle.

Priest: Yeah that's right we were firing from hedgerow to hedgerow but we couldn't see who we were firing at. We knew where it was coming from but through that quick shooting you don't know where he's at. At night you could tell you know the muzzle velocity the flash that comes out.

Interviewer: Now how long did it take before you finally linked up with your unit and finally got back?

Priest: I wish Tex stayed here he remembers so fucking good. Two or three days or so we had quite a bit of the battalion maybe a couple a hundred guys. There's 500 in a battalion. See most we lost most of the battalion we lost like half of it in the water. We found gas masks the Germans had gotten some of our guys they totally got their gas mask floating in the water. But we think they got them captured them or sent them back somewhere. We knew each other's laundry marks so one guys gas mask I knew his laundry mark. They had captured him because his gas mask was in a bunker a guy named Perdue. When I went back in 94 I made a jump in 94 I made another jump I go back every time I get invited and jump again the same spot. Same thing in Holland I jump every couple of years. I won't be jumping this year but I hope I get an invite. What was I saying?

Interviewer: I was wondering you jumped in you were in the artillery how did they get your artillery pieces in?

Priest: They was a bomb rack underneath the plane then there's a door. Just as you go out you pick it out the door.

Interviewer: So you got your artillery in by parachute as well?

Priest: Yeah of course there is a line a static line and it's usually on your back. There's one for that package gun package and that's a static line. And that holds a very large equipment parachute. And then there's various other things in a bob rack there's six salver releases for the bomb rack. One, two three, four that's six pieces of the gun are all released at the same time you kick the big load out the door. When you get on the ground you find that and you follow the lines if it's dark which it was you find the rest of the gun. You had to follow the rope from one piece to the other. That wasn't easy sometimes you had to wait until day break I guess. We didn't get our own gun back that probably ended up in the channel because we landed on the beach you know. But we got a gun out of the glider the 105 split trail our gun was a pack 75 howitzer.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: So we fired that son of a bitch until we blew it up. On Caranton which is one of the places we flew in for and accomplished our mission. I think that's where the 502 had a bayonet charge. I wasn't privy to that but that's a true story.

Interviewer: Colonel Cole

Priest: Yeah Colonel Cole

Interviewer: Colonel Cole's infantry sure.

Priest: So I don't know how successful it was except they took Caranton.

Interviewer: They took Caranton.

Priest: We were their support fire support.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: But we were infantry half the time because we landed everywhere but where we were supposed to you know.

Interviewer: Sure

Priest: We were around them amongst them. So I'm glad I jumped with them in Holland. I was with them on the drop zone on the small arms fire on the mortar fire. I hid behind a great big package equipment bundle. My first sergeant started yelling at me get the hell out of there get the hell out of there and I didn't want to move I was safe behind this bundle. Until he yelled and told me there was a bunch of mines it was a package of mines I hid behind that we were supposed to plant when we got into position. But my first sergeant I never did listen to him I could have got blown if one of those things had set off one of the mines I would have been blown to kingdom come.

Interviewer: Sure

Priest: One mine would do it but there was a pack a whole bunch of them in that package. And you could tell by the color of the parachute what was in the package. Equipment bundle they called it so we took a lot of prisoners there too.

Interviewer: In Holland?

Priest: They were firing back and forth and their artillery countered by battery fire. We lost some guys where they got direct hits on our gun positions. Not too many I can remember the guys I helped patch up. A jeep pulls up you put him in a jeep and he takes him off to you know what do they call a field hospital. They had three stops on the way to a hospital now a days they throw them in an ambulance or something helicopter and away they go. This guy's guts were hanging out so were one of the guys in Normandy. I'll never forget his he got hit by one of our artillery pieces when we had a deflection change you move the gun around like then and your observers are giving you something to fire at. The gunner chief moved the gun too far. You have the guns laid out you're only supposed to fire from safe ranges from here to here. And if you get a change you're not supposed to fire he fired and a piece of the shell hit a tree and it went off right above the gun. So it got this guy Joe Justice from Georgia and boy he was screaming with pain. And I saw them carry him off with all of his guts hanging out in the jeep. They had a jeep there but these jeeps seemed to appear out of nowhere.

Interviewer: Now you had mentioned that you were an FO you were a forward observer.

Priest: Well I was when I was the 502. I wasn't a fire forward observer I was a scout with a forward observer. I was their guard like you know you cover their backs.

Interviewer: So you went out as a team of two one forward observer and one security?

Priest: There was two forward observers usually. Did you get Jim Robertson or Bill there were three forward observers sitting around all the time around that lobby? They could have told some god damn good stories they were always right with the infantry and they really know their stuff. You ought to try to reach them even if you did it over the phone. Jim Robertson in St. Augustine Red Andrews in Fayetteville North Carolina and Bill Hardy from somewhere in Organ three great guys and they knew their stuff. We didn't see them much because they were always in a forward observer. Sometimes they were helping out with ammunition I suppose. But you have to talk to them to get those stories.

Interviewer: Sure

Priest: But once again Tex has such a great memory he exaggerates a little bit his memory is quite fantastic.

Interviewer: How successful was your artillery in Holland?

Priest: Not being forward observer I don't know but they used to get back to a division and the division not division headquarters but battalion headquarters and we'd get the word through our communication with headquarters battery. Plus we had telephones you know and wires and we would tell them you know you are right on. See first you fire smoke to see where the range how close you're getting to the tanks or whatever they are. And once you're near the troops or the tanks and they say fire for effect ten rounds. Well four guns fire ten rounds that's 40 rounds until he tells you okay cease fire. Then he looks for another mission for you unless he sees some more guys then he gives you a deflection change. We move the gun around elevation and deflection elevation that way deflection this way. They you will fire a couple of round of smoke see where it hits and if it hits where he wants them then ten rounds for effect. Then he tells you what kind of rounds he wants. And there is a setting on your shell you can set it to open fire explode before it hits the ground or when it hits the ground. That way you can get more troops at once.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: Then if you are shooting at tanks you would fire an armor pierce HUAT Armored Pierson. And we knocked out tanks you know two miles away. We also in Bastogne we knocked out three or four tanks as they come through I don't know as they come through the infantry they ran a bazooka ammunition and stuff. They let them through they didn't have any choice.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: They told us they were coming when they came through as soon as they broke out of the woods we got them. Direct fire

Interviewer: Direct fire with the 75 pack.

Priest: That's in the history book about it.

Interviewer: Sure

Priest: About Bastogne

Interviewer: Sure but your prospective is better than reading out of a book.

Priest: The one that blew with us it is probably in there somewhere.

Interviewer: So you were on the guns at Bastogne you saw direct

Priest: I wasn't a gunner I was a cannonade then.

Interviewer: You saw directly how effective the 75s were against the Tigers.

Priest: I saw what it will do directly but once again we were firing out of perimeter we were surrounded. But we were firing all kinds of but there were three artillery officers in there so we had an area maybe this big you know of the circle. And we were firing counter battery fire and they were hitting around us. And we don't know what we were hitting but once again Tex might remember that more than I. But then we went wild we'd celebrate if we had knocked out a gun position or something. I don't know how successful we were at that because sometimes you were firing at guns that were in the woods they were camouflaged.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: You don't know until you get up there if you get up there.

Interviewer: Now you had an ammunition shortage didn't you at Bastogne?

Priest: Yeah we ran out we were firing smoke at the end. Then of course that day or the next day I forget when it was gliders came in when the snow cleared up the weather cleared up. They came in a dropped equipment and personnel doctors and we got a glider crash right next to us. But it had one great big ammunition we didn't pack 75 ammo somehow or another we got it. They must have got it somewhere else and they shipped it over to us.

Interviewer: You got 105 ammo right next to you.

Priest: Probably yeah we needed 75.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: Did you read that somewhere?

Interviewer: Not compatible.

Priest: Yeah well we were firing smoke and whiles it's effective when it landing out in front of them they don't know what it is you know it makes this big boom. We called it smoke but it makes an explosion.

Interviewer: Well after Bastogne.

Priest: Well after Bastogne we were there quite a while a couple of weeks or so I don't know how long that was. We went by train or truck we went by truck again I think oh no we took train we went from there to Outside Loraine.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: And then we took over took private homes. We lived pretty good then fine clothes and all. The war was basically over for us then. We looted the houses a little bit of the eggs and things they had we ate whatever they had in their basements we were eating pretty good.

Interviewer: Finally.

Priest: We also we run out of food there at Bastogne.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: I was whittling chocolate from c-rations which we finally got. I whittled it into my canteen cup melted add snow to make a nice hot chocolate. I loved stuff like that, that was a delicacy.

Interviewer: Sure

Priest: And our cooks hadn't caught up with us yet.

Interviewer: So you had no hot meals at all.

Priest: Well they did finally when they broke through to us we got some meals and the cooks came along with it I believe. Same thing in Holland the cooks came later and they set up a kitchen in a barn right in our gun position. One of the things I'm leaving out

Interviewer: You said after Bastogne the war was basically over for you? The artillery wasn't used much?

Priest: I don't remember any firing or anything else after. Somebody got there before us I think Patton got there before us.

Interviewer: Now were you with the division when they went south and crossed the Rhine and into

Priest: Well what was left of the division yeah because we had got chewed up our artillery there at Bastogne. A lot of guys then they had that Normandy or Malmendy whatever where they call it they captured a lot of guys and lined them up and shot them. Are you familiar with that?

Interviewer: No

Priest: That was in a picture in the Battleground. They captured a lot of the first guys. They had them march into a field had a truck back up opened up the back of the canvas.

Interviewer: Yes yes I did now did you were you still with the division when they went into Birches Garden?

Priest: Yeah yeah I was in a place called Younkin which is near Birches Garden. We were spread out all over the mountains there still picking up SS troopers hiding in the woods.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: You'd go out looking for trouble and they'd come walking out of the woods you know comrades. They thought we were going to kill them that's why they ran into the woods I think. Or they thought they were going to survive but we had a lot of guys scrounging around that got ahold of calvary horses. They went ridding up into the hills they had girlfriends with them some of the guys were fraternizing with the girls. I had a little girl Russian girl who we had taken from the Germans and she was working in our kitchen as a PK. That was my girlfriends in Austria. We were staying in a chalet drinking beer shooting crap playing cards.

Interviewer: So you had pretty good living then?

Priest: Oh yeah that was just waiting to be shipped home. Then they shipped us down to Lucky Stripe that Camels they were the different camps where they shipped us out of Belgium and Lansworth I think it was Lansworth.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: And every camp you went to had a different name Lucky Stripe camp Ville Camel I don't know which one I was in. But we were allowed passes to town boy did I got eat we also got a partial pay. I went from restaurant to restaurant I didn't want to big a pig at one so I went from restaurant to restaurant to restaurant. Bacon and eggs bacon and eggs bacon and eggs potatoes then soup soup soup. Then you know if they had anything going on I'd go to the dance the Red Cross dance. They organized those things pretty fast bring Red Cross girls over donuts and coffee and stuff.

Interviewer: And you had to make up for lost time if you hadn't eaten.

Priest: That wasn't at the front it was near the front.

Interviewer: Right

Priest: So you know I was I did pretty well I was a loner. Tex didn't hang out with me too much in town or anything I just went out and did my own thing. And I got myself a girlfriend or something same thing in London same thing in the towns when we were in England. Go to the nearest town find go to the Red Cross where you meet the people and they were chaperoned and they would come to the dances and then you got yourself a girlfriend.

Interviewer: Now did you get to mustard out as soon as the division

Priest: No I was one of the high pointers but some guys beat me out got more points some got more decorations. But you know got to march up Broadway with the Veteran's Day parade and all. But I came in the middle of the night at Camp Shanks or somewhere they brought me up to Camp Shanks. That was on the outskirts of New York the suburbs and that's where I was discharged from. I didn't go home I went to the city and played around for about three or four days. Got in trouble got in trouble.

Interviewer: Got in trouble we'll leave it at that.

Priest: Then I crawled home some coming home I'm going to take the subway out and then a bus home.

Interviewer: What did you go into after the war?

Priest: I went back to my original job I had left behind with the American Express Company. Traveler's checks money orders then I left that I didn't like it anymore. I went with an electro plating company that manufactured silverware gold plated silver plated it chrome plated electro plating outfit in other words. Then from there I went to a welding outfit Utech Welding. I don't know what I did then I went to the City of New York I was with them for 28 years.

Interviewer: What did you do with the city?

Priest: I was a mechanical engineer.

Interviewer: Very good

Priest: That's a provisional job then I got a permanent it was really in maintenance and maintaining it was called the Test Operation Division the Board of Water Supply City of New York. It was a great job nice bunch of guys' small group. We had our own truck our own two or three small vehicles. And we went up state where the reservoirs, dams and tunnels where a lot of the problems arose. And we would take something apart rebuilt it modify it and get it running. All the stuff that was built had to be redesigned after it was installed. But every valve would cost a million dollars to control the water flow from that dam. And then it would stop at different reservoirs go to one to the next one to the next one. You know like 30 or 40 miles underground 100 feet 200 feet 500 feet of solid rock and then when you get to below the shaft they drove another shaft down to the tunnel and bring the water up. Then they would pump it up down to the next shaft until it finally ends up in New York City.

Interviewer: Before we finish up I want to ask your opinion of a couple of leaders that the country had. What was your take on FDR?

Priest: Our president?

Interviewer: Our president what did you think of him?

Priest: I was too young to be very much educated on things then but I thought he was a great president. But I heard all kinds of things some of my father-in-law who didn't care for him very much and my father who was the other side of the fence one was a Republican and one was a Democrat. I don't know what he did wrong except I heard that he knew the Japanese were coming at Pearl Harbor and you know that's hard to believe he let all of those guys get shot out. You know of course that was going to help the economy or something like that.

Interviewer: Right now were you aware at the time I'm sure you know now but did you know at that time when the war in Europe was over that the 101st was slated to jump into Japan?

Priest: Oh yeah we were getting ready to go to Japan. When we got on the plane when we got on the boat we thought we were just getting ready. Only then they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and the other place Nagasaki or wherever it was.

Interviewer: Nagasaki right

Priest: We knew we were going there we didn't know if we were going to jump or not. Yes we did know did you find anybody that didn't know or did know?

Interviewer: There was some confusion in the people I've talked to. Some said they were training up for it and then there were others

Priest: Well we knew we weren't going home and then that changed all of a sudden. We for a short while we knew we were going home and then we had the word that oh no we weren't. I forget Tex probably remembers that too.

Interviewer: What now the other leader I wanted to ask you about was Harry Truman? What did you think about his decision to drop the bomb?

Priest: I thought it was a great idea. Too bad about all of those civilians but see they didn't hesitate you know when they had prisoners or when they took Pearl Harbor and they sunk all of those ships and didn't expect anybody any trouble. Lots of I don't know how many of those dead.

Interviewer: Very good Mr. Priest I appreciate your time.

Priest: Well I appreciate you

Interviewer: I can't thank you enough for your contribution to the museum.

Priest: Well we didn't have too many exciting stories but the ones we did

Tape ended